

THROUGH THEIR EYES: THE CULTURAL AND STRUCTURAL FACTORS THAT
SHAPE THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AND BEHAVIOR OF YOUNG BLACK BOYS

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SHAPE THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AND BEHAVIOR OF YOUNG BLACK BOYS

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DEDICATION

“See, I am sending an angel ahead of you to guard you along the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared” (-Exodus 23:20).

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Linda Diane Jamison. There are not enough words to explain the void that exists from your absence. While you are unable to be with me physically to encourage me across the finish line, the values instilled, life lessons, and steadfast focus on education has served as the catalyst to propel me to this monumental moment in my life. While there were many disappointments, trials, and struggles, I have learned resiliency, tenacity, and the ability to persevere through all things. When I was frustrated and wanted to give up, I reflected daily on your sacrifice and while I can only see my foot prints along this journey, I know that your unwavering support and love have strengthened me. I am blessed to have had you to contribute to the woman that I have become and I am grateful to God for you. You are the angel that guarded me along this journey.

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THROUGH THEIR EYES: THE CULTURAL AND STRUCTURAL FACTORS THAT SHAPE THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AND BEHAVIOR OF YOUNG BLACK BOYS

Bonita E. Jamison

ABSTRACT

Numerous scholars (Allen, 1992; Cuviet, 2006; Howard, 2014; Wood, Hilton, & Lewis, 2012) have pointed out that the challenges of Black boys in school might be better explained by examining how and why Black boys succeed in school through their individual experiences and voices. In this dissertation, a phenomenological study was utilized to explore the factors perceived by eight elementary-aged Black boys and their seven parents believed to contribute to their academic and behavioral success in late elementary school. The researcher conducted one student focus group, eight individual student interviews, and one parent focus group from Black boys identified as not doing well in school academically and behaviorally. The data revealed four themes: (a) Visualizing Success (definition of success, perceptions of failure, ego, teacher, family/community, and personal motivation), (b) Cultural Weapons (stereotypes, identity, and race), (c) Making a Way (access and opportunity), (d) The Teacher Matters (race, relationships, oppression, teacher perceptions) and (e) The Rules Only Apply to Us. The results from the study reflected that the success of Black boy is heavily influenced by family encouragement and motivation, teacher-student relationships, stereotypes, and the community.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Over 100 years ago, W.E.B. Du Bois (1903) in his seminal work *The Souls of Black Folks* articulated the perils associated with being a person of color and the United States Emancipation Proclamation's contribution to the development of how Blacks were viewed over time. More specifically, DuBois' concept of "double consciousness," pertains to viewing one's self through the eyes of others or being viewed as an outcast in society, continues to shape the experiences of today's Black boys today who are often treated based on stereotypes developed by others e.g. dangerous, lazy, uneducable, etc. (Strayhorn, 2008). Because of these stereotypes, Black boys continue to be disenfranchised and are faced with more barriers as they seek to procure equality and social rights (Howard, 2008). Du Bois' work still resonates especially as the United States continues to experience polarizing events stirred by the death of Michael Brown (Hafner, 2016). Fatalities of Black boys at the hands of law enforcement are not new occurrences; increasing numbers have been recently publicized, including the deaths of young Travon Martin, Tamir Rice, Tyre King, and Jordan Edwards (Fernandez & Haag, 2017).

Such incidents reflect the need to address the plight and inequities experienced by Black boys not only in society, but also within public education (Howard, 2014). Most poignantly, Du Bois' (1903) question, "How does it feel to be a problem?" (p. 6), probes and challenges an inequitable society that continues to turn a blind eye to the lived experiences of this population of students. Despite Du Bois' scholarship evidence shows that these challenges are not new. As an educator who works very close to the place where Michael Brown was killed, I have seen how DuBois' poignant question continues to shape the experiences of Black boys both in and outside of schools. On a regular basis, I have recognized how young Black boys are marginalized, with

few educators or researchers ever directly asking what they think. In turn, this dissertation was designed to help us understand more about how young Black boys themselves experience this question, by asking them what they know and think about the structural and cultural factors that shape their own lives.

What Du Bois details as a “problem” and Ann Ferguson (2000) describes as “trouble makers”, is realized through what Ferguson (2000) details as a dual dichotomy that exists within school systems where institutional practices and cultural representations continue to marginalize Black boys. That is, structural issues such as the political economy and class hierarchy, as well as cultural factors that shape the norms, values, and beliefs in society (Noguera, personal communication, May 28, 2017) for disadvantage children of color and have led to poor outcomes for Black boys (Howard, 2014; U.S Department of Education, 2015).

While many theorists have attempted to translate the challenges faced by Black boys, it is critical to highlight and pay homage to scholarly canons that include landmark studies of Black masculinity, institutional racism, oppression, and an emphasis on teaching and leadership that promote quality education to African American students. Seminal studies were conducted and proposed by such scholars as Asa Hilliard, and Amos Wilson that align with the controversial study by Jawanza Kunjufu, *The Conspiracy to Destroy Black Boys*. Each of these works emphasized systems of racism and oppression that exists within public school systems and contributed to the dehumanization of Black children (Kunjufu, 1985; Wilson, 1978). Similarly, Hilliard’s work underpins the work completed by Kunjufu by focusing on cultural dynamics in schools that impede the education of Black children (Hilliard, 2006, 2014). Much credit must also be accorded to Carter G. Woodson’s *Mis-Education of the Negro*, and other the earlier writings of W. E. B. DuBois.

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data reveal a 22% gap between Black students and their white counterparts (Schott Foundation for Public Education's State Report, 2010). In addition, teacher-student relationships are a critical cultural factor that impacts student outcomes and their perceptions of self as well. Strayhorn (2008) posits that students' sense of belonging impacts how they perform academically at post-secondary level. Likewise, Baker (1999) and Crosnoe, Johnson, and Elder (2004) make the point that supportive teacher-student interactions and relationships are related to increased student learning outcomes. However, while a growing body of studies document the perils associated with the academic and behavioral performance of Black boys, we know much less about what Black boys themselves think about their situations. This dissertation fills a critical void, in attempting to further unveil the systems of oppression—or as coined by Iris Marian Young, “Faces” of oppression—by speaking directly with and documenting the voices of this underserved population (as cited in Adams, Blumenfeld, Castaneda, Hackman, Peters, & Zuniga, 2010).

From Whence It Started

This study is the result of an accumulation of life experiences that brought into perspective the tumultuous times experienced by Black boys. It begins with my own childhood as a Black girl. As a young student, who frequently visited the principal's office, I found that making appropriate choices was not easy. However, my 4th grade teacher, Ms. Thomas, was very fond of me and encouraged me. For example, one time I cut my mother's signature from one form and glued to another one. But rather than humiliate me in front of my classmates for “forgery”, she pulled me aside to point out the error of my ways. I eventually came to realize that the things that I did as a Black female student afforded me much more latitude than my male counterparts. More specifically, I observed that male students received much harsher

consequences and were suspended for the same infractions that I committed that resulted in no suspension. The same trend continued as I transitioned into middle and high school. I vividly recall questioning why the system was not fair to “them.” Conceivably, it appeared that the problem did not always rest with the Black boys receiving the punishment, but with the teachers who was giving it.

The reality of what Black boys face within school became even more apparent after I had given birth to one. As a teen parent, who at the time lacked some necessary knowledge and skills to raise a Black boy, I questioned what his school experience would be like. His early years consisted of boy-like mischief and far and few calls from school. However, as he transitioned into middle school, a noticeable change occurred. He questioned his identity, frequently indicating to me that he was too Black to be white and too white to be Black. He habitually shared that he did not fit in. Academically he still performed well, but started to steal things, talk back, and question authority. Those negative choices led to visits to the principal’s office, in-school suspension, or having to be picked up. Each incident resulted in a longer discipline record. With no answers, I did my very best to support my Black son so that he could successfully navigate that stage of his life and experience success later.

Serving in the capacity of a classroom teacher and then principal furthered my curiosity regarding Black boys. One incident made me question how educators contribute to the dismal outcomes that impact this most underserved student population within schools. It was early afternoon and I was looking for a student. I casually entered the “dungeon” as the middle school students coined the in-school suspension room. When I opened the door, I observed nine faces staring at me, seemingly hopeless. One student named Andre, asked me how I was doing. I recall inquiring why he frequently visited the dungeon. As our conversation progressed, his responses

simultaneously filled me with hope and despair. He told me that he appreciated that I treated him with respect, inquired about what interested him, and spoke to him about college and his future aspirations; he suggested that he never got that kind of respect from other educators. At that moment, it was evident to me that it was what I do as an educator that contributed to the success of this underserved population of students. Unfortunately for Andre, his life trajectory did not change much and he is current serving a seven-year prison term for murder. However, it was at that moment that I knew that not only did my son's life matter, but his did too.

Statement of the Problem

The interest in Black boys and how they perform academically and behaviorally in schools is a pressing national topic (Noguera, 2008; Dance, Katz, & Muller, 1999; Ferguson, 2003; Howard, 2014; Harper, 2015 & Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2010). While much has been learned about this complex group of students, the achievement gap, discipline gap, and disproportionate referral of African American students for discipline (Monroe, 2005) continue to exist. More specifically, Black boys are more likely to be referred for special education services, deemed as behavior problems, receive more days of out of school suspensions, and are reading further below grade level than their white counter parts (Mendez-Raffaele & Knoff, 2003; Mayfield, 2017; Noguera, 2008; U.S. Department of Education, 2015; Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2015 & Gregory et al., 2010). Even more alarming is that Black boys are not provided full access to the curriculum and infrequently experience pedagogical approaches that are not culturally relevant (Delpit, 2006; Douglas, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Gay, 2000; 2010; Howard, 2003 & Dance, Katz, & Muller, 1999). In other words, there are clearly opportunity gaps experienced by Black boys; they often lack access to resources that would support their academic and future success e.g. AP courses and highly qualified teachers (Flores, 2007). In addition, the stereotypes held by classroom teachers about Black boys may limit their abilities to develop nurturing relationships and to understand their students (Baker, 1999; Aultman, Schutz, & Williams-Johnson, 2009).

While studies continue to question and highlight this range of achievement and opportunity gaps, less research examines the experience of young Black boys from *their* perspective, documenting their voices. As a result, this dissertation will explore the factors perceived by Black boys, within the context of late elementary school, that enhances their

behavioral and academic success. In turn, the findings from this dissertation, with its focus on the experiences of elementary-aged Black boys, can inform the instructional and curricular decisions made in schools.

Research Questions

This research sought to better understand and describe the factors that make school meaningful for Black boys from their perspective. The following research questions guided the study:

- 1) What factors do elementary-aged Black boys perceive as contributing to their academic success?
- 2) What factors do elementary-aged Black boys perceive as contributing to their behavioral success?
- 3) Which structural (space/context) and cultural (teachers' beliefs, values, pedagogy) factors do Black boys perceive as important for their success in school?

Design for the Study

A qualitative research approach was utilized as the lens to explore the perspectives of Black boys. Qualitative research takes an inductive approach where the researcher seeks to unveil trends and patterns that surface from a problem that is explored by the researcher in its natural setting (Creswell, 2007). In addition, the researcher serves as a primary instrument used for data collection and analysis (Merriam, 2002). From qualitative research, one is able to extract rich, descriptive, in order to understand the phenomena (Creswell, 2007).

The researcher chose a phenomenological design to study five Black boy's lived experiences from their perspectives and through their voices. According to Mertens (2005), phenomenological research "...seeks the individual's perceptions and meaning of a phenomenon

or experience” (p. 240). This type of research aims to place the individual at the center of the study and allows the participants to understand the meaning of their experience (Mertens, 2005). Lastly, a phenomenological approach is relevant because its qualitative emphasis focuses on an “interpretive,” “naturalistic approach” related to transforming the world, more specifically changing the trajectory of African American males (Creswell, 2007).

Data Collection and Methods

This study was conducted with five boys enrolled at Kennedy Elementary School (pseudonym) (K-5) serving 366 students in a small suburban city in Missouri. At the time of the study, 100% of the students qualified for free and reduced lunch and 98.8% of students were Black, according to district data. Encapsulated by multi-unit apartment complexes, Kennedy Elementary sat less than one mile from the location where an unarmed teenager was killed by a police officer while the participants were in elementary school. Because of the small sample size, the researcher also used snowball sampling and eventually worked with a basketball coach of one of the original students to solicit three additional participants who did not attend Kennedy Elementary School.

With regards to data collection, participants were purposefully sampled. The principal of the school assisted with identifying Black boys who: (1) had more than four office discipline referrals (ODR) in the previous year; and (2) scored within the bottom two levels of state assessments. These students, who seemed to have the most need for both behavioral and academic support, were chosen because these are the students most frequently viewed as a “problem” by society and the school system. Notably, the principal had strong relationships and bonds with the community and families, which served as leverage for the researcher (Seidman, 2013).

Because the voices of the participants are crucial to understanding how they experience late elementary school, the researcher utilized structured interviews as a means to collect a large portion of the data. This model of interviewing predetermines the questions to be asked as well as the order of the questions to explore the research questions (Merriam, 2002). During the interviews, participants had an opportunity to engage in dialogue around the questions posed and elaborate upon their response when probed. The questions for the interview funneled from general questions to more specific questions that were related to the research questions being explored. The questions were grouped by difficulty and were also related to themes associated with what makes school meaningful for Black boys. Seidman (2013) posited, “Every word that people use in telling their stories is a microcosm of their consciousness (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 236-237). Individuals’ consciousness gives access to the most complicated social and educational issues because social and educational issues are abstractions based on concrete experience of people” (p. 7). See Appendix B for the interview questions.

Additionally, one focus group with the seven boys together was utilized as a means to engage the participants who were more reticent in one-on-one conversations with adults (Krueger & Casey, 2009). Through this focus group, participants had the opportunity to respond to the responses of other participants or to elaborate upon a theme that surfaced. Taken together, these data sources allowed for triangulating the findings, thus building the trustworthiness of the study (Creswell, 2007).

Limitations of Study

As will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three, a limitation of this phenomenological study was the challenge of transferability, “the degree to which you can generalize the results to other situations” (Mertens, 2005, p. 256). Although the Black boys who

participated in the study might share common backgrounds relating to discipline and academic achievement, their perspectives might be shaped by other experiences and circumstances unique to their lives, which may not be transferable to other contexts. Trustworthiness was a challenge as well. Specifically, the interpretation of the phenomenon shared by the participants in the study have the potential to be shaped by the researcher's bias and impact the trustworthiness of the study (Mertens, 2005; Merriam, 2002).

Definition of Key Terms

As a means to develop a shared understanding regarding the study, it was critical to provide readers with the key terms being used as a means to develop common language (Bruffee, 1999). Likewise, Gill (2010) makes the point that in order for collective understanding to occur, individual learning and knowledge must first be acquired. In addition, by providing context, capacity is built and by providing readers the definitions to the key terms they will have the ability internalize the key terms as a means to acquire a deeper understanding of the study.

Anti-deficit achievement framework. This term refers to a belief that students, despite what is reported in research or the media, can achieve high levels of academics (Harper, 2015).

Black. Lori L. Tharps explains that “when speaking of a culture, ethnicity or group of people, the name should be capitalized. Black with a capital B refers to people of the African diaspora. Lowercase black is simply a color.” (“The Case for Black with a Capital B,” 2014”)

Cultural capital. This term refers to “...the cultural goods transmitted by the different family pedagogic actions, whose value qua cultural capital varies with the distance between the cultural arbitrary imposed by the dominant pedagogic action and the cultural arbitrary inculcated by the family pedagogic action within the different groups or classes” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. 30).

Cultural factors. This term is defined as a “product of beliefs, values, norms, and socialization...moral codes that operate within particular families, communities, or groups” (Noguera, 2003. p. 439).

Deficit thinking. This term refers to the notion that “...students who fail in school do so because of alleged internal deficiencies (such as cognitive and/or motivational limitations) or shortcoming socially linked to the youngster – such as familial deficits and dysfunctions” (Valencia, 1997, p.11).

Discipline gap. This term refers to how “African American students are disciplined at rates that are disproportionately higher than Black students’ statistical representation in public schools” (Monroe, 2005, p. 1).

Faces of Oppression. This term refers to “a family of concepts and conditions divided into five categories: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence” (as cited in Adams, et. al, 2010, p. 35).

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). This term refers to the federal law that requires “all schools, district/local education agencies (LEAs) and states to show that students are making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).” NCLB was signed into law in 2002 and was replaced with Every Student Succeeds Act in 2015. (DESE.mo.gov.)

Opportunity Gap. This term refers to “unequal opportunities to learn experienced by many low income students and many Latina and African American students” (Flores, 2007, p. 29).

Resiliency. This term refers to the “...process and results that are part of the life story of an individual who has been academically successful, despite obstacles that prevent the majority of others with the same background from succeeding” (Morales & Trotman, 2011, p. 8).

Structural Factors. This term refers to the “political economy, the availability of jobs and economic opportunities, class structure and social geography” (Noguera, 2003, p. 438).

Summary

In general, the voices of Black boys at the elementary school level have not been explored as a means to transform the system that educates them. Using a phenomenological research design, this study investigated the following research questions:

1. What factors do elementary-aged Black boys perceive as contributing to their academic success?
2. What factors do elementary-aged Black boys perceive as contributing to their behavioral success?
3. Which structural (space/context) and cultural (teachers’ beliefs, values, pedagogy) factors do Black boys perceive as important for their success in school?

The implications of this research are far reaching. For one, this phenomenological study can add to our understanding of how young elementary Black boys view the structural issues and cultural values that shape their lives. The research also has the potential to unveil strategies that teachers might employ to develop positive teacher-student relationships. In turn, knowing more about students’ experiences could reshape how educators respond to them, such as cases like Andre’s. Consequently, the findings have the potential to influence: (a) site-based professional development geared towards instructional practices that impacts student outcomes for elementary-aged Black boys, (b) leadership preparation programs (c) pre-service teacher programs and (d) policy.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The data continues to paint a deeply disturbing picture of how Black boys are “seen as a problem” (Howard, 2013) in many U.S. schools. Overwhelming data suggest the Black children perhaps more than any other group of students experience unique challenges in schools that interrupt their learning opportunities and hinder their educational outcomes (Carter & Welner, 2013; Howard, 2010, 2013; Howard & Reynolds, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Milner, 2015; Nasir, 2012). At the same time, school systems across the United States are exploring ways to increase the student achievement for Black boys. Ann Ferguson (2000), in her book *Bad Boys Public Schools in the Making of Black Masculinity*, provides a vivid portrayal of how Black boys are perceived using statistics to underpin her rationale for her description. More specifically she suggests that statistics depict the following:

They eat candy, refuse to work, fight, gamble, chase hit, instigate, cut class, cut school, cut hair. They are defiant, disruptive, disrespectful, profane... fondle girls, draw obscene pictures, make lewd comments, intimidate others, and call teachers names. They are banished from the classroom to the hall to the discipline office, to the suspension room, to the streets so that others can learn. (p. 46)

While this may be how Black boys are often perceived or portrayed by others, we read much less about how Black boys themselves perceive and experience schooling and others within the school environment, especially their teachers. The purpose of this study was to collect, analyze, and report the factors that Black boys’ perceive augment their behavioral and academic success in schools. The literature review that follows first explores the historical perspectives associated with African Americans and Black boys in the United States. Because the study seeks to explore

factors that contribute to the academic and behavioral success of Black boys, it was critical to analyze literature that provides context to these phenomena. Next, the literature review identifies both structural and cultural factors that shape Black boys' lives in schools, highlighting the research on the importance of teacher values and teacher-student relationships as well as the smaller body of research that examines how Black boys perceive their education. This chapter will conclude with an explanation of how Critical Race Theory coupled with cultural capital, frames this study.

Historical Conditions and Recent Outcomes of Black Male Education in the U.S.

Although there has been a recent shift in research on why Black boys have limited success in schools from an academic and behavioral perspective, Black boys had not received such intense attention since the "lynching debates" of the early 20th century (Cooper & Jordan, 2003). Historically, the struggle for African Americans to gain access to educational equity, as well as identifying a cause for the underachievement of Black boys, has persisted for decades (Gordon et al., 1994).

Ladson-Billings (2013) has studied the historical perspective of African Americans, tracking the systemic suppression of equal opportunities for African Americans since slavery, with legacies of economic servitude, segregation, voter disenfranchisement, and unequal school funding. Slavery made it illegal to teach slaves to read or write. During the post-Civil War era of Reconstruction, separate schools were established for African American students. These schools followed an agrarian calendar, which meant they operated during crop-growing/harvesting seasons only. Further, these schools were substandard in physical plant and only had cast-off instructional resources from the White school systems for teachers to use. Even after the 1954 landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, which prohibited de facto segregation and

voter suppression, African American schools were still underfunded and under-resourced (Carter & Welner, 2013). Therefore, Ladson-Billings (2013) posits that the achievement gap, in part, is the result of lack of opportunity.

Educational Outcomes of Black Boys

Before I argue that educators must look beyond statistics when considering the education of Black boys (Ferguson, 2000), because these data indeed frame and define their lives, I provide a brief overview here. A large body of research documents Black boys' lower achievement in elementary and high school, in compared with their peers, as well as lower rates of attaining a high school diploma and college degree. In addition, data on behavior and discipline referrals suggest disproportionate treatment and outcomes in this area.

Reading Achievement and Standardized Test Scores. According to National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data, there is a 24% reading gap between eighth-grade Black males and their white peers in the United States; in Missouri the gap is 22% (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2010). More alarming is that only 10% of Black males are reading at or above proficiency (United States Department of Education, 2009). According to the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (2012), Black boys' Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores were notably lower than their white counterparts in reading and writing by nearly 20%. Furthermore, the same trend was evident in the American College Testing (ACT) results with nearly a 24% disparity between the performance of Black and white males (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010).

High School and College Degree Attainment. According to the Schott Foundation for Public Education, during the 2003-2004 school year, 55% of Black boys were not projected to attain their diplomas in four years as demonstrated by their graduating cohort (2006). Lee and

Burkam (2003) found in their study of almost 4,000 students in urban and suburban high schools across 190 high schools that race/ethnicity was strongly associated with dropping out of school, with African American students (22.6%) more likely to drop out than other groups. Large cities such as Chicago and Detroit experience higher percentages of Black boys who drop out of school without earning a high school diploma (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2010).

Such outcomes early in schooling can have long-range effects. Guy (2014, p. 18) purports that “The experience of Black males in schooling is often predictive of their career success later in life.” Low graduation rates and high dropout rates of African American males can, in part, be attributed to their earlier educational experiences.” Allensworth and Easton (2001) found that not attaining a high school diploma significantly impacts the life trajectory of students; such students are more likely to be unemployed, receive public assistance, and earn less money. They are also less likely to enroll in college or attain post-secondary education. In 2004, in colleges and universities around the country, 37% of Black men were enrolled, compared with 42% of Black women and 44.5% of white males. The college graduation rate of Black men is lower than other groups as well. Only 35% of Black male enrollees graduated within six years from selective and highly selected colleges in 1996, compared with 59% of white males, 46% of Hispanic men, 41% of American Indian males and 45% of the Black women who entered the same year (Alexander, 2004).

Behavior Outcomes. Black boys make up approximately 7% of the elementary and secondary school (pre-kindergarten to 12th, or PK-12) population in the United States yet they experience a greater percentage of challenges throughout their educational experience (U.S. Department of Education, 2011; Howard, 2008). This is particularly evident as it relates to the practices utilized to discipline this subgroup of students. According to the National Center for

Education Statistics, 17% of Black boys have been suspended at least once during their K-12 experience (2012). Furthermore, according to the Schott Foundation for Public Education's State Report (2010), Black boys are ascribed more astringent consequences as it relates to out-of-school suspensions than their white male counterparts; three times as many Black students are expelled from school than are white male students. Black students made up only 18% of students in public schools in 2012-2013, but were 40% of students who received one or more out-of-school suspensions. This is critical because the perception held by those who punish Black boys that create the disparities that set them apart from their white counter parts. Ron Ferguson (2003) and Guy (2014) make the point that society's perception of Black boys as criminals and an endangered species plays a critical role in identifying, classifying, and administering consequences by adults. Black children are at greatest risk of being funneled into the school-to-prison pipeline.

Furthermore, Black students were more likely to be classified as students with disabilities and were more likely to be suspended or expelled from school. For years, researchers have documented a disproportionate number of individuals across a variety of ethnic groups who are represented as needing special education services (Harry & Klingner, 2006; Ladner & Hammons, 2001; Markowitz, Garcia & Eichelberger, 1997). As evidenced above and as Howard et al., (2012) state, "Researchers interested in students of color, in large part, have pathologized these populations by continuously studying those who are not doing well, or questioning their innate intelligence, or lack thereof" (p. 94).

In summary, research suggests that Black boys can become emotionally and academically disconnected from education as early as kindergarten (Carter, 2003). Moreover, the percentage of minority student enrollment continues to increase, but the average academic performance of

Black boys continues to be lower than their peers (Edwards & McMillon, 2000). A large body of work argues that their challenges with academic success are related to living in structurally and culturally biased environments (Cooper & Jordan, 2003; Jordan & Cooper, 2002), as the following section argues.

Structural and Cultural Factors That Shape Black Boys' Schooling

As suggested by the brief historical overview, it is not individual characteristics of Black boys that lead to such troubling educational outcomes. Research supports the premise that a range of structural and cultural factors have a major impact on the academic experiences of Black boys (Douglas, 2016; Noguera, 2003; Ferguson, 2003; Ferguson, 2000). Although accountability has increased within public school systems, the variance associated with the academic achievement of African American males still exists (Wiggin, 2007). While school systems are attempting to address the academic achievement and behavioral challenges of Black boys, their efforts are inadequate as these boys continue to be impacted by social and cultural factors that impede learning (Douglas, 2016; Noguera, 2008; Ogbu 1987). The following review highlights a few of the most significant structural and cultural factors, including the structural factors of location, poverty and access to high-quality schooling and cultural factors of teachers' beliefs, biases, values, and pedagogy.

Structural Factors: Space and Access Matter

While Black students continue to make progress, public education in the United States is still “separate and unequal, even decades since *Brown v. Board of Education*” (Cooper & Jordan, 2003). Cooper and Jordan (2003) purport that Black students typically attend large urban schools with concentrated levels of poverty in areas that have experienced generational poverty. They stress, “These communities are marred by multiple social ills such as violence and crime,

unemployment, drug abuse, poor public health, and teenage childbirth, along with an educational system that reproduces intergenerational poverty rather than transforming it” (p. 381). Pedro Noguera (2003) examines the social issues highlighted by Cooper and Jordan in his article titled “The Trouble with Black Boys.” Noguera (2003) suggests that Black boys are in perilous times based on critical life indicators. It is no surprise that Black boys, within the context of school, experience higher suspension and expulsion rates, and struggle academically.

Harper’s (2015) article articulates how urban schools, historically inhabited by minority students, are large, dark and dangerous settings. Because of the nature of the physical plants of most schools in Black areas, “(m)ost educators find them undesirable places to work... Teachers who do end up there tend to stay only a year or two because students are so apathetic and underprepared, there are too few resources and incompetent leaders fail to ensure safety and stability” (Harper, 2015, p. 140). He goes on to say: “No one likes these places or believe they can produce better results... This is the master narrative about urban high schools in the United States” (p.140).

Educational Access for Black Boys. Within these locations, access to high-quality teaching and courses for Black males continues to be a grave area of concern. For example, Black males are less likely than their white counterparts to have access to advanced placement (AP) classes and are less likely to have success on the AP exams (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2010; College Board, 2012). In addition, the same disparities exist for students in mathematics as well. According to the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), 91% of African American and 87% of Latino students are below proficiency for eighth grade in the area of math. Flores (2007) purports, “The least prepared teacher recruits are disproportionately found in under-resourced, hard-to-staff schools serving predominantly low-income and minority

students...” (p. 32). Disparities also exist for Black boys with regards to identifying and receiving resources through gifted education (Noguera, 2003, 2008; Howard, 2014). These structural factors are related, then, to cultural factors, especially in the values, norms, and beliefs that shape the development of student-teacher relationships.

Cultural Factors: Teachers and Pedagogy Matter

Because schools are a microcosm of society, the power structures and racism that exist outside of schools are mirrored within the schools. Specifically, making connections with Black students and other children of color may pose a challenge due to teacher biases, which negatively shape their pedagogy and development of positive teacher-student relationships (Baker, 1999; Crosnoe, Johnson & Elder, 2004; Aultman, Schutz, & Williams-Johnson, 2009). Bakari (2003) suggested that teacher bias impacts the expectations that teachers have of African American students; in turn, this influences how the curriculum is delivered, which he refers to as the hidden curriculum. Irvine (1990) defined the hidden curriculum as:

...the unstated but influential knowledge, attitudes, norms, rules, rituals, values, and beliefs that are transmitted to students through structure, policies, processes, formal content, and the social relationships of school (p. 5).

Consequently, where Black boys attend school can determine the type of curriculum they receive as well as the expectations that are held of them.

Teacher Perceptions and Pedagogical Skills. Teacher attitudes, expectations and behaviors play a critical role in enhancing African American students' education (Byrd & Chavous, 2009). Lee and Burkam (2003) revealed that nurturing, intelligent teachers, and strong bonds between parents, school and community offered the greatest impact on education success for African American males.

More specifically, Solórzano (1997) makes the point that the deficit-thinking model stems from a genetic determinant and the cultural deficit model. He also suggests that stereotypes regarding students of color contribute to the deficit thinking by teachers. Like deficit thinking, teachers' microaggressions (e.g. body language, facial expressions, and word choice) contribute to how students view themselves as being value-add to the classroom community. Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) describe microaggressions in the context of academia and social environments as verbal, non-verbal, and body language of individuals toward African American students, that continues to perpetuate unconsciously white superiority. Davis (1989) conceptualizes microaggression through the lens of color caste systems as a means to understand the interactions between whites and Blacks. The pervasiveness of subconscious racism displayed by whites is not only evidenced within schools, but was initially codified in law systems that demonstrated bias against Blacks. Likewise, Garcia and Guerra (2004) advance Solórzano's argument by indicating that teachers neglect to look inward regarding the lack of academic success of students of color; instead, they shift the blame onto students and their families, further contributing to deficit thinking.

Tyrone Howard (2003) advises that teachers "need to understand that racially diverse students frequently bring cultural capital to the classroom that is oftentimes drastically different from mainstream norms and world views" (p. 197). In order for teachers who might come from dissimilar backgrounds to connect with and engage students, they must "construct pedagogical practices in ways that are culturally relevant, racially affirming, and socially meaningful for their students" (p. 195). Therefore, rather than looking solely at school structures and curricula, research suggests that the focus needs to be on addressing the needs of school staff to help them reach Black boys.

Teacher Perceptions and Teacher-Student Relationships. Research related to the benefits of student-teacher relationships expose how the stereotypes regarding male students of color impact the behavior and academic achievement of male students of color (Dance, Katz, & Muller, 1999; Douglas & Arnold, 2016; Ferguson, 2003). According to Baker (1999), the perception of students of color by their teachers affects students' social concept. Likewise, Sara Lightfoot (1978) (as cited in Ferguson, 2003) suggests that context is developed by teachers of students using the race, sex, and ethnicity instead of developing relationships and seeking to understand who they are as individuals. Consequently, teachers' paradigms are formed and mirror the "hardened caricatures of an initially discriminatory vision." (p. 461). Aultman et al. (2009) purports that the relationships developed between teachers and students aid in students' ability to engage in dialogue regarding content; hence further engaging students through their interests. Moreover, Aultman et al. (2009) and Dance et al. (1999) contend that teachers should strive to develop caring relationships with students that are respectful, sensitive, and inclusive of reciprocal dialogue. Bakari (2003) amplifies the findings of Aultman et al. (2009) and Dance et al. (1999) by suggesting that teachers' perceptions of African American students fall under into four domains: sensitivity, cultural needs, expectations, and teaching approach. Each, if appropriately addressed, will improve the underachievement of this sub group of students.

The research correlated to the benefits of student-teacher relationships, illuminating how stereotypes regarding male students of color impact the behavioral and academic achievement of that group, is profound. Previous research has found that student-teacher relationships have influenced student achievement.

As discussed previously, teachers' role in the education of Black boys is critical to their success. However, they exist within a cultural milieu that furthers deficit thinking. Lisa Delpit

(2006) in *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom* builds upon the work of Solórzano and Gloria Ladson-Billings through her perspective on what she coins “silenced pedagogy” utilizing the lens of power and pedagogy. She eloquently explains that educators, from all perspectives, must be afforded the ability to place their thinking at the center of the discussion if change is to occur for teachers and students. She (2006) addresses “the culture of power” which interestingly correlates to how the concept impacts students in classrooms through curriculum, the determination of intelligence, as well as how stereotypes are formed. In addition, Delpit (2006), proposes the five levels of power:

1. *Issues of power are enacted in classrooms.*
2. *There are codes or rules for participating in power; that is there is a “culture of power”.*
3. *The rules of the culture of power are a reflection of the rules of the culture of those who have power.*
4. *If you are not already a participant in the culture of power, being told explicitly the rules of that culture makes acquiring power easier.*
5. *Those with power are frequently least aware of- or least willing to acknowledge- its existence. Those with less power are often most aware of its existence. (p. 24)*

It is critical that teachers find ways to build student success in school without sacrificing the students' cultural and psychosocial well-being (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

In summary, African American boys may often fail to see the connection between academic success and the creation of a successful adult life due to such structural factors as impoverished environments, both at home and in school (Boyd, 2007; Irving & Hudley, 2008;

Jordan & Cooper, 2002). Research on cultural factors suggests that the focus of school staff is often on how the student must change in order to align with the culture of the school, rather than finding ways for the school to adapt to the culture of the students (Carter, 2003; Noguera, 2003). Despite all of this research, much less is known about what makes the school experience meaningful from Black males' perspectives, especially at the elementary school level.

Beyond the Data: Black Boys' Perspectives

While many of the aforementioned studies yield a plethora of data documenting the “failure” of Black boys, much scholarship has approached the challenges faced by Black boys using a deficit lens. Too few studies demonstrated how and why Black boys succeed. The data on structural and cultural address policy changes, academic programming or institutional reform, but most work neglects to examine the individual experiences and voices of Black boys (Allen, 1992; Cuyjet, 2006; Howard, 2014; Wood, Hilton & Lewis, 2012).

Deficit-oriented program models and research result in inadequate solutions to problems faced by Black boys (Howard, Flennaugh & Terry, 2012; Kim & Hargrove, 2013): “...Black males have been one of the primary victims of negative social imagery...It is critical that the success stories of Black males become more recognizable and commonplace in order to revise the master narratives” (p. 86-87). Similarly, Sonia Neito (1994) has emphasized the importance of students being involved in the conversation regarding their learning environment:

“...Educators can benefit from hearing students' critical perspectives, which might cause them to modify how they approach curriculum, pedagogy, and other school practices” (p. 397-398).

The research that does exist on Black boys' voices tends to concentrate on older students. For example, Kaplan's (1999) study sought the perceptions of Black and Latino teenagers regarding the impact of various educational programs that contributed to their academic success

and educational attainment. She found that participants in the study indicated that teachers, counselors, and their parents contributed greatly to their success academically. She also found that students were better able to develop strong relationships with their teachers and experienced an increase in their self-worth. Likewise, Patrick Lee (1999) studied the beliefs of high school students of color regarding the causes of their school failure, which they attribute to various factors, including the lack of role models and juggling home-related responsibilities such as working. His study suggests that teacher-student relationships, a sense of community, implementations of interactive learning, and a challenging curriculum had more of an impact on their ability to be successful. Arrington, Hall, and Stevenson (2003) conducted a study about the factors that contribute to academic success with Black students ages 11-17 enrolled in independent schools. Three main conclusions arose: Students need 1) a strong connection to the school community; 2) a positive sense of self across contexts and 3) a strong racial identity (p. 1-11). However, no academic factors were identified.

Another set of studies focus on Black males in college. Arthur's (2016) study of Black male college students at predominantly Black colleges and universities identified four interventions that propelled participants to graduate. These interventions included learning to study, leadership skills, networking, having a mentor, and building strong relationships with peers in the program (Arthur, 2016). Researchers have also found that Black males who succeed in primarily White universities/colleges are highly engaged, experience a strong self-efficacy yet benefit from the support of family and mentors (Bridges, 2010; Harper, 2006, 2009, 2012; Hebert, 2002; Herndon, 2003; Strayhorn, 2008; Williamson, 2010). Similarly, research conducted in colleges and universities with a predominantly Black enrollment identified peer relationships, family, and finances as contributing success factors (Flowers, 2012, Fries-Britt,

Burt & Franklin, 2012; Palmer & Strayhorn, 2008). Kim and Hargrove's (2013) study of Black male resilience identified the attributes identified that contribute to Black male's academic success in college, which include "...individual factors (i.e. help seeking tendencies, self-esteem, and motivation), familial support factors (i.e. supportive parents, role models, and high parental expectations), and social/ environmental support (i.e. tutoring programs, mentors, faculty, and peer support)" (p. 6).

Although the study of student perceptions about schooling have been limited and research has primarily been conducted at the high school and college levels, there are a few studies of younger students. For example, Tyrone Howard explored the viewpoints of elementary and secondary students to identify pedagogical approaches and descriptions of learning environments that they found meaningful (Howard, 2001, 2002). He found that researchers could learn a great deal from students by allowing students to share their perspectives. What students found effective were a strong teacher-student bond, a family oriented classroom environment, the use of verbal forms of communication and affirmations, as well as fun and engaging learning opportunities. Similarly, Waxman (1989) engaged in a study that examined elementary student perspectives of their learning environment, highlighting that the students have more knowledge and understanding of their environment than external observers.

In summary, Black boys are keenly aware of the cultural factors that impact their ability to be successful, citing caring bonds, respectful relationships, and a family-based atmosphere were also cited (Howard, 2001; 2002; Tatum, 1997; Waxman, 1989). Students were able to ascertain how communication with and socialization influence their academic achievement. For example, students say the use of call and response, affirmations, and tough love techniques impact them academically (Howard, 2001; Howard 2002; Waxman, 1989; Delpit, 2006). Lastly,

the research suggests African American students prefer pedagogical approaches that are engaging and infuse elements of their culture (Howard, 2001; Howard, 2002; Waxman, 1989; Gay, 2010; Delpit, 2006). While African American students were able to identify the cultural factors that either contribute to their success, research has not garnered from school-aged Black boys their perspectives on the structural factors on their success. Thus, further work must be done to capture how Black boys view their schooling, and whether they find the same structural and cultural factors critical to their academic success.

Theoretical Foundations: Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) was developed out of legal scholarship to explore “the ways in which ‘race-neutral’ laws and institutional structures, practices, and policies perpetuate racial/ethnic education inequality” (Solórzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005, p. 274). Derrick Bell and other legal scholars began using the phrase “critical race theory” in the 1970s as a takeoff on ‘critical legal theory’, a branch of legal scholarship, that challenges the validity of concepts such as rationality, objective truth, and judicial neutrality (Bell, 1995; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Yosso, 2005). In addition, CRT became ‘actionalized’ by the works of Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman and Richard Delgado (Bell, 1995). A key premise of Bell’s (1995) work included the advancement of what he called “interest convergence theory,” which holds that whites will support minority rights only when it’s in their interest. Since its inception, within legal scholarship, CRT has spread to many disciplines and educational institutions that impact policies from a wider cultural viewpoint as means to better understand the role of race and racism within the context of institutions (Solórzano and Yosso, 2001).

CRT has five basic tenets that guide its framework and they are used to provide a platform to challenge individuals to reflect on their role or actions in structures that may be

viewed as oppressive. These tenets, which are interdisciplinary, are manifested through the following themes: 1) the centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality; 2) the challenge to dominant ideology; 3) the commitment to social justice; 4) the centrality of experiential knowledge; and 5) the transdisciplinary perspective (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). While CRT provides a lens by which one can view the ideologies associated with the meritocracy and color blindness imposed on individuals of color, these structures continue to impede them through racial dissonance (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Yosso, 2005; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Bell, 1995). Because of the progress made during the civil right movement to eradicate racial inequalities, CRT established conditions for the continued removal of oppressive structures. However, Taylor (2009) posits that, "...[CRT] was a lifeline, a source of an explanatory model, and a wellspring of tools for action" (p.9).

CRT is loosely unified by two common themes. First, CRT proposes that white supremacy has been a pervasive and enduring reality and racial power are maintained over time, and in particular, that the law played a role in this process. Second, CRT work has investigated the possibility of transforming the relationship between law and racial power, and more broadly, pursues a project of achieving racial emancipation and anti-subordination (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas 1995). A component of CRT is the commitment to social justice and the active role scholars take in working toward eliminating racial oppression as a part of a broader goal to end all forms of oppression. This is the eventual goal of CRT and the work that most CRT scholars pursue as academics and activists (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Yosso, 2005; Bell, 1995).

Centrality of race and racism. Critical race theorists assert that race and racism are deeply engrained in the fabric of American society, and it is endemic and permanent (Solórzano

& Yosso, 2001; Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; & Yosso, 2005). Furthermore, CRT allows individuals to share stories of the experiences of minorities specifically in the social context of education (Solórzano et al., 2001; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). This enculturation of racism is the analytical lens that CRT uses to examine existing power structures and these structures are based on white privilege and white supremacy, which perpetuates the marginalization of people of color (Yosso, 2005). Lorde (1992) defines racism as, “the belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others and thereby the right to dominance” (p. 496). However, for this study the definition developed by Marable was used as a means to provide additional context. Marable (1992) defines racism as “a system of ignorance, exploitation, and power used to oppress African-Americans, Latinos, Asians, Pacific Americans, American Indians and other people on the basis of ethnicity, culture, mannerisms, and color” (p.5). Race and racism are key to this theme, but it is as equally critical to explore intersectionality within the scope of CRT, which includes class and gender. Moreover, Solórzano, Ceja & Yosso (2000) purport that by defining racism, a “discussion of race and racism from a Black-White discourse” shifts to one that “includes multiple faces, voices, and experiences.” (p. 61).

Ann Ferguson (2000) posits that race plays a pivotal role in how Black boys are excluded and marginalized based on the bias held by those who are in power. In fact, she says, “...The category of race has increasingly been defined through cultural rather than biological differences” (p. 20). Consequently, the bias held by those in power often incites what Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso (2000) refer to as innocuous and insidious behaviors that can be more debilitating. Superiority lends itself to bias, which manifests as racial stereotypes. Chavous, Harris, Rivas, Helaire, and Green (2004) concluded that, “African Americans’ lower academic performance and persistence, then, is viewed, at least in part, as a function of the deleterious

effects of negative cultural views of African Americans, or group stereotypes, on academic self-concept” (p. 2). Inevitably, the stereotypes of black students are further demonized as criminals and endangered through various forms of media (Ferguson, A. A, 2000). While it is not believed that the stereotypes portrayed via the media can impact the self-concept of Black boys, Steele (1999) makes the point that “‘stereotype threat’—the threat of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype, or the fear of doing something that would inadvertently confirm that stereotype” (p. 46) can ultimately cause one to disassociate from experiences. Therefore, the premise underpinning the CRT framework was to bring race and racism to the foreground without perpetuating identity through use of a monolithic stereotype-laden lens (Howard, 2008).

Challenge to dominant ideology. CRT also questions how, “...claims that educational institutions make toward objectivity, meritocracy, color blindness, race neutrality and equal opportunity” (Yosso, 2005, p. 73). Yosso (2005) supports the aforementioned claims, asserting they serve as a veil to camouflage the interests the people in power. Questioning the concept of “color blindness” is especially critical in the context of education because teachers must examine their own bias as it relates to pedagogy. Researchers such as Cochran-Smith (1995) suggest:

... [it is] not advisable for teachers or children to mistake color blindness for educational equity or to learn "the characteristics" of people of various races and cultures. These practices decontextualize teaching and learning and often result in either bolstering the very stereotypes they are intended to dispel or alienating parents and others who regard them as racist activities in and of themselves (p. 494).

Therefore, “it is also necessary to recognize that race and racism have been and remain central cultural and structural forms of oppression that permeate every social, economic, and political institution in the U.S.” (Howard, 2008, p. 962). Consequently, it is essential to unveil

the stories of disenfranchised, oppressed, minorities as a means to give credence to their lived experiences (Howard, 2008; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). In order for change to truly occur, marginalized groups must identify ways to heal. According to Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), “The story of one’s condition leads to the realization of how one came to be oppressed and subjugated and allows one to stop inflicting mental violence on oneself” (p.57).

Commitment to social justice. Critical race theorists are committed to ensuring social justice within various institutions is realized by providing privilege to those who are frequently silenced (Howard, 2008). Yosso (2005) and Solórzano & Yosso (2001) make the point that framing social justice under the auspice of CRT, “exposes the ‘interest convergence’ of civil rights ‘gains’ in education and works toward the elimination of racism, sexism and poverty, as well as the empowerment of People of Color and other subordinated groups” (p. 74). Moreover, “social justice then is the process of making the power and privilege of whites visible to those who possess it” (Arai & Kivel, 2009, p. 468).

Centrality of experiential knowledge. CRT researchers utilize the framework to continue to challenge those in power by providing a voice to those who are marginalized (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Because the lived experiences of people of color are critical in providing counter narratives, “CRT recognizes that the experiential knowledge of People of Color is legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing and teaching about racial subordination” (Yosso, 2005). Society can begin to legitimize the experiential knowledge through the use of methods such as narratives, storytelling, and testimonies (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). This is especially true in settings such as schools which minorities are often silenced and deterred from sharing their experiences and knowledge brought from home. As a result, Yosso

(2005) asserts that the “banking method”, by which students are viewed as repositories of information for the purpose of filling, is used within schools to educate those who are viewed as subordinates.

Interdisciplinary perspective. CRT has a rich history in disciplines such as gender studies, ethnic studies law, sociology, and race (Yosso, 2005; Bell, 1995; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Tate, 1997; Solórzano and Yosso, 2001). In addition, CRT recognizes the importance of the historical eras that served as catalysts to the CRT movement (e.g. Civil Rights Movement) (Yosso, 2005).

CRT and racial and gender microaggressions. Because CRT explores racism through institutionalized contexts, it is critical to understand the racist use of microaggressions by those who are in power. Tyrone Howard (2008) contends that often Black males experience racism through subtleties and put-downs, which continue to perpetuate inequities. He argues that researchers must continue to work to unveil racial microaggressions and the impact of teacher expectations on Black boys (Howard, 2008). Similar to Howard’s work, Solórzano’s (1998) study of Chicano males focused on how racial and gender microaggressions affect the career paths of Chicana and Chicano scholars. Thus, his study identified three patterns of racial and gender microaggressions: (a) scholars who felt out of place in the academy because of their race and/or gender, (b) scholars who felt their teachers/professors had lower expectations for them, and (c) scholars’ accounts of subtle and not so subtle racial and gender incidents. Because CRT explores race and racism through the intersectionality of class and gender, it is important to highlight the impact of microaggressions on Black boys (Allen, 2010; Yosso, 2005; Howard, 2008; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). While the bulk of Solórzano’s work surveyed Chicano youths, his research can be extrapolated to Black males.

Cultural Capital

Bourdieu (1977) argued that cultural knowledge and skills passed down through family and social networks, or cultural capital, explains why some students succeeded in school while others tend to fail. Solórzano (1998) and Yosso (2005) further expanded Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital. When applied to Black and Latino cultures, they observed, the cultural capital theory meant to critique the reproduction of social and family networks frames Black and Latino cultures as deficient.

Research on student cultural capital emphasizes the importance of verbal and non-verbal communication methods. Often there is a discrepancy between school and home (Rivers, Rosa-Lugo, & Hedrick, 2004; Sherwin & Schmidt, 2003; Zusman, Knox & Lieberman, 2005). For example, physical activity such as making body movements while talking are commonplace in communication in the home while these behaviors may be punished at school. Lisa Delpit (2002) captures the essence of how schools must learn to embrace students' natural selves which includes how students choose to identify with themselves through language. More specifically, she asserts that students tend to speak in dialects germane to their lives and communities. However, students learn to "code switch" between standard English and their chosen dialect in various settings. Delpit (2002) posits that if schools want to ensure that students are acquiring Standard English they must first ensure that the conditions are established so that students remove their "affective filter" or mental block to acquire standard dialect. Ultimately, Delpit purports that it is through connecting curricula to students' interests, culture, and by valuing their home language that students will be open to learning Standard English (2002).

Other cultural capital research has focused on how students view time and whether their orientation is on the present or future (Adelabu, 2007; Gayles, 2005; Hyatt, 2003; Sheppard,

2006). Findings indicate that African American male students have a more “present time” orientation, which in turn does not allow for long range planning and goal setting.

Further research indicates that the differences in cultural capital have led to an overrepresentation of African American males in disciplinary actions and special education (Neal, McCray, Webb-Johnson, & Bridgest, 2003). Neal et al. (2003) research consisted of viewing videotapes and conducting interviews with teachers about their perceptions of the students in the tapes. Teachers consistently ranked African American students as more aggressive, lower achieving and more likely to qualify for special education. Another study (Skiba, Poloni-Staudinger, Simmons, Feggins-Assiz, & Chung, 2005) analyzed data from 295 various school districts and found that race, poverty and suspension rates predicted special education referrals. Monroe (2005) further established that African American students are two to five times more likely than White students to be the recipients of disciplinary actions or suspension for similar behaviors.

Educators’ perspectives on academic success often differ from students’ understanding of achievement and what is necessary for navigating success (Wiggan, 2007). This difference often prompts African American students to abandon their dreams and goals because of this dissonance and the sense they don’t belong. Because sense of belonging impacts educational outcomes for Black males, Strayhorn (2008) suggests that feelings of isolation prompt Black men to depart from college before acquiring their degree. How Black men are perceived by faculty (e.g. dangerous, lazy, uneducable, etc.) shapes how these students view themselves as well as their ability to assimilate on campus. More specifically, these students begin to internalize the stereotypes used to define them. Strayhorn suggests that in order for Black males to feel a sense of belonging they must interact with racially diverse groups who possess different

interests and through that socialization attachment occurs (2008). Many African American students don't experience success in an educational setting nor view the institution of education as a means to advance in life.

Anti-Deficit Achievement Framework

An overwhelming majority of research and professional writing focuses on the problems existing within those educational settings (e.g., insufficient resources, dilapidated physical plant, instability of the teaching force, violence within the schools). Harper's (2012) Anti-Deficit Achievement Framework, created for a qualitative study of academically successful Black undergraduate males in college/university settings, flips research questions from a deficit model (e.g. why aren't Black males being successful) to explore and obtain insights into why some Black males are successful. This framework examines the individual, institutional and other factors that cause students to persist to graduation. While results of deficit model questions cannot be ignored, an anti-deficit model provides counter-narratives to help refocus the information obtained. Harper (2015) adapted this anti-deficit achievement framework to high school students in an urban educational setting. His premise was to bring to light successful Black male students in an urban educational setting to offset the master narratives (i.e. all urban schools are dangerous, Black students in urban schools don't care about education, etc.) that run throughout the professional research and publications. A focus on the positive aspects of Black male achievement and urban educational settings will help to reframe the consistent negative messages currently creating the master narrative around urban education and provide insight into Black males.

Given these frameworks, Chapter Three will outline the research design and methodology of the study, as well as the rationale for utilizing a phenomenological design for this study.

Chapter Four will analyze the data collected during the study, and Chapter Five will communicate the findings, conclusions, implications, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER THREE
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

As detailed in previous chapters, Black boys continue to struggle in school, are more academically and socially marginalized, and are more susceptible to recurring suspensions, which can result in behavioral and academic failure (Noguera, 2008; Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2015; Howard, 2014; Ferguson, 2000; Ferguson, 2003; Harry & Klinger, 2006). Because of the demoralizing depiction of Black boys through the media and music, Black boys continue to be portrayed as “problems” (Ferguson, 2000). From research previously conducted, a multitude of beliefs and perspectives have been shared regarding why Black boys are not successful in school (Howard, 2001 & Howard, 2002). While research has been conducted on Black boys and factors that impact their behavioral and academic performance in high school and post-secondary, very little research has been completed using the perspectives of elementary-aged Black boys (Howard, 2008).

Research Questions

Because the literature review serves as the foundation for developing research questions, it is critical for researchers to use the literature as a guide in formulating the project (Mertens, 2005). More specifically, “research questions operationalize the objectives of the proposed research” (Mertens, 2005, p. 107). According to Ryan and Bernard (2003), researchers should analyze texts and prior theoretical understandings to identify themes that aid in the construction of research questions. Creswell (2007) posits that, “Qualitative research questions are open-ended, evolving, and nondirectional; restate the purpose of the study in more specific terms; start

with a word such as ‘what’ or ‘how’ rather than ‘why’...” (p. 107). From the literature review the following questions were developed to direct the study:

- a. What factors do Black boys perceive as contributing to their academic success?
- b. What factors do Black boys perceive as contributing to their behavioral success?
- c. Which structural (space/context) and cultural (teachers’ beliefs, values, pedagogy) factors do Black boys perceive as important for their success in school?

Design of Study

When deciding on the type of research that is best, it is important to analyze the advantages and disadvantages of various types of approaches (Creswell, 2007). Because paradigms matter, the researcher felt it was critical to highlight the relationship of the transformative paradigm to the study. Mertens (2005) suggests that the transformative paradigm examines the placement of power in the context of human rights and social justice. More specifically, Mertens (2005) posits that realities are conformed by cultural, political, and racial factors, and it is these factors that will determine whose reality is considered privileged. Because the study is focused on Black boys, a marginalized group, this paradigm is appropriate primarily because the study seeks to “...place central importance on the lives and experiences of the diverse groups that, traditionally, have been marginalized” (Mertens, 2005).

While the researcher considered using a quantitative or a mixed methods approach, a qualitative approach was selected as it allows the researcher to explore a problem and to empower others to share their perspective and it is richly descriptive (Creswell, 2007 & Merriam, 2002). In addition, the researcher selected qualitative research as it addresses the “idea that meaning is socially constructed by individuals in interaction with their world” (Merriam, 2002).

The metaphor used by Creswell encapsulates the essence of why the researcher utilized a qualitative approach:

I think metaphorically of qualitative research as an intricate fabric composed of minute threads, many colors, different textures, and various blends of material. This fabric is not explained easily or simply. Like the loom on which fabric is woven, general world views and perspectives hold qualitative research together (p. 35).

Because the researcher sought to explore the lived experiences of elementary-aged Black boys, a phenomenological design was selected for the study (Creswell, 2007). According to Mertens (2005), “phenomenology is the study of the way in which members of a group or community themselves interpret the world and life around them” (p. 240). In using a phenomenological design, the researcher focused on participants’ perspectives, specifically, their responses during interviews and focus groups, and how such responses came together as emergent themes. Mertens (2005), makes the point that phenomenological research “...seeks the individual’s perceptions and meaning of a phenomenon or experience” (p. 240).

Phenomenological research aims to place the individual at the center of the study and seeks to use the participant to understand and make meaning of their experience (Mertens, 2005). Lastly, a phenomenological approach is relevant because its qualitative emphasis focuses on an “interpretive,” “naturalistic approach” related to transforming the world, more specifically for this study, changing the life trajectory of Black boys (Creswell, 2007).

Research Context

While there were nine elementary schools in the Riverside district that could have been selected as the research site, Kennedy was selected because it mirrors environments that Black boys experience across the country. (All names used in this study are pseudonyms.) As depicted

in the following paragraphs, Kennedy is within a school district that struggles academically and is nestled in a mostly Black community that has experienced reoccurring acts of violence. More specifically, in the years just before this study was conducted, a young Black teenager was shot and killed by police only blocks from this school.

The selection of the site was critical as the community contributes greatly to the narrative associated with Black boys. More specifically, this site was identified based on its geographical location to an event that polarized the nation and participants included in the study. In addition, Kennedy Elementary School was selected as the site for research because it lends itself to the population being studied. The demographics of the students is Black and the medium household income of the community has steadily decreased over the years, with nearly 15% unemployment at the time of the study. While events such as the one detailed occur across the United States, it does little to provide an explanation regarding how Black boys are viewed as they matriculate through the school system and after they leave.

Specifically, Kennedy is an elementary school (K-5) serving 366 students in a small suburban city in Missouri. While Riverside itself has gone through recent periods of accreditation struggles, Kennedy sits adjacent to a larger suburban school district with higher academic achievement results as indicated by state assessment scores. Meanwhile, for the 2015-2016 school year, Kennedy earned 70% (49/70) of the points on the annual performance report (APR) of which 36% of the points were achieved in the area of academic achievement. This made Kennedy a “provisionally accredited” school site according to the state department of education.

The interior of Kennedy Elementary is circular in shape, resembling a French horn, and the walls display various samples of student work capturing their personalities,

accomplishments, and challenges. The exterior of the school is void of landscaping and the south side of the campus is home to a basketball court which includes three hoops. In addition, Kennedy Elementary School is in a food desert with very few businesses or grocery stores nearby.

Kennedy Elementary is a neighborhood school, meaning that it educates students that reside mainly in apartments and some single-family homes nearby. One hundred percent (100%) of students qualify for free and reduced lunch and 99% of students are Black. Of the 366 students enrolled, the distribution of male to female students is proportional with approximately 50% (nearly 200) being male. The teaching corps at Kennedy Elementary has an average of nine years in the profession and their demographic composition is around 40% Black, 60% White, 95% female and 5% male. Unlike most urban elementary schools, Kennedy's teaching corps reflects only four teachers who have taught three years or less, suggesting that the majority of the staff is more experienced on average. Kennedy is a Title I school based on its high number of students who qualify for free and reduced lunch.

During the 2015-2016 school year, Kennedy had 68 suspensions of which 80% were issued to males and 20% were issued to female students. Of the discipline actions rendered, 40% resulted in out of school suspension (OSS). The most frequent office discipline referrals (ODR) resulting in OSS was fighting at almost 30% and pushing, shoving, or hitting at nearly 20%. Suspensions associated with bullying were only about 10% of the suspension totals.

Perception data from the state-issued Advanced Questionnaire (AQ) indicated that about 70% of the 23 teachers to complete the survey agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "I feel safe at this school." Moreover, 60% of teachers surveyed indicated they agreed (or strongly agreed) with the statement, "I have received violence prevention training" and 95% of teachers

agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “Educators in our school use effective practices to promote positive behavior.” The AQ survey all revealed that nearly all of the teachers agreed (or strongly agreed) with the statement, “Students are treated fairly in this school.” Student perception data from the AQ revealed that 70% agreed (or strongly agreed) with the statement, “Discipline is handled fairly.” In addition, 65% of students surveyed agreed (or strongly agreed) with the statement, “I am treated fairly at school.” Meanwhile, 70% of students surveyed agreed (or strongly agreed) with the statement, “I like going to this school.” The aforementioned data is essential as it refutes the notion that schools are always a microcosm of the community they service and while the community where Kennedy is located experiences high levels of poverty and violence, the school was perceived as providing students and staff with a safe learning environment.

Research Participants and Sampling

Having previously worked in the Riverside district, the researcher worked collaboratively with the building level principal to identify participants for the study. The researcher also used snowball sampling and eventually worked with a basketball coach of one of the original students to solicit additional participants. In both cases, gaining access to participants through such formal gatekeepers was critical because they portrayed to participants that their involvement in the research was acceptable (Seidman, 2013 & Creswell, 2007).

Because the study aimed to understand the lived experiences of Black boys, homogeneous sampling was used. According to Mertens (2005), “homogeneous sampling involves identification of cases or individuals that are strongly homogeneous...the researcher seeks to describe the experiences of subgroups of people who share similar characteristics” (p. 318). The researcher worked to identify participants who met the following criteria: 1) Black

boy, 2) fifth grade, and 3) who had experienced high occurrences of academic and/or behavioral failure before transitioning into the middle school setting. For the students at Kennedy, this was operationalized as scoring within the bottom two tiers of local assessments (Basic and Below Basic), and have four or more referrals office discipline referrals (ODR).

Although the study used state and cultural norms to choose students, which are generally understood to define such Black boys as “unsuccessful,” the researcher had a different definition of success and perception of the students. The definition of success used by the researcher differed from how success was defined and measured by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). Whereas DESE defined success based on student performance on state assessments (end of course exams and the state “assessment program”) aligned to standards and the readiness of high school graduates in the areas of English and math, the researcher defined success using a deeper definition. As an experienced educator and administrator of color, working with successful young men, the definition of success came from a critical race perspective, more holistic, giving consideration to and looking at social and cultural experiences. Defining academic success in only one way (by state tests) is a constraint on the experiences and perceptions of the boys. Success, as defined by the researcher, included students’ ability to have a positive self-concept of themselves and their identify as well as possessing the ability to use cultural capital to be resilient. For the purpose of this study, resilience is drawn from Morales and Trotman’s (2011) definition:

The process and results that are part of the life story of an individual who has been academically successful, despite obstacles that prevent the majority of others with the same background from succeeding (p. 8).

For recruiting students at Kennedy, the researcher provided a pre-written script that was recorded and sent by the principal, using the Student Information System (SIS), to the parents of boys that met the criteria for the study. For the purpose of this study, the researcher is using a broader meaning of “parent,” which goes beyond being the biological mother or father of a child. In this context, parent is being defined as any extended family member, i.e. aunt, uncle, grandparent, sibling, or cousin, who provided emotional or financial support to a child. Twelve parents responded to the recruitment phone call, indicating interest in their child participating in the study. Of the twelve parents, eight participated in an-person visit as a means to begin the process of building trust. Six parents chose to meet in their home, while two chose to meet at a local McDonald’s in Riverside. The contact visit served as the platform to explain the study and what was included in the consent forms (Seidman, 2013). Because parents and students were provided time to determine whether they wanted to participate in the study, the researcher had difficulty obtaining consent and assent from all participants. Of the eight families that participated in the visits, five of the eight consented and assented to participation in the study. The researcher worked to obtain consent and assent from the three parents and students who participated in the visits with multiple calls made and additional invitations to participate being disseminated by the principal. In addition, the researcher worked collaboratively with the school principal to send a second message to acquire more research participants; however, only five ultimately agreed.

Due to having only five consented participants from Riverside, the researcher then used these participants to identify additional students through snowball sampling. According to Mertens (2005), “although the researcher starts with a relatively short list of informants, the list grows (like a snowball) as names are added through the referral of informants.” From the visits,

one of the student participants indicated he played on a basketball team. The student was provided the pre-written script to provide to his coach to distribute to potential student participants. The researcher then received three calls from parents interested in participating in the study. The researcher scheduled three in-home visits to develop trust. In addition, the researcher explained the study and consented the parents and assented three additional Black boys at that time. By using snowballing, the researcher was able to bring the total student participants to eight. Table one shows a summary of students and their school demographics, using their chosen pseudonyms. Following Table one is a brief description of each student.

Table 1
Summary of Participants and Schools' Demographics

Pseudonym	Parent(s)	Age	Grade	School District	% of Black students	F/RL %
Clutch King	Cynthia	12	5	Riverside	99%	94%
Kevin Durant	Cynthia	11	5	Riverside	99%	94%
Tez Maniac	Tiffany	11	5	Riverside	99%	94%
Odell Beckham	Linda	11	5	Riverside	99%	94%
Fin Ballard	Linda	12	5	Riverside	99%	94%
CJ Williams	Michelle/Thomas	10	5	Parkside	15%	20%
Jump Shot	Marla/Kingston	10	5	Morningside	9%	30%
Larry Pickleman	Cheryl/Tony	10	5	Orchard Heights	8%	30%

Clutch King

Clutch King was a 12-year-old and lived in Riverside with his mother, younger brother, and sister. Clutch King was a very playful, jovial student. He struggled academically, which resulted in retention in fifth grade, and had received five ODR. He believed he was a helpful student who joked around a lot in class. Clutch King was a member on a local basketball team and enjoyed playing “buckets” on the nearby school court.

Kevin Durant

Kevin Durant lived with his older brother, sister, and mother in Riverside. During the interview, Kevin wore jeans and a t-shirt and wore his hair in a Corvallis. He was comical student and was academically average. Kevin was loquacious and taller than his grade appropriate peers. His free time was spent playing basketball with his friends. During the school year Kevin lost a classmate due to violence and impacted how he viewed his school community.

Tez Maniac

Tez was 11 years old and lived with his mother, father, grandmother, younger brother, and younger sister. Tez wore his hair in a short, curly, bob. Tez was a very serious student. While he experienced challenges in mathematics and behavior, he was working to improve his choices made in school. He enjoyed playing football on a nearby lot near his home in Riverside.

Odell Beckham

Odell, who also lived in Riverside, was 11 years old and lived with his sister, who was away at a local college, mother, younger brother, older sister and niece. Odell struggled in reading and math and experienced challenges behaviorally and received support due to a special education diagnosis. He wore his hair in dreadlocks and wore shorts and a t-shirt during the interview. His classroom teacher thought he did not put forth effort academically and lacked

social skills. Odell enjoyed sports and spent his free time playing football and basketball. He was very popular and well-liked by his friends.

Fin Ballard

Fin was 12 at the time of the study and lived with his sister, who was away at a local college, mother, younger brother, older sister and niece. Fin was retained in fifth grade and struggled in the area of reading and math. A quiet young man, Fin enjoyed playing football on the local junior Riverside football team. During the interview, fin wore sweat pants and a Nike t-shirt.

Jump Shot

Jump Shot was 10 years old and lived in Morningside with is mother, father, and sister who attended college in a teacher preparation program. He was a very conscious student who was calculated in his responses. While Jump Shot did not experience academic challenges in school, he experienced challenges behaviorally in school. He enjoys playing basketball and spent his free time playing basketball.

CJ Williams

CJ was 10 years old at the time of the study and lived with his mother and father (married) in the Parkside community. An only child, CJ did well in school academically. While he experienced challenges behaviorally, he was never suspended from school. CJ was well liked by his peers and was viewed as their protector. CJ had a low hair-cut during the interview and wore Nike flip-flops, basketball shorts, and a t-shirt. In his free-time he played basketball and spent time with his family.

Larry Pickleman

Larry Pickleman was a 10-year-old and lived with his mother, father, who are married and older sister in the suburbs of Orchard Heights. He wore his hair in a mohawk with highlights on the tips and wore basketball shorts and a Nike t-shirt. He was a reflective and comical student who attended five schools during his short elementary school experience. While Larry did not struggle academically, he experienced minor office discipline referrals during his schooling. Larry enjoyed playing basketball and football in his free time.

Data Collection

The voices and lived experiences of the participants were essential to the study. Thus, the researcher used structured interviews as a means to collect a large portion of the data. This model of interviewing predetermines the questions to be asked as well as the order of the questions to explore the research questions (Merriam, 2002). From interviews, participants had an opportunity to engage in dialogue around the questions posed and elaborate upon their response when probed. The questions for the interview funneled from general questions to more specific questions that were related to the research questions being explored. The questions were grouped by difficulty and were also related to themes associated with what makes school meaningful for Black boys. Seidman (2013) posited, “Every word that people use in telling their stories is a microcosm of their consciousness (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 236-237). Individuals’ consciousness gives access to the most complicated social and educational issues because social and educational issues are abstractions based on concrete experience of people” (p. 7). See Appendix B for the interview questions.

While the researcher attempted to assemble all eight boys for the focus group, only seven of the boys were available to convene for the focus group. As a means to build rapport amongst participants, the researcher allowed the boys to engage in activities and eat snacks prior to the

focus group convening. There were many benefits to utilizing focus group interviews as they provided an inordinate amount of information and context that emerged organically from the group conversations. However, a challenge was keeping the student participants on track answering each question.

In addition to the student focus group, the researcher was able to engage eight of the student participants' parents in another focus group, to provoke parents of the Black boys a platform to engage, collaboratively, in dialogue regarding their feelings and perceptions about their experiences perceptions of Black boys in school (Krueger & Casey, 2009). Through the parent focus group, participants had the opportunity to respond to the responses of other participants or elaborate upon themes that surface. In addition, Krueger & Casey (2009) suggest, "The focus group presents a more natural environment than that of an individual interview because participants are influencing and influenced by others – just as they are in life." (p.7). This was evident from the responses provided by parent participants as the participants frequently referred to statements made by other participants. Both the individual interviews and focus groups were audio-recorded to give the researcher an opportunity to revisit the transcripts of the conversations (Creswell, 2007). The researcher spoke with the students first and shortly after the student focus group the researcher interviewed parents in the focus group. See Appendix B for the student focus and parent focus group questions. Lastly, the researcher maintained field notes for the duration of the study. At the conclusion of each interview and focus group notes were recorded. More specifically, the researcher recorded specific statements made by participants, their dialect, mannerisms, and word choice. In addition, the researcher recorded the attire worn by participants and mention of extra-curricular activities and specific reference to involvement within their communities. Because it was critical for the researcher to

understand the information shared by participants, the field notes aided in the researcher's ability to make sense of what the participants shared as well as how it related to the study.

To review, the progression for the data collection for this study was as follows:

- a. Students were recruited with the support of the principal and through snowball sampling.
- b. Each of the eight student participants was interviewed one time (eight interviews total)
one on one
- c. One focus group was conducted with all seven student participants at a local elementary school
- d. One focus group was conducted with all eight parents of the student participants at a local elementary school

According to Seidman (2013) and Mertens (2005), it is the responsibility of the researcher to protect the privacy and identity of all participants. Therefore, as a means to ensure such the researcher utilized the following as outlined by Seidman (2013):

1. All interviews took place in a safe space designated by the participant, participants' homes and local McDonald's.
2. Interview transcripts were completed by two persons: (a) myself; and (b) reputable and discreet transcriber.
3. Pseudonyms were substituted in the transcripts for all names of participants, school districts, cities, towns, and counties.
4. The transcripts remained in the direct physical possession of the researcher.
5. All audiotapes and consent forms were kept in a safety deposit box.
6. Tapes will be destroyed upon acceptance of the dissertation. (p.70)

Data Analysis Procedures

Mertens (2005) addresses the scope of data analysis for qualitative research by making the point that, “Qualitative data analysis is not mechanistic. The basis for judging the quality of analysis in a qualitative study rests on corroboration to be sure that the research findings reflect peoples’ perceptions” (p. 422). As a means to analyze the data, a data analysis spiral was used as outlined by Creswell (2009). Data analysis, as purported by Merriam (2009), “is a complex process that involves moving back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts, between description and interpretation” (p. 176). Thus, the data analysis spiral creates a platform to synthesize the context of the participants experiences by reviewing the data through a holistic approach. Movement continues as a means to develop categories and from looping explanations of the categories develop into themes (Creswell, 2009).

Upon completion of each interview and focus group, participants were able to select pseudonyms. In addition, the researcher transcribed the audio-taped recordings and utilized the following steps outlined by Creswell (2007) to analyze the data for themes:

- a. Organized data into computer files using a computer program. Smaller units were used for organization.
- b. Listened to and read the whole transcripts two times and wrote notes to create categories.
- c. Designated descriptions to themes, classified themes, and interpreted themes.
- d. Presented data using a matrix to detail, in a visual format, themes and categories from the data.

Upon the completion of all interviews, the researcher reviewed the transcripts for phrases that reoccurred within each interview question. More specifically, the research questions were used as the catalyst for the first round of coding. For each occurrence of a

specific phrase it was highlighted red, common phrases noted were, “I am not able to explain myself” and “they do not listen to me.” The researcher coded the questions to aligned to cultural factors.

The questions naturally generated categories that aligned to the original research questions: structural, cultural, academic, and behavioral. Data was organized using an Excel file and additional files were created to capture the pseudonyms, schools, and categories aligned to the research questions. The researcher used the data to observe the frequency of various kinds of comments from the participants. Data points were created and additional data were created from the one on one interviews and the focus group interviews. From the review of the data and other indicators, additional categories were created from the summaries and larger themes surfaced. Table two shows the research questions in relations to the interview and focus group questions posed during the study.

Table 2

Research Questions in Relation to Interview Questions

<i>Research Questions</i>	<i>Interview Questions</i>
1. What factors do Black boys perceive as contributing to their academic success?	S3, S4, S5, S6, S7, S9, S14, S15, S18
2. What factors do Black boys perceive as contributing to their behavioral success?	S3, S4, S5, S7, S9, S12, S14, S15, S18
3. Which structural (space/context) and cultural (teachers' beliefs, values, pedagogy) factors do Black boys perceive as important for their success in school?	S4, S5, S6, S7, S8, S9, S10, S11, S12, S13, S14, S16, S17, S18
<i>Research Questions</i>	<i>Focus Group Questions</i>
1. What factors do Black boys perceive as contributing to their academic success?	S4, S6, S7, S10 P1, P2, P3, P4, P7, P9, P10
2. What factors do Black boys perceive as contributing to their behavioral success?	S4, S5, S7, S10 P2, P3, P4, P7, P9, P10
3. Which structural (space/context) and cultural (teachers' beliefs, values, pedagogy) factors do Black boys perceive as important for their success in school?	S3, S8, S9, S10 P2, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10

Note: S = student; P = parent

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher was critical to the outcomes sought in the research study. Stake (1995) makes the point that a researcher can have various roles. However, the most important aim of a researcher is to “inform, to sophisticate, to assist the increase of competence and maturity, to socialize, and to liberate” (Stake, 1995, p. 91). As an employee in the school district it was critical to the study that I maintained my role as a researcher, by delineating the difference between employee and researcher. The aim of this research was to provide voices to this underrepresented subgroup of students. As the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction prior to the study, I frequently spent time in classrooms and I was able to observe first-hand the perils faced by this group of students. In addition, as a Black mother of a Black boy I could often relate to what the boys were telling me. This helped me to develop rapport and listen carefully to the participants, even as I had to make sure I was not leading them to answer questions in particular ways, as discussed in the section that follows. In addition, the researcher kept field notes and a journal used to capture reflections during the study. It is critical to disclose that the researcher was formerly a classroom teacher of Black boys, elementary and middle school principal and central office staff member. Each role has contributed to how the researcher perceives how Black boys experience school, however due to minimal contact with participants there was limited familiarity.

Design Controls

To ensure the quality of the research, multiple strategies were utilized as recommended by Crewel (2007). Prolonged and substantial engagement was used as a means to ensure that themes were recursive and not extending beyond the themes that materialized (Creswell, 2007). Additionally, in an effort to ensure the validity of the phenomenological study, verbatim

accounts, low inference descriptors and triangulation of multiple data sources were used to address the validity of the study (Mertens, 2005). Trustworthiness was maintained through the use of an audit trail regarding decisions and procedures used during the research to ensure that the study can be replicated in similar environments. Member checks were utilized as well as a means to ensure that what was captured parallels what the participant stated (Mertens, 2005). Participants were provided an opportunity to clarify their responses and to agree or disagree regarding observations made during the interview. Lastly, the researcher defined her personal bias regarding this study that could impact the analysis of the data as her son is Black boy and he experienced these phenomena between the age of eleven and twelve while in fifth grade.

Limitations

This phenomenological study posed several limitations. First, the study identified five core participants from one school site with 3 additional students from nearby communities. This is a relatively small sample size, but one that fit the criteria for the phenomenon being studied. According to Creswell (2007) it is critical to study a few sites. In addition, transferability could be a challenge; specifically, it could be difficult to transfer the study into another setting (Mertens, 2005), given the particular historical and social context of these particular Black boys growing up in a time of “Black Lives Matter” demonstrations and strong attention on combatting the police violence that continues to plague young Black teenagers and men. Although the Black boys who participated in the study may have commonalities as it relates to discipline and academic achievement, there may be other factors that contribute to why school is not viewed as being meaningful. Additionally, trustworthiness was a challenge as well. Interpretation of the phenomenon shared by the participants in the study have the potential to be shaped by the

researcher's bias and impact the trustworthiness of the study and because of such peer debriefing will be utilized to limit the impact of the researcher's bias (Mertens, 2005 & Merriam, 2002).

Summary

Chapter Three provided the rationale for the use of a phenomenological study to explore how the experiences of Black boys can help shape and inform the instructional and curricular decisions made in schools. In addition, Chapter Three presented the research questions as well as the participants identified in the study and the method utilized for sampling the participants. Chapter Three also detailed the methods for data collection and analysis in the study. Chapter Four will provided a detailed analysis of the data.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Introduction

The aim of this study was to explore the factors perceived by Black boys, within the context of late elementary school, that enhance their behavioral and academic success. The purpose of this chapter is to present data to answer the following research questions that guided the study:

1. What factors do elementary-aged Black boys perceive as contributing to their academic success?
2. What factors do elementary-aged Black boys perceive as contributing to their behavioral success?
3. Which structural (space/context) and cultural (teachers' beliefs, values, pedagogy) factors do Black boys perceive as important for their success in school?

As a means to answer the research questions, I interviewed, separately, eight boys representing four school districts across the local area. Students were asked a series of questions aligned to factors that they felt contributed to them being academically and behaviorally successful. I also conducted one student focus group, with seven of the boys, at a neighboring school in a nearby school district. Finally, while the boys played basketball, I conducted one parent focus group which included seven parents.

This chapter begins with an overview of the findings from students' and then parent's perspectives. Then, three sections present evidence on each of the research questions. The specific findings are as follows. First, in terms of Black boys' perspectives, the students who participated in the study clearly expressed that they saw themselves attending college, citing sports as the conduit for them getting there; however, they could not specifically name what

success looks or sounds like. Second, students explicitly named the stereotypes held about them as Black boys and the impact of such stereotypes on their identities and how they are perceived. Third, the boys who participated in the study emphasized the importance of socializing with friends and recess. Students were aware of the lack of fairness when consequences were rendered and made a point to voice that the rules only applied to them. They also highlighted that relationships with teachers mattered as well as teacher pedagogy (relevance, breaking things down, re-teaching, projects, and group work).

Meanwhile, in terms of parents' perspectives, the participants' parents valued the opportunity to listen to their sons' perspectives on being Black boys in school and expressed how those responses have changed what involvement will look like from their perspectives as parents. Some of the fathers that participated could make connections from their sons' experiences to those from their childhood. They perceived race as a driving factor for their boys and for them as parents when interacting with schools and staff. In addition, they explicitly highlighted dissimilarities regarding how teachers discipline their sons. Lastly, parents indicated that college was not how they defined success for their sons and that they must work with their boys to change their perception of sports being the only way to college.

In summary, the findings from this research are organized into four sections: 1) perception of academic success, 2) perceptions of behavioral success, 3) structural factors, and 4) cultural factors. Across the sections, five themes emerged: (a) Visualizing Success (definition of success, perceptions of failure, ego, teacher, family/community, and personal motivation), (b) Cultural Weapons (stereotypes, identity, and race), (c) Making a Way (access and opportunity), (d) The Teacher Matters (race, relationships, oppression, teacher perceptions) and (e) The Rules

Only Apply to Us (fairness and consequences). Further discussion of the themes will be provided in Chapter 5.

Academic Factors

A critical focus of this study was to hear the voices and see through the eyes of elementary-aged Black boys. In an effort to focus the interviews on the topic of academic success of Black boys, the discussions began with questions specifically about school, the boy's grades, and their teachers. The boys related academic success with achievement later in life. Their perspectives regarding being academically successful meant working hard, going into the National Basketball Association (NBA) or National Football League (NFL) first and then having another career if professional sports were not an option. In addition, the role of parents and family contributed to how they viewed academic success. All boys in the study emphasized that how teachers taught them impacted them academically and contributed to their success. While not cited by all the boys in the study, they mentioned being intrinsically and extrinsically motivated would contribute to their future success. This section provides the students' and parents' perceptions on what it means for Black boys to be academically successful.

Visualizing success. As shared by the boys in this study, they were able to articulate what academic success looks like to them as well as what contributes to them being successful. According to the boys, many factors, like having role models and parent encouragement, propelled them to be successful academically such as working hard and studying. During the interview, Larry commented:

...It's kind of just a habit or there's someone that I look up to that I want to be like them, but no matter if it's sports or anything they still had to do the stuff they did not like doing. You always have to make sure you focus on school first because that's what gets you

there, and that's what like gives you the knowledge to learn how to do the stuff you want to do.

Tez felt that his parents were the reason that he did well in school. He said, "I want to make my parents happy and I want to get good grades because they help me go to college and to get a master's degree." CJ agreed sharing:

It's basically like, everybody. My family, my sister, my mom and dad. I just remember them and like my parents always say, when you go to college you should always have a plan. No matter what it is. I can make them feel happy and make them feel like good parents, that they raised their kid to have this successful career with whatever they do.

Odell concurred with CJ and Larry for why he does well in school by adding, "Because of my mom and to help my family."

While most of the boys cited that their mothers, parents, or family contributed to how they viewed success through an academic lens, they said that learning new things was a major aspect of success. Odell shared that academic success meant that he needed to work hard. He said, "I push myself to my limits, trying harder." He also believed that academic success was based on one's grades, proudly saying, "This year I made straight A's and if I keep working hard I can get a good job." That determination would help him to persevere, he concluded, "I don't like school, but I know we need to go to school to better our lives and stuff."

Other boys also saw a connection between good grades and future employment. For Tez, "Getting good grades is important because it helps me go to college." Larry stated, "I want to have a better record (grades) because everyone wants a scholarship. Then they want to do good things and do something pretty big when they're older or something like that."

Meanwhile, Clutch King defined success as being smart. He shared, “I am smart and I made it to the top of my class and the top whenever there is a quiz in class or a test.” Like Clutch King, Jump Shot also associated success with intelligence. “I just want to do, like, a lot of things, but I want to do well. I want to like go to the NBA and do well so I can be smarter. Yeah, I want to get smarter,” he said. Jump Shot further noted that he is smart because of the opportunities afforded to him. He stated:

I go to summer camps that a lot of my friends wouldn’t get a chance to learn about. I am smart as a Black boy because I go to a school where there is a lot of white people. So, of course if the white students are smart, I’m smart.

While the boys indicated college as an indicator of success, the parents expressed broader views. Mr. Kingston, the dad of Jump Shot and the basketball coach for three of the boys, who was very emphatic during the interview, shared:

I’ve got four kids and I evaluate each one of them based on the kid. I don’t think college is for everybody, that’s number one. So, I just evaluate my kids as they go along to see who’s built for it because I feel like some kids are made for tech schools, some kids are made for math programs, going to nursing or different colleges. Like he might need to be a policeman or fireman or get him a career, get him something that gets him prepared. So, I try to teach good habits, good work habits, just being smart and I just don’t think college is for everybody. So, I just judge it on an individual basis and I always try to see what my kids are interested in because really, at the end of the day I work a job right now that I like the money, but I would never tell you I like the job... That’s how I look at it; I don’t think everybody was built for college.

Like Mr. Kingston, Mrs. Cheryl acknowledged that college attendance does not define academic success or future success.

I can agree with that. I do expect them to graduate from high school, but as far as college goes, I absolutely want them to be happy and I want them to follow their passion. I felt a lot of pressure of course growing up having to go to college, but I feel the same way [Kingston] does. I can't necessarily say that my job is my passion and I hope to continue to teach them work habits, learning what it means to work hard and to follow their passion and regardless of what they decide to be in life that they're just the best that they can be at that. I think that if we teach that they'll be successful.

Pedagogy. While the boys indicated that they did not like their teachers or school, they did recognize that school was fun and they learned new things. They also believed that how the teacher taught them impacted how they engaged in the lesson and that a teacher's use of technology, hands-on type work, group work, and projects made learning enjoyable. They also noted when teachers deconstructed concepts and retaught material they were able to grasp the content better. The following five examples demonstrate these different kinds of pedagogy that motivated students.

First, CJ talked about how his teacher "broke up" important ideas and rewarded students with treats:

She actually broke it up into pieces because there were kids that were smarter than others and I was one of those smarter kids. So, she would break it down for the kids who didn't know. For the other kids they didn't know it, so it was just good that she knew what she had to do, before she even did it. She will like work with them one-on-one at her table

and that just made her a great teacher. She also gave out candy and all the kids were like, 'Oh, I'll participate in this if it means candy.' So, that's really all kids wanted.

Second, Clutch King believed his teacher's encouragement and use of music made him want to engage in the lesson. The use of dry-erase boards and other enticements, such as additional recess, also were motivators:

She actually encouraged us to start to do it. Sometimes she said we got to do it and she gave out freebies. She would sometimes give us longer recess or time to play on the computers. When we did science, we were working and talking about something and she taught it the easy way by like playing us some song and that way actually made me remember. The white boards, with everybody, was fun and everybody had to do it. She put the problem on the board and she would let everyone answer to see if they were right.

Third, Larry attributed his teacher's use of group work, simulations and projects as a way to get him excited about learning. He found himself more engaged when his teacher gave him an opportunity to move around:

So, some of those are like with groups and stuff and when she does groups in social studies we were talking about how something was different in a different country. Everyone gets money and stuff, but this one person will maybe be like the king or something. Then they take it all away and instead of using money we use Skittles and we all got to eat them. Also, how we make structures that hold up and she gave us some plates. It was either toothpicks or like dried up noodles. You know you put them in the pot before. She gave us this little baby bear thing and she gave us six or seven minutes to build something and we had to put the bear inside. We also had a timer to see how fast you could go like hopping in thirty feet, walking in thirty feet, and walking backwards in

thirty feet. It had to do with friction. I'm pretty sure, no that wasn't friction. I forgot, but I remember her making it fun.

Fourth, Odell believed that when teachers demonstrate they care about their students it motivates them to get involved in class. His relationship with the teacher made him want to work harder for good grades:

Some teachers care about you and some are just there for the money. That's how I feel. You can see when somebody care about you. They stay on you. They help you when you need help. They don't put you in the corner. My first teacher before I switched pinned me in a corner by myself and didn't help me at all with my work. She just gave me an F. She didn't care at all. Sometimes they just really not worried about you and only worried about what they need to worry about. They like give you the paper. There are just some teachers that make connections.

Fifth, Kevin shared some thoughts regarding his teacher's use of additional time in class to master unknown skills and concepts. He also believed that group work motivated him to be successful:

We got to practice it over and over again. Sometimes we knew and sometimes we didn't know. We just kept on practicing. I like when she paired us with our partner and our partner would try to make us understand. Groups that you read with worked too. We had exactly four people and we all share books that we read and we all talk about them.

While students found these particular ways of teaching to be helpful, they also found it beneficial when teachers provided feedback to help them learn. While the type of feedback that the boys shared varied, they each believed that it aided them in being successful in school. In this

quote, Clutch King emphasized the importance of feedback being delivered to ensure that students could still feel good about themselves:

She would talk to me and ask if I wanted to see my grade and she shared it with me out loud. I didn't know what type of grade was going to be shared, but I knew the kind of person I am. For example, there was this girl who always acted really odd. Like nothing really ever happened and she yelled at people. The teacher would yell out she got an F. The teacher didn't care.

For Odell, his frequent teacher feedback was beneficial and helped him to improve:

She gave me a daily check. She would tell me what happened or what I did wrong. She also would tell me what I was missing or what she needed me to do and to work on it. She helped me.

Larry gave an example of his teacher giving him feedback that helped him do well in class:

She tells me, "You did pretty good on this." Sometimes if you get a really nice score or a high score she'll show you and say you did really good on this like, "good job and nice work on doing this." She tells me some things that I could work on with my math. I would sometimes ask her like at recess if I could do some extra things and she would be a really good helper. But as far as my old school, I did get some help sometimes, but it wasn't the best. I mean, I'm not saying you get what you get, but at the same time when you can tell when you get more and not so much as that, it's actually pretty nice.

Tez attributed getting graded papers in a timely manner helped him do well in school:

She would pull me over to her computer and show me my grades and stuff like that. She would grade my work the day we did it and the next week she would give it to us with a note.

In summary, the boys believed that their academic success was underpinned by various factors. They noted that college is an outcome of doing well in school which is later connected to future success in life. While the boys saw themselves going to college, they believed that sports were the conduit to get them to college. In addition, the boys expressed very strong views regarding the role of their family as a contributing factor to their success. The boys also noted that how teachers engaged them in lessons also contributed to their academic. Lastly, the boys highlighted that they perceived learning, good habits, and possessing the ability to focus as factors contributing to their academic success.

Role of friends. Overall, the boys in the study held varying views regarding how their friends treated them if they made good grades. They found that how they performed on assignments dictated how their friends treated and judged them. For some, there was pressure to do well, and others said that their friends did not want to be around them if they did well academically. For instance, CJ, a student from Parkside School District where the free and reduced lunch rate was around 20%, noted that he was often excluded by his peers if he did not do well.

At my school, I have some people that will look at my morning work and they'll be like bro, you're way off and I'm like ok well that's just a mistake that I made and I'll learn from my mistake. If I get a bad grade they'll start to turn on me like oh well, you can't be in this group if you get the easy problem wrong. When you think about it, it's just a simple mistake that I made and I will learn from that. They shouldn't just like turn on me just because I got an answer wrong. So yeah, I get pissed off because of that.

Similarly, several of the boys noted that when you are smart and do well on assignments that people come around you more and want to be your friend or seek help from you so that they

can do well. Odell, a student at Riverside, believed that the better you do in school academically the more they will want to be around you. Odell made that same observation. “Yeah, like if you have good grades they’ll all want to be around you, but as soon as you don’t do well they all leave you.”

However, Jump Shot, a student at Morningside, provided the opposite perspective and added, “If one of your friends is smart and you’re not smart, they like the friends that are not smarter than them so that they are not outsmarted. Like some people won’t say they’re smarter than their friends.” Like Jump Shot, Fin added, “Yeah, like if you get good grades they look at you funny. So, then everybody will just try to copy off of someone’s work, so they’ll look like cheaters and not look smart.”

While the boys shared varying perspectives regarding how their friends viewed them if they made good grades, the boys from Riverside appeared to receive more criticism from their peers for doing well in school. Those boys who attend more affluent school districts noted that their non-Black peers make friends with students who are not smarter than them. However, as described earlier, a consistent trend amongst the boys was the role of family in their success, specifically the role of their mother.

Familial support. The boys in the study referenced how the encouragement from parents and their support from family helped them experience success in school. Most of them noted how their parents pushed them and expected them to do well in school, motivated them, and rewarded them when they did well. CJ noted his parents’ words of advice: “I just remember them, like my parents, always say like when you go to college you should always have a plan no matter what it is. They encourage me to try my best and to try to pay attention.” Odell also believed that support from his mother helped him to be successful in school, most notably by

pushing him. He stated, “My mom and my family stay on me. They help me learn and they put their thumb on me.” Similarly, Jump Shot and Larry believed that having family members who can help you at home with homework contributed to school success:

My family helps me sometimes. If I have hard homework, I would ask them and they help me and I would feel confident because I know more. Then I would be like, oh, I’m good now at that and I just want to do well. (Jump Shot)

I do get some encouragement when I do well. My family encourages me. It’s not just like I get it and get a reward. At the same time, I get encouragement or someone telling me congratulations. She also checks my grades and we talk about them. (Larry)

Conversely, students like Tez and Larry noted that receiving extrinsic items from his family when he did well in school helped him to be successful.

If I get a good grade, my family, they give me a surprise or something. So, like when I graduated, my momma had bought me a game. I was so happy and then my dad bought me a toy truck. (Tez)

If I make a good grade we can like do something fun. I remember one time I got a really high score and my mom she took me to Doozles. Sometimes I get money or something, it depends. (Larry)

In summary, students believed that family support, including intrinsic encouragement and extrinsic rewards, supported their academic success. Parent participants likewise believed that being actively involved in their son’s education would ensure their success. They noted attending parent teacher conferences and asking the right questions would contribute to their son’s success in school as well. However, the participants in this study also recognized that behavioral factors shaped their interactions and success in school.

Behavioral Factors

During the interviews the researcher sought the perspectives of the boys and their parents regarding those factors that contribute to their behavioral success. Questions were posed to delve deeply into how they viewed themselves within the context of school-related behavior. The Black boys in the study had a keen awareness of how they were treated and frequently referred to themselves as bad. They noted the idea of the lack of fairness when disciplined and the lack of patience on the part of the classroom teacher. In addition, they stressed the role of race and low expectations as factors that deter them from success behaviorally.

The rules only apply to us. The boys had very strong beliefs regarding how rules were administered to them and when they were excluded by them. More specifically, the boys believed that their teachers did not listen to them nor hear their perspective when disciplining them. In some cases, they noted that it was as if they did not matter. They also emphasized that what happens in the community reflects the same challenges they see within the school.

First, students gave a number of examples of teachers' lack of understanding or lack of listening to Black boys. For example, Fin stated Black boys get in trouble a lot in school because of the teacher's lack of patience. Here, he described how the teacher's attitude affects the response to misbehavior:

We get in trouble more because I think the teachers get tired of Black boys not doing what they're saying. Just like if we do something once and then do it again. That's why white students get all of the good chances. Because if you tell them one thing, they'll probably do it, but if you tell a Black boy something and we don't do it then we get in trouble these days.

Meanwhile, Tez believed that when his teacher didn't listen to him, it impacted the choices that he made in class:

The teacher wouldn't listen to me all the time. So, I had a little bit of a problem. Like once, I had asked for the restroom and she looked at me and then she started back working. She didn't ever come back to me and tell me I could go. So, when I asked her again, she told me no and let somebody else go. It made me feel upset.

Clutch King gave a similar example as Fin, noting, "I say yeah, we get in trouble more because they hate Black boys and they are racist and sexist. Because all they do is pick girls and white students."

Second, a number of students perceived that teachers are much more critical regarding the behavior of Black boys than other students. For example, CJ said:

I think yes, we get in trouble more because we just do like smaller things that might get us in trouble, but as soon as we do it, they're like all over. It like alright, you go over there and think about what you just did.

Larry also noted that teachers' expectations seem to change when it comes to Black boys. He stated, "It is expectations versus reality." Odell agreed, adding that teachers try to intervene (work with students or try to remedy the situation/context) when other kids get in trouble, but not for Black boys:

Yes, we get in trouble. Because when white students do something they don't do nothing about it. They try to fix it quickly. But when Black boys do it, they just point it out. For example, we can just pick up a pistol in a store and they call it misdemeanor, so they just make up a dumb reason to get us locked up and in trouble and we don't really do nothing.

But if this is a White person that do the same thing they be on the news with something good about them. It's what I don't get.

Related to this theme, the boys in the study expressed very strong views regarding unfair treatment by teachers in class. Several of the boys cited how the lack of fairness in the classroom impacted how they responded in class and the choices they made. Jump Shot recalled that his teacher would allow some students to work together, but would not allow him to work with the other Black boys in class.

If I ask to do something with my friends, she says no, and she let everybody else do stuff with their friends because she thinks me and my friends will get in trouble because we talk a lot about sports.

Clutch King remembered that his teacher treated him unfairly frequently by not allowing him to participate on field trips and then lowering his grade for not attending.

In science, I didn't go on the field trip and it's not as if there is nothing important about it. It was her saying you don't go to the field trip and you get an F. A lot of people cannot go, but sometimes she would just say that they will get an A or B. If I did go I would still get an F. She let other guys go on the field trip because I didn't go with them.

This is not to say the boys viewed all behavioral expectations in school from teachers as unfair. CJ noted that one of his teachers demonstrated fairness to everyone and gave each student what they needed individually. Because she was fair with resources, he said, it made her a nice teacher:

See, when she looked at the class in total, she knew that she saw every single one of us and so she like, she knew that whatever she did for the Whites, she would have to do for the Blacks. We had a student that had like a disability. Even though she didn't want to

help him, she was like, well I'm a teacher, this is my job so no matter what the kids is she is going to have to help them. She didn't treat anybody unfairly no matter what religion, if it was different than hers or what race it was. She just helped them because she knew that's what she had to do.

Parents' perspectives on behavioral factors. Parents shared many of the same perspectives as the boys regarding behavior and the treatment of Black boys by educators at their schools. For example, although she was mostly quiet and reserved during the interview, the dialogue regarding how staff and teachers treat Black boys in school provoked Mrs. Michelle, the wife of Thomas and the mother of CJ, a student at Parkside, to speak candidly. She retold the story of an incident that involved CJ where she felt minimized as a parent and believed that the school possessed preconceived notions regarding her son:

CJ chose to sit by his desk because he likes to read on his stomach and he propped himself up and I guess the teacher must have said something that he didn't hear so he raised his hand to ask a question like what did you say. I guess in the process another kid said 'oh my God' really loud, so he just automatically assumed that it was CJ. CJ has never gotten a letter sent home or a note from a teacher. The teacher spelled his name wrong and CJ was upset because he was like, 'now I'm going to get in trouble at home.' I went to the school to the secretary and said I wanted to talk to the teacher. They brought everybody in the office and it just amazed me. I couldn't get past the whole conversation because she kept saying 'oh my' and kept stopping him and saying 'I really appreciate the way that you're talking. You're talking so intelligent and you're explaining yourself.' I guess she was expecting something else from him like not talking with respect or talking like he didn't have any sense.

In summary, the participants in the study were keenly aware of the factors, within school, that impacted their behavioral success. They believed that race, unfair treatment, not being heard, and low expectations on the part of teachers created conditions where they were not successful. For the boys in the study who attended Parkside, Morningside, and Orchard Heights, they highlighted how race factored into their lack of behavioral success coupled with being stereotyped. This issue is further explored in the sections that follow.

Structural Factors

The boys in the study believed that their communities played a pivotal role in their success. During the interviews, the boys from Riverside noted the lack of access to quality community centers, activities, and the presence of crime and violence. In addition, it was noted that the community contributed to the perils experienced for families economically. It was also noted that the community cooperates based on events that happened within their communities. Three of the boys, who were not students in Riverside, noted that their communities were safer and offered a variety of activities for them to do. While the boys in the study are from various communities, they all noted that the community does not understand them as Black boys and don't value their perspectives. In addition, as described earlier, they held strong convictions related to the notion that sports and opportunities to play sports within their communities led to economic wealth.

Community impact. The boys in the study perceived the role of the community as a contributing factor to how they are viewed within their schools. They stated that the community did not see their side and often the police treated them as if they didn't matter. In addition, several boys held strong convictions that their communities could help them to be successful in school.

First, the boys were fully aware of the current local and nationwide conversations, demonstrations, and relationships between police and the killing of Black boys and men. Such situations led to their understandings of their communities. For example, CJ believed that if communities took time to understand Black boys, they would be more successful:

A Black kid will get shot in the neighborhood by a cop. He's going to jail for that or he's going to get shot. It makes me feel like why would you shoot someone and you didn't hear what their side of the story is. I saw something on Google and it said something like just because you think your side is right doesn't mean mine is necessarily wrong and they had a picture of a 6, but it kind of looks like a nine on the other side. So, if you shoot a person and you didn't hear their side of the story, it just basically no point in life because you do something bad or you think you did and your life is over.

Larry recalled the impact of the death of an unarmed teen in a nearby community and the aftermath in the community and its schools in this way:

They say all the old things that happened don't matter even though in that situation, he put his hands up and just because he was Black he still, well got shot. What about the kids who had to walk by the memorial every day on their way to school? Or saw his body in the street? What about the buildings that burned and businesses that were closed down.

That hurts the community. How will they get better? Rebuild?

Second, students discussed how their communities and the resources available there shaped their chances for success. For example, boys in Riverside believed that their neighborhoods contributed to the difficulties they and their families experienced. Odell (from Riverside) shared that life was hard, and his neighborhood did not offer much for him:

I don't really think about the memories. Life is different than other people. It is harder.

There is not much to do. There isn't a community center. We have an Urban League.

Like I got a single mom and she do everything for me.

Other Riverside students believed that events that occur in the community could impact their success in school. They also pointed out that there was very little for them to do in Riverside, and financial pressures were prevalent:

People were able to cooperate to gather enough money for our school for the girl that died and we built a playground to remind everybody of her. She died because one of her family members stole money from where they work from someone else and they shot her house up for no reason. A lot of people get gunned down. We have nothing to do except for the police coming around. Also, people I grew up with they would give us things that we would use. They also donated money to help us get a treatment from the flu, and they use to give us money to have some freebies and get the people coming home from school.

(Clutch King)

My neighborhood is a good place to stay. There was a basketball hoop at the park, but it got torn down. They probably don't care about the sport I like. They don't really care.

None of the people out here like basketball. So, now I don't have nothing to do after school. (Jump Shot)

Meanwhile, students in other areas noted that their communities helped them to be successful, and there were a variety of resources available. For example, Larry, a student in Orchard Heights, believed that his neighborhood contributed to him being successful in school because of the things available to him to and being able to hang with his friends:

I live in a good neighborhood. It's fun and a lot of my friends live there in my neighborhood. It has a pool, basketball court, coffee shop, volleyball courts, a bakery, amphitheater, a market, and a restaurant. It has a lot of nice and cool fun things and a lot of nice people. Our house is big and we have a lot of space. Being able to hang with my friends and go to places in my neighborhood does actually kind of make me want to do better at school too, so that's part of it.

CJ, another student who was not from Riverside, possessed strong beliefs about the role of the community and how people within it are perceived. He also believed that community plays a large role in the success of Black boys in school and highlighted that even though his neighborhood might not be the "safest," there were community members looking out for the children there:

I wouldn't say my neighborhood is the best or it's the safest neighborhood, but it's like an okay neighborhood. Sometimes someone may spray paint something. Like all depending on where you live there is like a bad part of the neighborhood and you never know who your next-door neighbor is going to be until they come and show themselves. My neighbor say that we are like their little grandkids. They tell me to go to college and stuff like that. I'm able to go to the pool, and we have a golf course which we don't really do because our family isn't into golfing.

CJ acknowledged that there are students who go to school in bad areas, which causes them not to be successful academically. He attributed the community difficulties, however, to "our race" when he mentioned these other areas:

A bad area to me would be like a lot of places where they have rioting or whatever. It's like people who have a lot of gangs. Houses are damaged and leaves are growing all over

them. If you see a lot of Black people walking on the streets, that means like it's a bad area. Our race isn't the best race.

In summary, the boys in the study possessed strong beliefs regarding the impact of their community on their overall success as Black boys in school. While the perspectives of the three students who did not attend Riverside varied regarding access, economic wealth, violence, and the challenges of the areas where they resided, all the boys strongly believed that they were misunderstood by their communities.

Making a way. While on the surface sports would not appear to be a structural factor that contributed to the success of Black boys, when analyzed through a narrower lens, it is at the intersection of race and poverty that it exists. Sports, or the ability to acquire a career as a professional athlete, is perceived by Black boys as their ticket out of poverty. With the notoriety that comes with being a professional athlete also comes economic and health benefits. In addition, becoming a professional athlete has the potential to increase one's financial wealth which aligns to the conceptualization of power. It also increases the disparity that exists between how the media idolizes money equated to careers within the profession.

The boys spent a great deal of time discussing their beliefs regarding sports being the conduit for getting out of their neighborhoods. When shown a picture of two boys playing basketball, various comments reflected how gaining entry into the professional league would be a means to a better future. Jump Shot noted, "[The boy] he's just working on his game and, you know, like he [CJ] said all Black boys play basketball. So, he's saying that because we're Black kids and so myself and nobody else is playing basketball." For CJ, basketball was an opportunity to improve ones' life and keeps kids out of the streets:

Just like an average Black person, he's just playing basketball out there on the street and he's trying to get better, so he has something to look forward to in his life instead of just selling drugs and walking out on the street. He's trying to create some opportunities for himself. That way he doesn't feel like he's nothing. So, he's trying to just help himself.

Odell agreed that basketball provided opportunities for Black boys and could enhance their quality of life:

The only option is to get away from the violence and stuff is sports, is to get a good raising, go to college, so you can get a good job and move on to improve in life.

Sometimes people get to the National Basketball Association (NBA) or National Football League (NFL) and forget about their people.

Jump Shot held slightly different beliefs than his peers about basketball being the only way to gain success.

I think it'll probably be one of them, but the thing about Jackie Robinson, he had baseball, so they asked him to come over and like track and a lot of sports. Not just basketball, you can succeed in all the sports if you really want to.

While students almost unequivocally saw only benefits to playing sports, parent participants recognized that additional dialogue is needed with their sons about the misalignment of success with sports. Mr. Travon noted that the boys emphasized sports could get them out the "hood."

Like he [Kingston] was saying, everything is not based off racism and then, too as far as them focusing on sports, there are other ways out other than sports. Everybody at the table is focused on sports.

In general, regardless of the school or community, the boys in the study all possessed the same belief that sports could be their opportunity to transition out of poverty or to acquire financial stability for themselves and their families. In addition, they believed that college was a tool to assist them in reaching their goal of becoming professional athletes.

Cultural Factors

In schools, culture greatly shapes how groups of individuals and communities intermingle within their environment. More specifically, the values, beliefs, and attitudes possessed by those in power are steeped in race and class. This is critical for Black boys in schools, as in most cases their culture is not the dominate culture. Coupled with institutional racism, this has the potential to create a dynamic between Black boys and their teachers grounded in power and oppression. For Black boys in school, culture simultaneously influences how they see themselves and others. More specifically, the values and beliefs that students inherited from their homes and communities often differ from those taught at school and possessed by their teachers.

During the interviews, the boys and their parents believed that within the context of school, the dominate culture emphasized in schools was not their culture. All the boys commented on the role of race and the impact of their race on the beliefs and attitudes held by their teachers regarding their success in school. In addition, they emphasized that the dominate culture taught in school played a major role in how they viewed themselves as well as how others perceived them, namely their teachers and peers. Lastly, the boys believed that successful teacher student relationships were created when their teachers had a deep understanding of their culture and background.

Putting the pixels together: The teacher matters. As discussed earlier, the boys in the study had very strong convictions regarding the role of the teacher in their success. Some of

them were keenly aware of how their teachers viewed them as well as the impact of racial stereotypes on their perception and academic performance. Larry acknowledged the way his teacher looked at him made him uncomfortable:

My teacher would probably describe me as maybe crazy because some things that I do are a little bit crazy sometimes or maybe that I don't necessarily know, but maybe some things that she might think might be by sometimes the way that she might look at me or not look at me sometimes. Like her tone, yeah.

Clutch King said he got frustrated frequently at school because his teacher would refuse to help him. He believed that because he talked a lot in class, she treated him differently:

When I ask for help, instead of coming to me, she just goes to a different person or she just totally ignores me and helps everybody that asks her for help and because she does it a lot I feel bad. She thinks I am bad sometimes.

Like Clutch King, Jump Shot also noted his discomfort by how staff interacted with him:

The principal, every time I walked past him or something he just looked at me like you know weird. Like a kidnapper type look. He looked me up in the corner of his eye and kind of turn like that. It was kind of like, strange, like, I'm kind of creeped out by it. He did it mostly to me because I didn't see him do it to a lot of people. I thought he just didn't like me.

For Larry, his teacher's interactions with him affected how he saw himself as a student and his capability to complete work. He felt minimized:

Sometimes I'll get a squint or sometimes I would get maybe like not necessarily a mean look, but not a very happy look. Like it would really irritate me because at the end of the day if I didn't do any wrong then that's all that matters, but that just something that

happened that I didn't necessarily like. It made me feel small actually. It kind of made me feel like I wasn't a good student. Like I wasn't doing the best I could do when I was, but that is how it made me feel. I couldn't explain myself when I needed to or wanted to. I was getting interrupted. What I would have said didn't really matter to them or they felt like they didn't even know what I was saying or what I was saying didn't make sense.

Larry also shared he did not like his teacher because she ignored him in class and would not select him to answer questions. He believed that the teachers selected the white male students in the class because she believed they had the right answer.

So, the thing I don't like about my teacher is just like they said. She gonna look at me, look me right in my face, turn around and call on somebody white. I got my hands straight up. I'm like hello, hello. Then I will start whistling and she gets mad and then she will look over at me like this and then she looked mad. I'm like oh you took too long to call on me and then finally calls on me and then I'm the one that gets that question right.

Odell noted that he felt as if his teacher did not like him by the way she treated him, and her remarks made him dislike her and cause him to be unmotivated in class:

She was mean and racist. She always talked about the boys and made fun of them if they don't know something. It made me feel sad because everybody doesn't learn the same as other people.

CJ, a student at Parkside where the free and reduced lunch rate is around 15%, felt the race and gender of his teacher played a huge role in his desire to attend school. He also mentioned the lack of male teachers and Black teachers:

If I do something for my teacher, she's like thank you and I ask her, 'do you need any more help?' and she's like 'no.' But as soon as I walk away she calls out one of her star

students, which is what I like to call them because she just treats them like they're the best people on earth. She just like goes full head steam for them and she's like 'alright guys, I have this great program.' And I am like, 'what did I do to make you hate me so much?'

I've never had a Black teacher in my life. Like never, not even in summer school. I've never had a Black teacher. And I only had one good white teacher. She was really good and she allowed everyone to get the resources that they needed. The Black teacher in my school tries to teach like a white teacher and I don't have a problem with that. I just wish like she had her own personality or her way of teaching because she could be a better teacher. She just like stands over there in the group with all of those white teachers because they're trying to influence her to treat some of the Black boys differently. The teachers are always talking about, "Well your son is getting influenced by some of the other Black students." It's like well you're trying to influence teachers to treat me differently so yeah, I'm going to be influenced by someone who actually stands up for what they believe. Like there's no shame in that. The world is a place that is supposed to be free. If you can't be free and say what you wanna say, what's on your mind, what's the point.

Overall, as these quotes demonstrate, CJ believed that because there is only one black teacher in the school that she is influenced by her white colleagues to treat Black boys a certain way. He noted that she could benefit from being herself and stand up for something.

In summary, the Black boys in the study clearly expressed that their school culture is shaped by the culture of their teacher. The beliefs, values and attitudes that exist at school impact how they see themselves and how others view them.

Cultural weapons. Because one's culture contributes to how they are viewed by others and how they perceive themselves, it also unconsciously gives credence to the stereotypes used to create one's identity. More specifically, the assumptions possessed by others are based on their values, beliefs, and attitudes. Context is also critical when linked with culture as it plays a pivotal role in how one is treated. In the case of the Black boys in the study, their culture was used to form stereotypes that attacked their identity. That is, the boys in the study had very strong views about how they were perceived and, in turn, how they perceived themselves.

First, all of the boys in the study were keenly aware of the stereotypes that exist and how it influenced them as Black boys. Students noted that people's stereotypes or judgements of them as Black boys are based on the fact that they think Black boys are unmotivated and violent; their ideas are not based on what they know about Black boys as individuals. The participants shared:

They kinda think Black people don't care, you know. I can't swim, like that I don't care.

We all have a gun. They are saying that we are violent. (Jump Shot)

They basically saying that we can't work together and help each other and do good stuff.

Instead we are all getting into fights. They give up on us. (Odell)

It's like because the person is bigger than you doesn't mean you have to see them as a threat. Like, you judge me off what I look like. You don't know my mentality or my personality. So, like that race thing. They think if they know one person they know that race's personality. Not every person is the same. Like, I'm a Black boy and I'm not a bad person. I'm not going to go in there and throw fire bombs or whatever. (CJ)

I think they say the cans and cant's that we do. Even though we can do anything and they basically say that just because they think Black boys stay strapped. We are violent. They think we all got pistols. (Larry)

They basically judging me based on what they think and the stuff they hear, but they don't really know. (Jump Shot)

Second, students pointed out the importance of how kids in schools treat Black boys, indicating that students as well as teachers treat Black boys differently because of race. In these quotes, CJ recalled an incident that occurred in the bathroom where he overheard other non-Black boys talking about him and his friends:

People just start being rude and start talking about other people like Black boys that will make me mad and make me have a bad day talking about me and about my friends. Okay it doesn't matter what grade they are in like kindergarteners. They'll start talking about the Black boys. I'm like, can you stop because it's making me uncomfortable and it's making them uncomfortable.

Last year, my friend and I went to the restroom after lunch. So, last year we had a lot of sneaky kids in our class, so they would run to the restroom just to get away from the teacher and not go into class. So, my friend and I went in the restroom because his hands were sticky. So, a white boy came along and stands right next to us and said, "It's not our fault you fell in a puddle of mud." So that kind of made me uncomfortable. Then they start saying like why isn't there a white history month? It makes me feel like, sad because people are questioning it.

Similarly, parent participants highlighted their beliefs that society treated their sons differently based on their race and stereotypes about them. First, Mr. Travon noted that whites label Black boys and have privilege over them:

Of course. I'm a black man in society and I think that they are viewed by the color of their skin because like she said going into any white area or particular place where there's

majority of whites they're all reading and labeling you. They have the upper hand or privilege. So yes, I do think that Black boys are looked at I would say in a bad way, some type of way.

Second, Mr. Thomas believed that Black boys are viewed as threatening and are assumed to be criminals:

I definitely feel like they look at them different. I feel like automatically they look at them as a threat. Automatically they judge them and put them in the same group, thug, gangster, and they steal. If they're walking down the side of the street because they got on a hoodie, people might want to walk on the other side of the street.

Third, Mr. Tony recalled a time when he was walking and perceived to be a threat to the community where he lived and related it to what his son might experience. He gave the example of him being accosted by a white man in the community:

I remember being a young man and my mom had moved into this little apartment. Me and my brother were walking around. We were new to the neighborhood with no Black kids over there. Just me and my brother. This white man just stopped us. He grabbed me and we were just walking up there to meet my dad. We weren't even causing a ruckus or anything. We were just walking up the street minding our own business. We didn't have a radio, we didn't have anything. We were talking and walking to meet my dad.

In summary, the boys and parents believed that the assumptions, values, and beliefs held by their teachers and peers regarding were fueled by the stereotypes developed by society. More specifically, the Black boys emphasized how race was a main factor in how they experienced school culture and how others viewed them.

Self-identity as students. While the boys highlighted how the perceptions held about them were based on the values, beliefs and values of others, primarily the dominant culture, they still possessed a good sense of who they were as students and Black boys, which was contrary to the beliefs held by their communities and schools. They were also honest about any shortcomings. Six of the eight boys indicated they were average students, but they also recognized other attributes that characterized who they were as students.

First, many students, like Odell, described themselves as smart, funny, and trustworthy. CJ felt he was smart because he had opportunities that some of his Black male peers did not:

I would say I am a smart boy as a Black boy because I get to go to summer camps that a lot of my friends wouldn't get the chance to learn about. I am independent, a leader, a lot of those things.

Second, a variety of students noted how they were "average" as students, but that they were successful in other ways. Clutch King noted: "I am an okay student. I talk a lot and sometimes I am not really good. Sometimes I get frustrated. I am mean sometimes, and I don't listen." Tez described himself as an okay student who was acting up. He said, "I didn't have a good day every day. I was not perfect. I was just like acting up and wasn't listening."

Meanwhile, Larry remarked that is he a "jokester" sometimes, but he also had positive traits beyond his abilities as to succeed academically a student:

I am an average student. I am too much of probably a bit of a jokester sometimes towards other people. I am a helper and I can think of a lot of things. I am open minded. I am cool, funny and probably like sometimes attractive and I am also like a good partner or whatever you want to call it.

From Their Perspectives

The boys in the study firmly grasped what teachers and their parents needed to do to ensure their success. During the study, the boys provided suggestions regarding the approach teachers used to teach them as well as appropriate ways to discipline them. They noted that it was important for teachers to listen and to be fair. Encouragement from family members also helped them to be successful, the boys said.

The boys believed that teachers should be creative, patient, fair, and humorous. They should develop lessons that simplify material, and they should develop individual relationships with each student, to get to know them. Most important, teachers should *listen to Black boys*. Here are a variety of recommendations for teachers, from the students themselves:

Use a variety of teaching tools and teach in different ways based on what we need, not just what you want to do. You got to figure out how to teach us because we are not the same. (Odell)

Teachers should break thing down a little bit more and show you how to do something and then give you time to figure it out yourself. They should also use humor. (Larry)

Try to get to know us. Whatever they feel or think say it and make friends with us. Keep trying to help us and look out for what is really good for us. Don't be mean and try not to be so rough on us. (Clutch King)

Teachers should care about us so that we can reach our full potential. They should also explain the questions and answer our questions. (Fin)

Tell us to stop doing whatever we are doing. You don't necessarily have to be really strict and take away our whole privilege. Sit us down for like a minute, but do whatever helps us get to that quiet place and settle down is what they need to do. (CJ)

I would tell teachers that all the students aren't gonna be good. They will go over you and they will not listen to you all the time, but instead of giving the whole class a punishment address the person. The teacher could also talk to us too and advocate and if that doesn't work they should call our parents and our parents should come up and have a talk with the student and the teacher all together. (Tez)

Teachers need to know how to motivate us on what we do and how to do it. They should know working with us is hard work because sometimes we don't listen. Also, they should know that we are not bad. (Kevin)

Likewise, parent participants also expressed that schools should work with their sons to ensure their success by teaching good habits, disciplining them fairly, and offering respect. The parents shared the following advice for teachers:

Basically, instill good habits in them. Whether you're an educator or a parent. If you teach them good habits, they will go forth with that. (Travon, Jump Shot's uncle)

I think schools should be more willing to help Black boys if they need actual help. They should offer to stay after school to help them get a better grade in the class. (Asia, Jump Shot's sister)

I think respect on both ends. I know a lot of times we look at them as kids and we've all grown up where it's like respect your elders, but sometimes it makes them feel like they can't be respected as well. It's hard to respect your elders when they're being completely disrespectful and have no reason behind the choices that they're making and, so I think that a big thing because when you respect children they automatically respect you.

(Cheryl, Larry's mother)

In summary, the boys in the study vehemently expressed what they believed educators and parents needed to know in order for them to experience success as Black boys in school. All of the boys emphasized actions, if taken by the teacher, that would contribute to their overall success. More specifically, they highlighted the importance of listening, developing relationships, motivating them as students and using pedagogical approaches that will engaged them in learning.

Emergent Themes for Future Exploration

While the boys and their parents in the study held similar perspectives regarding factors that contributed to their success, data revealed several interesting findings regarding glaring differences between the Riverside and non-Riverside participants. For example, the data revealed that the participants in the study who attended non-Riverside schools' interviews conducted lasted, on average, thirty minutes longer than Riverside participant interviews. More specifically, from analysis of the interview and focus group transcripts the non-Riverside participants used a variety of complex and compound sentences and possessed a vaster vocabulary. The Riverside participants used more simple sentences and had a more limited vocabulary. In addition, during the focus group, the conversations were monopolized by the non-Riverside students. However, Odell a Riverside student, contributed to the focus group conversation four times more than the other three Riverside participants. Other emergent themes for future exploration include the exploration of the perspectives held by the non-Riverside students regarding the Riverside community and the schools within the community. As it relates to the parent focus group, the non-Riverside parents spoke more frequently during the discussion, with one Riverside parent not speaking at all.

Summary

The aim of this chapter was to report the findings from the study based on the data collected during the individual student interviews, student focus groups, and parent focus groups. From the interviews, the researcher garnered the perspectives of the Black boys and their parents. The researcher noted common themes from the data and reported solutions to addressing those barriers that impede the success of Black boys in school. Chapter Five will present the analysis of data from the study aligned to the research questions.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATION, AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

Conversations regarding ways to improve public school education, particularly as it relates to the education of Black boys, have intensified with the increased fatalities of Black boys at the hands of law enforcement. As noted in the review of literature, the opportunity gaps experienced by Black boys continues to reveal the inequities that exist within the nation's schools. Not only do these gaps create barriers to resources that support this underserved population, they reflect the need to address the plight and inequities experienced by Black boys not only in society, but also within public education (Howard, 2014).

Overwhelming data suggest that Black children, perhaps more than any other group of students, experience unique challenges in schools that interrupt their learning opportunities and hinder their educational outcomes (Carter & Welner, 2013; Howard, 2010, 2013; Howard & Reynolds, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Milner, 2015; Nasir, 2012). Black boys are disciplined more frequently and receive more out-of-school suspensions and expulsions than their white peers, which ultimately impact their ability to be successful. Because Black boys tend to disconnect from school as early as kindergarten (Carter, 2003), this study attempted to find ways for educators and the parents of late elementary-aged Black boys to experience academic and behavioral success prior to transitioning to middle school.

This study explored the factors perceived by Black boys, within the context of late elementary school, that contributed to their behavioral and academic success. The focus for this study emerged as I observed my son experience challenges during his formative years and from my work as a principal at both the elementary and middle school levels. Utilizing individual

student interviews, student focus groups, and parent focus groups, data were collected from participants to develop a narrative of effective education for this underserved population of students.

In earlier chapters, the researcher presented the research questions, introduced and reviewed literature related to the success of Black boys in school, and outlined the methodology of the study. Chapter Four presented the findings from the study. Chapter Five begins with a summary of the findings and the relationship to literature on Black boys. Next, implications of the study will be presented from the lens of policy makers, school districts, principals, teachers, and parents. Lastly, the chapter will conclude with recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

The Black boys who participated in the study openly shared their experiences and views regarding their success and/or lack of success in school. In Chapter Two, the researcher examined existing literature on factors that contributed to the academic and behavioral success of Black boys. From the analysis of the collected data, themes that correlated to the academic and behavioral success of elementary-aged Black boys emerged. Across all of the participants five themes surfaced: (a) Visualizing Success (definition of success, perceptions of failure, ego, teacher, family/community, and personal motivation), (b) Cultural Weapons (stereotypes, identity, and race), (c) Making a Way (access and opportunity), (d) The Teacher Matters (race, relationships, oppression, teacher perceptions) and (e) The Rules Only Apply to Us.

Visualizing Success

During data analysis, agreement emerged among the boys in the study that various factors contributed to them being successful. The boys cited that their parents, family, study habits and focus on school were critical to attaining life goals. In addition, the boys noted that attending

college, which was a conduit to becoming a professional athlete, was the most significant factor to determine their success. Although the boys disclosed they did not like school, the consensus among them was that they desired to go on to college.

From the literature reviewed in Chapter Two regarding Black boys' success in school, three of the boys emphasized long-range effects of doing well in school and that success in school is predictive of their success in the future (Guy, 2014). As it related to doing well in school, Larry noted that habits and focusing in school would give him the knowledge needed to do what he wanted to do in life. Like Larry, Tez believed that getting good grades would help him go to college and attain a master's degree.

Role of Family

The boys in this study acknowledged the role of their families and parents in their academic success. Research showed that motivation, encouragement, discourse about grades and incentives all were contributing factors. The boys indicated that when their parents were actively involved in their education they did better in school. While the boys emphasized the support of their family, the role of the mother specifically was highlighted. Findings from the study, also indicated that extrinsic incentives played as much of a critical role in the success of the boys as did motivation and encouragement.

As noted in the review of literature, Kaplan (1999) revealed that parents contributed greatly to the success of their children academically. Similarly, researchers have also found that Black males experience success when they are supported by their family and mentors (Bridges, 2010; Harper, 2006, 2009, 2012; Hebert, 2002; Herndon, 2003; Strayhorn, 2008; Williamson, 2010). This study revealed that the boys believed that high expectations and support from parents and family contributed greatly to their academic success. From the data collected, the researcher

concluded that elementary-aged Black boys who are supported by their parents or extended family are more likely to experience success in school.

Pedagogy Matters

As discussed in the literature review, students and teachers often come from seemingly dissimilar backgrounds and teachers must “construct pedagogical practices in ways that are culturally relevant, racially affirming, and socially meaningful for their students” (Howard, 2003 p. 195). As reflected in the data, the boys in the study agreed that teachers who utilized various approaches to assist them with learning skills and concepts taught in class contributed to their overall success. When teachers used various engagement strategies that allowed the boys an opportunity to work with friends and socialize about their learning, they said they were more motivated to learn. More specifically, the boys pointed out that the teacher’s use of technology, hands-on type work, group work, reteaching of skills and concepts, and scaffolding of learning ensured their academic success. It should be noted that four of the students from Riverside indicated that their teachers frequently limited their opportunity to work in groups because they would engage in off-topic conversations that led to them getting in trouble. The assertions made by the boys align with the literature reviewed on how teachers’ perceptions of Black boys impact their teaching (Bakari, 2003).

Role of Friends

The review of literature, illustrated how building strong relationships with peers within school programs increases the likelihood of success for Black boys (Arthur, 2016). Overall, the influence of friends, as reported by the participants in the study, varied based on the school and community where they resided. The boys in the study acknowledged that attending school was

important to them because they could socialize and play with friends. In addition, seven of the eight boys noted that being popular at school among peers increased their desire to attend school and be successful. In describing their best traits, the boys cited a range of responses, including being good at sports, loyalty to friends, and being physically attractive.

From the data, the researcher concluded that the school attended by the boys evoked different responses. Three of the boys, who attend schools with a free and reduced lunch rate lower than 33%, held opposing views from their peers in the study who attend school at Riverside, where the free and reduced lunch rate was 94%. This is critical to note as it speaks to the impact of concentrated poverty on how Black boys experience school. More specifically, two of the boys indicated that their white peers did not want to interact with them if they were not “smart” and made good grades. In contrast, one of the boys indicated that his white peers wanted to be friends only with Black boys who were not as “smart” as them or made lower grades. Contrary to the experiences of students from other schools, the Black boys from Riverside shared dissimilar perspectives. Four of the boys from Riverside indicated that friends came around more and often wanted to cheat, using their work, because of their good grades. The Riverside boys also mentioned that they were frequently criticized by their peers for making good grades and doing well in school.

The researcher concluded that the role friends play in the success of Black boys in schools is important, but it is the function of that role that determines the type of impact that friends have, negatively or positively, on the academic success of Black boys. In line with the work of Terrell Strayhorn (2008), several of the boys in the study noted that their friends greatly influenced their participation in school. For CJ:

...The best thing about school I'll probably have to say recess because you can get away from all of the drama and stuff. You just be who you want to be with your friends and have your free time and just talk to them.

CJ's reflection regarding what he likes most about school aligns with Strayhorn's (2008) belief that students' sense of belonging impacts the educational outcomes for Black males.

The Rules Only Apply to Us

Ron Ferguson (2003) and Guy (2014) make the point that society's perception of Black boys as criminals and as members of endangered species plays a critical role in identifying, classifying, and administering consequences by adults. The Black boys in the study were attuned to the unfair treatment by their teachers. They emphasized that their teachers frequently did not listen to their explanations and regularly rendered illogical, punitive measures that also resulted in their peers being punished. Further analysis of the findings uncovered the boys' opinions about the beliefs, values, and negative assumptions their teachers held about them. All the referred to themselves as "bad" based on how their teachers treated them. They recognized that the challenges they face with the consequences and rules in school are similar to the ones they experienced within their communities. Larry, a student at Orchard Heights, captured the views of the group by stating, "It is expectations versus reality." Larry's sentiments are further reinforced by Bakari (2003) who posited that teacher bias impacts the expectations that teachers have of African American students.

Two interesting findings surfaced during the study that correlated with the review of literature produced by Solórzano (1997), indicating that deficit-thinking and stereotypes regarding students of color, by teachers, contributes to how they are treated. The first was that the boys who did not attend Riverside schools acknowledged that their race played a major role

in how and why they were disciplined. While only two of the boys from Riverside indicated that race was a factor in how they were treated, the other two boys believed that how their teacher's view them fueled how they were disciplined.

Secondly, all three students from non-Riverside schools, indicated that the teachers' body language and poignant looks were other forms of discipline, while only two of the five boys from Riverside indicated that the facial expressions and body language of their teachers were used to convey their displeasure with them. The boys indicated the race of their teachers as White. The behaviors of the teachers described by the boys in the study are examples of microaggressions, as noted in the review of literature (Solórzano et al., 2000).

The researcher concluded that Black boys' behavioral choices were closely aligned to their perceptions of being treated fairly by their teachers and whether they believe their teacher's assumptions about them, as Black boys, contribute to how they are disciplined. The findings in the study confirmed the assertions by Pedro Noguera (2003) that Black boys are in perilous times at school and, therefore, experience higher suspension and expulsion rates. Moreover, Black boys are subjected to displaced stereotypes and viewed as not having the scholastic aptitude to succeed in school based on levels of poverty. Too often society has become accustomed to Black boys being incarcerated, having a short life-expectancy, dropping out of school, and succumbing to the narratives that have been created for them.

Community Impact

Flores (2007) purported that, "The least prepared teacher recruits are disproportionately found in under-resourced, hard-to-staff schools serving predominantly low-income and minority students..." (p. 32) and the communities where the schools reside play a major role in the recruitment of quality teachers. Consistent with the findings of Douglas (2016), all the boys in

the study cited, overwhelmingly, that their communities have an enormous impact on their success as Black boys. The boys agreed that access to quality programs within their communities contributed to their success in schools. They also unanimously acknowledged that they are misunderstood by their communities and believed that they are not respected.

Several key findings emerged from the study regarding the role of the community. First, the three Black boys who were not students at Riverside all believed that crime-ridden neighborhoods, where rioting occurs, are bad and, therefore, produced bad teachers. They emphasized that those communities also did not provide access to quality programs for the Black boys. While all of the five boys from Riverside noted that their community experienced a great deal of crime, specifically referencing the death of an unarmed teen by law enforcement and a lack of access to quality programs, they still believed their community contributed to their success. Cooper and Jordan (2003) concluded that “communities are marred by multiple social ills such as violence and crime, unemployment, drug abuse, poor public health, and teenage childbirth, along with an educational system that reproduces intergenerational poverty rather than transforming it” (p. 381).

Secondly, the three boys from non-Riverside schools, cited the over-abundance of activities available to them, the absence of major crime, and the diversity that exists within their community. Jump Shot noted that his neighborhood was a good place to live. “My neighborhood it’s a good place to stay because there are a lot of white people”, he said. Larry, too, noted that he lived in a good neighborhood:

I live in Orchard Heights and I live in a good neighborhood. It is fun and has a lot of my friends who live there. My neighborhood has a pool, basketball court, coffee shop, a

bakery, volleyball courts, amphitheater, a market, a restaurant. It has a lot of nice, cool fund things and has a park. A lot of people like to hang out there.

Conversely, the Riverside student's descriptions of their communities and programs available were limited at best. Kevin noted that he felt his community did not offer him any opportunities to succeed:

...not that much because there are a lot of thing going on around my neighborhood. Like the killing of an unarmed teenager and rioting happened. My classmate was killed in her house. There is not really much to do.

The lack of faith in the boys' community was also echoed by Odell, a student attending Riverside.

Looking at the data, all the boys who did not attend Riverside schools lived in a two-parent household. However, of the five Riverside students in the study, only one resided in a two-parent household. This was highlighted by Odell, a student at Riverside, who stated, "Life is different than other people. It's harder. I got a single mom and she do everything for me." While the literature review did not examine the impact of single parent households on Black boys' academic success, the researcher deduced that it may be a factor worthy of future exploration.

The research findings indicated that the geographical location of the Black boys in the study influenced how they perceived the role their communities played in their success in school. Moreover, the three Black boys who did not attend Riverside believed that their communities had a great impact on their success in school. While the boys in the study from Riverside believed that one's community influences one's success in school, they did not believe their community offered such opportunities. Lastly, the researcher concluded from the data that the

boys believed that access to quality programs and economic freedom contributed to their success as well.

Making A Way

According to Cooper and Jordan (2003) Black students who typically attend large urban schools with concentrated levels of poverty experience generational poverty. Because living in poverty has the potential to heighten the desire for success, the Black boys in the study emphasized their aim of becoming professional athletes to support their families and achieve economic wealth.

There was unanimous agreement by all eight boys in the study that economic freedom and financial wealth were acquired by becoming a professional athlete. The emergence of this finding was revealing, especially since three of the boys do not reside in areas with concentrated poverty. The boys also noted that they viewed college as a pre-requisite to becoming a professional athlete as well. While all of the boys acknowledged that when you have money you get to make decisions, they were not able to articulate the relationship between acquired wealth and the concept of power. From the data, the researcher affirmed Delpit's (2006) views that, "Those with power are frequently least aware of- or least willing to acknowledge- its existence. Those with less power are often most aware of its existence" (p. 24).

The parents in the study disagreed with the shared perceptions of their son's regarding pathways to economic wealth. They viewed strong work habits as a means to change their son's life trajectory. While all of the parents indicated that college was an opportunity for them to be successful, they did not believe that college defined the success of their boys.

The Teacher Matters

The data analysis of the benefits of nurturing teacher-student relationships on Black boys validated an assumption made in the literature by Sara Lightfoot (1978) in which she suggests that teachers develop their context of students by using race, sex, and ethnicity instead of fostering relationships and seeking to understand who they are as individuals. Teacher-student relationships, from the data, proved to be a critical cultural factor that impacted student outcomes and their perceptions of self. For example, CJ's description of an experience with a school staff member confirms Lightfoot's hypothesis:

He looked them up in a corner of his eye and kind of turned like that. It was kind of, like strange. He did it mostly to me because I don't see him do it to a lot of people. I just thought he did like me, but when I had two friends in the stairway I got in trouble and they did not. Well, I guess both of them never do nothing wrong or it's probably because they are White.

The Black boys and their parents acknowledged that the culture brought from home was not the culture found within their schools. This awareness validated the notion shared by Bourdieu (1977) for why some students succeed in school while others fail. In addition, the boys in the study agreed that teachers rarely took the time to understand them, which impacted their ability to be successful in schools. In addition, the findings revealed that the Black boys emphasized that their race and the stereotypes held about them by their teachers contributed to how others perceived them as well as how they perceived themselves. The data support the assertions reviewed in the literature by Baker (1999) and Aultman, Schutz, and Williams-Johnson (2009), noting that stereotypes held by classroom teachers about Black boys may limit their abilities to develop nurturing relationships and to understand their students.

Lastly, the boys in the study, noted that the low expectations held by their teachers regarding their ability to complete work impacted their motivation to complete school work. The boys also cited that the race and gender of their teachers contributed to the academic performance of Black boys. Odell, a student at Riverside, recalled switching a class due to the racial undertones of some comments made by his teacher.

My first class, she put me in a corner by myself and did not help me at all. She joked around a lot about me being Black already and not being in the sun. She was White. She was a racist. She is talking about, “Your messed up.” It made me feel mad. She don’t care about kids.

Odell’s encounter confirms Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso’s (2000) assertions about the bias held by those in power. Odell’s teacher, from his account of the incident, displayed behaviors considered to be innocuous and insidious which can be more debilitating to Black boys and lead to more racial stereotypes.

The boys in the study believed that nurturing teacher student relationships that focused on both the ability and background of Black boys could encourage their success in school. They also cited that teachers who demonstrate genuine care for children and dismissed their beliefs and values, could also influence the success of Black boys. According to Baker (1999) and Crosnoe, Johnson, and Elder (2004) supportive teacher-student interactions and relationships are related to increased student learning outcomes.

From the data, the researcher discovered that the three students from non-Riverside schools emphasized that the race of their teacher was a major factor regarding how their teacher viewed them. This group of boys also revealed that the Black teachers at their school, one at each site, “taught White”. While the race of the teacher was indicated as a factor for two of the boys

attending Riverside, all five boys who attend Riverside emphasized that their teachers' beliefs and assumptions about them were more prevalent in how they were treated.

The researcher concluded from the findings that in order for Black boys to be successful in school, teachers must dismiss their perceived stereotypes of Blacks boys and take time to develop an understanding of this group of students' cultural backgrounds. Lastly, teachers must have high expectations for students to motivate them toward self-actualization.

Cultural Weapons

The boys in the study affirmed that the views held of them by their teachers and society contributed to their lack of success. The views, ranging from Black boys being violent and possessing an "I don't care" attitude to, low expectations, and inability to collaborate, all contributed to the lack of success for Black boys. According to Strayhorn (2008) Black boys today are often treated based on stereotypes developed by others e.g. dangerous, lazy, uneducable, etc. Similarly, Baker (1999) and Aultman, Schutz, and Williams-Johnson (2009) posited that the stereotypes held by classroom teachers about Black boys may limit their ability to develop nurturing relationships and to understand their students.

From the findings, the researcher deduced that the boys were casualties of misplaced beliefs and assumptions that they were a "stereotype threat" from their teachers, communities, and media. Because of their treatment, Black boys did not feel supported or valued which could result in them disassociating from the experience (Steele, 1999). Therefore, the researcher could validate that regardless of context, Black boys want to be respected, have their potential recognized, be viewed as individuals, and not be labeled as violent or dangerous.

The findings revealed that where students resided impacts their perception of the narrative held by society. For example, the students who attended Riverside emphasized how

their teachers and community believed that Black boys were unable to collaborate and that teachers have low expectations of them. Conversely, the boys who attend schools outside of Riverside noted that stereotypes based on their size and race contributed more to them being viewed the same as other Black boys from other communities. CJ, a student at Parkside (19.86% free and reduced lunch), emphasized that he was nothing like the boys who threw fire bombs. The researcher found this compelling because CJ reinforced the differences between the Riverside students and him.

Self-Identity

As cited in the literature review, Black boys who have a strong racial identity tend to fair better academically (Arrington, Hall and Stevenson, 2003). While the boys in the study acknowledged that stereotypes were used to define them, they believed they possessed a strong sense of who they were despite them. According to the literature review, the stereotypes typically held about Black students as criminals and endangered are further demonized through various forms of media (Ferguson, A., 2000). A reoccurring theme, among six of the eight boys, was that they viewed themselves as average students. They also noted that they were bad, got in trouble frequently, talked a lot and were jokesters. While a variety of literature studied how identity was developed by Black boys, Solórzano's (1997) notation of the impact of stereotypes on the development of deficit thinking correlated with the sentiments expressed by the boys in the study.

The parents in the study emphasized how they believed race influenced how their sons were treated. A finding that surfaced is that the boys did not necessarily base their identity solely on how successful they were academically, but on factors such as attractiveness or humor. However, they noted that their peers perceived their identities through grade attainment and

sports prowess. Another finding that emerged was how non-Riverside students indicated they were smart, but qualified it based on their race.

Black Boys' Perspectives

An analysis of the findings revealed that Black boys are keenly aware of what is needed to ensure their success in school. The boys openly shared their perspectives regarding what teachers, parents, and the community needed to be aware of to ensure their current and future success. The boys offered the following advice:

1. Break things down a little bit more, show us how to do something, and after they show us let us figure it out ourselves.
2. Teach for us, don't just do what you want to do.
3. Figure out how to teach the kid because every kid isn't the same.
4. Explain the questions and see that Black boys can reach their potential.
5. Teachers should know that I like sports and they can give an example of something and use a basketball player.
6. They need to know that we are smart.
7. Teachers should just tell us to stop doing something and they don't necessarily have to be really strict and take away our whole privilege.
8. Teachers can ask our parents what they do to calm us down.
9. If you see us playing in class that does not mean we are bad.
10. If somebody is doing something bad, know how to point him out instead of giving the whole class a punishment.
11. Care about us.
12. Keep trying to help us and look out for what is good in us.

13. Share whatever they feel or think and make friends with us.
14. Listen to us. We have a lot to say.
15. They should talk to us and advocate for us.
16. They should call his parents and the parents should come up and have a talk with the student and the teacher all together.
17. Try not to be so rough on us.
18. Be fair to us because we can tell when you are not.
19. We all are not violent.
20. Teachers should use humor with us.

Implications for Practice

Schools. In order for Black boys to experiences success in school, school systems will have to work to develop hiring practices that will aid them with identifying a diverse group of applicants as well as tools that will assist with identifying whether candidates possess cultural competency. In addition, school systems would benefit from providing professional development to teachers aligned to culturally relevant teacher practices. Because parents influence the success of Black boys in school, schools will have to identify ways to engage parents around parental involvement and strategies to support their sons at home. Because fairness and discipline practices were cited frequently by the boys in the study, school districts would also benefit from developing a system-wide approach for addressing the behaviors exhibited by Black boys. Because the voices of Black boys' matter, it would be beneficial for school districts to implement, as part of the teacher evaluation process, a method for allowing this underserved population to provide feedback to their teachers. To address the implicit bias and stereotypes held about Black boys, school districts should develop a platform for conversations regarding

race, values, beliefs and assumption to occur at the macro and micro-level. Lastly, the results from the study were clear regarding the absence of male teachers of color within schools in critical circumstances and because of such school districts would benefit from partnering with businesses and the community to develop a school-based, goal oriented, mentoring program for Black boys that guarantees support from elementary school through college.

Colleges and universities. The voices and perspectives of the boys were quite compelling regarding the role of the teacher in their success and because of colleges and universities will be required to critically examine their programs and approach with teachers in preparation for cultural diversity in schools. To accomplish such, colleges and universities would benefit from developing courses that define culture within the context of education while emphasizing the impact of the teacher's own ideologies and how they impact those around them and their ability to socialize within the context of school. Because early exposure to the classroom and community are key to shaping the narratives of pre-service teachers working with Black boys, it is critical that college and universities create a pipeline that enables them to have opportunities to begin practicum work in schools as early as freshman year. One of the most critical aspects of the data collected from the study has implications on the need for the development of pre-service teachers' ability to critique and reflect upon critical pedagogy in peer and group relationships. If colleges and universities seek a role in reform efforts for Black boys, it is also critical that they examine current curricula to ensure that content is being taught through the eyes of the students that they will service. Colleges and universities would benefit from investing time, during the scope of the teacher education program, to develop pre-service teachers' soft skills, strategies used to develop relationships, and how to listen critically to the students they service. Because the results from the study indicated the need to increase the

presence of teachers of color in education, colleges and universities would benefit from intentionally developing partnerships with school districts in urban environment to create a pipeline to teacher educator programs. Lastly, examining the admittance criteria and providing incentives for individuals of color interested in entering the field of education may contribute to closing the gap between teachers of color and non-teachers of color.

Policy makers. The results from this study have various implications for policy makers. Because Black boys from concentrated areas of poverty frequently drop out of high school and have difficulty matriculating through college, it is critical for policy makers to ensure adequate resources are made available Black boys as they have a critical role in improving their life trajectory. As a means to support the need for “equity in an inequitable society” (Noguera, 2003), policy makers should focus on the following initiatives:

1. Increase post-secondary funding for Black males
2. Allocate funding for preparation for college preparatory programs
3. Utilize an equity based approach for college funding
4. Develop adult learning programs for Black males in the area of literacy
5. Develop funding to support technical education
6. Allocate funding to support parenting programs

Recommendations for Future Research

This study sought to identify the factors, perceived by elementary-aged Black boys, that contributed to their academic and behavioral success as well as the structural and cultural factors that they considered most important for their success in school. While the study focused on hearing the voices of Black boys across four school sites, further research is needed to hear additional voices of Black boys who have experienced success in school. Because the findings

reveal that context matters, future research could identify participants from multiple schools within the same school district. It is also recommended that future research include the review of additional forms of data so that the researcher can triangulate it with the data collected during the interviews and focus groups. The data also revealed the concept of “teaching White” that proves to be worthy of further exploration in future research. Lastly, the data uncovered an interesting finding regarding the difference between the boys and parents of Riverside and non-Riverside schools which could prove to be worthy for future research.

Conclusion

The data collected from this study should provoke school systems, colleges and universities, communities, families and parents to critically examine their influence on the academic and behavioral success of Black boys. School systems need to implement culturally relevant discipline techniques to address behavioral concerns; provide teaches with professional development on cultural competency and relationship building that is aligned with engagement strategies that foster collaboration and socialization; develop a platform to foster communication between the parents of Black boys and school; provide teachers with professional development aligned to engagement strategies that foster collaboration and socialization; develop a platform to foster communication between the parents of Black boys and school, implement programs to address stereotypes through cultural awareness; and work with communities to develop programs that will provide access to programming as a means to create a pipeline to college. Finally, because the teaching force consists primarily of two-thirds white females, teacher preparation programs must identify ways to attract more students of color.

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APPENDIX A

Informed Consent

1. Youth Assent Form
2. Parent Permission Form
3. Parent Participation Form

Youth Assent Form

University of Missouri, Columbia

YOUTH ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Through Their Eyes: Structural and Cultural Factors that Shape the Academic Performance and Behavior of Young Black Boys

We are asking you to participate in a research study conducted by Bonita Jamison, a graduate student in the Department of Education Leadership and Policy Analysis at University of Missouri-Columbia, under the guidance of Drs. Lisa Dorner and Ty-Ron Douglas, Professors in the Department of Education Leadership and Policy Analysis at University of Missouri-Columbia. You were selected as a participant in this study because you are a fifth-grade Black boy. Your participation in this research study is voluntary.

Why is this study being done?

This study aims to understand factors that you believe enhances your behavioral and academic success.

What will happen if I take part in this research study?

Please talk this over with your parents before you decide whether or not to participate. We will also ask your parents to give their permission for you to take part in this study, but even if your parents say “yes” you can still decide not to do this.

If you volunteer to participate in this study, we would ask you to participate in one focus group (a group interview with up to 7 other students) and one interview to be conducted individually. You will be asked questions related to what you believe contributes to your academic success and why. You will also be asked questions related to what you believe contributes to your behavioral success and why.

How long will I be in the research study?

Participation in the study will take a total of about three hours within the next month.

Are there any potential risks or discomforts that my child can expect from this study?

There are no anticipated risks or discomforts, but if you are uncomfortable at ANY time, we will immediately stop the activity. You may also skip any questions you do not want to answer.

Are there any potential benefits if I participate?

You may benefit from the study because it will provide information on ways to improve teacher and principal practices. Also, the results of the research may add to our understanding about ways to improve the academic and behavioral success of Black boys.

Will I receive any payment if he/she participates in this study?

You will receive a fifty-dollar gift card after completion of the study.

Will information about my participation be kept confidential?

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can identify you will remain confidential (Missouri Assessment Program data, Galileo data, Fountas & Pinnell data, and Office Discipline Referral (ODR) data). Confidentiality will be maintained by never placing your name on any forms, audio recordings, or transcripts. Data will be kept for a period of seven years after the study has been completed.

Withdrawal of participation by the investigator

The investigator may withdraw you from participating in this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so. If your schedule does not permit you to participate in the focus group or if your behavior disrupts the focus group, you may have to drop out, even if you would like to continue. The investigator will make the decision and let you know if it is not possible for you to continue. The decision may be made either to protect your health and safety, or to protect the health and safety of others.

What are my rights if I take part in this study?

You may withdraw your assent at any time and discontinue your participation without penalty or loss of benefits to which you were otherwise entitled. You can choose whether or not you want to be in this study. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may leave the study at any time without consequences of any kind. You are not waiving any of your legal rights if you choose to be in this research study. You may refuse to answer any questions that you do not want to answer and still remain in the study.

Who can answer questions I might have about this study?

If you have any questions about the study or if you would like additional information, please call Bonita Jamison at 314.488.5076 or bejwf9@mail.missouri.edu or Professor Lisa Dorner Ph.D., at 573.882.7938 or dornerl@missouri.edu or Professor Ty-Ron Douglas Ph.D., at 573.882.1573 or douglstyr@missouri.edu. You may contact the University of Missouri Institutional Review Board (which is a group of people who review the research studies to protect participants' rights) if you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant and/or concerns about the study, or if you feel under any pressure to enroll or to continue to participate in this study. The IRB can be reached directly by telephone at (573)882-9585 and e-mail umcresearchcirb@missouri.edu.

SIGNATURE OF THE STUDY PARTICIPANT

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

SIGNATURE OF PERSON OBTAINING ASSENT

In my judgment the participant is voluntarily and knowingly agreeing to participate in this research study.

Name of Person Obtaining Parental Permission

Contact Number

Signature of Person Obtaining Parental Permission

Date

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records.

Parent Permission Form
University of Missouri, Columbia

PARENT PERMISSION FOR MINOR TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Through Their Eyes: Structural and Cultural Factors that Shape the Academic Performance and Behavior of Young Black Boys

We are asking your permission to allow your child to participate in a research study conducted by Bonita Jamison, a graduate student in the Department of Education Leadership and Policy Analysis at University of Missouri-Columbia, under the guidance of Drs. Lisa Dorner and Ty-Ron Douglas, Professors in the Department of Education Leadership and Policy Analysis at University of Missouri-Columbia. Your child was selected as a possible participant in this study because he is a fifth-grade Black boy. Your child's participation in this research study is voluntary.

Why is this study being done?

This study aims to understand factors perceived by Black boys that enhances their behavioral and academic success.

What will happen if my child takes part in this research study?

If you agree to allow your child to participate in this study, we would ask him to participate in one focus group (a group interview with up to 7 other students) and one interview to be conducted individually. He will be asked questions related to what he believes contributes to his academic success and why. He will also be asked questions related to what he believes contributes to his behavioral success and why.

How long will my child be in the research study?

Participation in the study will take a total of about three hours within the next month.

Are there any potential risks or discomforts that my child can expect from this study?

There are no anticipated risks or discomforts, but if your child seems uncomfortable at ANY time, we will immediately stop the activity. He may also skip any questions he does not want to answer.

Are there any potential benefits if my child participates?

Your child may benefit from the study because it will provide information on ways to improve teacher and principal practices. Also, the results of the research may add to our understanding about ways to improve the academic and behavioral success of Black boys.

Will my child receive any payment if he/she participates in this study?

Your child will receive a fifty-dollar gift card after completion of the study.

Will information about my child's participation be kept confidential?

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can identify your child will remain confidential (Missouri Assessment Program data, Galileo data, Fountas & Pinnell data, and Office Discipline Referral (ODR) data). Confidentiality will be maintained by never placing your child's name on any forms, audio recordings, or transcripts. All data will be kept for a period of seven years after the study has been completed.

Withdrawal of participation by the investigator

The investigator may withdraw your child from participating in this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so. If your child's schedule does not permit him to participate in the focus group or if his behavior disrupts the focus group, your child may have to drop out, even if he would like to continue. The investigator will make the decision and let you know if it is not possible for your child to continue. The decision may be made either to protect your child's health and safety, or to protect the health and safety of others.

What are my rights if my child takes part in this study?

You may withdraw your permission at any time and discontinue your child's participation without penalty or loss of benefits to which you or your child were otherwise entitled. You can choose whether or not to allow your child to be in this study. If you agree to allow your child to be in this study, you may withdraw your permission at any time without consequences of any kind. You are not waiving any of your or your child's legal rights if you choose to allow your child to be in this research study. Your child's interview and focus group will be audio recorded.

Who can answer questions I might have about this study?

If you have any questions about the study or if you would like additional information, please call Bonita Jamison at 314.488.5076 or bejwf9@mail.missouri.edu or Professor Lisa Dorner Ph.D., at 573.882.7938 or dornerl@missouri.edu or Professor Ty-Ron Douglas Ph.D., at 573.882.1573 or douglastyr@missouri.edu. You may contact the University of Missouri Institutional Review Board (which is a group of people who review the research studies to protect participants' rights) if you have questions regarding your child's rights as a research and/or concerns about the study, or if you feel under any pressure to enroll your child or to continue to participate in this study. The IRB can be reached directly by telephone at (573)882-9585 and e-mail umcresearchcirb@missouri.edu.

SIGNATURE OF PARENT OR LEGAL GUARDIAN

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to allow my child to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Child

Name of Parent or Legal Guardian

Phone number

Signature of Parent or Legal Guardian

Date

SIGNATURE OF PERSON OBTAINING PARENTAL PERMISSION

In my judgment the parent or legal guardian is voluntarily and knowingly giving permission for his/her child to participate in this research study.

Name of Person Obtaining Parental Permission

Contact Number

Signature of Person Obtaining Parental Permission

Date

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records.

Participant Consent Form

University of Missouri, Columbia

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Through Their Eyes: Structural and Cultural Factors that Shape the Academic Performance and Behavior of Young Black Boys

We are asking you to participate in a research study conducted by Bonita Jamison, a graduate student in the Department of Education Leadership and Policy Analysis at University of Missouri-Columbia, under the guidance of Drs. Lisa Dorner and Ty-Ron Douglas, Professors in the Department of Education Leadership and Policy Analysis at University of Missouri-Columbia. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because your child is a fifth-grade Black boy. Your participation in this research study is voluntary.

Why is this study being done?

This study aims to understand factors perceived by Black boys that enhances their behavioral and academic success.

What will happen if I take part in this research study?

If you volunteer to participate in this study, we will ask you to participate in one sixty to ninety-minute focus group. Questions will aim to gain your perspective of the information shared by your son during the individual interview or focus group held.

How long will I be in the research study?

Participation in the study will take a total of about sixty to ninety minutes within the next month.

Are there any potential risks or discomforts that I can expect from this study?

There are no anticipated risks or discomforts, but if you are uncomfortable at ANY time, we will immediately stop the activity. You may also skip any questions you do not want to answer.

Are there any potential benefits if I participate?

You may benefit from the study because it will provide information on ways to improve teacher and principal practices. Also, the results of the research may add to our understanding about ways to improve the academic and behavioral success of Black boys.

Will I receive any payment if I participate in this study?

You will receive no payment for your participation.

Will information about me and my participation be kept confidential?

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can identify you will remain confidential. Confidentiality will be maintained by never placing your name on any forms, audio recordings, or transcripts. All data will be kept for a period of seven years after the study has been completed.

Withdrawal of participation by the investigator

The investigator may withdraw you from participating in this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so. If your schedule does not permit you to participate, you may have to drop out, even if you would like to continue. The investigator will make the decision and let you know if it is not possible for you to continue. The decision may be made either to protect your health and safety, or to protect the health and safety of others.

What are my rights if I take part in this study?

You may withdraw your permission at any time and discontinue your participation without penalty or loss of benefits to which you were otherwise entitled. You can choose whether or not you want to be in this study. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw your permission at any time without consequences of any kind. You are not waiving any of your legal rights if you choose to participate in this research study. The focus group will be audio recorded.

Who can answer questions I might have about this study?

If you have any questions about the study or if you would like additional information, please call Bonita Jamison at 314.488.5076 or bejwf9@mail.missouri.edu or Professor Lisa Dorner Ph.D., at 573.882.7938 or dornerl@missouri.edu or Professor Ty-Ron Douglas Ph.D., at 573.882.1573 or douglastyr@missouri.edu. You may contact the University of Missouri Institutional Review Board (which is a group of people who review the research studies to protect participants' rights) if you have questions regarding your child's rights as a research and/or concerns about the study, or if you feel under any pressure to enroll your child or to continue to participate in this study. The IRB can be reached directly by telephone at (573)882-9585 and e-mail umcresearchcirb@missouri.edu.

SIGNATURE OF STUDY PARTICIPANT

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

SIGNATURE OF PERSON OBTAINING CONSENT

In my judgment the participant voluntarily and knowingly giving informed consent and possesses the legal capacity to participate in this research study.

Name of Person Obtaining Consent

Contact Number

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records.

APPENDIX B

Interview Protocol

1. Student Interview Protocol
2. Student Focus Group Protocol
3. Student Focus Group Images
4. Parent Focus Group Protocol

Student Interview Protocol

Participating Student: _____

Date: _____

Start Time: _____

Introduction:

Good afternoon. Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today on your feelings about being a Black boy in school and what you feel is important for you to be the best you can be. My name is Bonita Jamison, and I will be asking you a few questions. In order to make sure that I remember what you say, I will be recording our conversation.

I want you to know that what you tell me will not be shared with your teacher or principal. The things you tell me are for my homework assignment and I will not use your name with your answers. In fact, you get to choose the alias or pseudonym I will use for you. I am doing it this way so that you can feel comfortable and say whatever you want to say. Please remember that there are no right or wrong answers and you can tell me as much or as little as you want. Even though I want to get your thoughts and experiences, I want you to think of this as just a conversation and not an interview.

We will spend about an hour together and we won't stop so that we can get done pretty quickly. If you need to take a break, let me know and we will take a short break.

Now, I would like to learn more about you.

Questions	Research Question(s)
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Opening Questions: 5 min.

1. Tell me your name and what grade you were in this year. 2. Have you always attended (gone to) this school? What other schools did you go to? Do you remember what grade you were in when you went to that school?	Learn about participant
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Introductory Questions: 5-10 min.

3. Do you like school (Why/Why not)? What is the best thing about school? If you had to describe school, what words would you use?	Q1, Q2
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Transition Question: 5-10 min.

4. What kind of student do you think you are? What words would you use? 5. Tell me how your teacher would describe you as a student? What words might he/she use?	Q1, Q2, & Q3
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Key Questions: 10-15 min.

6. What kinds of grades do you get on your report card? <i>Probes: How do you feel when you receive a good grade on an assignment? How do you feel when you receive a poor grade on an assignment? Does your teacher let you know how well you do in school? How does he/she let you know?</i>	Q1, Q3
7. Tell me what your teacher did in class that made you want to participate or get involved with the lesson. Probes: What did your teacher do when you did not participate in the lesson? What do you think he/she could have done to make the lesson more interesting?	Q1, Q2, & Q3
8. What causes you to want to do well in school? <i>Probes: What does your family do that cause you to want to do well in school?</i>	Q3

Key Questions: 10-15 min

<p>9. What is school like for you.?</p> <p><i>Probe: Do you feel that the way you are treated at school helps you to be successful?</i></p> <p><i>Probe: What do you like most about your school? Least?</i></p>	<p>Q1, Q2, & Q3</p>
<p>10. Tell me about where you live, the neighborhood, the places around it?</p> <p><i>Probe: What memories do you have of your neighborhood/ community?</i></p>	<p>Q3</p>
<p>11. Do you think where you live, the neighborhood and places around it, help you to be successful in school? Why or why not?</p>	<p>Q3</p>
<p>12. Tell me about how your teacher treats you. Does how you act have anything to do with how he/she treats you?</p> <p><i>Probe: Do you think the way our teacher treats you causes you to feel the way you do about school? Yourself?</i></p>	<p>Q2 & Q3</p>

Key Questions: 10-15 min

<p>13. Tell me about your teacher. Is s/he funny, nice, silly, strict, etc.? How do the two of you get along?</p> <p><i>Probes: What does your teacher say/do that makes you think he/she does or does not like you?</i></p> <p>14. What can your teacher do to help you be even better at school? Principal?</p> <p>15. What else can you share with me that may help you be even better at school and or home.</p> <p>16. What do you plan to do after you graduate high school?</p> <p>17. Do you think school will help you in the future? <i>Probe: Why? How?</i></p>	<p>Q3</p> <p>Q1, Q2, & Q3</p> <p>Q1 & Q3</p> <p>Q3</p> <p>Q3</p>
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Ending Question: 5-10 min

<p>18. Is there anything else you would like to tell me that I have not asked?</p>	<p>Q1, Q2, Q3</p>
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Student Focus Group Protocol

Participating Students: _____

Date: _____

Start Time: _____

Introduction:

Good afternoon. Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today on your feelings about being a Black boy in school and what you feel is important for you to be the best you can be. My name is Bonita Jamison, and I will be asking you a few questions. In order to make sure that I remember what you say, I will be taping our conversation.

I want you to know that what you tell me will NOT be shared with your teacher or principal. The things you tell me are for my homework assignment and I will not use your name with your answers, but you will be allowed to give me the name you would like for me to use. I am doing it this way so that you can feel comfortable and say whatever you want to say. Please remember that there are no right or wrong answers and you can tell me as much or as little as you want. Even though I want to get your thoughts and experiences, I want you to think of this as just a conversation and not an interview.

We will spend about an hour together and we won't stop so that we can get done pretty quickly. If you need to take a break, let me know and we will take a short break.

Questions	Research Question(s)
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Opening Question: 2-3 min.

1. Okay, the NBA finals are over. Who were you going for, the Cavaliers or Golden State Warriors? Which player is your favorite? Why? <i>Probe: Okay, now what is your favorite subject in school? Why?</i>	
2. What comes to mind when you see these pictures (show picture 1, picture 2, and picture 3)?	

Key Questions: 5-45 min

<p>3. So, do you like going to school? What/who makes you want to go to school? <i>Probe: Are there reasons why you didn't want to go to school? What are they?</i></p>	<p>Q3</p>
<p>4. So, what do your friends think about you? Are you popular? <i>Probe: How do you feel about how they feel about you? What about your teacher?</i></p>	<p>Q1 & Q2</p>
<p>5. Do you think that Black boys get in trouble more? Why? <i>Probe: Is there anyone that comes to mind who you feel get in trouble less than boys?</i></p>	<p>Q2</p>
<p>6. Do you feel that your friends treat you differently because you make good grades? <i>Probe: What does it mean to be a good student?</i></p>	<p>Q1</p>
<p>7. Tell me how your parents support you in school.</p>	<p>Q1 & Q2</p>
<p>8. What career would you like to have as an adult?</p>	<p>Q3</p>
<p>9. What should your parents, teachers, and others do to help you be successful?</p>	<p>Q3</p>
<p>10. Is there anything else you would like to tell me.</p>	<p>Q1, Q2, & Q3</p>

Student Focus Group Images

Image 1



Image 2

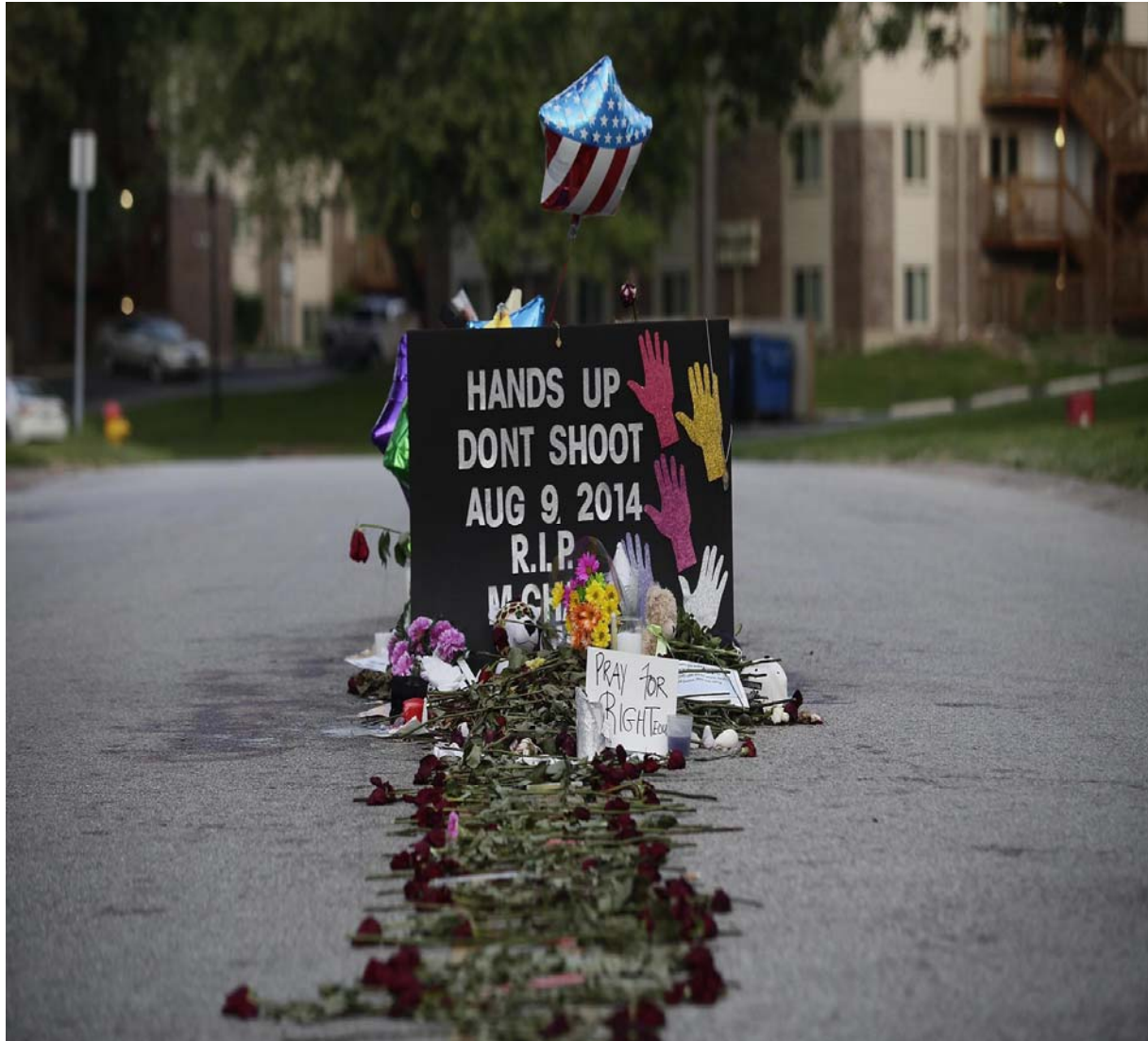


Image 3



Image 4



Parent Focus Group Protocol

Participating Parents: _____

Date: _____

Start Time: _____

Introduction:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the parent focus group. My name is Bonita Jamison and I am a doctoral student at the University of Missouri, Columbia. I would like to use a portion of our time to first share why we are here and why you were asked to participate in the focus group. You have been asked to participate because you have been identified as the parent or guardian of a Black boy enrolled in elementary school.

I am interested in hearing your perceptions of your experience as a parent/guardian of a Black boy in elementary school and what you feel is important for them to be successful academically and behaviorally. I have developed a series of questions, but this is meant to be more of a conversation. As a reminder, there are no right or wrong answers. If you want to add additional information or give specific examples, you may do so. I am here to learn from you as you are considered the expert. We will spend about an hour or so together and you can take a break if needed at any time and you may discontinue your participation at any time. Your responses will be confidential and I will not reveal your names to anyone and you are able to select the name you would like to use; therefore you can be completely honest. I also ask that we respect each other's privacy and refrain from sharing what is discussed outside of this group. It is also okay to disagree with someone, but it is important that we remain respectful and use respectful language. I will be recording our conversation as a means to capture what you say. At the conclusion of my study I will erase the recording. Does anyone have questions before we begin?

Questions	Research Questions
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Introduction Question: 5 min

<p>1. Tell me how you feel society views Black boys? <i>Probe: What experiences have contributed to your views?</i></p>	<p>Q3</p>
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Key Question: 50 min.

<p>2. Tell me about your son's experience in school this year.</p>	<p>Q1, Q2, & Q3</p>
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<p>3. How would you describe your son as a student? What words would you use?</p> <p><i>Probe: How would your son's teacher describe your son? What words might he/she use?</i></p>	<p>Q1 & Q2</p>
<p>4. Share with me how you view your son's overall experience at school? Outside of school?</p> <p><i>Probe: What did the school do to support your son academically? Behaviorally?</i></p>	<p>Q1, Q2, & Q3</p>
<p>5. Tell me about your involvement at your son's school.</p> <p><i>Probe: What are your thoughts (perceptions) of the school? Did you feel welcomed? Why/why not?</i></p>	<p>Q3</p>
<p>6. Tell me about your experience as a student in school.</p> <p><i>Probe: Did you graduate from high school? What plans did you have for yourself after high school? Do you think your experience in school impacts your involvement with your son's school?</i></p>	<p>Q3</p>
<p>7. Share with me your perspective on what it is like to be a parent of a Black boy in school.</p> <p><i>Probe: In what ways do you support your son?</i></p>	<p>Q1, Q2, & Q3</p>
<p>8. Do you expect your son to graduate from high school?</p> <p><i>Probe: How will you pay for college for your son? What steps will you take to ensure that he graduates? What courses do you feel your son needs in high school to be prepared for college? How will you ensure that he is enrolled in the right courses?</i></p>	<p>Q3</p>

9. As a parent of a Black boy, given your experience, what advice would you give to educators? Parents? to make their experience better?

Q1, Q2, & Q3

Ending Question: 10 min

10. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience as a parent of a Black boy to help them be successful in school?

Q1, Q2, & Q3

APPENDIX C

Student Information System (SIS) Recruitment Script

School Information System (SIS) Recruitment Script

- Are you the parent of a fifth-grade male student?
- Do you want to improve their chances of success in school?

If you answered YES to these questions, your son may be eligible to participate in a research study. Please call Dr. Lisa Dorner at 573.882.7938, Dr. Ty-Ron Douglas at 573.882.1573, or Bonita Jamison at (314) 488-5076 for more information. The study will last approximately two weeks and participants will be compensated \$50 at the end of the study.

APPENDIX D

University of Missouri-Columbia Institutional Review Board Approval



Institutional Review Board
University of Missouri-Columbia

190 Galena Hall;
 Dc074.00 Columbia,
 MO 6521
 573-882-3181
 irb@missouri.edu

July 18, 2017

Principal Investigator: Bonita E Jamison,
 Ed.D. Department: ELPA

Your IRB Application to project entitled Through Their Eyes: Structural and Cultural Factors that Shape the Academic Performance and Behavior of Young Black boys was reviewed and approved by the MU Institutional Review Board according to the terms and conditions described below:

IRB Project Number	2008786
IRB Review Number	227536
Initial Application Approval Date July 15, 2017	
IRB Expiration Date	July
Level of Review	15,
Project Status	2018
Expedited Categories	Expedited
Risk Level Child Category	Active - Open to Enrollment
Type of Consent	45 CFR 46.110.a(f)(6) 45 CFR 46.110.a(f)(7)
Internal Funding	Minimal Risk 46.404 Written Consent Child Assent Parental Consent (One Parent) Personal funds

The principal investigator (PI) is responsible for all aspects and conduct of this study. The PI must comply with the following conditions of the approval:

1. No subjects may be involved in any study procedure prior to the IRB approval date or after the expiration date.
2. All unanticipated problems and deviations must be reported to the IRB within 5 business days.
3. All changes must be IRB approved prior to implementation unless they are intended to reduce immediate risk.
4. All recruitment materials and methods must be approved by the IRB prior to being used.
5. The Continuing Review Report (CRR) must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval at least 30 days prior to the project expiration date. If the study is complete, the Completion/Withdrawal Form may be submitted in lieu of the CRR.

6. Maintain all research records for a period of seven years from the project completion date.
7. Utilize the IRB stamped consent documents and other approved research documents located within the document storage section of eCompliance. These documents are highlighted green.

If you are offering subject payments and would like more information about research participant payments, please click here to view the MU Business Policy and Procedure:

http://bppm.missouri.edu/chapter2/2_250.html

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB at 573-882-3181 or irb@missouri.edu.

Thank you,
MU Institutional Review Board

VITA

Born and raised in Los Angeles, California Bonita E. Jamison has been an educator for the past sixteen years. She has contributed to the field of education by teaching in various settings within and around the St. Louis region. Bonita has served in the capacity of principal for seven years and has worked in the capacity of Assistant Superintendent of Student, School and Community Support Services and as the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction in Riverview Gardens School District. In her current role as Regional Principal Director for Open Sky Education, Bonita works with regional leadership to coordinate instructional philosophy, objectives, and success measures as a means to improve the quality of life for children.

Bonita received her B.A. in education from Saint Louis University, M.A. in educational leadership from Lindenwood University, Ed.S. in educational leadership and policy analysis, and Ed.D. from the University of Missouri-Columbia. Dr. Jamison currently resides in St. Louis, Missouri, with her three children, Von' Ricco, Kennedy, and Kaiden.