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Man Enough: Exploring the Gendered Experiences of High-Achieving Black Men in Higher Education

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MAN ENOUGH: EXPLORING THE GENDERED EXPERIENCES OF HIGH-
ACHIEVING BLACK MEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION

by

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the graduate faculty of The University of Alabama at Birmingham,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA
2021

MAN ENOUGH: EXPLORING THE GENDERED EXPERIENCES OF HIGH-ACHIEVING BLACK MEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION

CHRISTOPHER E. JONES

EDUCATIONAL STUDIES IN DIVERSE POPULATIONS – METROPOLITAN EDUCATION STUDIES

ABSTRACT

Research regarding Black males in higher education has become an important endeavor for colleges and universities seeking to increase their graduation rates. Much of the previous research and practices have used a deficit-based approach explaining Black males' low levels of academic achievement as primarily the result of them being underprepared. This ignores the contributions of Black males who do excel academically while minimizing the role their racialized gender plays in their outcomes. This dissertation focuses on an anti-deficit approach by exploring how high-achieving Black college males' perceptions of manhood and masculinity have contributed to their overall academic success. Even though this study was influenced by existing theories used to understand the intersections of race and gender and their connections to academic success, the study's methodological approach of abductive analysis allowed the researcher to focus on building theory from unsuspecting revelations within the analyzed data. This dissertation explored the experiences of 20 high-achieving Black college men attending an urban university located in the Southeastern United States. Results for this study revealed Black male students who display progressive perspectives on masculinities can integrate pursuits for academic success into their ideas about Black manhood. Implications for this study are discussed in this dissertation.

Keywords: Black males, academic achievement, academic success, manhood, masculinity, anti-deficit, abductive analysis

DEDICATION

To Alecia, my partner in life. I am beyond thankful for your love and support during this endeavor. There is no way I could have done this without you.

To Cayla and Caleb, my children. I hope you feel I set a good example for you. I have pushed myself to achieve my life goals to serve as an example for you. I love both of you dearly.

Daddy and Mommy, thank you for always believing in me and for your many sacrifices. I hope I have made you proud. To all my family and friends, I am because of all of you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I want to thank my dissertation chair, Dr. Loder-Jackson. Your ability to make sure I am doing my best while providing motivation is what drove me through this process. I can't thank you enough. I also want to acknowledge my committee and their thoughtfulness in helping me conceptualize my study. Dr. Thomeer McBride, you really helped me to think critically about my methodology and how abductive analysis could serve as a useful method in examining my topic. Your feedback was always pertinent. Dr. Ashley Floyd Kuntz, I have known you for several years and I knew you would be a valuable member of this committee. I thank you for always challenging me to put forth the best product in my writings. Dr. Hannon, I appreciate you always being willing to help anyway you could. We were able to have many thoughtful conversations that helped me to respect previous scholars doing this work. Dr. Jamison, I strive to be the kind of scholar you are one day. You always would say what I needed to hear to make me think about this project critically. Through this process I have grown to admire and appreciate each of you even more.

To my family, Dad, Mom, Jr., and Mr. and Mrs. Smith. Sometimes I was not able to be with you during important occasions because I was focused on my dissertation, and you always were supportive. I thank each of you for your kind words and steadfast support. To my colleagues, Sharifa and Cortney. We have worked together for so long

and you all have always been in my corner. You all are the most amazing women I know.
To my line brothers. You all inspire me to achieve every day. I love you, my brothers.

To all the participants in the study, I thank each of you for your vulnerability and candidness. I hope I represented your perspectives the way you would like. I learned so much from each of you.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Statement of Problem

The experience of Black¹ males is an important topic for education researchers who are seeking to address the inequities for them within K-12 schools and higher education institutions. Much of this research has focused on Black males' comparatively lower academic achievement (Davis, 1994; Jackson & Moore, 2006; McGee, 2013). For example, Black male college graduation rates are at 34%. This lags Black women, whose degree completion rates are 44% (NCES, 2017). Black men also complete their degrees at lower rates than other males including white males (61%) and Hispanic males (50%) (NCES, 2017). While understanding the empirical data is important, it is also pertinent to understand what is unique about Black males' experiences in higher education. Their experiences as people with both racial and gender identities who face unique challenges at the intersections of these identities requires additional research and examination. However, the lack of research focused on Black males and their intersections of race and gender provides an opportunity to develop a new research paradigm which moves beyond a focus solely on the effects of racism within education to a research paradigm that views their race and masculine identities as simultaneous contributors of their intellectual and social experiences.

¹ Black is capitalized throughout the document as a recognition to the shared experiences within the Black diaspora as being unique.

It is important to note that research on Black males within higher education has been an ongoing pursuit for those interested in the racial achievement gap. Research concerning Black males became a prominent topic of discourse as the national focus on Black males in society became a focal point of media, government, and local communities alike emerging in the 1980s and continuing throughout the 1990s. There was an arrival of community responses to address the problems people believed came from toxic Black male culture, most notably the Million Man March² in 1995.

One of the early pioneers of research exploring the outcomes of Black males was scholar Juwanza Kunjufu. His book titled *Countering the Conspiracy to Destroy Black Boys* (1985) is seen as one of the foundational pieces of literature analyzing the causes of the plight of Black males. In addition to Kunjufu's work, other researchers began to write about the plight of Black boys and their connection to the deterioration of Black life often seen in poor urban communities (Gibbs, 1988; Madhubuti, 1990; Richardson & Evans 1992). Kunjufu (1985) even created a framework of the maturation process of Black males from infancy to adulthood and the sociocultural factors influencing their behavior. This framework focused on Black males learning to be self-sufficient and assuming their patriarchal role in the Black family. Kunjufu gives credence to sociocultural factors as a direct result of Black people's marginalization within the United States, but also the result of self-destructive behavior that had enveloped Black society and culture.

Even though many Black boys were sometimes engaged in self-destructive behavior such as violence, drug use, and unhealthy sexual behaviors, Kunfufu and his

² The Million Man March was a political demonstration in Washington, D.C., on Oct. 16, 1995, to promote African American unity and family values. Estimates of the number of marchers, most of whom were African American men, ranged from 400,000 to nearly 1.1 million, ranking it among the largest gatherings of its kind in American history.

contemporaries focused on the behavior without constantly addressing the larger systemic factors contributing to these outcomes, creating a deficit perspective in approaching research about Black males. Kunjufu unintentionally contributed to the belief that low outcomes for Black boys were connected to the deterioration of Black male culture. Other researchers followed this trend and legitimized the “endangered species” mantra which is a precursor to deficit-based research on Black males (Bush & Bush, 2018). The perspective of Black males being self-destructive is a product of stereotypes placed on Black people directly linked to slavery (Taylor et al., 2019). These stereotypes often deemed Black males as violent, hypersexual, and even intellectually incapable of participating in civil society. More importantly, Black males as an endangered species focused on the premise that they were in trouble and failed to give credit to those Black males who were excelling despite the insurmountable odds placed on them.

Researchers have begun to reexamine how they conduct research on the outcomes of Black males, with a focus on those who are succeeding (Harper, 2010; Howard, 2012). This is a departure from early research which often problematized Black culture and more specifically the culture of Black males that seemed to thrust them into a pattern of dysfunctionality. The new research approach, deemed as an anti-deficit model (Harper, 2010) sought to better understand the experiences of those boys and men who have had high levels of success, such as having high levels of academic engagement, have college-going behavior, and succeed in college. In support of this premise, Toldson and Lewis (2012) published a report on the success of African Americans within education. The report titled “Challenge The Status Quo: Academic Success Among School-Age African American Males” sought to provide empirical data demonstrating Black males as being successful in many ways. A major finding concluded Black males’ presence on college

campuses are proportional to their representation within larger society (Toldson & Lewis, 2012). The report also found a lack of nuance in the data regarding comparable achievement rates to other gender and racial groups. Black males are often subjected to some of the direst educational environments because of how they are perceived, and these perceptions become internalized by Black people in general. For example, Black males only represent 1.81% of the K-12 teacher workforce while they make up 7.4% of the overall student population (Toldson & Lewis, 2012). Failure to have teachers who look like them has placed Black male students into the care of educators who may not fully understand their experience or have biased perceptions of their abilities and behaviors based on educator's own socialization of who Black males are (Downey & Pribesh, 2004).

Data has shown that Black males are not as “endangered” as previously thought, and the disparities that exist in the educational outcomes for them are more connected to the systemic inequities within the educational system itself. How has the notion of Black males being in trouble become the dominant narrative about this group, particularly as it relates to educational outcomes? The idea of Black males as problems is entrenched in the psyche of the American public manifesting in the unique perception of Black males as dangerous and incapable. In contrast, this dissertation seeks to examine the perspectives of high-achieving Black collegiate men, namely regarding how their racialized and gendered experiences have played a role in how they are viewed in academic settings, as well as their perceptions on the importance of academic achievement. This study is an effort to reframe educational research on Black males using an asset-based perspective to re-envision how Black male culture is defined.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to describe how high-achieving collegiate Black male's perceptions of masculinity and manhood have influenced their views on academic achievement and success. Additionally, this study seeks to demonstrate how high-achieving Black males affirm their identities within various educational environments. This affirmation is directly addressed through their expressions of how educational activities in academic settings has contributed to their self-actualization as men. The expressed desire in this study is to establish that researchers can learn from Black males who have shown their resilience and commitment to academic achievement rather than focusing on the often-expressed plight of Black collegiate males. This aligns with previous methodological approaches such as Critical Race Theory, which establishes counternarratives as an important strategy to center race as an important aspect of racially minoritized people's experiences (Hiraldo, 2010). This dissertation also contributes to the emerging literature on high-achieving Black males while emphasizing how the intersections of race and gender uniquely play a role in their perceptions of manhood, as well as highlight their perceptions of how they feel others see them.

Aligning with the premise of qualitative research, this dissertation seeks to make sense of the world and to develop explanations through the development of models and theories (Morse & Field, 1996). Even though collegiate Black males have been researched previously, their perspectives on themselves are often not considered in developing theories and explanations to the many barriers and challenges they may encounter. This research is centered on the premise of Black males' experiences as unique and that only they can tell us why and how that experience exists.

Significance of the Study

The United States is currently in a state of flux due to the increased media coverage surrounding the treatment of Black people, and even more specifically Black males. Current movements such as Black Lives Matter seek to highlight the systemic oppression of Black people at the hands of United States institutions such as the police and the criminal courts (Lebron, 2017). The deaths of George Floyd, who was murdered by a police officer on camera in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and Breonna Taylor, who was murdered by police after they forcibly entered her home with false information about a suspect, have brought about a sense of urgency within various organizations and even corporations to speak out against the injustices faced by Black and Brown communities. As the country searches for answers on how to improve the lives of Black people, it is important to remember the value of Black people in crafting solutions to very large systemic problems aimed at them, while also acknowledging the need for institutions to change.

Black males have been able to thrive in many ways despite the insurmountable odds placed upon them by racist and even violent institutions seeking to denigrate the Black male image. This dissertation highlights those individuals' experiences who have succeeded in educational settings and acknowledge how they have developed a self-affirming Black masculine persona embodied in academic achievement. This research is different from other research aims focused on developing an anti-deficit framework as a means of simply prescribing general activities which support Black male student achievement. The significance of the research is its focus on high-achieving collegiate Black males and the simultaneous influences of their racialized gendered experiences. Additionally, this dissertation acknowledges how these experiences were also influenced

by school contexts regardless of their negative or positive effects. This allows the researcher to acknowledge the school environment's role in crafting a Black masculine identity, which is also connected to current research practices on Black males.

Scholars Christopher Chatman and Jarvis Givens have begun to focus on the unique racialized and gendered experiences of Black males and how they are uniquely interpreted by schools. In the book titled, *We Dare Say Love: Supporting Achievement in the Educational Life of Black Boys*, they discuss the need to conduct research with this focus in mind. Chatman and Givens (2019) stated the following:

Attending to Black boys' schooling experiences requires that we be attuned to how Blackness and maleness interact in unique ways, both in terms of Black male students' identity development, and also with respect to how Black males and their actions are often interpreted in school contexts. (p. 4)

As previously mentioned, early educational research on Black males identified behavioral issues within Black male culture as problematic. The researcher believed these behaviors are more connected to a hypermasculine culture that is associated with Western ideals of masculinity, which many Black males seek to uphold in a pursuit of social power. Black male culture is complicated and presents challenges for Black males, but also helps them develop a sense of self-actualization that is needed for positive identity development (Harper, 2008). In addition, it is the researcher's belief that Black male culture has value and this value should be emphasized in the research. There are many strengths in cultures who are marginalized within U.S. society, and research paradigms should reflect these strengths from their own perspectives (Yosso, 2005).

Theoretical Frameworks

Race continues to be a challenge to address in education research, especially with the varying perspectives on its impact on the educational experience. Yet, there are epistemological and methodological contributions to examining race within education. Abductive analysis creates an opportunity for researchers to consider previous theoretical implications based on the data that is collected during a study. Therefore, this study is influenced by the theoretical perspectives focused on understanding the experiences of Black males and encompasses the knowledge the researcher has gained from previous readings and perspectives. The theoretical perspectives that helped to conceptualize this study are Critical Race Theory (CRT) and African American Male Theory (AAMT). CRT was explored due to its focus on race as a central component of someone's experience. The racialized experiences of participants were explored to understand how their experiences are unique to them. AAMT was examined due to its focus on the experiences of African American Males specifically. The interview questions are structured to better understand the experiences of Black males. Even though Black people across genders have racialized experiences, this study's focus on the racialized gendered experiences is unique to only them. These theories are highlighted to demonstrate the researcher's previous theoretical understanding of the topic but did not limit abductive analysis's effort to generate new and unsuspecting insight generated by the data analysis.

Critical Race Theory

Emerging as a legal framework in the mid-1980s, CRT was used to understand race and its role in societal inequities. Popularized by Harvard professor, Derrick Bell, CRT analyzes the role of race and racism in perpetuating social disparities between

dominant and racialized groups (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). This theory was used to address the racial inequities prevalent in the criminal justice system. Since its development, CRT has been used to understand racial inequalities across various academic disciplines including sociology, education, and even theological research. In this dissertation, CRT is examined as a theoretical perspective due to its focus on the racialized experiences of participants.

CRT has five tenets encompassing its theoretical framework. The first tenet is counter-storytelling. Counter-storytelling places the experiences of people of color in the center of the research by collecting their stories as a counternarrative to the stereotypes placed on them by the dominant group (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Developing counternarratives related to Black males is essential in better understanding their racialized and gendered experiences from an anti-deficit perspective. Participants in the current study generated their own narratives about being Black males by sharing personal stories of their lives and experiences. The stereotypes surrounding Black males of being troubled has permeated through previous research paradigms and CRT's tenet of counternarratives reframes the experiences of Black males from their vantage point. More importantly, this helps to center the people who are often overlooked due to majoritarian viewpoints in the literature, this is especially true for Black males (Harper, 2009). Research which focuses on previous notions of historically marginalized people as being the sole source of their marginalization has even plagued well-intentioned researchers. For example, Fordham (1991) conducted a study on the kinship of high-achieving Black male students. The study concluded that Black males thrived most in settings where they were with other high-achieving Black students rather than in low-performing academic environments. Even though this premise made logical sense, it did not truly represent the

perspectives of students due to students not sharing their personal experiences. Because Fordham (1991) conveyed the outcomes of participants-based interviews, the research focused on the idea that peer-proofing educational settings benefitted those students. This is rooted in a majoritarian perspective and not truly on the students whose lives are being examined.

The second tenet of CRT is the permanence of racism. As previously mentioned, racism has been a prominent component of American society since its inception. The permanence of racism suggests that racism is central in the social, political, and economic structures of American society (Hiraldo, 2010). The permanence of racism is often seen through PWI's efforts to develop policies and bureaucracies that limit the visibility of Black students as well as their prospects of success all to establish culture norms that serve white student populations (Tuitt et al., 2018). Participants in this study discussed the effects of race and racism at every level of educational attainment they have encountered, including the PWI they currently attend. Because PWIs often seek to serve the interest of the white majority, even well-intentioned white administrators and some Black administrators enact policies that minimizes the presence of other minoritized groups on their campuses (Harper, 2012).

The third tenet of CRT is whiteness as property. This establishes that being white in American society should be seen as a property interest. Being white affords those who are the right to exclude others. This is most prevalent in the actual demographics of schools. Public schools are still mostly segregated based on race and socioeconomic status (Harper, 2012). Colleges and universities also have also excluded racial minorities, particularly in its efforts to hire faculty. While college enrollments for minoritized groups have grown, white faculty still account for 75% of full-time faculty on college campuses

(NCES, 2018). Their lack of diversity in hiring faculty to educate a still predominately white student body demonstrates the continued effort to appease the interest of white people. Regardless of the 1954 *Brown v. Board* decision, segregated schools continue to be fixtures within today's education system.

Interest convergence is the fourth tenet of CRT. Interest convergence establishes that gains in civil rights legislations are always coupled with the interests of the white majority. An example of this is affirmative action which was coupled with other protected identities that has more greatly benefitted white women than African Americans (Hiraldo, 2010). The fifth tenet is liberalism. The concept of living in a liberal democracy establishes the belief that everyone has access to success. But many of the opportunities outlined in the framework of a liberal democracy were denied to many groups of people based on their racial identities (Hiraldo, 2010). For example, Black Americans have contributed to the economic growth and progress of the United States, yet Black Americans with a college degree only have about 70% of the wealth of white Americans without a college degree (Hanks et al., 2018). This wealth disparity is reflective of a liberal democracy's failure to provide opportunities to those who are not white.

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) introduced CRT within education research because of its ability to acknowledge the historical marginalization and barriers present in schools and predominately White institutions (PWIs). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) determined this marginalization in schools is based on the United States seeing race as property. Therefore, the following premises generate the social inequality in schools based on racial categories:

1. Race continues to be a significant factor in determining inequity in the United States;
2. U.S. society is based on property rights; and
3. The intersection of race and property creates an analytic tool through which we can understand social (and, consequently, school) inequity. (p. 48)

Situating race as a core aspect of exploration in this study, the researcher discussed with participants the role race has played in their sense of privilege, oppression, and marginalization. This also was central in participant discussions surrounding their school experiences as American institutions have been proven to be racialized and are the primary places of marginalization for racial minority groups (Ray, 2019). Because race and racism has been shown to be inherent in American society and institutions such as schools (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), it was important to consider this in developing theoretical insights. CRT continues to grow more popular in analyzing higher education and its structural inequities. More specifically, CRT provides a framework for understanding the conditions of Black males and other racially oppressed people in a racist society (Crenshaw et al., 1995).

African American Male Theory

AAMT is an underutilized theoretical framework due to the popularity of other race-based theories such as CRT and Anti-deficit Achievement framework, a framework used to generate the positive characteristics of historically marginalized students' success in higher education. AAMT has been successful at establishing a theoretical framework aimed specifically at the experiences unique to Black males in education. For example, Goings et al. (2018) utilized AAMT to explore the experiences of a Black male

preservice teacher at a Historically Black College, specifically focused on his intersecting identities of being a Black male and born internationally. The authors deemed the employment of AAMT helped them to better understand how being Black, male, and international created both a sense of hostility and support within the educational institution.

Bush (2013) identified AAMT as a multi-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary framework used to appropriately theorize the experiences of African American males. This is done by considering the historical experiences of Black males in conjunction with various aspects of Afrocentric components of Black culture and identity (Bush, 2013). Its departure from other theories is rooted in the assertion that theories concerning Black people are rooted in traditional academic perspectives that are not centered on the perspectives of Black males themselves. For example, critical race theorists often highlight that people of color's experiences are rooted in their oppression by white people. Even though there is much truth to this notion, AAMT encourages researchers to move away from tragedy-centered perspectives as the only experiences of Black people in juxtaposition to their oppressors (Bush & Bush, 2018). Bush (2013) outlined the following tenets of AAMT:

1. The individual and collective experiences, behaviors, outcomes, events, phenomena, and trajectory of African American boys' and men's lives are best analyzed using an ecological systems approach;
2. There is something unique about being male and of African descent;
3. There is a continuity and continuation of African culture, consciousness, and biology that influence the experiences of African American boys and men;

4. African American boys and men are resilient and resistant;
5. Race and racism, coupled with classism and sexism, have a profound impact on every aspect of the lives of African American boys and men; and
6. The focus and purpose of study and programs that concern African American boys and men should be the pursuit of social justice. (Bush, 2013)

The tenets of AAMT provide a new perspective on Black male research. Even though CRT provides a useful theoretical perspective on the lives of Black people, AAMT offers a more nuanced perspective that truly views the experiences of Black males through their own experiences which affirms their culture and identity (Bush & Bush, 2018). Specifically, the use of an ecological model allows for the examination of Black males and their interaction with various environments. This is important to note as this dissertation explores the effects of schooling on the perceptions of academic achievement. The tenet focused on the effects of racism coupled with classism and sexism allow for the examination of the complexity of being a Black male and the many other aspects of their identity that influence their experiences. AAMT also encourages the emergence of other theories to guide research on Black males. This theory's encouragement of using its framework to discover other theories couples seamlessly with the methodological approach outlined with abductive analysis which seeks to enhance or discover new theoretical perspectives based on data that is presented. These theories greatly influenced the methodological efforts for this dissertation and helped to make sense of the experiences shared from the study's participants.

Guiding Research Questions

In this study, the simultaneous experience of race and gender is central to understanding the experiences of Black males. The methodology allows for the generation of rich data surrounding the experiences of the participants themselves. The research questions focus on the specific experiences of participants surrounding these social identities within educational settings, as well as indirect influences.

Therefore, the questions guiding this research study are, how are high-achieving Black collegiate male's perceptions of their masculinity and manhood presented in relation to their perceptions of academic success? Also, how are high-achieving Black collegiate male's perceptions of their previous educational and social contexts presented in relation to their perceptions of academic success?

Terms and Definitions

Previous literature surrounding Black males, manhood, and masculinity are distinctive to education and sociological practices. To ensure there is shared understanding for readers, the following key terms and definitions are listed to provide specific definitions to words which appear throughout the study.

Academic Achievement: Student outcomes demonstrating their excelling in classroom-related activities (Smith-Maddox, 1998).

Race: The significance and qualitative state that individuals attribute to being of a specific racial group (Seller & Shelton, 2003).

Racism: social and institutional structures, including policies and cultures, that were or are usually developed and upheld by supremacist ideologies (Keleher, 2004).

Black: Self identifying as being of African Ancestry while residing in the United States. In this study, being Black is having the beliefs and experiences associated with being a Black American (Deaux, 1994).

Men: Related to the social construction of someone identifying as a man. In this study, the concept of being a man is not related to sex; yet, it is connected to someone's gender expression of being masculine (Wade & Ferree, 2015).

Intersectionality: A theory highlighting the way in which various forms of inequality based on identity often operate together and exacerbate each other (Crenshaw, 1990).

Anti-Deficit: The process of inverting questions that are commonly asked about educational disadvantage, underrepresentation, insufficient preparation, academic underperformance, disengagement, and Black male student attrition (Harper, 2012).

Gender: Refers to the symbolisms of masculinity and femininity that societal norms connect to being male-bodied or female bodied, different from expression which is associated with one's behavior of gender (Wade & Ferree, 2015).

Masculinity: Someone's degree of manliness (Wade & Ferree, 2015).

Manhood: Ideas and ideals about what it means to be a man (Hunter & Davis, 1992).

Culture: A set of norms prescribed to a group of individuals with similar values (Smith-Maddox, 1998).

Academic Success: A student's ability to reach desired academic outcomes (Smith-Maddox, 1998).

Limitations

Abductive analysis is an appropriate qualitative method for this study due to its focus on generating innovative theoretical insights by utilizing collected data to generate

theory rather than depend on existing theories produced by a grounded theory inductive approach (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). Black male masculinity and its connection to the perceptions of academic achievement amongst Black collegiate males has received little attention in Black male research, which lends to establishing an abductive rather than an inductive methodological approach. Abductive analysis also has its limitations. Like grounded theory, abductive analysis's focus is on the meticulously analyzing of data. Challenges to the grounded theory approach include its lack of focus on specific methods, which brings into question its credibility (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In this study, data collection was conducted by interviewing participants. Conducting interviews to generate rich qualitative data is necessary to establish credibility within qualitative research, and a specific effort was made to generate such data through semi-structured interviewing. Bias is also a concern in all qualitative research practices. The researcher's biases as a Black male conducting interviews with other Black males is a limitation to this study that cannot be avoided. But the researcher's identity as a Black male proved to be an asset in gaining the trust of participants, which led to them feeling comfortable to discuss their experiences as Black males. Yet, various parameters were established to minimize bias which included having participants review their interview responses as a means of truly representing their answers during interviews.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature explored for this dissertation helped to generate a more nuanced approach to understanding Black male success; it also acknowledges the complexity of Black manhood and masculinity. To interrogate the experiences of Black males as both being racialized and having gendered experiences simultaneously, it is important to explore these two identities separately since previous literature has provided more insight into these social identities independently, followed by research centered around these intersecting identities. This section includes scholarship addressing gender, race, and other intersections as it pertains to the experience of being a Black male. Additionally, the literature in this chapter helps to identify the important aspects of how Black males generate ideas about manhood and where academic achievement fits into those ideas. These areas of focus are important in understanding previous research and its influence on this study of Black males. More importantly, this section helps to better understand the many perspectives and influences surrounding manhood and masculinity, as well as the important role race plays in the experiences of Black males, which differs from other racialized and gendered groups. For clarity, this review of literature is organized to first focus on the construction of Black masculinity, and to secondly focus on Black males' influences on their ideas about Black manhood. See Table 1.

Table 1

Review of Literature Overview

Review of Literature Overview	
Understanding Construction of Black Masculinity	Influences on Ideas about Black Manhood
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Race and Racism

Within American society, race has played a major role in the acquirement of economic, social, political, and cultural capital (Birzer & Smith-Madhi, 2006). Racism has shaped the experiences of people of color through the various inequities they have faced throughout the course of U.S. history. The invention of race was established for the purpose of creating a socialized hierarchy which has placed historically marginalized racial groups into a state of consistent poverty and diminished their opportunities of affluence (Williams, 2019). Kendi (2017) chronicled the emergence of racism through the lens of chattel slavery in Europe. In the 1400s, prominent Europeans began to build massive amounts of wealth and capital through the African Slave Trade, and with this began the emergence of racist ideas as a means of justifying the institution of slavery (Kendi, 2017). These racist ideas have not only become part of the hierarchical social structures of American society, but also serve as a source of institutional inequalities that have been revealed within various institutions (Birzer & Smith-Mahdi, 2006). To be able

to discuss how institutions operate to reinforce systemic racism, one must be able to understand how entrenched racism is to the American ideal.

After the American Revolutionary War, the framers of the U.S. Constitution decided to develop a radical idea of governance based on empowering its citizenry to have power over those who were governing them (Keping, 2018). One of the framers, Thomas Jefferson, wrote the phrase, “All men are created equal,” yet he himself owned several slaves and made sure the U.S. Constitution did not include them as part of the men who were created equal. Instead, he classified slaves as three-fifths human. This is important to recognize, because this demonstrates the United States’ founding on the idea of Black people being inferior through the lens of a white supremacist perspective. There is no place this is more apparent than U.S. public schools.

In 1954, the landmark decision of *Brown v. Board of Education* required that separate schools based on race were not equal and that schools must integrate. The immediate impact was felt as schools began to integrate, but many white families decided to move to suburban and private schools as a means of fleeing integration (Reber, 2005). Because of this effort schools are more segregated today than immediately following integration. Today, only 1 in 8 white students attend schools that are predominately Black, while 7 in 10 Black students attend a school that is predominately white (Hussar et al., 2020). The effects of this reality have placed Black students in under-resourced schools as the racial demographics of schools often reflect the school’s resources and socioeconomics. For example, 72% of Black children attend schools deemed as high poverty, while white students represent only 31% of high poverty schools (Hussar et al., 2020). In turn, African Americans have also found themselves with inequitable outcomes vital to their success. Among fourth-grade students, Black children had a 26-point gap in

reading scores. This gap increases to 30 points by the time students reach grade 12 (NCES, 2018).

In addition to lower educational outcomes, Black students are overly disciplined compared to their white peers. In 2012, a higher percentage of Black public-school students than of public-school students from any other racial/ethnic group received an out-of-school suspension (NCES, 2018). With the history of racism in U.S. society, many of these outcomes can be attributed to various educational institutions' entrenchment within environments that see Black students as only racialized versions of themselves, as well as their denial of these factors that have contributed to these outcomes (Harper, 2009). This is especially true for Black males attending urban schools.

Black males in urban schools specifically have been a long-researched topic. Even though urban communities are not the only places where Black people live, it is representative of living spaces where most Americans live, accounting for 80.7% of the population. Criteria from the most recent census data classifies an urban area as having 50,000 people or more and urban clusters of having at least 2,500 people but less than 50,000 (U.S. Census, 2010). With large numbers of people living in proximity of one another there has been a challenge for schools to address the unique needs of their diverse student populations.

Black males have faced several challenges in urban schools. Most importantly, Black males have struggled to accomplish the same level of academic achievement as their peers. Early research regarded their challenges as being connected to cultural issues. Most notably, Fordham and Ogbu (1986) introduced the concept of Black students' "fear of acting white." In this thesis, Black students created a counterculture of academic success as an act of defying institutional norms placed on them by living in a society that

values white culture over their own (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). In other words, Black students created a culture that devalues academic achievement as a means of not conforming to dominate white standards. This has been a consideration of scholars who have tried to understand the gap in academic achievement of Black male students in urban schools. The problem with this perspective is Black males are blamed for schools' failures to educate them and devaluing the cultural capital that they may bring to a school setting (Brooms, 2019). In other words, Black culture has been deemed the real problem facing Black student success instead of seeing their culture as beneficial to their intellectual development.

More recent studies have presented a different set of variables that have generated the many challenges Black male students face. Urban school environments where stereotypes of Black males are prevalent, deem Black males as less than capable of academic success and contributes to the perceptions and attitudes that some Black male students have embodied during their educational experience. As evidence, Strayhorn (2008) conducted a quantitative analysis of data collected on urban high school students who participated in a longitudinal study of their educational experiences. Evidence from this study demonstrated that participants' teachers had lower expectations for Black males when compared to their white male and Black female counterparts. 16% of Black males reported that their teachers recommended work rather than school post-graduation. White males and Black women reported significantly lower rates. Black males were significantly more likely to have a teacher recommend work rather than school providing evidence of their teachers' low expectations. Secondly, 20% of Black males reported feeling put down in class by their teachers (compared to 4% of white men and 4.8% of Black women). Data from this study demonstrated that school environment, and more

importantly the people who shape that school environment play a major role in the attitudes surrounding academic achievement for Black male students.

As a researcher focused on the gendered experiences of Black male students, it is important to see urban schools as more than being positioned in a defined urban environment, but rather see them as a complex schooling experience that encompasses teachers, administrators, parents, and peers who are constantly shaping the identities of Black male students. Urban environments in themselves create a unique set of challenges for students as they are often high poverty, high crime, and are under-resourced (Brooms, 2019). Yet, there are Black male students that persist. As the researcher examined how school environments shaped the experiences of Black male students, there was an intentional focus on the role various environments have had in shaping successful Black male students and their perspectives on manhood and masculinity.

Viewing educational institutions as being places where race plays a significant role in the experiences and perceptions of students is important to address the various inequities that exist. Ray (2019) explored how many of our U.S. organizations are racialized and that these organizations should consider this premise in developing strategies. Race connects cultural rules to social and material resources through organizational formation, hierarchy, and processes (Ray, 2019, p. 27). This is apparent when viewing the resources and various contexts seen within predominately Black schools.

Despite efforts to address inequities in K-12 funding through redistributive efforts based on poverty, predominately Black schools still face a major disparity in funding and often have less qualified teachers (NCES, 2018). Ray (2019) outlined the following four tenets on how racialized organizations negatively affect the outcomes of racial minorities:

- racialized organizations enhance or diminish the agency of racial groups,
- racialized organizations legitimate the unequal distribution of resources,
- whiteness is a credential, and
- decoupling is racialized.

These tenets establish that race is more than merely a social construct for identification purposes.

The concept that whiteness as a credential is central in understanding the power dynamics surrounding race within organizations. Whiteness is seen as the default norm within American society, and if people of color try to operate outside of the boundaries set by whiteness, then they are penalized, especially within organizations in which racialized standards have been set. Schools and universities are not exempt from Ray's description of U.S. organizations as schools also participate in this same framework (Ray, 2019). Race has become very much part of the conversation surrounding inequities in education. However, the systemic nature of racism was never addressed until the emergence of scholarship describing the experiences of Black people in America became prevalent amongst scholars.

The racialized experiences of Black people within educational organizations becomes more apparent when the discussion is centered on Black males. Noguera (2009) described the environmental factors that have influenced the low academic outcomes of Black male students. These include coming from low-income housing, having higher rates of school suspension, and being overrepresented within the population of students considered to have a learning disability (Noguera, 2009). Noguera (2009) also acknowledged that who these students are, have bearing on how adults in schools treat them. The preconceptions and stereotypes about Black males often inform expectations

for them. This is evident in studies conducted on Black males' involvement in academically gifted programs. Fish (2017) found that Black and Latino males are referred to needing outside help for behavioral problems more than white males. Additionally, with similar measurements of giftedness, teachers were less likely to recognize academically talented Black and Latino males in their classrooms (Fish, 2017). The perceptions constructed within a racialized society about ability is empirically represented in teacher behavior towards racialized groups. However, there are still few studies about the specific nature of the perceptions and expectations that are held toward Black males and how these may in turn affect their performance in schools (Noguera, 2003, p. 433). Understanding how the intersection of race and gender affects educational outcomes is important to understanding the experiences of Black male students.

Gender and Masculinities

Gender is a social construct defined by the social norming across a broader society (Wade & Ferree, 2015). The concept of gender is often defined along a continuum of someone being masculine or feminine. But males often find less variability in their expression of masculinity within society. The policing of gender is more often directed at people who have been identified as a boy more than those who have been identified as a girl (Ecker & McConnell-Ginet, 2013). This "policing" is related to adults and peers alike who seek to make sure boys are doing what is prescribed as masculine (Wade & Ferree, 2015). For example, in department stores, you will likely not find dresses in the boys' section; yet, there is more variability in expression in the girls' section. This is not a reflection of the lack of policing which girls face, rather a

reinforcement of society's marginalization of femininity (Ecker & McConnell-Ginet, 2013).

Yet, it is important to note that there is no ideal masculine or feminine interpretation as there will always be dissention within society about how those traits are defined (Wade & Ferree, 2015). For example, Persian men once wore high heels as a sign of strength due to their use in riding horses in battle. This expression of masculinity went on to influence Western culture. Today in U.S. Society, high heels are attributed to feminine footwear. This example demonstrates how the concept of gender and gender expression operates beyond the property of individuals, rather it is defined by situational expressions of that gender based on previously established social expectations.

Masculinity is often defined through the expression of one's manliness and is connected to gender expression (Butler, 2006). Gendered behavior often varies based on situations and cultural parameters that have been put into place to define what is appropriate in expressing masculine and feminine actions (Harris, 2008). This variability in situational gender performance often requires gatekeepers to hold everyone accountable (Morris, 2012). The constant accountability by peers who are seeking to ensure that everyone is performing their gender within agreed terms causes men to perform their gender in ways that are often counterproductive to their educational experiences (Davis, 2002). For example, Courtenay and Keeling (2000) found that college men regularly engage in unhealthy behaviors that include unprotected sex, driving under the influence of alcohol, and engaging in physical altercations.

These detrimental performances of masculinity are often associated with the concept of hegemonic masculinity. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) described hegemonic masculinity as the contextually specific pattern of gender practice that

ideologically legitimizes the subordination of women and men that are thought to be feminine. This is often associated with an effort to be aggressive and exhibit your masculinity in ways that are in competition with other men. In essence, hegemonic masculinity seeks to establish the idea of their being only one way to exhibit manhood, and the more someone subscribes to this ideal the more legitimized their power and control over other men and women (Wade & Ferree, 2015). Competition is often limited to someone's ability to be physically dominant or to exhibit a sexual prowess in relationships with women. This concept also seeks to construct masculinity as a counter to femininity and to pursue a constant effort to uphold a standard of masculinity that provides little flexibility for men to exhibit emotions and be vulnerable (Morris, 2012).

The pursuit of an ideal masculine persona through the subordination of what has been deemed as feminine has contributed to the ideas boys and men have developed concerning their perceptions of academic achievement (Harper & Harris, 2010). In other words, to establish a hegemonic masculine identity, men throughout their educational experiences are asked to negotiate whether academic achievement, which is rooted in intellectual pursuits, affirms their masculinity (Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998). This also is represented in secondary and postsecondary educational data focused on the academic outcomes of boys and men. For example, high school dropout rates for male students in secondary education was 5.6%, while female students dropped out at 4.1% (NCES, 2019). In 2015, 72.5% of female students who had recently graduated high school were enrolled in a two-year or four-year college, compared to 65.8% of men. The Fall 2011 cohort of collegiate men graduated at a rate of 57% while collegiate women at 63% (NCES, 2019). Girls and women encounter just as many barriers at the intersections of their identities, so why do boys and collegiate men continue to fall behind academically?

The researcher believes this negative perception of academic achievement can be attributed to gender-role conflict.

Role conflict occurs when there are incompatible demands placed upon a person relating to their job or position. People experience role conflict when they find themselves pulled in various directions as they try to respond to the many statuses they hold. Gender-role conflict seeks to normalize socially acceptable behaviors surrounding gender that often leads to the detriment of those involved (O'Neil et al., 1986). These negative consequences can involve the person who is trying to live up to the social expectations surrounding their gender performance or can be restrictive to the person who is having this socialization placed on them by others. A prevalent representation of gender role conflict are heterosexual men's efforts to reject other men socially for being gay or being perceived as such. Heterosexual men seek to establish normative masculine behaviors by establishing heteronormative roles on sexuality, and being a gay man presents a threat to that masculinity (Hunt et al., 2016). Masculinity threat occurs when men are made to feel threatened because they are viewed as feminine to other men (Fowler & Geers, 2017).

Much of the effort to establish masculine ideals for men is rooted in their fear of being perceived as feminine by other men (O'Neil et al., 1986). Fear of femininity is at the center of gender-role conflict and is demonstrated in a variety of ways. Fear of femininity is also connected to O'Neil et al. (1986), who defined gender-role conflict and its strain into six patterns of socialization that include the following: (a) restrictive emotionality; (b) homophobia; (c) socialized control, power, and competition; (d) restrictive sexual and affectional behavior; (e) obsession with achievement and success; and (f) health care problems. As an example of how gender-role conflict can affect the

academic success of men, Good and Wood (1995) found that gender-role conflict restricted college men from seeking out help and assistance specifically through counseling services. This effort to restrict help-seeking behavior prevents men from engaging in various campus resources connected to academic success such as tutoring, career services, and even talking with faculty (Good & Wood, 1995).

O'Neil et al. (1986) found men who are seeking the ultimate masculine ideal fear femininity, the research is still not clear on why academic success is not embodied into this ideal masculine persona. If one of the patterns of gender-role conflict is obsessions with achievement and success, why aren't boys and men connecting that achievement and success to their academic success? The researcher believes that this is associated with boys and men's efforts to establish a masculine identity rooted in an anti-intellectual framework based solely on physical and material affirmations. Intellectual development for many boys during their formal educational years is often not associated with society's characteristics of being a man (Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998). For example, Morris (2012) conducted an ethnographic study at both a rural and urban high school to better understand the gender gap in achievement that was evident at both schools. The study revealed that regardless of school setting, boys at both schools viewed the characteristics surrounding academic achievement as feminine (Morris, 2012). These characteristics included reading, writing, and spending time in educational extracurricular activities. Even though this study was focused on the academic attitudes of students, it also supports the idea that males often subscribe to the social manifestations of masculinity in schools that would lead them to an anti-intellectual worldview of being men. This is even more problematic when these socializations have built-in accountability measures.

The constant policing and establishing boundaries surrounding the presentation of masculinity and femininity were explained within the theoretical framework of Doing Gender Theory (West & Zimmerman, 1987). The Doing Gender Theory, particularly in education, states that students participate in socialized behaviors related to gender performance and others in the group seek to hold those accountable for this gendered behavior (Morris, 2012). Much of the stereotypical gendered behavior amongst men is associated with hegemonic masculinity. In addition to hegemonic masculinity's effort to subordinate femininity, it also is performed by men who seek to uphold systems of patriarchy, heteronormativity, as well as violent and aggressive associations with manhood (Skelton & Francis, 2011). The outcomes of boys and men began to be more researched as the trend of low academic achievement has produced an emerging gender gap in educational outcomes; however, this gender gap was most prevalent amongst those men from historically marginalized communities (Morris, 2012). Even though Morris's study included the connections of gender and race as a manifestation of the different kinds of gendered behavior, the study did not explore the role that specifically racism has played in defining their gendered experiences. Musto (2019) conducted a study focused on how schools frame academic exceptionalism through gendered attitudes. This study found that marginalized groups of male students in middle school are seen as less capable and receive less encouragement to engage in constructive academic activities than more affluent or white male counterparts (Musto, 2019). The biases placed on Black males as being less academically talented is based on the racist ideas developed within larger society and manifested in schools. To discuss the experiences of Black males, there must be an examination of the systemic racism that has shaped their experiences in education.

Intersectionality and Black Masculinity

There is an immense amount of research surrounding gender within education. More specifically, there is much exploration on how gender affects schooling and academic achievement. Researchers acknowledge that schooling contexts are important for gender construction as well as racial identity development, but these intersections are rarely viewed in educational research (Brown et al., 2013). The problem with the lack of educational research in this area is that it is unknown how the construction of Black masculinity in schools have either aided or been to the detriment of Black male students. Education researchers must begin to view their work on schooling and Black males within a feminist as well as sociological framework to further expand the understanding of the role of school context in shaping Black masculinity. The combination of both feminist literature and sociological studies provide a start in better understanding the social construction of Black masculinity and how that may affect the experiences of Black male students.

Many feminist theorists have written about the construction of masculinity and how hegemonic masculinity specifically leads to various problems for all genders (Butler, 2006; Collins, 2006; hooks, 2004). Hegemonic masculinity is defined as a practice that legitimizes men's dominant position in society and justifies the subordination of the common male population and women, and other marginalized ways of being a man (Connell, 1998). Yet, when hegemonic masculinity intersects with race it also has a broader impact on the socialization of men of color (Harris et al., 2015). Because men of color have had to subscribe to Western ideals of masculinity, they are constantly seeking to prove their manhood to their peers and to others without the privilege of white maleness that legitimizes their behaviors (hooks, 2004). This constant performance of

hegemonic masculinity and the racism that is prevalent in society has had many documented consequences. One of the more recent phenomena concerning Black males in society is violence against them by law enforcement. Even though this is not directly attributed to Black male's performance of hegemonic masculinity, their performance of a Black masculine identity is often seen as threatening (Goff et al., 2012). Black males represent 32% of deaths from law enforcement, while only representing 5.8% of the U.S. population (DeGue et al., 2016). Black males also represent most incarcerated individuals within the United States (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2014), and they struggle with getting to college as well as getting their degrees (Harper, 2012). Many of these outcomes are due to the inequitable treatment of Black males but are in many ways still connected to their performance of hegemonic masculinity, which they do not benefit from the white males do (Mutua, 2006). With the mounting evidence of the negative impact that hegemonic masculinity has on Black males, there is a needed effort to explore the role that masculinity plays in Black male collegians attitudes toward intellectual development that is counter to the stereotypical norms associated with masculinity.

Viewing Black males simply through their participation in patriarchy is problematic because it does not acknowledge the other intersections of social identities that are marginalized within this system that also disadvantages people of color (McGuire et al., 2014). Therefore, many Black males subscribe to a patriarchal viewpoint yet lack the privileges that are often connected to white male hegemonic masculinity. The premise of people being multi-faceted in their experiences, particularly people of color, embodies the theoretical framework of intersectionality. Intersectionality, popularized by scholar Kimberle Crenshaw, stated that the interconnected nature of social identities such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, creating overlapping and

interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage (Crenshaw, 1990). Intersectionality has become a popular theory amongst scholars and activist but is also problematized by its over application within organizations who are trying to establish neoliberal diversity and inclusion efforts (Luft & Ward, 2009). Crenshaw (1990) specifically addressed the interconnectedness of being Black and being a woman. In other words, Black women will experience oppression much differently than Black men. Likewise, Black women will experience oppression much differently than white women. This example is representative of the premise that Black men and their masculine performance causes them to experience oppression and marginalization much differently than other marginalized groups especially white men. Decoupling their gendered experiences from other men must be established to better understand how educational environments see them. This does not diminish the marginalization faced by other men of color, but rather allows for the addressing of specific issues that plague Black male students.

Even though Black males still operate in a patriarchal society that values their maleness, they are the victims of systemic racism and marginalization at the same time. Connell (1998) examined the concept of hierarchies of masculinities. All masculinities are not socially seen as being equal, specifically racialized minorities (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). By reinforcing ideas of hegemonic masculinity there is an establishment of which masculinities receive privileges and those that will be seen as less favorable. Black males are perceived as dangerous and have found themselves having to navigate this suspicion as they matriculate through their educational experiences (Wade & Ferree, 2010). The suspicion of deviance associated to Black males has shaped their

public perception of being criminal and predatorily hypersexual (Chatman & Givens, 2019). Howard et al. (2012) articulated this reality in their work as follows:

Many of the twentieth century depictions painted Black males as pimps, thugs, hustlers, and law-breaking slicksters who were not to be trusted, were not worthy of equal treatment, and needed to be marginalized because they were a “menace to society,” prone to violence, and constantly involved in gangs and drugs. These characterizations have become entrenched in the public mind through pseudo-scientific research, literary sources of the day, cinematic outlets, and persistent caricatures. These caricatures contributed to the development of an image that perpetuates widespread disdain for Black men. (p. 89)

Another researcher explored the development of masculinity in Black male groups. McClure (2006) used the theory of double-consciousness and amalgamation as a means of providing a critical analysis of race and masculinity amongst Black male students involved in historically Black Greek-Lettered organizations. The study’s results revealed the persistence of both hegemonic and Afrocentric masculinity. From this, McClure (2006) coined the term as hegemonic-Afrocentric masculinity. Participants emphasized an Afrocentric mindset emphasizing the community over individualism and cooperation over competition. Nonetheless, participants subscribed to a male hegemonic mindset to combat the negative stereotypes of Black males. Therefore, participants placed an emphasis on obtaining leadership positions and majoring in academic pursuits they felt would allow them to be the breadwinners in their household. McClure’s study revealed to the authors the complexity of the gendered experiences surrounding Black males on college campuses. This complexity revealed the need to move beyond stereotypical ideals

of masculinity that are often prescribed to white men and seek out progressive masculinities that some men do embody.

Progressive Black Masculinities

Afrocentric approaches to viewing masculinity have been applied in various academic works to provide more context to the Black masculine experience (Nickleberry & Coleman, 2012). This perspective is a precursor to new conversations surrounding Black masculinity and more importantly redefining Black masculinity outside of the stereotypical norms placed on Black males by society. The reshaping of the paradigm of Black masculinity is apparent in scholarship focused on Progressive Black Masculinities.

Progressive Black Masculinities is not a frequently used framework, but an important one in producing a counternarrative for Black male masculinity. In his book titled *New Black Man*, Neal (2015, p. 29) described the emergence of a newfound vision for the perceptions and complexities of Black masculinities. This masculinity for Black males would be a progressive framework that pushes back on previous descriptions of Black males who are entrenched in stereotypical masculine behaviors. Neal (2015) stated “The New Black Man is not so much about conceiving of a more positive version of black masculinity—“positive” being a word too often used by the traditional Black bourgeoisie to sanitize the more unpleasant aspects of Black life and culture (see the NAACP Image Awards)—but rather a concept that acknowledges the many complex aspects, often contradictory, that make up a progressive and meaningful Black masculinity” (p. 29). Mutua (2006) provided a definition of Progressive Black Masculinity as being pro-Black and antiracist as well as pro-feminist and anti-sexist. This definition allows for the possibility to conduct research amongst undergraduate

Black males who embody these masculinities. More succinctly, this allows for researchers to move beyond the stereotypes of Black males and acknowledge the masculinities that are anti-racist and anti-sexist. McGuire et al. (2014) called for an examination of progressive masculinities by using research practices that are rooted in Black feminist practices. The search for progressive Black masculinities has received very little attention but provides an opportunity for researchers to ground their work in more than stereotypical perspectives of masculinity.

By moving beyond the stereotypical images of Black males, researchers can begin to explore the gendered experiences of high-achieving Black male students to determine whether their social experiences surrounding academic achievement also connects with a more progressive masculinity in their daily lives and interactions.

Black Males Conceptualizing Manhood

The meaning making of manhood has been explored by gender scholars, sociologist, educators, and even historians alike. Yet, the concept of manhood is often conflated with masculinity. As previously stated, masculinity refers to the socially constructed norms of men; yet, manhood is focused on the meanings men construct about themselves. This distinction is important to understand as Black male's conceptualization of manhood is influenced by their direct environmental factors, while their masculinity is based on the behaviors and performances that emerge from broad manhood constructions (Dancy, 2012). Black male's ability to convey how they make sense of their manhood has been emphasized by Critical Race theorists as an important component of generating counternarratives for Black males (Harper, 2009b). Black manhood is shaped by multiple social identities, including race, gender, social class, sexuality, and religion, among

others (Strayhorn & Tillman-Kelly, 2013). In other words, the ability of Black males to construct their own ideas of manhood are greatly influenced by the culture in which they live.

For example, Majors and Billson (1993) studied how culture influenced young Black males' perceptions of manhood. To combat their marginalization Black males often must seek out the affirmation of their manhood through various other methods of expression. This expression is captured in the theory of cool pose. Cool pose is a masculine strategy embraced by young Black males to cope with racism, oppression, and marginalization (Majors & Billson, 1993). This is a ritualized performance of behaviors that project a sense of pride and strength. Unfortunately, the cool pose persona is often prescribed to stereotypical images of Black males such as pimps, rappers, and athletes (Anderson, 2019). This gendered performance has been thought to lead to negative social and academic outcomes, but this analysis is anecdotal and is an effort to minimize the reaction that Black males have in response to unwelcoming social environments (Jackson, 2018). As Black males continue to construct their ideas of manhood, it is important to understand the various influences of that construction.

Family Influences

Black families have been shown to provide a major influence on the ideas and beliefs Black males conceptualize about themselves and their environment (Flowers, 2015). These beliefs include the conceptualization of their manhood as well as what is deemed as appropriate when expressing masculinity (Dancy, 2014). Additionally, Black males often develop their academic habits and motivations based on the level of support they receive from a parental figure (Moore, 2006). Black male student motivations from

parental figures comes from parents offering strong emotional connections and academic support during the academic process (Coles, 2006).

Maton et al. (1998) conducted a study on high-achieving Black male students and the role their families played in their success. All participants were students in a collegiate program designed to support their attainment towards a terminal degree. Participants were asked about the roles their families played in their academic development and motivations. The study found that parents played an important role in establishing a sense of determination and perseverance toward their academic goals. Parents also provided structure and accountability towards reaching academic goals. Additionally, the study found parents of these students provide loving and supportive environments where their sons could develop self-efficacy and establish a positive self-image of oneself (Maton et al., 1998). Lastly, participants in the study deemed family extended beyond the nuclear household and included important people within their communities as well as various institutions. The people in their neighborhoods, extended family, and institutions such as churches and local businesses all helped to develop a supportive environment.

Studies have also shown Black males seek to affirm their roles as protector and provider by being motivated to support their family (hooks, 2004). Because degree attainment is often deemed as an opportunity to improve the economic outcomes of their families, Black males have been shown to develop motivations for academic success as an effort to take care of their family presently or in the future, as well as gain an equal standing socially to white men who have achieved academic success (Dancy, 2012). The pursuit for degree attainment intersects with ideas of manhood represented by Black males means to care and provide for others.

Black Male Schooling

Social science has developed the theory of social identity to explain how differences around human social categories affects the behaviors and outcomes of different groups of people. These social identities include race, sex, gender, socioeconomic status, sexuality, and several other aspects of who we are defined by ourselves and the society around us. These social identities are often shaped by our social interactions with other people as well as the institutions we encounter. Being both Black and male are also shaped by these interactions. In the United States, being Black and male comes with the burden of being stereotyped due to the historical marginalization and violence against the Black male body (Oluwayomi, 2020). During slavery, the trope of Black males included being hypersexual, irresponsible, violent, and a host of other broad stereotypes (Hammond & Mattis, 2005). These stereotypes continue to shape and influence the experiences of Black males in various ways. There is no place more apparent in shaping the Black male identity than schools and education more broadly.

Educating Black males in today's public-school settings is often seen as a challenge (Ladson-Billings, 2011). Black males find themselves drastically overrepresented in expulsions and suspensions while their enrollments continue to be outpaced by Black women in postsecondary education enrollment (Ladson-Billings, 2011). These realities are often overlooked due to the adulation some Black males receive for excelling at sports and entertainment. In 2018, professional basketball player LeBron James criticized President Donald Trump for investing in racist policies which disproportionately affect communities of color. Fox News host Laura Ingraham responded by stating that LeBron James has no credibility to discuss political matters and he should just "shut up and dribble." Ingraham's response is representative of the

positionality of Black males in U.S. society as being valued and respected for their athletic or entertainment value but vilified for expressing any intellectual commentary. Schools and universities quantifiably accept this notion.

The overrepresentation of Black male athletes in comparison to actual Black male student enrollments are representative of education's emphasis on Black males being rewarded for their athletic prowess but not supported in developing intellectual college-going attributes (Harper, 2009). Harper (2018) conducted a study on the overrepresentation of Black male student athletes on college campuses in relation to the overall enrollments of Black male students on these campuses. The five major collegiate athletic conferences are notorious for this overrepresentation. Within the Southeastern Conference, the geographic region of the present study, Black males make up approximately 68% of athletes involved in basketball and football, while only being 4% of the undergraduate student population at these institutions (Harper, 2018). Major colleges and universities have supported the enrollment of Black male student athletes but have failed to support the growth of the overall Black male student population.

The "love-hate" trope of supporting the entertainment value of the Black male body while simultaneously viewing Black males as a problem is often expressed in the everyday schooling of Black males (Ladson-Billings, 2011). The dichotomy of either being popular because of their ability or being a problem because they do not fit the stereotypes of society surrounding Black males often affects how Black males make meaning of their identity, hence schools playing a major role in the identity development of Black males (Dancy, 2014). This is problematic in the sense that Black males have been shown to engage in behaviors that contribute to their underachievement, and these behaviors are not appropriately corrected by the adults who are supposed to educate them

(Noguera, 2003). Instead of addressing behavioral concerns in a manner that demonstrates care and value to the student, schools often label Black males as troublemakers and unsalvageable (Dancy, 2014).

Because schools play a major role in the identity development of children, the negative perceptions of Black male students often lead to their disengagement and has drastic effects on their academic outcomes (Davis, 2003). Therefore, the behavioral experiences of Black males in K-12 schools are pertinent in better understanding how the masculine identity of Black males are engaged in education. Scholars have identified that common stereotypes surrounding Black male identity has resulted in the reactions, policies, and strategies which influence how Black males make meaning of their manhood over time (Dancy, 2012). How Black males see themselves as gendered beings, and more importantly how they define their manhood over time is greatly influenced by schools as well as the many sociocultural influences Black males will encounter.

High-Achieving Black Males

Building on the above literature, the focus of this dissertation is an understudied population, high-achieving Black males. Recent scholarship surrounding Black males have begun to focus on those students who have high levels of engagement and academic achievement. Much of this literature has sought to provide a counternarrative to the deficit-focused research that has historically been the exhaustive focus on Black males in education. Education researcher, Shaun Harper, has become a leader in developing anti-deficit research that highlights the success Black male students have experienced in the face of inadequate schooling. High-achieving Black male students often site their belief in education despite their recognition of disproportionate opportunities and resources they

have received (Harper, 2012). In addition to Black male students demonstrating resiliency in K-12 education, there is also research that demonstrates these students have resiliency in higher education. In his most seminal work, Harper (2010) developed an anti-deficit achievement framework as a means of reframing scholarship that examines Black male student success. This framework called for researchers to view the experiences of high-achieving Black males in higher education as a means of developing programs and prescriptions that could duplicate the experiences these students have had (Harper, 2012). In one of Harper's earlier studies, he was even able to view the perceptions of manhood and masculinity amongst high-achieving Black male students. Harper (2004) completed an analysis of 32 high-achieving Black male collegians perspectives on manhood. This was part of a larger data set designed to better understand the experiences of Black male collegians. Nonetheless, using a phenomenological research approach, he was able to gather the lived experiences of participants. The findings showed that participants overwhelmingly exhibited conflict-free masculine ideals that allowed them to define themselves outside the stereotypical norms of masculinity. They viewed their peers who were not performing academically as being consumed with outside activities that allowed them to pursue sexual relationships with women. This translated into spending more time working out and doing physical activity. Additionally, participants did not connect their academic success with materialism, rather it was a responsibility to their families and communities (Harper, 2004). These results demonstrates that Black manhood does not have to be defined by traditional standards set by broader societal norms; yet, Black manhood can also be connected to academic achievement and selflessness. The challenge with Harper's study was that there had not been many efforts to duplicate the focus of this study across the research on Black males.

Additionally, subsequent research has focused primarily on Black male student success without addressing student's identity development.

McGee (2013) conducted a study that focused on examining how Black male students attending urban high schools see their experiences despite the many challenges they face. Students described the challenges they face within various contexts. First, students challenged the stereotypes they face from white teachers, administrators, and peers (McGee, 2013). Participants also described their experiences of navigating their dangerous neighborhoods. One participant was attacked on his way to school, so he developed means of navigating a frequently unsafe environment. McGee stated, "His attendance at the mathematics summer program was important, not just to him but to his family as well. Therefore, his family made arrangements to ensure that his last week at the camp would be safe" (p. 17). As previously mentioned, families of high-achieving students have played an important role in their success.

Tucker et al. (2010) conducted a study on developing a sense of mattering amongst high-achieving urban high school students. He inferred,

Feeling as if they mattered to others at school likely helped these young men build a strong foundation of self-efficacy and self-confidence from which they have found a sense of purpose and an enduring sense of purpose and an enduring sense of intrinsic motivation and drive for continued school engagement and academic success. (p. 141)

Harper (2013) conducted a study of 325 high-achieving Black and Latino male urban high school students in New York City. The focus of the study was to understand what factors contributed to their motivation towards academic success. The qualitative study identified several themes from the participants. First, participants identified that

their families valued their educational experiences. Contrary to previous research on Black male student achievement, participants in the study shared that academic achievement was very much part of the cultural environment embedded within their households. Second, high expectations from their families and teachers helped motivate them to do well in school. Participants shared that these high expectations were apparent to them very early on in their academic careers. Lastly, students saw value in their community experiences. Students saw the connections they made daily with the various people in their community created a sense of comradery and safety for them as they navigated even the dangerous aspects of the same community. For some participants, their settings would change as they would eventually move to safer neighborhoods, or their communities would become gentrified. As some participants in Harper's studied reflected on their experiences as having to move to safer neighborhoods in the suburbs, it brings into reality the move of Black families from traditional urban environments to more suburban and exurban communities. The experiences of Black male students are becoming more complex as they find themselves having to navigate new environments that have been researched less.

Harper and other researchers have helped to reframe the conversation surrounding Black male students in education, moving from a deficit to an anti-deficit approach. Yet, most of the research is focused simply on their abilities to be resilient regarding their academic success, but very little focus has been made to connect their focus on academic engagement to their gendered identity development. This dissertation considers the gendered experiences of Black male students as having some bearing to their engagement surrounding academic success. To explore this topic, research methods must reflect a means to establish some flexibility in exploring an unknown topic of discussion.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative study is to describe how high-achieving collegiate Black male's perceptions of masculinity and manhood have influenced their views on academic achievement and success. Additionally, this study seeks to demonstrate how high-achieving Black males affirm their identities in various educational environments. By examining and extracting the experiences of high-achieving collegiate Black males, colleges and universities will be able to develop programs and resources specifically geared toward their retention and graduation. Also, K-12 educators will understand their influence on the development of Black males' perceptions of manhood and masculinity. To provide an anti-deficit approach to this research, participants were selected based on their success as students and their voices are centered in the data collection.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is a form of social inquiry that focuses on the way people interpret and make sense of their experiences in their natural setting. Unlike quantitative research, which leads to hypothesis testing, qualitative research focuses on the "why" rather than the "what" of social phenomena (Stake, 2010). The researcher relied on the views of participants, asked broad, general questions, collected data from participants, described and analyzed these words for themes, and conducted the inquiry in a subjective, biased manner (Creswell & Plano, 2011). In the study, the researcher sought

to better understand the gendered experiences of high-achieving Black male students. Therefore, using a qualitative approach positioned the researcher to move beyond the empirical notion of “Black men’s gender plays a role in their educational challenges” and into “this is how Black males’ gendered experiences has shaped their educational experience.” Qualitative theorists believed that although individuals experience the same phenomenon, the participants’ perceptions are unique in interpretation (Creswell, 2009). This premise is at the crux of the current research. Previous perspectives on Black males have viewed them as monolithic regarding their experiences. Qualitative research allows for the investigation of Black males’ experiences as unique and complex individuals who exist within a world in which their identities affect their overall perceptions of those experiences.

Abductive Analysis vs. Grounded Theory

The central approach to this qualitative study is its departure from inductive and deductive practices which focuses on theory being something simply generated from data and our own expectations. When researching minimally researched topics it is important to acknowledge and aspire to generate new theoretical insights. Therefore, the research in this study is constructed on a pragmatist methodological approach emphasizing a different logic of inference that stands at the basis of theory construction (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012).

Abductive analysis is a qualitative method related to grounded theory within its methodological structure of conducting interviews, synthesizing data from those interviews, and producing themes. It differs by departing from an inductive analysis focused on simply naming an existing theory to explain an outcome. Abductive analysis

has a focus on theory construction based on new or unexpected insights (Deterding & Waters, 2018). Grounded theory asks for the researcher to be inductive in their approach, which allows them to generate theory based on the data collected. The inductive nature of grounded theory is thought of as being the most legitimate as inductive analysis calls for the researcher to suspend all previous assumptions and to allow the data to generate the emergent theory. This method of qualitative research has been widely revered as an appropriate method to determine which theory best explains the outcomes that emerge from the data. But the grounded theory approach leaves little flexibility to generate new theoretical insights and scientific creativity due to the overreliance of current theoretical models available (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). Additionally, with the emergence of theories from this approach, its usefulness has transformed much of its efforts into trying to fit the data collected into the latest and most popular theoretical framework at the time. Theory construction is the production of an understanding, of a new claim regarding the empirical world that researchers hope others will take up, argue with, refute, or employ (Tavory & Timmermans, 2014). To move away from simply using a previously established theory as a means of grounding the proposed research, the researcher employed the use of abductive analysis which allowed for the integration of various theoretical perspectives and the possibility of refining existing theories based on surprising data that emerged.

As currently stated, this approach allows the researcher to acknowledge their previous experiences with various theoretical frameworks but allow for the flexibility to move between those theories and the generated data (Timmermans & Tavory, 2014). In this study, abduction allowed the researcher the flexibility to develop new insights to a topic that has very little supporting research currently. More specifically, there is much

unknown about the gendered experiences of Black male collegians in relation to schooling. Researchers have gathered data about Black males that describes them as being marginalized, but how does that marginalization specifically impact Black males and their success through schooling? Current theories suggest that there are many factors that influence these experiences, but forthcoming research should not be restricted to singular interpretations of Black male students' experiences. This research method allows for the researcher to be creative and insightful while looking for new insights to this research focus.

Positionality

In qualitative research, the data collected is mediated through a human medium, rather than through quantitative apparatuses. With this in mind, it is important that the researcher describe relevant aspects of their self, as well as reflect on any experiences that could affect the analysis of data collected. This effort to be transparent helps to address any biases and focuses the researcher to be intentional about suspended judgement during data collection and analysis.

I am a Black man who was raised in an urban setting similar to the university's setting. I also am the product of a public-school environment and was immersed in an all-Black community during my life's maturation. I had two parents who were college graduates who impressed upon me the need to pursue education to climb the social and economic ladder within the United States. My community was a middle-class Black neighborhood by way of "white flight" which influenced my views on race relations within the United States. Because I was so immersed in a Black community and attended schools with mostly Black kids, I had little time to examine my racial identity outside the

context of a very segregated city. Therefore, I always had a consciousness about my Black identity in relation to whiteness only. Following my K-12 experience I went on to attend a traditional PWI located in the Southeast United States. This was the first time I was in an educational setting in which I was truly the minority racially. This experience created a passion for me as it relates to the experiences of Black collegians at PWIs. As a researcher who is studying a segment of Black male students at a PWI, I am aware of how my own personal experiences have shaped my worldview on Black male student success. Even though few researchers enter their work with no subjectivity, it is important that I am aware of my own experiences as it relates to collecting and analyzing the data collected.

Setting

This qualitative study was conducted at a medium sized urban research university in the Southeast United States. The university is very racially diverse as 39% of the student body identifies as non-white, and 22% of the student body identifies as African American. Nationally, this provides a very racially diverse student population as the average percentage of African Americans on college campuses is 13% (NCES, 2014). The university also has a number of programs and diversity efforts aimed to address the needs of Black students including a Black student programs board, delineated Black registered student organizations, and even a retention initiative designed to assist in the retention and graduation of Black male students specifically.

Within any research, the research questions set the foundation of a research project, including the site selection. The importance of utilizing an urban university as a context is an important component of completing this project. Urban universities have been

found to contribute to the success of Black male students by immersing them in communities that value their presence and contributions (Strayhorn, 2017). By using the environment of an urban university as part of the overall experience of participants, the researcher was able to explore how the location of the university plays a role in either supporting or deterring their success.

Participants

To qualify for this study participants must have identified as the following: (a) be a currently enrolled student at the university, (b) self-identify as a Black male, (c) be at least a second-year student, and (d) have a minimum 3.0 grade point average on a 4.0 scale. In addition to the stated qualifications, priority was given to participants who provided a cross-section of various educational experiences that include the types of secondary schools they attended prior to enrolling at the university (suburban, urban, etc.). Participants were recruited using purposeful sampling to ensure that those selected meet the minimum requirements. Purposeful sampling is a technique widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources (Patton, 2002). This involves identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2012). By specifically recruiting Black male participants who fit the selected criterion, the researcher gained the most insight about this phenomenon directly from the experts who have experienced it. Participants represented a diverse range of Black male social and educational experiences. Several participants shared they had attended both well-resourced and poorly resourced schools within their K-12 experience. Two participants

graduated from private Christian high schools. Five participants discussed attending urban schools. Two participants shared they attended schools in rural communities. The majority of participants discussed their experiences attending what would be characterized as suburban or exurban schools. Participants also shared their experiences from the perspective of holding other social identities. Two participants identified as gay men. One participant shared he had an undisclosed sexuality. The majority of participants grew up in middle class families; however, six participants mentioned specifically the challenges of growing up poor and having a low socioeconomic status. Only one participant shared he grew up within a higher socioeconomic status, with parents who made well above \$100,000 annually. Lastly, two participants shared that being the children of immigrants had a large effect on their social and educational experience.

Due to the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic facing college campuses, interviews were conducted virtually with all participants. Archibald et al. (2019) found that Zoom videoconferencing was an effective tool in conducting qualitative data collection. Therefore, participants were provided a secure online virtual interview via Zoom conferencing hosted and secured through the university's Information Technology department. All interviews were recorded and secured through the university's cloud-based system. The university's Office of Institutional Effectiveness confirmed the students' GPAs upon their agreement to participate. Participants were entered into a \$150 Amazon gift card raffle for their participation in the study. In total, 20 were selected for this study. Best practices for reaching a saturation threshold in qualitative research is not dependent on having a set minimum of participants, rather it is more important for the data to reflect the theoretical saturation needed to explain a phenomenon (Conlon et al., 2020). Theoretical saturation was determined by the researcher generating cross-case

memos and utilizing those memos in the coding process to reveal theoretical insights. This aligns with qualitative best practices, as abduction allowed the researcher to reach theoretical saturation once he was able to utilize analyzed data and determine theoretical insights from the produced analysis (Conlon et al., 2020).

This study included 20 Black male students attending the same urban university in the Southeastern United States. Each participant was deemed high-achieving by earning at least a 3.0 cumulative GPA on a 4.0 scale. Their average cumulative GPA as a group was a 3.5. Black males at the university have an average GPA of 2.87, which demonstrates this group’s ability to achieve beyond their peers academically. Out of the 20 participants 12 of them were classified as seniors, there were also four juniors and four sophomores. Their ages ranged from 19-30, providing a range of diverse life and educational experiences. Participants’ majors varied representing five out of the six schools available to undergraduate students on their campus. Participants’ pseudonyms, ages, majors, GPAs, and classifications are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Participants

Participant	Age	Major	GPA	Classification
Kirk	22	English	3.96	Senior
Isaac	22	Communication Studies	3.71	Junior
Eric	23	Psychology	3.34	Senior
Travis	20	Biomedical Sciences	3.7	Junior
Shannon	24	Sociology	3.07	Senior
D’Angelo	20	Music	3.7	Senior

Adrian	20	Criminal Justice	3.36	Sophomore
Brian	30	Communication Studies	3.34	Senior
Claude	21	Psychology	3.36	Senior
Terrance	29	Computer Science	3.68	Sophomore
Jason	23	Materials Engineering	3.1	Senior
Giles	23	High School Education	3.42	Senior
Milton	22	Public Health	3.34	Senior
Calvin	20	Finance	4	Sophomore
Joe	22	Biology	3.01	Senior
Ryan	19	Biology	3.47	Sophomore
Will	23	Nursing	3.39	Senior
John	20	Psychology	3.25	Junior
Marcus	23	Management	3.22	Senior
James	21	Biomedical Sciences	3.66	Junior

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to allow participants to reflect on their racialized experiences as Black males and as high academic achievers. High-achieving Black college males were selected by recruiting participants via email through the university's email system. Additional contact to student organizations, faculty, and staff were made to ensure a high concentration of Black students in recruitment efforts. Participants were asked the following questions in semi-structured interviews:

Table 3

Interview Questions

Participant Interview Questions	
Question 1	What does it mean to you to be a Black man?
Question 2	Who do you feel has been the biggest influence on your idea of manhood and why? <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Is this some you know or an inspiring figure?
Question 3	What experiences in school or college have given you an opportunity to affirm your manhood? <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Academic Experiences?- Extracurricular Experiences?
Question 4	Do you think your race has impacted your views on manhood? Why or why not
Question 5	Have your thoughts on what it means to be a man changed over time? <ul style="list-style-type: none">- What do you think has influenced your response?
Question 6	Has being a Black man influenced your college experience?
Question 7	What is your motivation to excel in the classroom?
Question 8	Do you feel that your views on academic achievement are shared by your other Black male peers?
Question 9	Has your pursuit for academic achievement affirmed your manhood? If so, how?

These questions were created to steer the conversation, but interviews were not limited to these questions. Because these were semi-structured interviews, the researcher asked follow-up questions based on the responses of the participants. Yet, the interview questions were created to directly address the research questions. The first interview question was developed to ask a broad question focused simply on how they define

themselves as Black men. The second question was asked with the purpose of better understanding who the participants may have emulated or looked up to in better understanding their manhood. The third question relates to their experiences in college. Since participants are high-achieving, the researcher wanted to better understand how they connect their academic engagement with their masculinity. The fourth question was developed to understand how their racial identity intersected with their masculine identity. The fifth question focused on how their perceptions of manhood and masculinity evolved throughout their maturity. The sixth question was developed to confront how their socialized perspective on masculinity may have conflicted with a social norm. The seventh question is asked to better understand their personal motivation for academic success. The eighth question was asked to determine whether they feel their peers share their same views on academic success. The ninth question was asked to determine whether they see the academic success as part of their masculine identity. The average length of interviews were 46 minutes with the shortest interview lasting 32 minutes and the longest lasting 61 minutes.

Data Analysis

As previously mentioned, abductive analysis allows researchers to move in and out of existing theories as the data leads them to do. For this process to be rigorous and intentional, the researcher developed an analytical approach that allowed this flexibility. Considering today's technological advances in coding and analyzing data through software tools, it is necessary to outline how a methodological approach for this research topic allowed for flexibility in exploring various theoretical considerations. Deterding and Waters (2018) developed a framework for "flexible coding" that allows for

researchers to analyze data with flexibility that has not been possible without the emergence of Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) software. Borrowing from the field of sociology, methods included a semi-structured interview protocol with 20 participants seeking to meet theoretical saturation. This is another area where this research approach greatly differs from the constructivist approach, and that is having many participants that would allow for greater validity and generalizability of data collected. Reviewing of previous theory and appropriate literature was included in the research process as well. Reviewing previous literature that may influence a study is encouraged in abductive analysis which greatly distinguishes it from grounded theory methods. After interviews were conducted with participants, the analytic process began by utilizing QDA software to index transcripts and anchor content to the interview protocol. Before transcripts were indexed, the researcher read through them to determine whether previous theories and concepts should be considered. During this phase, the researcher also produced respondent-level and cross-case memos. This allowed for the later documentation of the codes to the transcript. This also provided for greater reliability and validity of the coding process (Deterding & Waters, 2018). The second stage of the methodological process was coding all the transcribed data. The coding process required numerous reads of transcripts and was also assisted by using QDA software. The third and final stage was using software tools to validate codes across cases and generalizing the data to existing theory and existing theoretical concepts to include the findings validated in the study (Deterding & Waters, 2018).

Using an abductive approach suited this study's purpose as it allowed the researcher to investigate a very little researched topic. This research focused on an aspect of Black male student experiences that have not been thoroughly examined by previous

researchers. Therefore, as new theoretical production in this research, it was important to provide a methodological approach that provided the flexibility to examine existing theory, but simultaneously use it to collect qualitative data in generating new or consider previous theory that may not have guided the research initially. The researcher's approach to this qualitative method helped to address one of the greatest weaknesses in qualitative research. How do researchers connect theory, observation, and method into a cohesive structure that is legitimate within the scientific community? Abductive analysis answers this by acknowledging previous theories that have guided these topics and at the same time providing the flexibility to add to them by acknowledging new and surprising data.

Lastly, this approach allowed the researcher to acknowledge his previous experiences with various theoretical frameworks but allow for the flexibility to move between those theories and the generated data (Timmermans & Tavory, 2014). More specifically, much is unknown about the gendered experiences of Black male collegians in relation to schooling. Researchers have gathered data about Black males that described them as being marginalized, but how does that marginalization specifically impact Black males and their success through schooling? Current theories suggest that there are many factors that influence these experiences, but forthcoming research should not be restricted to singular interpretations of Black male students' experiences. This research method allowed for the researcher to be creative and insightful as a researcher looking for new insights to this research focus.

Thematic Relationships

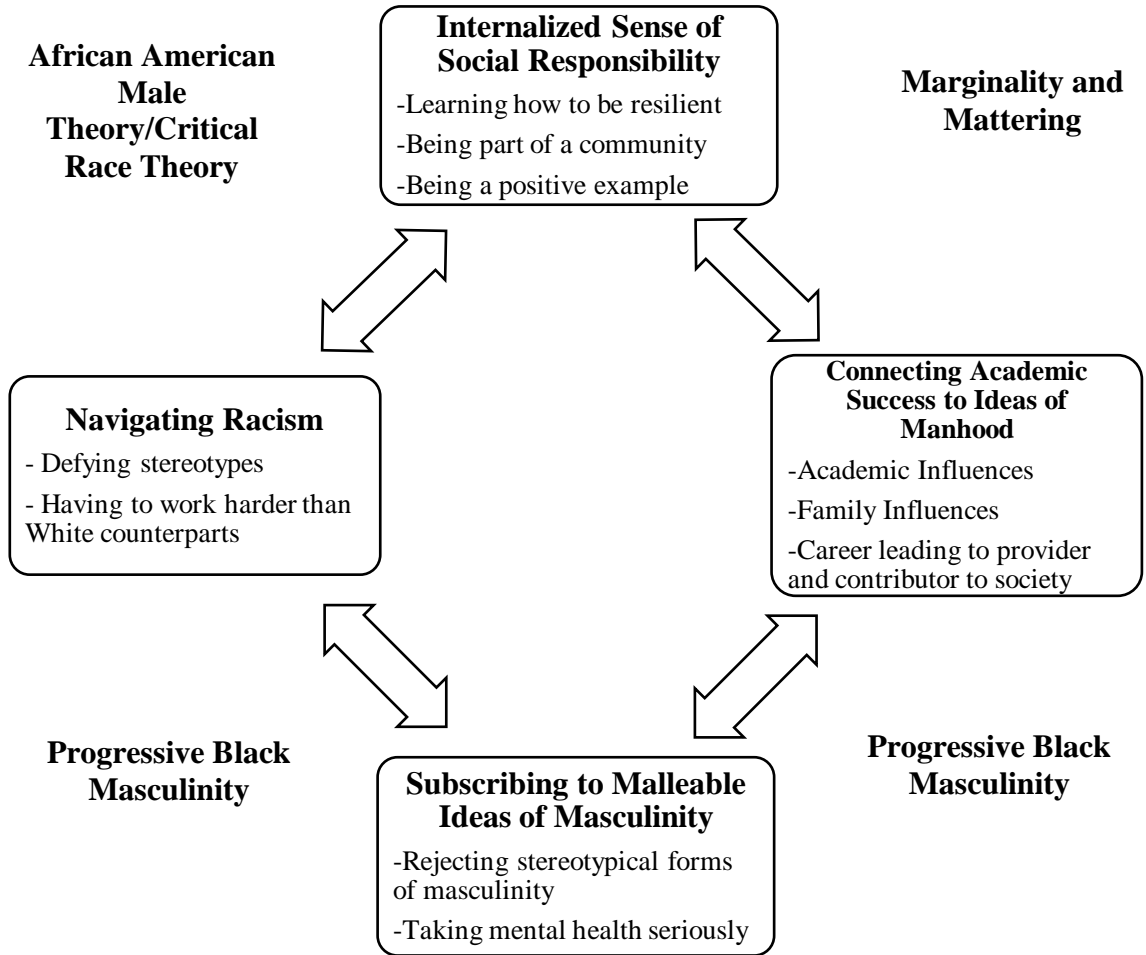
With this dissertation, the researcher used the methodological approach outlined in abductive analysis practices to create themes and subthemes based on the transcripts collected from interviews with participants. This approach required the researcher to write analytic memos, which allowed the researcher to reflect and record on "coding processes and code choices; how the process of inquiry is taking shape; and the emergent patterns, categories and subcategories, themes, and concepts in their data, possibly leading toward theory" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 44), following each interview to familiarize the researcher with the raw data. These memos were ultimately used to generate themes across transcripts (Deterding & Waters, 2018). The researcher then read over the transcripts numerous times while indexing transcripts with broad codes which emerged from the memos. After broad codes were solidified, subthemes were developed in the data reduction process. Lastly, analytic coding was applied across participant transcripts to provide evidence of key relationships with the analysis. The entire coding process was done using NViVO 12 qualitative data analysis software.

There were four themes which emerged from the data analysis, which were the following: (a) Connecting Academic Success to Ideas of Manhood, (b) Internalized Sense of Social Responsibility, (c) Navigating Racism, and (d) Subscribing to Malleable Ideas of Masculinity. As the researcher generated themes and subthemes from the analyzed data, relationships across themes were explored to determine connections between each theme. The theme of Internalized Sense of Social Responsibility shared a relationship with Navigating Racism. This relationship was discovered as respondents shared how the subthemes under Internalized Sense of Social Responsibility was significant in their efforts to navigate the racism they encountered, developing resilience in their academic

experiences. Additionally, participants saw their need to overcome the racism they encountered as a skill they developed through their internalized sense of responsibility to their communities, families, and other Black males who may try to emulate them. Internalized Sense of Social Responsibility also shared a relationship with the theme of Connecting Academic Success to Ideas of Manhood. This relationship formed due to participants' motivation to demonstrate social responsibility by succeeding academically. Similarly, participants saw that being successful academically as a Black man generated value for themselves by people they wanted to receive approval from, hence creating motivation to be successful in every aspect of their lives. The theme Connecting Academic Success to Ideas of Manhood also shared a relationship with Subscribing to Malleable Ideas of Masculinity. This relationship is the byproduct of participants sharing how they want to construct their own perspectives of Black manhood that are not stereotypically masculine and reject stereotypes of Black men not being academically astute. The theme of Subscribing to Malleable Ideas of Masculinity also shared a relationship with the theme Navigating Racism because of the shared desires of participants to construct a Black masculinity that is affirming to Black males and is not harmful to others. Visual representation of themes and their relationships are revealed in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Thematic Relationships of High Achieving Collegiate Black Males Perceptions of Manhood and Masculinity



Credibility and Trustworthiness

The study’s use of QDA software allowed for an opportunity to establish credibility within the research. To establish credibility of the study the researcher employed a progressive focusing model using NVIVO 12 coding software. Progressive focusing allows for the meanings and data gathering along with issues and prospective findings to

change throughout the study (Stake, 2010). This is deemed as an appropriate credibility strategy for qualitative researchers (Stake, 2010). See Figure 2.

Figure 2

Progressive Focusing Model



Progressive Focusing Model

The first task in the progressive focusing model is developing your topic and reviewing previous literature and theoretical contributions to the topic (Sinkovis & Alfoldi, 2012). As the researcher began this study, he reviewed previous research on

Black males, masculinity, high-achieving Black males, and the theories associated with them. The second task associated with progressive focusing is to develop a research design to fit the research topic (Sinkovis & Alfodi, 2012). The research design of interviewing participants through semi-structured interviews and conducting an abductive analysis was implemented due to the lack of current research focused on the topic. The design was an effort to generate new perspectives and theoretical considerations while considering previous contributions to Black male research. The third task is to have appropriate sampling and access to participants. Purposeful sampling was used to recruit participants due to the effort to recruit high-achieving Black males. It also was appropriate to do so considering the researcher's access to student data via the institution's data office. The fourth task is associated with fieldwork or collecting data. The data collection process was focused on interviewing 20 participants who were identified within the purposeful sample parameters. Task five is the analysis portion. In a progressive focusing approach, existing theory may not fit directly with the data, and neither the theory nor the data take precedence over the other. Because differences often arise, the researcher moves back and forth between analytical insights and alternative theories in an exploratory manner (Sinkovis & Alfodi, 2012). Because the researcher spent a large amount of time reviewing previous research and theoretical perspectives, he was able to seamlessly move between the data and previous theoretical considerations in an exploratory fashion. Once a feasible explanation is found, the researcher may move on to the sixth task of findings. The researcher was able to develop findings based on the analysis of the collected data. Task six involved developing the key arguments and modifications to existing theory as well as the overall contributions of the research

(Sinkovis & Alfodi, 2012). The researcher in this study was able to reveal theoretical insights gleaned from the analysis of collected data.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to describe how high-achieving collegiate Black male's perceptions of masculinity and manhood have influenced their views on academic achievement and success. Additionally, this study sought to demonstrate how high-achieving Black males affirm their identities in various educational environments. The study's guiding research questions were:

1. How are high-achieving Black collegiate males' perceptions of their masculinity and manhood presented in relation to their perceptions of academic success?
2. How are high-achieving Black collegiate males' perceptions of their previous educational and social contexts presented in relation to their perceptions of academic success?

The findings from this study revealed distinct themes generated from the data analysis, which helped to generate theoretical insights between these thematic findings. This chapter was specifically designed to present the findings of the study.

Theme 1: Connecting Academic Success to Ideas of Manhood

The first theme of Connecting Academic Success to Ideas of Manhood emerged early during the index portion of analysis, as participants shared their experiences and perspectives on manhood. Through the continued analysis of themes other subthemes of

academic influences, family influences, and careers leading to being a provider and contributor to society emerged as distinct representations of how various aspects of their academic experiences had influenced how they make meaning of their manhood.

Academic Influences

In discussing their ideas of manhood, some participants shared how specifically their academic experiences had influenced their ideas of manhood. These participants particularly mentioned how their pursuit for academic success made them feel more connected to their idea of manhood. Isaac gave the following perspective:

Because I want to say, for me, my manhood revolves around my value. You know, if I feel like I'm nothing, I am nothing. You know, if I don't have the data to back it up then I am nothing to myself. I have value as a man. So yes, like as far as my grades staying high, then I am valuable. Not to myself, but to others.

This quote directly connects Isaac's value to his idea of manhood, and how academic achievement validates that value. Similarly, Milton shared,

Doing well in school has taught me to value being a Black man as being intelligent and being knowledgeable of different things. You know, as being strong and being capable. And just being able to network and share with the world, and I feel like that's important for Black men.

Like these views, Giles stated a parallel perspective while discussing having to work in college and realizing his retail job offered immediate gratification to buy items for himself, but now he sees how obtaining his degree will give him a sense of pride because of his intellectual development as a Black man. While talking about the value of earning a degree, Giles went on to share how he sees his degree attainment as solidifying

his masculine identity by comparing himself to other Black men with high levels of academic esteem and said,

While I probably didn't get my hands dirty doing it, it made me more of an esteemed man. Maybe I can't compare myself with someone like Mike Tyson, but I can compare myself with someone like Booker T. Washington, George Washington Carver. Those folks who are educated, so I feel like I'm at the same level with them.

Participants often connected their obtainment of intellectual pursuits as something that made them feel like being more of a man. No participant shared they saw their intellectual pursuits as an affront to their manhood or masculinity, but there were other reasons participants had not always valued academic success.

Some participants did not always value academic success because of their early academic experiences, and their transition to better schools allowed them to integrate academic success into what they desired for themselves. After attending under-resourced schools in elementary and middle school, Joe attended a magnet high school which he did not want to initially attend. But he talked about how it changed his academic mindset. He said,

And for my parents to literally force me into getting that application signed by my current teachers, that type of thing. At the time I resented them for that. You're pulling me from my friends, that type of thing. I resented them for that, and I've told them that.

Yet, as he reflected on his experience at the magnet school he said,

At that time it was a necessary switch for me to become who I am now and for me to even make it this far, I guess. I mean to go to that academic, I mean that magnet program. It was something totally different.

The change to a school environment where academic success was important helped some participants find value in their educational experience. Calvin also had a similar experience as Joe. He said,

I didn't come from the best neighborhood, so obviously, you know underfunded neighborhoods don't necessarily have the best school systems. I mean, you're talking about schools that didn't have enough textbooks for all the students. You're sharing textbooks with different people. It is not the healthiest place to thrive because they don't give you a lot of opportunities to express yourself and open yourself up.

He continued by talking about when he moved to a better high school, his academic experience was excellent, but the culture of his well-resourced high school presented cultural challenges. There were not many other people who looked like him or came from his community. This experience shows the dichotomy of attending urban schools where you feel connected to a community where you belong, and well-resourced suburban schools that provide rigorous academic environments but fail to create welcoming environments.

As the researcher asked questions about their experiences in school and college, participants demonstrated how their academic environment had shaped their ideas about manhood. Kirk discussed how he did not have many male figures in his personal life, and the white teachers and administrators at his school played an important role in shaping his ideas about manhood. He stated,

So in terms of learning what manhood was, it turned out to be that my band director and my chorus director kind of ended up being almost surrogate fathers for me and mentors in the sense, when I did grow older and was trying to figure out how to be just a man in general. And they were kind of at least anti-racist enough to understand that I was Black and things were different for me.

The influence of teachers, even if they did not share similar identities as the participants, helped to create supportive environments if they were willing to acknowledge their experiences as Black males.

Milton also shared the following on how he specifically had been influenced by male teachers:

And one teacher that I got to name drop is my fifth-grade teacher, Mr. Johnson. I think he was my first male teacher, so I gravitated toward him. And I think he targeted kids like myself that didn't have a male figure in the household and just made sure he taught us look, you know those minor things that he felt like we may have been missing. Like you know, just the basic things that you learn as a young man like being responsible and kind to others.

Milton even shared that he felt like Mr. Johnson was one of the few teachers who saw potential in him early in his life. Early positive encounters at school prove to be important to the academic mindsets of Black males.

Other participants stressed how their extracurricular activities at school and college had allowed them to lead, and they associated leadership as being essential to ideas of manhood. When asked if any of his educational experiences helped to shape his ideas of manhood, Calvin, who had previously mentioned the advantages and challenges of moving from a bad school setting to a well-resourced high school, said,

When I was in high school, I was president of the finance business organization. I would try to get everybody on the same page and talk to them and show them how I wanted to do things. And I think leadership is one of the main qualities of manhood and as a man you should be able to be a leader. And doing all those organizations and taking all those leadership roles I became not only a good leader, but a better man because of it.

Travis, who is in the university marching band, added the following similar notion:

Freshman year of college was a lot of getting to know other people around. I joined the band fraternity. Which also was a big step in another thing which is independence. I guess that was a choice that I made. Or probably one of the first big choices that I made about my social and extracurricular activity without any guidance from anybody. It wasn't my mom saying hey, do you wanna do this? It was completely a decision I made of my own volition. And then I guess I carried over the confidence and ran for a position and received a position on the executive board for the fraternity sophomore year, and then carrying over now to junior year. I made it up to president of that fraternity. So I guess through band I learned a couple of those aspects of manhood.

These leadership experiences rooted within their academic experiences helps to generate positive learning environments for Black males by demonstrating they are competent and capable in leading their peers through academically purposeful activities.

Even though participants rejected many stereotypical ideas about masculinity, a few participants also discussed how their academic influence was driven through stereotypical ideas connected to masculinity such as being competitive with other men.

John shared he does not get along with many Black men because there seems to be a need

to compete with one another. When talking about his experiences of building relationships with other Black males while attending a predominately white high school John stated,

I don't necessarily have that, and I think because I just like I just didn't get along with a lot of other Black men or Black boys growing up for whatever reason. I mean, it wasn't our fault. I guess we felt the need to compete because we were Black boys around mostly white people.

Terrance also said his academic success is attributed to his competitiveness and that men should be competitive. Even though participants felt the need to be competitive, some of them were conscious of this and made efforts to not do so. This is exemplified as Shannon discusses his challenges with trying to fit in with other Black men while still trying to be a Black man that is looking to uplift others,

It's kind of like discord in the Black male community a little bit to what we have to compete. And one thing I don't want to do is I don't want to try to compete with others or try to tear others down that are competitive with others. So have self-worth and validation if that makes sense.

These statements of competitiveness from participants shows they are also products of their socialization of their manhood. They were taught to be competitive and therefore they still find means to do so, even in academic environments.

In addition to academic environments contributing to their meanings of manhood, participants also tied how families' influence on their academic achievements also had contributed to them making connections of academic success and manhood.

Family Influences

Participants shared that family had been a major influence on their ideas of manhood, regardless of the family member's gender. As the researcher continued to talk about the participants' experiences with their family, several participants discussed how those family members also integrated the importance of academic achievement into their social development. Claude talked about how his parents did not encourage him academically, but there was an uncle who always provided encouragement including academic achievement.

Even if I feel like I'm making some type of mistake, there's still encouragement with him. With my parents there was only discouragement around any mistake I made. Recently I got to the semifinals of Fulbright and they didn't even say anything. My uncle called and congratulated me as soon as he found out.

James had a different experience with his parents being more focused on his academic success. He described,

I did not have a choice, that's why I kind of didn't even like school to begin with because of the fact that my parents, when I was younger, that's all they cared about I was doing.

The focus on academic success for participants also presented mental and emotional stress for many participants as family sometimes placed immense amount of pressure on them being successful. Claude, Terrance, and Brian were the only participants who did not feel family pressure to succeed academically. Isaac mentioned his father would be disappointed with anything less than the highest mark in school. He remarked,

I remember in elementary school, like him flipping through my grades like 90, 94, 92, and he's at the last one that says like 88 and he threw me the dirtiest look. I felt like complete garbage for the rest of the day.

Will even mentioned his fear of corporal punishment for making bad grades. Will shared,

My sister used to get an ass whooping every now and then when she got home even when she got a C. And I didn't want that to be me. So even in school that was motivation for me. I'm not trying to get a whooping every time I come home with my report card. So that's what pretty much drove me to like make A's and B's, and then that just continue on as I grew up.

As the researcher continued to learn more about the motivation of participants to succeed academically, family pressure was a motivator but in what could be perceived as unhealthy for some participants.

Overall, participants really were motivated to succeed academically throughout their educational experiences due to praise or the wanting to not disappoint family. Jason even says this directly in talking about his parents and their expectations for him. "I just really wanted to make them proud and get good responses from them, it really drove me." Families' influence on participants' perceptions of academic achievement proved to be an essential component to how participants make meaning of themselves.

Careers Leading to Being a Provider and Contributor to Society

As participants discussed the influence of their families, they also shared their desire to be a provider upon completion of their academic pursuits. They connected their success academically to their ability to be a provider and establish themselves as productive men within the larger society. Participants shared men should see themselves

as protectors and earning money to provide financial security for their family was often emphasized. Participants also wanted to be able to provide for themselves. While discussing how he had not grown up with much money, Joe shared,

I guess my motivation now is because I am so into my own now. I guess my own experiences trying to do things that type of thing and the lifestyle that I have chosen for myself requires a certain, I guess bank account and I need to get to that bank account so I can continue my lifestyle that I like.

Brian had a similar sentiment. He talked about growing up poor and being neglected by his father. Because of that experience, he wants to make a living so he can adequately support himself and a family. Brian said, “My motivation in the classroom is pretty simple, to make a lot of money in what I love so I can take care myself and those I care about.”

The statements concerning their ability to earn money to support their families and themselves demonstrates the connections Black males have made to money equating their ability to see themselves as successful. These traditional notions of securing financial prosperity coincide with common ideas of manhood and masculinity. Yet, these participants also saw this financial security as a means of changing their lives from previous circumstances of poverty.

Other participants connected their academic success to developing a high level of professional competency so they could be successful in their careers. Will shared how his academic success would ensure his competency in being a great healthcare provider. The financial outcomes were not something he thought were the most important aspect of his academic achievement leading to career opportunities. Will commented,

I know a couple of my friends are just like I'm in college because I want to get a good job. I'm really just essentially looking out for myself. But, essentially for me. I chose healthcare as a way to give back to the community, not as just to say I make a lot of money. This is not why I'm choosing this. It means much more to me than that.

He also expanded on how his competency is important to his career success for the benefit of others by stating the following:

I wanna make sure I know my job thoroughly or to the point where people can come find me and ask me for questions if they don't know something. I can tell them and let them know, that's my motivation and drive.

The desire to want to be the most competent person within the career field was a common perspective amongst participants. Being seen as capable is something many participants felt Black men often were seen as not. Therefore, statements concerning their academic success as a means of gaining competency for future careers helped participants feel they would be seen as more competent as they moved into their future careers.

Competency not only was a concern about entering their future career fields, but also as they sought to gain access to elite academic spaces. Ryan wants to go into medicine and shared how few Black men get accepted to medical school. He directly connected his identity as a Black man to the need to be seen as a competent future medical school student by saying,

The fact that I'm a Black man I have to work harder. So when it comes to I guess the interview for medical school, I don't want them to just see African American on the application and fit the stereotype of African American grades. I want to be

the top candidate and I want to surprise them and show them that you know as a Black man you can get these grades and it is normal.

All participants quoted connected their academic experience with reaching a career goal for themselves, while many others felt the need to serve their communities through their career success. Some felt it was important to do so as a provider for themselves or for their community. Other participants had a desire to simply be the best at what they do and be a representative for their larger community.

Theme 2: Internalized Sense of Social Responsibility

The research questions guiding this study sought to analyze how perceptions of masculinity and manhood have influenced their views on academic achievement and success. The previous theme focused on participant perceptions of academic success in relation to who they are as Black males, and the current theme highlights specifically their experiences being part of Black social environments. The environments, whether those were all-Black communities during their early maturation, or Black communities they have become part of through their collegiate experience, emerged as an important aspect of their identity development as Black males. Additionally, participants shared how participating in various activities specifically related to Black people also gave them a sense of purpose and identity as well as were motivating factors to strive for academic success. All 20 participants made some reference to this specific theme. The subthemes of being part of a community, being a positive example, and learning how to be resilient are outlined in the following sections.

Being Part of a Community

Being part of a community was a subtheme which emerged out of the theme Internalized Sense of Responsibility, specifically as participants were being asked to talk about their motivation to excel academically. As participants began to discuss their motivations, they often shared they are not only excelling because they would like to be successful, but rather they see themselves as part of a larger community in which they get support from and feel affirmed in that community. For example, Eric shared,

I don't know what it is, but Black dudes when we see each other, it's always some type of hyping up. We are hyping each other up it's never like we ever praying on each other downfall. We are always helping each other out. Like, are you good? How are you doing? Or if we see each other slacking we may say Ok, tighten up you need to do this. Do you need help with this? We are always motivating each other.

Most participants saw themselves as a larger collective of Black people, which in turn made them feel a sense of camaraderie with other Black men especially. This departure from being competitive with one another demonstrated the Afrocentric nature of high-achieving Black males regarding academic success. They do not feel their success is tied to another Black male's failure, and instead seek to support one another.

Black males' sense of camaraderie is cultural where they feel they have a shared experience. Milton talked about being part of a community of Black people and Black men specifically. When the researcher asked him about what influenced his ideas of manhood, he said there are common activities and experiences that are prescribed to Black males,

So my perspective has always come from my dad and especially his brothers and just growing up, going to the barbershop, you know? We would have football games, baseball games, and the normal stuff for us being Black men in those types of situations where you're around other Black men that do other Black men things and such. I don't know how to explain it but you're an individual amongst people who do the same things you do, at least when I was growing up.

Milton went on to discuss how previous experiences he related to being a Black male translated to his collegiate experience generating a supportive community of Black peers.

Being a Black man, it has allowed me those opportunities to feel a sense of community. You know the Black people at our school are so connected. I don't know, I just feel like I know a lot more people and am able to connect with a lot more people just because there's not many of us. We get to connect and see each other in ways that other races probably are not able to do because they don't. I can't speak for them, but I just know being a Black man I feel very connected to my community.

Milton's statement of feeling connected to other Black people during his collegiate experience is representative of the subset of communities that participants created as a means of fostering some familiarity at a predominately white college campus. The ability to foster this environment helped to make participants feel like they belong.

Even though participants talked about feeling supported by being part of a community of Black people and Black men, they also discussed how they really would like to receive an education to support the same community. John, who previously talked about how he didn't get along with many Black males, even shared this sentiment despite his challenges with other Black males by stating,

I have real desires of my own that I really want to succeed. That makes me really happy, but I mean I also feel like if I achieve those the happier I am, the more I'll be able to obtain so that I can give to others which would also make me happy.

Like just giving to my family and friends would make me happy.

Jason connected serving his community as an important aspect of him being a Black man. He continued,

As far as being a Black man to me. You have to stick up for your family members, friends, all that and be available to help because you know not everybody is going to help them. I say that's a big thing I attribute to being a Black man.

The same sense of responsibility to community was shared by Shannon when talking about his passion for education,

I want to teach other people who are like me. I want to educate people like me. I want to write and I knew there wasn't going to be any real money in it, but I didn't do it for the money. I know if I did it for the money I would not succeed because you know, your heart's not in it then your passion is not in it. If I'm not passionate about something I won't do it no matter how much money it gives me. I won't do it, it's just how I am. And so I had to quickly find a passion, and my passion was helping others.

Participants not only valued being part of a community of Black people, but also felt indebted to it. Their pursuit for career success was not only tied to their own financial well-being, but also as an effort to improve the circumstances of their family and community. They thought taking care of others within their community was the duty of Black men.

Developing a sense of responsibility to others also translated to their collegiate experiences. While discussing different activities he was involved with, Milton who previously emphasized his connection with other Black males through unique experiences, stated his involvement with Black organizations to being an affirmation of manhood because he was serving the community of Black students on campus,

Manhood to me is doing what you're supposed to do and taking care of what you're supposed to and those around you. I feel like I can be proud of myself, for you know, being in organizations and doing different things in college like the Black male mentoring program, like Freshman forum, like the Black student programs board, like the Black modeling group. Being there doing those things and helping different people, showing that I can take care of people, just proves to me that I'm being a better man.

Again, participants shared the need to serve others within their community. Black organizations on their campus created opportunities to serve their Black peers. Majority of participants sought out Black organizations as a means of fulfilling their responsibility to others.

Being a Positive Example

As participants shared how being a part of a community has influenced them as men, they also discussed the need to be a positive example for that community and how education is important to the example they want to convey. Giles said “Honestly, education you have a far better chance than running the football. And so, I want to be that.” Ryan shared a similar statement, “I feel like to be able to have a great level of

influence and power in a platform. You have to be educated as a Black man.” He shared the specific moment when he realized the power of his example,

One day I went to the university dining area, and some people who went to my high school were visiting and they were excited to see me, and they wanted my knowledge. I don’t even remember all the conversations or what I did when I was in high school. What’s the big deal? But in that moment I realized how much impact I have as an educated Black man.

Participants also shared they wanted to be a positive example because others served as positive examples for them. Isaac shared a recent example of how he connected with someone in his desired profession of Communications as inspiration to also be an example,

It's like I don't really know too many Black people in Communications. I just talked with this guy from the local tv station. He's I want to say a director over there like production. He was talking about barely seeing Black people in the workforce. And obviously, I'm sure the Black people haven't, I don't know the Black percentages and stuff like that, but it definitely hasn't been rising up and there's just isn't more of us in the field today.

He went into detail about how he could be the example for all the Black men coming after him with communications degrees. He felt a genuine responsibility for being the example for other Black men who are thinking about entering his desired profession. Similarly, D’Angelo talked about his desire to be an example for his family because not many of them had obtained college degrees,

So for me, yes academic achievement and not seeing many people in my family, I want to say well educated you know Black men in my family, that kind of like

pushed me. I was like, OK well let me push my family forward doing something different because they all kind of like do the same thing. They're good with their hands and everything so I was like maybe I'll do something different. Kind of like make a better name.

Participants appeared to take on the responsibility of reshaping the image of the Black male through their efforts to be high achievers. They felt their success was an opportunity to show others that Black men can be good students and successful in their lives. They also wanted to increase the visibility of successful Black males.

Even though participants were not directly asked about being a positive example to others, their motivation to succeed academically so they could be a positive example to others within the larger Black community was mentioned by several participants. Kirk described how he did not see many Black men as English professors and that he wanted to be an English professor not just because of his love for the subject, but he wanted other Black men to see themselves in him. Terrance has a son and a younger brother who he wants to set a positive example for by obtaining his degree. Marcus reflected on having friends who had gone to jail and that he wanted to set the example for others in his community to avoid similar paths,

You know, it's for you know all my homeboys that are in jail, all my homeboys that's dead like it's for them you know what I'm saying. Because a lot of the people that I grew up around, you know, they haven't come anywhere close to where I'm at and I want to use what I've done as motivation for them and for the people who come after me.

Being a positive example for others brought about some of the most personal reflections from participants. Marcus's reflection on his friends who did not make it out

of his community is an example of why academic success for Black males who may emerge from dire circumstances are driven to succeed despite those odds. Furthermore, they want to show others within their community they can do the same.

Learning How to Be Resilient

Participants stressed the need to be resilient as a significant factor in how they see themselves as men, and that is reflected in their academic pursuits. The process of them being resilient was when they felt the most affirmed as men. In talking about overcoming his trials and tribulations and still maintaining his academic success Milton said, “I want to look back and say I did that or, you know, even though it was hard, I was able to learn from my mistakes and grow from it.” Will discussed how being resilient gave him a sense of affirmation in his manhood,

I think manhood wasn't affirmed to me until like I guess when I got to college when I was pretty much by myself alone in a sense. I'm not saying I didn't have help from home. But I wanted a little bit more when it comes to money and stuff like that. So I went out and got a job, and you know bought me a car, and started doing all these different things and even moved into my first apartment and I started paying rent. So that's when I picked up more responsibility. That's when my manhood was affirmed.

Participants learned to embrace the struggles that other students may not have to face. Encountering financial difficulties and solving those financial burdens by obtaining employment presented significant challenges for participants, but they also saw this as them taking care of themselves. Their independence as college students was a great source of their manhood affirmation.

Some participants shared how the need to be resilient affected them positively when they experienced academic challenges as well. Calvin discussed how the transition from high school to college was not ideal, but he had to adapt to the new environment.

Calvin said,

Even though I did go to a pretty decent high school academically, I think this preparing myself to study for a huge test and trying to adapt to different teachers' styles. And then achieving that way is the only thing that I can think of as pertaining to the idea of a manhood, just learning to adapt and overcome.

Similarly, Giles discussed how being the only Black kid in his middle school class had motivated him towards academic success,

While I don't necessarily feel like I have a target on my back, I feel like I have to always prove myself even in the everyday routine of doing things. So yes, it just reminds me that I have to go hard just to make a point.

The ability of participants to work through academic challenges were key to their success. They found ways to adapt through seeking out assistance from other peers and engaging in on-campus or school-related academic resources. When these academic challenges were presented, participants found ways to navigate them.

Marcus provided the most in-depth information about the need to be resilient in his interview. He shared that he lost both his grandmother and father during his time in college and came to the realization that he still had to take care of his responsibilities academically even when it affected him mentally,

Regardless of what's going on, your mother may pass, your friend may pass. The world is never going to stop for me. You know what I'm saying? So that was something that was the biggest thing that made me realize, like you know, I still

have to be a man and handle my responsibilities and similar the situation with my grandmother like it's the same thing you know. I still have responsibilities to take care of, like I still have bills to pay and in that situation right after my grandmother passed, my mother had went into like a depression state.

He added how his being resilient differentiated him from other students because he had to not only deal with the barriers of being low-income, dealing with racism on campus, and handling family tragedy, he also had to persevere. He stated,

And, you know, to be a student and deal with these stereotypes about us and put up with the university. Like come on, I know you cannot do what I'm doing. And I'm going to show you that I can do this and I can achieve at the same time. I'm not only going to be here, I'm going to do well. And I'm not going to lie. I feel like in terms of my potential as a student. I can accomplish anything.

Participants' desire to continue their education despite personal and financial challenges was a constant factor within the analyzed data. Their ability to handle these challenges and emotions was when the interviewer received the most insight into their experiences. They deemed their resiliency as a testament to their manhood.

The subtheme of needing to be resilient was extracted from the major theme of social affirmations due to its role in helping participants make meaning of themselves within their social experiences. Their resiliency was a major component of how the participants defined their manhood.

Theme 3: Navigating Racism

As participants talked about what it means to be a Black man and what experiences have shaped those perspectives, every participant talked about encountering

racism, and more specifically having to manage their behavior and expectations due to the racism they encountered or perceived from larger society. In this dissertation, racism was defined as social and institutional structures, including policies and cultures, that were or usually are developed and upheld by supremacist ideologies. Racism is perpetuated by subscribing negative attributes to a racialized group of people and, within this dissertation, these negative attributes are focused on negative stereotypes of Black people and Black males especially. Some participants used the negative perceptions of Black males as a means of motivation to defy the stereotypes being placed on them. Others shared how they were made aware of these perceptions surrounding Black males; therefore, they were told they would need to work much harder than their white counterparts. The theme of navigating racism was the most prevalent theme within the study and was delineated into the subthemes of defying stereotypes and working harder than white counterparts.

Defying Stereotypes

Participants consistently shared their desire to defy stereotypes placed upon them by what they perceived as societal factors, or those stereotypes placed on them by the people they encounter. Participants received messages from family about needing to defy stereotypes about Black males throughout their educational experiences. Travis shared, “I grew up being told constantly like present yourself a certain way to avoid being viewed as something that you're not.” Ryan shared a similar experience,

Ever since I was little, I had to make sure that I knew that I was well. I was a Black man and what that means to society. And I was told even at a young age that you know you have to work twice as hard as everybody else because they're

going to look at you differently and judge you before you even speak. Which means you also have to speak well and everything else.

The comment of having to work as hard as possible as a Black man was shared by all participants and reflects their efforts to defy the stereotypes placed on them. They internalized these stereotypes even though they knew they were not true. They were committed to prove to others they were not any of the stereotypes reflected in media or other sources of influences for the general public.

Many participants also shared how they worked every day to present themselves as being worthy within predominately white spaces, even when it detracted from their personal characteristics. Giles stated,

Before I transferred to UAB, I went to an HBCU. You know I had a haircut with a part in my head and all that. No big deal, and I don't think that it really said much about my personality. But, I told myself when I was going to transfer to my current university I was going to get rid of that part right? And like I said, it doesn't represent my personality, but I knew that there were going to be some people and some professors who wanted to look at me and think I was a fool.

Giles, more than any other participant, was determined to defy the stereotypes about Black males and elaborated even more about other ways he was conscious of his image. He explained,

So I said let me get away from all stereotypes and just, you know, not necessarily try to fit in, but I'm going to show you I'm not what you think I am. So I don't go to class with jeans on. I don't go to class with shorts on every time. Before Covid, I've come to class with a collar shirt on and khaki pants with the shirt tucked in. I've always dressed like I was going to do something, you know? No jeans, no T

shirt. I'm going to prove myself to be better than those stereotypes you have in your head.

D'Angelo had similar notions of needing to conform physically to defy stereotypes. He shared,

So you know they see me or see I'm wearing a head scarf or something, they have a perception of who I am. I haven't even said a word, so I have to be mindful of how I talk. And I have to be extra clear and enunciate my words so people can understand what I'm saying, and I won't be labeled as like you know, like a stereotypical Black kid or whatever. So, I have to be mindful of that because I don't want to be perceived as something different.

Even though participants knew they were conforming themselves to present a comfortability to the dominant culture at their schools and university, they still saw it as a means to survival within these places. They felt white comfortability was essential to their success within academic spaces.

Participants knew these stereotypes were representative of white comfort. Kirk shared a deeper understanding of why he felt it necessary to work to defy the stereotypes placed on him by making good grades, stating the following:

I was taught to be respectable very early on as a means of kind of surviving in this kind of new environment, and so part of that respectability was that you need to make sure that you have the highest grades possible and things of that nature in terms of education. But it also meant kind of being, I know that you're of course Black or white. We know that in the family and we have our certain things, but like white people are not going to understand that up to the same degree and so you're going to have to learn over time, especially with the people you are around,

to be able to basically kind of assimilate in a way, just like a temporary assimilation.

The researcher asked Kirk to elaborate on these experiences of having to assimilate. He responded,

Yeah, so kind of like when it comes to just respectability politics, this is basically this idea of trying to, at least for me in my experience, of um trying to act as white as possible or not doing anything that will offend, like the comfort of white people, and white spaces. And so there's been quite a few times which I felt I wanted to say something, especially when it came to just like things in history like the Civil War. OK, why can't we like wait for reparations later? Especially why couldn't we had like a simpler time where we just like slowly freed the slaves or something like that? Why did they had to come so harsh? And when it was just like, Black people were either like extremely victimized in terms of their enslavement, where they were seen as perpetrators because of the problems of white people and white people's racism. I really want to say something about this. But it's like I have this reputation as being like kind of like a smart kid in the class.

Kirk was the longest interview in the study, and this is partly due to his eloquence in defining the issues that plagued his identity development. His quotes from his time attending a white Christian school reflect his challenges in feeling affirmed as a Black male in those spaces, but needing to be careful to not offend anyone. He was in a constant state of navigating his own identity as a Black male while being respectable as a means of surviving socially at his school.

Terrance talked about how he had encountered negative stereotypes as he transitioned from an urban to suburban high school. In a conversation with the white principal at his new school he mentioned,

I'll never forget this. The principal when I first sat down at that school. He told me and I could probably remember this word for word. He said I don't know what they accepted at your other school, but we will not accept any of that here. That was my first meeting with him. The first few words he ever spoke to me so.

The researcher asked for clarity on how Terrance perceived the comment and he explained that kids from his previous school, which was in a predominately lower-income Black neighborhood, were viewed as troublemakers and as even violent.

Giles shared he had been enrolled at both predominately Black and white schools within his K-12 experience. He mentioned,

And so in eighth grade I went to a rural school which was predominantly white when I was in 8th grade. I think it was 10 Black students. And that was it. And so there was culture shock. I mean it when I say culture shock, it was culture shock. But one thing I realized is that it made me. I didn't want to play into the stereotype.

He also shared how he used the reality of being one of few Black kids in his class as motivation to excel academically,

So being the only Black student, we had five or six classes a day, so sometimes I would be the only Black student in class. You know you were not going to look at me and say, hey, that's the dummy in class, no. So I pushed myself harder so that I could be the best. And so I think that eighth grade year I ended up having the highest average in history class. And so I got a reward for that highest average.

The expressed efforts to make white people feel comfortable were an important aspect of participants working to defy stereotypes of Black males. Even though participants often shared that these stereotypes never went away, they still felt the expressed need to work to defy them.

Other participants shared more direct experiences regarding the stereotypes placed on them. James was considered a high achiever at his high school and had done well academically his entire life. He said it didn't stop people from stereotyping him. He shared two different occasions where this occurred,

I've had experience, personal experiences where the work that I've done has gotten undermined just because I was Black. In middle school I once had gotten told that I wasn't supposed to be at an honor society meeting because I was a thug. So it just made me really kind of put it into perspective.

He went on to share another experience about playing sports at his high school,

So my coach told me one time that, well, this was just flat out bad. He told me that I had struck out one time and he was like, you have to realize that Black people can't hit curveballs. And I was like. I actually didn't say anything, I just had to go walk away. Because like you know, I don't know what I would have said. I probably would have. That would have been my last time being allowed to play. I ended up not playing the next season and what not, but it was just. Stuff like that, like the fact that he actually thinks that. And this is like a 35-36 year old man! They honestly believe that I couldn't hit a curveball because I was Black! Are you kidding me right now?

Travis talked about how he learned very early in his academic career there was not much error for making mistakes as a Black male because of the way he was perceived by teachers. Travis said,

I have no disciplinary track record up until that point in 7th grade or of doing anything wrong or anything whatsoever. But this particular day in my class, I had my phone in my backpack, but I hadn't had it turned off that day for whatever reason and reaching into my backpack I put my binder in it and the voice assistant went off and it was fairly loud, like it did disrupt the class. And I apologized to the teacher. I told her my voice assistant went off on my phone. I didn't know it was even on. It was in my backpack. The next day she took my phone. Which OK, that's what happens I guess. But the next day whenever I went to get it or at the end of that day, whenever I went to get it, I was assigned retrack, which is in-school suspension for that.

He later realized just how unfair this treatment was,

And I thought that's just the way things go. But after I was back from that, one of my friends pointed out that there was another student who happened to be a Caucasian female who pretty much every other day was either on her phone, caught on her phone, or like talking on her phone whenever she wasn't supposed to, and like me, being myself, I was focused on me, but when he pointed that out, I was like, you know, that's kind of right.

Stereotypes perceived by peers, teachers, and administrators at their schools often created hostile environments for participants. These hostile environments resulted in legitimate disdain for the predominately white schools attended by several participants, as well as made them feel like they did not belong; but, many of the participants shared how

these experiences of needing to defy stereotypes, only made them realize they needed to work harder than everyone else.

Working Harder Than White Counterparts

A consistent subtheme which emerged from the larger theme of Navigating Racism was having to work harder than their white counterparts in the classroom, as well as in life. Joe is approaching graduation and talked about going to a job interview while reflecting on how much harder it was for him to prepare for a job interview than it would be for a white man.

Just going back to having to work a little harder or work a lot harder by being a Black male stepping into that room and my stereotypes that may fit me at that time in their mind steps in before me.

Joe also added he did not think white males would have to deal with the same kinds of stereotypes. Adrian shared a nearly identical perspective,

Well, see a Black man, they have to really work for everything. I guess if you got a Black man interviewing and a white man interviewing for the same job. And the white man will more likely get the job than the Black men typically. Because of the color of his skin and I mean, this has a lot to do with everything because I mean, the white man has more privilege than a Black man. Just based off history and everything. That's just how it always has been and if you're Black, a Black man has to work harder than a white man has to get done what he wants done.

The perspectives of white men having more access to opportunity was a major distinction revealed from Black males when thinking about their own manhood compared to those of

white men. The gendered racism they received as Black men did not allow for the same privileges and opportunities that white men often receive in society.

Participants also believed that the need to work harder is due to the lack of value Black people are given particularly when academic excellence is considered. Several participants talked about professors, potential employers, and even white classmates not wanting to believe they could accomplish high levels of academic achievement. For example, Claude mentioned a conversation he had with a group of other Black men on campus about how they were treated by their professors and classmates during group assignments,

It was like this group worker who so happen to be white was getting more credit for the stuff that he had done, than he was. And it's just stuff like that. We all agreed that we felt that if we had did the same thing as like one of the white students in one of our classes it would weigh or matter less than if they did it. Like it would be the same feat, same achievement. But it's not worth as much. It's just that whole thing to work twice as harder to get the same results.

Kirk, who wants to be an English professor, talked about wanting to work in an academic setting and feels like his hard work and the work of other Black academics are minimized,

Um, but then it's also kind of like this. I feel it could be this kind of fear of like oh, we're afraid of what's going to happen? We have like an overload of Black achievement and Black individuals like what happened to the state of academia? Like either becoming too inferior, or what would happen if there's white people end up having their spots taken because Black males? Like Black individuals come and take that from them so it's kind of like that. Fear of what they will see if

there are a ton of high-achieving Black males. But to put it simply it is racism.

Like that's what that that's kind of like. Some of the racism, like thoughts I've seen kind of prevail in academia.

Participants' views of how racism has hurt them in academic spaces is connected to the ideas of Black males being less intellectually capable. Yet, participants continued to work to prove others wrong about their intellectual capacity.

The theme of racism was a consistent element of interviews with participants. They made sure to share how it interacted with their ideas of manhood and how it has challenged as well as motivated them towards high academic achievement.

Theme 4: Subscribing to Malleable Ideas of Masculinity

The fourth theme that emerged from interviews was the subscribing to malleable ideas of masculinity. This emerged most frequently when participants were asked to describe their ideas of what it means to be a Black man, and how their views on manhood have changed over time. Even though some participants provided characteristics that were connected to stereotypical ideas of manhood, such as being a provider, they also shared varied amounts of nuance in their responses to what they believed about masculinity. The subthemes outlined in this section show these responses confirmed their willingness to think about masculinity and themselves outside of mainstream hegemonic perspectives.

Rejecting Stereotypical Forms of Masculinity

Participants talked about how they had learned their ideas of masculinity from various social influences including family, friends, and even school environments. But

they shared how they had begun to challenge what they had learned as they got older.

Giles talked about how he had originally thought it was only important to be a provider as a man, but now he has a different view which includes a more nurturing viewpoint,

And so as I've grown older, I've thought about how important it is to not only be a provider, but to put in time. I mean you can go to work seven days a week and have everything they need and want. But what time have you put in? For me, I've learned the importance of time that that family time together. And how you can't get that time back.

Giles, who presented more stereotypical views of manhood and masculinity throughout his interview, thought it was just as important for him to be a loving member of his family. Because many participants came from working-class families, they saw their academic experiences to garner jobs that would allow them more time with their eventual families. Their views on masculinity included being a caring parent and partner.

Kirk shared that he was taught by white male teachers that his primary role as a man should be that of a protector. But he re-envisioned the protector role to directly challenge the stereotypical idea of being a protector,

I think that's a big one in terms of the masculinity that we know now, especially like a toxic kind of like white male masculinity is like, oh, you only need to show like three emotions and the primary one is anger. Um, and it's like no, you can be able to cry and feel sad. You can have empathy for others, and that's what's going make you a better man if you want to be like that protector role for other people.

Participants thought that understanding one's emotions and being comfortable with them was an important aspect to who they were as men. They directly rejected the notion of men as being unemotional.

Several other participants shared their willingness to challenge traditional notions of masculinity through their expressing of emotion. Jason said,

Just because I'm a man like that doesn't mean I can't express love. Like you don't have to get all your affection from women in your family or the women in your friend group. Like I can be loving too, you know I can be sad too. I mean I can need help you know, like I can accept that way easier now because just life but.

Ryan adds to this sentiment by saying,

I don't think you should be hard. I don't think it should be a bad thing to do when the time comes when they ask you certain questions, or you know you feel like you have to share something, then you should share it and it should be true to you and you know whatever your testimony is. And you can find strength in showing your emotions as well.

This was a surprising perspective in the data, as participants made sure to emphasize, that they do not subscribe to men being unemotional. This perspective is representative of society's effort to challenge traditional notions of masculinity. Because participants are students on a college campus, many participants mentioned they have the opportunity to engage in this practice without retribution from others.

Another form of rejecting stereotypical forms of masculinity was participants' views on sexuality. Kirk, who previously talked about attending a white Christian school, questioned the need to be in a heterosexual relationship to be perceived as a man.

Being at a Christian academy, a lot of, kind of like the stereotypical like forms of manhood was that of like you had to like be with like a woman or something like that or like having like those heterosexual relationships. So, the best forms of

manhood for me taught me how to be a man despite whoever like I liked or things of that nature.

Milton identifies as a gay man and says he felt empowered to step outside of what others think he should be because he is gay. "But as far as being masculine, in that sense, I feel like me being gay, it allows me to do a very good job of stepping outside the norm." He provided an example of how he does not feel confined because he is gay.

Say for instance, wearing certain clothes, you know certain men don't like wearing tight fitting clothes, men don't like to wear certain colors. Uh, stuff like that. I'll go into a dressing room, and I don't see something on the men's side. I'll go to the women's side and see what fits. See what looks right and you know I sew. I'll just take my clothes in and make it look right for me because that's what I know I can do. But these days I feel like other men they look at it and be like, ah, that's for women.

Participants' views on sexuality confirms literature surrounding Black gay men as being less connected to traditional notions of masculinity (Strayhorn & Tillman-Kelly, 2013). The surprising portion of this perspective were the participants in the study who identified as heterosexual but did not believe one's sexuality dictated their masculinity.

Participants credited much of their thinking on masculinity to being in environments which exposed them to new perspectives or being personally connected to someone from whom they had learned. Will talked about having a close friend who was mistreated because he was gay. He described,

My senior year of high school, my best friend came out and he came out as gay. And like he was pretty much a social pariah ever since he came out as gay, but I continued to be his friend. I was like, OK, well I'm glad that you can be open and

you're living your truth and stuff like that, but a lot of people start messing with him because of that and I was just like that's not really cool. I don't like that and then it got to the point where people tried to associate his views on life, like I had the same views or was saying I was gay. But it was just like, no this is my friend. I'm not going to change up on him just because he likes certain things that I don't. That's messed up. So that was one of the driving factors behind me like challenging hypermasculinity. Like this just this isn't it.

He also talked about how he decided to begin challenging himself around ideas of masculinity he had conformed to his entire life, saying,

Oh, I would say like, for a while I felt uncomfortable me personally, just like complementing my homeboys. If I liked what they had on or they were clean. I was like I feel there was no way for me to be like, man I don't know how to like compliment another dude. Like your clean your clean. But I don't want to come off as like you know me trying to like show interest in them or something like that along that nature. So, like just rearranging my mind or like OK, you got to think of it like a different perspective. Like this man clean. So, you like man, I like your outfit. Where you get those from? Stuff like that along that nature. Trying to combat that.

Shannon shared a similar scenario in which a close friend had influenced him and explained,

When I was 16, my best friend, she came out to me as transgender. And then after that, that kind of changed my view on masculinity and femininity and you know Cis hetero you know issues like that and that kind of made me want to study.

A participant's ability to learn from others about reforming their ideas about manhood was a notable experience throughout the interviews. As participants formed personal relationships with other people who challenged their stereotypical views on gender and sexuality, they were able to integrate those experiences into ideas about themselves. This made their perspective on gender more malleable and allowed them to shape their own perceptions, even if they differed from the ideas they grew up learning.

Participants continuously shared they believed their masculinity was something they defined outside of what others thought, and their ideas about masculinity were still being shaped and formed. A major influence in which these ideas were transformed was through their engagement in campus activities and university resources.

Taking Mental Health Seriously

When participants were asked about what activities helped to shape their views on manhood, 50% of them said their engagement in mental health resources played a significant role in how they saw themselves as Black men. Additionally, they felt like taking care of your mental health was a way to engage in healthy dialogue surrounding their masculinity. Kirk talked about redefining his masculinity by moving beyond the idea of physical strength and into a healthy mental state that seeks to help people. He believed that the men in his life, such as his father, had been harmful and even mentally abusive to women. He specifically did not like the way his father mistreated his mother mentally and emotionally. He stressed that he wanted to find ways to support women through his masculinity. Calvin, the youngest participant in the study, shared a personal testimony of how he had used his pursuit of a healthy mental state to shape his masculinity.

Well, my mother and my dad got divorced. And during that time I would not allow myself to feel any type of emotions until a few months later I just snapped and I was just I was sick. I was tired. I didn't want to go to school. I wouldn't necessarily say it was depression. But it was definitely very saddening. And I was crying and crying and crying. But that made me feel better and that made me understand more why my mom and my dad split. And I think that made me smarter and stronger because I was able to recognize and acknowledge the pain that I was suffering. So, I think that was the one thing that made me a man just being able to acknowledge the traumas and the bad things that have happened in my life and be better because of it and learn from it.

Some participants talked about how they had not learned to be comfortable expressing issues around mental health in fear of being seen as feminine but encountered peers and counselors at the university who exposed them to the idea of taking care of their mental health. Marcus talked about how his involvement in groups with other Black men had allowed him to have these conversations,

Really just having to sit down and express yourself amongst a group of men like I haven't had to do that before, and the Black Male mentoring program hosting a group counseling session helped me do that. So, I would say overall relationships and that carries back to like I say friends, my girlfriend, the Black Male Mentoring program, and my fraternity just giving me different outlooks. Because I feel like the Black male mentoring program has definitely tried to make a safe setting where you know we can come in and just talk, like bring in counselors. Like you know, feeling comfortable saying things that usually you wouldn't say. I'm saying this because it may be seen as you being sensitive or you being soft.

By engaging in mental health resources, participants were able to manage the trauma they encountered in their lives. The ability to manage trauma and maintain a healthy mental state helped participants build their resiliency.

Other participants talked about their counselors on campus as reasons they were able to confront the issues associated with their masculinity which had kept them from reaching their potential both socially and academically. Isaac talked about how his counselor helped him deal with his anger and that his masculinity did not have to be defined by anger,

I started therapy like maybe October of my freshman year, and that was the first thing we agreed about. That was the first thing that we talked about with like you know. Anger is your first emotion because that's what you learn from an early age, right? So it's like OK, are you really angry? It's like emotions wrapped up in something and that's just starts with this stuff. You know I've come home angry. And then like it will be 10 minutes later after I cool off. I was like, I'm really upset with the thing so it's like, maybe like my idea of being a man isn't like what I thought it was supposed to be. And that masculinity is just what you want it to be for yourself.

Anger has been shown to be a characteristically hegemonic masculine trait. Isaac's ability to manage his anger through counseling services demonstrated how engaging in mental health services helped to challenge traditional notions of masculinity that could be harmful.

Eric talked about how he felt like as a man he had to be successful with a course load that was creating a significant challenge for him academically and mentally. His counselor helped him navigate those issues by encouraging him to go at a pace that

allowed him to maintain a healthy mental state. While talking about his counselor, he says,

She was like, why are you trying to rush to finish school? I was like I don't know. I just want to finish on time. She's like what does that mean? I don't know, I just want to finish on time. She's like on time is you know when you finish, not when you're supposed to finish or how your academic advisor supposed to define how it's supposed to be finished. You finish when you know when you're comfortable, you know you finish.

Participants valued having a healthy state of mind, and admitted they initially were not interested in mental health resources; yet, once they were able to connect with these resources, they saw them as valuable aspects of shaping who they were as men. As high-achieving students, participants also admitted to placing unneeded pressure on themselves to achieve. Eric's previous example, however, demonstrated how they were able to navigate this pressure in more healthy ways.

Overall, participants were able to connect their efforts to maintain their mental health as an important aspect of how they saw their masculinity. Once participants were able to understand their emotions, and manage them by talking to counselors, they were able to better assess their ideas about masculinity by being vulnerable with someone.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe how high-achieving collegiate Black male's perceptions of masculinity and manhood have influenced their views on academic achievement and success. Additionally, this study sought to demonstrate how high-achieving Black males affirm their identities within various educational environments. The study's guiding research questions were:

1. How are high-achieving Black collegiate males' perceptions of their masculinity and manhood presented in relation to their perceptions of academic success?
2. How are high-achieving Black collegiate males' perceptions of their previous educational and social contexts presented in relation to their perceptions of academic success?

The data collected in this study revealed four broad themes. These themes were as follows: (a) Connecting Academic Success to Ideas of Manhood, (b) Internalized Sense of Social Responsibility, (c) Navigating Racism, and (d) Subscribing to Malleable Ideas of Masculinity. This chapter reveals in greater detail the findings of the research study, implications, theoretical insights, recommendations for practitioners, recommendations for further research, and a final summary.

Summary of Findings

The perceptions of manhood and masculinity amongst high-achieving collegiate Black males were dictated by many factors in their educational and social experiences. The themes of (a) Connecting Academic Success to Ideas of Manhood, (b) Internalized Sense of Social Responsibility, (c) Navigating Racism, and (d) Subscribing to Malleable Ideas of Masculinity provide insight into how various experiences and influences have contributed to this group's perceptions of manhood and masculinity. The relationships shared across themes revealed that even though themes were generated independently, themes displayed connections to one another that helped to make sense of the experiences of participants. These themes and their relationships with one another are discussed in greater detail within the following sections.

Connecting Academic Success to Ideas of Manhood

Participants in the study spoke candidly about how their academic success provided them affirmations on their ideas of manhood. This was a significant finding as this demonstrates that Black males in the study did not subscribe to any significant gender role-conflict in displaying their academic aptitude, which often appears amongst males throughout their maturation process, especially within schools (O'Neil et al., 1986). Schools serve as a place where gendered behavior is often policed by peers to ensure everyone is maintaining socialized expectations of gender performance (Morris, 2012). Yet, participants consistently discussed how their involvement in school-related activities helped to shape their ideas of manhood and made them want to succeed academically. Their academic success and engagement made them feel valued and affirmed of who they were as Black males.

This finding coincided with Price's (2000) longitudinal study about the lives of six African American males navigating three distinct academic environments growing up. The study found that African American males who successfully integrated their intellectual development into their identity development as being Black and male, could negotiate their relationships with peers who may not see them as authentic, as well as be resilient to the racism they encountered directly or systemically (Price, 2000). Participants in the present study overall saw their development academically as a source of pride and affirmation to their communities and families and more importantly to who they were as Black males. The affirmation participants received from their communities and family helped to generate motivations for academic success.

Internalized Sense of Social Responsibility

The theme of Internalized Sense of Social Responsibility demonstrated the ways in which Black males felt that their peers and their broader community helped them to feel accepted and have less gender-role conflict socially. Being intelligent in their Black social circles was even more important in college. Participants discussed how they felt there was a shared sense of needing to support one another amongst Black students on their campus, which they believed was not shared by other racial or ethnic groups. In the present study, several participants felt their peers and families were their biggest supporters and motivators. Participants' families also were influential in providing social affirmations to them as children which created expectations for academic success that carried forward to their lives as adult men. Additionally, these expectations were present in their communities as they sought to be positive examples for other children and were

characterized as “good young men” for their academic success according to several participants.

The qualitative data highlighting the social affirmations received by participants coincided with educational practices of students mattering to the people and institutions they were connected to, especially for Black males (Tucker et al., 2010). These insights also were significant as the participants’ development served as a remedy to the emphasized gender gap in academic success highlighted within previous research (DiPrete & Buchman, 2013; Jacob, 2002; Quenzel & Hurrelman, 2013). For example, Morris (2012) found the environments of male students, regardless of race, often contributed to the academic apathy seen within school environments. Because the participants’ high academic achievements were affirmed and expected from adults, schools, and their communities they were able to integrate academic success as an attribute of their masculine identity.

Navigating Racism

Every participant in the study expressed how they encountered racism during their academic experience. The racism they perceived was sometimes direct from individuals, but also represented larger structural representations such as being seen as less capable by teachers and school administrators. Participants stated they sought to defy stereotypes by working harder in the classroom than their white counterparts. In their efforts to defy stereotypes placed on them, they often said they had to “code switch” when around others outside of their race. Code switching refers to racial minority groups talking and behaving in what is deemed as culturally appropriate by white people (McCluney & Robotham, 2019). The need to code switch amongst high-achieving Black males is

common, and often presents challenges for positive identity development, as the performer of code switching must reconcile their cultural identity to the expectations of the dominate group (Smith & Hope, 2020).

Participants felt a sense of accomplishment by using the racism they received as motivation to succeed academically. Kirk and Shannon, who attended predominately white schools growing up, talked about how they felt afraid to confront the racism they experienced within those environments, as the consequences may have been to be socially ostracized. Yet, they internally told themselves to persevere despite these obstacles. Marcus even said he looks forward to seeing people from his previous high school, which is predominately white, so he can show them he was successful in college. This attitude of perseverance supported previous research which suggested Black males must find ways to navigate racist institutions such as schools to achieve personal and academic success (Sanders, 1997).

Subscribing to Malleable Ideas of Masculinity

Participants shared varying perspectives on their ideas of masculinity and more specifically rejected attitudes related to stereotypical or hegemonic masculinity. Many participants shared they were comfortable with being emotional and that it was healthy for men to do so. Previous research regarding men and masculinities, particularly for those men in college, suggested that men seek to personify the ultimate masculine ideal, which is characterized by being unemotional, engaging in risky sexual behavior, and rejecting academic achievement as a core aspect of masculine behavior (Harper & Harris, 2010). The reasoning for participants' previous assumptions regarding masculinity is its connections to hegemonic masculinity based on white western ideals of gender roles

(Collins, 1998). This is problematic for Black men as hegemonic masculinity does not offer the same privileges to Black men as it does to white men. Hegemonic masculinity, in essence, is defined by white masculinity and therefore it automatically subordinates Black masculinity (Collins, 2006). Because participants shared their desire to be supportive of others, slow to anger, and emotional and recognized their competitiveness with other men as being negative, they directly rejected notions of hegemonic masculinity.

Participants in the study seemed confined by questions regarding their perceptions of masculinity. They wanted to define their ideas of masculinity for themselves. Travis and Claude especially had a hard time discussing their ideas of masculinity, as they had begun to actively reject previous notions they had been socialized to believe. Claude mentioned how he had used the women in his life to help him re-think ideas of masculinity. He gave an example of wearing a pink shirt and being worried that it would be deemed as too feminine. His friend, who is a woman, told him he was being ridiculous and that made him reevaluate why he had those thoughts. Claude's concern about wearing a pink shirt is a subtle example of how the fear of femininity creates narratives about masculinity that are rooted in gender role conflict, which emphasizes that to create the ultimate masculine ideal, one must subordinate all aspects of femininity (O'Neil et al., 1986).

Many participants also rejected the premise of needing to be in a heterosexual romantic relationship to be masculine. Two participants identified as gay men and they saw their sexuality as not a defining factor of their masculine identity. Milton particularly mentioned stereotypically masculine activities such as participating in sports, being a protector, and being strong as masculine qualities that he saw in himself; however, he did

not see his sexuality as a challenge to his masculinity. He even saw it as an empowering aspect of his identity because he could create more nuance in his masculinity. This is a departure from previous research that specified how other men socially expect men to participate in heterosexual relationships, which is deemed as compulsory heterosexuality (Wade & Ferree, 2015). Many gay men seek to hide their sexuality in fear of recourse. But even the participants who were heterosexual felt the need to express their support of gay men in affirming their masculinity.

Lastly, participants emphasized how their collegiate experiences helped to shape their new perspectives on masculinity. Participants emphasized the role of counseling services as helping them better understand their ideas surrounding masculinity and how some of those ideas were problematic. This was another surprising finding due to previous literature highlighting the reluctance of Black men to seek mental health resources (Watkins & Neighbors, 2010; Watkins, Walker & Griffith, 2010).

Theoretical Insights

This dissertation was influenced by the theoretical perspectives of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and African American Male Theory (AAMT). The effort of the researcher to present an anti-deficit approach to research on Black males led to the emphasis of AAMT and CRT being essential in understanding the experiences of the Black male participants in the current study. The counternarratives shared by participants were representative of CRT's tenet of counternarratives reframing the experiences of Black males from their own vantage point. Participants in the study consistently discussed the need to share their own story about being Black males. They conveyed a message of often being mischaracterized due to the dominant narratives about Black males and, in

turn, developed a desire to defy those stereotypes. Additionally, CRT's establishment of the permanence of racism was revealed through the counternarratives of participants. Particularly, when asked about what it means to be a Black man, every participant shared their experiences of navigating racism.

Navigating Racism was emphasized by all participants regardless of the context of their upbringing or school environment. More importantly, this theoretical insight was generated when determining the connection of Navigating Racism to Internalized Sense of Responsibility. Particularly, their identifying the permanence of racism was informed by their families and communities encouraging them to defy stereotypes about Black people, and Black men especially. The responsibility they felt to their families and communities were often connected to them demonstrating their ability to persevere despite the racism they encountered. In other words, participants received information about racism from others, or by experiencing it themselves, and made the determination that racism was going to be apparent in their lives and they needed to find ways to thrive socially and academically despite the challenge racism presented.

AAMT was shared within these themes due to the unique experiences conveyed by participants on being Black males. Because Black males often do not uncouple their identities as being Black and male, they do not see their masculinity as being privileged in the way masculinity benefits white males. This provides an experience of their own. Lastly, AAMT acknowledges the resiliency of African American Males. Participants consistently shared how their resiliency benefitted them through personal and academic challenges. This acknowledgement of their resilience presented a shared pride among participants.

Most recently, there has been robust conversation surrounding the use of CRT within educational practices amongst education practitioners, parents, and policy makers alike. More specifically, conservative political figures and media have criticized the implementation of CRT as deeming white people as inherently racist. Yet, the researcher in this study utilized CRT to explain the systemic nature of racism in the lives of Black males. The narratives and statements shared by participants serve as evidence of the need to scrutinize institutions' history of racist practice and policies. This is not an indictment of white people, but rather a critical examination of the history of racism and its influence on our educational institutions. Theories such as CRT as AAMT allow researchers to make sense of the disparities often seen along racial lines.

The researcher was not limited to these theories, as the methodological approach allowed for the pursuit of finding new theoretical insights by generating data through abductive means. Additionally, the researcher depended on his previous academic experiences along with reviewing literature related to Black males, masculinity, academic success, and manhood to reflect on potential theoretical implications revealed in the data analysis. The following sections are representative of these insights which were revealed through relationships established across the themes. It is the desire of the researcher that these theoretical insights help to generate a better understanding of Black males and their perceptions of manhood and masculinity, as well as how these perceptions are cultivated throughout their lives.

Marginality and Mattering

Schlossberg (1989) developed the theory of marginality and mattering. The theory of marginality and mattering emphasizes the need for students at all levels of education to

feel like they belong in those institutions and if they do not, they feel marginalized by those institutions. When students feel like they belong and are affirmed in who they are as individuals, they experience higher rates of success. Internalized Sense of Social Responsibility shared a relationship with the theme of Connecting Academic Success to Ideas of Manhood which revealed this theoretical insight. This relationship formed due to participants' motivation to demonstrate social responsibility by succeeding academically. Similarly, participants saw that being successful academically as a Black man generated value for themselves by people they want to receive approval from, hence creating motivation to be successful in every aspect of their lives.

Participants shared stories of how they felt important because they were setting positive examples for other Black males and their communities. Likewise, they expressed feelings of mattering when they engaged in activities in schools where they were able to provide leadership and display competency, and when they participated in collegiate activities that affirmed their identities as Black men. Schools and their university helped participants feel like they mattered which made them feel like they belonged. The theoretical insight generated by this relationship also affirmed other studies that have emphasized the use of mattering as a theoretical imperative in examining ways in which schools and universities could create more welcoming environments for Black males (Carey, 2019; Tucker et al., 2010).

Progressive Black Masculinities

Mutua (2006) theorized progressive Black Masculinities as being pro-Black and antiracist as well as pro-feminist and anti-sexist. This theoretical insight was revealed in the shared relationship of Connecting Academic Success to ideas of Manhood and

Subscribing to Malleable Ideas of Masculinity. This relationship is the byproduct of participants sharing how they want to construct their own perspectives of Black masculinity that are not stereotypically masculine and to reject stereotypes of Black men not being academically astute.

The progressive responses to ideas about Black masculinity were a surprising theme within the data, as it is a departure from previous notions of Black manhood and masculinity. Participants discussed how their ideas of masculinity had evolved over time.

Because participants valued their academic achievement, they embodied their efforts as a direct affront to what others thought about Black male's intellectual capacity. These efforts were supported by their families and communities which allowed them to successfully establish good academic behaviors as being affirming to their masculinity.

Participant's departure from hegemonic masculine practices that often devalues intellectual pursuits is a demonstration of the importance of a progressive masculinity for Black males. Their ability to form conflict-free masculinities allows them to expand beyond a limited view of their manhood. This theoretical insight was surprising while informative regarding why participants valued their high academic achievements.

Progressive Black Masculinities also was theorized from the sharing of themes Subscribing to Malleable Ideas of Masculinity and Navigating Racism. This insight is the result of the desires of participants to recognize their experiences of gendered racism, while also striving to generate their own construction of Black manhood and masculinity that is affirming to Black males and is not harmful to others. Progressive Black Masculinities is applied because of its desire to view Black males as not necessarily intersections of both privileged and oppressed identities, but rather as being penalized due to their existence as Black males uniquely.

Dancy (2012) distinguished the difference between manhood and masculinity by establishing manhood as a state of being, and masculinity as related to behavior. This distinction is important in applying the theory of Progressive Black Masculinities to this dissertation as participants often sought to control how they are seen within predominately white spaces by engaging in respectability for the comfort of white people, while acknowledging this effort was never enough. Even though their behaviors reflected the desire to be accepted by the larger society as capable Black men, issues such as racism required them to construct their manhood along racialized lines that were unique to only them. Participants often didn't separate their ideas of manhood from their Black identity, generating a multi-faceted racialized view of their manhood rather than seeing their identities as men as being privileged. Viewing participants as singular representations of Black manhood rather than intersectional components of oppressed and privileged social identities was a major theoretical insight to this study.

Implications for Practice

Black males have become a focus of K-12 educators and higher education practitioners alike. There have been numerous programmatic efforts designed to address the disparities in educational attainment and success of Black male students. Yet, there continues to be real challenges to improve the outcomes of Black males in education. This section will provide possible prescriptions for alleviating the challenges Black males face in educational settings by using the findings as a tool to better understand ways to improve outcomes of Black males.

A major consideration for K-12 educators is to invest in educational practices that affirms the identities and experiences of Black male students. Many participants shared

they had not seen themselves within the education they received until they came to college.

Additionally, K-12 schools with mostly white teachers and administrators should heavily invest in training and teaching practices that account for the experiences of Black people within American society. Participants who attended either racially mixed or predominately white schools shared how their schools were racist or teachers reinforced a racist ideology.

Travis's experiences of being placed into a disciplinary process that disproportionately affects Black boys is an example of how schools help to shape the development of manhood and masculinity among Black boys. These experiences generate the cycle of being seen as a problem. Based on the shared experiences of participants, schools should work with families to develop appropriate disciplinary strategies for students who have disciplinary problems. Family influence was a major factor in the motivations for academic success for participants, which demonstrates the cultural value of many minoritized groups of students, particularly in school settings (Yosso, 2005).

Colleges and universities proved to be an important factor in shaping and reshaping participants' perceptions of manhood and masculinity away from hegemonic masculine beliefs. Academic experiences and co-curricular activities in which participants were able to explore and challenge ideas about their identities as Black men were helpful in shaping positive masculine versions of themselves. This proved to be important in developing a conflict-free masculine persona which made them comfortable in engaging in activities that would be deemed as academically purposeful.

Colleges and universities who are invested in retention and graduation efforts should develop programs and services focused on the holistic development of Black male students. Participants valued their participation in programs and services focused on their identities as Black people or Black men. They used those experiences to form healthy perspectives of who they should be as people. Clubs such as Black Student Unions and Black male mentoring initiatives are worthwhile investments for universities that want to develop holistic strategies. Two participants mentioned their involvement in the university's Black male mentoring program as significant to their holistic development.

Overall K-12 schools, as well as colleges and universities, serve as an important aspect of helping develop the perceptions of manhood and masculinity amongst Black male students. These institutions should be intentional in developing practices and services focused on the holistic development of their students. Their ability to engage with Black male students, particularly offering support of their academic capabilities as well as helping them develop conflict-free masculine identities is important to their success, as was revealed within this dissertation.

Recommendations for Future Research

The research conducted in this dissertation revealed the need to support the holistic development of Black male students throughout their educational experiences as a means of providing them a conflict-free masculinity that encourages them to see their manhood as being a positive aspect of their academic pursuits. Yet, there needs to be further research to learn more about different groups of Black males. The current study was conducted with high-achieving students to generate an anti-deficit approach to conducting research with Black male students. Focusing similar research with students of

varying academic achievement levels could help researchers better understand the many social barriers impeding their development as Black men, who should not feel the need to engage in hegemonic masculine practices.

Additionally, this research was influenced by Critical Race Theory and African American Male Theory, but its efforts were exploratory in nature and sought to develop unknown or surprising theoretical insights. The theoretical insights found in this study included Critical Race Theory, African American Male Theory, Marginality and Mattering Theory, and Progressive Black Masculinities. Only Critical Race Theory and Marginality and Mattering Theory have been widely used to understand the experience of Black males in education (Cooper, 1997; Gossett et al., 1996). Progressive Black Masculinities has been utilized infrequently to examine the experiences of Black males in education. Future research on Black males grounded in this theoretical framework would provide a deeper understanding of how Black males make meaning of themselves, and how these perceptions of their manhood and masculinity serve as an important aspect of how they view academic achievement. Secondly, research utilizing Progressive Black Masculinities would allow for the examination of the unique experiences of Black males. Because Progressive Black Masculinities allows for the coupling of race and gender rather than viewing them as two separate identities that simply intersect, it would allow for a specific examination of gendered racism encountered by Black males in educational settings. Progressive Black Masculinities also would contribute to anti-deficit approaches to Black male research by demonstrating how the kinds of masculinities, which are not rooted in white male hegemonic practices, can demonstrate that Black males do not have to be products of these harmful masculine practices.

Another opportunity for additional research is to develop quantitative studies that would allow for an empirical perspective on the role manhood and masculinity plays in the academic outcomes of Black male students. As with other qualitative research studies, the aim of the current study was to understand why students have the perceptions they conceive about manhood and masculinity. Because these students were all deemed as high-achieving, the study does not reveal whether students who have lower levels of academic success have differing perspectives. A quantitative study could be designed utilizing a survey with a scale focused on whether surveyed participants do have a conflict-free view of their masculinity, followed by an empirical analysis of that data against their overall academic outcomes.

Lastly, as the researcher began constructing literature on Black manhood, there was very little focus on this distinct phenomenon concerning Black males. Black masculinity has been the focus of much research about Black males, but very little of this research has contributed to the understanding of how Black males make meaning of manhood specifically. Research focused on Black males and manhood could provide additional support to further research on Black males and their motivations.

Conclusions

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe how high-achieving collegiate Black male's perceptions of masculinity and manhood have influenced their views on academic achievement and success. Additionally, this study sought to demonstrate how high-achieving Black males affirm their identities within various educational environments. The study's guiding research questions were as follows:

1. How are high-achieving Black collegiate males' perceptions of their masculinity and manhood presented in relation to their perceptions of academic success?
2. How are high-achieving Black collegiate males' perceptions of their previous educational and social contexts presented in relation to their perceptions of academic success?

The data collected in this study revealed four broad themes. These themes were (a) Connecting Academic Success to Ideas of Manhood, (b) Internalized Sense of Social Responsibility, (c) Navigating Racism, and (d) Subscribing to Malleable Ideas of Masculinity. Relationships cultivated between themes revealed significant theoretical insights which included the following: (a) Critical Race Theory, (b) African American Male Theory, (c) Mattering and Marginality Theory, and (d) Progressive Black Masculinities.

Black males often have been the focus of education research due to the academic disparities that often exist between them and other groups of students. Yet, there are Black males who have excelled academically and become important members of their community. Their ability to succeed often comes despite the many challenges they face including coming from impoverished backgrounds, encountering institutional racism, and being seen as a problem (Harper, 2008). This dissertation sought to examine the perspectives of high-achieving Black collegiate men regarding how their racialized and gendered experiences have played a role in how they are viewed within academia, as well their perceptions of the importance of academic achievement.

The results of this study revealed that high-achieving Black male students realized the effects of the gendered racism they encountered, but found ways to be resilient

through the support of their families, communities, and peers. Also, high-achieving students were able to merge their views on academic achievement into their ideas of manhood and masculinity by developing a conflict-free masculine identity that values academic success as well as works to be an asset to others. Overall, participants found value in themselves as people who could support their families and communities through their educational attainment.

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