

POWER, SCHOOL CULTURE, AND EXCLUSION: THE SOCIO-ACADEMIC
REALITIES OF FOUR UNDER-CREDITED BLACK MALE YOUTH

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The Requirements for
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Doctor of Education
In
Educational Leadership

by

Donald I. Frazier, Jr.

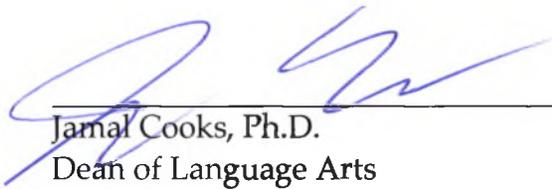
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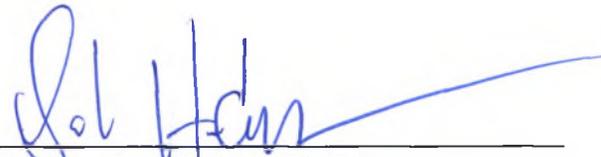
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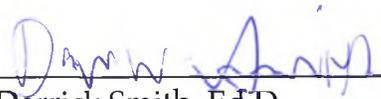
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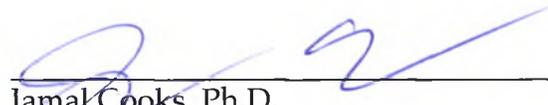
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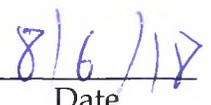
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This purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the socio-academic realities of four under-credited Black male youth who attended a high-performing public high school. I used a phenomenological praxis research design and systemic questioning to investigate the socio-academic experiences of participants. I conducted three subsequent reflective focus groups, multiple one-on-one dialogic follow-ups, and naturalistic exchanges with participants. I used constructivist grounded theory and elements of discourse analysis, narrative inquiry, and symbolic interactionism to construct the socio-academic realities of participants. The following themes emerged: *In a culture of perpetuated exclusion, Please check the power relation, and Constructive gestures cultivate caring communities*. Implications and recommendations emphasize the creation of transformative frameworks and humanizing pedagogical practices on the district level, and for school administrators, counselors, and teachers who serve Black male youth.

I certify that the Abstract is a correct representation of the content of this dissertation.



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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to Inez "Granny" Frazier, B.J. Jackson, and Margaret House. These three women were always, and will forever be the most influential women in my life.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Purpose of Study

Black male youth continue to amaze us with their ability to exist, construct, create and frequently recreate an individual and collective self that continues to influence, bewilder, agitate, satisfy, educe, restore, and preserve a humanity that has been historically denied. Their humanity does not go unrecognized, considering the amount of time, energy, and resources that have been used, and are consistently being used, to demoralize the very multifaceted and admired nature of Black male youth. The meanings attached to being Black, being male, and being a youth, ignites mixed emotions and a myriad of thoughts that both, constructs and deconstructs the various concepts of what it means to be Black, male, and a youth.

Like any other group of students, Black male youth enter the school setting with their social constructs, concepts, and lived experiences. The difference between other students, and Black male youth is the spoken and unspoken expectations placed upon them by onsite educators: they will fail, they don't belong, they're in school to play sports, they don't care about their education, they receive too many special support services, they wouldn't succeed without special supports, they'll drop out eventually, they come from broken homes, they are criminals, they use drugs, and they are not smart

enough to succeed. These social stereotypes and lived experiences have a direct and negative impact to their academic experiences. Therefore, I will refer to the interpreted experiences, constructed environments, and detailed exchanges as the socio-academic realities of Black male youth.

This study investigates the socio-academic realities of four under-credited Black male youth who attended a high-performing public high school. The day-to-day experiences of Black male youth are provocative in the sense that they are regularly policed in their communities as well as at their schools. While they are often only celebrated for their recreational abilities such as athletics or entertainment, they are also perceived as emotionally unstable, thus more often discriminated against, or even killed in broad daylight (Juzwiak & Chan, 2014; Martin & Harris III, 2007; Smith, Mustaffa, Jones, Curry & Allen, 2016). In addition, Black male youth are described as savages and brutes, and are regularly portrayed as deviants and thugs, and often dismissed as being unable to intellectually contribute in educational settings (Hooks, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2011; Patton & Snyder-Yuly, 2007; Smiley & Fakunle, 2016). The aforementioned messaging, and actions continue to dehumanize, and exclude Black male youth. Subsequently, they develop and utilize particular codes of conduct, and individualized ideologies to exist within different socio-academic environments.

This study highlights the cognitive, social, and emotional abilities of four under-credited Black male youth at a high-performing public high school. The intention of this study is not to focus on the hardships of four under-credited Black male youth, but rather to build on the backbone and willpower they displayed during this study. Thus, reaffirming their humanity, and reassuring their individual and collective strengths are recognized. This study seeks to engage with four under-credited Black male youth who can offer additional insight about the various elements that contribute to the socio-academic realities of Black male youth, both positive and negative. The hope is that these Black male youth are reminded of their abilities to be critical change agents, and the constructors of their own individual and collective socio-academic realities.

I feel a particular obligation as a Black male, as the father of a Black male youth, as a committed transformative practitioner, as an example for Black male youth, and as a critical colleague for others who are committed to emphasize the qualities of Black male youth that often go overlooked. With that, I choose to focus on this particular social group because they continue to demonstrate an inner strength, and social sensitivity that has contributed to their socio-academic realities in ways that have helped to counter the daily experiences of being misread, devalued, marginalized, excluded, dehumanized, and discriminated against.

Problem of Practice

Black male youth are regularly punished for making poor decisions and refusing to “play school” by its traditional rules and outdated values.

Traditional rules and outdated values are centered on singular truths, and hierarchical power structures, which were derived and are maintained by the politics of White supremacy (Wilson, 2014), and are existent throughout society, as well as the education system. Educators are perceived as power holders, and students are expected to obey educators’ requests, or receive the ultimate punishment of exclusion from that particular socio-academic setting in the context of America’s school system, (Foucault, 1979; Gregory et al., 2016). Black males’ educational journeys throughout the P-16 school system have historically been problematic, beginning with disproportionate exclusion at an early age (Gibson et al., 2014).

Kunjufu’s (2004; 2005; 2007) extensive works on Black boys in education strongly suggests the education system is structured to be disloyal to the academic, social, emotional, and cultural needs of Black boys. In the 2013-2014 school year, the US Department of Education (2016) reported that although 19% of enrolled students in preschool were Black boys, they made up 45% of students who received one or more out-of-school suspensions. In a more recent study, Wood, Harris, and Howard (2018) reported the largest disparity

regarding the exclusion of Black boys in education is between preschool and third grade. Exclusion at an early age has an immediate and lasting impact on a student's personal well being.

Black males are also disproportionately excluded throughout middle school and high school. In fact, it has been well documented that Black males receive harsher punitive sanctions, and are punished more frequently than any other racial/ethnic group (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Heitzeg, 2009; Lewis, Bonner III, Butler, & Joubert, 2010; USDOE, 2014). This is unfortunate, because the reality is that Black male students are more likely to be suspended, drop out completely and display delinquent behaviors that increase the probability of being detained or possibly killed by law enforcement (Caton, 2012; Christle, 2007; Lee, Cornell, Gregory, & Fan, 2011; Losen & Skiba, 2010). In 2009-10, The US Department of Education (2012) reported one in five Black males received out of school suspensions. Studies by Gregory, Skiba, and Noguera (2010), and Smolkowski, Girvan, McIntosh Nese, and Horner (2016) have shown race and gender to be consistent factors associated with disproportionate suspensions of Black male students. This particular revelation reaffirms Kunjufu's (2004; 2005; 2007) argument that the education system was designed to oppress, fail, and dehumanize Black males. This indicates educators exclude Black males for reasons such as not sitting down, for being

too loud, for being disrespectful, for not listening, for asking too many questions, and for not “playing school” in the traditional sense. Regardless of the aforementioned reasons Black males are excluded, the characteristic that remains consistent is that they are Black and male.

Theoretical Foundations

Socio-academic Realities

A socio-academic reality conceptual framework will be used to help illustrate my understanding of how the social experiences, and academic character intersect for Black male youth to construct a socio-academic reality (Flenbaugh, 2016). The concept of socio-academic is derived from the Tinto’s (1990) student integration framework, and Deil-Amen’s (2011) socio-academic integrative moments framework. The concept of reality is derived from Berge and Luckmann’s (1967), and Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner and Cain’s (2001) theory of figured worlds. I considered using terms such as lived experiences, and educational moments to develop a framework that would help structure the social and academic experiences of this particular population. I chose to combine social and academic (socio-academic) to illustrate how social experiences are intertwined with the developing academic character of a person (Flenbaugh, 2016). I refer to academic character as a person’s way of being in regards to their scholastic activities within a given social context.

Tinto's (1975) earlier work proposed the concept of student integration. Student integration is the concept that suggests formal and informal academic and social engagements contribute to student success. He examined the retention, and persistence of nontraditional college students. Nontraditional students are referred (but not limited) to post secondary students who are enrolled as single parents, work full-time jobs, attends college part-time, has a GED instead of a high school diploma, and does not attend college right after high school. Nontraditional college students likely come from backgrounds of impoverished communities, and low-income and single parent homes prior to entering college, which would encompass the social, economic, and political backgrounds of most Black male youth attending public high schools. Other works (Keels, 2004; Lehr, 2004; Salinitri, 2005) on student retention, persistence, and integration found positive interactions with concerned adults, authentic exchanges with peers, and having ample social support services influence students' sense of belonging on campus.

Tinto's (2007) updated integration framework suggests that students are likely to increase their commitment when they are able to engage and integrate socially and academically into the school campus. Similar to Tinto's works on engagement and persistence, but in K-12 settings, Marks (2000) evaluated the effect on engagement theories and whether patterns exist in students'

engagement across grade-levels. Marks found school, classroom, and parental supports “[...] positively and significantly affect the engagement of all students” (p. 173). Like Tinto and Marks, Deil-Amen (2011) posit socio-academic integrative moments are social and academic experiences that combine simultaneously to generate a college students’ identity, sense of belonging and intellectual competence. Deil-Amen emphasizes integrative moments. Deil-Amen found that the social experiences of students were not only intertwined with the academic progressions of students, but their academic experiences were heightened from their social interactions with peers and professors.

While the aforementioned scholars emphasize the importance of retention, persistence, and engagement, a myriad of studies have shown Black male students generally have adverse experiences in education opposite to that of socially integrating, and engaging towards academic success (Anderson, 2008; Hope, Skoog, & Jagers, 2015; Hotchkins, 2016; Howard, 2008; Noguera, 2008). This is a reality for many Black male students throughout the K-20 education system. The word “real” or the phrase “keep it real” is a common term in the Black male culture, which means to be authentic and genuine. Thus, I decided to use the term reality to help develop a framework for the experiences of Black male youth. Reality is personal; it is an ongoing bi-

directional involvement between an individual's social environment and the interpreted meanings they apply to their experiences within that given context (Berge & Luckmann, 1967). Realities are both, shared and differentiated. For instance, two individuals can witness the same incident, interpret their understanding of the experience differently from one another, and come to the conclusion that they shared a real experience.

Berge and Luckmann (1967) best described reality in their book *The Social Construction of Reality*, as an intersubjective world of self that is shared with others. Berge and Luckmann frame reality as multifaceted and suggest the intersubjectivity of self "sharply differentiates from everyday life from others' realities of which I am conscious" (p. 23). This means that the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of people are continuously interacting with each other. A person's immediate environment either challenges or reaffirms their realities as true or false within that given context. Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain's (2001) book titled *Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds*, furthers previous works on sociological theory and posits that a person's thoughts and feelings are reciprocated in the external world by which they both, exist in, and co-construct with others through figured worlds. As scholars mentioned, "Figured worlds move through us as spoken discourse and embodied practice" (p. 251). Gee (2004) suggests "life-worlds" are spaces or places where persons

communicate past, presents, and futures through spoken discourse and make claims of their day-to-day interactions and understanding in relation to their sphere of reality with others. Students' life-worlds in a shared environment cannot be separated, though they can be differentiated. Realities are created and maintained through people's narratives. Thus, socio-academic realities are intersubjective and co-constructed narratives individuals and groups use to decipher, and describe their lived experiences in relation to their educational journey.

Literature Review

One personal dilemma Black males encounter is when they are situated to make decisions that recreate or resist negative descriptions and unfavorable stereotypes about Black males (Flenbaugh, 2016). In these moments, one's decision reinforces certain behaviors and beliefs that can be both beneficial, and adverse during the process of *becoming* more human (Freire, 2000). The concept of becoming more human (i.e., developing into a whole person) is critical during adolescence, particularly because of the need for connection, and to feel valued as relationships become more important and complex during this particular developmental phase (Price & Osborne, 2000; Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004). The experiences that Black male youth have in their communities, in after-school programs, and mentoring programs also influence

their *becoming* (Anderson, 2016; Watson, Sealey-Ruiz, & Jackson, 2016). With that, the following literature will be centered on the lived experiences of Black males youth, both inside and outside educational settings.

In alignment with the work of Warren, Douglas, and Howard (2016), this study amplifies the voices of Black males who were enrolled in traditional schools and alternative schools, as well as Black male youth who were involved in after-school programs, and Black male youth who have dropped out of school completely. This array of voices were included because I think it is important to include the voices of Black male youth based on their different, and similar social, emotional, cultural, relational, and exclusionary experiences. Though some of the selected studies do incorporate female voices, and the voices of other ethnic/racial groups, I chose to focus specifically on the experiences and voices of Black males in the selected studies.

I took a grounded theory approach to completing the literature review. It was important to understand and acquire knowledge of the phenomenon in which it existed before writing the literature review. The literature review was written in a cyclical pattern of research, working between the findings and existing literature to influence the overall structure of the literature review. The literature review contains three sections that match with the conceptual framework of the study. The conceptual framework of the study aims to frame

the socio-academic realities of Black male youth under the concepts of power, exclusion, and reciprocity. The three sections are briefly described, then fleshed out into three conceptual themes: *Reproducing power relations through perceptions, The exclusion of Black males, and Humanization through acts of respect and reciprocity.*

The first section explains how stereotypes and power relations have impacted Black male youth. Stereotypes are oversimplified symbols that communicate oppressive educator-student power relations. Freire (2018) would argue that Black male youth are oppressed in this socio-academic context, and that onsite educators are their oppressors. An educators' interpretation of both societal messaging, and the in-the-moment messaging Black males deliver does have an influence on the educators' actions, interactions, and reactions with Black male youth within that given social context. Likewise, a Black male youth's interpretation of societal messaging, and the in-the-moment messaging of onsite educators has an influence on the way he chooses to act, interact, and react.

The second section details the how Black male youth are excluded from educational settings. Exclusion exacerbates academic inequities between groups of students on the basis of race, gender, and class. Forms of exclusion include feeling discriminated against, stereotyped or marginalized in a given setting

(Hotchkins, 2016; Howarth, 2006). An individual can also voluntarily exclude himself. Self-exclusion in this context is when the individual voluntarily removes himself from the situation physically, emotionally or mentally. Self-exclusion can occur from feelings of boredom, avoiding embarrassment, or to meet with peers. Self-exclusionary acts can also be seen as self sabotage, nonparticipation in social or academic activities, “flashing” on school personnel to escape to the Dean’s office or dropping out of school altogether (Cole & Hill, 2013; Gordon et al., 2001). Adverse psychological, social and emotional skills sets are developed due to the ongoing feelings of exclusion.

The third section details ways in which caring gestures such as reciprocity and respect can exist, and have a positive influence on the socio-academic realities of Black male youth. Respect and reciprocity are valued in the Black/ African culture (Woodard, 1995). Black males use a developed critical awareness to analyze different types of social situations by the time they enter high school (Watts, Williams, & Jagers, 2003). This developed awareness can also include a predetermined belief that they will be excluded, resulting in their decision to exclude self in the process. Educators who display support, compassion, empathy, and care informs Black male youth that they are valued within that particular socio-academic setting, and often inspires Black male youth to meet and surpass expectations ascribed to them by others, as well as

their own (Strayhorn, 2008). Moreover, educators who are able to provide real expectations, and maintain highly supportive relationships through culturally integrating *with* Black male youth positively can significantly contribute to a vigorous socio-academic reality.

Reproducing Power Relations through Perceptions

Power relations are spoken and unspoken bi-directional communications that influence the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors between people, and are maintained through belief systems, ideologies, social acts and the interpretations of societal status or perceived hierarchies (Fiske, Dupree, Nicolas, & Swencionis, 2016). Rogers and Way (2016) conducted a longitudinal study to investigate patterns of resistance and accommodation at the intersection of racialized and gendered stereotypes amongst Black male youth at an all Black, male charter high school. Though the study collected data from observations, surveys, and interviews of 183 Black male youth, I focused on the subsample of 21 Black male youth who participated in the one-on-one interviews over the course of the two-year study.

Overall, Roger found participants were more resistant to racial stereotypes and more accommodating to gender stereotypes. An important finding from the study is that participants' resistance to stereotypes such as Black males are illiterate, incompetent, and unsuccessful increased over durations of time. It is important to note that these findings suggest the

resistance Black male youth demonstrate shows agency and a personal power that could help protect their psychosocial, and emotional well being while also recognizing systems of oppression. These findings also suggest Black male youth are regularly reminded that their personhood is and will be symbolic of something negative, unimportant, or even non-existent (Burton, Burton, McHale, King, & Van Hook, 2016; Stokes, Wilson, Jordan, & Harris, 2017).

Black male youth may experience tensions as they seek ways to employ their personal power, as this potency would result in others that would result in others recognizing their humanity. Although Dumas and Nelson (2016) place their focus on the earlier years of Black boys and argue that Black boyhood is unimaginable due to societal ideologies that do not see Black boys as human, they recognize the tensions Black male youth experience during adolescence. This happens because Black boys lose their status as children, as they are often perceived and treated as adults (Rattan, Levine, Dweck, & Eberhardt, 2012). While Black male adults in positions of power such as CEOs are often perceived as infantile (Livingston & Pearce, 2009), it is well documented that Black males, even very good ones, are generally perceived as threats to society (Goff et al., 2014; Rattan, Levine, Dweck, & Eberhardt).

These unfortunate realities are constructed by misleading narratives and adverse stereotypes that perpetuate a power relation that devalues the

humanity of Black male youth. A study by Todd, Thiem, and Neel (2016) conducted four experiments to investigate if stereotypes linking Black men with criminality and violence extended to young Black boys. They found Black male boys (5 years of age) were susceptible to the implicit biases and stereotypes linked to Black men and Black male youth. This is critical to note, specifically because it suggests Black males are criminalized at birth, and over time become embodied forms of symbolic violence (Dance, 2002; Wilson, 2011). Thus, since criminality and acts of violence are completely unacceptable, and Black males are deemed a symbol of violence, it holds that society will continue to see Black males as unacceptable and use this narrative to regularly exclude Black males from environments where they are perceived as threats to others.

The Exclusion of Black Males

The exclusion of Black male youth in society (e.g., high unemployment rates, high incarceration rates, unduly high rates of homicide, police brutality, and death at the hands of police) are not removed from their in school experiences (e.g., the absence of Black truth in school curriculums, high dropout rates, low graduation rates, high suspension and expulsion rates). All of which stem from various forms of discrimination. A study by Hope, Skoog, and Jagers (2015) investigated how two Black female and six male high school students understood and overcame issues of racial discrimination and inequalities.

Though all participants recognized how oppression, discrimination, and racism existed in society, as well as in their respective schools due to the racial socialization of their parents, they still felt excluded at their respective school sites. Hope, Skoog, and Jagers found that all participants in the study desired to talk about historical, and contemporary issues regarding culture, race, and diversity. Two male participants were bothered about the lack of ethnic representation in their school's curriculum as they expressed the lack of teachers' ability to teach complex issues on diversity, race, and culture; and that the schools course that do address complex social issues are not mandatory graduation required classes.

The exclusion of Black males extends from the curriculum to teacher and administrator discipline practices. Unduly punitive discipline practices of educators towards Black males have been linked to implicit bias and cultural mismatch (Gilliam, Maupin, Reyes, Accavitti & Shic, 2016). Misperceiving behaviors and misinterpreting school discipline procedures lead to harmful outcomes, particularly for Black male youth (Gregory, 2010). Punitive discipline practices exclude Black male youth at disproportionate rates, and ongoing discrimination and dehumanization can lead to self-exclusion, and ultimately dropping out of school (Cole & Hill, 2013).

A qualitative study by Caton (2012) used personal narratives of ten Black males to examine their in-school and post school experiences after they dropped out. What Caton's study shows is that Black male youth develop an awareness that can be used to help understand hegemonic systems of oppression, and the negative social, emotional, and academic outcomes associated with school surveillance, and punitive discipline practices. What this current study, which draws on a smaller group of Black male youth who feel excluded from their high-performing public high school is able to further develop the importance of Black male youth needing to feel supported by, cared for, and encouraged by the onsite educators who serve them. Caton also emphasized a need for educator-student relationships to help counter the negative experiences of Black male youth. This dissertation adds to Caton's study by exploring the socio-academic realities of four under-credited Black male youth who felt they were regularly excluded by the school culture and by some onsite educators. This dissertation also furthers Caton's study by exploring the reciprocal and respectful acts onsite educators can employ to establish and maintain positive relationships with Black male youth.

Most participants related their schooling experiences to that of correctional facilities and expressed undergoing some form of routine body searches, yelling security guards, and/or metal detectors at the schools

entrance. School personnel encourage adverse psychosocial distresses upon Black males through symbolically criminalizing their character (Casella, 2003; Curtis, 2013; Rios, 2011). A participant in Caton's (2012) study was transferred on his first day based on how he was perceived by teachers. Comparable to the male participant in the study by Hope, et al. (2015), who attempted to combat the negative stereotype of his teacher, one of the participants in Caton's study surrendered after finding it difficult to change the perspectives of teachers. He resolved his personal dilemma by excluding himself from those dehumanizing circumstances. Participants in Caton's study also felt that the security measures their schools implemented did more harm than good, by discriminating against Black males. Discriminatory and punitive discipline practices increases existing anxieties of students, and as a result further alienates students from the school-community (Hawkins, Smith, & Catalano, 2004). Most of the participants in Caton's study expressed spending a majority of their time excluded from the classroom.

Exclusion also occurs in school policies and common discourse. Duncan (2002) conducted a critical ethnographic study from January 1999 until June of 2001 that examined the various stories of teachers, administrators, and students at a high-performing school, called City High School (CHS) to help to identify points of conflict in the ethos of the school that perpetuated the oppression of

the Black male students. The strengths of Duncan's study were found in his ability to gain perspectives from students, teachers, and school administrators to gain a better understanding of the school's exclusionary culture towards Black males. Similar to the current study, CHS was hailed for their competitive academic nature, and high-performing status, while at the same time Black male youth feel excluded from the school as a whole. The current study will contribute to Duncan's findings by focusing on the voices of Black male youth whose exclusionary experiences have resulted in under-credited academic statuses.

While Caton's (2012) study examined the affect of punitive discipline policies and practices from the perspectives of Black male youth who dropped out of school. Duncan (2002) found that although the ethos of the school promoted high academic achievement, the discourse of students and onsite educators perpetuated stereotypes of Black males and undermined their voices, experiences, and abilities as contributing persons to the educational institute. Like Caton, a final strength of Duncan's study is that Black male youth value caring and personal educator-student relationships. The current study is needed to help demonstrate how certain acts by onsite educators can affect the socio-academic realities of Black male youth at a high-performing public high school.

Humanization through Acts of Respect and Reciprocity

Educators can have a positive influence the socio-academic realities of Black male youth through ongoing acts grounded in respect, reciprocity, and care (Nelson, 2016). Though Diaz, Cochran, and Karlin (2016) suggest educators can display respect for students by acknowledging the student as an agent with power within the given social context, Terry, Flenbaugh, Blackmon, and Howard (2014) argue that respect and reciprocity can be co-created in educational spaces that foster and inspire Black male youth to further their critical thinking about their own lived experiences in relation to the larger social ills they face, daily (i.e., racism, discrimination, and oppression). Quality educators engage Black male youth toward educational success by using real life circumstances through culturally relevant pedagogical methods (Delpit, 2012; Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Respect is maintained by demonstrating patience, acknowledgement, and acceptance of students' lived experiences (Terry, Flenbaugh, Blackmon, & Howard).

Respect, care, support and personal connections serve to have a significant influence on students' socio-academic experiences (Rodriguez, 2008). Deutsch and Jones (2008) consolidated findings from two studies that examined youth development in after-school programs. Study one was an ethnographic study that lasted over the span of four years. Youth in study one age ranged

from 12–17, and students in K-8 attended one large primary urban school while high school youth attended urban schools throughout the city. Study two was a larger ethnographic study that included all youth and staff of another after-school program over the course of one year. There were a total of 17 youth who participated in study two, and age ranged from 12-18. Youth in study two all attended the same middle and high school. It was noted in study two that although the schools were evenly split between Black and White students, it was clear that an achievement gap as well as academic segregation within the school.

Deutsch and Jones (2008) used a qualitative method to understand the processes of development within natural settings from the perspectives of Black and Latin(x) youth in two after school programs hosted by The Boys & Girls Club. Scholars relied on youth's perceptions of their authority relations with their teachers from their respective school sites. Through ethnographic observations, semi-structured interviews, and grounded theory data analysis (Charmaz, 2014), Deutsch and Jones found the term respect was not only widely used by youth participants but it was also identified as a significant construct that influenced "youth's perceptions of and relations to adults' authority" (p. 675). In comparing the relational dynamics between authority figures in the after school program and students' schools, researchers found

participants feeling a sense of freedom at the club houses, as well as having more familial relations with authority figures. Youth at both clubhouses valued the personal relationships they established with staff at the clubhouses, while they had not with many of their teachers at their respective schools. Respect is a core value for Black male youth and they reciprocate the respect shown towards them (Jackson, Sealey-Ruiz, & Watson, 2014).

Reciprocity is established and maintained through ongoing respectful interactions between persons within a given social context. Educators who demonstrate reciprocity for Black males take personal accountability for their educational successes and failures (Harrell-Levy, Kerpelman, & Henry, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Watson, Sealey-Ruiz, and Jackson (2016) conducted a phenomenological qualitative study aimed to investigate the lived experiences of 14 over-aged and under-credited youth and their mentor of the UMOJA Network for Young Men program. Similar to the current study, Watson, Sealey-Ruiz and Jackson's study uses a qualitative phenomenological approach to investigate the lived experiences of Black male youth, conducted three semi-structured focus groups, and referred to grounded theory for data analysis. The current study used multiple one-on-one follow-ups, naturalistic exchanges, and three semi-structured focus groups to gather more data, which would contribute, to a deeper understanding of the participants.

All participants were excluded from their traditional schools for reasons that included “overcrowding, school shutdowns, discipline issues, violating academic probation, or general lack of fit” (Watson, Sealey-Ruiz, & Jackson, 2016, p.988). The mentor’s pedagogical approach was centered on highlighting the voices of participants. All participants in the program used words like care, teaching us, respect and trust to describe the mentor-student relationship, the established peer group relationships, and the overall feel of the program itself. Seven of the 14 youth participants identified as Black and male. One Black male participant’s sentiments of his peers, the program, and his mentor summarized a humanizing experience that contributed to his personal development. The mentor of the program emphasized the importance of listening to each student, teaching from the heart, and being committed to the cause.

In a similar study, Rodriguez (2008) suggests personalized relationships grounded in respect are beneficial to the educational successes of Black male youth, particularly if those relationships are maintained with deliberate commitment. Moreover, educators who use unstructured time (e.g., during lunch time, during break, in the hall) to talk with students and encourage them to pursue their personal interests demonstrate a level of care, love and humanity Black male youth seldom receive from traditional public schools (Howard, 2013).

Educators who demonstrate empathy towards Black male youth reaffirm their value as humans. While Franklin (2007) indicate that when Black boys do not receive compassion and empathy from their teachers they are more likely to demonstrate behaviors that would further agitate the educator, Howard (2010) suggests that compassion and empathy helps to produce outcomes such as higher academic expectations, and affirms the multiple identities Black male youth bring with them into the classrooms. Ladson-Billings (2008) calls this compassion “informed empathy” which means that educators feel *with* students, instead of feeling for them. A study by Warren (2013) documented the benefits of empathy in the educator-student interactions between four White female teachers and Black male students. Black male juniors and seniors were randomly selected from different schools throughout the school district to participate in three 1-hour focus groups to express their good and bad experiences in relation to White female teachers at their respective schools. Multiple classroom observations were also conducted over a 10-week period to see document patterns of behavior and interactions between teacher and student.

The four White female teachers who Warren focused on demonstrated their ability to take the perspective that the whole lives of Black male youth should be valued just as much as their academic character. For example, she

carved out academic time from class to allow students to socialize with each other. It was reported by a Black male student that this teacher makes him *feel* heard. She knew how to adapt her perspectives in relation to each individual student, and collectively as she knew how to sync with the cultural norms and lived experiences of her students. These findings suggest together, Black males and educators become humanized within a given context as a result of equitable supports, honest dialogue, and validation of accomplishments, as well as efforts to overcome various barriers (Delpit, 2012; Noguera, 2003).

Chapter Two: Methodology

This qualitative study was conducted from an inbetweener's perspective. Inbetweener is an active term that acknowledges the researcher as an agent in their position, and also understands that their identities are also constructed and determined by the participants in a given social context (Milligan, 2016). An inbetweener is also referred to as a person that is both an insider and outsider of the studied group or phenomenon. I am an inbetweener because I am perceived, as well as self-identify, as a Black male (who was also once a youth) and an onsite educator. Additionally, the socio-academic realities of participants were co-constructed through an iterative socially interacting process between themselves, myself, other onsite educators, and involvements they experience throughout society.

The aim of this qualitative study is to investigate the socio-academic realities of enrolled Black male youth at one of the highest academically achieving public high schools in the school district, as well as throughout the state. In the following section, I provide an overview of the methodology section and the theoretical references that were influential for this particular methodological approach. I then provide the context of the study, my relationship with the participants, the process for gaining access to participants, descriptions of participants, the process of selecting participants, and the efforts

to protect participants. I close the methodology section by providing an overview of my data collection, transferability, systems used to track the data, and data analysis.

Research Design

This study was designed as a phenomenological praxis (Stones, 1986), with the primary data collected from three semi-structured reflective focus groups. Secondary data were collected through multiple one-on-one dialogic follow-ups, and naturalistic exchanges with Black male youth whom I work with as Dean of Students/Head Counselor at a high-performing public high school.

Phenomenology is the study of one's consciousness. To study one's conscious involves an approach to understand how one interprets their immediate surroundings or their situated context (Connelly, 2015; Munhall, 2007). Praxis is referred to as a process of a person reflecting their actions in relation to the experienced moment (Gallardo, Parham, Trimble, & Yeh, 2012; Freire, 2018). Thus, phenomenological praxis is referred to as ongoing inquiries, and reflections of experiences within inner social worlds through intersubjective descriptions of the identified phenomena being studied to further new discoveries through the transformation of existing social conditions (Apprey & Eckman, 1992; Apprey & Talvik, 2006; Depraz, 1999; Stones, 1986).

In this context, the studied phenomena is the interpreted socio-academic realities of Black male youth who attend a high-performing public high school. Phenomenological praxis allowed me to empathize and examine the interpreted experiences *with* participants, while allowing participants to remain the narrators, architects, and change agents of their own social realities (Bradfield, 2007). I emphasized the term "*with*" to illustrate my my positionality in relation to the participants.

I chose not to remove myself from the study because of my positionality as an inbetweener in relation to the participants, and the context in which the study was conducted. Because of my positionality as an inbetweener, I sought to create a fluidity of power between myself and the participants. Thus, I used reflexive journaling to help identify my power in relation to the participants, the data, and the overall study (Etherington, 2004). By the nature of the study, I found it best to utilize theoretical systems that allowed space for interpretation, and that shift the social power relations, while remaining within the co-constructed social worlds of participants. Therefore, I utilized an investigative method that allowed participants to interconnect their experiences, explore shared and individual reflections, and highlight certain narratives in a natural state of being within the socio-academic realities of participants.

Systemic questioning was used to help investigate and reconstruct new meaning of the socio-academic realities of participants (Chen, 2014). Systemic questioning is often used in therapeutic settings as a dialogic communicative tool to help subjects better understand how social systems influence the co-construction of relationships and experiences (Romme & Seggelen-Damen, 2015; Warner & Rountree, 1997). Pearce and Pearce (2000) would suggest onsite school educators and Black male students engage in a co-constructed dialogue aimed at identifying and reconstructing harmful patterns that frame their shared social world. Systemic questioning can also be used as a tool to help an identified social group transform their perceptions and experiences of power, within a given context, to improve their social worlds (Chen, 2013). Hedman and Gesch-Karamanlidis (2015) suggest a person within their social setting can make conscious decisions by personally contextualizing their experiences in relation to the existing cultural narratives within that setting. With the correct method, participants can examine, understand and transform adverse circumstances that halt the social mobility of one's self and social group.

To answer the research question: what are the socio-academic realities of four under-credited Black male youth who attend a high-performing public high school? I used a research design that allowed a description of the studied phenomenon in its lived context (Finlay, 2012; Giorgi, 1985; 2012; Parsons, 2005;

Schutz, 1970). I invited participants to self-reflect on thoughts, feelings, and actions associated with their socio-academic realities (MacLeod, 2008; Magrini, 2015; Stones, 1986). We co-constructed spaces for dialogic communications that led to critical investigations about how meaning making can fuel persons, and groups of people, to be social change agents of their social, political, and economic conditions (Cameron & McColl, 2015; Freire, 2000; Watts, Williams, & Jagers, 2003). I also wrote reflections about how my experiences may have influenced the phenomena throughout the duration of the study.

Elements of discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1992; Gee, 2004; 2010) were used as one method to further investigate the studied phenomenon. Discourse analysis is used as a tool to analyze language in use. Moreover, unspoken language such as eye gazes, body gestures, and even moments of silence can be analyzed as ways of communicating. Gee (2010) emphasizes the importance in the social context of communication. In a previous publication, Gee (2004) talks about how a social language is constructed of units that are eventually configured to create a social language that is then shared amongst those in a given situation. Gee offers, "To learn such relationships is part of what it means to learn to recognize the very social context one is in." (p. 52). Gee is referring to the agent as one who co-creates the social context that they are in.

Elements of narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2006) were also used to help tease out key elements that would help answer the research question. Narrative inquiry is used to study and help understand how context can influence a person's reality over durations of time. The narrative a person decides to share is made up of a culmination of lived experiences from a variety of social settings such as the grocery store, an after-school program, over grandma's house, while riding the train, at school, from one class to another, while with a counselor in their office, and at a basketball game. In an older publication Connelly and Clandinin (1990) write, "Life's narratives are the context for making meaning of school situations" (p. 3). Connelly and Clandinin's description emphasizes the concept of socio-academic realities of students. Bruner (1991) posit language and the structure of thought are inseparable, and that symbolic systems imprint meaning on one's reality. Thus, I will utilize elements of narrative inquiry to help uncover nuances, and details of participants' interpreted socio-academic realities.

Context of The Present Study

This qualitative study is designed to investigate the socio-academic realities of four under-credited Black male youth attending a high-performing public high school. The term under-credited means a student has failed the required classes they need to graduate. Ideally, students would then need to

retake those failed classes in order to obtain the required credits to graduate. All enrolled students who are on a general education track are expected to graduate after they have acquired 230 credits, and completed the A-G requirements. A-G requirements are a sequence of high school courses that students must complete (with a grade of C or better) to be minimally eligible for admission to the University of California (UC) and California State Universities (CSU).

Students can acquire five credits per class, and take up to twelve classes each semester or six classes per quarter. Students enrolled at Upward & Beyond Academy (UBA) operates within semester sessions. Students may pass with D or above and acquire the necessary credits to graduate without having to retake a class to recover credits. Students that fail a class earn 0 credits, and must retake the failed class to recover those credits. The more classes a student fails, the more they fall behind, and are expected to recover those missed credits either through night school, or during summer school. The more students fall behind, the more under-credited they become, and eventually positioned to transfer to a continuation/credit recovery school to graduate with their incoming freshman class. In addition to acquiring 230 credits, and meeting the A-G requirements, all enrolled general education students must also pass the California High School Exit Exam in both math and English language arts.

At the start of the study, 1,872 students were actively enrolled at UBA. Racial/ethnic demographics were as follows: Asian 59.5%, Latin(x) 18.3%, Filipino 7.3%, White 6.2%, Black 6%, Two or More Races 2%, Pacific Islander 0.5%, American Indian or Alaska Native 0.2%. In numbers, out of 1,872 actively enrolled students, roughly 112 Black students were enrolled at UBA during the time of the study. Of the 112 enrolled Black students, 58 self-identified as Black and male. Between grades 10 and 12, there was a total of 36 Black male youth. Of the 36 Black male youth (grades 10-12), 30 were identified as under-credited. Some Black male youth were between 5 and 15 credits behind. Other Black male youth were 15 to 30 credits behind, while some were over 60 (an entire school year) credits behind. Students who were identified as mildly under-credited were missing up to one semester worth of credits (30 credits - six classes). Students that were identified as significantly under-credited were missing up to one year's worth of credits (60 credits - twelve classes). Students who were identified as critically under-credited were missing more than an academic year's worth of credits (60+ credits).

At the start of the study, UBA was entering its second year of implementing Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS) and Restorative Practices (RP) during. PBIS is a proactive approach to establishing the behavioral supports and social culture needed for all students in a school to

achieve social, emotional and academic success. RP are a range of approaches and strategies used to both prevent relationship-damaging incidents from happening and to resolve them if they do happen. Several schools throughout the school district have implemented PBIS and RP with the attempt to decrease punitive school discipline practices and increase positive teaching and discipline practices.

PBIS is a 3-tiered (1-Universal, 2-Targeted, and 3-Intensive) system which is designed to provide appropriate social, emotional and academic supports for students based on their specific needs. Restorative practices offers schools alternatives to exclusionary approaches to discipline students. Restorative practices can be used in addition to or separate from the PBIS framework. Tier one (primary tier) is designed to prevent incidents from occurring (i.e., school-wide, classroom, and non-classroom). Tier 2 (secondary tier) is designed to reduce the frequency and intensity of problem behaviors for students who are not responsive to primary interventions. Students identified in tier 2 receive additional more focused supports and frequent small-group and individualized responses when problem behaviors are more likely to occur. Tier 3 (intensive tier) is designed to provide most individualized responses to problem behaviors where tier 1 and tier 2 did not reduce the intensity, frequency, or

complexity of the existing problem. The idea is to implement restorative practices within the framework of PBIS.

Since the first year of PBIS and RP implementation at UBA, out of school suspensions decreased by 15% in the latest year-over-year comparison. The decrease was attributed to the implementation of the site's PBIS, and tiered RtI system. However, Black students were still disproportionately truant, and Black students who had IEPs remained as the most likely to be suspended, or to receive an out of office referral. At the time of the study, UBA was entering its third year of implementing PBIS and RP. As an active member of the PBIS Leadership Committee (PBIS-LC) at UBA, our task is to develop strategic school-wide plans to utilize RP and PBIS frameworks in all settings throughout UBA to enhance psychosocial, emotional, academic and behavioral supports for all students. One aspect of the system wide approach is to foster relationship building between onsite educators and students.

In addition to PBIS, and RP, UBA has a Wellness Center, an after school program, over 30 social clubs for students (including Black Student Union), 15 of the 122 staff / faculty identified as Black. Onsite Black educators were throughout the school as teachers (i.e., history, English, math, PE, JROTC) secretary, special education teachers, security guards, the Wellness director, football and track coaches, and a Dean of Students. During the time of the

study, the school district also used UBA to pilot an initiative aimed to collaborate with onsite educators at UBA, and various community based organizations throughout the city to identify and remove barriers that were impeding Black students from succeeding academically. Also worth mentioning, during the implementation of the study, UBA received a new administrative team, which included a new principal, and three new assistant principals.

Participant Selection

A the start of the study, I sought to investigate the socio-academic realities of 12 under-credited Black male youth at UBA. I used purposive sampling to select 12 Black male youth. My intent was to select participants from diverse socio-academic backgrounds, and experiences. For instance, I sought to include Black male youth that were enrolled in the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program, some who were receiving general education, and some who receiving special education services. I also sought to include Black male youth from different grade levels (10 – 12). I did not include ninth graders because of their limited experiences as enrolled students at UBA during the time of the study. In addition, I sought to select Black male youth with different grade point averages, and different attendance records. These differences would help construct a more holistic picture of the socio-academic

realities of Black male youth who attend UBA. Other criteria for participant selection included varying levels of credit status.

Although 12 Black male youth were originally selected to represent the diverse and holistic experiences of Black male youth at UBA, I decided to focus on the socio-academic realities of four under-credited participants. I focused exclusively on the four participants in this study because they attended all three reflective focus groups, they met with me for multiple one-on-one follow-up dialogues. I also had substantial naturalistic exchanges throughout the duration of the study with the selected four participants. The selected participants constructed a shared perspective of a particular social group. The identified participants voiced concerns that are often misinterpreted, ignored, or too complex to be simply addressed with a modest answer.

Relationships with Participants

I have established respectful relationships with all participants. I have dialogued candidly with all participants on various occasions prior to, during and after the study about various notions, such as Black and male identity, school and Black culture, respect, power, self knowledge, integrity, relationships, emotion regulation, communication practices, and honesty to oneself and others. Prior to collecting data, all participants were aware that I was in the process of obtaining my doctoral degree. Some participants called

me Dr. Frazier from the moment they discovered I was in the process of obtaining my degree. Moreover, I realized that in the eyes of the participants, I was perceived as someone more than Dean of Students and Head Counselor. To some of the participants, I was perceived as a mentor, as a big brother, as an uncle, even as the school principal. A couple participants expressed that they could come to me about anything. All participants were comfortable discussing frustrating issues and successful events in my presence.

Study Participants: Access and Protection

The current study was a voluntary participation project; students were not penalized if they decided not to participate. Participating students were informed that our personal relationship would not be altered if they decided not to participate in the current study. As Dean of Students, Head Counselor, and advisor for BSU, I had regular and ready access to the participants. Participation in this particular study involved minimal risks. I advised all participants of the study's purpose, duration, procedures, risks, benefits, confidentiality, method of contact for further information, voluntary nature (no penalty for not participating or choosing to withdraw), and provided information after the study to all participants. To diminish any possible privacy risks, no names or identifiable information were used in any data files, memos,

field notes, or published reports of the research. Additionally, the name of the school and community was changed and disguised.

Due to the dialogue within the reflective focus groups, including personal opinions and experiences, further measures were taken to protect each participant's privacy. I began each reflective focus group by asking participants to verbally agree to the importance of keeping information discussed in the focus group confidential. I also asked participants to sign a confidentiality agreement that pertains to the discussions that were held during all reflective focus groups. I also asked each participant to verbally agree to keep everything discussed in the room confidential, and reminded them at the end of the group not to discuss the material outside of the reflective focus group. I also verbally reassured participants during one-on-one follow-up dialogues that all information shared is confidential.

Participants were informed that they could answer the proposed questions they in which they chose to answer, and that it would not stop others' participation in the research at any time. All collected data of participants who withdrew from the study were treated like any other data collected, and used to help generate overarching themes toward the socio-academic realities of Black male youth who attended UBA. The aforementioned options were outlined in the consent agreement and were reinforced at the beginning and end of each

focus group. Since participants will continue to be students at the school where the research was conducted, I emphasized the voluntary nature of participation, and explained to participants that refusing to participate had no consequence upon our relationship.

Assent, and consent forms were obtained from all participants and their guardians. Students were clearly informed that their involvement in the study would in no way affect any part of their grades. The study's findings and conclusions were provided to the school's principal and the district office, and were available to parents and students, upon request.

Participant Portraits

Portraiture as described by Lawrence-Lightfoot (2005) as "a way of reflecting its cross between art and science, its blend of aesthetic sensibilities and empirical rigor, and its humanistic and literary metaphors" (p.6). Although portraits provide a partial narrative and intermediate glimpses of a person's lived experiences, like Dixson, Chapman, and Hill (2005), I used portraits of participants to "construct intricate, multifaceted portraits of individuals and events" (p. 21). Portraits of the participants were developed from the acquired narratives and gathered information from the participants themselves. As the portraitist of this current study, I sought to use the voices of participants and my own to contextualize the historical and present day experiences of myself in

relation to participants (Chapman, 2005). Dixon, Chapman, and Hill suggests that the concept of portraiture acknowledges the portraitist position in relation to the subject(s) studied, and acknowledges the subject to be the knower of their lived experiences. Portraits of the subject(s) are encompassed and totalized truths by the researcher / portraitist empathetic, and critical lens (Dixon, Chapman, & Hill). Portraits were used to provide a history and context in which the participants' individual stories contribute to a grand narrative that is revealing by having an understanding of their backgrounds.

Phillip

Phillip was born and raised in Lovely, CA. He has only attended public schools. During the time of the study, he was a 16-year-old junior, and was identified as significantly undercredited. Phillip was expected to transfer at the end of the semester, but may not be able to because the identified continuation schools could only accept a certain number of students who received special education services. Phillip had grown a strong liking of UBA, and expressed that he would like to transfer back to graduate from UBA with his friends. Phillip is an only child and lives with his father, approximately one mile from UBA. Phillip has never had a close relationship with his mother. He talks with her over the phone a few times a year. Phillip is into mixed martial arts and hopes to become a professional fighter someday. Phillip's coaches, as well as his

father, acknowledge his focus and determination during his training. Phillip's father frequently encourages his son to transfer those skills to his academic and scholastic practices. Phillip's father expressed to me over the phone, "You know Dean Frazier, it's me and him. We're all we got. It's hard sometimes because I have my own issues to deal with, you know?" Phillip speaks highly of his father, and has shared with me that he wants his father to be happy and proud of him. Phillip is well respected by his peers and is acknowledged for his gentleness, sense of humor, and talents in the mixed martial arts. Phillip does not have a history of behavioral issues, though he did have a verbal exchange with a school official that he believed allowed a physical altercation to occur that resulted in Phillip being violated. Though Phillip was identified as chronically absent, and labeled as a "hallwalker," he was regularly reminded and encouraged by his father, the success counselor, myself, and at times his peers, to attend his classes on time, stop roaming the halls, and to turn in all classwork so he could graduate on time without having to transfer.

Whiz

Whiz was born and raised in a city 14 miles west of Lovely, CA. He has only attended public schools. During the time of the study, Whiz was a 16-year old junior, and was identified as significantly undercredited. Whiz is the oldest of three brothers. Though he and his family still live 14 miles west of Lovely,

they all attend schools in Lovely, CA. Ms. Williams (Whiz's mother) also works in Lovely. Whiz was often expected to take public transportation to pick up his little brother from his elementary school a few blocks from UBA. Whiz spoke highly of his family and vowed to always do what's best for his brothers and mother. He shared with me that his dad was killed and that he never got a chance to get to know him. Whiz told me, "I would like to be the first person in my family to not jus attend college, but to actually graduate from college. Moms would love that!" Whiz was not labeled a hallwalker. He said, "Frazier! It's way too easy to leave campus. And to be honest, if I'm not gonna be in class, ain't no reason for me to be at the school. So..." Whiz wanted to transfer to a continuation school at the end of the semester, and return to graduate from UBA after he was caught up with the credits that he was supposed to have as a junior. Ms. Williams called me and said, "Dean, I really want him to transfer, but the choice is really up to him. I'll support him with whatever he decides. So, let's give him this week and revisit the conversation." He transferred to UBA in the middle of his freshman year. Since his arrival, he has been chronically absent, and would only attend a few classes throughout the week. Educators who have worked with Whiz describe him as brilliant, sharp, charismatic, a natural leader, needed in class, and funny. Whiz's peers perceive him as a leader, loyal, and charismatic. Whiz has been to several different middle

schools due to behavioral issues. Unfortunately, Whiz was involved in the social world outside of school more than the social and academic phenomena that were happening at UBA.

Bottoms

Bottoms was born in a city 30 minutes south of Lovely, CA. He lost his mother at birth, never met his father, and was raised by friends of his mother. His new family consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Smith, and their five adult children. Three of their five children attended and graduated with honors from UBA. They lived approximately four miles from UBA. Bottoms had attended several different middle schools due to what was called bad behavior. He told me, "I didn't really like those schools anyway, they kept putting me in these classrooms with three or four students... But some of the teachers were cool though!" During the time of the study, Bottoms was a 15 year old sophomore, and was identified as mildly undercredited. Bottoms was a vigorous young man during his freshman year. He smiled a lot, always had jokes, and you could hear his voice and laughter down the hall. Every educator who worked with Bottoms spoke of his genuineness and described him as honest, open, funny, real, and raw. During the time of the study, Bottoms was removed from the football team due to his failing grades, and allowing his GPA to drop below a 2.0. His coach and peers noticed a downward shift in Bottoms' demeanor

when he was removed from the team. I also noticed Bottoms returned for his sophomore year with a different demeanor. He expressed to me that he would rather be at another school in a smaller setting. He asked if I would talk with his mother about transferring him to a smaller setting. Mrs. Smith expressed, "When Bottoms is able to demonstrate he is capable of handling business there at UBA, then Mr. Smith and I will see about transferring him. Until then, no." Bottoms is unclear about what he wants to do after UBA. Bottoms' peers perceive him as honest, hotheaded, and real. Last year, Bottoms was suspended for kicking another student while the student was on the ground during a group fight. Bottoms speaks his mind, and holds himself accountable for his actions, no matter the situation.

Kicks

Kicks was born and raised in Lovely, CA. He has attended both private and public schools. During the time of the study, he was a 15-year-old sophomore, and was identified as mildly under-credited. Since his freshman year, Kicks has wanted to attend a continuation / alternative school. He knew that UBA was too big of a school for him, and asked if I would talk with his mother about transferring him to a smaller school setting. Kicks eventually acquired a liking for some of the onsite educators at UBA, but still resisted others. He told me, "I like it here. It's just some of the teachers are garbage. For

real!" Kicks said that he would rather transfer and just graduate from another school. Kicks lives with his mother and older brother several blocks from UBA. Kicks defines himself as an all around athlete and wants to play baseball or basketball professionally. Kicks was frequently acknowledged for his athletic talents by onsite educators that witnessed his skills, by his peers, and by several citywide athletic organizations. Kicks' mother expressed to me, "Dean Frazier, I don't get it. He's the total opposite of his brother. He thinks having an IEP will help him. Ain't nothing wrong with boy, he just lazy! He ain't transferring nowhere!" Though Kicks abided by his mother's requests and / or demands in those moments, he regularly reverted back to the opposite of what she demanded. All of Kicks' teachers expressed that Kicks is more than capable of not just doing the work, but surpassing his classmates with ease if he tried. Kicks' brother did receive special education services, but was in general education classes with general education students. Kicks wanted the same services and treatment, such as being able to take a test with another teacher in a smaller, quieter setting where he would receive one-on-one support. Kicks' friends identify him as playful, young, and a really talented athlete. Kicks has had several reports made by other students and onsite educators for his rowdy, rude, and inconsiderate behaviors towards others. Last year, Kicks was identified as chronically absent, and labeled a hall walker. He regularly resisted

the requests, suggestions, and supports offered by school personnel and his mother during his entire freshman year. Kicks was often defensive, and often finding himself having an excuse for his unwarranted behaviors. Kicks entered UBA with familial anxieties, which often left him feeling excluded.

Positionality

I have a personal relationship with this kind of research. It was critical that I self-reflect on my own experiences, perspectives and practices in relation to the participants. As well as the context in which the study was conducted; the design and implementation of the study, the emerging data, and how data was processed, analyzed, and presented. I recounted my own social and academic experiences as a Black male youth, as well as my more recent experiences as a practitioner and as a researcher for this study.

The Adolescent

Several of my friends and I had just finished a conversation about life. Duck says, "Bro, you gon' grow up to be either a preacher or teacher." Laughingly, I responded, "Well, I dunno bout all that... But what I do know is I'm not gon' be no preacher!" I was always told that I was a good listener and was often sought out for what my older friends would call "sage advice." I say that to mean that I have always been intrigued about people's processes and how they interpreted their lived experiences and made meaning of their

external world(s). I wanted to understand how bidirectional behaviors and individual implicit feelings and thoughts influenced people's experiences and shaped people's relationships. I was fascinated with meaning making. My attraction with the socialization process between my close friends was just as heightened and intentional in educational settings. I observed interactions between students and educators and often wondered how students' interactions would be different if they were to dialogue with a peer or a parent. In addition, I wondered how educators' interactions would be different if they were interacting with a colleague or a different student, like myself.

By the time I entered high school, I developed insecurities about my academic identity. As a result of my academic insecurities I did the bare minimum to pass my classes and graduate high school. I was creative. In fact, I often used my visual and lyrical talents to manage my academic insecurities. Some educators endorsed my artistic abilities; others encouraged me to do well academically (i.e., graduate high school). Mrs. G. (advisor/school counselor), Mr. Roberts (Art teacher), and Big Steve (school custodian) always engaged with me with care, comedy, curiosity, and calm. They had the keen ability to provide a sense of security. There were several instances when I interpreted the actions or decisions of some of the onsite educators as unfair and hurtful. Those instances prompted a set of mixed emotions like fear, anger, sadness, and

shame. In those anxiety driven moments, I never went to an onsite educator to share my experiences because I didn't think anything would be done to change it. However, I did talk with Big Steve about my socio-academic experiences. Big Steve is an older, wise, and funny Black man.

The Practitioner

As one of the Dean of Students, one of my core objectives is to discipline and help manage the behaviors of students. For instance, I respond to office discipline referrals that could range from a student using foul language toward school personnel, to a student verbally or physically assaulting another student.

As a practitioner, I also respond to the immediate psychosocial, emotional or academic needs of students. I facilitate mediations between students, and between educators and students. I also address truancy issues, damages to property, school thefts, and drug and weapon possessions. As one of the Head Counselors, my main objectives are to cultivate safe spaces for community members to communicate concerns and engage in progressive conversations; provide psychosocial and emotional supports for all students; and to be available for students and educators to voice their concerns and share their contributions as active agents of the school community. I am also a member of the Positive Behavioral Intervention Supports (PBIS) leadership committee at UBHS. I work closely with a committee comprised of teachers,

counselors, administrators, and a student to develop school wide systems of support for educators and students alike.

At most secondary schools, the Dean of Students are generally perceived as coercive authoritarians, particularly by the demographic that I seek to better understand, Black male youth. Also, at most secondary schools, Head Counselors have little interaction with students, because they assume responsibilities in developing, implementing, and evaluating a school counseling and guidance program. I have more interactions with students because of my role as Dean of Students. In fact, we have an assistant principal that handles the aforementioned responsibilities. As a practitioner, I am asked to help educators develop better ways to guide students through transformative character building (Flennaugh, 2016). Though the term discipline is commonly viewed in a negative light, my pedagogical approach transmutes the discriminatory description associated with Dean of Students to one of equity and care. The aim of this current study is to foster the necessary skill sets to reverse the social injustices and inequities that are interwoven into the fabric of America's educational.

The Researcher

I was accepted into the San Francisco State University Educational Leadership program the same academic year I began working as Dean of

Students/Head Counselor. The principal at the time graduated from the same Educational Leadership program years earlier. From the beginning, he would ask me about my experiences in the program, and want to engage in a dialogue that allowed him to share his wisdom. I entered his office to discuss a qualitative study that I was developing for my graduate class, and I vividly recall him saying, "Don, you are always a researcher... Remember that. You have to always question what's going on, 'Why is this group working with our students? What are their unspoken objectives?' You know?" This statement was in line with my personal and professional practices. As I nodded in agreement he sighed and said, "Everything is data, and as research practitioners we need to understand how that data is impacting our students..." These interactions inspired, challenged and influenced me to remain thoughtful, aware and considerate of other people's experiences. Moreover, I was inspired to be as sensitive with my own experiences as I was becoming of others.

As researcher/participant observer, naming my identities was both challenging and significant. Identity is an ever changing bidirectional process of accepting and/or challenging various past, present and future factors that include social, cultural, racial, political, educational and spiritual influences (Brittian, 2012; Cross & Fhagen-Smith, 1996; Flennaugh, 2016; Marcia, 2002; Tatum, 1992). Throughout the duration of the study, I reflected verbally with

critical colleagues to help with the processing of both the explicit and implicit factors that were inevitably influencing my position in relation to the participants and the overall study. I also composed data memos and reflexive journal entries to help me recognize the many challenges and significances of my positionality in relation to the participants and the research. My personal and professional approach does have an influence on the lives of others, particularly on the lives of Black adolescent male students.

My social, educational and political identities are all co-constructed ideals that are frequently interpreted and recreated by persons I interact with, including participants. For instance, one participant may perceive me as a Dean in some instances. Another participant may perceive me as a scholar in the process of obtaining my doctoral degree, while another participant may perceive me as a counselor who could help with his personal statement for his college application. All of them are valid interpretations in relation to this particular target group within this socio-academic context. My multiplicity cannot be dismissed, as I am a direct influence on socio-academic realities of participants.

Data Collection

This study sought to investigate the socio-academic realities of four Black male youth enrolled in a high-performing public high school. Although I initially created interview protocol questions for all three focus groups, I decided to question participants using semi-structured questions and through systemic questioning (Chan, 2014). This particular approach allowed participants to yield power and direction of the conversation, which is essential for phenomenological praxis (Stones, 1986). All follow-up questions were used to further investigate, revisit, and dive deeper into the socio-academic realities of participants. This particular approach allowed me to remain as a partner in both the examination, and the influence on the lived experiences of participants (Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006). The domains of interest included power, social power relations, exclusion, and culture.

Modes of data collection included reflective focus groups, one-on-one dialogic follow-ups, contextual field notes, and reflexive journaling. Descriptions of data collection are detailed below. Some questions that were asked during the reflective focus groups were asked again for clarity, and possible similarities or differences in their responses during the one-on-one dialogic follow-ups with some participants. Reflective focus groups averaged 1-1.5 hours in length. All

four participants attended all three reflective focus groups, met for multiple one-on-one follow-up, and provided rich naturalistic exchanges.

Reflective Focus Groups

Reflective focus groups were used to generate a multiplicity of perspectives as data, and analyzed to develop common understandings between participants (Bradbury-Jones, Sambrook, & Irvine, 2009). All three reflective focus groups were audio recorded and conducted in a secured classroom on the school's campus. It was important that all participants were offered a secure sanctuary that inspired open sharing about their lived experiences as Black male youth (Krueger & Casey, 2014).

One-on-one Dialogic Follow-ups

One-on-one dialogic follow-ups were used as opportunities to employ a series of deep questions relating to the individual interpretations of each participant. All one-on-one dialogic follow-ups were conducted in a secure office at UBA. All dialogic follow-ups were conducted after school or during the most convenient time for the participant. For example, some dialogic follow-ups occurred when a teacher sent him out of class to the Dean's office. Other examples involved participants assigned as a teacher's assistant or taking a break from.

Contextual Field Notes

I used contextual field notes throughout the duration of the study to extract deeper meaning from participants' statements and behaviors. Contextual field notes served as a way to revisit, recount, and closely examine the implicit and explicit happenings that occurred, particularly after the naturalistic exchanges I had with participants. Contextual field notes were used to highlight evidence that gave meaning to the attitudes, behaviors, and interpretations during focus groups, one-on-one dialogic follow-ups, and unstructured occurrences (Becher & Orland-Barak, 2017). In qualitative research, the researcher must be aware of their influence on the data; how data is collected; how data is interpreted; how data is manipulated; and how it will be illustrated for the reader.

Reflexive Journaling

Reflexive difference between reflexive field notes and reflexive journaling is that field notes are used to remember and record observations of the field study, while journaling is a record of ongoing documents containing the researcher's emotions, thoughts, concerns and self-assurances. I used reflexive journaling to gain a deeper understanding about my presumptions, in the moment experiences with participants and with the data, and to understand how decisions may have influenced emerging data. I used reflexive journaling

to clarify my position in relation to participants and the social context in which the phenomenon was studied (Berger, 2015; Etherington, 2004). Reflexive journaling served as a barometer to gauge how my subjective involvements shaped interactions with participants and allowed me to remain engaged in the research, while holding myself accountable throughout the duration of the study (Finlay & Gough, 2008).

Issues of Validity

This is a qualitative study and issues of bias should be handled differently than in traditional positivist studies. Nonetheless, As an inbetweenener (i.e., onsite educator, practitioner and researcher) of the study, I create a social context and knowledge that naturally affects the data. That is a strength but also critical that I take the necessary steps to ensure a legitimacy of the study. Therefore, it is critical that I take the necessary steps to protect the data from researcher error and bias. Data can become invalid if I fully assume the position and identity of a group member. I can also invalidate the data by manipulating the data to illustrate a particular outcome.

To prevent invalidation of data, I verbally reflected with critical colleagues Vanson and Roam. Another step that I took to prevent the invalidation of data was to examine and proclaim my values and assumptions in consideration of the current study. Data memos and reflexive journaling

were used to help with this particular process of validity. These approaches helped me acknowledge my position in relation to the participants, the context of the study, and most of the emergent, collected, and analyzed data.

Triangulation among data sources was also used to help prevent researcher bias, and issues with validity. Triangulation included peer review, critical colleagues, and reviews of existing literature.

Untruthful Participants

Another threat to the credibility of the study includes participants that are not truthful during the study. The behaviors of participants may not be as authentic in certain situations than in others. For instance, some participants may perceive me as an authoritarian and hold back their honest thoughts, feelings, and perspectives that could possibly enrich emerging data. Moreover, some participants may want to intentionally distort the data and make their experiences seem worse than they actually are. In some cases, participants' mental, physical, and/or emotional wellbeing can also distort the data. For instance, one participant may second guess themselves or why the researcher is conducting the study, and as a result can have an impact on the emerging data. To prevent the data from becoming distorted, I had participants review and validate their transcribed dialogue.

Unexpected Changes to the Social Context

Unexpected changes to the social context of the study can also affect the data. For example, participants may refuse to participate in one social context and not in another. They may also share different information around different participants. To help prevent data distortion by way of social influences, I remained authentic in my exchanges with all participants and expressed the importance of their voice and participation regarding the study.

Data Analysis

It was that I use approaches where I could be with the data as it emerged, and as it was closely analyzed. Thus, as previously mentioned, elements of discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1992; Gee, 2004; 2010), narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2006), and symbolic interactionism (Charmaz, 2014) were used to investigate the phenomenon that constructed the socio-academic realities of participants.

Data analysis was an ongoing and iterative process. I used elements of constructivist grounded theory to systematically construct and compare emerging data through symbolic interactionism (Charmaz, 2014). Symbolic interactionism involves an analysis of larger social systems of power, and allows people to position themselves as change agents in relation to their immediate surroundings and larger society (Charmaz). This approach allowed

me to remain with the data, and to compare and synthesize emergent data from participants' interpretations of their experiences that shaped their socio-academic realities.

I reviewed audio recordings of each interview no more than 3 hours after the recordings were completed. I transcribed the entirety of all three reflective focus groups, and one-on-one dialogic follow-ups. I used responses from transcribed reflective focus groups to guide subsequent and reflective focus groups, and one-on-one dialogic follow-ups with participants. This approach allowed participants to be reflective meaning makers and change agents of their experiences and situations (Charmaz, 2014; Stones, 1986).

I considered using NVivo, Atlas.ti, and YouTube as ways to transcribe, code and analyze data. I decided to use Microsoft Excel to transcribe, analyze, organize, and code data. Using Microsoft Excel allowed me to create, and maintain a system of organization and fluency. Unclear about how I would utilize Excel, I searched YouTube for examples. After trying to use the examples provided on YouTube, I quickly discovered that I needed to do something that worked for me and for this study in particular.

I utilized Microsoft Excel in the following way: to transcribe the reflective focus groups and the one-on-one dialogic follow-ups, I used cell A1 for my opening question. The cell to the right (B1) was titled participants. Each

subsequent cell to the right was titled as follows, me (C1), participant (D1), me (E1), participant (F1), and so on. The cell titled A2 was used for the transcribed question. B2 was used for the transcribed answer of the participant(s). C2 was used for my transcribed follow-up question. Subsequent cells to the right were used for the actual transcribed audio (my questions and their responses). I decided on this particular approach because reading the dialogue from left to right allowed for a flow of the dialogue that seemed natural, and ongoing exchange.

I used cells in the third row (A3, B3, C3, and so on), as brief data memos to help analyze, and process the transcribed audio in row two. These cells were critical, because they allowed me to frequently revisit the existing, and emergent data. I used cells A4, B4, C4, and so on to ask myself questions about the questions I posed to participants, or that I should have posed to participants. These cells were also used as building blocks to follow up with subsequent reflective focus groups or with certain participants.

I applied specific colors to entire cells for different reasons. I also applied specific colors on the actual transcribed texts for different reasons. For instance, I colored entire cells yellow for questions that I asked and thought were significant to the study's overall objective. I colored cells light brown to identify my data memos. I colored cells light gray to keep track of what I may need to

revisit a certain exchange or response that a participant provided. I used the color red and bolded the actual transcribed text to help identify patterns, and emerging concepts. I used the color blue on text to identify my voice in the study.

Several tabs were also created for organizational reasons. For instance, each reflective focus group has an individual tab. Each one-on-one dialogic follow-up has a separate tab as well. I titled a tab "Process." This tab was used to help me reflect and document the steps and processes that occurred throughout the study. Cell A1 was titled "Date of Process." I used cell A2 to implement the date of the event that occurred. Cell B1 was titled "The Event" and B2 was a general description of the event that occurred. Cell C1 was titled "Process" and cell C2 was used to detail the exchanges between others and myself (including participants, and other school personnel). I detailed the actions of myself and others, as well as my thoughts and feelings about the event that occurred.

I titled another tab "Questions." The questions tab served as a way to continue *fleshing out and organizing the emerging themes*. Prior to using the questions tab, I reviewed all questions, and general discussion topics I talked about with participants during reflective focus groups, one-on-one dialogic follow-ups, and naturalistic exchanges. I began to group similar questions and

topics that were also similar in nature. For instance, I used three cells (A2, A3, A4, and A5) for questions and discussions about school culture, Black male culture, changing the culture, and suggestions to change Black male culture. I used cells A6, A7, and A8 for questions and discussions about helpful faculty, positive experiences with faculty, and negative experiences with faculty. The following three columns (B, C, and D) in the tab titled "Questions" were used for the reflective focus groups coded responses to the appropriate grouped questions and discussions cell. The following columns (E, F, G, and so on) were designated for each participant's one-on-one dialogic follow-up. I copied the already (red and bolded) coded responses from each participant's individual one-on-one tab, and pasted the codes into the accurate cells that housed the particular grouped questions and discussions row.

I titled another tab "Generative Themes." The generative themes tab served as a way to help organize developing concepts and emergent themes. I titled the first column "Categories." Categories were developed from the patterned words; repeated terms and phrases that I began to identify through the iterative process of data analysis. I titled the second column (cell B1) "Questions." Here, I copied the grouped questions and discussion cells from the tab titled questions. The next column (cell C1) was titled "Descriptors" and

was used for the meaningful terms and descriptive comments participants used in their to narrate their experiences.

The following column (cell D1) was titled “Roam’s Themes” and was used during the time I spent with her as one of my critical colleagues. I referred to critical colleagues as identified persons who constructively helped me further my thinking by questioning my worldviews, and listening with empathy. I also utilized critical colleagues to review conceptualized data as a peer review. This approach helps to decrease possible biases that I may have experienced during the process of data analysis. Roam and Vanson were two of my identified critical colleagues throughout the study. Both Roam and Vanson reviewed the raw data, as well as the emerging concepts and patterned codes that I analyzed from the raw data. Roam then reviewed the category in cell A2, looked at the grouped question/discussion in cell B2, and followed by reviewing the descriptors in cell C2. Roam then used cell D2 to type what she believed were possible emergent concepts and themes. Roam and I dialogued about my process and how I arrived to this particular place. Roam repeated the same process for each row. This was all involved in the critical colleague dynamic.

I titled cell E1 “Reflections.” I used cell E2 to transcribe my thoughts and feelings from Roam’s potential concepts and emergent themes. This process allowed me to revisit the previously analyzed raw data, my thought processes,

and how I arrived to certain points throughout the study. I titled the following column "Developing Themes." Cell F2 was used to further develop emergent themes based on Roams input. I then titled the following column "Vanson's Themes" and allowed him to develop themes based on the data that was provided to him from the concepts and patterned codes that I noticed from the data. Vanson did not have access to Roam's concepts and themes. I took that approach because I didn't want Roam's results to influence Vanson's. Like Roam, Vanson repeated the process for each row as well.

Overall Reflection on Data Analysis Approach

Overall, approach to data analysis while grounded in the work of Chamaraz (2014) and Wick (2011), this particular approach to data analysis positioned me to immerse myself in the data, and to explore at various depths, the implicit meanings codes and patterns, and ultimately how these nuanced elements were constructed to illuminate the socio-academic realities of the participants. This approach is a unique contribution to bodies of literature on constructivist grounded theory methods, and phenomenological qualitative research designs.

This particular approach to data analysis was unique, and has already helped other doctoral students in the program. This method of analyzing and transcribing has also allowed for effective organization, and represented an

ongoing fluid dialogue between participants and myself. This method of analysis allowed me to pursue emergent questions as they developed throughout the study. Lastly, this approach allowed me to connect implicit and explicit phenomenon to develop a cohesiveness among the findings.

Chapter Three: Conceptual Framework of Findings - Theme One

Introduction

This qualitative study investigated the socio-academic realities of four under credited Black male youth who attended a high-performing public high school. I utilized elements of discourse analysis, narrative inquiry, and symbolic interactionism through a phenomenological praxis research design to further investigate the phenomenon that constructed the socio-academic realities of the identified four participants. Though the study began with a focus on the socio-academic experiences of 12 participants from various social, cultural, and academic backgrounds, I was able to acquire more information from the four identified participants. The remaining eight participants attended one or two of the reflective focus groups but not all three. Therefore, I focused on the voices and interpreted experiences of the remaining four identified Black male youth. I used three reflective focus groups, multiple one-on-one dialogic follow-ups, and naturalistic exchanges to acquire the socio-academic realities of participants. To triangulate the data I used peer review, critical colleagues, and reviews of existing literature.

I used elements of narrative inquiry in relation with a systemic questioning approach to help co-construct the complex, interwoven, and individual socio-academic realities of participants. I revisited emergent data

prior to one-on-one dialogic follow-ups, as well as the second and third reflective focus groups. This circular approach allows for a depth, and assurance of participants' experiences. I found that naturalistic exchanges were some of the richest data to acquire and investigate. Using elements of a constructivist grounded theory approach allowed for intimate connections with the data to naturally emerge by searching for similarities and distinct differences in participants' choice of words, moments of agreement and/or disagreement, tone of their delivery, certain silences in the dialogue, and how often they decided to revisit a certain aspect of the topic. From the iterative, and rigorous data analysis, three themes emerged: 1) *In a culture of perpetuated exclusion*, 2) *Please check the power relation*, and 3) *How constructive gestures create caring communities*.

Excerpts were strategically chosen to help illustrate the socio-academic realities of participants. Findings are presented in narrative form from within the context in which participants existed. This particular approach serves to identify, examine, and explain the studied phenomenon within the individual and shared socio-academic realities of participants. References to existing literature were used to help validate the individual, and collective realities of participants. These references extend the use of empirical literature in this study beyond the sources cited and discussed in Chapter 1.

Because I took this particular approach to thoroughly understand the implicit and explicit nuances of the identified phenomenon, the initial draft of the findings sections were too long. Thus, for the reader and to keep a coherent set of discoveries, findings were designed as follows: Chapter Three – Theme One; Chapter Four – Theme Two; and Chapter Five – Theme Three.

Chapter three establishes the conceptual framework for the socio-academic realities of the four under-credited participants. While Chapter Three also presents findings from theme 1) *In a culture of perpetuated exclusion*, Chapter Four presents findings from theme 2) *Please check the power relation*, and Chapter Five presents findings from theme 3) *How constructive gestures create caring communities*.

Figure 1 is a visual of the conceptual framework. The image shows a cyclical process that illustrates how existing phenomenon (i.e., power, culture, and exclusion) influences ideologies. A person's ideologies, previous experiences, personal relationships, and desired results have an influence on the decision making process with the ultimate aim to acquire a particular result. That decision then influences the codes of conduct that eventually contributes back to the existing phenomenon.

Socio-academic Realities of Four Under-credited Black Male Youth

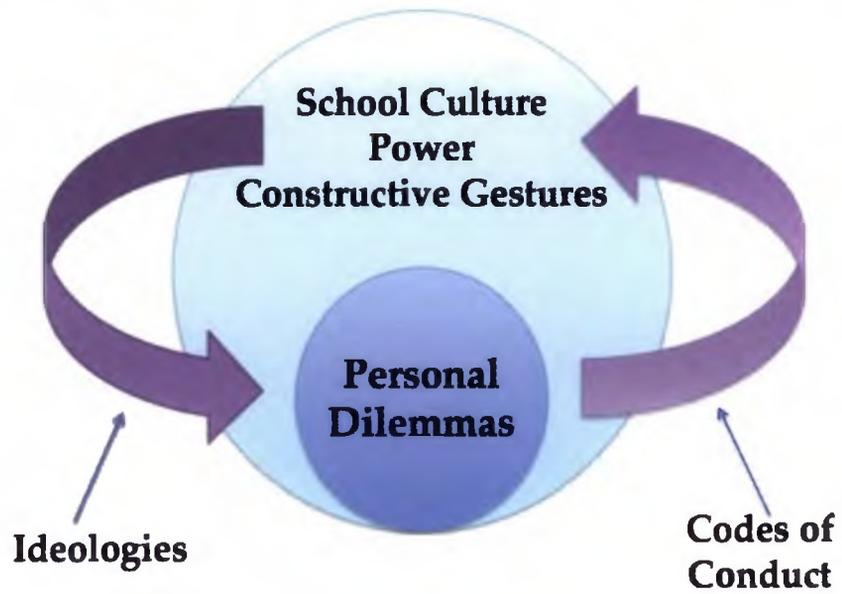


Figure 1.

Findings: Theme 1

Me: How would you describe the Black male culture at UBA?

Phillip: Different. Seems like it's separate from other students.

Me: How?

Phillip: That's hard... Well, it's like [we're] a small dot on the paper.

Me: What does that dot represent?

Phillip: Us [Black males] as a whole. We're very close together.

First thing you're gonna see is that it's hard to get that one dot to move to another part of the paper... It is that space that the dot is in [that] needs to be worked on.

This section will present findings from the first theme titled: *In a culture of perpetuated exclusion*. Culture is a philosophy that is influenced by social circumstances, and maintained by codes of conduct, ideologies, and behaviors that are shared and practiced within a group of individuals (Duncan, 2002). Certain codes of conduct, ideologies, and/or behaviors can result in the exclusion of a person by other group members, by members from an outside group, or by voluntary omission. Exclusion is referred to as a disadvantaged or marginalized status that effectively prevents someone(s) from fully

participating in the present state (Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco, & Twenge, 2005).

As an insider, I was conveniently positioned to explore the codes of conduct, ideologies, and behavioral patterns of the participants. I sought to investigate *with* participants, the socio-academic realities they revealed through focus groups and one-on-one dialogic follow-ups. I inserted a break between the selected excerpt below to help contextualize the experiences of participants. During a reflective focus group, the following exchange occurred:

Me: So, what did y'all do to end up here [significantly credit deficient]?

Whiz: Well I came [to UBA] in the middle of my ninth grade year... I was kicked out of another district and came here. Moms felt like I needed some specific supports. My mom was close with the security guard and put me here. My ninth and tenth grade year, I didn't care about anything. With me not caring, I had that ignorant attitude. I wasn't listening to nobody...

Kicks: Me too! I came in with an older brother and four cousins that were already here. Then there was also four other people here from around the way. I was doing dumb stuff, but I don't think it would've been bad or worse if those people wasn't here. I came in

with a bad mindset from middle school... I came in from having a bad summer hanging out with the wrong people. I feel like, things would have been worse if I brought that in school. Which I kind of did a little...

(Extended pause... I interpreted this pause as a moment for Whiz and Kicks' experiences to resonate with the group and myself)

Me: [...] and Phil, what about you?

Phillip: Maannn, with me... I just was not going to class. Not applying myself as a student. A lot of cussing, ignorance, childish stuff, wrestling, loudness... I ain't gon' lie, I don't be doing the homework. It's like the worst thing in the world.

Bottoms: Haaa... Yeah, same with me, I was also just horse playing... Chilling on the courtyard; then end up being late for class. It's crazy cause when I'm late, I'd rather not go at all.

(Reflective Focus Group)

Whiz's and Kicks' reflections suggest that there are direct relations between interpreted former experiences, developed behaviors and ideologies, and in the moment exhibited behaviors that contribute to their current academic status. I interpreted Whiz's previous careless way of being and resistant activities, such as refusing to listen anyone (including his mother), smoking marijuana, and

intentionally evading school during his early adolescent years as normal codes of conduct, and a set ideologies that he brought with him from his previous schooling experiences to UBA, where he continued to construct an exclusionary socio-academic reality. I interpreted Whiz's previous ideology of having an "ignorant attitude" as an existing factor to his codes of conduct, and ideologies where he resisted assimilation to the school culture at UBA.

Similar to Whiz's codes of conduct and behaviors, Kicks' developed behaviors and ideologies also contributed to his exclusion from UBA; however, the tension Kicks experienced regarding his personal dilemma between bonding with his family and friends, or engaging with his academics, bare more weight than Whiz's personal dilemma, because the pressures and stresses that Kicks had to deal with at home and in his community were existent at UBA, because he had family, and friends from his community that contributed to this particular dynamic who also attended UBA. Within the Black male culture you find codes of conduct and behaviors that indicate a desire that Black males prefer being with each other (i.e., other Black males) (Kunjufu, 2013). When Black males resist cultural behaviors and codes of conduct within their peer groups, they often become intensely scrutinized by members within the peer group (Fergus, Noguera, & Martin, 2014). Unfortunately for Kicks, he continued these codes of conduct and behaviors where he was excluding himself from the

educational setting displaying a particular academic character, but including himself with his peers and family members, which he admitted situated him to become under-credited.

Kicks' comment, "I don't think it would've been bad or worse if those people wasn't here" suggest Kicks adverse behaviors were predictable, and he would have displayed these particular codes of conduct regardless if his family and peers from the community were enrolled at UBA or not. Kicks' comment, "Which I kind of did a little" shows us that he has reflected on the previous behaviors and ideologies that lead him to become under-credited. Kicks' personal dilemmas during middle school, and over the summer prior to his freshman year, attributed to the behaviors and ideologies he demonstrated during his freshman year, and for most of his sophomore year at UBA. Like Whiz, Kicks developed a set of ideologies over the years that shaped a particular socio-academic reality that perpetuated frequent moments of exclusion from certain classroom, and ultimately UBA.

Different than Whiz and Kicks, Phillip began his reflection about his exclusionary behaviors while attending UBA during his freshman and sophomore years. Declaring, "I just was not going to class" demonstrated Phillip's ability to take ownership of the previous behaviors and ideologies that led to his current academic status as under-credited. Upon closer examination,

when he says, "Not applying myself as a student" implies he is not welcomed at UBA because he is not perceived as a student worthy of attending UBA, thus perpetuating what the culture of the school expects of him as a Black male. This perception extends a cyclical culture of exclusion. Similar to Whiz's experience, Phillip used the word ignorance to describe his codes of conduct, ideologies and behaviors that led to his academic status as under-credited. During my analysis, I wondered why Whiz and Phillip used the term "ignorant" when referring to their behaviors. Though the average 14-15 year old boy is often rambunctious with his peers, talks out of turn in class, and transitions in and out of childlike behaviors, Black males are highly scrutinized, and punished (Allen, 2017). Some of these behaviors include, but are not limited to, being dishonest (regardless of the consequences), curiously exploring their world, being excitable, and discovering a sense of self-worth (Allen, 2013; Carter, 2006). Whiz, Kicks, and Phillip's ideologies about their behaviors mirror the harmful fallacies and discriminatory beliefs that systemically halt the social mobility of Black male youth.

Compared to Phillip, Bottoms' reflection demonstrated how the cycle of exclusion exists when he stated he'd rather not go to class if he were late, but was often late to class because he regularly made the time to bond with his peers by "chilling in the courtyard" instead of getting to class on time. Bottoms

articulated that, like Phillip, he was “horse playing” with his peers. Horseplay is another way to explain how people physically play in a more boisterous or rough way with each other. Bottoms' language of “horse playing” and “chilling” accentuates Kunjufu's (2013) argument that Black males don't want to be isolated from their peer group. Here, it is indicated that like Kicks, Bottoms values the social and emotional bonding time they have with their Black male peer group. Bottoms' behaviors of excluding himself from attending class when he's tardy further the existing culture of perpetuated exclusion at UBA. Bottoms' actions of avoiding attending class could also imply that he was attempting to save face or to protect his self-worth (Allen, 2017; Isaacson, 2014). It can also be implicated that Bottoms never felt connected to the larger school.

All participants demonstrated the personal dilemma where they were situated to either attend class or bond with their peers. The exclusion of Whiz and Kicks stemmed from previously developed risky patterns and unresolved experiences that existed before arriving at UBA, while the exclusion of Phillip and Bottoms may have begun during their freshman and sophomore years at UBA. While Whiz and Phillip's reflection was about their individual behaviors, Kicks and Bottoms' reflection implicated a desire to connect with others and receive a social-emotional sense of inclusiveness amongst their peers, and in Kicks' case, also from family members. As a result of learned behaviors and

opposing sociocultural factors, the academic character of these Black male youth appears to emphasize existing stereotypes about Black male youth. However, the reflections of all four participants also indicates that the school system fails at creating socio-academic experiences that has a positive impact on the socio-academic realities of Black male youth (Kunjufu, 2004; 2005; 2007). All four participants understood the possibility that they would have to transfer at some point if they continued with codes of conduct that led to their current under-credited academic status. They also were aware of how frequently Black males become under-credited and positioned to transfer to continuation schools by the time they enter into their junior year at UBA.

I noticed how often participants used certain dichotomous words such as right/wrong and good/bad throughout the focus groups. They often referred to their experiences as good or bad, and the behaviors or actions of themselves or an onsite educator as right or wrong. I took into consideration that all four participants were aware of existing factors that contributed to the high transfer rates of Black male youth from UBA to continuation schools for credit recovery. I sought participants' perspectives about the high transfer rates for Black male youth.

This excerpt was taken from a continued dialogue about the exclusionary experiences of Black male youth at UBA during a reflective focus group:

Me: What do you mean by (Black males) not having the right experiences as to why they transfer at high rates?

Bottoms: What I mean is it wasn't what they (Black males) expected; because they homeboys not there or they (the school's) sports not up to par.

Kicks: Nah bruh! I think it's because of your boys... If I went to school in Marin, CA, I wouldn't have a choice but to do my work. I'm not about to hang with them (students) if I don't know them. Sometimes you make the wrong choice with that wrong person...

Whiz: Yeah, that's real... But you also gotta look at it like... Certain students just wake up with that I don't give a fuck attitude. Some schools different... It's different [here] at UBA. We[re] lacking teacher support. If the Black male is not motivated... Then the teacher is supposed to be motivating him.

Participants begin to rapidly exchange:

Bottoms: [...] the teacher not fucking with him everyday, the teacher being hella negative!

Kicks: [...] Yeah! It's like, what's the point?

Whiz: Real talk! It's like, what's the point? Then from that point on... Some [Black male youth] jump right into the streets [...]

Kicks: [...] Shit! Man... Some are already in the streets!

Whiz: [...] Yeah! 100! And try to work both ways out!

Bottoms: [...] I'm gonna be honest, Black students spend 2-3 years here and then end up at a continuation school.

Although Bottoms' reflection was an attempt to remove himself from the socio-academic realities of other Black male youth attending UBA; however, I interpreted Bottoms' comment as a direct indication that this is also his socio-academic reality. In a naturalistic exchange, Bottoms articulated to me that he had no friends at UBA. He perceives other Black male youth attending UBA as "friends at school, but not like [my] real friends." To Bottoms, the term homeboy is has a different meaning than friend. This nuance is significant; though Bottoms does horseplay and chill with his "friends at school" he may also be feel excluded because he has no "homeboys" inside UBA that he could also connect with outside of school. Though Bottoms was seen as hot tempered, which resulted in students keeping their distance, Bottoms also distanced himself from his peers. His codes of conduct and ideologies suggest his cycle of exclusion may stem from conditions outside UBA. Bottoms response reflects the fact that many Black male youth, particularly in urban environments are tasked with navigating the street life in direct relation to school life (Anderson, 2000).

As Kunjufu (2013) contends school culture intentionally disapproves Black male culture, eventually corrupting the developing academic character, and stagnating the social mobility of Black males. I interpreted Bottoms' comment about UBA's "sports not up to par" as an association with his personal experiences of playing football at UBA. Though Bottoms made personal connections with his Black male peers during football season, he gradually began to exclude himself from his peer group once he was removed from the football team because he failed three classes. It appears that Bottoms' socio-academic reality is filled with exclusionary experiences.

Contrary to Bottoms' ideology that having homeboys at UBA would provide the right experiences for Black male youth, Kicks determined Black male youth are themselves to blame for the high transfer rates. Kicks' ideology about having no choice but to do the work if he attended a school in Marin, CA (a predominantly White and wealthy city) infers that he has a choice at UBA and he chooses to bond with his peers. With that, he implied careless decisions with certain individuals also attribute to the high transfer rates of Black male youth from UBA. Kicks inferred that high transfer rates are due to Black male youth who "make the wrong choice with that wrong person." These wrong choices Kicks referred to can also be understood as learned behaviors from the sociocultural conditions outside the school system that lack adequate social-

emotional, mental, and economic support for families, particularly in urban communities (Ramaswamy & Freudenberg, 2012). Though Bottoms' and Kicks' disagree about the relation between having peers at UBA and its direct relation to high transfer rates for Black males, both participants' responses suggest Black male youth are individuals, and their experiences should be perceived and treated as such.

Whiz offered an additional perspective about why Black male youth transfer at high rates from UBA. Whiz began his reflection by suggesting some students experience personal hardships that impact their day-to-day actions, and without finding resolve to their personal dilemmas, students wake up with careless attitudes. Feelings of carelessness can lead a person to demonstrate aversive and unwarranted behaviors in certain environments (Twenge, Catanese, & Baumeister, 2003). Depending on the social context, a person's behaviors can be deemed unacceptable and as a result, they can be excluded from that particular social milieu. Unfortunately, the sociocultural, political, and economic conditions Black male youth experience throughout society has a negative impact on their academic motivation, which is then demonstrated in ways such as refusing to attend school, having a negative interaction with an onsite educator, or completely dropping out of school (Cole & Hill, 2013). With that, Whiz argues that it is the teachers' job to create a supportive environment,

even when students arrive to school with an aversive demeanor and lacking motivation.

The rapid exchange between participants offered an explicit and succinct illustration of the perpetuated cycle of exclusion that has occurred to Black male youth attending UBA. Bottoms pointed out that teachers also contribute to the exclusion of Black male youth at UBA, and infer negative interactions and lack of personal relationships between onsite educators and Black male youth also contributes to the high transfer rates of Black male youth from UBA. Having a personal connection with an onsite educator or a personal adult advocate can help Black male youth to identify, address, and remove factors that would flaw their academic character (Kunjufu, 2013; National Middle School Association Research Committee, 2003; Nelson, 2016). While Kicks and Whiz are in agreement with Bottoms, that teachers do contribute to Black male youth self-excluding themselves from class, they further their understanding and argue that the street life Black male youth encounter also contributes to the socio-academic realities they experience as Black male youth while they attend UBA. This echoes the inference I made earlier that Bottoms' codes of conduct may be explicit demonstrations of trying to balance both sociocultural life-worlds.

Whiz's comment, "100! And [they] try to work both ways out" implies that Black male youth are in an ongoing cycle of trying to escape two worlds

that they don't belong in. In this context, Whiz's response "100!" means he is in full agreement with Kicks about having to balance the street life and school life. It is not uncommon for Black male youth to have a street lifestyle and involved in risky activities while also seeking to further their education (Payne & Brown, 2010). Whiz's comment about trying to "work both ways out" implies a desire to escape from an overbearing street lifestyle, and the punitive experiences in school, particularly UBA. Bottoms closed out the exchange by articulating a culture of perpetual exclusion, which I have also noticed during my time as an onsite educator.

Reflective focus groups allowed participants to provide descriptions that characterized socio-academic realities where Black male youth felt excluded for various reasons. These reasons include tensioned interactions with onsite educators, and particular involvements with peers that also increased existing tensions of trying to balance life inside and outside of UBA. Behaviors and ideologies Black male youth exhibit in direct relation to the school environment at UBA is a perpetuated culture of exclusion. All participants provided reflections that demonstrated codes of conduct, and ideologies that contributed to their exclusion from UBA.

I sought to further investigate and make sense of the socio-academic realities of participants by using one-on-one dialogic follow-ups. During a one-on-one follow-up dialogue:

Me: What are some things you notice at UBA?

Phillip: Well, from my freshman year, it seems like its less, and less and less Black males... It's like always something [as to] why they (Black males are) not here.

Me: Are there times when you feel excluded?

Phillip: Yeah definitely feel left out! Like what we [Black males] are doing, is it normal? But what is normal in this certain environment? I be seeing kids studying in the halls during lunch. But they don't seem like they have a social life... I wonder if you can have a social life and still be a 4.0 student... But, yeah... When I fall behind on my work.

Me: Why when you fall behind on your work?

Phillip: Because catching up is not the problem. It's understanding what you're catching up on... That's a BIG problem. Like, one day, five classes, ten assignments... That's one day... Then [I] think 3 days... Crazy.

Phillip's reflection about the recurrent exclusion of Black male youth attending UBA echoed Bottoms' previous reflection regarding the limited 2-3 year enrollment duration for Black male youth attending UBA before transferring to a continuation school. Phillip admitted to feeling excluded, and patterns of exclusion played out for Phillip in ways such as feeling abnormal in certain environments, and times when he fell behind on his schoolwork. Both of Phillip's exclusionary experiences can contribute to any future personal dilemmas Phillip will likely experience, and ultimately perpetuate the existing culture of exclusion at UBA.

Both Fanon (2007) and Wilson (1993) infer that Black males are in a continuous struggle between the idea and the reality of being Black in a society that has dehumanized the mind, body and spirit of the Black male. I interpreted Phillip's response, "Like what we [Black males] are doing, is it normal" as an ongoing exclusionary reality that all participants have experienced while attending UBA. Phillip redirected the idea of shaming Black male youth to a critique of the exclusionary setting of UBA when he stated, "But what is normal in this environment?" Phillip's query is both humbling and critical, and could either help or hinder future struggles and personal dilemmas he may experience as a Black male in certain environments where he would feel excluded, both at UBA, and beyond.

One of my obligations as a member of the PBIS Leadership Committee is to investigate and better understand the school culture and climate at UBA. One way I investigated the school culture was by asking students about their school experiences. One morning I noticed Kicks lay on a couch in a classroom, on his phone watching videos on IG (Instagram) when he was supposed to be in art class. He smacked his lips and sighed when he noticed me walking towards him. He continued to watch videos. I paused, took a deep breath, lowered the volume on my radio (walkie-talkie), and pulled up a chair and sat down. I reminded Kicks that he was not in trouble. I told him, "Fam look, I'm genuinely curious to know why you refuse to attend your classes." He gave me several reasons, which included being the only Black student in most of his classes, having a hard time understanding the content in some of his classes, and that some of his teachers are just weird and irritating. These three reasons added extra layers to the socio-academic realities of Black male youth attending UBA. Kicks' reasons for excluding himself from his classes, in conjunction to what he shared during the reflective focus groups, inspired a further investigation of Kicks' perspective about the school culture at UBA. During a one-on-one follow-up dialogue:

Me: Describe the school culture here at UBA.

Kicks: Like, not a big population of African American students...

[There is a] Big population of others like Asians. Sometimes its bad cause I feel like they [educators] don't care because we African American... Like they just want us to go... Just leave... And, I don't know but... Well... I don't know if I should say this, but all the other ethnicities are together. But us? Well... It's like we always fighting each other, and taking each other's stuff. Like, we naturally behave like this.

Similar to the other participants, Kicks interpreted the school culture at UBA as exclusionary for Black male youth. Not only does Kicks accept existing negative stereotypes such as "We always fighting each other and taking each other's stuff," Kicks stated onsite educators do not care about Black students simply because of their ethnicity as African Americans. Whether Kicks ideology is true for all Black male youth, he illustrated that at UBA Black male youth feel invisible (Ellison, 1952; Franklin, 2014), or as Duncan (2002) suggests Black male youth are beyond love when they "are excluded from society's economy and networks of care and thus expelled from useful participation in social life" (p. 140). This is important to note, as Kicks went on to say, "we naturally behave like this." This particular ideology can contribute to unjustifiable behaviors that

were deemed damaging in the academic setting. The combination of this particular ideology, and adverse codes of conduct increases the likelihood of perpetuating exclusionary ideologies, and behaviors (Baumeister, 1997). The language Kicks used such as “they don’t care,” “just want us to go” and “just leave” are substantial indications that Black male youth enter certain settings defensive, and with an anticipation that they will eventually be discriminated against (Brittian & Gray, 2014). This particular mindset would influence some Black male youth, like the four participants in the current study to avoid class altogether. For Black male youth in this study, as evidenced by Kicks here, the ethos (Duncan) at UBA does not include Black students.

Kicks’ reflection, “all other ethnicities are together” in relation to the Black population illustrates awareness and implies UBA provides a setting for “other ethnicities” to engage in a way that Kicks acknowledge is happening. Though it can be implicated that UBA provides students with settings, it is also implicated that other students operate with different codes of conduct than Black male youth. For instance, Kicks’ ideology mirrors Phillip’s ideology when Phillip stated, “I be seeing kids studying in the hall during lunch.” What is missing from this analysis are the socio-academic realities that Black male youth enter high school with sociocultural skills sets that are devalued (Kunjufu, 2013), a lessening appeal of academic focus (Ferguson, 2001), but yet

with a desire value education and want to be successful (Fergus, Noguera, & Martin, 2014). Kicks' reflection, "We always fighting each other, and taking each other's stuff" not only perpetuates existing stereotypes associated with Black male youth, but also the furthers the exclusion of Black male youth at UBA, as opposed to the cohesiveness that other ethnicities demonstrate at UBA as Kicks articulated.

I interpreted Kicks' ideology "Well, we naturally behave like this" as a socio-historical pathologization that he has accepted and unwarily refers to it as a way to justify his own and his peers' unwarranted behaviors, which has contributed to the perpetuation of exclusion for Black male youth at UBA. The pathologizing I interpreted from Kicks' ideology is identical to the negative and harmful perspectives about Black male youth throughout larger society (Todd, Thiem, & Neel, 2016). Wilson (2010) argues that the these kinds of self-defeatist or self-hatred attitudes of Black males are influenced and controlled by external (i.e., social, political, economic) forces created by White America, and disables the Black male from becoming self-centered, and as a result they verbally, mentally, physically, and emotionally harm each other. Kicks' ideology can also be seen as in-group stereotyping, which can be just as hurtful as outer-group stereotyping, and has also been damaging to the self-worth of Black males in the sports field (Harrison & Lawrence, 2004; Richards & Hewstone, 2001).

Kicks' ideology has been constructed based on his previous experiences, and reconstructed by the experiences he's had while attending UBA. Since Kicks' entry into UBA, he has been involved in several thefts, has called other students hurtful names, has verbally threatened onsite educators and students, and was an instigator for several fights between other students.

All participants interpreted Black male culture as separate from the school culture at UBA. Their reflections also demonstrated a cyclical dynamic between the two cultures that frequently resulted in the exclusion of Black male youth from UBA. Whiz visited my office one day to talk about a personal dilemma that occurred outside of school. During this naturalistic exchange, Whiz began to reflect on the culture of UBA and stated, "Er'body got they own culture, and the Black culture needs to come together better. To be completely 100 witchu, Blacks setting the examples for er'body, and it's not a good example that's being set, yuh know?" Similar to Kicks, Whiz's socio-academic reality is that Black students are excluding themselves from each other as well as the from the school environment. This sentiment was highlighted by naturalistic exchanges of all four participants as they had expressed at one point or another that they only get along with a select few of the other Black male youth at UBA. Examples of statements participants made include "I don't really rock with fam like that," "Dean Frazier, you see who I be with? That's all I need!" "Nah, I

don't fuck with them" and "I'd rather stay to myself than hang with them like that." These comments offer substantial insight into the spoken and unspoken communicative practices between Black male youth at UBA.

I was intrigued by Whiz's observant nature and his ways of analyzing the similarities and differences of students' behaviors. Particularly after he stated, "Blacks are setting the examples for everybody, and it's not a good example that's being set, ya know?" I was inspired to further my investigation of Whiz's interpretation of culture at UBA based on the aforementioned naturalistic exchange and select reflections he provided during the reflective focus groups. During a one-on-one follow-up dialogue:

Me: How would you describe the school culture here at UBA?

Whiz: Yeah man... Its like our Asian culture, they are pretty much structured; they are... what's the word? They come together. Like in the movie ATL, they put each other on! That's how the Asian culture do it out here [at UBA]. They better themselves. I would say the Mexican culture falls in with the Black culture. Not all the way, but a majority of the way. Because as a teacher at UBA, you can step outside [your classroom] and nine outta ten you gonna just see the

Mexican Brothers and sisters or the African American brothers and sisters... You're not going to see the Asian or White brothers and sisters... That's just something you don't see.

I chose this excerpt because it offers a broader, and distinct perspective on the intermingling codes of conduct from different ethnic/racial groups at UBA. Like Kicks and Phillip, Whiz also observed and articulated cohesion within the Asian students codes of conduct that resulted in what Whiz shared as “they are pretty structured” and that “They come together.” Here, it could be said that Whiz’s comment is suggesting that he, Phillip, Bottoms, Kicks, their families, and their communities are to blame for their incoherent codes of conduct. It could be further argued that these four participants purposefully contest opportunities to work as a collective if they find themselves excluded from school curriculum and lesson plans (Duncan, 2002), discriminated against (Howarth, 2006), frequently punished for subjective reasons (Simmons-Reed & Cartledge, 2014), and are not reflected on the school’s faculty (Brown, 2012). Whiz furthered his analysis as he made a comparison between the codes of conduct Asian students demonstrated and that of the premise of the movie ATL.

I further explored Whiz's comparison of the movie ATL and the togetherness he articulated within the Asian culture at UBA. On the surface, the movie ATL appears to be about Black male teenagers and drug selling. Upon a closer analysis, it is clear that the movie is about how four Black male youth commit to support one another and strive to prevail out of poverty while navigating sociocultural hardships by the strength of their friendships. This offers additional insight into the socio-academic reality of Whiz. His comment about the movie in relation to the Asian student population, "they put each other on!" both, emphasizes his desire that the "Black culture needs to come together" and contradicts his ideology and codes of conduct about only relating with a small group of Black male youth at UBA. This indicates Whiz's belief that there is value in the Black culture at UBA. This is clear when he stated earlier "Blacks setting the example for er'body." A final comparison to the movie is when Whiz's stated, "They better themselves." The codes of conduct the four Black male youth in the movie ATL were rooted in the belief that they would better their circumstances all for the goal of acquiring a sense of social mobility.

In fact, Whiz offers a unique perspective as he reflected on the cultural practices of different ethnic groups while attempting to use inclusive language such as "our," "brothers" and "sisters" to articulate his this particular aspect of

his socio-academic reality at UBA. Whiz's statement about teachers seeing Mexican and Black students in the hallways is a clear indication that they are not receiving the social, emotional, and academic assets that would help to better prepare them for the real world conditions they face daily. As a result, the culture of exclusion is further perpetuated. Whiz's remark "nine outta ten you gonna just see the Mexican Brothers and sisters or the African American brothers and sisters" suggests these students are conducting themselves in this manner for a several reasons. These students are finding little to no value in the classwork, thus leading to resist attending class. These students have yet to establish a relationship with certain teachers, as a result they resist attending class. These students then fall significantly behind in classwork, and broaden the existing gap on content knowledge in selected classes, thus resulting in a culture of perpetuated exclusion.

Chapter Four: Findings Continued - Theme Two

Me: What's the power relationship between students and adults on campus or educators?

Phillip: Hmm... Well, I say they have power over students... Well, the students that actually care. Because if you don't care they can't have no power over you.

Me: Tell me about that.

Phillip: If you have a goal in class or life, then you want to pass that class. To pass that class, you want to have that relationship with that teacher... If you don't or you're not applying yourself, or you not on task, or not even coming to class, it won't matter what the teacher do. It starts with self.

The last chapter established the conceptual framework of the study's findings, and the first theme of the findings section. This chapter continues the findings section of this dissertation with the following theme: *Please check the power relation*. The conceptual framework illustrated a cyclical process that includes an inner circle that represents in-the-moment opportunities for decisions to be made. Decisions are followed by codes of conduct, which contribute back to the existing phenomenon that constructs the various socio-

academic realities of participants. Each participant is both, influenced by, and influential to the construction of his own, and their shared socio-academic realities. Findings from the last chapter revealed a cyclical dynamic: participants entered UBA with ideologies, and codes of conduct that contributed to their under-credited academic standings. Findings also detailed how Black male youth felt excluded from UBA. I interpreted participants feeling excluded as a result of their analyses of spoken or unspoken messages by onsite educators as disregarding or deliberate punitive acts of power.

The term power has traditionally been referred to, and used as a top-down, hierarchical dynamic between people or groups. From this perspective, individuals or groups of people (i.e., negotiators) influence the thoughts, feelings, or behaviors of others to position themselves as power holders, ultimately benefiting self and/or the group with perceived power (Kim, Pinkley, & Fragale, 2005). Unfortunately, this top-down power dynamic often results in the marginalization of other individuals or groups perceived as having little or no power, ultimately perpetuating a racialized status quo that has systemically excluded people of color, particularly Black folk (Wilson, 2014). Wilson contends, power is a psychohistorical dynamic, and intimately interwoven into the social, economic, political, and educative fields, and “constrains and restricts the consciousness of subordinate groups by setting

limits in the form of laws, biased discriminations, degrading expectations, sheer economic and political repressions" (p. 110). I will refer to this particular power dynamic as Traditional Hierarchical Social Power Relations (ThSPR). ThSPR are found throughout society, from governmental structures, healthcare systems, and educational institutions.

Participants responded to questions about power, social power relations, relationships and experiences with onsite educators, and self-power.

Interpretations of power and social power relations were in direct relation to the word "respect." Gaining the respect of others (e.g. peers, family members, onsite educators) is important for anyone, particularly for Black male youth, both in society as well as in the classroom (Payne & Brown, 2010; Rodriguez, 2008). Payne and Brown conducted a community-based phenomenological participatory action research study to examine the street-life oriented experiences of Black male youth between the ages 16 and 19. A majority of the participants perceived their teachers and interactions with school personnel as disrespectful. Examples of disrespect included a teacher telling one of the participants that he would never be successful after high school. Similar to the current study, certain behaviors demonstrated by participants like "antagonism towards teachers, academic disengagement, and truancy" can also be explained as explicit strategies to demonstrate their power (p. 322). This current study will

build on Payne and Brown's findings about Black male youth experiences with school personnel. Particularly, what power and respect looks and feels for four under-credited Black male youth attending high-performing public high school.

Showing respect for someone acknowledges their personhood and the qualities they contribute to any given setting, and is more often reciprocated by the person or persons who feel respected. In this context, participants of the current study perceived educators as having power over students (i.e., ThSPR). Conversely, the participants also emphasized their own power, and their perspectives on respect and reciprocity in the educator-student social power relation. During a reflective focus group:

Me: So now y'all talking about having power over others... I got a question, do y'all have the power to influence us as educators?

Whiz: Yeah! I mean... Well... I look at it like this. If the student shows respect, the teacher or educator will show respect back. If you disrespect them, they're gonna be disrespectful to you.

Phillip: True that! Yeah... You right! You right! (Laughingly) I definitely agree with that!

Bottoms: Yup! That's real! You can't be an asshole, and not expect them to treat you like one. It's not going to work for you. You know? And for me, well as far as influencing educators and stuff,

I'm good at wording my words, so it gives them a good understanding of what I am trying to do.

Me: Okay... And Kicks, what about you?

Kicks: Ahhh... I agree with them. Teachers gon' treat you how you treat them... But still, with some [educators] it don't matter! They gon' treat you how they gon' treat you.

Whiz sets the tone when he articulated his perspective about Black male youth having power to influence educators. His ideology is similar to that of the golden rule: to treat others how you want to be treated. Whiz, Phillip and Bottoms agreed with the concept of reciprocity: tangible and intangible exchanges between persons for a mutual benefit. In this context the treatment, exchange and benefit is respect. Though all participants agreed with Whiz's perspective, Kicks perceived educators as power holders who sometimes "treat you how they gon' treat you," implying disrespect.

I was motivated to explore the term respect within the context that the participants referred to it, and tease out the meanings they applied. After revisiting numerous excerpts, reflecting on naturalistic exchanges, and reviewing contextualized field notes and my own reflexive journal entries, I found linkages to the meanings of respect. My interpretation of the code word "respect" was a person who demonstrated patience, compassion, and care

within the contextualized exchange of another person or social group. Thus, I interpreted disrespect as someone who dishonors others, someone who is uncompassionate, and who shows carelessness towards others.

During a naturalistic exchange, Bottoms reflected on a conversation between he and an educator that resulted with him calling the onsite educator a bitch. He stated, "The teacher was talking to the homey like he was a dog. Then tried to apologize to him the following day like it was cool. But that shit was outta pocket!" Bottoms interpreted the onsite educator's actions as disrespectful. Bottoms' statement, "that shit was outta pocket" was a clear indication that he was agitated and upset by the educator's attempt to gain control of the situation, but instead dishonored a Black male youth in front of the entire class. The phrase "outta pocket" means the onsite educator's actions were unacceptable from Bottoms' perspective.

Bottoms went on, "Days later, the teacher yelled at me, 'get outta class!' because I wasn't doing what I was supposed to be doing. So, I looked right at her and said 'you're a bitch' as I walked out." He also expressed that the situation would have been worse if he did not exclude himself from the situation. Though Bottoms acknowledged calling the teacher a bitch was disrespectful, he also said the educator's actions were careless, and dishonoring toward himself and the homey. The educator's actions intensified Bottoms'

sensitivities. He was positioned to decide what values were more important to him in that given moment. Bottoms' exchange with this particular onsite educator highlights Kicks' perspective that educators will treat you how they want, regardless of the situation.

I chose to highlight this naturalistic exchange because it shows: how ThSPR at UBA effectively dehumanizes and excludes Black male youth; the personal dilemmas and race-based injustices Black male youth experience at UBA; and how Black male youth at UBA utilize discretionary engagement methods to employ their own power. Smith, Mustaffa, Curry, and Allen (2016) examined the experiences of 36 Black males who attended historically elite research institutions, and found Black males were criminalized, and surveillanced, and discriminated against. Scholars conceptualize Black male vulnerability and argue that White patriarchal values sustain structural violence, and the psychological oppression of Black males. Smith et al. concluded that "racial inequality and power" not only plagued the academic institutions participants attended, but have historically oppressed the psychological and physiological existence of Black males throughout their educational pipeline.

This current study contributes to Smith et al. (2016) by emphasizing how ThSPR within an educational institution served to impose exclusionary norms

that incited feelings of disrespect and powerlessness. Bottoms and his homey experienced feeling disrespected, and powerless first hand in front of the entire class. People react in ways to protect their self-worth when they feel disrespected and powerless (Rodriguez, 2008). Bottoms demonstrated this in his exchange with the onsite educator who he felt disrespected him and his peer. Hotchkins, (2016) conducted a study that examined how Black males responded to microaggressions at a culturally diverse high school. Participants established alliances with students from other racial/ethnic groups to acquire the academic support they were not receiving from their teachers. While one participant expressed experiencing the same careless treatment by teachers at his previous school, another participant said, "I try to create a rapport, but most are slow to respond so I feel like they don't care" (p. 22). Findings from the current study advance Hotchkins study, and provide additional insight into the ways in which Black males experience social power relations with onsite educators.

All participants regularly disregarded the requests of onsite educators they did not know as people, not to mention as onsite educators. In fact, participants refused to show respect towards onsite educators unless they liked that educator. After a closer look at the term respect and how participants referred to the term, I have come to understand the association of the terms

“like” and “respect.” For instance, students who “liked” educators were prone to act toward those educators with care, and compassion. Thus, equating “like” to “respect”: a person who demonstrates patience, compassion, and care results in, ‘I like you’ which equates to, ‘I respect you’.

Participants were sensitive to how they received and interpreted educators’ requests and demands. These sensitivities contributed to their interpretations about how power existed within the educator-student relationship. For instance, during a naturalistic exchange Whiz asked, “Dean! For real, who are these people n’ why are they telling me what to do? I don’t know them!” Though Whiz eventually responded to the requests of onsite educators after introductions were made and titles were provided (such as assistant principal and principal), he and other participants refused to respect certain onsite educators until they acquired likeability towards those educators.

These realities inspired me to further investigate participants’ views on social power relations with onsite educators. During a reflective focus group:

Me: Okay... Okay... I see where we are. I have a question about power relations... What’s the power relationship between y’all and educators here at UBA?

Kicks: Oh! Easy! They control us by the way they act towards us.

Me: Digs... And how is that?

Whiz: C'mon bruh! You know Dean! It's like how they talk to us.

Bottoms: Maaan... (laughingly) They [educators] just hard headed!

Me: For real? And what are some things that make them hard headed?

Phillip: Oooooo!!! I know! I know! They won't listen!

Whiz: Yup! They won't listen to what you [Black male youth] have to say.

Bottoms: Yo! I'm saying though... They think because they older they get big headed about their positions. Really though? I think it's a pride thing. But at the end of the day you can't blame everything on the teachers. Cause at the end of the day, we all humans.

Me: Damn fam! I digs that... Well, how can they [educators] impact y'all's experience?

Kicks: By being respectful to us as people... You know? Like, if they can see our side of the story.

I chose this excerpt because it demonstrates participants' awareness of how educator-student social power relations are contributing the socio-academic realities of Black male youth at UBA. Participants indicate educator-student social power relations between onsite educators and Black male youth are authoritative, lack compassion and honor, and are dehumanizing; equating to

ThSPR. Language such as “control us” and “won’t listen” signifies a one-sided educator-student power relation. These are the ThSPR that regularly result in Black male youth feeling unheard, oppressed, and ultimately powerless (Smith et al., 2016; Wilson, 2014).

I interpreted participants’ reflections about their interactions with onsite educators as traditional and hierarchical, and ultimately unfavorable to their socio-academic realities. It can be argued that participants are illustrating a psychosocial defeatist mentality about onsite educators at UBA. However, these findings also suggest that any preconceived notions participants may have had were reassured, and maintained by the interactions they expressed having with onsite educators. Scholars (Gregory & Roberts, 2017; Noguera, 2003) contend, punitive displays of power from educator to student begin early on for Black boys, and often increase and become more frequent in the usage of behavioral referrals, out of school suspensions, and school expulsions as they matriculate through the school system.

Kicks’ comment, “They control us by the way they act towards us” is an explicit delivery that illustrates the oppressive practices onsite educators employ on Black male youth at UBA. Based on the aforementioned findings, onsite educators are authoritative, they don’t listen, they are teacher-centered, and act with disrespect towards Black male youth. Educators that behave this

way are attempting to maintain oppressive educator-student power relations, and expect students to conform. While some students can get by demonstrating their power by resisting, challenging, and disobeying educators, Black males are instantly perceived, diagnosed, and treated as abnormal (Wilson, 2014). These acts deprive Black male youth of opportunities to bring their individual and collective qualities to socio-academic settings (Kunjufu, 1985; Noguera, 2003). Though Kicks' ideology suggests Black male youth have no control in the educator-student social power relation, a closer examination suggests Kicks does recognize the hierarchical power dynamic, but is uneasy about as he said, "the *way* they [educators] act towards us."

Whiz's opening response "C'mon Bruh!" is a request for me to see his perspective, and have an understanding about his and other participants' experiences. C'mon is the actual request, and Bruh is the shared sentiment of friend, often used informally in casual exchanges. Whiz followed up in an undoubted tone. Whiz's comment "You know Dean! It's *how* they talk to us" influenced me to reflect on the similarities and differences between the approaches of other onsite educators, and my own approaches in relation to Black male youth at UBA, particularly the participants of this study. I concluded, most onsite educators at UBA lack sentiment, and sociocultural appreciation for the lived experiences of Black male youth (Kunjufu, 2002).

Whiz's comments "It's like how they talk to us" and "They won't listen" again, reaffirms the existing ThSPR at UBA. The "how" in Whiz's comment is interpreted as his perception that educators talk down to Black male youth as though they are of little to no importance. Talking down to someone is a dehumanizing and disrespectful way of communicating. As a result, the person with perceived less power is then positioned to either submit to the person perceived as having more power or exert their power to demonstrate their value in that particular social context (Parker & Shotter, 2015). Thus, it can be argued that Black male youth feel powerful when they feel heard and respected, and not talked down to and belittled by onsite educators.

During a night of peer review with critical colleague (Vanson Nguyen), he stated, "Bro! I just wanna say... YOU GIVE YOUR STUDENTS POWER!!! Real talk!" Vanson's comment influenced me to further reflect on my data, and my approach in relation to my students, particularly Black male youth. In conclusion, I didn't see myself as giving students power. However, I realized my approach is to utilize my own sensibilities to explicitly demonstrate compassion, care, trust, and patience with each contextualized exchange between Black male youth (Land, Mixon, Butcher, & Harris, 2014). This incites value, which is then reciprocated by Black male youth, resulting in mutual exchanges, and a human-to-human social power relation.

From the reflective focus group excerpt shown above, I interpreted Bottoms' expression "hardheaded" as an educator who employs fixed agendas, and singular truths that reproduce ThSPR. Bottoms suggest hardheaded educators are insensible to the socio-academic realities of Black male youth. Bottoms' claim that age and pride are two attributes that contributes to the disrespectful acts of onsite educators. The term "older" indicates some onsite educators have traditional ways of educating, and that "pride" interferes with expressing courage, vulnerability, honesty, and empathy for the socio-academic realities of Black male youth. As a result, traditional ideologies, deficit beliefs, and one-sided values sustain the ThSPR between onsite educators and Black male youth (Allen, 2015; Harper, 2015).

Allen (2015) conducted a qualitative study that examined the ideologies and practices of high school teachers that served Black male youth at a high school. Allen found that the teachers in the study perceived Black male youth through a deficit lens. As expressed by other scholars (Scott, 2016; Wright, 2018), teachers often assume Black boys lack certain cultural qualities such as academic language, familial support, and that are accepted and needed in academia to acquire success in schools. Thus, educators who perceive Black male youth through deficit lenses prolong social pathologies that perpetuate social power relations between the educator and Black male youth that keeps

Black male youth powerless. Though Bottoms suggest the hardheadedness of onsite educators interferes with their ability to demonstrate compassionate exchanges with Black male youth, Bottoms added to the dialogue when he inferred Black male youth are also creators of their own socio-academic realities by stating "At the end of the day, we all humans." Though Bottoms perceived teachers as hardheaded and reluctant to listen to Black male youth, he also displayed empathy by humanizing their actions or lack thereof.

Bottoms' comment "we all humans" added an additional quality to the dialogue. In this moment Bottoms illustrated a characteristic of Black male youth that is often ignored. Bottoms' inclusive gesture personified the existing ThSPR between educators and Black male youth at UBA. While Jeffrey (2002) suggest school policy and culture perpetuates hierarchical structures and depersonalized educator-student relationships, O'Connor (2008) offers a discourse to counter ThSPR and emphasize the importance of an customized pedagogical approach, and educators who care for and about each student as distinct personalities. As Kicks' responses "by being respectful to us as people" and "if they can see our side of the story" reaffirm O'Conner's humanistic discourse, Kicks' responses also accentuates the day-to-day dehumanizing experiences of Black male youth UBA. These insights suggest that Black male youth refuse to return to socio-academic settings when onsite educators

demonstrate blatant disrespect through carelessness, and a lack of honor about the narratives and experiences that construct the socio-academic realities of Black male youth.

Participants' reflections and descriptions of power relations provided similar, and varied perspectives and experiences that contributed to the phenomenon constructing the socio-academic realities of Black male youth UBA. During several naturalistic exchanges with participants in different environments, they offered two perspectives: Black male youth have the power to control their realities; and educators have the power to influence the realities of Black male youth within UBA. Though all participants provided their interpretation of power at different times throughout the study, I sought to further explore their meaning of power.

I pulled three excerpts from the one-on-one dialogic follow-ups. During a one-on-one follow-up dialogue:

Me: Alright Phillip, can you tell me more about your definition of power?

Phillip: Yeah, I got you... I look at it [power] like the more you know, the more you can do. The more you can do, the more power you have.

Me: Okay... Well is it a certain thing you should know, or just knowing anything?

Phillip: Anything really... Just having that advantage of knowing what other people don't know. You know? It's all about having the will to create. It's like... The more opportunities you have... No, no, no! The more opportunities you take, the [more] power can be presented to you. It's all about taking the opportunity. One thing about taking opportunity is that you have to be consistent with it.

Mine is not the best... Well, I'm working on it.

Phillip referred to power as the capacity of information a person can obtain, then having the desire and ability to take action toward grasping opportune moments to better a person's circumstances. Phillip's reflection "advantage of knowing what other people don't know" is similar to that of Raven's (1965; 2008) informational, or positional power. Raven's theory on informational power influenced numerous scholars to further advance the concept.

Informational power is when a person has access to important information that others do not. Informational power is limiting and can be hard to identify or measure (Raven). For instance, the information an onsite educator has about Phillip, and that Phillip does not have can be insubstantial because the context of Phillip's reality is ever changing, and the acquired information about Phillip

may not apply in one setting, but does apply in another. Also, that withheld information may not be as important to Phillip in either setting, making the informational power of the educator useless. In fact, information an onsite educator has about Phillip or another student may be false or misleading, thus lessening an anticipated educator-student power relation.

Phillip furthers his interpretation of power when he stated, "It's about having the will to create." This part of Phillip's reflection is substantial! I interpreted "will to" as an internal life force, and "create" is an action term that implies a production of something into actuality something or someone. Phillip's perspective of having the will to create is similar to that of having a sense of personal power. Personal power is an internal gauge that fluctuates depending on the social context in which a person dwells (Anderson, John, & Keltner, 2012). Anderson, John and Keltner argue that a person's sense of personal power "is coherent within social-relational contexts, wherein individuals generally tend to see themselves as more or less powerful along specific dimensions of influence" (p. 339). This perspective contributes to the concept of social power relations.

Phillip stopped himself mid-sentence to readjust what could be an outdated ideology about power when he stated, "The more opportunities you have... No! No! No!" Phillip's new perspective of power stemmed from

personal experiences he has had. He demonstrated his personal power when he adjusted his outlook on power as he declared, "It's all about taking the opportunity." Phillip demonstrated a vigorous internal process as he described power. He began with a person knowing something others did not know, to having a drive to create; then from having opportunities to intentionally taking them. Phillip's ability to self-reflect and hold himself accountable also demonstrated his personal power when he stated, "I'm working on it."

Opposing to Phillip's aversive socio-academic patterns during his freshman and sophomore years, he has since then demonstrated his personal power by taking opportunities to improve his under-credited status. He attends class regularly, completes and submits his work on time, submits appropriate documents regarding his attendance, and regularly meets with his teachers and counselors to make sure he remains on track to graduate on time from UBA. During a naturalistic exchange, I asked Phillip, "Why did you turn it around?" He responded, "I want to graduate from UBA. I really don't want to go to a continuation school." Phillip used the information he acquired about continuation schools to create a perspective that contributed to his will to graduate from UBA (Anderson, John, & Keltner, 2012).

Phillip and I talked more about power during another naturalistic exchange. I asked him to talk about times when he felt powerful. Phillip

wrinkled his eyebrows as though thinking, and responded, “Times like these, and when teachers put me on game.” Phillip’s comment, “Times like these” aligns with my critical colleague, Vanson’s comment that I give students power. It also adds to Anderson, John, and Keltner’s (2012) concept of personal power. Vanson is one of two critical colleagues who assisted me with the data analysis that lead from concepts and patterned codes to emergent themes. Vanson also helped me understand my position in relation to the participants and the emerging data. To that, I did my best to be emotionally and mentally present each time that I engaged *with* Phillip. The compassion and care I demonstrated with him was delivered and received as genuine (O’Conner, 2008).

Phillip’s comment “when teachers put me on game” stems from a previous conversation we had when he expressed he likes it when educators take learning beyond the books, suggesting the importance of context and content in the dynamics of power and respect (Freire, 2018). In an exchange with Whiz, he echoed Phillip, particularly about taking opportunities, and working together. He expressed that he didn’t see that with Black students, particularly at UBA.

I sought to better understand how Whiz interpreted power. During a one-on-one dialogic follow-up:

Me: Check this, you talked about power in a previous focus group. I was wondering if you could dive a little more into it... Just straight up! How would you define power?

Whiz: Yeah... Okay! Look, you know how we have the All-Student Store. For instance, if we [Black students] can work together and fundraise for something like that, we can use it for our power. We can have more leverage over teacher and staff than we already have. We should be able to take actions into our own hands. What I mean by power is you should be able to... Look, UBA sets you up but it also doesn't set you up. You can go to class, do your work and still feel neglected. You gotta have the power to speak up for yourself. You can't stay trapped, you gotta express yourself and how you feel.

Whiz interpreted power as structural, economic, interpersonal, and personal sources that can be utilized towards the social mobility of Black male youth, and Black students in general. Whiz's interpretation of power echoes the sociopolitical, and economic works by Anderson (2001), and Wilson (1988), and the philosophy of Garvey (1923) as he suggests Black students who perceive and govern themselves as decision-makers, creators and negotiators of their own personal, social, and financial realities have a direct influence on the

actions that are needed to acquire leverage through both tangible and intangible assets. Whiz's comment "We can have more leverage over teacher and staff than we already have" illustrates an important aspect of his socio-academic reality. Not only is Whiz inclusive as he says things like "We can" and "than we already have," but he clearly believes Black students already have power over onsite educators.

I interpreted Whiz's reflection as a request for organization and unity of Black students within at UBA. Wilson (1998) would emphasize Whiz's perspective and point out the need for Black students, and families to organize and acquire Black power with the aim to transform their oppressive socio-cultural, political, educational, and economic conditions. Findings from the current study furthers Wilson's argument when Whiz suggests the need for Black students to have a store that sells merchandise that Black students could use towards making decisions for themselves, instead of relying on the All Student Store which he implies Black students are excluded from.

I interpreted Whiz's statement that Black students "should be able to take power" as an implication that Black students are capable of acquiring the leverage he referred to, but are not able to because as he stated, "UBA sets you up but it also doesn't set you up." Whiz insinuated that UBA has the resources needed for Black students to be "set up" with the assets they could use to

acquire more leverage. I interpreted Whiz's phrase as an existing system that does not serve Black students. With that, Wilson (2014) argues that Black folk are suffering from the absence of an economic system. He states, "A system involves the systematic and organized utilization of money; a systematized utilization and distribution of money" (p. 44).

Whiz offered a substantial perspective about the dynamics of power and respect in his statement "You can go to class, do your work and still feel neglected." I found this ideology to be substantial. Like the study by Duncan (2002), Whiz's expression about doing what is expected, and still feeling powerless is rarely explored or shared in educational discourse about Black male youth. However, another study (Bimper, Harrison, & Clark, 2013) has implicated how Black males experience intersections of neglect. Participants in Bimper, Harrison, and Clark's qualitative study talked about how their academic and racial identities were ignored because they were athletes on the football or basketball team. Although Bimper, Harrison and Clark's study was conducted on college campus, Black male youth experience similar feelings associated with neglect and powerlessness on high school campuses, and navigate between experiences of resisting, accommodating, or excepting existing social and structural powers (Rogers & Way, 2016). The participants of the current study share similar experiences.

Voluntarily, Whiz checked in with me at least once a day because like other students, he felt that I cared about him as a person. I established and maintained different relationships with different students (O'Conner, 2008). Each connection was rooted in care and compassion. Like Whiz, other students expressed to me that they value our relationship because they feel emotionally supported, and safe. Because of these reasons, a variety of students met with me throughout the day, and some had a desire to stay longer than they actually needed.

Over time, educators began to perceive students as just hanging out in the Dean's office, particularly in my office. In an attempt to restrict students from "hanging out" in the Dean's office, we requested developed a policy that all students complete a document that explained their reason to meet with a Dean. We anticipated students feeling uneasy about the change. One day, Whiz entered the Dean's office and asked about the new posters that explained the new policy. Before I could explain, Whiz stormed out of the office. In a stern voice he declared, "Okay! Well, y'all gonna have to complete paperwork if y'all want to talk to me about anything!" Whiz's expression highlighted his statement that "You gotta have the power to speak up for yourself. You can't stay trapped, you gotta express yourself and how you feel."

Several days passed after Whiz stormed out of the office. As a result, he completely avoided coming to the office. In a casual exchange with Coach Finesse, I shared what happened between Whiz and I. Coach Finesse expressed that Whiz had already informed him of what happened. Coach told Whiz that he and I should work things out because Coach Finesse perceived Whiz and I as a powerhouse at UBA. Coach Finesse used his power and inspired Whiz to lower his guard so he and I could revisit the circumstances that had shifted our relationship.

Several days later during lunch, Whiz and I paused as we locked eyes on the courtyard. I raised my hands and tilt my head to gesture, "what's up?" This gesture was to let Whiz know I was ready to talk. He immediately responded with the same gesture. He walked towards the front gate where I was stationed. I asked if he would walk with me to deliver some paperwork. He replied, "Yeah, its good." While on the walk, I acknowledged Whiz for being open to talking with me. I went on to say, "Look fam, you have every right to be upset. I can't take that from you. Real talk though? I want you to know, regardless of these rules and policies; I don't want it to interfere with our relationship. Bottom line." He smiled, nodded in agreement and said, "Aight... 100! We good! I ain't gon' lie though... That shit had me heated Dean Frazier! For real,

for real... I get it though." We dapped up (shook hands), exchanged a hug, and continued on with our day.

My positionality as an inbetweener is explicit in this exchange. What is powerful about this exchange with Whiz is that I that my positionality as an insider allowed me to see the situation in the way that I did. As an outsider, my positionality incited tension between Whiz and I because as part of school leadership, I needed to work within the new policy. It is important to note that the exchange between Whiz and I can contribute to existing literature on personal power (Anderson, John, & Keltner, 2012; Harris, 1995), and educator-student power relations (Chhoun & Wallace, 2014).

Anderson, John, and Keltner (2012) argue that the personal sense of power is coherent within the social context, and that "power is a relationship-specific construct" (p. 317). Though Whiz's actions of coming into my office, and yelling on his way out could be interpreted as unwarranted and disrespectful behavior, I interpreted it as a display of his personal sense of power, and not just in relation to me but also in relation to a top-down school structure. Chhoun and Wallace (2014) emphasize the importance of social context as it highlights the power of teacher-student relationships and argue that teachers can highlight students' power and their becoming of adolescence while developing a professional and personal relationship with the student.

With that, I am creating a socio-academic learning environment as Dean Frazier, big bruh, uncle, and Dr. Frazier. This educator-student relationship serves as a reassurance for Black male youth, and arguably other students of other ethnic/racial and gender groups, that they are supported as developing bodies and minds in search of safety, care, and power.

Like Phillip and Whiz, Kicks interpreted power as both a top-down communicative process from educator to student, and that the student also has the ability to possess and demonstrate their own power in the educator-student dynamic. During a one-on-one dialogic follow-up:

Me: So, I was hoping to get a better understanding about your perception of power...

Kicks: Okay... Yeah...

Me: Well, just straight forward. How would you define power?

Kicks: Hmph. Someone that has a higher advantage.

Me: Digs... So, what do you mean by higher advantage?

Kicks: Hmm... Like... Someone that has a higher ranking than me. You know what I mean? Like a student to a teacher... A boss to an employee...

Me: Okay! I see what you mean... So does the teacher have more power than the student?

Kicks: Oh! No! No! Now, sometimes they might say they do, but no! They say that because they can give the student bad grades, the teacher can kick the student out... It's crazy too cause the counselor or anyone else always believe the teacher over the student because they [educators] older... But, it's really up to the student to show up. You know? And... The teacher doesn't give grades really because when you [students] go to class, you [students] make your own grade really.

Like Phillip and Whiz, Kicks' begins his reflection by defining power as a top-down relation. Kicks' interpretation of power was consistent from a previous reflective focus group. For instance, he referred to power as a hierarchical social dynamic that positioned students as having less power. This ideology serves to perpetuate ThSPR, ultimately oppressing persons of color, particularly Black males (Wilson, 2011). Kicks provided explicit examples of the power relation when he commented "Like a student to a teacher" and "boss to employee." However, like Phillip and Whiz, Kicks shows not only a shift in his thinking around the definition of power, but provides an additional perspective to the educator-student social power relation as he continued with his reflection.

Kicks inferred onsite educators have a false sense of power when he emphatically objected if teachers have more power than students. He provides

insight to the concept of perceived power. Perceived power is referred to as an analysis and belief of a person's possible authority in relation to others within a particular setting or particular relationship (Kim, Pinkley, & Fragale, 2005). Though Kicks suggested teachers having a false sense of power, he also perceived teachers as the power holders when he acknowledged their ability "give the student bad grades" and "can kick the student out." Though Kicks interpreted the acts of educators' power using punitive measures, this reality of the use of power holds true for other Black male youth (Hope, Skoog, & Jagers, 2015; Love, 2014).

Kicks illustrated his anxiety when he went on to express how power relations between onsite educators work within UBA as he commented "the counselor or anyone else always believe the teacher over the student." Unfortunately these are the limiting experiences Black male youth encounter in school, particularly in schools where they feel separated, ultimately resulting in feeling powerless (Duncan, 2002). Duncan states, "The absence of opportunities [B]lack male students have to describe their experiences in schools is also linked to the limitations of desegregation policy and their status as an oppressed social group" (p. 140). To echo Duncan's point, Kicks expressed in a focus group that onsite educators could have an impact on the socio-academic realities of Black male youth if they would listen to their side of the story. With that, during a

naturalistic exchange, I asked Phillip if educators have more power than students. He responded, "No! Because a teacher wouldn't be nothing without the student and the student wouldn't be nothing without the teacher." Like Whiz and Phillip, Kicks perceive Black male youth, and students in general as power holders in the educator-student relationship.

To Phillip's point about personal power, Kicks reminds us "it's really up to the student to show up." The implication within his statement is that students need to feel motivated, commit, and apply themselves to the work because "you [students] make your own grade really." Participants in the current study have shown us that motivation, commitment, and application to their academic endeavors was not a practiced behavior for their freshman and sophomore years. Whiz expressed in the current study that it is the responsibility of the teacher to motivate the student when the student is not motivating himself. Like any other student, Black male youth are motivated when they feel a sense of belonging, and cared for. Belonging and care are fundamental needs, and Baumeister and Leary (1995) tells us that belonging and care is acquired through "the combination of frequent interaction plus persistent caring" (p. 497). As participants in the current study recognize the social power hierarchy, they also recognize the power they hold in the educator-student relationship, and want to be treated as such.

The time was roughly 10:30am. Kicks entered the general area of the Dean's office and sat on one of the long, brown, imitation wood tables; deciding not to use the chairs that were there. Swirling his headphone wire in his left hand, halfway wearing his backpack and jacket. Baseball cap slightly tilted, he slowly stands and begins to walk in my office. He said, "Dean Frazier, I need my classes..." I abruptly interrupted, "Okay! Okay! Well, is that how we coming in here?" Kicks entered the office with an agenda, and he hoped I would use my position of power to help him. Kicks sought me for advice about how he could get his class changed. He expressed that he had already met with his counselor, but his schedule remained the same. Kicks' schedule could have remained the same for various reasons. However, Kicks interpreted his experience as that he was not heard, and that he had no power in that educator-student relationship.

I used several inanimate objects on my desk to help explain the process and protocols of changing classes for students. He wanted to know if there was anyone else that he could talk with about the situation. I explained, "Even talking with someone else, they may tell you what I just said. So be ready for that." He nodded his head to show he understood. I invited him to role-play. We talked about about *how* and what he would say to the next person he meets with about the situation. I wrote him a pass to talk with the Assistant Principal

who could help him with his situation. I saw Kicks two days later and asked, "So, what was the outcome?" He responded enthusiastically, "They changed my class!"

I provided this exchange because it helps to exemplify the importance of understanding my positionality, and acknowledging Black male youth as power holders. Like the other participants, Kicks believes that Black male youth have the power to shape their own socio-academic realities. I interpreted Kicks' and the other participants' ideologies as requests for onsite educators to authenticate the lived experiences Black male youth bring into the classroom, and into school as a whole. Participants in the current study illustrated how power can be used to deconstruct, interpret, and reconstruct meaning to help navigate and exist within any given social setting.

Chapter Five: Findings Continued – Theme Three

Me: Is there anything educators can do that would make you want to be in class?

Whiz: Yeah! Everybody needs to learn to put their differences to the side and go about their day. A teacher's job is to teach you. If a teacher raises her voice at you and you don't like her tone, you can always say, 'Hey, you know you're not my mother, I didn't come at you so can you please not yell at me. I'm not yelling at you.' So if teachers recognize the kind of power they actually hold instead of thinking they have, then we can be comfortable here.

This chapter details the findings for the final theme: *How constructive gestures cultivate caring communities*. While Chapter Three's findings elucidated how an exclusionary school culture was perpetuated at UBA; Chapter Four's findings detailed how ThSPR exist in relation to Black male youth at UBA. Chapter Four's findings also offered substantial insight about how participants perceive, interpret, and demonstrate power. It is important to note, participants recognized the social power hierarchies between educators and students. Participants also believed students have more power and leverage than onsite

educators. Unfortunately, Black males feel under-valued for the strengths and power they bring to the school community. This chapter will detail how constructive gestures contribute to the socio-academic realities of Black male youth at UBA.

Constructive gestures are intentional spoken and unspoken acts of scaffolded support towards something or someone. Examples of constructive gestures include (but are not limited to) clarifying misunderstandings, displays of availability, validating the strengths and efforts of others, and providing ample opportunities for socio-emotional and academic growth (Beachum & McCray, 2011; Johnson, 2017; Murrell, 2002; Warren et al., 2016; Vassallo, 2015). These intentional acts by educators are aimed to further advance a person or groups of people within a given context of teaching, and learning (del Carmen Salazar, 2013; Freire, 2008). Constructive gestures are often interpreted as care. When students feel cared for, they encouraged others to act in ways that are beneficial to themselves as well as their surrounding environment, they strengthen themselves. Moreover, constructive gestures can strengthen social-emotional capacities such as decision-making, self-efficacy, and accountability of self and others in a given context (Uwah, McMahon, & Furlow, 2008).

In this context, participants provided insight into their socio-academic realities that offered a broader perspective about the interpreted experiences of

Black male youth attending a high-achieving public high school. Participants described the social acts of certain educators as supportive, helpful, and caring. These terms helped to establish the developed theme of how constructive gestures can cultivate caring communities. As previously stated, this theme was developed based on the quantity and quality of data that was provided and analyzed. During a reflective focus group:

Me: You know? Based on what y'all talking about, it sounds like there might be some supportive educators here... I mean, I noticed y'all use the word help a lot when talking about some of the educators... (Laughingly) Not all, but some... Can y'all provide some examples of what a helpful educator approach looks like?

Whiz: Okay! Well... Straight up! (Emphatically laughing) When I got them letters of recommendation when I needed them the most! You feel me!?!?

Kicks: (Laughingly) Yeah... Well, for me... (Nodding his head) It's when teachers saying they would help me however they could to make sure I played sports.

Bottoms: Well for me it's when they [educators] give you a second chance! Real shit!

Phillip: Yeah... Well... I say a teacher that puts in the effort that they expect the student to do.

I chose this excerpt because it offers multiple examples of what constructive gestures could look like for Black male youth at a high-performing public high school. Language like “I got them letters,” “they would help me,” “second chance” and “that puts in the effort” are direct correlations to gestures of onsite educators. These educators proved their availability, and provided opportunities for participants to feel cared for and a sense of belonging in the same socio-academic settings that perpetuate exclusion. It is important to note that while participants answered this question, I noticed their tones of speech, and subtle differences in their body language as though they were delighted to share their experiences. I interpreted these adjustments in their deliveries as responses of appreciation.

One late Thursday morning, Whiz asked if I would write a character reference letter 24 hours before his court date. I was pinched for time between a project for work, several assignments that were due for my doctoral classes the coming weekend, my obligations as a graduate assistant, and agreements I made regarding my personal life. I said, “Fam, you do know you’re asking me during crunch time, right?” He responded, “Yes fam. I do. And I’m really sorry. But I know you got me.” I chuckled, looked at him and said, “Bruh, you

tripping with this last minute business!" The following Monday, Whiz revisited my office and said, "Look, I know I'm supposed to fill out that paper to see you, but I just came to say thank you." As he exited he shouted, "And I got you Frazier! Whatever you need!" In this exchange with Whiz, I demonstrated transparency, availability, care, and support. Whiz later informed me that two other onsite educators were obliged to write letters for him. I asked if he had read the letters. He responded, "Yeah, I did... And to be 100 wichu, it made me want to do better. Well at least with the time I have left here." Whiz's response "it made me want to do better" is a testament to what constructive gestures, particularly being available, present, honest, and supportive can do for the socio-academic realities of Black male youth.

Kicks' statement about teachers "saying" they would help him is a chance that teachers actually would. Teachers, as well as counselors and administrators must also follow through with their adage about helping students, particular Black male youth because the actual follow through is what has a positive impact on their socio-academic realities (Kunjufu, 2002; Land, Mixon, Butcher, & Harris, 2014). During a naturalistic exchange with Kicks, he communicated about a teacher helping him and said, "they went out they way to help me with one of my classes." I asked, "What did they do to help you?" He went into detail about how the teacher stayed after school to help him

prioritize his assignments, create a plan for success, and showed him how to use his phone to access his grades and assignments. I asked, "Why do you think they did that for you?" He responded, "Because he noticed the effort I was already putting in." This experience speaks directly to Kicks' comment "help me however they could" from the reflective focus group. His teacher's constructive gestures, which included being available, putting in the same effort expected of Kicks, validating the efforts of Kicks, and providing opportunities for growth.

I was intrigued by Bottoms' emphatic reflection about educators giving second chances. One day Bottoms was sent to the Dean's office because he didn't have the work he was expected to have for the day. I took the opportunity to ask about educators giving second chances. He talked about not having regretted the choices he has made to counter aversive narratives about Black males, and that he's smart enough to know what happened in the past were experiences to learn from (Conchas, Lin, Oseguera, & Drake, 2015; Howard, 2008). Bottoms said, "I won't make the same choices if things like that come back... You know? We human." I interpreted Bottoms' comment "We human" as having empathy for himself and others, something that Black male youth rarely receive in society and in school (Lozada, Jagers, Smith, Bañales, & Hope, 2017). Bottoms then expressed how good he feels when educators

acknowledge him as a person, particularly as a person who communicates his experiences in a way that can be understood by others. Bottoms stated, "When they [educators] see that from me, then I know they know where I'm coming from." Here, Bottoms' experiences indicate educators who validate strengths and efforts, and connect on emotional levels has a positive affect on the socio-academic realities of students (Cammarota & Romero, 2006; Dale & Hyslop-Margison, 2010).

Phillip indicated that helpful educators perform to the level they expect their students to. An analysis of Phillip's comment suggests the words "effort" and "expect" can be perceived differently in the eyes of each educator. Though I interpreted "puts in the effort" as a constructive gesture, it also lacks context and could fall short of how Black male youth interpret "puts in the effort." Kicks' teacher who met with him after school "puts in the effort" that Phillip is refers to. Kunjufu (2002) suggest teachers who arrive early, leave later, and builds relationships with students are master teachers. Master teachers also have high expectations of their students. I jotted in my contextual field notes 'Ask Phillip about teachers expectations.' During a naturalistic exchange, I asked, "What comes to your mind when I say teacher's expectations?" He immediately responded, "Oh! Ms. Williamson! (Laughingly). She was on my case! I wouldn't skip cause it was in the back of my mind that her and pops

would be talking about it... (He smiles) She expected me to be there everyday, and I was for the most part. She really does care though." Phillip knew Ms. Williamson would be on his case, he knew what was expected of him, he knew that an educator-parent relationship was established, and he also knew that Ms. Williamson cared. These are the constructive gestures that resulted in Phillip dependably attending Ms. Williamson's class.

The participants created a space where they felt comfortable discussing particular interactions they had with onsite educators. I was inspired by the openness, the vulnerability, and the candid exchanges between participants. They spoke highly of several onsite educators, which provided a side of UBA that can go unrecognized if not closely examined. Participants were expressive about relationships they had with different educators. During a reflective focus group:

Me: I have another question for y'all... It kinda stems from some stuff we were talking about before though... Do y'all think educator-student relationships are important? And if so, how?

Whiz: Maannn!!! Off top! Yeah, I feel like relationships is that connection to the educator. You have to have that to feel comfortable.

Kicks: For me... I just feel like if you ain't got no relationship with the teacher she ain't gonna care for you.

Bottoms: Fam, check this... I remember this one time my language arts teacher asked me if I ever lost someone... I told her I lost my brother. She asked me if I was comfortable talking about it. Then I told her yeah... We talked about it and she gave me a hug.

Me: Wow! And did it feel real?

Bottoms: Actually... Yeah, it did... Shit... Most teachers would say, 'I'm sorry for your loss,' and keep it moving... But this felt real though! (Emphatically nodding his head)

Me: Digs. Do you still have a relationship with that teacher?

Bottoms: Yeah, lightweight...

Me: Okay... So a good relationship [with your teacher] will get you to class?

Whiz: (abruptly) Yes! It would get you to class, but everybody has a different excuse as to why they not going to class... Check, like today, I bullshitted off today. I didn't go to class today. It wasn't because of the teacher; shit, I just wasn't feeling the energy, the community today... Ya know?

Bottoms: Yeah! That's real... But at the same time, it is something to look forward to when you there.

I chose this excerpt for its richness, rawness, and the vulnerability participants displayed. Participants used descriptive words like look forward to, care, comfortable, and hug to illustrate the types of educator-student relationships that are important to them. Participants relayed how constructive gestures can influence the socio-academic realities of Black male youth at UBA. Participants also shared how onsite educators demonstrated constructive gestures of availability, and provided opportunities for growth. It is apparent that Black male youth see great value in affective educator-student relationships (Milner, 2008; Nelson, 2016; Zell, 2011). To that point, as Whiz's reflection explained, having a good relationship with an educator does not necessarily imply Black male youth would attend class. Although there are existing social phenomena that exist indirectly to the classroom and educator, Bottoms' reflection "something to look forward to" offers insight into their socio-academic realities at UBA.

Whiz reflection sets the tone for the rest of the group. Whiz recognizes worth to educator-student relationships as he associates it with connection and feeling comfortable. This is further insight that Black male

youth value personal connections with onsite educators (Caton, 2012; Rodriguez, 2008). In fact, he expressed positive educator-student relationships “would get you to class, but everybody has a different excuse as to why they not going to class.” Here, Whiz recognized the affect of educator-student relationships, though he also indicates existing additional factors that influence the socio-academic realities of Black male youth at UBA.

Kunjufu (2012) and Sealey-Ruiz and Greene (2011) argue opposing cultural values (Black male culture vs. school culture) are essential to Black males resistance to school. Whiz highlights (in the above reflective focus group excerpt) Kunjufu’s notion when he said, “I just wasn't feeling the energy, the community today.” Another day during school hours I saw Whiz at the corner store. I asked, “You going to classes today?” He responded, “I went yesterday and tomorrow I'm going, but today... I just didn't feel it.” Whiz continued, “I mean, I can go and not be feeling it, but they go be like, ‘what's wrong? You need anything?’ Then gon' get an attitude. Fuck that! I just won't go.” Upon first glance, Whiz’s reflection illustrates Kunjufu’s theory of a cultural disconnect. It indicates that Whiz had not established a relationship with an onsite educator. What Whiz did not share is that family was being evicted, his stepfather was being

released from prison, and his brother was arrested two nights prior to this exchange. Like other Black male youth, Whiz is also challenged by larger social factors that are beyond his control, yet impacts him directly (Howard, 2013). This is the socio-academic reality many Black male youth are challenged with.

Kicks used the word “care” to talk about the importance of educator-student relationships. Here, it is implied that Kicks’ previous codes of conduct where he exhibited carelessness towards his academic undertakings was because he didn’t have a relationship with a teacher who cared. This is implied from his comment “if you ain't got no relationship with the teacher she ain't gonna care for you.” One day in passing, I overheard Kicks and several of his peers holding a dialogue about relationships with educators. I asked the group, “So if you have a good relationship with your teacher and they tell you to stop doing something, would you listen?” All the young men were in agreement when Kicks shared that his feelings and actions would depend on who the teacher was, and more importantly “it’s *how* they say it.” Bottoms asked Kicks, “So is it about the relationship or power?” Kicks emphatically responded, “Power! If they [educators] like ‘STOP!’ I’m like ‘Who you talking to?!?’ Fuck this relationship! (group laughs) Who you yelling at?”

Like other Black males, regardless of age, I interpreted this particular discretionary engagement method as a protective factor, and that Kicks would protect his sense of self-worth (Dowden, Gunby, Warren, & Boston, 2014).

Kicks' reflections are important to note. He claims that relationships are important, and Black male youth can feel cared for when they are established (Jackson, Sealey-Ruiz, & Watson, 2014). He also adds that *how* an educator delivers their message can either override or strengthen any existing educator-student relationship (Kunjufu, 2012; Rodriguez, 2008). Kicks' reflection suggest Black male youth will not be devalued; similar to Bottoms' experience when he called a teacher a bitch for feeling as though the educator attempted to devalue him and the homeboy in front of the class.

From the above reflective focus group excerpt, Bottoms offered a substantial perspective to the importance of personal educator-student relationships. Bottoms' opening statement "Fam, check this" was an intentional attempt to gain the attention of his peer group, indicating an authenticity to his reflection about the personal interaction he experienced with his teacher. Unbeknownst to Bottoms' teacher (Ms. Haze), his brother was killed at the beginning of this school year, a week prior to the first

reflective focus group. As Bottoms' experience is not uncommon for other Black male youth, cultural values and standards around masculinity denies Black males the space to discuss the psychological and emotional impact of traumatizing events (Rogers & Way, 2016).

Ms. Haze's gesture of asking Bottoms about losing his brother and if he wanted to talk about it was substantial and an opportunity for Bottoms to explore and strengthen his socio-emotional capacities. Ms. Haze demonstrated her availability, and that she cares when he said, "We talked about it and she gave me a hug." Though policies exist that refute physical interactions such as hugs from educators to students, Bottoms' experience suggest touch and meaningful conversation between educators and students is important (Chhuon & Wallace, 2014). Bottoms also talked about the inauthentic gestures of other onsite educators. He stated, "Most teachers would say, 'I'm sorry for your loss,' and keep it moving." Keep it moving is referred to as a gesture that passively acknowledges someone or something else. Passive acts, particularly in relation to personal experiences contribute to feelings of neglect, and can counter the positive exchanges Bottoms experienced with Ms. Haze (Marx, 2006).

Important to note, Ms. Haze is the same educator who told Bottoms to get out of class. During a naturalistic exchange while walking him to

Ms. Haze's classroom I said, "I thought y'all had tension, what happened?" Bottoms informed me that Ms. Haze not only apologized to him and his homey individually, but also to the entire class. Bottoms went on to talk about how intentional Ms. Haze was and *how* she decided to interact with him moving forward. He said, "It was weird at first; then after a while I could just tell she cared." It is important to highlight the intentionality of Ms. Haze, and her willingness to acknowledge her positionality and opposing acts toward Bottoms, the homey, and the entire class. I interpreted Ms. Haze's constructive gestures as invaluable because they reminded Bottoms that, in his own words, "At the end of the day we all human." Ms. Haze demonstrated her availability; care, support, and she offered multiple opportunities for social-emotional growth to occur.

I wrote in my contextual field notes that Phillip did not share during the portion about the importance of educator-student relationships, though he did nod in agreement when the other participants were talking about the behaviors and gestures of onsite educators. At other moments, I recall Phillip speaking highly of a couple educators. I decided to use the one-on-one dialogic follow-up time with

Phillip to further explore what helpful educators looked like to him.

During a one-on-one dialogic follow-up:

Me: So, who were some of the adults that helped you get to this current place you're in now?

Phillip: Oh! That's easy, it wasn't a lot of them... Let's see, Ms. Williamson, Mr. Scott, you and Coach Finesse. That's it really though... I mean... Yeah, that's it. Well, there's Mr. All-Day, but he didn't really help me. He does come through with snacks when we be hungry though! But that's all really... I had to do me. You know?

Me: Yeah, I know what you mean... So what was it about these few educators?

Phillip: Maannnn!!! They was just sticking with me!!! Man!!! Or just trying to get me to apply myself... They were just on us. Like when we did stuff, they was on us. They would just let us know... Like, 'you know better!' They wouldn't just stand there and watch... When like 80% of these other teachers just do [watch]. I don't know, it's like a community thing. They talk to us on a one-on-one basis.

Me: So, was it the way they approached you? What did you notice?

Phillip: Yes! Most definitely! Like Ms. Williamson... It was the one-on-ones with her... It was like, if she just see that I'm not in there... Like not focused or something, she gon' tell me like, 'P! You're not focused!' She never sugar-coated it, you know? It was stuff like that... Yeah.

Me: Okay... I feel it. Well, What's the difference between her approach and other teachers' approach?

Phillip: (Laughingly) Shit! Most teachers wouldn't even approach me.

In addition to my interest about Phillip not sharing during the reflective focus group about educator-student relationships, I was also aware of the studious codes of conduct and academic improvements Phillip began implementing to better his academic status since the beginning of the school year (his junior year). Thus, I sought to have Phillip reflect on the actions of educators. Particularly for him to describe the behaviors educators displayed that contributed to his productive codes of conduct.

Phillip's narrative details the importance of community and care through encouragement, support, and persistency. Specifically, Phillip's reflection illustrated the symbiotic and continuous constructive gestures of onsite educators he identified as helpful. A community is when a group of persons

within an environment have shared goals, and attitudes. In this context, care is referred to as taking sincere attention to the social, emotional, academic, cultural, and political welfare of a person, group of persons or things (Antrop-González & De Jesús, 2006; Delpit, 2012; Ware, 2006). Help is referred to as the acts of offering one's services to another person with the aim of improving their current conditions. Persistence is referred to as ongoing intentional acts of a person despite existing challenges. Phillip interpreted help as being persistent, explicit, and available.

Phillip identified four educators who supported, helped and cared about his wellbeing. I interpreted Phillip's use of phrases such as "sticking with me," "stayed on us," and "to apply myself" as educators who encouraged Phillip about what was expected of him as a person, as a young leader, and as a Black male youth at UBA (del Carmen Salazar, 2013). An example of encouragement is when I walked by Phillip's classroom, noticed his focus, locked eyes with him and saluted. This was a gesture to acknowledge his efforts. Later that day I asked how that particular class went for him. He responded, "Well you know Dr. Frazier? Wait, you do know I gotta call you Dr. Frazier right?" Laughingly, he said, "It was actually pretty cool." While I demonstrated an unspoken constructive gesture when I saluted Phillip for his efforts during class, I also followed up with him to ask how about class. This gesture illustrated my

availability, persistence, and gesture to provide opportunities for his social, emotional and academic growth (Beachum & McCray, 2011; Johnson, 2017; Murrell, 2002; Vassallo, 2015). My constructive gestures, and the gestures of other educators that Phillip described are consistent with his remarks about onsite educators sticking with him, and staying on him. Moreover, these are the constructive gestures that inspired Phillip to say, "It's like a community thing."

The above excerpt from the one-on-one dialogic follow-up offers a plethora of descriptions about the caring, helpful, and communal actions of certain onsite educators. I interpreted Phillip's comment "They wouldn't just sit there and watch" as caring onsite educators who value the wellbeing of others (Engster, 2005), particularly Black male youth (Kunjufu, 2012). When Phillip arrived tardy, or didn't show up at all to Ms. Williamson's class, she called Phillip's father not only to inform him of this missing class, but to also talk about what she expected of Phillip, what she has done to work *with* Phillip, and to ask what else can be done on her part (Kunjufu, 2002). Like other students, Phillip left campus to get food whenever he was hungry. When students needed food, but couldn't leave campus, Mr. All-Day provided, and sold food (e.g., sausages, baked chicken, rice, noodles) and snacks (e.g., pop tarts, ice cream). When Phillip went for food, Mr. All-Day used this opportunity to talk about the expectations he had of Phillip. These are the constructive gestures

that Phillip values. Although Phillip only perceives Mr. All-Day as a one stop for food and snacks, Mr. All-Day not only provides students with a fundamental need (food), but he also reinforces shared expectations of onsite educators who Phillip identified as helpful.

Phillip mentioned "one-on-one basis" twice in his reflection. I interpreted his reference of "one-on-ones" as key aspects of constructive gestures. Beyond the availability that Ms. Williamson demonstrated were the lines of communication she used to talk with Phillip's father. During a one-on-one dialogic follow-up, Bottoms indicated Black male youth could succeed at UBA when "parents have something to do with it." Phillip reassured Bottoms' ideology when he indicated he did not want Ms. Williamson to call home. During a naturalistic exchange, Phillip energetically shared, "Dean, I was on they ass today!" Confused, I asked "P, What the hell are you talking about?" He went on to tell me how Mr. Scott told him to just be ready when he's called on. Phillip went on, and in his own words he "hit the class with a barrage of facts" and left everyone stunned except for Mr. Scott. When Phillip was finished providing his answer, he looked over at Mr. Scott; and Mr. Scott sat with, in Phillip's own words, "a big ass smile on his face." Here again, Phillip describes key elements of constructive gestures that cultivate communities of care.

Phillip's experiences provided rich examples of constructive gestures from onsite educators. The educators Phillip identified implemented constructive gestures such as availability, persistence, encouragement, transparency, nourishment, and advocacy. These aspects contributed to Phillip feeling a sense of community. Like other Black male youth, Phillip finds value in one-on-one dialogues with educators (Canevello & Crocker, 2010). In fact, Phillip emphasizes the need for onsite educators to involve themselves socio-academic realities, and in the *becoming* of Black male youth at UBA (del Carmen Salazar, 2013). Unlike Phillip, Whiz did not talk too much about helpful onsite educators. Because of this, I sought know more about Whiz's experiences about helpful educators. During a one-on-one follow-up:

Me: I got a question for you... Can you tell me if and how educators have been helpful to you?

Whiz: Oh! Fuh sho! Well for me, they have not been helpful... Well, some have been helpful, and I know that they will be even after high school. For some students, I don't think they can build that relationship with that educator because they don't trust them enough. You need to trust. I wouldn't even say build a relationship, but you need to trust.

Me: Digs... Well what about you and specific educators? Like, are there any teachers or educators that you trust or have been helpful?

Whiz: Mrs. Mable... Yeah, I would say I had the most positive interactions with her for sure. We have a very good relationship. We do check-ins. She wants me to be very successful. There is no need, but she has my best interest. With her I am very productive... You remember during the pep rally before the big game right?

Me: Yeah, I remember... Why?

Whiz: Remember how my class was hella quiet, but I know we're actually the loudest in the halls and the school actually...

Remember I came over to ask you if I could use the mic to get my class loud?

Me: Yeah! I do remember that. What about it?

Whiz: Remember I kept coming back and forth to you and Ms. Levels? If it wasn't for y'all, I woulda never asked. (Smiling) I mean, they told me I couldn't anyway, but y'all was just being real and encouraging me to at least ask... (Laughingly) Yeah, I was gon' get em' hyped Dean!!! You already know!!!

I chose this excerpt because it shows Whiz's humanity. He demonstrated tension, awareness, comparability, reflectivity, appreciation, and self-worth.

Whiz's immediate response "they have not been helpful" was countered with "Well... Some have been." Like other participants in the current study have indicated, there is value in establishing personal educator-student relationships (Boe et al., 2017). Whiz's response "I know they will be even after high school" is an explicit indication that educator-student relationships can have a lasting impact on the socio-academic realities of Black male youth (Billson, 2018). Rodriguez (2008) contends trusting relationships not only contribute to student agency, but also to student success.

I sought to know why Whiz trusted educators, and what constructive gestures were employed by the few educators who have been of help. Whiz identified Mrs. Mable as one educator who helped. Whiz provided explicit examples such as "positive interactions" and "check-ins." Positive interactions are central to check-ins. The trust between Whiz and Mrs. Mable occurred through ongoing bi-directional exchanges driven by a solidarity, honesty, commitment, vulnerability, and courage (Boucher, 2016; Katsarou, Picower, & Stovall, 2010). The "check-ins" Whiz referred to are explicit displays of availability by Mrs. Mable. A check-in is contextually influenced by the lived experiences of the student, and serves as a method for educators to connect with their students about the school and beyond (Brookfield, 2006).

I interpreted Whiz's emphasis "very successful" as Mrs. Mable setting real expectations for Whiz. It is indicated that Mrs. Mable not only had real expectations for Whiz, but that she also provides the high supports he appreciated. Although Whiz said, "[t]here is no need," – demonstrating humility – he followed up with an authentic appreciation when he said, "she does have my best interest." I interpreted Whiz's comment "she has my best interest" as an authentic acknowledgement of Mrs. Mable's ongoing constructive gestures such as positive interactions, and check-ins. Students whose strengths are acknowledged and receive ongoing praise, support, and security want to succeed (Ladson-Billings, 1995; 2008). Black males are slightly different in that, they use discretionary engagement methods to assess the authenticity of interactions with people they do not trust (Dowden, Gunby, Warren, & Boston, 2014). Whiz feels a sense of value with Mrs. Mable. This is clear when he stated, "[w]ith her I am very productive."

Whiz effortlessly shifted the dialogue to talk about the pep rally. I interpreted Whiz's shift as a desire to share another experience when he felt a sense of value. Important to note, as Whiz shifted the dialogue verbally, his tone also became lighter, a small grin on his face, and he tilted his head and squinted his eyes as though he was hoping we would make a connection with what he was about to share. As I noticed this physiological shift with Whiz, I

was curious to know what he would share. His reflection explicitly demonstrated how trust and encouragement could reinforce the existing power Black male youth enter schools with (Kunjufu, 2012).

As Black male youth are often perceived and treated older than they actually are (Rattan, Levine, Dweck, & Eberhardt, 2012), This excerpt not only illustrated the playfulness, gentleness, leadership, and social awareness Whiz embodies, but it also highlighted the trust he established with other onsite educators other than Mrs. Mable. Ms. Levels and myself demonstrated our availability and encouraging acts for Whiz. Though Whiz articulated that he wouldn't have performed if it were not for the encouragement of Ms. Levels, and myself, I'll add that if it were not for his curiosity, awareness and trust, he would have never taken action.

I interpreted Whiz's comment "y'all was just being real" as an awareness, and level of trust that was established and maintained through constructive gestures similar to the gestures of Mrs. Mable (i.e., availability, presence, support, encouragement). Similar to other participants, Whiz humanized onsite educators in his reflections. Moreover, participants in the current study have demonstrated the very behaviors they would like to receive from onsite educators at UBA. I sought to connect with Bottoms in an attempt

to further investigate this constructive gesture dynamic. During a one-on-one follow up:

Me: I remember the last time we talked, I wanted to ask you about the help of educators here at UBA. Do you think educators here can help Black males be successful?

Bottoms: Yeah... Well actually, I think the parents have something to do with it too though...

Me: Yeah?

Bottoms: Wait, now don't get me wrong. UBA is trying to change, [I can tell by] the way a teacher started the semester and my other teachers said the same. But she stayed to her word... I can tell she really care.

Me: So, is there anything staff can do to get you to go to class?

Bottoms: Nothing. If anything, I have issues with other people more than staff. Like... G-O-D! (Laughingly) You can't say this teacher is annoying and you barely go to that class. And its some classes that make me feel like that...I mean, there are some teachers and stuff that I rock with, like Coach Finesse. He reminds me of myself, if you show you don't care he'll cut your ass short! He really wants you to not rely on people and to hold your own. Then

theres you Dean Frazier... I mean, you just like Big Brroo!!! I know you still Dean, but you know what I mean.

Me: I do. I do... So back to getting you in class, is there is anything we can do?

Bottoms: Oh! (Laughingly) Yeah! Play y'all role.

Bottoms provided a reassuring response after asking if he thought educators could help Black males succeed. He went on to express "parents have something to do with it too." Scholars have identified the benefits including academic expectations, and racial socialization practices of parent involvement for Black males (Allen, 2015), and particularly during their early schooling years (Barr & Parrett, 2007). I interpreted Bottoms' response "[w]ell actually" as him declaring, it is "in fact" the responsibility of the parents to make sure their sons are successful. This is an indication that Bottoms may have unsettling thoughts and feelings about feeling excluded at home, and has higher expectations for his adoptive parents to help him succeed, resulting in his comment "I think the parents have something to do with it too."

While Bottoms expressed in one of the reflective focus groups, "Black students spend 2-3 years here and then end up at a continuation school." While this was one aspect of his socio-academic reality, he also expressed "UBA is trying to change." This is an indication that Bottoms has noticed the efforts of

his onsite educators. Moreover, Bottoms echoed the importance of educators who follow through with concrete actions aimed to support and care for Black males (Kunjufu, 2002; Land, Mixon, Butcher, & Harris, 2014). This was further proven when Bottoms stated, "she stayed to her word... I can tell she really care." Educators who acknowledge the racialized, socialized, and politicized relations between themselves and intentionally get to know Black male youth as people demonstrate a commitment that is interpreted as care (Boucher, 2016). Bottoms indicated a sense of community as he witnessed other teachers demonstrating similar behaviors aimed to change UBA.

I recalled a previous conversation Bottoms and I had about why Black males weren't in class when they were supposed to be. I decided to revisit the conversation and asked if there was anything faculty could do to get him to attend class. I interpreted his immediate response "Nothing!" as an indication that he was taking responsibility of his actions. Bottoms expressed having more issues with other students more than he was with educators. This sentiment echoes what he and the other participants expressed through casual exchanges that they are selective about other Black male youth at UBA. In fact, this sentiment also relates to what Bottoms expressed in another exchange about not having his "homeboys" at UBA. I interpreted Bottoms expression "[y]ou can't say" as a way to distance himself from his peers that do not take responsibility

for their actions. For instance, in his follow up response “its some classes that make me feel like that” implies that he has also experienced annoying teachers. Bottoms went on to identify educators that he “rock with.” I interpreted “rock with” as another way of saying connects with. Bottoms response “rock with” is a personal sentiment and signifies a level of respect, value, and admiration that can be misinterpreted as “too personal” in some settings.

Bottoms “rock with” Coach Finesse and me. It could be implied that Bottoms employed value and admiration for Coach Finesse and me because we are Black and male. However, Whiz experienced Coach Finesse demonstrate his availability, and acknowledged his strengths. Phillip also identified Coach Finesse as someone who contributed to his change in his socio-academic endeavors. I interpreted Bottoms comment “he reminds me of myself” as another gesture to illustrate the respect he has for Coach Finesse, but also the gratitude Bottoms has for Coach Finesse and the authenticity he regularly demonstrates.

Bottoms and I were talking about how Coach Finesse works with students during a naturalistic exchange. Bottoms said, “I heard him (Coach Finesse) talking about a student’s grades. He said ‘I’m not gonna care about a students grades more than they do.’ That’s real shit!” I interpreted this interaction as Bottoms placing a high value on care, and that he would self-

exclude from environments where he feels that he would have to provide more care than others in a given environment, including with onsite educators.

Bottoms' ideology about Coach Finesse and his desire to "hold your own" helps to better understand the codes of conduct and discretionary engagement methods Bottoms displays from time to time. Being able to "hold your own" implies a person who employs agentic strategies to acquire success (Wright, Maylor, & Becker, 2016). In addition to Coach Finesse, Bottoms identified me as someone who demonstrates care through constructive gestures. He identified me as "Big Brroo!" Big Bro is a term of endearment (Carter, 2013). Like other participants, Bottoms understands the hierarchy as he said, "I know you still Dean, but you know what I mean." This implies that he respects the hierarchy of educator-student, and yet values the personal connection as human-human. Bottoms ended his reflection by informing me that onsite educators need to play their role. In this context, for educators to play their role means they are involved in the socio-academic realities of Black male youth at UBA, and have an effect on it.

Chapter Six: Discussion

This dissertation highlighted a normalized socially unjust dynamic that required immediate and specific attention. Institutions similar to UBA that are traditionally functioning, and high-performing stigmatize the innocence of the curious minds and developing bodies of Black male youth. Unfortunately, traditionally functioning high performing schools like UBA discriminate, dehumanize, and are ethically unjust when it comes to serving Black male youth. High-performing schools are often schools with smaller Black populations. Black students who do not perform to certain social, and academic standards often disappear because they have become excluded from the school setting completely. An all too common pattern in the United States despite, or maybe even intensified by the No Child Left Behind federal policies, is that high-performing schools draw students and funding without ever actually serving Black youth.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the socio-academic realities of four under-credited Black male youth who attended a high-performing public high school. This study furthers growing bodies of literature by using the voices of Black male youth to highlight their individual and collective experiences (Nelson, 2016; Warren et al., 2016). While leadership often operates in isolation and as a top-down approach, the aim of this study is to emphasize

the need to include the lived experiences of Black male youth into future policies and practices that most impact them (Anderson, 2016). The phenomenological praxis research design, systemic questioning approach, and constructivist grounded theory analysis allowed me to acknowledge my influence on the socio-academic realities of participants and the collection and analysis of data throughout the study. The methodological approach I used was intended to humanize the lives of participants by asking critical questions that influenced making meaning through deep reflections and narratives about their individual and co-constructed realities (Charmaz, 2017).

This section will begin by providing a conceptual implication framework that relates to the three developed themes which were derived from the current study's findings in Chapter Four: Theme One – *In a culture of perpetuated exclusion*, Chapter Five: Theme Two – *Please check the power relation*, and Chapter Six: Theme Three – *3) How constructive gestures create caring communities*. The aforementioned themes emerged through a constructivist approach using elements of symbolic interactionism, discourse analysis and narrative inquiry. Reflective focus groups, one-on-one dialogic follow-ups, and naturalistic exchanges allowed for a deeper and richer exploration of the socio-academic realities participants.

I developed three conceptual implications that are in direct response to the three developed themes derived from the current study's findings. The following three conceptual implications include: 1) *Transformative leadership*, 2) *Humanizing pedagogy*, and 3) *The value of relationships*. The following conceptual implications will be used to help frame the larger recommendations discussion. The larger discussion will include leadership and practical recommendations for teachers, counselors, school administrators, and the school district. The larger recommendations discussion will be provided using a transformative framework. The recommendations provided emerged from a combination of findings of the current study, implications that corresponded to the current study's findings, and from previous studies that have demonstrated to be of significance and beneficial to closing the opportunity gap for Black males in the education pipeline.

Implications

Transformative Leadership

Transformative leadership takes a comprehensive approach to education. Findings from the current study imply school leaders have failed to create a cohesiveness within the school that would contribute to enriching socio-academic learning environments where Black male youth feel valued as contributing community members to UBA. The transformation of institutions

begins with educational leaders who interrogate themselves in relation to the existing social injustices and racial inequities that perpetuate the exclusion of marginalized groups (Shields, 2010). Furthermore, educational leaders must lead by example with practical and lived compassion for this particular population (Santamaria, 2014).

Findings from the current study indicate a clear disconnect between what the school district and onsite school leaders understand about Black male youth, the actual socio-academic realities of Black male youth, and how to maximize resources to improve educational outcomes of Black male youth at UBA, and arguably throughout the school district. In fact, findings further suggest school leadership (district and onsite) made little to no effort to familiarize themselves with the populace of Black male youth enrolled at UBA. Another implication worthy of acknowledging is the lack of modeling school leadership for counselors and teachers serving Black male youth. Although leadership can be interpreted a variety of ways, leadership is about modeling, decision-making, and communicating in ways that best serve everyone within the organization (Anderson, 2016).

Elmore (2004) defined leadership as “the guidance and direction of instructional improvement” (p. 57). To further Elmore’s definition, Darling-Hammond (2010) suggests, there should be a requirement that (instructional)

leaders be involved and engaged in learning pedagogy, curriculum development, effective supervision procedures and how to work with exceptional children. Findings from the current study indicate a lack of instructional leadership aimed to improve the instruction and practice of teachers at UBA. Findings also indicate Black male youth excluded themselves from attending class for various reasons such as not being able to connect with the teacher or the content, for being the only Black student in the class and for a lack of specific supports. This is a clear implication that teachers were not receiving adequate instructional leadership.

Darling-Hammond's argument is not specific to instructional leadership, as instructional leaders' characteristics also hold true for each individual committed to becoming institutional transformative intellectuals. Giroux (1988) argues transformative intellectuals must understand their own unconscious biases and acknowledge existing powers and privileges in relation to external sociocultural power structures. As findings from this study reveal ThSPR were alive and well as participants described onsite educators as close-minded, and their actions as controlling, and authoritative. This implies there is a lack of transformative intellectuals at UBA.

Shields (2010) contend transformative leadership is a courageous direction towards social justice, equity, and liberation, and a transformative

approach utilizes critical reflective practices (through a multi-systemic lens) to discern how historical and day-to-day experiences influence their pedagogical approach (Dirkx, 1998; Freire, 2000; Mezirow, 1991; 2003). Unfortunately, findings from the current study indicate a socially unjust and inequitable school structure, and particularly for the participants of the study who were excluded so often that they needed to transfer within 2-2.5 years of their time at UBA. Transformative intellectuals use educational practices to distinguish historical, and existing individual and structural stressors that impede the advancements of marginalized groups.

Humanizing Pedagogy

It is only right that in 2018 we are explicitly dialoguing about humanizing the lives of Black male youth. With that, it is also unfortunate that the actual art of humanizing Black males continues to miss the mark and results in ongoing dehumanizing experiences for not only Black males themselves, but for those of us who serve Black males. Humanizing is the process in which a person characterizes someone or something to be accepted as they are, and to bestow a sense of value toward their *becoming* as a whole person (Bartolome, 1994; Dale & Hyslop-Margison, 2010; Paris & Winn, 2014). Findings from the current study indicate educator-student social power relations between onsite educators and Black male youth were authoritative, lacking compassion and

dishonoring. In fact, findings suggest the *way* in which educators delivered their messages to Black male youth were degrading and resulted with participants protecting themselves from feeling completely degraded. The *way* in which educators communicate is an art form, and del Carmen Salazar (2013) argues for a humanizing a pedagogical approach.

Pedagogical approaches should be humanizing to help students in their becoming of contributors and agents to improve their circumstances toward liberation (Bartolome, 1994; del Carmen Salazar, 2013). Though findings from the current study imply Black male youth do not often experience this kind of pedagogy, findings revealed its existence. The aspects and practices that make up humanizing pedagogy highlight the student as an active knower and change agent of their lived experiences (Cammarota & Romero, 2006).

Findings from this study indicate existing oppressive structures, and practices interfered with the humanizing process for Black male youth. Findings also reveal the power of participants and their roles in a humanizing pedagogy, as they understood power structures, acknowledged the positionalities of educators, and demonstrated empathy for themselves as well as onsite educators. Humanizing pedagogy involves highlighting the personal narratives, connecting experiences societal structures and systems, and co-constructing humanizing systems of power (del Carmen Salazar, 2013).

Unfortunately, findings from the current study revealed Black male youth stories are not heard, and they don't feel respected as people.

Although growing bodies of research have identified multiple ways to engage students in academic endeavors, the commonality in the results show the importance of student acknowledgement, full acceptance, and an incorporation of students' lived experiences into the classroom/school curricula and pedagogical approach (Delpit, 2012; 2015; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Nasir, Ross, McKinney de Royston, Givens, & Bryant, 2013; Nelson, 2016; Zacharia & Calabrese Barton, 2004). Findings from this study reveal Black male youth are not being acknowledged, they don't feel fully accepted, and their lived experiences are excluded from the classroom and school curriculum. Moreover, participants in the current study identified non-instructional educators who were incited feelings of importance for Black male youth. While Murrell (2002) reminds us that culture and pedagogy are intimately intertwined, Johnson (2017) suggest educators incorporate humanizing approaches and culturally sustaining pedagogies to allow Black male youth to nurture their critical consciousness and interrogate unjust race-based systems inequitable practices.

The Value of Relationships

It is imperative that educators understand the value of establishing and maintaining quality relationships with low-income minority students (Nelson, 2016; Rodriguez, 2008). Findings from this current study demonstrated Black male youth not only placed value on educator-student relationships; they showed appreciation for educators who displayed intentional acts of care and support. Allen (2015) suggest when low-income underrepresented students feel that educators genuinely care about their personal well-being, students will move themselves to exceed the expectations set by the educator.

Quality relationships are centered in the personal connections that flow with respect and reciprocity between student and educator (Delpit, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Findings from the current study not only suggest Black male youth place value on positive relationships with onsite educators, but that they also want to be treated with respect, and that they are willing to give respect when they feel respected. Therefore, it is important for educators to make the time to get to know their students through their lived experiences, and that those lived experiences are not unattached from the classroom learning experience (Beauchum & McCray, 2011; Vassallo, 2015).

There is an urgency to respond to the needs of Black male youth, and to concentrate on relationship building (Wilson, 1990). Findings from the current

study detailed the importance of responding to the immediate needs such as feeling respected, feeling cared for, and feeling supported of Black male youth. In fact, the findings illustrated the how the intentional gestures such as being available, encouragement, and modeling can have a positive impact towards relationship building with Black male youth. This positive impact can incite feelings of security, support, and care, which contribute to upholding good relationships between students and teachers (Clark-Louque, Greer, & Balogun, 2017). Findings from the current study about power, and respect illustrated how Black male youth were more likely to reciprocate the treatments employed upon them by onsite educators. Findings from this study imply educators who employ consistent and constructive gestures can have a positive impact on the socio-academic realities of Black male youth.

Recommendations

Introduction

This current study demonstrated how a traditionally structured high-performing public high school excluded four Black male youth. Participants were either excluded by spoken or unspoken gestures of onsite educators or they excluded themselves from particular settings. Descriptions such as “sets you up for failure” and “less and less Black males” are explicit examples of traditional hierarchical systems and top-down social power relations that did

not work for these Black male youth. Conversely, descriptors such as “know me as a person” and “relationships is that connection to the teacher” suggests for UBA to develop practical ways to humanize systems and transform teaching and discipline practices of educators to work *with* Black male youth, particularly Black male youth.

It is imperative that transformative intellectuals (Giroux, 1988) immerse themselves in professional developments and personal growth opportunities that nurture culturally responsive practices, improve social harmonization, help with moral purpose, and develop the necessary psychosocial, emotional and cultural skills needed to manage self and others in various educational settings (Fullan, 2001; Hawkins, Smith, & Catalano, 2004; Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Shields, 2010). These evidenced techniques can help committed educators identify, and investigate how nuanced social power influence the educator-student relationship, particularly between Black male youth and themselves.

In the following section I used the theme *Humanizing inequitable systems through transformative frameworks* to detail how leadership recommendations for teachers, school counselors, school administrators, and the school district can be applied to better serve the socio-academic needs of Black male youth at UBA.

Humanizing Inequitable Systems through Transformative Frameworks

As we begin to implement humanizing pedagogies and co-creating dialogic spaces *with* Black male youth where they can have vibrant and constructive exchanges about how their lived experiences in society, and in school are impacted by policies and practices that have oppressed their group as a whole (Cammarota & Romero, 2006), it is important that we as educators highlight Black male youth as power holders. This happens as onsite educators regularly acknowledge Black male youth as change agents with the cognitive, social, and emotional abilities to transform the classroom, and the school as a whole (Kunjufu, 2013).

Another way to apply humanizing pedagogy is through curriculum, and lesson plans that are centered directly on social change within the school and throughout society (Adams, Lee, & Griffith, 2010; Anderson, 2016). Equally important are learner-centered small group learning communities that contribute to students developing positive attitudes toward understanding the material and fostering a positive academic identity (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 1999; Esmonde, 2009; Mehan, Hubbard & Villanueva, 1994; Springer, Stanne, & Donovan 1999; Zacharia & Calabrese Barton, 2004).

Lastly, educators who employ transformative approaches utilize critical reflective practices (through a multi-systemic lens) to discern how historical

and day-to-day experiences influence their pedagogical approach (Allen, 2015; Bailey, 2012; Dirkx, 1998; Freire, 2000; Mezirow, 1991; 2003). These essential aspects of holistic teaching and learning all contribute to the becoming of students as persons, who are fully capable of transforming themselves, and their communities. It is important that all educators who work *with* Black male youth, particularly at educational institutions that are traditionally structured and high performing, seek to understand the singular perspectives of Black male youth, their cultural practices, and their individual styles of processing.

Implications for Teachers

Teachers have the most face-to-face contact with students, and as findings from the current study imply participants value personal connections, reciprocity, and the respect of their teachers once acquired. Personal connections are established and maintained through an ongoing authentic, and honest dialogue (Nelson, 2016). In some cases such as the current study, Black male youth expect schools to fail them, therefore it is imperative that teachers remain truthful, and transparent about what they observe, feel and experience at all times when working *with* Black male youth (Allen, 2015).

Like most teens, participants in the current study sometimes avoid telling the complete truth, try to manipulate conversations to get what they want, and look for shortcuts to acquire success. Unfortunately, like the

participants in the current study, Black males enter social settings believing there are negative stereotypes associated with their social and racial identities (Todd, Thiem, & Neel, 2016; Wilson, 2011), and will resist most forms of authority when they are negatively perceived or when they feel they don't belong. Thus, it is vital that teachers practice patience while exploring social power structures rooted in White supremacy, and develop a sense of discernment for Black male youth. Terry, Flenbaugh, Blackmon, and Howard (2014) suggest faculty who are personable, and willing to foster environments of validation will inspire Black male youth to reciprocate those personal interactions through honest conversations with those faculty members. Therefore, I recommend teachers nurture empathy, listen, and regularly acknowledge the strengths, and the efforts of Black male youth in various settings. These personal gestures contribute to the respect Black male youth desire.

In the current study, the ways in which participants used the term "like" was equated to the term "respect." I witnessed a teacher tell a Black male youth "I didn't become a teacher for you to like me." This is unfortunate, because findings from the current study suggest Black male youth are responsive, and are more likely to work *with* onsite educators after likability has been established. That means, teachers who are liked by a Black male youth has

gained the respect of that Black male youth. Respected teachers are more likely to contribute to the successes of Black male youth (Shaunnessy & McHatton, 2009). Therefore, I recommend teachers demonstrate an ongoing use of constructive gestures such as being present, displaying availability, contacting parents and establishing a connection with Black male youth early on, showing support and care, showing a deliberate commitment, and offering ample opportunities and encouraging words.

The current study allowed for the cognitive, social, and emotional capacities of four under-credited Black male youth to be highlighted. Though participants admitted some of their exhibited adverse behaviors were developed early on by former school experiences, family dynamics, and experiences in the community, they also provided insight regarding the exclusionary culture of UBA, which lead to their current academic status as under-credited. Findings illustrated how Black male youth felt excluded when they stated things such as “feeling separate from other students” and “feeling abnormal in certain environments.” Findings from the current study also reveal Black male youth too, feel excluded when they fall behind on their schoolwork, when they have a hard time understanding the content, or because of irritating teachers.

Considering this explicit insight, Blake et al. (2016) would encourage teachers to culturally synchronize with Black male youth into the multidimensional facets of the classroom by way of inviting, and acknowledging their cultural practices, and co-constructing new cultural practices within the classroom. Scholars like Ladson-Billings (2014) and Paris (2012) argue that a culturally sustaining pedagogy would help foster responsive learning environments where the lived experiences of oppressed students would be addressed through a social justice and equity focused lens. Accordingly, it is critical that teachers regularly make the time to work *with* Black male youth, and make a commitment to co-constructing a socio-academic learning environment that allows students the space to honestly express themselves. During these synchronizing moments, I recommend teachers carefully create individualized projects *with* Black male youth that would emphasize their originality, validate their lived experiences, and contribute to the development of their critical thinking capabilities.

Black male youth from the current study had a hard time foreseeing their futures at UBA. Kunjufu (2013) contends that teachers must believe in Black boys and that teachers “have to be convinced of the outcome before you invest in the practice” (p. 30). With that, I recommend teachers have real expectations, and provide ample support for each individualized Black male youth. For

instance, a Black male youth who travel an hour to get to school, has Hot Fries (chips) and an tea for breakfast, and is insecure because he receives special education services should have a real expectation to meet with his teachers once a week to discuss how high supports would be provided and accepted in each particular classroom.

I recommend teachers use quality time to help Black male youth counter feelings of exclusion, while encouraging them help foster socially just and equity focused classrooms by authentically exploring their interests, and methodically incorporating aspects of the lesson plan to help develop their critical thinking skills, and reaffirm their personal power (Anderson, John, & Keltner, 2012). This form of scaffolding can increase student participation, inspire student collaboration, and ultimately lead to positive social-emotional outcomes and academic advancements for Black male youth.

Implications for Counselors

It is a central obligation of the grade level counselor to ensure that students are on track to graduate on time. As findings from the current study illustrated, these four Black male youth were deemed significantly and critically under-credited by the end of their sophomore years at UBA. This insight indicates school counselors at UBA were not fulfilling their obligations at keeping these four participants on track to graduate with their peers. Findings

also indicate these Black male youth entered UBA naïve of certain social, emotional, and academic skill sets that they would need in order to remain on track to graduate on time. Thus, I recommend grade level counselors create mandatory one-on-one meetings as structured opportunities centered on enhancing specific skill sets such as self-advocacy, leadership, social responsibility, and emotional intelligence by using the individualized prior knowledge of Black male youth and linking it to learning new life skills (del Carmen Salazar, 2013; Uwah, McMahon, & Furlow, 2008). These life skills are essential to the Black male youth in the current study who demonstrated certain social, emotional, and cognitive abilities to resist the concept to “play school” by its traditional standards.

With that, I also recommend having grade level counselors connect with Black male youth during unstructured time, and while they are in their natural environments such as the courtyard during lunch, before school, or during practice (Rodriguez, 2008). These constructive gestures imply someone other than their favorite teacher cares about their personhood. Grade level counselors can also bring lunch for an identified group of Black male youth, and allow them time to talk about things that interest them. These opportunities can help school counselors gain a better understanding of this particular population they are obligated to meet the needs for, while also building a sense of community

(Kunjufu, 2013; Uwah, McMahon, & Furlow, 2008). This insight would further help school counselors guide Black male youth toward success beyond high school. These are the constructive gestures that make Black male youth feel safe, supported, and cared for, and can ultimately have a greater impact on their socio-academic realities.

A common practice in the counseling department is having students called down to the office to meet with their counselors. Findings from the current study indicate participants would rather skip class and evade visiting their counselor to connect with their peers, especially when given an opportunity to do so such as being called to the counseling office. In addition, findings illustrated that participants were likely to give up once they began falling behind academically. Therefore, I recommend school counselors attend in-class sessions of Black male youth they are obligated to meet the needs of (Clark & Breman, 2009). This is another constructive gesture that could be interpreted as respect, and fuel a potential reciprocal relationship with a Black male youth.

I recommend grade level counselors routinely meet with teachers about the progresses, and challenges of the Black male youth they are designated to serve. To address surfacing socio-academic barriers, grade level counselors can help teachers by providing counseling intervention techniques that could also

be applied in classroom settings. For instance, Clark and Breman suggest “The school counselor inclusion model pushes the implementation of small-group and individual interventions into the classroom setting” (p. 8). This way, Black male youth wouldn’t have to feel singled out, as if something is wrong with them.

School counselors are essential to helping create cohesive relations between different stakeholders such as parents, community based organizations, and afterschool programs that provide academic, social, emotional, and mental supports. Other studies (Day-Vines & Terriquez, 2008; Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2008) have shown how partnerships between the school, the student’s family, and community based organizations are beneficial to the academic successes of students of color, particularly Black males (Harris, Hines, Kelly, Williams, & Bagley, 2014). Findings from the current study implicated that Black male youth at UBA, particularly the participants very little interactions with their grade level counselors. This is unfortunate because grade level counselors who are committed to the holistic growth and development of Black male youth can serve as a model, and student-advocate to help regulate some of the adverse socio-academic experiences they encounter early on as freshmen and sophomores. Looking ahead, it is essential that grade level counselors not only connect with Black

male youth early upon their transition into high school, but to also begin making connections with the family, the extended family, and community based organizations that may be of benefit for the student and/or the family unit.

An obligation for school counselors is to maintain direct lines of communication from home to school. As the findings from the current study demonstrated educators who utilized their direct lines of communication from school to home were likely to help participants hold themselves accountable for their actions or lack thereof. As one participant argued that parents are also responsible for their sons' education, another participant expressed how his teacher and father talked regularly about his in-class progresses or lack thereof. Therefore, I recommend school counselors make connections between teachers, and parents early on, and often.

School administrators can delegate duties to school counselors that can become barriers to counselors establishing and maintaining relationships with additional stakeholders such as students' homes, community based organizations, and after school programs that could help serve the needs of students, particularly marginalized populations of students (Bemak & Chung, 2005; Lopez-Baez & Paylo, 2009). Therefore, it is imperative for school counselors to maintain a level of autonomy regarding their counseling

approaches. A study by Harris, Hines, Kelly, Williams, and Bagley (2014) found Black male youth could acquire academic achievement with the support, and care that ongoing communications between onsite educators and parents who all demonstrated ways that Black male youth matter. The counselors in the study recommended enrolling Black male youth into rigorous classes early on, and with teachers that would push, and nurture them to succeed.

As findings from the current study demonstrated, validating the efforts of the participants proved to be of importance, regardless if certain expectations were met or not. Thus, it is not only important that school counselors enroll Black male youth in rigorous courses, but to also work with teachers in the classrooms, families at home, and community based organizations to further nurture the becoming of the Black male youth they serve.

Implications for School Administrators

It is essential for school administrators to model the codes of conduct expected of school counselors, teachers, other school personnel, and students throughout the school year. Codes of conduct are influenced by beliefs, expectations, attitudes, needs, and common goals (Canevello & Crocker, 2010; Mead & Hind, 1934). Expected behaviors are often implicated through the schools mission statement. A schools mission statement holds as a public declaration that describes the broader goals for the future of the school, and its

students. Kunjufu (2013) contends that the schools mission statement should be explicitly visible throughout the school and should be “recited, meditated upon, and internalized daily” (p. 29). Findings from the current study would suggest for future recommendations that include school administrators believing in the cultural strengths Black male youth bring to the school by making personal connections in ways that are filled with optimism, empathy, real expectations, and high supports (Anderson, 2016; Howard, 2010; Kunjufu, 2013). School administrators can obtain distinctive knowledge from Black male youth after personal connections are made. This is critical, because school administrators hold the power to make decisions, which would influence teaching, counseling, and discipline practices of educators at UBA. Therefore, I recommend school administrators use the contextualized experiences of Black male youth to employ best practices by inviting them into decision-making processes such as the school site council, and PBIS-LC meetings.

Best practices are influenced and determined by the context in which the situation(s) exist (Hieberler, Kelly, & Kettelman, 2012; Patton, 2001). Therefore, if UBA seeks to enrich the socio-academic realities of Black male youth, it is imperative that school administrators provide ample opportunities for Black male youth to enhance their leadership capacities, personal morals, and social powers they need to thrive at UBA as well as throughout society. These

leadership opportunities can be used to help school administrators further explore ways to use practice-based evidence (Leeman & Sandelowski, 2012). Though practice-based evidence is commonly used in the healthcare field in relation to physicians and their clients, the basic cyclical process of 1) developing interventions, 2) implementing interventions, and 3) evaluating interventions of practice-based evidence can also be applied within the educator-student dynamic. While Kunjufu (2013) recommends that school leaders cultivate master teachers, who are treated as researchers, and ones who collaborate to develop a cohesive system that supports the holistic experience of Black males, Losen et al. (2015) suggest school administrators work directly with teachers, and include school discipline and school climate data toward improving student behavior, and academic outcomes. I argue that the aforementioned approaches and practices can help to develop realistic remedies aimed to address systemic social, racial, gendered, and disability injustices of Black male youth.

Another recommendation for school administrators is to make time to personally connect with Black male youth and tighten the relationship gap between school administrators and Black male youth at UBA. Due to the obligations of school administrators, and as findings from the current study indicate, school administrators are often perceived as distant, and removed

from the direct experiences of students, particularly of Black male youth unless a Black male youth is being punished for a particular reason. Howard (2008) recommends school leaders develop awareness on behalf of the lived experiences of Black males, particularly around race and racism. With that, I recommend school administrators create multiple coordinated opportunities to personally connect with Black male youth. For instance, school administrators can conduct monthly meet and greet activities targeted specifically for Black male youth and school administrators. Meet and greets would serve as opportunities to close the existing relationship gap between Black male youth and school administrators. Black male youth could also begin to see school administrators as more than authority figures, but also as parents, college graduates, comedians, musicians, athletes, critical thinkers, and trusted adults. Cranton (2006) emphasizes the importance of establishing, and maintaining authentic educator-student relationships. Findings from the current study support previous studies (Allen, 2015; Cranton; Land, Mixon, Butcher, & Harris, 2014), which also found personal connections between Black male youth and onsite educators to be beneficial to the socio-academic experiences of Black male youth (Elder, 2004; Rodriguez, 2008).

Just as participants were aware of the existing educator-student social power relations, they were also aware of their own personal power, and were

not fearful to demonstrate that power on different occasions. Therefore, I recommend school administrators recognize, and authenticate the influence Black male youth bring to the school community as often as possible. This also includes moments when a Black male youth's actions have led to an exclusionary consequence such as an out of school suspension. One way to authenticate the influence Black male youth bring to the school community is to validate their identities (i.e., athletic, artistic, academic).

Scholars like Fenning (2007) and Monroe (2005) argue that minority groups, particularly Black male students are disproportionately excluded due to a formula of educators' analyses and reactions to students' behaviors. Therefore, I recommend school administrators desist operating from traditional reform frameworks that perpetuate punitive social power relations, and to operate from transformative frameworks that promote cultural congruence *with* Black male youth. Cultural congruence would allow school administrators who work *with* Black male youth to co-construct applicable connections between an educators' pedagogical practice, and what the student and family wants and needs within the sociocultural context of relevant domains (Schim & Doorenbos, 2010). Moreover, I recommend school administrators higher more educators who reflect the racial, and sociocultural experiences of Black male youth.

School administrators are also instructional leaders, and as instructional leaders one of their obligations is to improve the effectiveness of all onsite educators through the management of people and resources (Darling-Hammond, 2010). A transformative approach that can help to improve the effectiveness of onsite educators is by validating their efforts, and highlighting their successes while offering additional personal and professional supports to address the challenges of both educators and students (DeMulder, Kayler, & Stribling, 2009).

Transformative leaders provide school personnel with in-service personal development opportunities centered on unpacking implicit biases that can become barriers to establishing and maintaining healthy interactions between other educators, students, and Black male youth (DeMulder, Kayler & Stribling; Shields, 2010). Mezirow (1996) argues transformative education is “understood as a process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action” (p. 162). Taylor (2008), a professor of adult education, suggests that it is just as important to engage learners in critical reflection, not only from a cognitive level, but also from a social-emancipatory, cultural, spiritual, and race-centric perspectives. With that, I recommend school administrators develop ongoing professional *enhancement* opportunities centered on critical

self-reflection, humanizing pedagogy, relationship building, and transformative education.

Findings from the current study indicate Black male youth value feeling supported, and cared for, but instead feel excluded and separated for a significant amount of their time at UBA, which stemmed from a lack of social, emotional, and academic supports they needed from onsite educators. Between weekly meetings, which include SAP meetings, PBIS-LC meetings, Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) meetings, and department meetings, I recommend school administrators mandate one department meeting each month to be dedicated to constructive dialogue around serving the needs of Black male youth at UBA.

I recommend school administrators instruct each department to devote one meeting a month to reflect on teachers experiences, practices, challenges, and successes while working to serve the social, emotional and academic needs of Black male youth at UBA. The lead educator for each department would then analyze the data and present it at one of the weekly ILT meetings. School administrators can then use the authentic reflections of onsite educators regarding the teaching, counseling, and discipline practices employed on the Black male youth they serve as a form of practice based learning. This approach would help with supporting contextualized best practices for onsite educators,

while regularly assessing and contributing to the progresses of Black male youth. Also contributing to the progresses of Black male youth are parental and familial involvement.

Participants offered links between their occurrences that happened at home and in communities to their socio-academic experiences at school. In fact, one participant suggested the need for parents to be involved with their son's educational journey. Similar recommendations I made for teachers and school counselors to connect with families of Black male youth, I recommend school administrators also regularly contact the families of Black male youth, particularly during their freshman and sophomore years. The intent of school administrators contacting Black families during the freshman and sophomore years is to establish a bi-directional home-school relationship. Finally, I recommend school administrators collaborate with counselors, teachers, and community-based organizations to host multiple family engagements within the communities of Black families of enrolled students at UBA. Community engagements provide families pointed time to personally engage with the educators and community based organizations to better meet the direct needs of Black families, and Black male youth attending UBA.

Implications for the School District

It is important to note that the social, emotional, academic, and racial issues Black male youth experience at UBA are similar to those they face in society, as well as in their own communities. Jordan and Cooper (2003) suggest school policies and practices take complete advantage of Black males' cultural experiences and history. One way the school district could help UBA, and other schools throughout the school district take advantage of Black males' cultural experiences and history is by mandating ongoing workshops centered on the lived experiences of Black male youth. School administrators from selected schools would refer several Black males to work with a designated coordinator from the school district who would work *with* the selected Black male youth to co-create, co-facilitate, and co-evaluate the workshops. School administrators from all middle and high schools would select a number of Black male youth from their respective school sites, attend the trainings together, and work directly with a designated coordinator from the school district to help develop similar workshops that school administrators would then provide for their respective school sites.

In addition to the systemic racism that has historically oppressed Black males, The President's Task Force (2014) identified multiple sociocultural, economic, and healthcare conditions that complicate the academic journey for

Black male youth in ways that are beyond the means of the schools they attend. Therefore, it is important that Black male youth, and their families are aware of available resources, at the school and within their respective communities. I recommend the school district; particularly the Office of Family and Community Engagement develop specific strategies to better understand how sociocultural, economic, and healthcare conditions are impacting Black families.

In an effort to enhance the socio-academic realities of Black male youth, I recommend Black male youth procure incentives such as academic credits, the opening of a bank account, or a future paid internship for working directly with the Office of Family and Community Engagement to collect, analyze, and present the data to families, school administrators and teachers. This approach not only leads to reversing the exclusion of Black male youth at UBA, but it also lends to the transformative framework, and humanizing pedagogy in which Black male youth would attain experiences where they would learn to acquire available resources, and opportunities to identify various support systems that would lead to their development of real-world socio-political change agents who would be more equipped to contribute back to their communities (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Shields, 2010).

Findings from the current study suggest Black male educators have a positive impact on the socio-academic realities of Black male youth at UBA. The

sociocultural and racial make-up of school educators is disproportionate to the sociocultural and racial demographics of the students, and can increase challenges for students to acquire educational achievement. Though teachers, counselors and school administrators in the K-12 education sector are overwhelmingly made up of White men and women (US Department of Education, 2016), Kunjufu (2002) argues the racial make-up of the teacher is of little importance if the teacher lowers their expectations of the Black student and “who makes decisions in the best interest of the union rather than the African American children” (p. 37).

A recent study by Gershenson, Hart, Lindsay, and Papageorge (2017) investigated if having a same-race teacher in primary school had a long-term effect on educational attainment and achievement. Scholars found causal effects on the long-run educational outcomes of Black students, particularly Black males. This is important to note because participants from the current study expressed having more respectful, and reciprocal relationships with Coach Finesse (Black male coach) and I. In fact, participants were more likely to respectfully respond and follow through to the requests, suggestions, and expectations of Coach Finesse and I, than they were of other onsite educators. Though participants expressed having a more personal relationship with Coach Finesse (Black male coach) and I, it is also important to note, findings from the

current study echo Kunjufu, and illustrate the importance of constructive gestures by onsite educators, regardless of their ethnicity. Therefore, I recommend the school district develop policies that not only recruit Black male educators to serve the social, emotional, and academic needs of Black boys in their primary, middle, and high school years, but to also provide ongoing trainings on rigor and instructional effectiveness, culturally sustaining pedagogy, and educational leadership for educators of other ethnic/racial groups who work directly with Black male youth.

Black males lose interest in traditional forms of schooling early on in their educational journeys. Traditional educational practices push Black males into the StPP. As a result, Black male youth resent the idea of associating themselves with anything related to their schooling experiences. That includes having no interest in becoming an educator. I recommend the school district to work closely with high schools and local colleges to engage Black male students to explore the field of education as future schoolteachers, counselors, special education teachers, and school administrators. Barbarin, Murry, Tolan, and Graham (2016) recommend that school districts develop “innovative policies that encourage males of color to consider teaching careers as part of a loan forgiveness program should be considered” (p. 16). Though findings from the current study do not explicitly suggest participants would venture into the field

of education, findings do suggest participants would involve themselves in bettering their conditions when they are provided with ongoing constructive gestures, authentic interactions, and ample opportunities to demonstrate their abilities. Therefore, I recommend that the school district consider getting Black males involved in the decision-making processes on the district level, as well as provide multiple opportunities where they can display their abilities as contributors to their school, home, community, and larger society as a whole.

Portraits of participants provided additional insight that could offer future recommendations for working with Black male youth. For instance, like many of the Black students at UBA travel great distances to get to school, one of the participants highlighted in the current study travels over an hour to get to school, and is expected to arrive at school before 8:00am, sit at a desk and intake information for five out of six periods of the school day, and to participate in every class without interruption. Though these expectations are real for some teenagers, these are actually unrealistic and high expectations for Black male youth considering the interlinks natural male adolescence, trying to maintain a particular persona, and having to deal with the social, political, and economic stressors at home, in the community and throughout larger society (Howard, 2008; Kunjufu, 1985; 2013). This unrealistic expectation is more unfortunate for Black male youth who are bombarded with the expectations that they will fail,

the belief that they don't belong, or that they are incapable of acquiring success based on a set of stereotypes and values that dehumanizes their character based on physical appearance (Todd, Thiem, & Neel, 2016).

I recommend the school district coordinate with city transit to acquire a bus service that identifies two central locations within the communities where enrolled Black students of UBA live. Enrolled students who attend UBA would be allowed to ride the designated bus and taken to UBA, and driven back to the centralized location after school. A valued member of the community would be stipend by the district to ride the bus with enrolled students to, and from UBA back to the identified central location. The valued member of the community would also serve as a direct line of communication to the designated coordinator of the school district who works to meet the needs of Black students and families. The valued member of the community would also receive the workshops, and trainings on humanizing pedagogy, culturally sustaining pedagogy, and transformative frameworks the school district provides for all other employees of the school district. This recommendation serves as a basic need for our most marginalized demographic.

Another fundamental need that helps students navigate the life-world of academia is proper nutrition. Findings suggest Black male youth do not receive the necessary nutrition they need to be fully present, and engage for all six

periods of the school day. Though it was pointed out that Mr. All-Day provided food (e.g., sausages, baked chicken, rice, noodles) and snacks (e.g., pop tarts, ice cream) for all students, he also gave Black male youth more food and snacks more than any other demographic at UBA. It is also important to note that Mr. All-Day is also a Black male teacher at UBA, who regularly talks to Black male youth at UBA about academic character, integrity, honesty, and identity. It is common knowledge to start the day with proper nutrition practices. With that, I recommend the school district develop policies that would allow schools like UBA to work with food vendors, particularly Black owned businesses to help provide breakfast and healthy snacks for Black students. Moreover, I recommend the school district provide financial incentives for Black parents to cook meals for Black students, and encourage Black male youth to help parents with coordinating dates and times to feed Black students.

I recommend that the school district employ someone who has experience with humanizing pedagogy, transformative leadership, effective communication, and culturally sustaining pedagogy. This liaison would serve as a direct line of communication between the school district and UBA, and work directly with school site administrators to review school discipline, school climate data, and the needs of onsite educators. This liaison would be at the school site at least two days a week, working directly with department heads,

school administrators, and Black male youth. This liaison would use data collected from the school site to present to UBA's school site council, and select departments from the school district such as The Pupil Personnel Services Department, The Office of Family and Community Engagement, The Office of Equity, and The Research Planning & Accountability Data Center. The contextualized data would then be used to influence district level policies that would then have a direct influence/impact on the school site level.

Mistry (2016) found that not all policies that are developed are a good fit for the location in which the policy would have been implemented. With that, I also recommend that the school district develop policies that allow social workers from CBO's to incorporate themselves on the school site during school hours. The intent for such a recommendation is to meet the specific needs of Black male youth, and their families, develop specific methods to understand and address the barriers and provide the supports toward positive outcomes for Black male youth, and to influence policy and practice for all stakeholders who serve the needs of Black male youth.

Next Steps

The transformation happens over time and with ongoing support. My next steps as a transformative practitioner is to use the aforementioned recommendations in chapter seven to implement contextualized transformative

frameworks toward social, racial, and gender justice. I am taking this particular approach because of the psychohistorical impact that education has had on Black males, and the educators who serve them. I am challenging existing pedagogical practices, policies and protocol measures.

Chapter Seven: Practitioner Self-Reflection and Conclusion

Practitioner Self-Reflection

Findings from the current study recommend I regularly examine my positionality and power in relation to Black male youth, and onsite educators who interact with Black male youth. I denote to critical self-reflection (CSR) as a method to examine and challenge my thoughts, feelings, and actions. CSR is referred to as an active learner who intentionally seeks discernment so that their power and influence becomes a bidirectional exchange between self and others, while continuing an openness and self-evaluation to counter perspectives (Critten, 2015). CSR allows for self-examination of assumptions, ideologies, and positions in relation to others. CSR allows for educators to remove their presuppositions, and for the voices and experiences of others to be heard and valued, ultimately fostering feelings of respect (Freire, 2000; Mezirow, 1991; 2003; Taylor, 2008). In the following section reflect on my experiences throughout the duration of writing this dissertation. I also provide my interpretation of discipline, and contend that my scholar-practitioner identity is that of a transformative disciplinarian.

Completing the Dissertation

The process of completing this dissertation was exciting, but at the same time it was also humbling, frustrating, reassuring, promising, and time-consuming. I entered the program with extreme academic insecurities. These insecurities surfaced pretty often during the beginning of the program, and from time to time, incited ideations that I should walk away. When these moments surfaced, I dialogued with my critical colleagues Roam and Vanson. I shared emergent ideas and concepts with Barbara, and received words of support from Jamal. These interactions were valuable. Roam, Vanson, Barbara, and Jamal validated my feelings, highlighted my strengths, and pointed out not only what I meant to my cohort, but what I brought to the program, how my work contributes to the literature, what influence my work would bring about for institutions serving Black male youth, and what my work means for the participants and other Black male youth beyond UBA.

The reflection is not solely for Black male practitioners in leadership positions working with Black male youth attending high-performing institutions. This reflection is in fact for committed transformative intellectuals who are seeking to enhance their own pedagogy and practice, improve the socio-academic experiences of marginalized student groups, and to get a better understanding regarding the multilayered complexities of scholar-practitioner

work. Though it was important that I reflect on my own engagements *with* Black male youth, it was equally important that I reflect on my interactions with the onsite educators who served them. I have to be aware of my decisions and how my perspectives influence school policies, teaching practices, as well as the thoughts, feelings and actions of students. Parents also placed value on my position and power often seeking me for support when difficult situations (i.e., social, behavioral and academic) occurred with their son(s).

Transformative Disciplinarian

My obligation as a committed scholar-practitioner involves humanizing a school culture that promotes connectedness among students and teachers. This obligation comes with spoken and unspoken expectations of all stakeholders involved. These expectations are maintained by discourse and approach, and the interpretation of the two. For instance, I am expected to manage and control the behaviors of students through discipline practices, be that punitive or restorative. First, I find the discourse around controlling and managing students' behavior as an oppressive and dehumanizing method of pedagogy and practice. The expectation I have of myself is that I contribute to fostering spaces where students and faculty want to connect, and to model what healthy communication looks and feels like.

I see discipline as intentional acts to synchronize the affective and practical skill sets towards *becoming* of self. I believe we are our own disciplinarians, and we strive to do and be well, no matter the setting. With that, I see myself as my own disciplinarian who models, coaches, influences, advises, suggests, offers, and provides perspective to the circumstances of others. Particularly with students, my intentions are for us to explore, and co-construct meaning around their *becoming* as young change agents. The challenge is the dichotomous mindsets that I am this or that, removing the fluidity of how multiple identities exist and intermingle with others moment-to-moment. This discourse does not excuse the codes of conduct of students who exhibit behaviors that cause harm to self or others, be that physical, emotional, or mental. However, this particular discourse does emphasize the essence of what a transformative disciplinarian does.

Over the years as Dean of Students/Head Counselor, other educators have told me "Don, you're not a disciplinarian," "Dean Frazier, you're not supposed to be laughing with them!" "Don, I think you're failing our Black students," and "Some teachers don't think you're doing your job." Conversely, students value my approach. For instance, I have been told by students of different ethnic/racial groups, and genders, "Dr. Frazier, I don't know what this school would be without you," "Unk, I think you should work with some

of the faculty about how to talk to students,” and “Dean, even though I think I’m in trouble when I have to see you, I would still rather talk with you over anybody else on campus.” I share these excerpts to help illustrate the importance of CSR, and for me to better understand how I influence others, and how I am also influenced by the thoughts, feelings, actions, reactions, and expectations of others.

It would appear that on the surface I know the secret to connect with Black male youth, and students in general. There is no secret. However, the reason I am perceived and treated by some students, faculty, and parents as “exceptional” is due to my concept, and approach with discipline and communication. These aspects nurture the need to feel cared for, and warmly connected to someone. Communication with any student, particularly Black male youth involves practicing the same characteristics, beliefs, and values we attempt to instill such as trust, self-respect, humility, moral purpose, and social responsibility. Unfortunately, by the time Black male youth enter high school they have been dehumanized to the extent that they expect educators to be inauthentic, punitive, and unconcerned. I speak with this awareness from both personal and professional experiences to guide the way in which I improvise, take risks, listen, and dialogue with Black male youth and faculty who serve them.

Conclusion

Like any other student, Black male youth enter academic settings with developing ideologies, and codes of conduct from previous socialized experiences. The difference is that Black males are up against unjust race-based systems and inequitable practices that curtail their opportunities to acquire social mobility. The intent of this study was to acquire a better understanding of the socio-academic realities of four under-credited Black male youth who attended a high-performing public high school. The results of the research suggest there is an absolute absurdity that the school district, and UBA cannot meet the needs social, emotional, and academic needs of roughly 60 Black male youth centralized at one high-performing high school. Results provided numerous practical implications for the school district, and onsite educators who work with Black male youth.

I began this research because of an anomaly that was presented to me within a few months in my role as Dean of Students/Head Counselor. Black males were transferring to continuation schools at higher rates than they were graduating from UBA. In addition to the disproportionate achievement rates, and the high referral and suspension rates of Black males at UBA, they regularly attended school, but refused to attend class. Intrigued by this phenomenon, I sought to understand the phenomenon of power, culture, and

exclusion within a high-performing high school for Black male youth. Findings indicate there is a lack of specific resources and school personnel at UBA that could help Black male youth avoid significantly under-credited academic statuses, and finish on time. Findings also suggest Black male youth can graduate from UBA, and on time with contextualized supports, ongoing professional enhancements on humanizing pedagogy, and the implementation of transformative frameworks.

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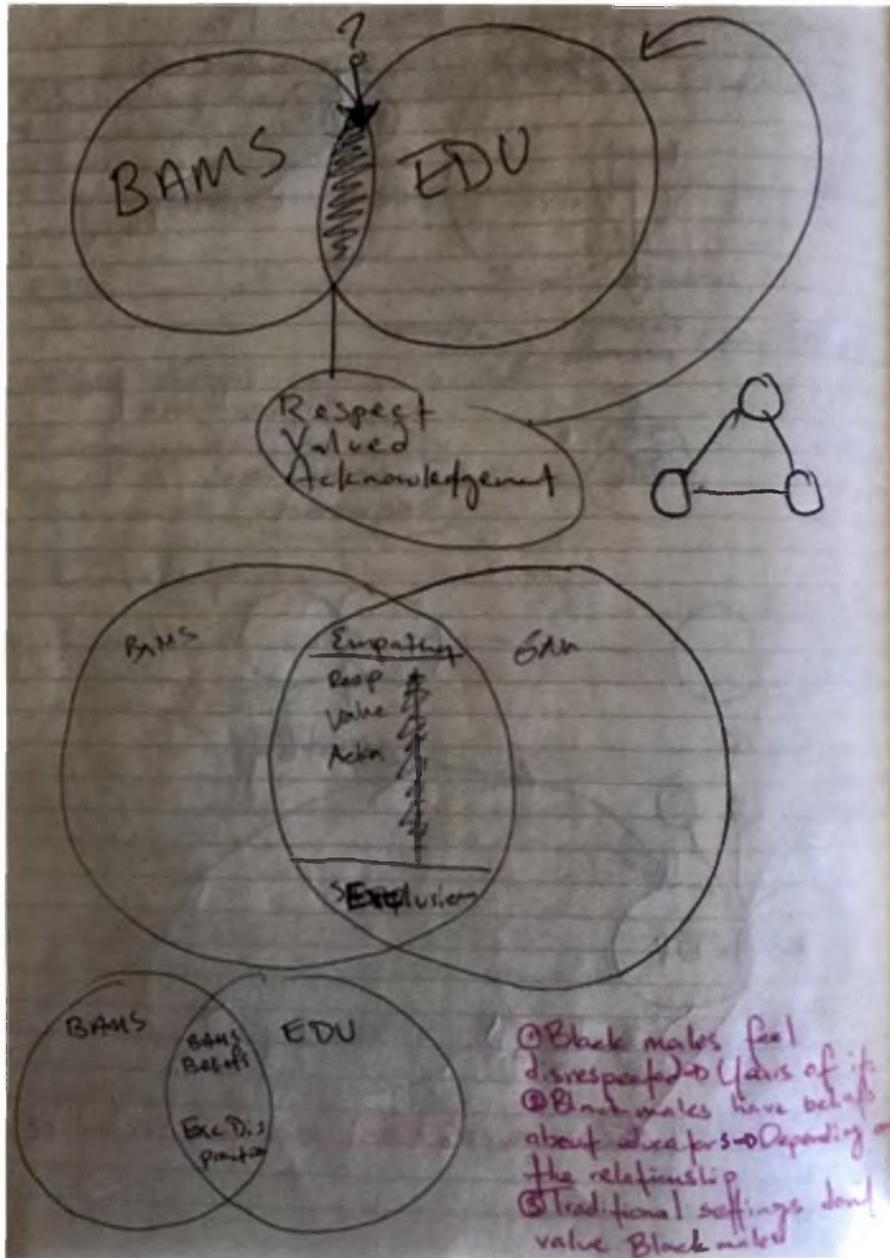
A	B	C
Categories	Questions	Descriptors
1 <i>Helpful Faculty:</i>	What is it about the educators approach that you find helpful?	They were on us - Sticking with me - Stayed on us - Let us know - Community - Personal relationships (1-1) - Check up on you - On my case - Trying to get me to apply myself - Putting us on game - The one-on-ones... - She never sugar-coated it - Her class was interesting - On my case - Want you to succeed - They care - <i>Know me as a person</i> - give you a second chance - puts in the effort that they expect the student to do - They'll like go out of their comfort zone to help you - help you with other classes too - She [the teacher] gave me a hug - But this felt real though - extra credit some teachers will give it to you - They care - They know me as a person, not just as a student - Help me understand what's right and what's wrong -
2 <i>Positive experiences with educators</i>	<i>Experiences (positive)</i>	Personal connections with educators - Community - Seeing Black males' side of the story - One-on-one attention - Being told I would pass the class - We bonded on the field now in the class - My teacher got a hold of one of my friends - She gave me - She cared about my grade - She helped me in class too - Like one-on-one - I got... when I needed them the most - He just kept me on track - She try to help me when I don't get stuff - They just be on us - A community thing - Make you wanna do better - She said she knew I could do it - We just had a cool moment - She felt like it was a strong poem - They'll try to make sure we on top of our stuff - It was nice -
3 <i>Negative experiences with educators</i>	<i>Experiences (negative)</i>	Depends on the person's attitude - Feeling excluded - It's my size... I walk in and they be scared as hell - they [teachers] take it the wrong way - Did not like me at all - Choose students not to help - It made me feel left out - Me and my friend were failing her class - She wasn't helping us - He just wouldn't let me go - I think its just because I'm Black - Sometimes they [teachers] get attitudes - The teacher shushed me - They [teachers] write you up for that - Go to class! -
4 <i>Self-power that empowers</i>	Student/self power	Applying self - Desire to succeed - Caring about one's education - Going to class/showing up - Doing what I was supposed to do - Stayed on top of myself - Cared about what I was doing - Putting me on game - If the student shows respect, the teacher or educator will show respect back (reciprocity) - I'm good at wording my words - we need to treat them right (reciprocity) - proving everybody wrong. Not skipping class, we gonna do what we need to do - Proving something to ourselves - We have the power to do what we have to do - I can influence people to do better - I make them go [to class] when I go - When I say something

Appendices

Appendix A: Screenshot of Data Analysis - Generative Themes Tab

Roam's Themes	My Reflections
Characterizing warm demander; caring; community; non judgmental; helpful)	Could Roam's theme of warm demander also be equated to educators' expectations? I see expectations from the terms want you to succeed, check up on you, and trying to get me to apply myself. I also see an emerging theme of social acts of admiration
reflecting on personal attention; community; high expectations;	Roam's theme on personal attention can go further. For example, a closer look at the emergent descriptors of participants. I also see how educator's approach can be biased and making assumptions that Black males are more than capable of academic success.
making assumptions (teachers); experiencing bias; describing white supremacy; teacher behavior is shaming/humiliating	Roam identified shaming and humiliating, which I can definitely see. However, I see Black males interpreting their experiences as never even being included in the socio-academic setting.
expressing agency; breaking stereotypes; power in collectivity; abuse of power; gaining the system	Roam identifies the the overarching themes very well, particularly about expressing agency and power in collectivity.

Appendix B: Emergent Ideas for Conceptual Framework



Appendix B Continued: Emergent Ideas for Conceptual Framework

