HIGH-ACHIEVING AND HIGHLY MOTIVATED AFRICAN AMERICAN

MALE STUDENTS WITH A POSITIVE RACIAL IDENTITY NAVIGATE

AN URBAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: A VILLAGE COLLECTIVE

by

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HIGH-ACHIEVING AND HIGHLY MOTIVATED AFRICAN AMERICAN

MALE STUDENTS WITH A POSITIVE RACIAL IDENTITY NAVIGATING

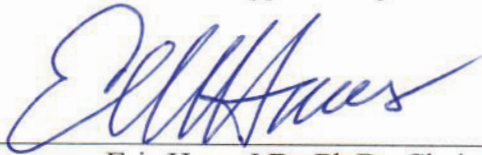AN URBAN PUBLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: A VILLAGE COLLECTIVE

Abstract

When we look at perceptions of African American male students in elementary school and beyond, what do we think of? Some may think of low-performing African American male students as "defiant" and not interested in learning. The reality is that many African American males are high achieving and highly motivated, but a multitude of factors, including their racial identity, influences perceptions of African American males and their academic achievement. Given these challenges, how do some African American males become high-achieving students and manage to succeed in school? The deficit model has long been utilized to explain why some African American male students are underperforming in urban public schools. To counteract this, I sought to understand how some young African American male students with a positive racial identity navigated an urban elementary school setting. I looked at the some of the factors that current research suggests affect many African American male students. I then focused on some of the influences that helped other African American males to achieve in school. Here, I discuss my data results and the emerging themes, which highlight the role of the village collective and how adults instill the history of ancestral sacrifices through explicit teachings. Further, I describe how these young African American male students interpreted these teachings of the village collective through their self-identity and academic aspirations.

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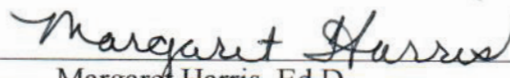Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership for Social Justice

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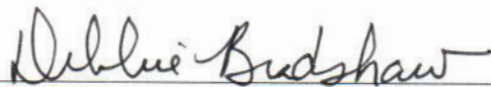June 26, 2019
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DEDICATION

I give my highest praise and utmost gratitude to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Without him, I could not have made it, for He is my guiding light. Secondly, I give thanks to my family: You are my life and my inspiration, and I love you all very much! You have been my support system; through all my trials and tribulations you have always been there to uplift and encourage me. I thank my 99-year-old grandmother, whom I love very much! Thank you also to my uncle, who has cheered me on and believed in me. I want to sincerely thank my participants for providing their time and experiences and for their loving support. I dedicate this doctoral degree to my ancestors who fought for us to have the right to be educated. I want to let them know that their lives were not lived in vain. I also dedicate this to all my students to show them the value of hard work, perseverance, and getting back up on that horse even when you've fallen off repeatedly. The end result is worth the hard work. The sky is the limit—don't ever settle for anything less than the stars, because you are a star! Get ready to shine bright!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

My experiences as an African American educator teaching in urban public schools has shed light on the treatment of some African American male students. One image that stands out to me is the sight of African American male students standing outside their classrooms for extended periods of time or sitting in the office waiting for the principal. I remember asking them in passing why they were outside or in the office. They all replied with an expression of defeat: looking down, saying either that they didn't know or that some action of theirs had been interpreted as aggressive or condescending. Interestingly, their responses were quite honest; they replied, "I was out of my seat," "I don't know," or "I was talking." These responses troubled me because they resulted from the actions of my teaching colleagues, yet I felt I didn't have the authority to question another teacher's actions. Little did I know this would be the impetus for my future work as an educator.

Most African American male students are failing to meet proficiency levels in California's urban public schools (California Department of Education, 2018; Schott Foundation, 2017). According to the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP), in 2017 only 27% of Black male students met or exceeded proficiency in mathematics. There are many factors that affect the school success of African American male students. These factors include both external and internal components that have led to many Black males falling through the cracks of the public school system (Brown, 2004; Davis, 2003).

Despite these findings, however, some African American male students have risen above these same influential factors to become successful in school. In studies of the academic achievement of such young Black males, researchers have found that students who possess a strong racial identity tend to perform better academically (Henfield, 2013). This study will seek to understand how high-achieving and highly motivated African American male students with a positive racial identity navigate an urban elementary public school. In the next section, I provide insight into contemporary problems concerning African American males in K-12 public education.

Background of the Problem

Data show that African American male students in K-12 public education continue to struggle academically (Howard, 2013). Studies of African American male students in public schools have raised concerns about their academic achievement, academic success, and the need to narrow and close the achievement gap (Tomlinson & Jarvis, 2014). African American male students experience roadblocks throughout their educational journey in K-12 urban public schools, and research continues to show that African American male students are underperforming (Schott Foundation, 2015). Kunjufu (2013) identified several factors that make urban public schools ill-equipped to address the academic needs of African American male students.

However, despite facing similar academic struggles and barriers, some African American male students are striving and highly successful. Furthermore, researchers have linked ethnic/racial identity to academic success (Henfield, 2013; James & Lewis, 2014; Williams & Bryan, 2013). Nevertheless, research on ethnic and racial identity and academic success in African American male students at the elementary level is minimal. Missing from the literature are the voices and perspectives of younger African American

male students and their experiences in urban public schools. Thus, my research focused on high-achieving and highly motivated African American male students with positive racial identities at the elementary level.

Statement of the Problem

California's urban public schools reflect the reality that many African American male students are falling short when it comes to achieving academic success. For example, according to the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP), in 2017 Black males ranked the lowest among all racial and gender groups in meeting or exceeding proficiency levels in English language arts (ELA) (California Department of Education, 2018). Many factors may contribute to these students' academic decline, including the prevalence of negative racial stereotypes in the media, a lack of positive male role models, low self-esteem, and the absence of a culturally relevant curriculum (Hammond, 2014; Kunjufu, 2013; McGee & Pearman, 2014).

However, some African American male students have succeeded in overcoming similar obstacles and achieving academic success (Ford & Moore, 2013; James & Lewis, 2014; Winsler et al., 2013). Research has found that racial identity and academic success are interrelated, and possessing a strong racial identity is associated with high achievement among Black male students (Davis, 2014; Ford & Whiting, 2013 Henfield, 2013; James & Lewis, 2014; Wright, 2011). In sum, possessing a positive racial identity appears to be a key link in fostering academic and future life success for many African American students.

Despite the importance of these findings, few empirical studies have examined the early development of African American males' racial/ethnic identity and its connection to academic achievement in elementary school. In addition, there is limited empirical

research on how successful Black male students develop their racial and academic identities within a dominant White culture, beginning in elementary school. Thus, the current literature lacks the voices and perspectives of elementary age African American male students and their experiences in urban elementary schools.

Research Question

How do high-achieving and highly motivated African American male students with positive racial identities navigate an urban elementary school?

Purpose and Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study is to help understand how racial identity formation and development help to shape the self-esteem of young Black male students, and how racial pride may influence current and future academic success throughout their years of schooling. The findings from this study can help urban public schools empower Black male students to be successful in school and beyond.

Definition of Terms

The following key words are defined to clarify their meaning within the context of this paper.

Academic achievement is used to identify students who are proficient in one or more subject areas or identified in school as gifted.

Black and African American will be used synonymously to identify members of this racial group who were born in the United States; the choice of terms will coincide with researchers' use of the terms as well as historical terminology (particularly in the 1960s and 1970s the term *Black* was most often used; presently *African American* is also used).

Institutional racism refers to the internal structures that perpetuate racism through schooling, policies, and other aspects of society that minorities must navigate.

Racial identity is used to identify people based on their race.

Urban public school will be used to identify federally- and state-funded public schools located within a midsized city of 165,000 people; it is a territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with a population of between 100,000 and 250,000 people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017).

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Given the reality that many Black male students are not demonstrating proficiency in California's urban public schools, it is crucial to discern how some students break through these same challenges to succeed in school. As we delve further into the literature, some key ideas that relate to my findings will be discussed in Chapters Four and Five. This chapter will examine the external and internal factors and supports that affect achievement to help illuminate how certain African American male students are able to be successful in school.

Yosso's (2005) concept of "community cultural wealth" helps explain how minority groups access cultural wealth in public education. It is important to understand how, despite experiencing the same struggles as their underperforming peers, high-achieving and highly motivated Black males seem to flourish academically. It is also important to understand the sociopolitical and historical backdrop of the educational system and race relations of the time.

The first section of this literature review describes the data related to low-achieving Black males. The second section focuses on high-achieving Black males and the factors that foster academic success. The third section looks at the sociopolitical background as it relates to education and race in America. The fourth section looks at the theoretical frameworks that help guide an examination of high achievement and racial identity in Black males from various perspectives. The fifth and final section delves into the current research literature, which includes very limited research on achievement and

racial identity in elementary Black males. As a consequence, the discussion of current research will focus primarily on middle and high school students.

Low-Achieving Black Males

With only 27% of Black males reaching proficiency in math, Black male students scored the lowest of any gender and racial group on both the mathematics and English language arts (ELA) portions California's standardized tests (California Department of Education, 2018). According to the 2017 CAASPP, Hispanic or Latino male students met or exceeded proficiency levels at 37% and White male students met or exceeded proficiency levels at 63%. These percentages show that even among minority groups, Black males are below average on the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) (California Department of Education, 2018).

Within the ELA assessment, only 23% of Black males reached or exceeded proficiency, whereas Hispanic or Latino males demonstrated a 30% proficiency and White males met or exceeded proficiency at 56%. Moreover, Black males continue to struggle in high school in other areas as well. For example, The Schott Foundation (2017), which looks at the impact of race and gender on the challenges students confront and advocates for systematic change in education policy, reported that in 2011-2012 the high school graduation rate for Black males in California was 61.6% and the national percentage for Black males was 59%. In comparison, White male graduation rates in California were 81.8% and the national percentage was 79.7%. There was approximately a 20% difference between the graduation rate of Black males at both the state and national levels in comparison to their White male counterparts.

These percentages show the disparity in educational achievement between Black males and their White male counterparts. The Schott Foundation gathered data from 48

states and discovered that in 35 states, including the District of Columbia, Black male students continue to be at the bottom of the high school graduation rates. When we further examine the underperformance of Black male students in urban public schools, we find numerous reasons that this subgroup is falling behind their peers. Thus, the question becomes, what are some of the major factors described in the research literature that hinder these young Black males from achieving academic success? I discuss these factors in the following section.

External and Internal Factors Affecting Achievement

Ogbu and Simons's cultural-ecological theory states that community forces influence the ways in which minorities' perceptions are carried out through their negative reactions to their treatment in society (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). (More about cultural-ecological theory will be discussed in later sections.) Many Black male students in urban schools face social, psychological, and cultural factors that negatively impact their academic outcomes (Henfield, 2013). Henfield (2013) argues that these factors perpetuate the achievement gap and do a disservice to the Black male student's potential.

James and Lewis (2014) appear to build on Henfield's (2013) ideas in introducing what they term the "inopportunity of Blackmaleness": the institutional structures, worldviews, and individual expressions that hinder Black males' academic success (p. 268). The inopportunity of Blackmaleness encompasses three frames that help explain what is hindering many young Black male students from becoming Black male geniuses. The first is what Henfield (2013) calls *ideological inopportunity*, or the social class structures in American society that place a low priority on educating Black males. This is the present-day continuation of the historical and social beliefs of the past.

The second frame, *individual inopportunity*, results from individual educators and administrators consciously or unconsciously accepting the deficit model as it applies

to Black male students. One external factor influencing this frame are the negative stereotypes portrayed in the media, which likely contribute to educators' perceptions of Black male students (Howard, 2008; Noguera, 2003). Black males are often portrayed by the media in a negative light in relation to school and achievement. Consequently, many school cultures have made it a normal practice to accept low academic expectations for Black male students (Allen, 2015; Davis, 2003; Thomas & Stevenson, 2009).

The last frame, *institutional inopportunity*, refers to the numerous educational, legal, and economic inequities facing Black males that are present in institutional practices and policies. A prime example are the zero tolerance policies adopted by many of California's public schools and the resulting school-to-prison pipeline (James & Lewis, 2014). Thus, in everyday life, Henfield's (2013) three frames of the inopportunity of Blackmaleness play out in multiple internal and external factors that can negatively affect academic success among Black males. These everyday negative factors include low socioeconomic status, lack of parental involvement, institutional structures, and lack of a culturally responsive pedagogy. Each of these factors will be discussed in further detail below.

Low Socioeconomic Status

Researchers have found that children living in low-income and poverty-stricken communities tend to be at a disadvantage because they are faced with negative external factors beyond their control (Webb & Thomas, 2015). Research has also found that Black and Latino students attend schools where approximately 70% of the student population lives in poverty, while White and Asian students attend schools where approximately

40% of the student population lives in poverty (Orfield & Ee, 2014). White (2009) concluded that poverty highly impacted African American male students and academic achievement. For example, White noted that children living in poverty are already behind their peers when they begin kindergarten, due to their less developed language skills that result from little or no access to reading and vocabulary development in the home.

Entwisle, Alexander, and Olson (2005) looked at a random sample of 20 city public elementary schools in Baltimore from which six African American, six Caucasian, and eight mixed-race students were chosen. Of the random sample, 14 students were inner city or working class and six were considered middle class. The study sought to understand how social stratification influences educational and life attainment. It found that the conditions of living in poverty and in an urban environment negatively affected students' chances of graduating from high school or even earning a GED. The next section looks at the issues involving lack of parental involvement.

Lack of Parental Involvement

One important factor that has been linked with lower levels of African American male success in school is parents' lack of involvement in their child's schooling (White, 2009). Studies have found a negative relationship between levels of parental involvement and student success. Some researchers have found that lower parent involvement is often due to parents' distrust of public schools, which may result from the belief that schools are racist institutions that are not set up to educate their child of color (Howard, 2008; Martinez, 2004; Ogbu & Simons, 1998).

For 15 years, Ogbu and Simons (1998) investigated the schooling differences between minority and dominant student populations in the United States. Through their research, Ogbu and Simons concluded that the treatment of minorities in society and

school-based on stereotypes directly affected the academic performance of involuntary minorities. The researchers distinguished between voluntary minorities, who came to the United States in search of opportunity and of their own free will, and involuntary minorities, who were in the United States as a result of being enslaved, colonized, or conquered.

Ogbu and Simons (1998) found that involuntary minorities had a somewhat distant relationship with the public schools. They noted that parents who were involuntary minorities, such as Black parents, didn't necessarily trust an educational system that had historically discriminated against them. These parents wanted their children to be successful and to have the same opportunities as other students. Yet due to their distrust of public schools they didn't see the schools as welcoming them, and as a result they participated less often than they could have in school events (Ogbu & Simons, 1998).

Beyond mistrust, Martinez (2004), referencing Family Support America, pointed out four major reasons for the lack of parental involvement in schools. First are the attitudes, particularly the differing viewpoints the staff and parents hold about each other. For example, staff often perceive parents as being too overwhelmed to participate in school functions, whereas parents may believe they have nothing to offer in the school setting. Unfortunately, these misconceptions may lead to the perception that these parents are not interested in their child's academic success. In addition, many of these parents live in poverty and/or work multiple jobs to support their household (White, 2009). These contexts, taken together, often result in neither staff nor parents putting much effort into building strong parental involvement.

The second factor, logistics, includes barriers such as lack of access to childcare, lack of transportation, and conflicts between school meetings and working families' schedules, particularly when many households are led by single parents. A third factor

involves systemic barriers, in which the lack of financial and other resources allocated for parent leaders prevent those parents who are or want to be involved from being able to accomplish much. Lastly is the issue of a lack of skills, which includes parents' lack of understanding of the policies and procedures they are to follow as well as of the respective roles of parents and teachers. In addition to the impact of poverty on parental involvement, race also appears to play a specific role in the lack of parental involvement in the schooling of African American male students (Ogbu & Simons, 1998).

Institutional Structures

How does it feel to be a problem? W.E.B. Du Bois raised this question in his book, *The Souls of Black Folk*. Du Bois's (1991) subsequent work expanded on this question in a chapter entitled, "On Being Ashamed of Oneself: An Essay on Race Pride." In this chapter, he writes, "First of all comes the fact that we are still ashamed of ourselves and are thus estopped from valid objection when white folks are ashamed to call us human" (p. 77). Du Bois's commentary, made over 80 years ago, still seems relevant today.

Seventy-plus years later, Darling-Hammond (2009) described how the inequities in U.S. education that are embedded in institutional structures encompass both race and class. These inequities perpetuate the educational gap experienced by students of color and students from lower socioeconomic communities. For example, these inequities are evident in the lack of high-quality curriculum taught by highly qualified teachers, the special education tracking of many Black males, and a lack of teaching practices that foster success among Black male students (Orfield & Ee, 2014).

In a study using data from the Miami School Reading project, 453 of 6,926 students from low socioeconomic backgrounds were studied. The participants' grade

levels ranged from preschool to fifth grade. Black male students were identified as gifted in grades 1 and 2, yet only 15% of those identified as gifted were ever placed in courses geared toward their subject area competencies (Henfield, 2013). As a result of such neglect by schools, as well as due to other societal injustices, many African American students feel alienated from the dominant White middle-class culture present in public schools.

Steele and Aronson (1995) describe the phenomenon of stereotype threat and self-fulfilling prophecy, in which Black male students may deliberately sabotage their own learning by accepting prevailing negative stereotypes, resulting in behaviors such as messing around in class and becoming disinterested in learning (Noguera, 2003). If we connect these injustices to the perceptions of Black male students in urban public schools, Davis (2003) notes, "Clearly, schools are critical sites for young Black males as they make meaning of who they are supposed to be, and how others perceive them" (p. 520). In accordance with this belief, researchers have identified concerns regarding the differing academic expectations of students based on their race, class, and gender; the resegregation of schools; student tracking; and the disproportionality of school discipline imposed on males of color (Allen, 2015; Noguera, 2003; Orfield & Ee, 2014).

To further understand how structural inequities in education are stacked against African American males, Bertrand, Perez, and Rogers (2015) examined state educational policies that perpetuate schooling inequities and institutional systems based on class and race. They found that the quality of education provided to students of color and students from low SES communities was poorer due to teacher turnover and the employment of new teachers. From another perspective, Ogbu and Simons's (1998) cultural-ecological theory looks at the factors that influence schooling as a microcosm of society itself, meaning that the dynamics of schools often mirror the dynamics of the broader society.

Ogbu and Simons's cultural ecology focuses on the inner workings of communities of color and the ways in which they perceive the world around them.

Ogbu and Simons's (1998) theory is divided into two categories. The first category, known as the system, encompasses the way minorities are treated or mistreated in schools through policies, pedagogy, and return on investment. The second category, community forces, looks at the treatment of minorities by the White dominant class structure, resulting in school and community segregation, lack of job opportunities, and the stereotyping of language and culture. Ogbu and Simons (1998) refer to the obstacles faced by minorities as collective problems, meaning that many minorities encounter these barriers on a regular basis (Ogbu & Simons, 1998).

After exploring Ogbu and Simons's (1998) concept of community forces and the mistreatment of minority students in school, Brown (2004) presented a fictional narrative of a young African American boy entering the third grade, having matured physically and become more expressive and active in school. Yet due to the negative responses to his expressive behavior, the child's positive experience dissipated and this began to affect his academic achievement. Similarly, many actual African American male students are faced with the repercussions of the system (Ogbu & Simons, 1998).

Lack of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

In many public schools, there is lack of culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP). Howard (2012) defines CRP as, "an approach to teaching that incorporates attributes, characteristics, or knowledge from student's cultural background into the instructional strategies and course content in an effort to improve educational outcomes" (p. 1). Brown (2004) states that educators need to use practices that help Black male students and that these strategies and practices need to incorporate all subject areas. Similarly, Ford and

Whiting's (2011) research looked at ways to recruit more African American students into gifted programs. These authors stressed the need to provide multicultural education in which African American students are able to see themselves in literature in positive ways, with the objective being to increase racial pride among Black students.

Hammond (2015) focuses on ways to incorporate culturally responsive teaching in schools. She discusses how the implicit bias and structural racism that result from the sociopolitical context of schools disadvantages students of color and students from lower socioeconomic status (SES) families. For the purposes of this section, I will focus only on implicit bias as it relates to schooling. Hammond defines implicit bias as the unconscious manner in which we perpetuate stereotypes in our teaching, stressing that such bias is unconscious and not intentionally imposed. African American male students must have access to positive role models in school and be exposed to culturally responsive pedagogy in order to develop a positive sense of self- and racial identity (Kunjufu, 2013). Despite the challenges confronting African American male students as a result of both internal and external factors, many have overcome many of these obstacles and achieved academic success. These factors are discussed in the following section.

High-Achieving Black Males and Factors that Foster Academic Success

Despite the many barriers to academic success for African American male students, there are African American male students who succeed in school. Research studies have found several common factors that contribute to academic success among Black male students. Whiting (2006) created a model grounded in achievement-based theories that he called the Scholar Identity Model. Whiting believed that a scholar identity could be fostered through the four supports of family, community, mentorship, and school. He viewed these supports, which encompass positive racial identity, high

parental involvement and community support, mentorship, and high-quality schooling, as foundational to the academic success of African American males.

Notably, some of these supports are positive versions of factors negatively linked to Black male achievement, namely high parental involvement and high-quality schooling. A Theory of Action, depicted in Table 1, demonstrates how supports such as positive racial identity, parental and community involvement, mentorship, high-quality instruction, and high teacher expectations create individual student success characteristics. These characteristics in turn increase the likelihood of high academic and life success among high-achieving African American male students.

Supports	Individual Student Success Characteristics	Academic and Life Success
• Culturally Responsive Pedagogy • Parental and Community • Involvement • Mentoring • High quality Instruction and High teacher expectations	• Self-efficacy • Future orientation • Motivation • Internal Locus of Control • Self-Awareness • Need to achieve • Academic Self-Confidence • Positive • Racial Identity • Confident • Masculine Identity	Outcomes of Supports may possibly produce individual success characteristics and in return these students experience success in school as well as in life.

Table 1: A Theory of Action

The Theory of Action presents an outline of specific student supports and outcomes that seem to advance future life success. Each element and action will be discussed in the following section.

Supports

There are supports that help many African American students to both succeed in school and embrace a positive racial identity. These supports include, but are not limited to, culturally responsive pedagogy, parental and community involvement, mentoring, high-quality schooling, and high teacher expectations. These supports are described in-depth below.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

There often is a disconnect between White middle-class dominant school structures and non-White and poor students' lives outside of school. Therefore, there is a need for culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) in both the curriculum and the teaching aspects of schooling. Hammond (2015) outlined four areas of practice that accompany culturally responsive pedagogy. The first, *awareness*, stresses that educators must begin by acknowledging the racism that is deeply embedded in society, and more specifically in education, that disadvantages students from non-White and non-native-English-speaking cultural and linguistic backgrounds, among other characteristics.

In the second area, *learning partnerships*, teachers and students develop an environment that fosters social and emotional understanding and allows for greater in-depth learning. In the third area, *information processing*, teachers use their understanding of culture and the brain to help elevate learning acquisition to a higher level. The fourth

area of *community building* creates a safe environment in which students feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and are free to make mistakes and take risks. Hammond (2015) observes that CRP is one of the strongest tools that teachers possess to help close the achievement gap.

Parental and Community Involvement

Parental and community involvement have been shown to foster academic success among African American students (Davis, 2014). McGee and Pearman (2014) conducted a qualitative study of 13 highly gifted African American male students in grades K-8. The study focused on mathematics classes that were taught at an urban elementary charter school. The researchers utilized the Phenomenological Variant of Ecological System Theory (PVEST) and interviews using narrative analysis to identify which traits foster mathematic identity and achievement in African American male students.

Sanders (1998) found that community involvement and family support were important aspects of Black students' academic achievement. The researchers also found that family plays a central role in the success of high-achieving Black males. Families of high-achieving Black children tended to place intense focus on the expectation of academic success for their children, which was due to parent involvement with teachers and participation in school groups (McGee & Pearman, 2014).

Community, including the church, has long been a source of support for Black families, as seen in Sanders's (1998) qualitative study. Sanders looked at 827 eighth grade African American students who attended school in the urban district in the southeastern United States. The researcher wanted to study the influence of school, family, and community on African American students' perceptions and academic success. Sanders found that school, family, and community did influence academic achievement. Sanders

believed the connections between school, family, and community helped Black students achieve an academic self-concept, demonstrate positive school behavior, and acquire positive achievement beliefs that ultimately produced academic success (Sanders, 1998). James and Lewis (2014) noted that in addition to parents and family, community was very important in these students' lives. In other words, as an African proverb states, "It takes a village to raise a child."

Mentorship

Having positive Black male role models to look up to is another important factor that positively influences young Black male students' self-esteem and academic achievement. Simply put, these students are able to identify with the experiences of mentors who faced similar challenges in school (Gordon et al., 2009). Gordon et al. (2009) examined the benefits of mentorship for Black males in an urban middle school. They found that mentoring that incorporated Afrocentric views coupled with a positive racial identity development enhanced the high academic performance of young Black male students (Gordon et al., 2009). Similarly, Ford and Whiting (2010) argued that mentors can mold gifted African American students by sharing their own experiences as gifted students and explaining how their experiences helped them in their present careers.

High-Quality Instruction and High Teacher Expectations

High teacher expectations of Black male students are important in fostering academic success (Hammond, 2015). When teachers hold high expectations for all students, they allow students to see that they are capable of learning and succeeding in

school, fostering a sense of pride and self-esteem. Thus, when teacher expectations are high, students respond by putting forth the effort (Pitre, 2014).

Closely related to teacher expectations is high-quality instruction, in which teachers teach at higher levels that challenge students' ability to formulate and apply ideas (Hammond, 2015). In response, Black male students can see that they are important and valued (Kunjufu, 2013), leading them to put forth greater effort. This link between African American male achievement and racial identity is important in illuminating how high-achieving African American male students navigate urban elementary schools. Understanding the relationship between positive racial identity and academic success among African American male students in elementary school can help foster greater academic success for these students in future grades as well as for future Black male students. The following section will discuss the characteristics that lead to academic success among African American male students.

Individual Student Success Characteristics

Studies have identified specific attributes that characterize successful African American male students. Whiting (2006) described nine characteristics that promote a scholar identity, which is based on a foundation that includes family, community, mentorship, and school. To develop academic fortitude in African American males, Whiting (2006) presented a conceptual model of what he believed produced successful African American male students in secondary education.

There are nine aspects of a scholar identity. The first, *self-efficacy*, is the belief in oneself and one's ability to achieve. Whiting (2006) states that self-efficacy is the basis of possessing a scholar identity and that students who possess this characteristic believe that they are capable and can be successful. Students who possess the second aspect, *future*

orientation, prioritize the goals they want to achieve and are motivated to pursue both short- and long-term goals.

The third aspect is that students are willing to make *sacrifices* to attain their goals, such as missing social activities in favor of studying because they know they will obtain a greater prize if they continue to work hard. The fourth aspect is an *internal locus of control*, meaning students believe they have control over their circumstances. For example, if they are not doing well in a class or perform poorly on a test, they are willing to ask for help without feeling ashamed. They do not blame external factors for their poor performance but instead believe that they themselves are responsible for their own circumstances.

The fifth aspect, *self-awareness*, is the ability to understand one's own strengths and weaknesses. The individual with a scholar identity acknowledges their weaknesses and searches for ways to strengthen the areas that they lack. The sixth aspect, *the need to achieve and the need for affiliation*, highlights that students are internally driven to succeed and that the need to achieve takes priority over the need for affiliation and social interaction. The seventh aspect, *academic self-confidence*, makes students feel at home in academic settings. In the eighth aspect, *racial identity*, these students identify strongly with being Black and take pride in their racial background, while at the same time understanding the need to navigate the dominant culture.

Whiting (2006) stressed that racial identity is an important aspect of a scholar identity, but that this identity requires understanding how to navigate the dominant culture as well as exhibiting racial pride. Fordham (1988) introduced the term *racelessness* to explain the inner turmoil some high-achieving Black students experience due to the belief that they must reject their own racial identity to fit in with the dominant culture. Tyson, Darity, and Castellino (2005) refer to this as the burden of acting White

to become successful in the White dominant culture and discuss the negative responses young Black males often receive for these behaviors from their Black peers.

Research has shown that possessing a strong racial identity may influence academic success in school (Cokley, McClain, Jones, & Johnson, 2012; Henfield, 2013; James & Lewis, 2014; Williams & Bryan, 2013). Holcomb-McCoy (2011, p. 60) notes that "Ethnicity plays a huge role in shaping behavior and has been identified as a significant factor in black student achievement." In Clark and Clark's seminal study of identity among African American children, conducted in 1939, the researchers worked with African American children, including Black males, ages 6-9 years old. The children were asked to choose between a Black or White doll based on eight questions prompted by the researchers.

Question 1: "Give me the doll you want to play with."

Question 2: "Give me the doll that is the nice doll."

Question 3: "Give me the doll that looks bad."

Question 4: "Give me the doll that is a nice color."

Question 5: "Give me the doll that looks like a White child."

Question 6: "Give me the child that looks like a colored child."

Question 7: "Give me the doll that looks like a Negro child."

Question 8: "Give me the doll that looks like you."

In the Clark doll experiment, a significant finding of the study was that the White doll was preferred over the Black doll. More importantly, this study showed the effects of segregation and its relation to young children's perceptions of themselves. Clark and Clark's research was the impetus for the decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), which found that segregated schools were inherently unequal. The decision

to desegregate public schools in the South opened the doors for further research on children's psychosocial and racial development.

Hraba and Grant (1970) repeated the doll study in 1969, using the same eight questions posed in the original study. The authors found that Black children gravitated toward Black dolls while White children chose White dolls. To delve deeper, the original Clark and Clark (n.d.) study observed that Black children between the ages of three and seven chose White dolls. In contrast, Hraba and Grant's (1970) study found that Black children between the ages of three and eight preferred Black dolls.

Another difference between the studies was in the manner in which the Black participants were identified. In the Clark and Clark study, the participants were identified as light (practically white), medium (light brown to dark brown), or dark (dark brown to black). Those who were identified as light preferred the White doll, but the children categorized as dark did not choose the White doll. The updated study did not show these references for White dolls. The purpose of the original study was to examine the formation of self-esteem and racial identity in children who were attending segregated schools, but the study ended up providing evidence that Black children believed White dolls were prettier and better than Black dolls.

In contrast, Swanson, Cunningham, Youngblood, and Spencer (2009) focused their research on racial identity development during childhood. They found that at 3-4 years of age children were able to distinguish race based on the color of a person's skin, like brown or pink. By age five to six children possess the ability to establish racial labels based on socially constructed schema, so they can identify Black and White. This is important in understanding the lived experiences and thought processes of Black children and, in this case, Black males in their early years. The significance of these findings was that Black children become aware of skin color at an early age, which can be a detriment if racial pride is not fostered and celebrated in elementary school.

Lastly, the scholar identity redefines what masculinity represents and challenges the stereotype that associates Black masculinity with a lack of intelligence. "It is quite clear that when issues related to Black students, even those formally identified as gifted, are introduced in scholarly literature, it typically focuses on race without taking gender and identity development and associated factors into full consideration" (Henfield, 2013, p. 395). Even when Black students are identified as gifted they still struggle to fit in, to find the support they need to succeed, and to overcome the stereotyping they are subject to from members of their own racial and ethnic group.

Williams and Bryan (2013) speak about academic resilience in African American students who, despite growing up in low-income communities and having to overcome many obstacles, are nevertheless able to thrive academically. These students perceive themselves as part of the norm and not the exception when it comes to their male identity. How do these supports and student characteristics result in future success? This is discussed below.

Academic and Life Success

Maton, Hrabowski III, and Greif (1998) noted that attending preschool and developing an early interest in school helped set the stage for Black males' future academic success. Winsler et al. (2013) found that African American boys who attended preschool exhibited increased chances of being identified as gifted in future grades. Simply put, when certain supports are put into place they produce positive student characteristics, which in turn influence future positive outcomes, including college and career readiness during high school and college as well as future career success. In the next section I delve into the social and political aspects of public education in the United States.

Historical Background of U.S. Public Schooling

In 1896 the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* set the stage for the beginning of public school segregation in the United States. In this legal case, which began in Louisiana but was ultimately decided in the U.S. Supreme Court, a Black man disputed Louisiana's "Separate Car Act" stating that Black people had to ride in alternative railcars, separate from White riders. Homer Plessy believed this was a direct violation of the 13th and 14th amendments. Plessy lost the case and the outcome was that separate but equal became the law of the land, including in public education.

Subsequently, the case of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) declared the establishment of separate schools for Blacks and Whites unconstitutional. Following this U.S. Supreme Court decision, in 1956 Southern states including Florida, Georgia, and Mississippi drafted the Southern Manifesto to oppose integration in public areas like schools. Around this same time, in 1957, a group of nine Black high school students integrated Little Rock High School in Arkansas. Known as the "Little Rock Nine," the group had to be protected by the U.S. Army's 10th Airborne Division from the large crowd of protestors who awaited them at the school.

Three years later, in 1960, a group of Black college students in Greensboro, North Carolina conducted a sit-in at the Woolworth's lunch counter to protest the store's refusal to serve colored people in their diner. Charles Houston, a Black lawyer, activist, and educator, served as special counsel to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Houston was responsible for creating legal precedents that deemed segregation illegal in schools and other public places.

On another front, prior to No Child Left Behind, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was enacted in 1965 under the presidency of Lyndon B. Johnson.

One objective of ESEA was to ensure that federal funding would go toward serving economically as well as educationally disadvantaged students.

Under ESEA, the federal government initiated Title I, consisting of programs that were designed to improve academic achievement among disadvantaged students. Under Title I, specific programs were developed to support the needs of specific groups of students. Title I, part A focused on students from communities with a high percentage of low-income families, providing funding for local educational agencies that assist these students with the demands of academic achievement and state assessments.

Title I programs are still in effect today, but some question the effectiveness of these programs due to the penalties placed on Title I schools in Program Improvement. Schools that failed to meet requirements faced consequences such as school restructuring, in which the principal and staff were asked to relinquish their positions, some staff were replaced, and some schools were reconstituted by the state altogether. Under ESEA, Title I schools have five years to increase student achievement: Year 1 is a newly identified school, Year 2 is continuing improvement, Year 3 is corrective action, Year 4 is restructuring, and Year 5 is alternative governance.

Subsequently, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was enacted in 2002 by then-President George W. Bush. This policy was designed to increase state test scores nationwide and to assure that low-achieving and economically disadvantaged students would become proficient in math and reading. Another expectation of NCLB was that all students would meet the content standards for each grade level.

Due to NCLB, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was amended to ensure that all students would be proficient by 2013-2014. NCLB mandated programs that schools must adhere to and identified the five objectives for school-wide programs: 1) Conduct a comprehensive needs assessment of strengths and obstacles to identify factors that affect student achievement, 2) Create a comprehensive school-wide

plan to address the needs of student achievement, 3) Identify measures to include teachers' decisions regarding the use of academic assessments, 4) Ensure that students experiencing academic setbacks receive interventions, and 5) Make use of federal, state, and local programs (California Department of Education, 2014). Moreover, to assure that these goals were being met, NCLB held the nation's public schools accountable through their Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) scores.

My Brother's Keeper Alliance (MBKA) was initiated in 2014 by President Barack Obama to improve the academic success of boys of color. President Obama's stated objectives were (a) to make sure that boys of color are ready to learn at the onset of primary schooling, (b) to ensure that boys of color are on reading target by third grade,

to see that boys of color are graduating college and demonstrating career readiness, (d) to support boys of color in completing post-secondary education or learning a trade, and (e) to provide career and job opportunities for boys of color. Finally, the MBKA's stated intent was to provide "buffers" to allow for mistakes and to get boys of color back on track.

In 2009, the Common Core was introduced to make sure students are career- and college-ready when they graduate from high school and to help ensure that common curriculum access is available to K-12 students wherever they live, and even if they move (California Department of Education, 2018). In 2010, President Barack Obama created Race to the Top, an incentive-based grant initiative that allowed public schools throughout the states to compete for funding if their schools did well on state assessments (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). In the following section, I will illustrate the social and political backdrop of the current climate as it relates to the treatment of many African American males in U.S. society.

Social and Political Backdrop

When it comes to Black males in U.S. society, history seems to repeat itself, as issues from the past seem to continually resurface in present-day society. A major social movement that is playing a sociopolitical role today is Black Lives Matter (BLM). The BLM mission states,

> Black Lives Matter is an ideological and political intervention in a world where Black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise. It is an affirmation of Black folks' contributions to this society, our humanity, and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression.

The BLM movement gained public notoriety when the case of Trayvon Martin was broadcast over numerous media outlets (Schott Foundation, 2017). Martin, a young Black male, was shot to death by George Zimmerman, a white man who exercised the Florida "Stand your ground" law. This case caused a nationwide uproar in response to the killing of an unarmed Black male youth and the acquittal of the White man who took his life.

Soon more names were spoken, including that of Michael Brown, who was shot by a Ferguson, Missouri police officer who was also later acquitted of the crime. In response to the outcome of the trial, two Ferguson police officers were shot by a Black male. Subsequently, neighborhoods, the community, and the nation expressed outrage at the senseless killings of Black males. Set against the backdrop of race relations in low-income areas, police brutality against Black men and the senseless murders of young Black males in inner-city neighborhoods have set the tone for race relations in many arenas, including urban public schools.

Theoretical Framework

I will draw on three theoretical frameworks to examine how high-achieving Black males develop a positive racial identity and how their identity influences academic success. Nigrescence theory will be used to explain racial identity formation and development among African Americans. Critical Race Theory will be used as a framework to help illustrate the inner workings of institutional racism and its effects on urban public schooling. Lastly, the concept of community cultural wealth will be discussed to explain how these students negotiate their academic abilities in the context of both the dominant culture and their own "minority" culture and how capital can be used to navigate a society embedded in racism.

Nigrescence Theory

Cross's (1971) Nigrescence model was one of the first to create a theory based on Black racial identity, which was later revised in 1991 (Vandiver et al., 2001) as the Theory of Racial Identity. This theory identified three phases of racial identity through which African American children are believed to advance. Twenty years later, Cross et al.'s (1991) Revised Nigrescence Model represented an update of the original model (Cross, 1971). The first stage, Pre-encounter, includes three substages. The first sub stage, is Assimilation, which says Blacks demonstrate low salience with their own race yet strongly identify with White American culture. The second sub stage, Miseducation refers to Black people who hold a deep-rooted hatred toward their own race and believe or buy into negative associations created in the White, dominant culture. The third sub stage is Self-Hatred, which is characterized by the ingrained sense of self based on being Black, which impedes the awareness of the plight of Blacks in the dominant society.

The second stage is the Encounter stage which can be defined as the realization that racism exists and that Blacks begin to understand that they are not part of the dominant society and thus they begin to acknowledge that they are not shielded by institutional racism.

The third stage in the Nigrescence model is Immersion-Emersion, which remains much like the original model but adds two opposing identities, Afrocentric and Eurocentric (Vandiver et al., 2001). Afrocentric represents the total acceptance of all things Black with the goal of an "internalized" identity. The opposing identity rejects Eurocentric values and replaces these values with one's own Black culture. Whereas, Eurocentric is the rejection of White culture.

The fourth stage is Internalization, which includes two theoretical changes from the original model. The first stresses that internalization is not connected to the humanist view concerning other cultural groups. Blacks' responses to other racial groups depend on the individual. The second stage of Internalization is described when Blacks dismiss stereotypes, allowing individuals to focus on more critical issues. Yet another revision of the Internalization stage includes recognizing an internalized bicultural identity that is defined by the acceptance of being both Black and American. The second stage is an internalized multicultural identity that embraces the saliency of being Black while also accepting other important aspects of one's identity; for example, being a Black female with a disability. The fifth stage known as Internalization-Commitment is the embracing of racial identity and progressing forward with an understanding of race in society and the hierarchical structures that exist.

Lastly, as part of Nigrescence theory, Black Nationalism is defined as a "focus on Black empowerment, economic independence, and a heightened awareness of Black history and culture" (Vandiver et al., 2001, p. 180) In the revised model (Cross, 1991), Black Nationalism was not added to the revised Immersion-Emersion stage but

is seen as imperative for those reaching the Internalized stage (Vandiver et al., 2001). Understanding that Black people possess a sense of racial/ethnic identity is an important aspect of both how they view the world around them to make sense of their experiences and how their experiences as African Americans translate to learning in the very environments from which their experiences are drawn.

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) will be utilized to help understand what Black males may experience internally, whether subconsciously or unconsciously, in public school. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) explained that critical race theory as applied to education in the United States emphasizes the inequities in the treatment of non-white students, which serves as a microcosm of oppression of people of color within the broader society. Thus, CRT subscribes to the idea that there are inequalities present in many aspects of society including education, and that people of color disproportionately bear the effects of these disparities (Davis, 2014; Howard, 2008).

Yosso (2005) describes the work of Solorzano (1997, 1998) in further developing CRT. Solorzano (1997, 1998) goes beyond the separate and central natures of race and class to identify five tenets of CRT as it relates to education. The first tenet concerns the intercentricity of race and racism, which acknowledges that racism is embedded in many aspects of U.S. culture. The second tenet concerns the importance of challenging the dominant ideology, thereby questioning the status quo and confronting White class privilege. The third tenet of CRT is the commitment to social justice, which requires addressing the inequities that result from racism, sexism, and living in poverty. The fourth tenet is the centrality of experiential knowledge, emphasizing the need to validate the experiences of people of color and provide them the opportunity to share their stories.

The last tenet concerns the utilization of interdisciplinary approaches, or the analysis of sociopolitical issues through various disciplines such as feminism and ethnic studies.

Incorporating CRT will provide a lens to help understand institutional racism within the walls of urban public education and its effects on African American male students. These disparities in education may include limited or lack of resources needed to support students of color. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995, 2004) also recognized that CRT was an important framework to help understand the inner workings of race and racism in education.

Community Cultural Wealth

Bourdieu (2011) developed a hypothesis of social capital based on his observations of how inequities between those from different classes, specifically the haves and have nots, play out in society. Lott (2012) explained how this form of classism influences the educational system through "negative attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors directed toward those with less power, who are socially devalued" (p. 654). How does social class relate to Black males and academic achievement?

I will shed light on this question through reference to Yosso's (2005) Theory of Community Cultural Wealth, which describes the ways people of color foster and protect their cultural wealth. There are six forms of capital: aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital (Yosso, 2005). *Aspirational capital* is the ability to maintain aspirations for the future despite the challenges of being a person of color. *Navigational capital* represents the ability to thrive in an environment not necessarily welcoming to people of color. Another form of capital is *social capital*, which captures how a person of color networks and utilizes resources to be successful in school.

In the fourth type of capital, *linguistic capital*, individuals draw on particular language skills and/or styles to communicate within institutions. The fifth type, *familial*

capital, represents the backbone of who a person is based on the support and teachings of their family. The last form of capital, *resistant capital*, is a means through which people of color oppose inequities in institutions.

In this regard, Yosso (2005) argued that the perpetuation of embedded racism has lent itself to viewing historically underserved minority students through the lens of the deficit model. This deficit model tends to blame the family for the student's lack of academic success, based on the beliefs that students enter school lacking common cultural knowledge and skills and that their families don't value education and therefore don't support their child (Yosso, 2005). Cultural and social capital and community cultural wealth theory are useful in acknowledging that our society is based on a hierarchy of class that creates a division as well as an unequal distribution of wealth and power. As Jah'mes (2004) reflected, "This Robber Baron Capitalism has existed and contributed in one way or another to the makeup of the American social consciousness and in my opinion to a great degree determined how we relate to class and ethnicity" (pp. 135-136). Utilizing social and cultural capital and community cultural wealth can help in understanding the internal structures that operate in our society and how these structures affect the education of young Black male students.

Similar Studies

Few previous qualitative studies have examined racial identity and high-achieving African American males in elementary school, and there were no studies focusing on exactly this topic. One of the few similar studies, conducted by McGee and Pearman (2014), looked at Black male students who were successful in mathematics. This qualitative study used Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST) to look at 13 African American male students who were considered high

achievers in math at an urban elementary school. The study's objective was to understand the processes of African American male students in their first eight or nine years of schooling related to their mathematics achievement. The study used student narratives to explore factors that both affected and propelled their success in elementary school. The researchers noted the role of family as important to the success of high-achieving Black male students. McGee and Pearman (2014) also found that families were intentional in their expectations of academic success from their children.

In a similar study conducted by Winsler, Karkhanis, Kim, and Levitt (2013), the researchers gathered data from 453 Black male students who were recognized as gifted. The purpose of the study was to identify predictors of placements within gifted programs in elementary school. They found that African American males who attended preschool showed high predictors for increased chances of being identified as gifted in future grades.

These prior research studies focused on high-achieving African American male students, but the research literature is minimal at best when examining elementary-aged African American males with a positive racial identity who are high achieving and highly motivated. Studies of racial formation and development among African American male students in elementary school are absent from the scholarly research, as are efforts to understand whether and how racial identity is related to academic success. Also missing from the research are studies that seek to discover how young Black males thrive in an urban elementary school environment.

In conclusion, few research studies have examined how high-achieving African American male students with a positive racial identity navigate urban elementary schools. This study aims to fill this gap in research at the elementary level by delving into racial identity among high-achieving and highly motivated African American male students.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative design to investigate how certain African American male students in an urban elementary setting thrive academically despite factors that hinder the success of many other Black male students in California's urban public schools. Thus, my research question asked: How do high-achieving and highly motivated African American male students with a positive racial identity navigate an urban elementary school?

Purpose of the Study

I wanted to understand the experiences of young African American male students, so I conducted a qualitative study. For this study, I used various data types focused on providing a platform for students and their caregivers to share their experiences in a semi-structured environment. Conducting interviews and utilizing several forms of data collection also helped me elicit the thoughts and feelings of African American male students and their parents in their own words, which was meaningful and important in understanding how high-achieving and highly motivated African American males with a positive racial identity navigated their learning environment in an urban elementary school (Whiting, 2006). In addition, I administered the Multigroup Ethnic Identity

Measure (MEIM), a questionnaire that measures one's membership identification with their racial group.

Research Design

The data collection methods used in this qualitative study included semi-structured interviews, quick writes, the MEIM short online survey, and the Starburst Identity Chart and creative activity. Interviews were divided into two parts, individual student interviews and small group interviews. This was a purposive study (Rea & Parker, 2005) of two African American males who possessed strong racial identities, were either high achieving or highly motivated, and were part of a minority population in their elementary school.

Student participants were in fourth and fifth grade (one fourth grader and one fifth grader). The East Bay elementary school I selected has a small population of African American male students, who are considered a minority within a minority-majority population of Hispanic/Latino students. There are very few high-achieving and highly motivated African American male students at this school, which made this study unique. This study utilized the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) survey to help assess the students' levels of racial awareness and pride. It should be noted that I was a third-grade teacher at the school but I did not teach the students who participated in this study.

Research Question

How do high-achieving and highly motivated African American male students with positive racial identities navigate an urban elementary school?

Participants

I used a purposive sample (Merriam, 2009) of two students and their parent and grandparent based on the following criteria:

- African American (both parents self-identify as Black or African American and were born in the United States)

- Male students

- One fourth grade Black male student and one fifth grade Black male student

- One parent and one grandparent participant

- Students attend an urban elementary public school in the East Bay

- Identified as high-achieving and/or highly motivated students or as gifted and talented (GATE) through the district

The socioeconomic status of the student participants was not considered.

In conclusion, I chose two African American male students attending an urban elementary public school in the East Bay who were identified as high achieving and/ or highly motivated. One student was a fourth grader and the other was a fifth grader at Palms Elementary School. I recruited the students by talking with parents and past students of mine to see if they were willing to participate in the study. I had established a rapport with a few parents so I met with them face to face to ask if they were interested in participating in my study. I received permission from the school before beginning any recruitment activities.

Description of Setting

Palms Elementary School (pseudonym) is a school located in the East Bay. Palms Elementary was selected due to its convenience, as I also teach there; thus, this is a convenience study. As of the 2016-2017 school year, approximately 500 students attended Palms. The majority of the student population was Hispanic or Latino, followed by Pacific Islander. The next largest racial group was Filipino, followed by Black and Asian. White students comprised the smallest racial group (Ed Data, 2018).

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2017), Palms is an urban school, as it is located in a midsize city of 165,000 people and it is a territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with a population between 100,000 and 250,000. In 2016-2017, slightly more than half the student population received free or reduced lunches (Ed Data, 2018). The median household income in this area was about $65,000 and an estimated 15% of the population was living in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). In the next section, I will explain each data type in depth and provide a timeline for all data collection activities.

Data Collection

This qualitative research study utilized several forms of data collection, including interviews, Survey Monkey, quick writes, the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM), the Starburst Identity Chart, and a creative activity. I describe each data type below.

Individual Student Interviews

Data collection began in early January and continued through the end of February. I originally wanted to set up two individual interviews for each student; fortunately, the adult participants were present for all the interviews. I used this opportunity to elicit their perspectives on the topics we covered during the interview sessions. Thus, I ended up conducting one individual interview with each student participant to achieve an understanding of each participant's thoughts, feelings, and experiences related to being a high-achieving and highly motivated African American male student.

The first interview with Steven lasted a little over 10 minutes; I subsequently manually transcribed four pages of content in order to capture body language and voice nuances. I wanted the first interview to be short to ease into the second interview. The second time included Steven and Mrs. Helms, which took place one week later, lasted a little over one hour.

I then conducted the first interview with Dylan (his father was also present at both sessions). The interview lasted an hour and produced 10 pages of content that I manually transcribed. The following week I conducted the second interview with Dylan, which also lasted approximately an hour, and which I also personally transcribed. I followed the same agenda for every interview and all interviews (individual and cohort) were audiotaped to ensure accuracy for transcribing and data gathering purposes. All participants agreed to be audiotaped and I obtained their informed consent as required by the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

The first interview consisted of warm-up questions that allowed the student participants to feel comfortable; eventually the interview questions led into slightly more focused questions. The second interviews were conducted a week after the first interview. The second interview focused on the key questions, which were semi-structured and

based on the theoretical frameworks and research discussed in the review of literature (see Appendix A).

The second interview with Steven and Mrs. Helms lasted one hour and seven minutes and resulted in approximately 10 pages of transcription. Due to scheduling and time restraints, I followed up with Dylan at the first student cohort interview. The interview questions helped guide my study in understanding how high-achieving Black male students with a positive racial identity navigate urban elementary school.

The questions started off at a very basic level to warm up the participants for the more in-depth questions that followed. The interview sessions were held after school in my classroom, which is on the campus of the school. Prior to conducting the individual interviews, I obtained permission from both the parents and the students. I also received permission from the school principal and the school district as well as IRB approval.

Student Focus Group

The student focus group began after the first individual interviews ended. I conducted one 60-minute group interview session with the Steven and Dylan; Mrs. Helms and Mr. Carter were also present as participants. The interview was held in my classroom and conducted after school. I asked the focus group basic introductory questions that led organically to more in-depth responses due to the experiences of Mrs. Helms and Mr. Carter.

Parent Focus Group

I conducted one parent focus group interview (Steven and Dylan were also present) which took place in my classroom after school. The first interview lasted 90 minutes, resulting in 11 pages of transcription. I manually transcribed this interview

because it would be very difficult for professional services to catch all four voices. All four participants were present during this interview session.

I asked 10 semi-structured, open-ended questions based on theory and literature studies (see Appendix B) to elicit the adults' thoughts and beliefs regarding their child's racial identity, academic success, and the supports that promote individual student success characteristics. The first interview focused on a few introductory questions leading into the key questions. The second interview was conducted within two weeks of the first interview and was a follow-up from the first interview.

The second interview lasted approximately an hour. Initially, the adult participants were to be a secondary source of information, but I found throughout our interview sessions that they provided rich, in-depth data that added to my research. As a result, they became co-participants who shared vivid stories of their childhood and whose voices and experiences really connected to the thoughts and actions of my student participants. I learned that there were strong ties between the caregiver's past and the student's present.

Quick Writes

Student participants were asked to complete two quick writes designed to elicit short responses. The students were asked to answer the following questions:

1. Describe your idea of what a good student is and what they look like.

2. Describe two friends at school. What are they like and why do you like hanging out with them?

3. Describe two friends outside of school. What are they like and why do you like hanging out with them?

I provided the student participants with a set of two quick writes (See Appendices H & I). After the first individual interviews, student participants were given the first writing prompt to be completed as homework. The participants needed to write only

a paragraph or so from the writing prompt. They completed the quick write before the second individual interview session in order to discuss their quick write. The second quick write was given to student participants at the second individual student interview and they returned it within a week of that interview. I highlighted similar words that both student participants used. The quick writes enabled students to express themselves through writing and allowed me to gain additional understanding about who their friends were and the qualities they believe characterize a good student.

Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure

The quantitative portion of my study analyzed data from the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) survey. The MEIM was first developed by Phinney (1992) to measure racial identity (See Appendix C). The original measure contained a 14-item questionnaire, but the MEIM-adolescent contains 12 items and is designed for 12-year-olds and older (Roberts et al., 1999). In my opinion as a teacher, the questionnaire is very basic in nature and is easy enough for 10- to 11-year-olds to answer.

The MEIM is based on a 4-point Likert scale, with one indicating "strongly disagree" and four indicating "strongly agree." The survey was paper and pencil administered; the student participants completed it individually at home and returned it to school within a week's time. The survey was given at the first student focus group and completed by the second student focus group. Although the MEIM is based on a Likert scale, because I had such a small sample I created a graphic organizer in which I recorded similarities and differences between Steven and Dylan. I noted interesting ratings and used this data to write up my findings. The MEIM findings helped illuminate the students' levels of racial pride and membership.

The following was the schedule I used to conduct my interviews and other data collection methods.

Survey Monkey

I created a short online survey through Survey Monkey based on research on academics and identity. I asked Steven and Dylan to complete a 10-question online survey either in my classroom or at home; the survey took approximately 10 minutes to complete. Both boys' responses were submitted online and could only be accessed with a private password. Six of the questions were fill-in, three were multiple choice, and one was based loosely on a Likert scale that included ratings of "Important," "Very Important," and "Not Important." I used the responses to gain an understanding of the student participants' identities as Black males and high-achieving students.

Starburst Identity Chart and Creative Activity

I conducted the Starburst Identity Chart and creative activity together in one session. This session focused on Steven and Dylan; Mrs. Helms and Mr. Carter were also present. The students' interviews began with administering the Starburst Identity Chart, a graphic organizer that asks the participants to write down words or phrases that describe their identity. The students were asked to take turns reading the directions and then to write down adjectives that described themselves. Steven and Dylan were asked to share their responses if they wanted to, which they both did. They were then asked to write down adjectives that described the ways they perceived others viewed them. Again, Steven and Dylan were asked to share their responses.

The second section of the interview focused on the creative activity, in this case the video game Fortnite. This activity was based on the participants' interest in video games. I chose to use Fortnite as an interactive means to understand how the students use certain skills in the game and how they use certain skills in class.

Fortnite has various games but according to Steven and Dylan, players need to have quick reactions, communicate with other players, and use teamwork to fight battles.

I asked Steven and Dylan five questions intended to elicit responses related to strategy, problem solving, and their opinions on Fortnite characters. Steven and Dylan were also provided with Legos and asked to build something related to Fortnite. I asked them questions as they began building and I also asked them to explain their creations when they finished.

This interview lasted over about an hour, culminating in 11 hand transcribed pages. I used this data to pull out relevant information regarding academics and identity. For example, I asked Steven and Dylan if there were any skills used in Fortnite that they also use in the classroom. Steven responded, "I do, uh teamwork, you need teamwork in Fortnite when you're like doing a duo or squad's game, you really need like to communicate and teamwork" (See Appendix F). I also asked the following questions:

1. Is there a character that best describes you and why?

2. If you were to create a character from Fortnite, what abilities would they have and why?

3. Build a character with Legos (I will take a picture of your character). This shifted to building something from Fortnite and describing it.

The following was the schedule I used to conduct my interviews and gather the various data.

Chronology of Data Collection

1. Prior to the first individual student interview, I gave each student Quick Write #1 to complete at home and bring to the first interview session.

2. The first individual student interviews were conducted during the week of January 14th. Students returned Quick Write #1. I then distributed Quick Write #2, which was completed and returned to me the following week at the second interview session.

3. I conducted the second round of individual student interviews and collected Quick Write #2. I handed out the MEIM, which was to be completed at home and returned during the first student focus group.

4. Parent focus group. Parents were asked semi-structured questions concerning their thoughts on school, race, and having high-achieving Black sons.

5. First student focus group, which turned out to include the caregivers. So, both student and adult participants were asked questions that led to more questions that organically grew throughout the session. Students completed the Starburst Identity Chart and participated in the creative activity. The MEIM was also collected.

6. Students were asked to fill out a short online survey, which was later submitted online.

7. The last meeting was held and I wrapped up the session, thanked my participants, and gave them thank-you cards with gift cards.

Procedures

For the qualitative section of my study, I gathered data from semi-structured interviews, quick writes, MEIM, Starburst Identity Chart, creative activity, and online student survey. I collected data from two separate individual interviews with student participants. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes and included questions focused on racial identity, academic achievement, and supports based on theory and research.

In addition to the student interviews, I conducted one parent focus group to help shed light on the family structure and beliefs regarding school and education. Again, interview questions were derived from theory and the research literature. All interviews were audio recorded on two personal recording devices to ensure that data was collected

accurately. All interviews were personally transcribed to capture the nuances and inflections of voice, among other mannerisms.

Pseudonyms were used to protect the anonymity of all participants. Participants were reminded that all data and information collected is confidential and would be securely stored using enhanced passwords. All interviews were conducted in my classroom on the school campus. It should also be noted that I am a teacher at the school, so I had established rapport with the student participants and their caregivers at the school. This helped in establishing a certain comfort level while conducting the interviews.

Data Analysis

I began with in vivo coding, in which I analyzed direct quotes from my participants. For my qualitative data (interviews) I went through and highlighted short sentences/quotes that stood out to me based on my theoretical framework and key topics in the research literature (initial open coding). I then recorded specific words and short stems of sentences from the first highlighting (Saldaña, 2016).

Next, I created a graphic organizer that laid out possible categories and themes based on the results of my coding, including in vivo coding, which are codes in the participants' own words (Merriam, 2009). I then read and re-read the data, added the emerging codes to the graphic organizer, and reworked the codes and themes. The themes consisted of groups of categories, with each category containing groups of distinct codes.

Three major themes emerged from the data that ultimately helped to answer my research question. I then analyzed my data through the process of triangulation, using various data sources to help ensure validity and reliability (Saldaña, 2016). These sources included individual and small group interviews, the results of the MEIM survey, the two

quick writes, the Starburst and creative activity, and Survey Monkey. All interviews were personally transcribed to ensure accuracy in documenting the participants' responses.

Positionality

First and foremost, as an African American woman with an African American father and nephew, I am especially sensitive to the stereotypes and struggles of African American males in our society. I am also an educator and consider myself an advocate for my students, including my African American male students, whom I've seen standing outside their classroom for extended periods of time throughout my teaching career. I've also seen African American male students sitting in the office wearing expressions of defeat and sadness.

I also acknowledge my own experiences of racism and so I am sensitive to the experiences of my students of color. Through these experiences, I am truly sensitive to the realities confronting African American males and the challenges they face in school and society. My role as an educator has afforded me an indigenous insider perspective, which may be very valuable to my research. At the same time, I acknowledge the things that I am not. Specifically, I am not an African American male youth and I may not come from the same community or have the same SES background as my participants, which may limit the richness of my interviews.

Overall, I am always aware of my responsibilities as a teacher and the importance of running my classroom in a way that provides equitable learning opportunities. It's important that I provide an environment in which my students feel free to express their thoughts, feelings, and opinions, but more importantly, I want my students to challenge and ask questions, to become independent thinkers. As our future, young students need to understand that what they have to say and contribute is important. Thus, I am influenced

by the lives of my African American male students, their experiences in school, and the impact of their learning.

I can identify with the feeling of being the only African American student at my elementary school, which was primarily Caucasian in an upper middle-class community. Coming from the South, I quickly became aware of my differences, which included my hair/styles, my southern accent, the way I dressed, and the fact that my father was Black. At an early age I was aware of the way others in society treated my father. Consequently, I felt I had internalized my father's experiences as well as my own. These experiences are the basis for my research and as a result, this research is very personal and important to me, as well as to young Black males in urban public schools.

Limitations

This study captures only a snippet of the experiences of African American male students in a K-12 urban public elementary school. This research focused on only one urban public school in the East Bay area and on a very small participant pool. The first limitation is therefore the study's small sample size, which prevents the generalization of the findings to larger populations. Also, the gender and age differences between the researcher and the student participants may affect how certain questions were answered.

Summary

Racial identity develops at an early age, but very little research has captured the experiences of elementary school-aged African American male students to explore how high-achieving African American males navigate urban elementary schools. Due to the young age of my student participants, certain concepts, such as race and achievement,

seemed a bit abstract for them to truly understand, which may have prevented them from effectively articulating their thoughts. Consequently, more research is needed to understand the development of racial identity in African American males and how this identity development influences academic success for African American male students in elementary school and beyond.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This research focused on how high-achieving and highly motivated African American male students with a positive racial identity navigate an urban elementary school. Individual and small group interviews were conducted to shed light on the experiences and thoughts of two high-achieving African American male students in an elementary school setting, as well as to elicit the perceptions of their caregivers. In this chapter, I will provide in-depth descriptions of my four participants. I will then discuss the findings from my interviews, writing and creative activities, identity chart, survey, and questionnaire data. I highlight three major aspects of my study, which include academic achievement, racial identity, and navigating an urban elementary school. Lastly, I will discuss the three themes that emerged from my data and how these themes help us understand how these young African American male students thrive academically and maintain a strong racial identity in a setting in which Black males represent only a small proportion of the student population.

Extended Participant Descriptions

The following section provides in-depth descriptions of the participants' backgrounds and thoughts to gain a deeper understanding of who they are within the context of this study. The first participant, Steven, is a fourth-grade student at Palms Elementary School, where he is one of the very few African American male students

in the school and one of only two African American students in his class of about 30 students. Steven has attended Palms since second grade; prior to third grade, he attended a private school in the Bay Area. Steven divides his time between his mom and stepdad, grandparents, and biological dad.

Steven's grandmother, Mrs. Helms, describes him as having a loving relationship with both families, and they all stated in various ways that they are invested in raising him and making sure he receives a high-quality education. For example, Mrs. Helms said that she will donate her life to making sure that Steven gets a college degree. She went on to say, "Education is important because again, we're still in the same society that uses education as a weeding out process." She talked about the competition for jobs and the need to have something extra in comparison to the next person:

> It's not so much that education is used for you to get a job; it is used to determine if you can commit to something in comparison to the next person. So, certainly you have to be educated, you have to know how to navigate through this life, but you also have to have a formal education because this generation won't be employable without it.

Mrs. Helms emphasized the importance of raising Steven as an intelligent and caring Black male. Steven participates in extracurricular activities in his community and takes swimming lessons outside of school. When asked to describe himself, Steven stated that he is a great swimmer. He enjoys chasing and playing with his friends during recess. Steven receives many compliments from teachers who interact with him due to his polite and engaging demeanor. He has his select group of friends whom he tends to play with. Steven described himself as easygoing, with a social personality that helps him make friends easily.

Steven speaks very intelligently and for the most part seemed to be smiling and upbeat during my interactions with him. Steven described himself as funny, smart, caring, and a good swimmer. He stated, "I like that I like to be funny!" Steven mentioned several times throughout our interviews that he enjoys reading chapter books and likes books that are funny and adventurous. He also loves playing at recess with his good friends, who are both male and female and from different racial backgrounds. Some of his favorite activities during recess are playing and running with his friends.

Steven described two of his best friends at school. One is a Filipino boy whom he met this year; the other is a girl who is also Filipino whom he met in second grade at his current school. They enjoy listening to K-Pop, which is a type of Korean music. Steven commented, "She likes this type of music and I like it too, and there's a book about the band that she likes and we both like their music." Steven's friends at school share common interests and are similar to Steven in that they are funny and caring.

When asked to describe what he likes about his friends, Steven said they were funny, caring, and smart. He used these same adjectives to describe himself, his friends, and what a good student is. When asked to describe a good friend outside of school, Steven and Mrs. Helms both mentioned one name: Byron! Steven said, "I've known him my whole life." Byron is African American, and he and Steven are one year apart. Mrs. Helms said they are more like brothers. They attended the same preschool under the direction of Ms. Tammy, who was responsible for teaching them both how to read at the same time.

According to Steven, he has a very supportive family in which his grandparents play an important role in his life. Mrs. Helms is Steven's grandmother and she is an active volunteer at Steven's school. She serves on the decision board at school, she volunteers in the parent center, and she donates her time to organizing and helping with events at the school. In addition, she has attended both school and district African

American Student Achievement Initiative (AASAI) meetings, which have motivated her to help create a school climate that fosters successful and happy students. Ms. Helms

regularly attends "Coffee with Principal" meetings and knows many of the students' and teachers' names.

Mrs. Helms grew up in Oakland during the time of the Black Panthers with Angela Davis, Black Pride, and the civil rights movement of the 1960s and 70s. She attended a primary school populated by Black students, but she also attended an integrated school. Her parents taught her and her siblings the value of education from an early age.

Mrs. Helms shared many stories of growing up in Alameda with her family. Mrs. Helms interviewed Rosa Parks in middle school, around 7th grade. She attended Mills College, where she interacted and became friends with White female students from privileged backgrounds. She felt the need to challenge the status quo through protests and daily interactions with a class and race so-called hierarchy to show that she was Black and proud, and as educated and well-spoken as anyone else. She grew up knowing and acknowledging her race and being proud of who she was. Mrs. Helms recalled, "I was always taught to hold my head up, even though I didn't see blatant racism as a child because I went to a school that had become integrated." She also stated:

> I was always aware of my Blackness because it was something that was a source of pride in our home. My father is a product of an environment of Jim Crow; his grandfather who raised him was a freed slave. So my great-grandfather was actually a slave the first 18 years of his life and so when he got to be an older gentleman, his daughter, my grandmother, my paternal grandmother had three children. She died fairly young so that left him and his wife to raise her children, so she instilled a strong sense of, of Black pride in my father.

These stories were shared with Steven to ensure that he understand the importance of education and of hard work and paying forward the trail that his ancestors paved for future generations. He was taught that getting an education is an honor and because of this, you must always try to do your best and if you don't understand, then ask! From the experiences of learning to read as a slave and sharecropper to owning a business as Black man, education was essential and the impetus for Mrs. Helms. She was accepted at Mills College at a time that included a political movement of Black people to now Mrs. Helms' grandson given the opportunity to carry the torch so to speak. Carrying the torch is connected to the community, because it conveys an expectation that is explicitly taught and implicitly witnessed by people in the community.

The second student participant, Dylan, is also is an African American student attending Palms Elementary. He has been at Palms since kindergarten. Dylan is a very intellectual student who thrives on the "why" questions. Dylan is classified as a GATE (gifted and talented) student; he excels in math beyond his fifth-grade level and is an avid reader.

Dylan described himself using adjectives like bookworm, good person, and smart. He can be described as a sensitive, deep, and thoughtful thinker. If he is not challenged in school, he becomes easily bored. Dylan has been involved in karate for several years and attends karate classes four times a week. He is also a student teacher in his martial arts school, where he helps other students practice their skills and test for their belts. Dylan is a black belt and his little brother also takes karate. Dylan's Dad also studies karate along with his Dylan's brother and stepsister and they attend these classes religiously.

In comparison to Steven, Dylan has a more serious side, and enjoys debating topics like dinosaurs and video games. He also enjoys asking questions and loves being challenged in school. Dylan excels in math, science, and reading, but says he struggles with writing. He prefers typing his work instead of writing, but he also finds the task of

typing grueling. He is aware of his weakness and mentioned that he needs to improve if he wants to have a future in science.

At recess, Dylan likes to read or be by himself. If he does socialize, he prefers to hang out with one friend who shares the same interest in dinosaurs, video games, chess, and science. Dylan enjoys science that is hands-on and interactive. Dylan explained what he enjoys about science: "Learning stuff that I don't know and seeing stuff for myself, my own eyes seeing whether the difference between when you put certain chemicals in." He noted, "It is the thrill of thinking that something besides what is expected to happen might happen."

His father shared with me that Dylan is an avid reader who enjoys reading lengthy chapter books and can spend hours reading. His father also noted that Dylan is reading beyond his grade level. This can also be said for his math abilities; he is known to work at the middle school level in math. Dylan explained that he doesn't particularly love math, but he's good at it. Mr. Carter reported that his mother had a love of math that she handed down to him, "We grew up reading, writing, and a lot of math."

Dylan completes pages of extra math throughout the week with the encouragement of his dad, who was also considered a whiz at math. "My mom loved math and then she had a lot of science books, so I was always interested in everything," Mr. Carter stated. He noted:

> Math makes sense because I do music, it's 4, 16, 32, you know triplets (inaudible) mechanics and engineering and then you go to biochemistry. It's all physics and certain things react with other certain things and others and so if you know your physics, you'll understand how it works.

Mr. Carter is a single father raising two elementary-aged sons who walks his children to and from school daily, even when it's raining. On their brisk 10- to

15-minute walk to school, he points out street signs to his youngest son and has in-depth conversations with his oldest son. Mr. Carter has repeated this walk to and from school for several years and knows many of the students, his children's teachers, and many of the staff by name.

For as long as I have been a teacher at this school, Mr. Carter has checked in with his children's teachers almost every day, making a committed effort to see the teachers in person. Following his teacher check-in you can hear him asking about his child's day, responding to questions his children have, and explaining terms that arise to clarify his children's thoughts. He participates in school and district AASAI meetings and regularly attends school events. Mr. Carter has made sure his children are engaged in activities that keep them busy as well as challenged.

Mr. Carter also shared his experiences growing up during the 1960s and 70s. He comes from a family in which both parents were educated; his mother was a nurse and his father was a teacher. Mr. Carter stated that both of his parents enjoyed learning and his mother had love of reading that she passed on to Mr. Carter. He reported, "I grew up in the suburbs, so I wasn't around a lot of minorities." Mr. Carter mentioned that he did not have Black friends in school when he was growing up. He recalls being one of a few Black kids, whom he later found out were not Black but Hispanic. Mr. Carter had this to say about the struggle of the of his parents' generation:

> They had the Birmingham thing and Black students were allowed to go to all-White schools and so on and so forth. So we kind of pushed through, the generations after us kind of sat on their heels because all the work was done and they hadn't seen the struggle and the push to go to college and to succeed.

Mr. Carter explained that this sense of "making it" occurred because his parents' generation had paved the way for his generation, creating the sense that they didn't have

to fight for their rights. He explained that through the yuppie generation, their idea of success focused more on materialism than educational attainment. Mr. Carter recalled, "It was overshadowed by a lot of the yuppies." He continued, "These people were really the generation after us, caught up in making money and having the good things in life."

Mr. Carter explained that his parents' generation struggled to have a better life and pushed him to do well in school. He concluded by saying, "They don't realize that the struggle is still there." He also discussed the generational differences between his own upbringing and that of his son's generation.

To further explain the generational divide, Mrs. Helms and Mr. Carter both stated that they grew up during the 1960s and 70s. Some of the events of that era that they report influenced them which included protests to achieve equal rights in access to lunch counters and motels. They both described the reality of growing up during an era in which Blacks were demanding their civil rights, and at the same time there was also a sense of Black pride that emanated from Bay Area natives like Angela Davis, Huey Newton, and Bobby Seale. These community activists, known as the Black Panthers, sought to support school programs like free breakfast and provide protection from crime and from racist police officers using excessive force against Blacks. Mrs. Helms and Mr. Carter also recalled the influence of segregated schools as well as the busing of Black children to White neighborhood schools. In addition to changes in the educational system that occurred during that era, 1963 saw the assassination of John F. Kennedy, the first U.S. President who helped to establish civil and equal rights laws.

The civil rights movement affected every level of society from politics to music. Local musicians like Jimi Hendrix and bands like the Beatles and John Lennon were singing about radical, forward-thinking ideals. In such cities as Oakland, Berkeley, and San Francisco a local consciousness was developing through which many Black people were standing up for themselves in many aspects of their lives, in ways that these cities

and the nation had not seen before. Blacks were protesting for fair pay and civil rights. Their mindset was that they must either conform and accept their current conditions, fight for their civil rights in a peaceful but powerful way, or demand their rights in the so-called "militant" manner advocated by Malcolm X. I presented a short backdrop of the historical time frame in order to understand some of the major events of the era.

In addition, the parents talked about their children's generation, which they see as experiencing struggles reminiscent of the 1960s and 70s, particularly related to the police brutality targeted at young Black males that sparked the Black Lives Matter movement. What is different now is that social media and cell phones have helped to uncover and expose the injustices of the present. With a bit of déjà vu from the prior generation, people of all races are saying that we must not accept the unjust treatment of fellow human beings. They are joining forces with other educated, well-spoken, and powerful people who are aware of how to create change by stirring things up.

The previous paragraphs described each of the four participants in detail to introduce them, their backgrounds, and their experiences. The scene was set for the stories of Mrs. Helms and Mr. Carter, both of whom lived through the era of the 1960s and 70s. The climate and feel of the 1960s and 1970s were introduced to provide the backdrop for many historical and political events of this time, from the national exposure of the civil rights movement led by people like Medgar Evers, Dr. Martin Luther King, and Dorothy Height to local activist groups like the Black Panthers in Oakland, California.

The following section will introduce the three themes that emerged from my research. My research findings are supported by data that includes examples of text with strong emotional impact as well as textual content that was repeated throughout the data. I believe I was able to gather this level of rich data because I had known both caregivers

prior to interviewing them. I had built a rapport with them in prior years because they were present and active at school events that I also attended.

As I began my interviews with Mrs. Helms and Mr. Carter, I noticed that they both regularly used the word "community." I had heard the word "community" on several occasions during our interview sessions and I began to note the repetition of this term and similar references to a collective in phrases like, "We as a community," "The village," and "Our children." It became clear to me that this represented an underlying theme tied to the village. References to the village included the African proverb "It takes a village," which identifies the foundational role of the community, and "the village and who I am," which references how engagement in the community contributes to the development of internalized self-pride as well as the promotion of racial pride. The last theme, "investment, armor, and collective purpose," captures the family investment, how these students stay motivated in school, and how their achievements represent part of a bigger picture connected back to the community. I explain these three themes in greater depth below.

Table 2 outlines themes 1-3 and the subthemes that relate to the academic achievement and identity of these young Black male students.

Themes	Sub-themes
Theme 1. The Village and Parental Intentions	a) "My Fo and No Mo," b) Keeping the Past Alive, c) It Takes a Village, and d) Ode to the Past—Ancestral Sacrifices
Theme 2. The Village and Who I Am: Students' Internalization	a) Internalization of Self-Pride, b) Racial Pride, and c) Male Role Models
Theme 3. The Village as a Conscious Collective	a) Investment, b) Armor, and c) Collective Purpose

Table 2: Themes and Subthemes from the Research

The next section will provide descriptions and examples of supporting data for each theme and subtheme.

Theme 1: The Village and Parental Intentions

I started with The Village and Parental Intentions because it seemed to be the foundation for much of my findings. The presence of the village was a major point of discussion throughout my interviews with Mrs. Helms and Mr. Carter. According to Mrs. Helms and Mr. Carter, the village is comprised of several components that include neighborhood, community, and for Mrs. Helms, the church.

Growing up, both participants identified the important role the village played in their lives. They described the village from a time and place in their lives where people took on the responsibility to take care of each other; in both their cases their families welcomed the extra support that was provided to them as children. They also spoke about the transparency of the members of the village community. For example, both talked about how when a child did something wrong, the older adults in the community would say something to them, both to let them know that others were watching and aware and to show them that people other than their families also cared about their well-being. Another common aspect of the village was the belief that investment in the community helped their young Black sons develop a sense of racial pride and self-identity, a topic I will discuss further.

As I looked further into the caregivers' concept of the village, I found that these larger ideas were supported by three subthemes: a) "My Fo and No Mo," b) "Keeping the Past Alive," and c) "Ode to the Past—Ancestral Sacrifices." The first theme, "My Fo and No Mo," embodies the absence of the village and the lack of communal support for the youth. "Keeping the Past Alive" focuses on the greater purpose of keeping the village

alive by making the most of one's opportunities, in this case education and paying it forward. Lastly, "Ode to the Past—Ancestral Sacrifices" acknowledges the ancestors who paved the way for future generations of Blacks. These themes will be discussed in the following sections.

"My Fo and No Mo"

I chose to use this quote from Mrs. Helms both because it was a profound statement and because it summarized the sentiments of Mrs. Helms and Mr. Carter that there is no village anymore. This was a commonality that was mentioned throughout my interviews. "Old folks used to say, 'my fo and no mo,'" laughed Mrs. Helms. She continued, "It takes a village. A lot of people have lost all sight of what the village looks like; they don't have any sense of community." Mrs. Helms used the expression, "My fo and no mo" to describe the mindset of some who believe their responsibility is only to their own (children) and no one else. She felt that those in the village no longer had the strong ties they once had, when any child in the neighborhood was considered everyone's child, and therefore it was everyone's responsibility to help raise that child.

Mr. Carter gave an example of how he reaches out to his son's classmates and invites them to come study with his son while their parents are working, but he also felt that there was not enough of the extension of help and support needed to foster strong ties among other parents. He went on to express the disconnect between his generation and the present generation, where parents are not as open to helping each other's children and lending a hand. He went on to say that this generation of parents is more concerned with being "fitted" (wearing nice clothing), driving expensive cars, and updating their social media accounts and that spending quality time with their children has become secondary. Both Mrs. Helms and Mr. Carter expressed a desire to get back to the village mentality.

For example, the community provides an environment that teaches values, develops confidence, inspires pride, and promotes community service. These deeply rooted ideals and expectations can be seen through the involvement of these African American males in their communities. So how does the village instill a positive racial identity in high-achieving and highly motivated African American male students? In the following sections I will delve into the importance of the village, the relationship between the village and identity, and the importance of investment, armor, and collective purpose as they relate to these young Black male students.

It Takes a Village

I recognized that the presence of the village was a consistent topic throughout my interviews with Mrs. Helms and Mr. Carter. Both spoke highly of the sense of village and shared experiences with me in which they recalled the benefits and support they received growing up. The village—also known as the community, neighborhood, and church— also played an important role in supporting Steven and Dylan. Yet, according to both Mrs. Helms and Mr. Carter, the new generation has lost sight of the village's importance and forgotten how the village used to be. This leads to the subtheme of "Keeping the Past Alive," which captures the adults' intentional teaching about the village and the students' internalization and interpretation of these lessons.

Keeping the Past Alive

Keeping the past alive was the sentiment of my adult participants that captured the desire to teach their son and grandson with purposeful intent as a means of passing the past to the future. Throughout our interview sessions, Mrs. Helms stressed the importance of the village, providing specific examples and sharing stories with me as well as with her

grandson. I have chosen to share some of these stories and explain how they are tied to the village.

Mrs. Helms spoke about the pride of the village and the importance of keeping its stories alive and passing them on to Steven. She talked about how, when she was growing up, people in the community embraced every child as their own, as if it were an unspoken expectation. The following quotes express her thoughts:

It's no pride, no sense of real understanding of what it cost for us to be here, because if you knew what price our people paid and if there was a value to you, then you would still have your best life but still give back something so that you are helping shape our future for the better.

Mrs. Helms also reflected, "We are our children's first teacher and we have to teach them more than just academics; we have to teach them how to navigate through this life, we have to teach them about community."

I noted that Mrs. Helms used the word "our" to stress that it's not just about "me." In their interviews, the participants emphasized that having knowledge of the past is essential because it deepens the desire and motivation to get an education and pay your opportunities forward to others. Mrs. Helms shared her thoughts concerning the new generation as compared to her generation, where the "ol' folks" saw every child as their own and if they caught the child doing something wrong, they could tell them they were doing wrong. The unspoken assumption was that my child is your child. Parents viewed the village as a support system in which they had the right to chastise the child or do whatever was necessary to get the child back on track.

The participants expressed concern that many parents today have lost sight of the meaning of collective efforts in raising children. Instead, it's a lot of "me" and not "we." Mrs. Helms gave examples of parents buying their children the latest tablets to

keep them occupied. In addition, Mr. Carter added that many parents are more concerned about their social media accounts than about spending valuable time with their children. He expressed concern that parents' priorities were backwards and that materialistic items have become a substitute for quality time spent with their children. In the following section, I discuss another aspect of the village and its appreciation of the past, shared through the stories of my participants.

Ode to the Past—Ancestral Sacrifices

As Mrs. Helms and Mr. Carter shared more in-depth thoughts about the village, I began to recognize that there was a strong connection to the past. Both adult participants talked about the sacrifices Blacks made through the historical events of slavery and segregation. Mrs. Helms told stories about her great-grandfather's life as a slave and how his desire to read surpassed even his fear of being beaten or killed by his slave master. Mr. Carter painted a picture of the civil rights movement of the 1960s and 70s and the social and political events that were a direct result of the Black community's sacrifices during this time.

Both Mrs. Helms and Mr. Carter provided examples of ties to the past and recalled people who left a historical legacy as a result of the sacrifices they made to achieve educational equity and civil rights. Ultimately, these stories reflect the reason for the establishment of the village in Black communities: it resulted from these ancestors needing to look out for one another, because all they had was each other. In the following section I share more of Mrs. Helms' and Mr. Carter's thoughts and feelings about the sacrifices of Black people. Although this was an inclusive participant interview, in this section I chose to use Mrs. Helms' responses, as her experiences and those of her father and great-grandfather were impactful and really stood out to me. I share her insights and experiences below.

Mrs. Helms talked about how her ancestors paved the way to make life better for their descendants through their sacrifices and suffering. A knowledge and understanding of the past seemed to connect to these young Black males through the explicit teaching of the history and struggle of Black people. Mrs. Helms spoke about the paternal side of her family and the struggles and sacrifices they had endured. "My father is a product of an environment of Jim Crow; his grandfather who raised him was a freed slave, so my great-grandfather was actually a slave the first 18 years of his life."

Mrs. Helms went on to explain that despite being a slave, her grandfather learned to read. "My great grandpa was very proud of the fact that someone taught him, albeit illegally, how to read." She said that her great grandfather was a sharecropper and eventually ended becoming a landowner who was able to leave property to his family. Mrs. Helms stated, "Our people died for the right to be able to read." This is an example of one of the numerous stories Mrs. Helms shared with Steven about the many Black people who risked their lives to ensure that he would have the right to read and pursue an education.

In Mrs. Helms' view, the people who have an interest in building up their neighborhood are the backbone of the community. In reference to the village, Mrs. Helms said, "I still want him to understand the struggle." Mrs. Helms wants her grandson to have an awareness of the people who came before him and the sacrifices they made to pave the way for him and for future generations. She goes on to quote Myles Monroe, "When you don't know the value of it, [education] becomes abuse."

The village is the foundation through which these young Black males learn that their success is not theirs alone, but also belongs to all the people who helped them along the way. Mrs. Helms described the network that supports her grandson, including family members, church members, community members, and friends, noting that they each play an important role in Steven's life. The village is both an important element and an early

foundation of the lives of these young African American males. In the following section, I will examine how explicit parental teachings about the village manifest themselves through their children.

Theme 2: The Village and Who I Am: Students' Interpretation

The subtheme of "the village and who I am" captures Steven's and Dylan's experiences that differ from their parents' experiences. This section delves into the impact of the students' internalization of the village as a result of parental teachings about the village. These findings highlight the benefits of perceiving themselves as young members of their village community, as demonstrated by Steven's and Dylan's strong sense of self, racial pride, and the presence of male role models in their lives. Here, I spotlight how and to what extent these young Black males have internalized the explicit teachings of their Black history and how these teachings relate to the importance of being part of the village. I will shed light on Steven's and Dylan's experiences to explain how the concept of the village translated from the parents to their son and grandson.

Mr. Carter and Mrs. Helms described the village as the many members of a community who participate in molding, teaching, and raising the children in their neighborhoods. These interactions between parents and children revealed a positive relationship between the village and these young Black males that produced beneficial outcomes, including the development of a strong sense of self, the promotion of racial pride, and the instilling of educational direction through the presence of male role models. This was accompanied by the implicit and explicit teaching of values, caring, and empathy, which fostered self-pride and racial pride because these were males they interacted with on a regular basis.

In my student data, Steven and Dylan described how they embodied many of the traits and attitudes their caregivers desired. They noted that the foundation and support of the village were essential to their development of identity and a strong sense of self. These young black males described possessing a sense of pride in who they are and what they contributed to their community.

Another aspect of this support was evident through community service. In addition, the presence of African American male role models in the students' lives was a key factor in their development of racial pride. In the following section I will elaborate on these factors.

Internalization of Self-Pride

The students' responses to the various forms of data collection demonstrated that they possessed an internalized sense of self-pride. The development of self-pride is characterized by the inner confidence of being an individual. When asked to describe himself, Steven replied, "Me, technology person, and funny person." Then he paused and said, "Oh, and a Black African American kid!" When describing himself as a student he stated, "I see myself as average. I really do not like to compare myself to other students."

Steven's grandmother noted, "I want to teach Steven that his character is more important than the color of his skin." She went on to express that she wants society to judge her grandson by who he is as a person. Mrs. Helms was also very clear that he needs to understand that he is Black, but for now she wanted Steven to enjoy being a child; learning to be a Black man will come later. She said she didn't want her grandson so to carry the weight of the world on his shoulders while he's still so young.

During one of my interviews with Mrs. Helms, she shared that she had read an article that observed that Black boys are "adulted" at a very young age, meaning that they are viewed as more adult than their chronological age. She went on to say that White

boys of the same age are able to enjoy their childhood without the "adulting" that Black boys experience. Mrs. Helms noted that she does talk to Steven about being a Black male in society, but not on a deep level. Even though Mrs. Helms is well versed on the treatment of Black males in society, she makes sure to also instill in her grandson the importance of being a good person.

Steven demonstrates his sense of responsibility and the development of self-pride through his participation in community service. For example, Steven and his grandmother are members of a local church and Steven helps organize food drives throughout the year to help the homeless and those less fortunate. They talked about how they set up a space in their church where people from the neighborhood can come and pick out free clothing and grab a hot meal. Steven and his grandmother also donate their time in their school community. Mrs. Helms mentioned that Steven grew up in the church, so he had the benefit of watching his family members, caregivers, teachers, etc. participate in community service.

Dylan also described himself in terms of personal characteristics that are not based on race. Dylan's dad expressed similar thoughts to Mrs. Helms. For instance, Mr. Carter stated that he wants his son to be aware that he is Black. He went on to describe his own experiences in society as a tall, muscular Black male. He talked about how his way of talking and his ability to express himself as an intelligent Black man has helped him out in certain situations. He told me that he is aware of his physical presence when he is around certain groups of people and that he tries to minimize his assuming presence by utilizing his intellect and easygoing manner to lower the intimidation factor.

As with Mrs. Helms and Steven, Mr. Carter is also aware of a fine line when talking with Dylan. He also wants Dylan to be seen as an intelligent and caring person. These student similarities will be shared below. The following section will focus

on the participants' results on the MEIM questionnaire and how their racial identity
was examined.

I Am Black and I'm More Than That

In examining how my student participants' racial identity influenced their
development as young high-achieving and highly motivated Black male students, I soon
realized that racial pride was but one component of these young Black males' identity,
and that their identity seemed to be fostered through their parents' teachings and the
support of the village. Two forms of data collection helped extend my understanding of
the students' identity: the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) for adolescents
and the Starburst Identity Chart. I also used the data from Steven and Dylan's interviews
to help understand how they interpreted being Black or African American males. I will
discuss each data type below and provide examples from the students' responses.

I administered the MEIM for adolescents, an instrument with 15 questions based
on a four-point Likert scale as follows: 4-Strongly Agree, 3-Agree, 2-Disagree 1-Strongly
Disagree. The MEIM measures one's sense of racial/ethnic membership (Phinney, 1992).
Possessing racial pride was one of the characteristics of the high-achieving and highly
motivated African American male students whom I interviewed. Thus, this questionnaire
provided a means of measuring their racial pride and identifying their areas of greatest
and least strength. The data was used to help understand their thoughts about who they
are, as well as their perceptions of how others see them.

Steven and Dylan both have a strong sense of pride about being African American
males. When asked, "Are you proud to be an African American male?" Steven responded,
"Yes, because my race has a rich history, lots of famous people, and very intelligent
people." Steven provided examples from a historical point of view that was explicitly
shared with him through stories of his grandparents' past.

Dylan offered a more practical response, stating, "Yes, I am proud to be an African American male. Because my dad is an African American male." On the MEIM survey, both students chose "Strongly Agree" in response to the statement, "I have a lot of pride in my ethnic group." In rating the statement, "I am happy that I am a member of the group that I belong to," Steven indicated "Strongly Agree" and Dylan responded "Agree."

Although Steven and Dylan shared a recognition of and pride in their race, their descriptions of themselves differed. Whereas Steven described himself as smart, funny, and caring, Dylan described himself as caring, smart, and a bookworm. According to both of these young males, it was important to be a good person. Steven commented, "It feels good; I sometimes wonder what it's like to be a different colored skin. I wonder what it's like sometimes, but it's very good. It's like being unique in a type of way." Steven noted, "You don't really see a lot of people like your skin color; you mostly see White people."

When asked if he saw any differences in being an African American student, Steven replied, "There are no differences because we're not the same color; we're just kids, so I don't see any difference."

Steven expressed his pride in being African American, but he also showed an awareness of the visibility of people with White "skin" color. Steven used the word "unique" to describe being African American. On the MEIM questionnaire, he chose "Strongly Agree" in response to the statement, I have a lot of pride in my ethnic group. Steven described himself first in terms of personality characteristics like smart, caring, and funny, but he also included being Black as part of his identity, though secondarily. These personal characteristics overshadowed the fact that he is an African American male. In other words, who he is as a person was more important to him than his racial identity. In addition, Steven used the word "me" when asked to come up with words to describe himself.

Dylan described himself using adjectives like bookworm, good person, and smart. He didn't include his racial identity. In addition, Dylan chose "Strongly Disagree" in response to MEIM question # 7, "I understand pretty well what my ethnic group membership means to me." Similarly, Dylan indicated that he disagreed with MEIM question #11, "I feel a strong attachment towards my own ethnic group." He gave the same response when asked if he has a strong sense of belonging to his own ethnic group. Nevertheless, Dylan stated that he was proud to be African American because his father is African American.

MEIM Question	Steven	Dylan
#1 I have spent time trying to find out more about my ethnic group, such as its history, traditions, and customs.	Strongly Agree	Agree
#5 I am happy that I am a member of the group that I belong to.	Strongly Agree	Agree
#7 I understand pretty well what my ethnic group membership means to me.	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
#8 In order to learn more about my ethnic background I have often talked to other people about my ethnic group.	Agree	Strongly Agree
#9 I have a lot of pride in my ethnic group.	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree
#10 I participate in cultural practices of my own group, such as special food, music, or customs.	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Table 3: MEIM results

The data above outlined the specific questions that were included on the MEIM questionnaire as well as the students' responses indicating how they felt about their racial identity. According to Steven and Dylan's responses, they seemed to understand their racial identity in a way befitting elementary-age students. I did note, however, that

Steven and Dylan had similar responses when asked to describe themselves individually, identifying characteristics that were primarily non-racial, aside from being Black males. This seemed to relate to both Mrs. Helms and Mr. Carter instilling in their boys that race is important but individual traits are just as important.

Steven and Dylan used words like smart, funny, and caring, which also appeared to reflect their parents' teachings. In the next section, I discuss the role models in Steven's and Dylan's lives. I will examine how these young Black male students learned to navigate school due to the presence of male role models. I will also talk about why the students viewed these individuals as role models.

Presence of Male Role Models

The presence of male role models represented an important extension of the village in both Steven's and Dylan's lives. The role models whom Steven and Dylan describe possess certain characteristics that both students emulated. Thus, I felt that it was important to understand how the male role models in their lives impacted them. Notably, both students named male role models. This seemed to be an important aspect of how these young Black male students navigated their school environment. My student participants described their role models through characteristic traits, which I will address in more detail below.

Steven and Dylan were asked if they have anyone they look up to. Dylan replied, "My dad, well, he's done a lot for me even though I haven't done that much for him (pause) yet!" As he looked at his Dad sitting next to him, he went on to say, "He's always calm; I haven't actually heard him yell, yet." Dylan continued, "He's giving me a lot of ideas. Even though sometimes I want to argue with him a lot, I do occasionally listen to him, even though I wished I listened to him more. But at the same time, I'm kind of okay with it."

What stood out to me was the fact that Dylan acknowledged that he wished he had taken his dad's advice more often. This was an interesting insight from a fifth grader. It also struck me that he mentioned that his dad had done so much for him but that he hadn't done a lot for his dad, then he looked over at his dad and said, "Yet!" To me, this was a very telling indicator of the respect that Dylan has for his dad. During this interview, I observed Mr. Carter sitting patiently while Dylan shared his thoughts in a slow, thoughtful manner. The session felt relaxed and easygoing and Dylan appeared relaxed and free to answer questions.

During Steven's interview (which was a separate interview) he was also asked if there was anyone that he looked up to. He mentioned both his biological dad and his stepdad. Steven started with his biological dad, stating:

> He is one of my role models because he likes to be funny, he teaches me stuff that I'm supposed to do and what I'm posed to do, so right or wrong and he's my role model because he's my dad and I love him.

Steven went on to talk about his stepdad, stressing that, "He teaches me right and wrong and he's someone that I can talk to." When it came to homework, Steven stated that both his biological dad and stepdad encourage him to try first, and only after he tries his best do they step in to help him with his homework.

Both of Steven's dads expressed similar sentiments when it came to helping Steven with his homework. Receiving the same message from his biological dad and his stepdad demonstrated consistency between Steven's two households, providing reinforcement for Steven to learn to try on his own first before asking for help. Interestingly, in the online survey he took, he responded that he would ask the teacher for help.

Steven and Dylan were asked to participate in an online survey in which they were asked several questions. When asked, "Do you have role models that influence you to do your best?" Steven responded, "Yes, my village." He did not go on to describe how the village had influenced him. In response to the same question, Dylan stated, "Yes, I do have role model that pushes me to do my best. My dad, my friends, and my MMA instructor." He continued to say this about his instructor, "Well, even though things are hard, he still goes and there aren't too many days when he's not there; he doesn't really give up, which I do quite often."

In earning his black belt, Dylan had to learn patience, confidence, discipline, and perseverance through his karate instructor. Dylan has had to use his perseverance skills to help him with his writing, as he stated that he struggles with writing. His confidence can also be seen in his description of himself as a smart student. These students' growth has been fostered through the care, time, and guidance provided by people within their communities. Steven grew up in the church, which taught him about community and helping others through service. Mrs. Helms is an active member of her church and through her, Steven is developing a sense of community and a desire to help others.

Dylan shared with me that he is an active member of his karate class. As a result of his hard work, Dylan was chosen by his karate instructor to serve as a student teacher, helping other students. He instructs them on how to kick and punch, and in this way he has become a mentor and role model for the younger karate students. After one of our interview sessions, Dylan complained that he didn't feel like attending karate class on this particular day. His father reminded him that other students were depending on him and that he had the responsibility to give back to other students out of appreciation and respect for those who had helped guide and inspire him to reach his level in karate. In response to his father's reminder, Dylan gave in and agreed to attend class. Dylan himself had noted that his MMA instructor still teaches class even when it's tough, and this was

another example of how Dylan drew on the experience of his MMA instructor as well as on his father's words.

Having male role models helped these young Black males develop a sense of pride in who they are and a sense of responsibility for helping others. The next section will discuss parental investment and how these young Black males "suit up" in their armor to deal with the obstacles they encounter in school. Lastly, I will talk about the idea of collective purpose and the village's expectations of its members.

Theme 3: The Village as a Conscious Collective

The village as a conscious collective represents the compilation of the parents' investment in their sons' lives and their education. Suiting up in armor is a concept the students shared with me that helps shield them from racial stereotypes as well as the stereotypes associated with being smart. The ability to put on this type of armor was the result of intentional teaching from their parents. Lastly, collective purpose refers to the idea of the village—meaning the neighborhood, community, and church— coming together to invest time in and support these young Black males. In return for this investment, there is an expectation that the recipients will give back to the village, ultimately carrying the torch and giving thanks to their ancestors and prior generations who paved the way for them. The village in this way has developed a symbiotic relationship in which benefits are afforded to both groups. These components will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

Investment

"You are my investment," Mr. Carter said to his son Dylan. Mr. Carter and Mrs. Helms expressed their dedication to their children and their educational aspirations. They

shared two key factors: first, the quality time they spent with their children, and second, their involvement in various aspects of their child's life. Throughout our interviews, Mrs. Carter and Mr. Helms talked about their investment in spending time with their children, whether by taking advantage of a few minutes to talk with their child on the way to school or picking them up after school. This time was seen as very valuable because while walking their children to school, they were able to provide encouraging and positive words before they entered their classrooms.

In addition to their morning conversations, Mr. Carter and Mrs. Helms also used the time walking home from school to ask how their children's day went. If it wasn't so great, they would use this time to listen and offer advice or provide another way of seeing a situation. Some days, Mrs. Helms noted, the walks would just be about "imparting knowledge." Mrs. Helms picks up Steven from school several days a week and as they walk home they engage in conversations about his day. Mrs. Helms explained the purpose of these discussions: "I'm talking to him; I'm checking in on his emotional well-being." This valuable time shared with her grandson allows her to find out how his day went, to see how he's feeling, and most importantly, to lift him up and encourage him.

When asked to reflect on the time he spends with his son, Mr. Carter replied, "You either have money and less time with your child or you have less money and more time with your child; you don't get both." Mr. Carter has made sacrifices to make sure he is there when his children wake up in the morning and that he's there to pick them up from school. He makes the effort to be present at his son's school functions and attends school and district meetings because he believes it's important to know what's going on in his son's school district, as well as to be involved and have a say. Many times, he's the only African American father at these meetings. Nevertheless, he is very active and involved in Dylan's school activities.

Just as Dylan takes karate classes several days a week, Mr. Carter and Dylan's younger brother also take karate at the same studio as Dylan. This is another example of Mr. Carter spending time with his sons and being involved in what Dylan enjoys doing. Mr. Carter noted that the quality time he devotes to his children is important because when he's old or gone, he knows his children's future will be secured due to the time he spent to ensure that they are well-rounded, happy, and educated Black males.

Mr. Carter had this to say concerning parents taking time out to attend their child's events:

> What they don't understand is when your child is in practice, he's going to look at you approximately every two to three minutes in a 45 minute or half hour practice, he's going to look at you at least 10 to 15 times and if he looks and you're not looking, that tells him that you are not as important as Instagram or Facebook or me taking a selfie.

Mr. Carter further stated that this is a generation of me, and that the children are being fitted with the latest Jordan's and buying Lexuses but living in Section 8 housing. Mrs. Helms agreed, saying, "They care more about them being fitted and they've got the latest tablets, the latest technology, but they're empty." Mr. Carter went on to explain that our priorities are all turned around and that money does not equal quality time spent with your children. Mr. Carter added, "If you spend more time with your child, you're going to have less money; it is a hard one but at some point, you have to become self-sacrificing."

Mrs. Helms reflected, "I thought it a blessing to be able to be this involved in my grandchild because I made it my business." She added, "I will be involved in Steven's education until Steven hands me a high school diploma and then when he hands me that bachelor's and masters and when he hands me that Ph.D." She said she has talked about college ever since Steven was very young. She has also built a rapport with her

grandson's teachers and checks in with them to ask how Steven's day went and to see if he has his homework.

Mrs. Helms can be seen almost daily waiting for Steven after school because he enjoys visiting his teachers' classrooms from last year. She waits patiently for him while she talks with other parents. Mrs. Helms noted, "You have that sense of family values, then it'll propel you to spend time with your child and it doesn't even have to be a whole lot of time." Referring to the time Mr. Carter spends walking his children to and from school, Mrs. Helms observed, "Every day I see Mr. Carter on his hustle, even in the rain; if you notice, whenever I see him, he's imparting wisdom."

Mrs. Helms stressed that her investment in her grandson's future is very important to her and that she will be involved until the day he earns his degrees. Steven was sitting next to his grandmother as she shared this. Mr. Carter also talked about how Black people are not investing in property to create generational wealth because they are not taught to invest for future generations.

Mr. Carter and Mrs. Helms discussed the racial differences that exist with regard to parents taking advantage of the educational opportunities that prepare them for school. For example, Mrs. Helms stated that some churches offer financial workshops in addition to church services. She explained, "What I'm saying is the difference is that I've been in White churches and they're not just focused on Christianity; they're in the Bible, but they're also teaching their people about life application." She continued, "On a Sunday afternoon they have financial workshops, they have youth night classes on resume writing or teaching their children public speaking for oratorical fests so that they can gain some communication skills."

Mr. Carter also made some similar points. He stated that parents of White and Asian kids take advantage of summer classes where their children learn skills such as coding. Then in high school these same students are ahead of Black students because

their parents invest in and understand the importance of education and are preparing their children for the future. The White and Asian kids who took advantage of these opportunities, he notes, are the ones who are working at companies like Google, because they have several years of experience prior to obtaining jobs at high-tech companies. In contrast, Black male students are not taking advantage of these same opportunities for whatever reason, so they are not as highly qualified as their White and Asian male counterparts.

Commenting on her grandson's education, Mrs. Helms said, "So I think in helping him, I try to instill values for him; education is important because again we're still in a society that uses education as a weeding out process." She noted the need for a formal education as a means to becoming employable in our society. Making sure their sons received a good education was very important to both Mrs. Helms and Mr. Carter, and both stated that their goal was for their sons to receive a good education in order to make it in this society. They also expressed the importance of education as a means for their son/grandson to secure a good quality of life. Another dynamic all the participants noted were the various ways in which they protected their identity through what I term "armor." I will discuss their experiences of armoring up in various contexts below.

Armor

As my interviews progressed, I noticed how these students used a sort of personal protection to navigate their school environment. I wanted to understand this better, so I began by asking, "How do you stay motivated in school?" and "Are you aware of stereotypes in school?" Steven's and Dylan's responses to these two questions helped evoke this idea of armor. This metaphor evokes an image of covering one's body with physical armor to prepare for battle, and this is not far from the truth. The armor that these Black male students wear is an internal form of protection that helps shield them

from negative stereotypes connected to being smart or to their racial identity. This armor also provides an inner locus of control that allows them to keep moving forward.

Armor seemed to be manifested in various ways, such as in confidence, in perseverance, and as protection against negative stereotypes. Through the explicit teaching of historical and familial sacrifices from family and community, Mr. Carter and Mrs. Helms described the armor that their sons wear. Mrs. Helms explained, "I don't want his life to go on without me and I also don't want him to face manhood without his history, because I think knowing your history helps to define who you are." She stated that it was important for her to make sure Steven knows who he is as a Black male, as he will grow up one day to be a Black man and he has to know his self-worth.

"It's not an angry Black man you need to fear, but an intelligent Black male, you need to fear my intelligence!" exclaimed Mr. Carter. This was his armor and he used his intelligence as a weapon against society's perceptions of Black men. This "armoring up" is also being passed down to his son. For example, Dylan stated that getting a good education is important to get a good job. Mrs. Helms expressed a similar sentiment, stating, "I had something to make me want to carry on, to make me want to take the next step, and that was my father sharing or always saying, 'Aren't you glad your daddy can read?'"

Mrs. Helms was talking in the context of having attended both segregated and integrated schools growing up and eventually attending Mills College. These parents are teaching their children that education is a necessary route to help ensure a successful future in a society that will judge you simply for being an African American male. In this context, educational armor is one way to protect themselves and set them apart from the negative stereotypes of Black males. This can also be seen in the way Steven and Dylan speak. Both students are very "proper" in the way they speak, and Mrs. Helms and Mr.

Carter correct their language in a non-condescending and caring manner. I saw this as a way these parents help to armor their son/grandson.

In my research, I describe armor as a shield of reassurance and strength that has been ingrained in these young African American male students through their family's instilling of pride and confidence in who they are, both as Black males and possessing an internalized sense of self-pride. For example, when Steven was asked how he stays motivated in school, he replied, "It was this line from a movie, I didn't know if it was a superhero—he was getting beat and so one moment he just said you just have to push through it."

Steven's armor is similar to his grandmother's when she used the words, "carry on." Mrs. Helms shared, "On the days that I didn't want to go to school, I had something to carry, to make me want to carry on, to make me want to take that next step, and that was that memory of my father." "Pushing through" seemed to be an internal motivator that helped Steven focus on staying motivated in school, especially when it came to writing, which he struggled with.

Another example of armor is displayed in the students' sense of confidence in who they are as highly motivated and high-achieving African American male students. When asked about his reaction to words like "nerd" and "geek," Dylan said, "I mean I have heard it used a few times; it doesn't bother me." When asked to describe one thing he likes about himself, Dylan replied, "One of the things I like about myself is that I can help others besides myself and that others can also help me." He went on to say, "Sometimes things aren't like well sometimes negative things turn into somewhat of a positive thing, so it's not all bad." Dylan is aware that being smart does not mean you can't learn from others and that these are opportunities from which he can learn and grow. He seems to possess enough confidence to understand that learning is a reciprocal

process. These were examples of armor that the participants shared through their experiences.

Collective Purpose and Carrying the Torch

I realized that there was a greater motivation inspiring these caregivers to carry on the village ways and maintain the tradition of support through their teachings. Collective purpose encompasses the implicit and explicit consciousness of the connection to the village, the support that the village provides these young Black males, and the expectation and obligation that they will "carry the torch" and pay forward what was given to them. The collective purpose is connected again to the village, establishing a "we" rather than a "me" mindset and reminding individuals that there is a purpose greater than oneself.

Collective purpose is the connection to the village in the sense that members of the community help and support one another in pursuit of this larger purpose. The collective purpose also comes with expectations from the members of the village that those that have helped guide you anticipate you giving back in some way. These expectations are not seen as a burden, but instead instill a sense of pride and gratitude toward the village and all those who invested in you.

There is also an expectation that you must make something of yourself due to the path that has been paved by prior generations and your ancestors. Thus these strong ancestral ties carry an obligation to continue their work and give back to those who have guided and encouraged you. This includes doing well in school and striving for further educational opportunities, with the goal of returning the "favor" and coming back to help the community that helped you.

Mrs. Helms and Mr. Carter agreed that the goal of the community is to provide support, which hopefully creates a cycle of support and giving back. In return, the

community receives benefits from its members. These benefits may include providing mentorship programs within the school community, opening Black-owned businesses in the community, establishing foundations for youth, or producing educated Black males as citizens within the community, among others. These are examples of a collective effort that is mutually beneficial. Giving back to the community that served them creates communities of positivity and fosters the development of proud Black youth who continue to advance the community. The ultimate objective is to create a strong foundation for the youth to become successful in order to give back.

By the same token, according to Mrs. Helms, prior generations in the community have paved the way and opened up opportunities for future generations, including creating a foundation through which young Black males can invest in their neighborhoods and use their education to leave a mark for future generations. Similarly, Mr. Carter talked about the need to create generational wealth and understand how important it is to invest for long run, thereby sustaining the future of the Black community.

The diagram below outlines the three themes discussed above. It shows how the village, racial identity, and parental investment relate to high-achieving and highly motivated African American male students with a positive racial identity.
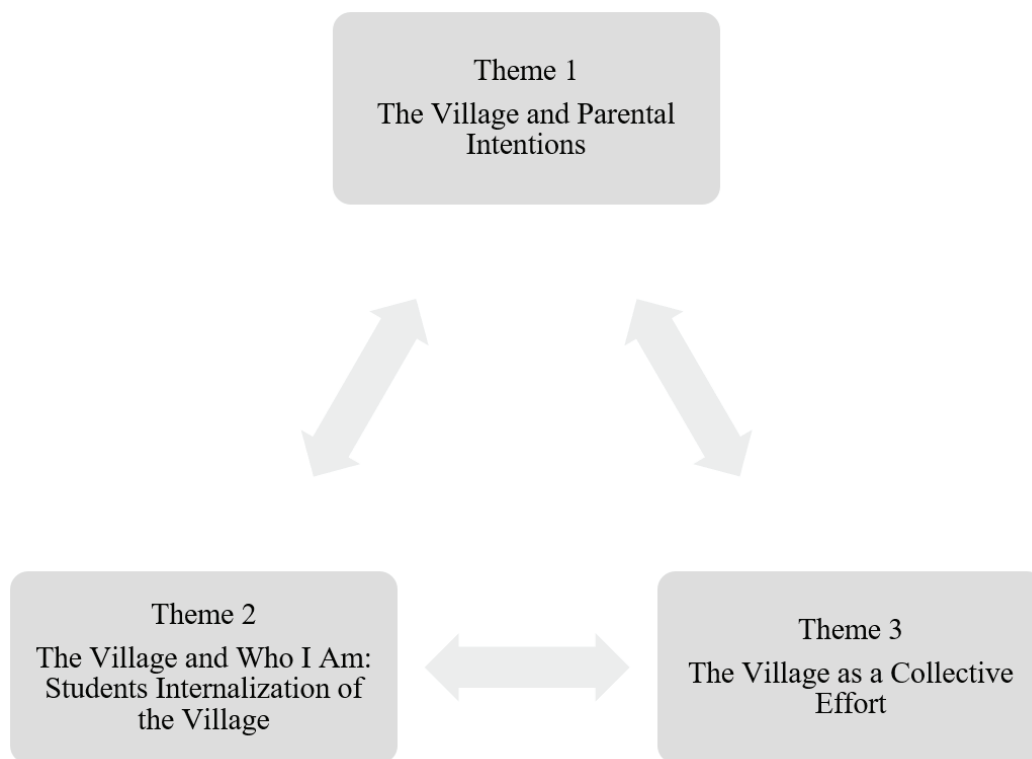
Figure 1.1: Themes of the high-achieving and highly motivated African American male participants

I have discussed the importance of the village conscious collective from the perspective of the caregivers, through their intentional teachings of the historical and social sacrifices of past generations and the ancestral ties connected to the village. I have also discussed the internalization of the village from the students' perspective through the development of racial pride, an internalized sense of self-pride, and the formation of armor. Lastly, I talked about the village conscious collective and the importance of keeping the past alive through the obligation of present members to get an education and to pay forward for future generations. In the conclusion, I will give a wrap-up of my research starting with the participants, then summarizing the emergent themes, and ending with the idea of a conscious collective.

Conclusion

This chapter presented the backgrounds of the four participants in order to understand each individual's upbringing and how their experiences have shaped their beliefs. I also sought to provide a deeper background to understand the generational differences of the adult participants as well as the backdrop of the era in which each participant grew up.

The chapter's second component was a discussion of the themes that emerged from this study. Three themes shed light on the experiences of the high-achieving and highly motivated African American students. The first was the exploration of the village and how the foundational beginnings outside the students' home environment helped support their growth and development as young Black males. The second theme focused on the village, the formation of the students' identities as African American males, and the development of their sense of self.

Lastly, the themes of investment, armor, and a conscious collective purpose were discussed in relation to implicit and explicit parental modeling and teachings. I talked about the armor the students wear, which allows them to continue moving forward despite the challenges they face. I concluded with the idea of collective purpose, which is the understanding and expectation that the students will give back to the village community that invested in them. Chapter 5 will discuss recommendations and implications based on my research findings that may help elementary-age African American males achieve both academic success and positive racial and self-identity.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

In the following section, I will describe how my three themes—The Village and Parental Intentions, The Village and Who I Am: Students' Internalization, and The Village as a Conscious Collective —relate to the research literature. I will also discuss how Nigrescence theory, community cultural wealth, and critical race theory relate to the research outlined in Chapter Two.

Summary of Findings

My research examined how high-achieving and highly motivated African American male students with a positive racial identity navigate an urban elementary school. I used a qualitative approach that included conducting semi-structured interviews, administering questionnaires, and incorporating other forms of data gathering to help understand how these young Black males were able to thrive academically despite the challenges they face an urban elementary setting. Three themes emerged from this study: 1) The Village and Parental Intentions, 2) The Village and Who I Am: Students' Internalization, and 3) The Village as a Conscious Collective.

Family and the presence of the village represented the fundamental support that connected all three themes. For my participants, the village seemed to provide certain supports that were connected to a sense of pride in various ways. For the adults, the village symbolized the pillar of their community, in which being a member meant carrying the torch and continuing to support those who paved the way for the younger

generations. For the young male participants, however, the idea of the village was internalized in a different way. For example, the adults shared experiences that were associated with an awareness of the 1960s and 70s era and the racial climate of the time. In contrast, the Black male students interpreted the village through the presence of male role models and the development of strong racial identity and sense of self. There was a common goal, however. Throughout my interviews with them, both parents and children highlighted the importance of receiving a good education.

In the following section, I relate the literature review to my research findings. I then review the factors that promote academic success among high-achieving Black males. Next, I analyze my theoretical frameworks in relation to my research findings. I then go on to offer recommendations, followed by implications for practice. I conclude with suggestions for future research.

Research and My Findings

Previous research studies identified several factors that affected African American male students and their academic achievement. These factors include low socioeconomic status (SES), lack of parental involvement, the presence of racial institutional structures, and lack of a culturally responsive pedagogy. In this section I discuss each factor and how it relates to my student participants.

Low SES was not a factor I considered when I chose my African American male participants. However, parental involvement was a key factor in selecting these caregivers, as Mr. Carter and Mrs. Helms were highly involved in their son and grandson's schooling. They participated in several school meetings, attended many school events, and established relationships with their child's principal and teachers.

The third factor was the influence of institutional structures. Mr. Carter and Mrs. Helms both acknowledged this influence and took measures to challenge the status quo and the impact of inequality in education. These parents were intentional in their teachings and storytelling of the past to prepare their son and grandson for their educational and societal journey as a Black male. This included teaching them how to "suit-up" in what I have termed "armor." It also included incorporating the village, in which the neighborhood, community, and church play important roles in the lives of these young Black male students.

Recognition of the sacrifices made by these Black males' ancestors and the honoring of their ancestral ties were deeply embedded in the adult participants. Mrs. Helms shared familial stories with Steven through her ties to the past as experienced through her great-grandfather being a slave. Mr. Carter told stories of the 1960s and 70s civil rights movement and the climate and sacrifices of Black people, as well as sharing personal stories with Dylan and me.

Both Mr. Carter and Mrs. Helms also shared stories of the village, and how important it was to their parents and themselves growing up during a time of racial unrest Oakland and San Francisco. Mrs. Helms shared that she experienced both segregated and integrated schooling, but stated that she was always aware of her Blackness in a positive way. In contrast, Mr. Carter lived in the suburbs and attended integrated schools. He was aware that he was the only Black male student in his class, and he was also conscious of the racism present in school, where he heard names like "n#@$@#." However, he recognized that as he grew taller and bigger than the rest of his classmates, the other students feared him, which was how he armored himself.

Another difference between the research literature and my findings was the presence of male role models who helped these young Black males feel a sense of pride in who they are as smart and intelligent male students. Steven and Dylan were both

supported by Black male role models, both of whom happened to be their fathers. The student participants identified their fathers and stepfather as their role models for similar reasons. They stated that their fathers encouraged them to do their best and not to give up, and that they were fun to be around.

The results of my data did show a connection to parental involvement, as my student participants' parents were actively involved in their schooling. These parents participated in school activities, joined school and district committees, and knew their child's teachers to the extent that they checked in with the teachers daily or weekly. My research findings were consistent with parents being involved in school by participating on committees as well as attending school events with their son and grandson. Mrs. Helms and Mr. Carter were both highly involved in their son and grandson's school, knowing both many of the teachers as well as other students in their child's class.

Another similarity to prior research relates to the consequences of being educated within a structure in which racism has historically been embedded. These implicit and explicit social structures result in the awareness of being different, as mentioned by one of my participants. The parent participants were even more aware of the institutionalized racism, as they shared their experiences of growing up and attending school during the 1960s and 1970s. These explicit stories were an important part of their teachings to their children and so the stereotypes, images, and perceptions were a part of all my participants' experiences, but on slightly different platforms.

I also realized that the difference between the Black males in the research literature and the young black males in my research was that they all had ways in which they "suited-up" in their armor to counteract the stereotypes they confronted in school, enabling them to continue to move forward and achieve academically. I will now discuss the research on how high-achieving Black male students succeed in school and compare it to the findings of my study.

Factors That Promote Academic Success among High-Achieving Black Males

When discussing the factors that promoted success, the parents were very deliberate in their teachings to their son and grandson. I will share how Mr. Carter and Mrs. Helms expressed these identities to Steven and Dylan. As a reminder, Henfield (2013) highlighted the characteristics of a scholar identity, which included: 1) self-efficacy, 2) future orientation, 3) motivation, 4) internal locus of control, 5) self-awareness, 6) need to achieve, 7) academic self-confidence, 8) positive racial identity, 9) confidence, and 10) masculine identity. Along with these factors, there were also supports that included culturally responsive pedagogy, parental and community involvement, mentoring, high-quality instruction, and high teacher expectations.

This research matched my findings in various ways. Whiting's (2006) model of the scholar identity mirrored my student participants in that both Steven and Dylan displayed all 10 identities. However, some characteristics were more highly present than others. Thus I will focus on a few that stood out to me, describing these identities and how they were manifested in Steven and Dylan.

The first scholar identity I noted was the boys' academic self-confidence. Both boys used the word "smart" to describe themselves on several different occasions. For example, they used the adjective "smart" on the Starburst Identity Chart, and Dylan wrote, "Knowledgeable" when asked how he perceived that others would describe him. Along the same lines, Steven was consistent in answering "smart" when he was asked to suggest words that others might use to describe him. In addition, during our interviews both students referred to themselves as smart. Lastly, both Steven and Dylan indicated that "smart" was one of their attributes on Survey Monkey. As evidenced by their responses, these students clearly possessed strong academic self-confidence.

Another scholar identity I noted was that of motivation, which particularly stood out in a response Steven gave me. When asked how he stays motivated in school, he replied that he thinks of a superhero and repeats a mantra to himself. Dylan, on the other hand, stayed motivated through the encouragement of his father, whom he identifies as his role model. Dylan also stated that he looks up to his mixed martial arts instructor because he never gives up.

When asked how they would describe themselves, the boys were also very confident in being who they are. Steven responded, "Me" and Dylan replied, "Dylan." According to the MEIM, both boys possess a strong racial identity. Lastly, due to their parent/grandparent involvement, when Steven and Dylan shared with me their future goals they both mentioned attending college. This demonstrates a future orientation in that Steven and Dylan have plans for the future, and both stated that they need to get good grades and work harder in the subject areas they struggle with.

In these ways Whiting's (2006) scholar identity model was demonstrated in my research findings. My research highlighted many similarities with this model and both student participants displayed these characteristics through the interviews, online survey, MEIM questionnaire, quick-writes, and creative project. However, Whiting's scholar identity was based on Black adolescent male students, whereas my student participants were elementary-aged, which made these similarities quite interesting. It would be fascinating to extend this research to include elementary-aged Black males to examine the consistencies and differences between Black male adolescent students and elementary-aged Black male students. It would also be valuable to examine which identities were stronger than others.

In addition, my research provided some significant findings that were absent from the research literature. For example, my findings were deeply rooted in the generational sacrifices of Black ancestors that were linked to the village. The village was the source

of the purpose and strength of Black people that the adults appeared to purposefully and intentionally instill in their son and grandson. There seemed to be a greater purpose of keeping the village mentality alive, and I was able to see how these adult participants passed these values on to their son and grandson.

I realized that these participants resisted the status quo by continuing the traditions of the village and helping to equip their son and grandson with this armor that they could use when faced with negativity. I believe that the village and the preparing of armor in young African American boys need to be examined in greater depth. These two findings were very impactful in my study and may offer keys to improving the academic performance and strengthening the racial identities of young African American male students in urban elementary schools. In the following section I will discuss my conceptual frameworks and the outcomes of my research.

Theoretical Frameworks and Research Findings

I used three conceptual frameworks to inform my research: Nigrescence theory, cultural and social capital, and critical race theory. In conducting my research, there were some interesting outcomes and these findings will be presented.

Nigrescence theory described the developmental phases of Black identity. The first stage called Pre-encounter includes three sub stages, Assimilation, Miseducation, and Self-Hatred. Assimilation, describes Blacks who demonstrate low salience to their race but strongly identify themselves within White culture. The second sub stage, Miseducation, describes the acceptance of negative images and associations of Black people. The third sub stage says that Blacks internalize a deep-rooted hatred of their own race.

In the next stage of the Nigrescence model, the Immersion-Emersion stage, there are two opposing identities referred to as Afrocentric and Eurocentric (Vandiver et al., 2001). An Afrocentric identity represents the total acceptance of all things Black, with the goal of embracing this identity. Consequently, the opposing identity rejects White values and replaces these values with their ideas of Black culture. The fourth stage, Internalization, incorporates two theoretical changes. The first stresses that internalization is not connected to the humanist view concerning other cultural groups; this means Black peoples' responses to other racial groups basically depend on the individual and their interpretations of a given groups. The second change dismisses stereotypes, which allows individuals to focus on more critical issues that are a part of their reality.

The Internalization stage includes an internalized bicultural identity that is defined by the acceptance of being Black and American. The second stage is an internalized multicultural identity that embraces the saliency of being Black but also accepts the other important aspects of one's identity. Internalization-Commitment is the realization that racial identity is important to who they are and that they look to acceptance and pride. Lastly, as part of Nigrescence theory, Black Nationalism is the belief in one's race to be self-sufficient within the Black community and to possess Black pride (Cross, 1971; Vandiver et al., 2001).

In accordance with this theory, I did note that my student participants were at a primary assimilation stage; for example, Steven stated that he wondered what it would be like to be White. While these young African American male students did not seem to focus intently on their race, in their responses the students acknowledged their Blackness, so I believe it was also salient at a primary stage. For example, Steven and Dylan were aware that they were Black and that their skin color was different from that of their peers, but at the same time, their race was secondary as they described themselves through character traits and not physical traits. They stressed that they identified themselves

in terms of being a good person, being smart, and being funny. Nevertheless, at some level both boys expressed an awareness of their Blackness, and in this way the work of Vandiver et al. (2001) was reflected in my findings.

This was a very small sample size, and additional research should be conducted to determine whether and how other African American males develop through this model. Understanding more specifically the formation and progress of racial identity in young Black males may benefit the educational field. Developing a knowledge base of racial development may help increase racial pride by defining and understanding its stages, thereby normalizing racial development as we have normalized the stages of development in the "dominant" society through the work of Freud, Erikson, Vygotsky, and Piaget.

This perspective argues for conducting research in the early schooling years to examine how identity forms and to define the stages of racial development in African American male students. A related question that must be addressed is when racial identity develops in African American boys. I believe that establishing a strong racial identity in young Black male students may help foster academic success because these students will have a strong foundation to build upon.

Likewise, the Clark and Clark doll study was conducted in the 1960s and an updated version of this research was conducted by Hraba and Grant (1970) a decade later, but how does this research lend itself to the young Black males of today? Again, more research needs to be conducted to truly understand the development and formation of racial identity in Black male students in elementary school.

The second framework I used, critical race theory (CRT), subscribes to the idea that there are inequalities present in many aspects of society, including education, and that people of color bear the effects of these disparities (Davis, 2014; Howard, 2008). In the present study, there were subtle elements of CRT that I noted in particular with my student participants. For example, Steven stated that he was proud of being an African

American male, but he followed up by saying that he wanted to see how it felt to be another color.

When Dylan was asked whether he identified as Black or African American, he replied, "Well honestly, it, I just use both I guess, I mean myself, mmm, I don't really identify, well not really." Steven and Dylan acknowledged being African American, but they stressed more of their character traits to describe themselves. The boys rarely mentioned being Black unless they were asked specific questions concerning their race. Steven did mention being African American after completing his Starburst Identity Chart, but he completed the chart and then, after a pause, mentioned his race.

I realized that these parents were fighting against the status quo by providing their son and grandson with armor. In my research I identified three tenets of CRT that related to my findings. These tenets included tenet one, which acknowledges that racism is embedded in many aspects of society. The second tenet describes challenging the dominant culture, and lastly, tenet four is the importance of validating the experiences of people of color by providing opportunities to share their stories. Thus, my research was consistent with critical race theory, which basically states that institutional racism resounds in all aspects of American society.

My adult participants were well aware of the racism they experienced attending school in the late 1960s and early 70s, and they spoke about several occasions in which they experienced or witnessed racism growing up. Through my interviews with Mr. Carter and Mrs. Helms, I saw how these parents stressed to their son and grandson that being proud of their race was important, but they also stressed that being a good person was most important to them.

Perhaps there is a new generation of young Black males for whom racial pride isn't necessarily as important an aspect of their identity as having a positive sense of self as a person. I think this is a valuable consideration to add to the current research

as it represents the complexity of racial identity and self-identity in these young Black males. In the future, I hope to see more research on Black males, their overall identity development, and their experiences in urban schools at elementary level, as well as on how their perceptions affect their schooling and academic performance.

The last framework I used was social and cultural capital, which examines how one's capital determines their position in society. Yosso's (2005) theory of Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) described several ways that people of color foster and protect cultural wealth. Community Cultural Wealth can help in understanding the internal structures that affect the educational success of young African American male students. There were some strong similarities between CCW and all three themes of my research. They included all six forms of capital: aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital.

I credit Yosso (2005) for her contribution of Community Cultural Wealth because my research findings were in alignment with her capital model. I noted that the forms of capital I found were related to the caregivers' positive influence. One form of capital that I found was aspirational, in that both student participants stated that they wanted to attend college and they were at some level aware of what they wanted to be when they grew up. I also recognized linguistic capital at a primary stage, as the caregivers were intentional in making sure their boys spoke in an intelligent manner and they were both corrected if they weren't. These caregivers felt that the way their son and grandson presented themselves through speaking "properly" added to their presence in a society in which color is viewed first and negative images of Black males abound. To counteract these images, they wanted to make sure the boys would carry themselves in a certain manner.

Throughout my research, familial capital seemed to be the strongest and most salient form of capital. The time and involvement that Mrs. Helms and Mr. Carter dedicated to their children were observed and confirmed by their children's responses.

I also saw some forms of navigational capital in the adult participants, as they voiced knowledge and understanding of "the system" and ways to get ahead in society, which for them meant speaking well, being educated, and dismissing negative stereotypes. Lastly, my research found resistant capital demonstrated in a positive and proactive way through the caregivers' very intentional manner of intelligently challenging the status quo by teaching the boys about Black history and the sacrifices of their ancestors. Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth was thus in accordance with my findings.

It would be interesting to explore how the village collective might play a part in CCW, as another component in understanding the deeply embedded fortitude of the Black ancestors' support and the generations of Blacks who were able to keep the tradition of cooperative environments. This consciousness was transported through time and space to extend the traditions of the past through the ties of the African American slaves, which I noted in my research. Ancestral ties have allowed certain cultures to thrive despite the "dominant" presence of the status quo. Their homage to the past keeps them moving forward despite the challenges they confront as cultural minorities.

Perhaps finding a way to provide homage to the village may influence the "armoring" of these young Black males through the intentional teachings of their parents, through familial and ancestral connections to the past, and through the formation of positive racial and self-identity. The village has been the foundation and support of the American Black family since the days of slavery. As profoundly stated by Mrs. Helms, the village is no longer—and why is that? Is it intentional? Has it been forgotten by this new generation?

These are crucial questions that may help us understand the plight of young Black male students. The benefits of the village for young African American male students cannot be ignored or dismissed. For when we dismiss the backbone of the Black village, the status quo will continue to undermine and destroy the very foundation of Black

empowerment, especially through the educational system. The village is being eradicated as a result of the intentional collapse of homage to their ancestors through the societal focus on obtaining materialistic possessions and involvement in social media to offset the raising of a generation of high-achieving and highly prideful young Black males. Mr. Carter stated this confidently with his son sitting right beside him: "You don't need to fear an angry Black man; you need to fear my intelligence." He shared that although he has no control over his color nor his (tall and muscular) size, he does have control over his intelligence, which he identified as his weapon in society.

Recommendations

The lived experiences of the caregivers through their involvement in school integration and the social climate of the late 1960s and early 70s helped equip their sons with certain educational and identity benefits. As a reminder of the history of American education and Blacks, the decision in *Brown vs. Board of Education* in 1954 marked the beginning of the desegregation of public schools. The effects of this ruling included busing Black children to White schools, the discrimination that accompanied these students, and of course the impact of integration and racism.

The adult participants also spoke about the social climate at the time that included both the local activism of the Black Panthers and the national civil rights movement, which impacted the entire country. Mrs. Helms and Mr. Carter shared their personal experiences during this time with Steven and Dylan, and these unique experiences of their past provided their son and grandson with an appreciation and desire to do well in school. Sharing stories of the historical challenges Blacks faced and the sacrifices of their ancestors can be a valuable tool to help young Black males strive academically and to inspire a positive racial and self-identity.

Even though not all caregivers have similar lived experiences, it can be equally powerful simply to share Black history by reading stories of Black historical figures, slavery, and the civil rights movement. Local districts should fund programs like LLI (after-school tutoring) specifically geared toward African American male students to help low-performing students focus on specific target skills. Another recommendation is to allocate a portion of funding from English Language Learner Specialists to identify the levels of underperforming Black males and create interventions for these students. The rationale for this suggestion is that Black male students in the East Bay are the lowest performing subgroup, so state funding should support specific interventions for low-performing Black males in urban elementary schools.

"I" am in Identity

As my research has shown, possessing a strong identity, including internalized self-pride as well as a positive racial identity, is characteristic of high-achieving and highly motivated African American male students. All children form an identity, but how that identity develops is different for different children. Developmental psychologists like Jean Piaget and Erik Erikson outlined the stages of identity, but are their stages relevant to Black boys? It is important to examine the development of identity in Black boys, who are a minority within the school environment. Understanding their racial identity formation and development, how their identity relates to school achievement, and their stages of development may help educators better serve young African American male students by equipping them with armor.

Implications for Practice

Some implications of this study for educators include the importance of teaching students about the contributory roles of historical and present-day African American males in such areas as math, science, and writing to counter the stereotypical views presented by the media, which typically spotlight black males primarily in sports and entertainment. Although these areas showcase great talent, young Black males need to see an array of African American males who have contributed to society from a variety of important fields like medicine or science. This will inspire these young males to change the existing narrative and to create new ones for themselves.

For educators, this means teaching social studies and history from a realistic view that includes such events as the history of slavery and the history of segregation and education, as well as the positive outcomes of Black struggles, and introducing historical and current Black figures in various aspects of American society. Creating a classroom environment that honors the roles of Black male figures is crucial because it enables young Black males to learn about their history and appreciate the sacrifices of their ancestors, and in doing so builds racial pride in who they are as Black male students. The ultimate goal is to develop positive racial identity in our young Black males, thereby creating a learning environment that fosters high achievement among Black male students beginning in elementary school. Such efforts will build a strong foundation for the future success of generations of Black male students in public education.

Implications for Future Research

I recommend that future research examine several key areas related to my research findings, specifically how the village contributes to positive racial identity

and internalized self-pride, how armor helps protect young Black males from negative stereotypes, and how Black male students and their parents challenge the status quo. By supporting the development of a positive racial identity, I believe such an approach will foster confident young Black male students in elementary school. Further, it will equip young Black male students with armor and support a village-like environment in schools, allowing teachers and staff to create an encouraging, family-like environment in which students feel they have people who care about and uplift them. Even more importantly, young Black males will be able to see that they have a responsibility to those invested in their educational success and therefore have an obligation to do well in school. This is a powerful motivator and a reason for Black males to achieve success in school.

Conclusion

When I think about my early days of teaching, I often revisit the image I shared earlier of African American male students standing outside their classrooms with a look of sadness. This scene really bothered me internally and I used to wonder what the interaction was between these young Black boys and their teachers. I think about my research and wonder how I can be a voice for these students.

As educators we would never deny a student's right to achieve their dreams or obstruct their pursuit of those dreams, yet this is exactly what we do daily, to many of our African American male students. Whether consciously or unconsciously, we as educators are members of the village, and we have a moral responsibility and obligation to counteract the ills of institutional racism that have long altered the path of many African American male students. We need to invoke a counterculture of change that challenges the status quo of who a high-achieving and highly motivated student is and what that student looks like.

All medical doctors must take the "Hippocratic Oath," swearing to do no harm to their patients. Perhaps educators should be held to the same standard and similarly required to do no harm. What I mean by this is that we need to rid ourselves of our skewed perceptions of Black male students. We must embrace the richness of language, fostering the tactile and rhythmic nuances that African American children may demonstrate. We must create a "village"-like learning environment in the classroom, encourage productive challenging and questioning, inspire out-of-the-box thinking, be caring yet firm, celebrate all students' learning successes, set high AND obtainable learning goals, and—most importantly—teach to the child and not to the color of the child's skin. Adopting just a few of these practices could make the difference between a "nuisance" and a genius.

The time has come to break the ties that bind; there are no more excuses. I end with a poem dedicated to all the young Black male students, to remind you that you are highly capable and important, and that you must allow no one to dismiss your brilliance and intelligence:

Look not to the future

Without a ray of hope

Spend not the youth of your life pretending not to care

Rekindle the flame

Restore the dream

Consider life anew

Be not retained unto the past

When the future beckons for you.

By Jah'mes D. Chapman

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APPENDIX A

STUDENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Student participants were reminded that at any time, they could stop the interview if they felt uncomfortable. First interview included warm-up questions like, "How was your day?" etc.

1. Tell me one thing you like about yourself?

2. How do you feel about being an African American male?

3. Who are your role models and why?

4. How do you see yourself compared to other racial groups?

5. Are there any negative perceptions or stereotypes that you hear on TV or YouTube?

6. Describe what you like about school?

7. Do you experience and negativity from peers about being smart?

8. Who are your two good friends at school? Explain why? Who are your two good friends at home? Explain why?

9. How do you stay motivated in school?

10. What do you want to be when you grow-up? Explain.

APPENDIX B

PARENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Parent participants were reminded that at any time, they could stop the interview if they felt uncomfortable. The first interview included warm-up questions like, "How was your day?" etc.

1. Why is education important to you and your child?

2. What are some of the factors that contribute to your child's academic success?

3. What are some of the ways that you shape or model working hard?

4. What supports do you have in play that help influence the way your child perceives education/school?

5. Who are your child's influences? Church, grandparents, etc.

6. How is race discussed in your household? If so, in what ways?

7. Who are some Black figures in history or the present that you share with your child?

8. What aspects about being an African American male are discussed at home?

9. How do today's political events effect how you discuss being a Black male in society?

10. In your opinion how do you see race and achievement within the context of having young Black males who are high achieving?

APPENDIX C

THE MULTI-GROUP ETHNIC IDENTITY MEASURE (MEIM)

Please fill in: In terms of ethnic group, I consider myself to be _____

Use the numbers below to indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement.

(4) Strongly agree (3) Agree (2) Disagree (1) Strongly disagree

1. I have spent time trying to find out more about my ethnic group, such as its history, traditions, and customs.

2. I am active in organizations or social groups that include mostly members of my own ethnic group.

3. I have a clear sense of my ethnic background and what it means for me.

4. I think a lot about how my life will be affected by my ethnic group membership.

5. I am happy that I am a member of the group I belong to.

6. I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group.

7. I understand pretty well what my ethnic group membership means to me.

8. In order to learn more about my ethnic background, I have often talked to other people about my ethnic group.

9. I have a lot of pride in my ethnic group.

10. I participate in cultural practices of my own group, such as special food, music, or customs.

11. I feel a strong attachment towards my own ethnic group.

12. I feel good about my cultural or ethnic background.

13. My ethnicity is

    (1) Asian or Asian American, including Chinese, Japanese, and others

    (2) Black or African American

    (3) Hispanic or Latino, including Mexican American, Central American, and others

    (4) White, Caucasian, Anglo, European American; not Hispanic

    (5) American Indian/Native American

    (6) Mixed; Parents are from two different groups

    (7) Other (write in): _____

14. My father's ethnicity is (use numbers above)

15. My mother's ethnicity is (use numbers above)

APPENDIX D

SURVEY MONKEY QUESTIONS

1. How important is getting good grades to you? (Very important, important, or not important)

2. When you don't understand a question in class, what do you do? (Ask a classmate, ask the teacher, try and figure it out, or other-explain)

3. Are you aware of your strengths and weaknesses in school?

4. Do you have role models that influence you to push you to do your best?

5. What do you do first when you get home? (Do homework, play outside, play video games, or do chores)

6. In the classroom do you feel (Confident, different than the other students, or never thought about it)

7. Are you proud of being an African American male? Why or why not?

8. What is a long-term goal you have concerning school or the future?

9. Write 3 words that best describes you?

10. Do you think being smart is important? Why or why not?

APPENDIX E

LINK TO THE STARBURST IDENTITY CHART

https://www.facinghistory.org

APPENDIX F

CREATIVE ACTIVITY & INTERVIEW

1. What skills do you need to play Fortnite?

2. Are there skills that you have used playing Fortnite that you have also used in class? (like perseverance, problem solving, teamwork, or completing tasks)

3. Is there a character that best describes you and why?

4. If you were to create a character in Fortnite, what abilities would they have and why? Describe.

5. Build a character that you would create using Legos. (I will take a picture of your character.)

APPENDIX G

QUICK WRITE #1

Describe your idea of what a good student is and what they look like.

APPENDIX H

QUICK WRITE #2

Describe two friends outside of school. What are they like and why you like hanging out with them?