

AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES IN SINGLE-GENDER CHARTER SCHOOL

EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES IN A SINGLE-
GENDER CHARTER SCHOOL

A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

IN PARTIAL FULLFILLMENT OF THE REQUIRMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

BY

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BALL STATE UNIVERSITY

MUNCIE, INDIANA

JULY 2021

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Abstract

DISSERTATION: Exploring the Experiences of African American Males in a Single-Gender Charter School

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This qualitative case study is focused on the success of a charter single-gender middle school for African American males in the Midwest from the years 2012-2016. Indiana Department of Education data showed this small middle school with 100% African American Male was ranked 55 out of 2000 middle schools across the state. During the 2013-2014 school year, its second year of operation, Male Prep Academy received an A rating from the state based on academic growth. The school would win four A ratings in a row. The school consistently exceeded statewide data and neighboring Indianapolis Public school data. With 75.6 percent passing both sections of the ISTEP 80.7 percent ELA and 87 percent Math. This dissertation identified seven emergent themes: scholar identity, celebrating academic achievement, otherfathering, rigorous curriculum, participation in school sponsored activities, strong leadership, and relationships. The key themes and factor for success yielded from the perspectives of past school administrators, teachers, parents, and students. I conducted 15 semi-structured interviews to compare themes and determine the factors that lead to these students being prepared for a rigorous high school and early college experience. As stakeholders seek options to support the academic success for Black male student, the Prep offers a template for success. This schooling model prepared many of its

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students for selective college admission. In this case study, Prep is reviewed for the elements that could lead to a successful high school and college experience.

Keywords: Black males, disproportionality in special education, the pedagogy of confidence, single-gender middle schools, black male success

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Today's technology-driven global society demands a quality education and skilled workers for a prosperous life. A direct correlation exists between educational attainment and income outlook especially for African American's quality of life across generations. Despite the understanding that a quality education remains critical for positive life outcomes, African American students remain in a crisis in this country with negative academic outcomes dominating their educational experiences. Black males have led every negative statistic including poor academic achievement, low graduation rates and a lack of post-secondary opportunities (Harper, 2015a; Harper, 2015b).

Schott Foundation's (2015) *Black Lives Matter* report described addressing the systemic deficiency in the educational opportunities for Black males as the need to "alert the nation to the serious reality of a quieter danger that does not instantly end young lives but creates an all but insurmountable chasm of denied opportunities that consigns them to limited chances to succeed in life" (p. 6). In summary, educational deficiencies began early, expanded during the school years and negatively influenced life outcomes. The report described these detrimental opportunities as a "grave injustice" (p. 6). The Schott Foundation for Public Education (2010) found only 47% of Black male students graduated on time from U.S. high schools in 2008, compared to 78% of White males. In 2012, the Schott Foundation reported that the national graduation rate for Black males was still a dismal 51 percent. Despite public outcry and some interventions, in 2012, the Schott Foundation reported that the national graduation rate for Black males remained at 51 percent. *Black Lives Matter* (2015) ranked Indiana as one of the worst states for African American male graduation rates, citing a 2012-2013 graduation rate of 51% as

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compared to the White males at 75%. This 24% percent gap ranked Indiana 44th in the lowest rank states for Black male graduation.

Not only was these data discouraging but a further examination of educational experiences among Black males in US schools showed that Black males were placed in special education classrooms, at disproportionate rates (Skiba et al., 2014). In class, research has shown that teachers discipline African American male students more often and severely, “even when students of other ethnicities demonstrate similar behaviors” (Matthews, 2010, p. 15). More recently, Okonofua and Eberhardt (2015) argued that racial bias in discipline – demonstrated by White teachers viewing the behaviors of Black students – as being indicative of a long-term problem and deserving of suspension while White students exhibiting the same behaviors warranted less policies. The research showed that the disparities in Black male suspensions mostly occurred around judgmental areas including, but not limited to, aggression, speaking out, being off task, non-compliance and disrespect, and any other behaviors that are deemed to be unacceptable or inappropriate by middle class White standards (2015).

Furthermore, Black students were more likely to be classified as students with disabilities and more likely to be suspended or expelled from school (Skiba, 2002, 2014a). These trends persisted at the national level as well as when analyzing data for individual states. Thus, the impact of educational inequities extended beyond the classroom into life outcomes as African American males have been disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system. Conversely, less than 3% of Black males have participated in gifted and talented programming (Grissom et al., 2016). Moreover, Black male students were often comparatively less prepared than others for the rigors of college-level academic work (Lundy-Wagner & Gasman, 2011; Palmer, Davis, & Hilton, 2009). Over a decade later, Black students’ referrals to gifted programs

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remained at a lower rate than White students. In addition, studies showed when student, teacher, and school characteristics were averaged, White students had a predicted probability of 6.2 percent of giftedness, whereas Black students had only a 2.8 percent probability (Grissom, 2016). Although student socioeconomic status, test scores, teachers, and school setting were associated with gifted assignments in reading and mathematics, none of these characteristics fully accounted for racial disparities. In addition, the study identified teacher race as the most indicative factor of gifted assignments. The studies showed Black students were three times more likely to be assigned to gifted program if they had been taught or previously taught by Black teachers.

Although the mantra that *you cannot learn if you are not in school* is touted to reduce absenteeism, Black male students disproportionately are “pushed out of schools.” Another oppressive school-based culprit of Black male disenfranchising school experience are zero tolerance programs. The American Psychological Association (APA) (2008) compared the destruction of the African American community by mandatory prison sentences with zero tolerance policies in schools. The report asserted that these predetermined consequences that are applied regardless of the severity of the behavior, mitigating circumstances, or the situation has exacerbated the problem. Zero tolerance policies contributed to the consistent overrepresentation in suspensions and expulsions for African American students (APA, 2008). According to Anyon et al. (2014) out-of-school suspensions damaged the schooling experience of Black male students leading to negative outcomes. The author also argued that although other disciplinary practices such as in-school suspension are assumed to be less harsh these practices were also damaging to students.

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For many African American males, the cycle begins with school-based disparate treatments that lead to social challenges and pathways to prison. Toldson et al. (2012) argued that this school-to-prison pipeline began with early preschool challenges and, once in school, was perpetuated by the disparity in suspension rates between African American and Latino or White students. “Nationally, African American and Latino males are more likely than any other group to be suspended and expelled from school” (Noguera, 2012, p. 174).

Multiple negative data points are associated with removing students from school. Studies have shown that being removed from school did not improve their behavior, but instead increased the probability of becoming a high school dropout and being incarcerated (Elias, 2013). Flounders (2013) argued that more African American men were in prison, on probation, or paroled than there were in slavery in 1850. Tupac lyrics summarized the Black Boy challenges: “Suspended from school scared to go home, hanging with the Big Boys, breaking all the rules” (Dear Mama, 1995). All of these measurements are indicators of the likelihood that the probability of school success for Black males will be interrupted. All of these disparate conditions are predictors of high school dropout, interrupting the probability of success.

The African American Male Achievement Gap

The Condition of Education 2020, NCES (2020) examination of data from 2000-2019 found that despite interventions, the achievement gap between Black and White students has not been closed. Although the data showed some changes, they were incremental at best. According to The National Report Card (NAEP, 2020), from 1992 through 2019, the average reading and mathematics scores for Black 4th, 8th, and 12th graders remained lower than their White peers.

- Only 9 out of 100 Black students performed at or above the NAEP proficient level in civics.

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- Only 13 out of 100 Black students performed at or above the NAEP proficient level in mathematics.
- Only 15 out of 100 Black students performed at or above the NAEP proficient level in reading.

Of the 16.6 million undergraduate students enrolled in fall 2018, 2.1 million were Black. The Condition of Education (2020) review of data found that public schools continued to fail African Americans as demonstrated by:

- The increased internet dependency of coursework and a lack of internet access at home has become a barrier to learning for Black students.
- A high percentage of Black students attended high-poverty schools.
- More Black students with disabilities received services for emotional disturbances.
- The disproportion between Black students and Black teachers has not improved.
- The achievement gap between Black and White students has not closed.
- School dropout rates remained high among Black students.

Graduation rates and college enrollment rates remained low among Black students.

From 2000 to 2018, the college enrollment rates among 18- to 24-year-olds African American students shifted from 31% to 37%. These numbers are lowered for Black males according to the Census Bureau reports of 2019. Of Black male high school graduates, 17.2 percent had enrolled in community colleges by October 2019, and 23.6 percent had enrolled in four-year institutions.

At the national level, the 2012-13 school year estimates indicated a national graduation rate of 59% for Black males, 65% for Latino males, and 80% for White males. It is important to note, however, that in a one-time federal data release, the U.S. Department of Education reported the 2011 Black male graduation rate at 61 percent, which would indicate a decrease when

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compared with the 2012-2013 estimate. Nonetheless, the decrease from 61 percent to 59 percent showed a need for more progress in increasing the Black male graduation rates in states and school districts across the country.

The current plight of most African American males is so severe, it is regarded as the Civil Rights issue of our times and as in crisis (College Board, 2010; Noguera, 2003). Researchers and policymakers acknowledged the need for change and have encouraged a collective, aggressive approach toward finding solutions to substitute success for failure. The need to improve the lives of African American males not only affects them but all Americans. Other pertinent questions should be: What roles schools play in perpetuating the negative outcomes, and how can schools promote success? Instead of victim shaming and focusing on the deficiencies in Black males reinforcing negative stereotypes (e.g., intellectual and social deficiency), schools should embrace their differences and work to embrace their strengths (Palmer et al., 2009). Addressing the need to focus on success and create a new type of scholarship centered on an anti-deficit thinking, a new framework of responding to students has emerged. Rather than researching how poorly Black men performed in educational environments, anti-deficit scholars began to study successful Black males to identify how—despite the odds—they succeeded in college (Harper et al., 2009; Harper, 2012, 2014).

A plethora of research has concentrated on the Harper (2015) argument that research on African American males primarily focused on problems and underachievement. As a result of these research limitations, Harper argued that research unintentionally perpetuated sustained and advanced hopeless notions of Black males in education. A research deficit existed examining Black male student success. Multiple scholars argued for the need to move beyond deficit thinking and expand research to include successful African American males (Harper, 2009,

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2012; Harper & Davis, 2012; Harper et al, 2014; Milner, 2013). To support these research efforts, Harper (2012) created an Anti-Deficit Achievement Framework that operated under the assumption that despite the overwhelmingly negative narratives, many Black male students entered postsecondary institutions academically prepared, well supported, and motivated for academic success and leadership opportunities. The framework was intended to identify policies, practices, and structures, as well as individual, familial, cultural, and communal resources that help Black men succeed educationally.

Another anti-deficit theoretical framework model, the Pedagogy of Confidence, guided this study. Jackson (2011) argued that deficit thinking will never increase the academic outcomes of school dependent black, brown and low-income students. It was her assertion that focusing on weaknesses (promoted by policies such as NCLB) perpetuated negative outcomes by blinding us to the strengths and intellectual potential of urban students. Instead of focusing on the negative, the Pedagogy of Confidence is based on the fearless expectation that all students are capable of high intellectual performances when provided High Operational Practices that motivate self-directed learning and self-actualization. These High Operational Practices are:

- Identifying and activating student strengths
- Building relationships
- Eliciting high intellectual performances
- Providing enrichment
- Integrating prerequisites for academic learning
- Situating learning in the lives of students
- Amplifying student voice (Jackson, 2011, p. 71).

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The literature review for this study uses anti-deficit thinking to examine single-gender education, contributing factors to school failure and achievement among African American males, effective pedagogical practices to promote academic performance, and early college high school success. As a counternarrative, the study will examine some success for middle schools with a Black male population. This qualitative study will use semi-structured personal interviews to examine the experience of African American male students who attended a single-gender middle school and are currently attending a postsecondary institution.

Statement of the Problem

Over five decades post-Brown v. Board of Education (1954), which ruled segregated schools unconstitutional, African American males continued to lead in every negative educational statistic, including poor academic achievement, low high school graduation rates, and disproportionate suspension and expulsion rates (Skiba, 2011). These dismal statistics directly correlated to high rates of incarceration, unemployment, and underemployment. African American males coped with academic and social factors that adversely affect school performance and success in life: chronic unemployment, lack of adequate income, mother's educational attainment, poverty, lack of equal opportunity, substandard schools, gangs, and community violence (Coy, 2012; Noguera, 2003). These factors and others have led to a culture of underachievement among African American students.

This racial group constitutes of a segment of the population characterized by hardship, disadvantage, vulnerability, pressures, stereotypes, and patterns of failure that effect and often begin in school (Little et al., 2007; Noguera, 2008). Educational stakeholders seek methods of closing the achievement gap by increasing the educational outcomes of African American males. One model championed is the use of single-gendered middle schools. A research deficit exists on

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this schooling model. This study seeks to explore this model to contribute to the anti-deficit research on African American male students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of African American male middle school students who attended high-performing single-gender middle schools. The study examined the African male student perspective of how attending this charter school model prepared the student for successful high school completion and college transition. The study used semi-structured interviews to explore the perspectives of African American males who attended a single-gender middle school.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study include:

1. In what ways did students at Male Prep belong to a school community that normalizes high expectations?
2. What routines, policies, and practices occurred at Male Prep that supported academic achievement?
3. What factors (if any) emerge as central to college preparation?

Significance of the Study

In the last few decades, several studies have explained or defined the plight of African American males in American schools. A myriad of studies has provided reasons and descriptions of the problem; however, there has been very little growth or improvements for African American males. It is time to find the solutions to foster the success of African American students despite their circumstances. Primarily, studies examined issues impacting Black males from a negative perspective or using deficit model thinking. As the education community

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continues to seek real answers for the achievement gap, a need exists to examine their experiences from their perspectives void of deficit thinking. Research grounded in a deficit perspective blames the victims of institutional oppression for their victimization by referring to negative stereotypes and assumptions regarding certain groups or communities (Harper, 2013).

Valencia (2010) argued that deficit thinking acts as an internal explanation for the academic failure of low socio-economic status students of color. She has investigated the deconstruction of the deficit thinking discourse over the last fifteen years. Deficit thinking examines issues of student failure around the weaknesses of the students. This mode of thinking justifies social conditions such as inadequate schools and poor educators by victimizing the student and blaming them for academic and social struggles.

Gorski (2010) maintained deficit ideology justifies the belief in the inferiority of African American students by drawing on mainstream stereotypes, which paint these students as intellectually, morally, and culturally, deviate or deviant. For African Americans, these labels indicate they are poor, lazy, and don't care about education. This mode of thinking underserves students with low teacher expectations and overrepresentation in special education.

In alignment, Valencia (2010) explained that deficit thinking assumes that internal deficits (e.g., limited intellectual abilities, lack of motivation, linguistics shortcomings) are the cause of the academic failure among low-SES students; in other words, academic failure is "the process of blaming the victim" (p. XIV). Valencia warned that deficit thinking is a pseudoscience in which ideology is embedded with science. He pointed out that deficit thinking is supported by research that lacks scientific rigor: unsound assumptions, psychometrically weak instruments, data collection in defective manners, absence of control of important independent variables and omission of rival hypothesis. This mode of thinking ignores systemic factors that

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have strong linkages with the academic failure of African American students including the influence of some schooling conditions (e.g., teacher quality and inequities in basic school resources). According to Gorski (2010),

Schools are microcosms of the larger society, thus allowing deficit ideology to permeate schools... a litany of atrocities within the education milieu, from the withering away of bilingual education to inequitable school funding, have been aided by deficit socialization processes that frame the least powerful communities as deficient and, as a result, undeserving of equal opportunity. (p.7)

Oftentimes, in attempting to explain the widespread underachievement among students of color and students from lower socio-economic in schools, teachers and administrators attribute the problems to the students, their families, and communities. This cultural deficit model attributes students' lack of educational success to characteristics often rooted in their cultures and communities. The problem with this research method is that it ignores the root causes of oppression by blaming individuals and/or their communities. These models often fail to address societal and school-based marginalization that combine to depress the performance of certain groups of students. Dr. Yvette Jackson, author of *Pedagogy of Confidence* (2011), argued these students possess intellect, and it is up to educators to develop the skills. Jackson summarized the need to use anti-deficit model thinking for closing the achievement gap requires seeing the opportunity, not the lack.

As stakeholders continue to seek effective interventions, two interventions are showing some success for Black male students increasing the numbers and retaining Black male teachers (Lewis & Toldson, 2013). Another potential solution identified is creating single-sex classrooms and schools (Fergus et al., 2014).

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Throughout the study, African American and Black male are used interchangeably. This study identifies effective educational practices that increase the awareness of middle school learning environments that may provide academic success and increase access to higher education for African American students. The study explores the importance of Black male teachers in the schooling experience of Black male students. This project provides a framework and action plan to increase awareness and understanding of the strategies that could bring academic success for African American male students. It will outline strategies from three different school models for increasing academic outcomes. As educational stakeholders, we must seek answers to the social and economic dilemmas facing our schools.

To protect scarce school resources, it is important to strategically examine what schooling experiences contribute to the school success or failure of African American male students. This study examined a high-performing charter school network whose primarily African American students consistently achieve some of the highest standardized test scores and SAT scores in the state. This study examined components of the environment which led to a 100% 4-year college admission rate and an over 80% college graduation rate for African American male students. This study identifies practices and processes that have led to the academic success of African American male students.

Experience with the Topic

I worked with this network of schools for 10 years as a teacher and administrator. At the time of the study, I had been separated from the network of schools for over 5 years. Some of the participants in the study and I had worked together at some point during my tenure. None of the participants are still employed by the network. My experience, relationship, and ethnicity as an African American female educator, and tenure in the network made the conversations during

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interviews comfortable and easy for participants to speak freely without any fear of backlash since no one was employed or worked with the network at the time of interviews.

As a special educator and administrator with over 20 years of experience, I have witnessed the decline in the achievement of African American males. With so much negativity about young Black men in the media and with school sometimes being an inhospitable place for Black boys are we creating a self-fulfilling prophecy? Many African American boys are being labeled as having mild disabilities (learning, mild cognitive, emotional disabilities). For many African American males, being scholarly or smart is associated with being White. This forces many to choose to be accepted by their African American peers and fall into the negative stereotypes rather than embrace scholar identity. How does this impact how they see themselves as scholars? Middle school seems to be a critical time for Black boys. What are the factors that keep them engaged at school and help them see it as a place where they belong?

Over the last several decades, an abundance of research has been conducted to examine the lack of movement in closing the achievement gap between Black males and other groups. Despite research and reforms, Black males are at the bottom of every educational statistic. African American females also face negative academic outcomes, but a research deficit exists that identifies their problems or investigates solutions. If the education community is aware of the problem, why have we seen very selective and some-to-no improvement on outcomes for African American students over the last three decades? Success does exist in small pockets for African American boys, but how do we take that success to scale? We know the societal ills that plague African American students: poverty, broken homes, over-representation in special education populations, and several other issues.

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This study will move the conversation forward and focus on what we can do as educators based on what we know from previous research studies and look at how interventions can be put into place to improve outcomes for African American male students in greater proportions.

Delimitations

Although the study was carefully designed, there were delimitations. In this study, I surveyed students of color who attended public schools, excluding private schools. The sample population resided in the Midwest. Due to the lack of area schools that are structured for single-gender education, I was not able to increase the number of participants in this study. The small number of participants could limit the generalizability to other settings. Another challenge for the data accuracy could be student memories. The students entered the middle school several years ago and are now college sophomores and juniors.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are used in this project:

- *African American males*. This term, often regarded as synonymous with Black males, refers to males whose forebears originated in Africa (Nogueira, 2003).
- *Authentic learning opportunities*. This phrase refers to instructional approaches that allow students to explore, discuss, and construct meaningful concept connections and relationships that are real-world relevant, and apply those skills to problems or projects (Nicaise et al., 2000).
- *Deficit Model Thinking*. Operates from the framework of focusing on school-dependent student's weaknesses (Jackson, 2011)
- *Dropout*. A student who did not complete school but was enrolled during the previous school year and did not enroll at the beginning of the following school year. This term

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does not include a student who transferred to another school, moved to a different country, died, or who cannot attend because of illness (National Center of Education Statistics, 2009).

- *Early college high school.* This school helps students complete 30 credits or earn an associate degree upon graduation from high school. Students can enroll in college classes beginning in Grade 9 (Middle College Consortium, 2012).
- *School-to-prison pipeline.* The national trend of criminalizing instead of educating the nation's children and adolescents (American Civil Liberties Union, 2012).
- *School-dependent children.* Students who have needs stretch beyond the intellectual, and rely on schools for physical, emotional, cognitive, cultural, social, and language needs (Jackson, 2011).
- *Single-sex or single-gender schools.* Both terms refer either to coeducational schools that offer classes, subjects, elective courses, campus activities, or extracurricular activities for the same-sex (National Association for Single-Sex Public Education, 2012).
- *Social justice education.* Social justice education refers to the full and equal participation of groups in a mutually shaped society to meet school and career needs (Adams et al., 2007, p. 1). "Social justice education enables people to develop the critical analysis tools necessary to understand oppression and their understanding of oppressive systems and to develop a sense of agency and capacity to interrupt and change oppressive patterns and behaviors in themselves and the institutions and communities in which they are part" (p. 1).
- *Student-centered learning.* This phrase refers to putting students at the center of education by using organized instruction to advance the interests and needs of students

instead of teaching the preferences of the institutions created to meet those needs (Komatsu et al., 2020).

- *Traditional classroom.* This term refers to a coeducational classroom environment within which boys and girls receive instruction, usually from the same teacher (Byers et al., 2018).

Summary

Chapter 1 outlines how this qualitative study used semi structured interviews and artifacts to examine the perspectives of African American males attending a same gender middle school. Initially, the chapter introduces the study, discusses the perpetual achievement gap between Black males and every other demographic. It outlined the ongoing need for stakeholders to question how to improve the academic and life outcomes of African males.

Educators and community leaders must review school-based policies that influence the negative outcomes. Negative stereotypes continue to define societal interests in African American males. As stakeholders seek real answers for the achievement gap, Valencia (2010) defined deficit thinking as an internal explanation for the academic failure of low socio-economic status students of color. Secondly, the chapter discussed the significance and purpose of the study. The chapter then discussed the need to explore school models that increase the academic outcomes of African American students. Finally, the chapter outlined the research questions and definitions. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the research and information available on the plight of African American students in our educational system. The chapter then examines the literature around high-performing charter schools with similarities. Finally, the review will look at single-gender schools.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Education is often described as the key to leveling the playing field for African Americans. The benefits of a quality education extend to quality of life including wealth, health, and family progress. Nearly a half century ago the Civil Rights Act of 1964, mandated equal access to education facilities for African Americans. However, this access has not resulted in educational equality as African American students remain mired in negative academic outcomes. Despite multiple interventions, including federal funding, designation, school choice, and charter schools, a continuing achievement gap or significant difference in academic outcomes between African Americans and White students remains. The persistent achievement gap between Black and White is reflected in data so poor that Hanushek (2016) described the modest improvements in disparities since 1965 as “a national embarrassment” (para. 4). Describing the gap, Hanushek maintained:

Put differently, if we continue to close gaps at the same rate in the future, it will be roughly two and a half centuries before the Black-White mathematics gap closes and over one and a half centuries until the reading gap closes. (para. 14)

The achievement gaps for African Americans are so persistent and far-reaching that some refer to it as the Civil Rights issue of our times. The detrimental effects of the achievement gap are a problem not only for African American students and their families and communities; it affects the well-being of the entire country (Solomon et al., 2018). McKinsey and Company (2009) maintained “the persistence of the educational achievement gap imposes on the United States the economic equivalent of a permanent national recession” (p. 6). The effects of inadequacies in school achievement affect all aspects of life including housing, employment, health care, education, and social acceptance (Reardon, 2015).

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The largest and widest achievement gaps are between African American males and every other demographic with Black males leading in poor standardized test scores, low high school graduation rates, low college enrollment rates, and low college graduation rates (Elias, 2013; Harper, 2012, 2015a, 2015b). Instead of leveling the playing field, education gaps contribute to how African American males find their life circumstances disproportionately constrained by race and class (Solomon et al., 2018).

This literature review examines the data for the relationships between Black males and schools, the academic opportunity gap for African American males in school, and the institutional challenges to success for African American male students. The literature review also examines charter schools and the charter school movement and explores the role of single-gender middle school in their academic success.

The Achievement Gap

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) defined the achievement gap as significant differences in scores between one group of students and another group of students. (2016). The achievement gaps included racial disparities, parental income, English language learners, and special education students. Achievement gaps for historically marginalized Black and Brown students extend beyond test scores into an opportunity gap, meaning that the arbitrary circumstances in which people are born—such as their race, ethnicity, ZIP code, and socioeconomic status—share their opportunities in life, rather than all people having the chance to achieve to the best of their potential (Mooney, 2018). The opportunity gap for this population extended into the system of education, including gaps in access to high-quality facilities, teachers, resources, and opportunities. Yet disproportionately their achievement and life circumstances are constrained by race and class.

The Educational Status of African American Males in Indiana

The Indiana Commission on the Social Status of African American Males (2015) report described data related to African American males as alarming at best and potential outcomes devastating. Overall, the report concluded too many Indiana Black male students failed to achieve success in school. The report highlighted contributing factors as lack of school readiness, not reading proficiently by third grade, summer learning loss, and disproportionate suspension and expulsion rates. The impact of education deficiencies in a knowledge-based economy expands into life outcomes, including low employment rates, high unemployment rates, interacting with juvenile and criminal justice systems, and high incarceration rates. Lack of education results in high poverty rates, which impact Black lives for generations.

Education stakeholders continue to seek methods to address these deficiencies. Research shows that African Americans students from low-income families often enter school behind and never catch up (Hernandez, 2013). In reality, even those from higher-income families rarely match the academic success of other demographics. This lack of school readiness is documented by research published by the Annie E. Casey Foundation (2019), which found up to 88% of children who start school behind their peers are not likely to close the achievement gap prior to high school.

Achievement data in Indiana is even more dismal. Although some research illustrates improved achievement for African American males (NCES, 2016) in Indiana, significant achievement/opportunity gaps remain. Consistent with national research, the opportunity gap exists as African American male attend low performing schools, lack access to high quality teachers and exposure to rigorous coursework. According to the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), the largest nationally representative assessment of K-12 academic

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skills, approximately 83% of Indiana Black fourth graders score below reading proficiency as compared to 58% of White fourth graders (Kids Count Data Center, 2019). In 2017, 58.1% of White students as compared with 25.1% of African American students in grades 3-8 passed both the English and Mathematics Sections of the ISTEP. According to the Indiana Department of Education (2018), students in Grades 3-8 Passing both Mathematics and English/Language Arts ISTEP+ actually decreased from 2015 to 2018. In 2018, 50.7% of students in Indiana passed with 57.7% of White students passing and 24.8% of Black students passing. Instead of progress, the longer Black males stay in school, the wider the academic achievement gap becomes.

All these disparate conditions are predictors of high school dropout and future incarceration. Each year from 2000 to 2016, the status dropout rates for White youth and Black youth were lower than the rate for Hispanic youth. During this time, the status dropout rate for White youth was also lower than the rate for Black youth in every year except 2016, when there was no measurable difference between the two rates. From 2000 to 2016, the status dropout rate declined from 6.9 to 5.2 percent for White youth, from 13.1 to 6.2 percent for Black youth, and from 27.8 to 8.6 percent for Hispanic youth.

Black Males and Schools

For African American males, school is happening to them and not for them. The fact is that the longer African males stay in school, the academic outcomes become progressively worse. This is demonstrated by both low ISTEP scores and low End-of-Course Assessment (ECA) passage rates for high school graduation without waivers. ECAs are tests given in mathematics and English to all Indiana high school students as a condition of earning a high school diploma. By meeting certain attendance and academic support criteria, some students who fail to pass one or more sections of the ECAs receive “waivers” to earn a high school diploma.

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The majority of Black Males do not Meet the Minimum Requirements for High School Graduation and/or do not pass the required ECA without waivers. According to the Indiana Department of Education, less than 50% of Black males pass Algebra I and English 10 assessments while less than 25% pass the Biology assessment (Indiana Department of Education ECA Pass Rate Data, 2015).

As a result of low ECA passage rates and other graduation qualifiers, Indiana ranks as one of the ten worst states in terms of Black male four-year high school graduation rates with an estimated rate of 51%. The Schott Foundation (2015) examined the systemic challenges in the current education system that create racially identifiable gaps in graduation rates, including school disciplined disparities and inequitable school supports. The report described the indefensible actions of inequitable practices that neglect Black male students in the public education system. The report's latest estimates for national public high school graduation rates were 59% for Black male students, 65% p for Latino males, and 80% for White, non-Latino males. The gap between Black and White male students increased from 19 percentage points in the 2009-2010 school year to an estimated 21 percentage points in the 2012-2013 school year. According to the Indiana Youth Institute (2019), achievement gaps are persistent and pervasive across race/ethnicity and sub-populations.

According to The Schott Foundation for Public Education's National dropout report (2015), the U.S. Black male high school graduation rate for the school year 2012-2013 is estimated to be 21 percentage points below White male graduation rates, 59% versus nearly 80% respectively. Indiana has declared an emergency state with a 23-point gap between White and Black students with the Black graduation rate at 51.3% and White at 75%. In 2016, the Indiana high school dropout rate was 4.0%. The dropout rate is highest for Black students (8.1%). Less

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than a third (32.1%) of Hoosier youth ages 16-19 who have dropped out of high school are employed (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2019).

Suspensions and Expulsions

Black male students suffer from both school-based and systemic disproportionalities including placement in lower academic tracks like special education classrooms. In 2017, there were 164,706 special education students enrolled in Indiana schools (14.5% of all students), 16.2% African American, 14.8% White. By contrast, in 2016, less than 6% of African American male students were enrolled in gifted and talented education programs. The U.S. Department of Education reports that Indiana had the second-worst percentage of Black male students who experienced out-of-school suspensions (tied with Missouri); only Wisconsin had a higher percentage (Anyon et al., 2014).

Disparate Disciplinary Practices

The Center for Evaluation & Education Policy (CEEP) at Indiana University depicts attendance as an effective predictor of future academic success. Absenteeism, including suspension and expulsion, adversely affects high school graduation rates. Research showed that suspension and expulsion for a discretionary school violation nearly tripled a student's likelihood of juvenile justice contact within the subsequent year (Carter et al., 2014). Exclusionary discipline practices continued to increase in America, particularly for Black students (Losen & Skiba, 2010; Skiba et al., 2014). Black males disproportionately represented a greater percentage of all suspensions in Indiana (Carter et al., 2014; Skiba et al., 2014). While Black students accounted for approximately 23% of the total student population in 2013, they accounted for nearly 43% of all out-of-school suspensions (Skiba et al., 2014).

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Black males represented approximately 60% of all Black student suspension and expulsions (Skiba et al., 2014). The U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights reports that suspension and expulsion rates for Black males (27%) is more than three times the rate of White males (8%). As a result, Black males disproportionately represent a greater percentage of all suspensions in Indiana (Skiba et al., 2014).

Riddle and Sinclair (2019) examined racial bias in disciplinary practices across the United States in their analysis of the federal Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) data from 32 million students at nearly 96,000 schools nationwide. The CRDC dataset compiled by the U.S. Department of Education from the 2015–2016 academic year includes data on “all [local educational agencies] and schools, including long-term secure juvenile justice facilities, charter schools, alternative schools, and schools serving students with disabilities” (2018, ref. 34, p. 6). The CRDC data represented 96,360 institutions enrolling approximately 50.6 million students, of which approximately 24.7 million were White and 7.8 million were Black. The researchers identified a racially bias disciplinary gap between Black and White students across five types of disciplinary actions. The types of disciplinary actions examined included: in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, law enforcement referrals, school-related arrests, and expulsions. In agreement with previous studies, Riddle and Sinclair (2019) found Black students in the United States were subject to disciplinary action at rates much higher than their White counterparts. The authors asserted that adverse disciplinary actions increased the probability of negative life outcomes including health and criminal justice system involvement. The authors championed the need for policies that targeted racial disparities in education and psychological bias. McIntosh et al. (2014) argued that multiple studies concluded that types and levels of

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discipline disparities are based in explicit biases. Students, parents, and administrators attributed disproportionate suspension of Black students to racial motivations (Haight et al., 2014).

In terms of systemic causes for the lack of success for Black males in school, the data show early education deficiencies play a key role. Specifically, students who are identified as “far behind” on 4th and 8th grade ACT testing instruments, have a less than one-third chance of being college and career ready by the time they reach twelfth grade (Dougherty & Fleming, November 2012). The studies showed that summer learning loss widens achievement gaps. Quinn et al (2018) discussed the disparities by socioeconomic level attributed to the summer learning loss (Quinn et al., 2016). Therefore, not only are many of our poor children starting behind, particularly Black males, but research indicates that the achievement gap between higher-income and lower-income students widens because of the effects of poverty, summer learning loss, and the inability of traditional school curriculum and environments to implement effective and comprehensive strategies to adequately address the effects both the readiness and achievement gaps.

A multitude of issues both in and out of school contribute to the negative schooling experience of Black males. In schools, Black males have been disproportionality assigned to special education classrooms (Scott & Quinn, 2014). These students were more likely to be suspended, expelled, and more frequently retained (Skiba et al., 2014; Lundy-Wagner & Gasman, 2011). Black male students were less likely to be enrolled in rigorous or college-prepared classrooms rendering them unprepared for college-level academic work (Harper, 2012; 2015a; Palmer et al., 2009). All these disparate conditions were predictors of high school dropout’s each year from 2000 to 2016; the status dropout rates for White youth and Black youth were lower than the rate for Hispanic youth. During this time, the status dropout rate declined

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from 6.9 to 5.2 percent for White youth, from 13.1 to 6.2 percent for Black youth, and from 27.8 to 8.6 percent for Hispanic youth. As a result, the gap between White and Black youth was 6.2 percentage points in 2000 but no longer statistically significant in 2016, and the gap between White and Hispanic youth narrowed from 20.9 percentage points in 2000 to 3.4 percentage points in 2016.

Assignments to Special Education

Throughout history, African Americans have been subjected to inequality in educational opportunities. Although *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) outlawed segregation in public, over 50 years later, African American children remained in segregated and unequal educational environments (Orfield, 2013). One method of resegregation has been the disproportionate number of African American students assigned to special education classrooms (Blanchett, 2009). More specifically, the data show African American males are the student group more likely to be identified and classified for special education services (Noguera, 2005). Although African American males make up only 13% to 33% of the student population, this population averages more than 50% of the special education students (Moore et al., 2008). African American male placement in Special Education includes cultural disconnects, academic misinterpretation, and cultural disconnects by school faculty members such as school psychologists, counselors, administrators, and teachers (Cloonan, 2017).

Describing the pervasiveness of African American males assigned to special education classrooms, Moore III et. al (2008) shared, “In many of these school systems, special education seems to be the preferred educational intervention or curriculum for students who are African American males” (p. 907). The American Black Psychologists Society argued, the disproportionate special education placement of African American reverberates results in higher

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incarceration rates, lower college attendance, under and unemployment, poor socioeconomic status, chronic health conditions, and lower life expectancies (Frazier, 2009).

Blanchett (2009) argued that Black students assigned to special education classrooms make less progress than White students. These students are more likely to suffer from the long-term consequences of being locked in their disempowering space. The author further asserted that the overrepresentation of African Americans in special education is not merely an educational dilemma, it is a civil rights violation and a major culprit in the —school to prison pipeline. This disproportionate placement of children in special education classrooms has been especially problematic for African American males (Sample, 2010). Conversely, African American students have been underrepresented classes designed for academically gifted students (Grissom et al., 2016). The challenges of African American male placement in special education are that these school-dependent children attend schools with the least number of resources to serve needs more often attending schools with fewer textbooks, technology resources, and effectively trained teachers (Moore III et al., 2008). Skiba et al. (2014) argued that the possibility that African American students require special education services more than Caucasian students because of their life circumstances including exposure to poverty, violence, and crime.

Skiba et al., (2011) defined overrepresentation in special education as representation of a cultural group in special education that exceeds the representation of that group in the total student population. A litany of continuing challenges for students exiting special education including lower graduation rates, poorer postsecondary outcomes, and higher rates of unemployment and underemployment (Thurlow et al., 2011). These outcomes were particularly discouraging for students labeled with emotional disturbance who are more likely to drop out and have encounters with the justice system. The study found 75% of young adults who are given

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this label in school will have some involvement with the justice system at some point during their lives. Students labeled with intellectual disabilities also have among the poorest postschool outcomes of any group.

The 30th Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act found that African American students are placed in special education programs at rates up to 2.8 times higher than all other cultural groups combined (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Despite attempts to address this overrepresentation through reform efforts, legislative actions, and Federal monitoring, the realities remain (Zhang et al., 2014).

Black males are mostly assigned to special education classifications by perceptions and judgmental disability categories including emotional/behavioral disorders, learning disabilities, intellectual disabilities, speech/language disabilities (Sullivan et al., 2011; Zhang et al., 2014). Minority students are more likely to be placed or categorized in the “judgmental” disability categories. Judgmental disabilities are also known as learning disabilities, intellectually disabled, and emotional disturbance. The reason why these disabilities are considered judgmental is that to be diagnosed with one of these disabilities, a school-based team evaluating the student might have some degree of subjectivity during the testing process (Piechura-Couture et al., 2011). Previous knowledge of a student can also interfere with the testing and diagnosis of a student. A student’s previous grades, test scores, race, and school rankings can influence the testing administrator and lead to errors in decision-making (Morgan et al., 2017).

Niefenfer (2015) concurred, stating that judgmental disabilities subjective to the opinions of school personnel subject may be responsible for inconsistencies in identification.

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McKenna (2013) argued that “without clear guidelines, a reliance on professional judgment and personal perceptions may lead to false positives and the overrepresentation of African American students” (p. 207). Inequitable systematic educational practices cause for overrepresentation include the referral, evaluation, and placement processes (Sullivan & Artiles 2011; Skiba et al., 2011).

In another disproportionality, African American students with disabilities are more likely than all other cultural groups to be removed from the general education classroom and instructed in more restrictive settings, even within the same disability category (Woodson & Harris, 2018; Zhang et al., 2014). Researchers assert these restrictive school settings operate as warehouses principally for African American males lead to continued warehousing in correctional facilities (Krezmien et al., 2008). The consequences of special education disproportionality for African American males are far-reaching beyond the school experience. The atmosphere of special education classrooms relegates students to learning environments with less academic rigor. The focus of these classrooms is not instilling academic confidence or preparing the students to function in a global economy. Instead, special education classes tend to be in the most restrictive environments, which retard academic achievement, stigmatize students, and limit access to services (Brown, 2010).

Elliott (2015) noted that students with disabilities “do not receive equal, let alone equitable” opportunity to learn concerning “three key dimensions—time, content covered, and cognitive process level.” He asserted that “differences in non-instructional time were most notable” (p. 60). Scott and Quinn (2014) argued that instead of supporting the needs of Black male students, special education seemed to be the preferred educational intervention and curriculum.

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As stakeholders continue to question how to improve the academic and life outcomes of African students the questions surround the methods. Negative stereotypes continue to define societal interests in African American students. The tremendous diversity in Black students fails to insulate them from the negative narratives, which, have existed in educational research since the 1930s (Brown, 2010). Disproportionate enrollment in special education courses is only one way that schools disenfranchise and retard progress for African American students. The challenges of Black males in schools have been well documented from poor academic outcomes to low high school graduation and college enrollment rates (Harper, 2012; Howard, 2014). Black males face disparities both in school and society in general.

Theoretical Framework

The Pedagogy of Confidence

The academic failure of African American males in schools oftentimes leads to challenging life outcomes including low high school graduate rates, under and unemployment, increased incarceration rates, and additional physical and mental health issues. To mitigate these challenges, educational stakeholders must shift from deficit model thinking to embrace the strengths of African American students (Davis & Museus, 2019; Harper, 2016). One mode of challenging the discord is deconstructing the model of deficit thinking. In her research on the schooling of urban students, Jackson (2011) argued the ineffectiveness of increasing student outcomes when focusing on student weaknesses. She further suggested that deficit model thinking has proliferated propelled by government policies enacted to “support” underachieving students. Policies such as No Child Left behind (NCLB) and Title One have blinded stakeholders to the strengths and intellectual potential of urban students. She argued that instead of producing positive results, stifling accountability standards devalue the motivation, initiative, and

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confidence of dedicated educators. These standards interfere with dedicated educators' abilities to search for and optimize the potential of urban learners.

According to Jackson (2011), school dependent children are often students in urban areas rely on schools to provide the tools necessary for academic success. These students are impacted by life experiences from home-based poverty and racism to school based low expectations and cultural incongruence which interfere with their high intellectual capabilities. The Pedagogy of Confidence offers a method of increasing the educational outcomes of school dependent students by focusing on students' strengths to inspire learning and high intellectual performance (2011). Instead of being wedded to negativities, Jackson maintained that educators who want to support these students must believe in the science that proves the brain is modifiable organ. Using these beliefs promotes teachers as mediators of High Operational Practices defined as to mitigate negative circumstances.

Instilling Pedagogy of Confidence inspires self-directed learning and self-actualization. Jackson (2011) argued that instead of using deficit model thinking which operates from the framework of focusing on school dependent student's weaknesses; educators should use pedagogies that stimulate the inner giftedness of all students. The art of applying the Pedagogy of Confidence is identifying strengths of underachievers and noticing the correlation with the strengths of gifted and talented student's and using this correlation to activate strengths. To support these notions, teachers must believe the science that demonstrates the brain as modifiable organ, and teachers can act as mediators to challenge deficit thinking and embrace concepts that all students can learn. The author challenged educators to adopt the fearless expectation and support for all children to demonstrate high intellectual performance (HIP). This system includes:

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1. Identifying and Activating Strengths
2. Building Relationships
3. Nurturing High Intellectual Performances
4. Providing Enrichment Experiences
5. Incorporating Prerequisites for Learning
6. Situating learning in the lives of students
7. Amplifying student voice.

The modifiability of the brain enables teachers as mediators to reconnect students into learning. The Pedagogy of Confidence incorporates neuroscience and cognition to maintain High Operational Practices (HOP).

Feuerstein's theory of Structural Cognitive Modification (1981) is divided into four pedagogical strategies for transposing underachievement with stimulating high intellectual performance. Initially, the theory worked within the assumption that intelligence is modifiable, and all students benefit from concentrating on high intellectual performance and learning. This learning is influenced by the interaction of culture, language, and cognition. Secondly, schools must acknowledge that underachieving school dependent students often live in environments outside of school (environment and socioeconomics) and inside of school (marginalizing labels, assessment and programs), which restrict intellectual development and impede learning. Thirdly, because the brain is modifiable, enriching mediation can correct cognitive dysfunctions making the brain more malleable so that high intellectual performance occurs. Finally, mediation can be validated through HOP that affirm potential, provide training to elicit learning by incorporating real life experiences thus creating a continual cycle of growth.

Mediation acts as an interactive process where teachers employ confidence in their students by building relationships through conversations which help them to make meaning by incorporating their lived experiences. The mediator uses these principles to transform instruction into Pedagogy of Confidence. It is Jackson's (2011) contention that teachers who act as mediators modify teaching strategies from what must be taught to how to best improve student learning.

Recruiting and Retaining Black Male Teachers

As stakeholders continue to seek effective interventions, two interventions are showing some success for Black male students

- recruiting and retaining Black male teachers (Lewis & Toldson, 2013).
- creating single-sex classrooms and schools (Fergus et al., 2014).

Carter and Welner (2013) maintained “children learn when they have opportunities to learn” (p.68). Darling-Hammond concurred, “The opportunity to learn—the necessary resources, the curriculum opportunities, the quality teachers—that affluent students have, is what determines what people can do in life” (Schott Foundation, para 1). In a recent study, Podolsky et al., (2019) argued the most powerful and persistent element affecting student academic outcomes are qualified teachers. The study found that the academic outcomes for students of color were positively impacted by well credentialed teachers and negatively impacted by inexperienced, under-credentialed teachers.

Cohodes et al. (2019) found that consistent professional development and the hiring of mission-aligned teachers produced positive academic outcomes. However, African American males often sit in classrooms with inexperienced teachers with cultural incongruence and low expectations. Understanding the importance of teacher-student relationships and the crisis for

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African American males, stakeholders are projecting the need for more Black male teachers (Bristol, 2014; Lewis & Toldson, 2013). Over the last twenty years, more attention has been given to the limited numbers of Black male teachers (Lewis & Toldson, 2013). NCES (2016) found in 2015–16, about 80 percent of public-school teachers were White, 9 percent Hispanic, 7 percent were Black, 2 percent were Asian, and 1 percent were of two or more races. Teacher influences go beyond improving test scores into life outcomes, economic security educational attainment (Chetty et al., 2014). Although over 50 percent of African males are attending public schools, over 60 percent of their teachers are White females. Currently, less than two percent of public-school teachers are African American males (Bristol, 2018). Research asserts that this lack of gender and race reflection in their teachers contributes to the continuing negative outcomes for African American male students.

The well-documented challenges of Black males in schools have prompted stakeholders to invest in a variety of interventions (Fergus et al., 2014; Howard, 2014; Noguera, 2008, 2012; Toldson, 2008). This model of schooling sets up an interesting paradox; whereas Black male youth have faced several barriers in their educational attainment—such as disproportionate punishment (Ferguson, 2000; Lewis, Butler, Bonner, & Joubert, 2010; Toldson, 2011), over placement in special education. One of the most prevalent interventions is the need to increase the percentages of Black male teachers.

However, research has shown one factor which has significantly impacted Black students ito be the lack of African American teachers and the cultural incongruence of an overwhelmingly White female teaching force (Milner, 2006). Coppersmith (2009) shared those teachers are overwhelming White women with suburban upbringing. Milner (2006) found the lack of Black teachers has been detrimental to the overall success of African American students.

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Discussing the benefits of Black male teachers, the American Federation for Teachers argued that:

Their unique lived experiences create a rich curriculum that contributes to student success in ways that can't be graded or easily quantified. Using methods that transcend traditional teaching and learning, Black male teachers can provide hope, inspiration, advice, compassionate listening, and, sometimes, tough love to make a difference in their students' lives. (American Federation for Teachers, np)

In her book *Learning While Black*, Hale (2001) maintained that one year of an ineffective teacher causes lifelong academic challenges for African American male students. Contemporary research identifies teachers as the most important determiner or input to success for African American students (Hanushek & Rivkin 2010). Their roles are especially critical for African American males who continue to struggle in schools.

Howard's (2008) Critical Race Theory analysis of the schooling experience of African American males found these students disenfranchised in school by race and racism and understood the influences of stereotypes. In addition, the students felt responsible for disrupting these narratives and presenting a more positive view of African American males. Studies show multiple benefits of students learning from teachers of the same race. Gershenson et al. (2016) found that Black students taught by same-race teachers perform better on standardized tests and experience more favorable teacher perception. In addition, the study found that Black male to a Black teacher at any point in grades 3-5 significantly decreases the dropout rate among Black male students by 30 percent and increases the likelihood of Black students aspiring to higher education. In alignment, a multitude of studies concludes that the negative experiences of

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African American males in school coordinate with a demonstrated need for increases in Black male teachers (Bristol, 2014; Lewis & Toldson, 2013; Nicolas, 2014).

Brooms (2017) shared that literature increasingly suggests that students need to see representations of their race and gender reflected in their teachers. The author further reasoned those negative experiences of Black males in schools seemed to support these claims. Brooms argued for a conceptual framework to understand students' experiences and perspectives on the benefits and contributions of Black male teachers to their schooling experiences. The challenges of the Black male in schools extend beyond school into life outcomes increasing the need to exemplify the presence of more Black male teachers in education.

Nelson (2016) examined the impact of relationships between Black males and teachers for students attending a single-sex middle school. Initially, the researcher sought to illustrate how a set of relational teaching strategies supported Black boy's engagement and learning. Secondly, the researcher sought to allow the voices of Black males as a counternarrative to the negative race and gender stereotypes Black males experience. The 27 participants in the study were 8th-grade males attending a single-gender middle school. The results of the study showed that the students wanted effective teachers who implemented realistic behavioral expectations. The students credited "relationally effective teachers" with reaching out and going beyond, personal advocacy, establishing and accommodating common ground (p. 1).

Otherfathering

A plethora of research has examined the numerous problems and challenges Black male students experience in schools. These problems range from poor academic outcomes, disconnected teacher-student relationships, struggles with identity development and social skills development (Brooms, 2017). However, a research deficit exists on perspectives of African

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American males on their experiences and the role of other African Americans specifically African males in supporting their journey. Othermothering refers to the motherly relationship between students and teachers and staff in schools (Collins, 2000; Giuffrida, 2005). According to Collins (2000), “Unlike the traditional mentoring so widely reported in the educational literature, this relationship goes far beyond that of providing students with either technical skills or a network of academic and professional contacts” (p. 191). These relationships often act as a conduit to success for urban Black students. In alignment with othermothering, otherfathering refers to the relationship between African American male students and other African American males in schools.

This otherfathering acts as an adoptive relationship between Black male students and other Black males in the building. Othermothering refers to a fictive kinship between students. Foster (1993) described othermothering as “an appropriate pedagogy for Black students [that] cannot be limited only to academics but must deal with political, social, and economic circumstances of children’s lives and communities” (p. 118). Addressing these relationships, Lynn (2006) argued that some males in schools can act as father figures by not only educating students in an academic sense but also by preparing these students to change the world by instilling values and supporting identity development.

Brooms (2017) examined the experiences of Black male students with Black male teachers at a single-sex urban secondary school. The study sought to gain insight from the perspectives of African American males on their attendance at a single-gendered middle school. The now twenty college-age Black males attended the same single-sex public high school. The study found that the Black male students considered the Black male adults “otherfathers” [based on their] pedagogical practices, care and concern, and support (p.1). The study identified three

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influences. Initially, the students wanted more Black male teachers and identified the benefits of African male teachers in their experience. The students considered Black male adults significant contributors to their development. Secondly, the students valued being taught by male teachers who looked like them as this fictive kinship aligned life experiences and provided shared perspectives and insights. According to the students, Black male teachers provided exposure to understanding life within the dualities of identities in being a Black male. The study found learning from Black male teachers provided them with insider perspectives and key insights on being Black and male. Students were exposed to opportunities to learn about how race and gender could matter in their lives. Finally, engaging with Black male adults in their schooling experiences provided students with unique opportunities to learn more about themselves. Broome (2017) credited students' learning with not only enhancing critical consciousness but also acting as a conduit to racial and gender identities. The students credited their success and personal development to the teachers who engaged them as otherfathers. In this role, the teachers gave students "holistic care, support, parenting, modeling, and life coaching" (p. 1). The students also stated that learning from their teachers was highly valued because their teachings offered insider perspectives about being a Black male. This approach to mentoring is significant because "little attention has been given to how Black male students "experience their relationships with Black male teachers" (p. 1).

Charter Schools

Financial investments and multiple education reforms and interventions have failed to drastically improve the academic outcomes of African American students. These data are especially dire for African American males. Stakeholders seeking schooling models that break the cycles of academic disparities founded charter schools with philosophies, missions, and

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visions designed to support varying student needs (Dobbie & Fryer, 2013; Wohlstetter, 2011). These open-access, tuition-free public schools in exchange for flexibility in school design, curricula, and operation accepted more accountability for success. (Miller, 2018; NAPCS, 2019). In addition, charter schools offer the flexibility for innovation and professional development for teachers and leaders (Chen, 2018). Without the constraints of collective bargaining agreements and rules and regulations, charter schools possess the freedom to adapt curricula and school environment to student needs (CER, 2020; National Charter School Research Center [NCSRC], 2021). The actual “charter” represents the contract with an authorizer for specified expectations for academics, operations and compliance with state laws. Each state has rules for charter operators with designated authorizes who monitor operations, academic progress and adherence to state laws. In their oversight responsibilities, authorizers have the ability to close schools that fail to meet expectations.

High-performing charter schools

Although questions about the general success of charter schools, models consistently demonstrated high levels of academic growth while serving low socioeconomic status, Black, and Latinx populations (CREDO, 2013). Although these schools served historically marginalized urban students of the most challenging populations, these schools consistently traditional schools (CREDO, 2013, 2017). Statistics showed that the most successful charter schools were in urban areas (Anbdulkadiroglu et al., 2013; Angrist et al., 2013; Gleason et al., 2010; Gleason et al., 2016). The commonalities in high-performing charter schools include best practices of data-driven instruction, high expectations, and intensive teacher development (Slavin et al., 2013). Dobbins and Fryer (2011) shared five tenets of high-performing charter schools: frequent teacher feedback, data drive instruction, high-dosage tutoring, increased instructional time, and a culture

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of high expectations. In agreement, Bambrick-Santoyo (2012) argued the key levers of high-performing charter schools: data-driven instruction, observation/feedback cycles, and a strong school culture to build effective learning environments. The author argued that adherence to a “core ideas and set of practices” would support school leaders in changing results for students from historically marginalized communities.

Studies show multiple benefits for students enrolled in high performing (CREDO, 2015). High performing urban charter school students gained 40 additional days of learning in math and 28 additional days in reading, compared to traditional public schools. As shown below, historically disadvantaged students experienced the greatest gains: Black students in poverty showed gains equivalent to 59 instructional days in math and 44 days in reading. The study also found that the longer students stay enrolled in charter schools, the greater the academic gains.

CREDO (2017) examined student-level data from 41 urban areas in 22 states from the 2006-2007 school year through the 2011-12 school year. The study found that Compared to the charter 41 urban charter regions have improved academic result in both reading and math. As a result of their success, high-performing charter schools were growing in number, invited to expand with additional funding opportunities. As research shows some progress for African American males, a growing number of these schools focus on single-gender middle schools (Brooms, 2017; Fergus et al, 2014).

School based Solutions

Single-Gender Middle Schools

Stakeholders constantly seek proven methods to interruptive the pervasive disparities in academic achievement between Black and Latino students and their White counterparts. Fergus et al. (2014) identified multiple interwoven theories of why single-sex schools are necessary for

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Black and Latino boys. These theories incorporated the challenges these students faced the role of the school in addressing these challenges and expected outcomes from attending a single-gender middle school. These researchers identified domains on how and why their schools operate: the needs and challenges faced by Black and Latino males (social/emotional and academic), the perceived influences of external pressures (community context, peer pressure, pop culture, etc.), and the assumed benefits attributed to single-sex schools designed for Black and Latino boys, as they relate to the boys' perceived needs (culturally relevant instruction, school climate, rigorous curriculum, teaching, and learning, focus on "male" identity, etc.). Additionally, creating single-sex educational environments suggests that they have unique needs that are not being addressed in coeducational settings.

Importance of Single-Sex Education

Historically, the concept of single-gender schools was mainly used in private schools. However, as stakeholders seek models to address the needs of African American male students single-gender schools have expanded in public schools. Increasingly single-sex schools have been examined as a model to improve the educational outcomes of historically marginalized low-income and minority students (Sax, 2006; Whitmire, 2010). Sax (2017) argued that support of single-gender education single-gender education could be more beneficial for the male learners as compared to female learners, especially at the elementary level. Noguera (2012) discussed the need to examine Single-gender environments as a strategy to educate African American males (Noguera, 2012).

Proponents for single-gender education focus on two main ideologies. Initially single-gender classrooms create an environment address the different learning styles of boys and girls attributed to structural and physiological brain differences. According to research, these differing

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learning styles require different learning environments (James, 2009; Sax, 2006). Another reason for gender-based classroom is perceived sexism in coeducational classroom. These arguments specifically pertain to Black males who are mainly taught by teachers who do not share their gender, race, or SES background. In addition, Advocates also argued that single-gender schools or classrooms reduces the distractions of interacting with members of the opposite sex. Chadwell (2009) argued separate learning environments for boys and girls promotes an environment encouraging full participation and opportunities for expressing opinions independently. Single-gender environments allow teacher to focus the differences in learning styles between boys and girls, for example, “text selections, video selections, lesson examples, teacher questions, and class projects” (p. 13). These factors can encourage boys or girls to engage in learning. Fergus et al (2014) found that single sex high schools for Black boys yielded academic gains with prioritization of relationships with adults in the building. Seeking to understand the student-teacher relationship, the role of resources that include instructional materials, rigorous curricula, human capital resources, and single-sex schools, Hubbard and Datnow (2005) conducted a two-year ethnographic study of low-income students attending single-sex academies. They identified three interrelated conditions contributing to positive outcomes: the single-sex setting; additional state funding; and caring, proactive teachers. Other authors championed the need for single-gender education arguing auditory acuity among girls exceeds the acuity of boys, resulting in behavior perceived by teachers as evidence of attention deficit disorder (Sax, 2010). These labeling disproportionality affects African American males. Sax (2009) shared the differences in brain development between “the various regions and sequence and tempo in girls compared with boys” (p. 17). Other authors that boys require more movement and space in classroom settings than girls for emotional processing (Payne, 2011). Chadwell (2009) supported designing and

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implementing single-sex programs and schools. He argued that gender is an important factor based on differences between genders in several parameters, including social, hormonal, sequence of development of different regions of the brain, and other factors determining student performance.

Single-gender Schools for Black males

“Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek” (Obama, 2008, para. 34).

Stakeholders seeking to increase the academic outcomes of Black males have examined single-gender schools and classrooms designed to address their needs. Fergus and Noguera (2010) conducted the Black and Latino Male Schools Intervention Study (BLMSIS). This longitudinal study (2006-2009) examined seven single-sex schools serving primarily Black and Latino boys ages 9 to 18. The study focused on examining the components of these schools (e.g., instruction, leadership, curriculum, climate, out-of-school time activities) and their effect on the boys being served. (p.4). Although size and operations differed, the schools maintained similar perspectives on the challenges and needs of the Black and Latino boys they served. “The schools in turn developed similar sets of strategies in response to these needs and challenges, including social/emotional development programming, rigorous curriculum, community service, college preparation, and academic skills remediation and acceleration” (p.4).

Initially the study showed how these schools addressed the socioemotional needs of Black male students as a key component in their design. The practitioners of these single-sex schools identified three prevailing social/emotional strategies related to the needs of Black and Latino boys: (a) changing boys' ideas of masculinity; (b) incorporating an academic identity; and (c) developing future and leadership. Secondly the study explored how school personnel focused

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on understanding and addressing the academic needs of Black and Latino males. The school principals and teachers outlined the academic needs of Black and Latino boys as involving 4 key areas: (a) addressing gaps in academic skills; (b) preparing them for college; (c) raising academic expectations; and (d) making curriculum and instruction relevant.

Miller (2012) explored the academic achievement and engagement levels of adolescent Black males attending single-gender and co-educational reading classes utilizing culturally relevant pedagogy. The study found while student engagement remained about the same, student achievement for the single-gender reading class showed statistically significant gains in comparison to the co-educational reading class. The study also identified three themes that impacted student engagement for Black male students: (a) cultural understanding; (b) cultivating an instructional community; and (c) psychosocial needs.

Robinson (2018) examined the effective factors necessary to successfully launch a single-gender elementary school for Black males in an urban setting. The study effective pedagogical practices and successful elementary-aged models that address the social emotional and academic needs of Black males within New York City. The study explored: (a) in single-gender elementary schools for Black males, what factors contribute to their academic and social-emotional growth and development? and (b) In what ways do school design, context, and leadership practice inform the academic and social-emotional growth and development of students of single-gender schools for Black males? The study identified six themes that coincided with the effective components of an elementary school of resilience for young males of color according to the perspectives, interviews, and observations of seven participants. This study identified what they believed to be the successful contributors to the academic and social emotional development of males of color in an elementary setting. The researcher argued that the

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study identified components of what leads to the success and sustainability of schools or the lack thereof for young males of color. These themes included:

- a) understanding/acknowledgment of Black culture/difference in learning and development (differentiated instruction);
- b) Black male (adult) on Black male (student) mentorship;
- c) strong sense of identity for students, parents, teachers, and leadership;
- d) culturally relevant pedagogy/culturally responsive school leadership;
- e) organizational structure (transformative school culture)/safety/support/financial capital;
- f) sense of belonging.

Prior research shows the importance of student–adult relationships in creating environments that promote success for African American males (Brooms, 2013, 2017). Generally, mentoring has been considered a method of supporting student needs. Meyerson (2013) suggested mentoring relationships have three common features:

1. Adult mentors have more experience and wisdom than their younger mentees.
2. Mentor’s guidance is intended to foster growth, development, and maturity.
3. The ideal mentor-mentee relationship has an emotional bond between mentor and mentee based on trust and respect as core principles (Rhodes, 2002, 2005).

A study conducted by Bayer et al. (2013) showed that unless mentors and mentees form a close relationship based on trust, the mentors’ impact on their mentees’ development may have little to no effect. Therefore, in practice, mentors should work to develop strong relationships by building trust and committing themselves to share time with mentees as role models (Stockslager, 2013). In the process of building trust, mentors should organize activities that are supportive in nature and structures. These structures for Black males seem to need more than just

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an occasional outing or conversation but school based “mentors’ that challenge, console and provide moral and academic support.

A relationship that has shown to create positive schooling environments that lead to success for African American males has been otherfathering. Otherfathering refers to the dynamic relationship between student’s school personnel, and school culture (Brockenbrough, 2015; Lynn, 2006). The school personnel are Black and often males. Othermothering was coined to describe student-adult relationships. In educational research, the concept of *othermothering* refers to the development of adult–student bonds, most specifically with women teachers and staff, and the maternal attention that they provide to students (Collins, 2000; Giuffrida, 2005). Collins (2000) asserted, “Unlike the traditional mentoring so widely reported in the educational literature, this relationship goes far beyond that of providing students with either technical skills or a network of academic and professional contacts” (p. 191). These relationships often act as a conduit to success for urban Black students.

Otherfathering entails both an academic focus (within the classroom and even within the curriculum) as well as tenets that speak to students’ social and cultural needs—such as personal relationships, maturation, and racial and gender identities (Brockenbrough, 2015; Brown, 2009). Smith, Newman-Thomas, and Stormont (2015) define youth mentoring as an intervention applied by adults to help adolescents at risk of academic and social failure. Mentoring is thought of by some practitioners as a simple way to help youths overcome challenges.

School-based research on the concept of otherfathering suggests it is an effective approach to mentoring African American boys (Hunter et al., 2006; Jayakody & Kalil, 2002). Numerous studies acknowledge that adolescent African American males need mentors who have their best interest at heart (Belgrave & Brevard, 2016; Gray et al., 2018). Researchers agree

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young African American males can benefit from the positive interactions gained in mentoring relationships with adult African American males who are focused on helping them to shape their identity (Broom, 2017). In addition, all-male learning environments or environments with mostly adult male teachers promote meaningful student-teacher relationships. Broome (2017) argued

In particular, otherfathering pays attention to how adult male school personnel—such as teachers, staff members, administrators, and athletic coaches—play critical roles in the holistic development of student’s social, emotional, educational, and identity needs.

Within the scope of this study, otherfathering is treated as gendered labor that adult Black male school personnel engage in and that is specific to developing and nurturing the intersecting identities of Black male students. (p. 6)

Brockenbrough (2015) shared that acting as otherfathers adult Black males bond with the students as fictive fathers in the classroom and the school building. These relationships promoted student success. The students shared how the environment created a space for positive engagement in school. The students credited otherfathers as a critical component in their success. These students at a single-gendered school provided a powerful counternarrative to oppositional culture explanations of the relationship between black males and schools. Instead of a disconnect engaging with otherfathers offered a clear testament that they *do* care about education (Broome, 2015; Harper & Davis, 2012). The students need reciprocity of relationships with adults who demonstrate care.

In another study, Fant (2017) examined otherfathering in a school-based setting, asserting that African American male teachers succeed as otherfathers because of their abilities to relate to the students and claim they have innate abilities that enable them to function well as otherfathers. As otherfathers. African American men provide needed care including personal concern, support,

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attention, and role modeling that motivate and influence adolescent males' positive identity formation.

Brooms (2017) examined the experiences of Black male students with Black male teachers at a single-sex urban secondary school. The study sought to gain insight from the perspectives of African American males on their attendance at a single-gendered middle school. The study focused on the schooling experiences of twenty college-age Black males who all attended the same single-sex public high school. The study found that the Black male students considered the Black male adults "otherfathers" "based on their pedagogical practices, care and concern, and support" (p. 1). The study identified three influences. Initially, the students advocated for and identified the benefits of African male teachers in their middle school experience. The students consider Black male adults' significant contributors to their development. Secondly, the students valued being taught by male teachers who looked like them as the teacher's life experiences provided shared perspectives and insights. The students felt Black male teachers provided exposure to understanding life within the dualities of identities in being a Black male. The study showed felt that learning from Black male teachers was valued highly by students because these experiences provided them with insider perspectives and key insights on being Black and male. Students were exposed to opportunities to learn about how race and gender could matter in their lives. Finally, engaging with Black male adults in their schooling experiences provided students with unique opportunities to learn more about themselves. Students' learning enhanced their critical consciousness and connected to their racial and gender identities as well. Students attributed much of their success and personal development to how Black male teachers engaged in otherfathering—expressed as holistic care, support, parenting, modeling, and life coaching.

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Fant (2017) whose study examined otherfathering in a school-based setting, asserts African American male teachers are seen as highly capable of serving as otherfathers. Observers claim they have innate abilities that enable them to function well as otherfathers. Fant found this thinking to be embedded in a belief that African American men have experiences that help them to better understand and relate to the experiences of African American male students. African American men who step up to serve as otherfathers provide the sons of other men needed care.

Deconstructing Anti-Deficit Thinking

Historically the experiences of Black males in schools have been examined from the lens of deficit model thinking. Black males are addressed as endangered or at-risk. A mode of thinking holds the victims, namely Black males, are responsible for the challenges and inequalities they face in schools (McKay & Devlin, 2016; Valencia, 2010). Overall, these perspectives serve as tools that maintain hegemonic systems and, in doing so, fail to place accountability with oppressive structures, policies, and practices within educational settings. Davis and Museus (2019) asserted that an anti-deficit perspective would suggest that racially minoritized students are not “at-risk,” but educational institutions are at-risk of failing them. As stakeholders seek alternative methods of schooling, single-gender middle schools offer multiple benefits to consider.

Anti-Deficit model thinking challenges the premise of public education. Deconstructing this mode will require additional teacher education and educational leadership. Standard based school reforms for students of color are misdirected as second, he examines the standard-based movement school reforms, arguing that it is misdirected: “It treats the symptoms of school failure (i.e., poor academic achievement indices such as low reading test scores and high dropout rates), rather than the root causes (inferior schools)” (Valencia, 2010, p. 1 52).

The Influence of Poverty

Research shows poverty, socioeconomics, and lifestyles create brain signals or stress, which interrupts the high intellectual performance of school dependent children. Thomas and Fry (2020) in a Pew Research study found that 38% of African American children continue to live in poverty. School assignment remains home zip code-dependent, dictating poor students' attendance at chronically underperforming schools. Students who attend schools with high-poverty populations fare worse in school than their middle-class counterparts. Family incomes force these students to matriculate at schools where 50% fail to graduate from high school and over 90% never receive a college degree (NCES, 2017, 2020). Increasing the number of quality school options to those from low SES backgrounds, specifically Black males, needs increased actions as the impact of poor schooling extends beyond the schoolhouse door into economically disparate life outcomes.

The devastating consequences of poverty interrupt the abilities of some student's preparedness for the educational demands of the traditional school model school prior to school entry. The Pedagogy of Confidence dispels this myth and provides practical approaches to rekindle educators' belief in their ability to inspire the vast capacity of their urban students.

The Impact of Public-School Environments

As the only mandatory and largest network of institutions in communities across the country, public school districts and their schools provide one of the few community platforms to address these learning, social and cultural issues and collectively, the impact of poverty on each. Education is a public good and as such, the public education system is a valuable platform that can be used to create a healthy living and learning ecosystem where all students have an opportunity to learn and their families an opportunity to succeed.

Creating this environment, which adequately serves African American students, demands a more holistic ways of assessing whether the appropriate mix of a student's academic, health, civic and climate supports are present. Furthermore, creating this culture requires schools to rethink policies and procedures to provide an environment, which supports all young people to meet high academic standards. This requires a paradigm shift where schools prioritize opportunity over oppression.

Summary

Chapter Two provided an overview of the extant literature around the schooling experiences of African American males. Initially the chapter discussed the achievement/opportunity gap focused on the historical and current barriers to success for African American males in schools. Secondly, the chapter provided an overview of the educational status of African American males in Indiana with the underlying data. Thirdly, the chapter provided an overview of solutions to support the improvement of academic outcomes for African American males in schools including: the role of teachers, the need for Black male teachers as otherfathers. Finally, the chapter examined single-gender middle schools. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the methodology.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

The purpose of this study is to examine the experience of African American males who attended a single-gender middle school. Specifically, the dissertation explores how these experiences impacted the high school and college experience. This chapter provides a description of the methods and procedures that were used to examine the experiences of African American males who attended a single-gender middle school. The chapter discusses the research design, sample identification, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis. In addition, the chapter identifies the study limitations and provides a summary.

Qualitative Research

Unlike quantitative research, which deals with numbers, qualitative research describes investigative methodologies such as ethnographic, naturalistic, case study, field, or participant observer research (Creswell, 2012; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Qualitative researchers convey the stories by examining the interactions of variables in their natural setting. The interviewer is an integral part of the investigation (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This type of research uses words to convey the story. It emphasizes the importance of observation in natural settings. In this type of research, detailed data is gathered through open-ended questions that provide direct quotations from participants.

Case Study

Yin (2014) states that a case study is “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the case) in depth and within its real-world context” (p. 16). This qualitative dissertation examined the experiences of African American male attendance at a single-gender middle school using a single case study design, a methodology suggested to test well-formulated theories or concepts.

The location of the case study provides a unique set of circumstances under which the case study takes place. This study also relies on several sources of evidence including interviews and site visits. The artifact review includes websites and other school specific documents (e.g., mottos, in school processes). The interviews and artifact reviews were examined in a way that demonstrates a relationship between current research and the interventions put in place to support the students. To examine these experiences, I used the logic model described by Yin (2014) as a tool that “stipulates and operationalizes a complex chain of occurrences or events over an extended period of time” (p. 155). According to the author, this method helps to explain the ultimate outcomes by observed events compared with the extant literature. In this case study, I used demographic surveys, organizational artifacts, and interviews to examine the experiences of former students of Male Prep Academy.

Recruitment and Sampling

To identify participants, this study used purposive sampling, which is a type of sampling that relies on the judgment of the researcher to select the units to investigate (e.g., people, cases/organizations, events, pieces of data). According to Creswell (2012) discussing qualitative research, “the intent is not to generalize to a population, but to develop an in-depth exploration of a central phenomenon,” which is best achieved by using purposeful sampling strategies (p. 203). This type of sampling requires a small sample size especially when compared with probability sampling techniques. Purposive sampling does not select random units from a population to generalize (i.e., statistical inferences) from that sample to the population of interest. Instead, the goal of purposive sampling focuses on characteristics of a population that best enable me to answer her research questions. With the participant descriptions identified I used class social media pages for initial student recruitment.

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To identify participants, I used snowball sampling a methodology where the participants asked for referrals of other potential participants in the absence of a sampling frame for the population of interest, however, I must retain at least some prior personal or professional contacts in the population of interest which can serve as the seeds of the snowball.

To conduct the present study, initially identified participants, former parents, students, teachers, or administrators of Male Prep Academy received a recruitment email. This email provided study details including the purpose of the study and study methodology and an IRB-approved informed consent form. The email and the informed consent form also explained the interview protocol one hour one to one with semi-structured questions. The participants were informed of the ability to withdraw at any time and the lack of compensation for participation. One week after the initial contact, the potential participants received a second reminder email requesting participation. The potential participants received a final email the following week. Once the participants agreed to participate, they were sent a Doodle poll to choose an interview slot.

Participants

The study examined the practices of Male Prep Academy, a pseudonym, to protect the confidentiality of the nationally known charter school. The study participants were former students, teachers, and administrators of the all-male high performing, public charter middle school. The participants included 4 Administrators, 4 Teachers, 3 Parents and 4 students. Demographic information of the 301 Male Prep Academy students were 93% Black with 100% receiving free and/or reduced lunch. During the 2012-2013 school year, the school reported a 97.7% attendance rate with a 76.5% passage rate state testing where 18.6 % of students qualify for special education services. The student participants are former students currently second or

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third-year college students. This case study used theories of effective school models for African American students, single-gender schools, and college persistence models to examine the experience of African American Male students who attended a single-gender middle school.

Participants' Rights and Confidentiality

Prior to conducting the research, each participant was provided an informed consent form, which includes participants' rights, to review and sign. The forms detailed the study including purpose and expectations. I explained to the participants that the session would be audio-recorded and/or video recorded to ensure the capturing of quality information for transcription. I explained to the participants that after transcription and their review of the transcripts the recordings would be destroyed. The research was conducted by the principal investigator, Nakia Douglas, via site visits and interviews over Zoom. To maintain the confidentiality of the participants, I secured all data in an encrypted file. After data collection, the information was coded with pseudonyms to protect the subjects' identities. All data will be deleted or shredded after three years.

Statement of Positionality

I worked with this network of schools for 10 years as a teacher and administrator. At the time of the study, I had been separated from the network of schools for over 5 years. Some of the participants in the study and I had worked together at some point during my tenure. None of the participants are still employed or attend school in the network. My experience, relationship, ethnicity as an African American female educator, and tenure in the network made the conversations during interviews comfortable and easy for participants to speak freely without any fear of backlash since no one is was employed or works with the network at the time of interviews.

Data Collection

This study method involved qualitative case study design. Qualitative research consists of an investigation that: seeks answers to a question systematically uses a predefined set of procedures to answer the question and collects evidence that produces findings that were not determined in advance and produces findings that are applicable beyond the immediate boundaries of the study. Qualitative research seeks to understand a given research problem or topic from the perspectives of the local population it involves. This type of research is important as it is especially effective in obtaining culturally specific information about the values, opinions, behaviors, and social contexts of particular populations, it to re-organize and re-label the narrative in this chapter that already exists.

Interview Protocol

In the qualitative phase, I conducted semi-structured interviews with students, parents, and teachers. Semi-structured interviews provide a method of inquiry that uses predetermined open-ended questions to provoke thought and discussion to allow the interviewer to explore the common themes in the study. This served as another data point in this case study. Questions for the interviews were centered on student achievement, special education services, and the development of scholar identity. Questions were targeted to provide insight on perceived and causal inferences (Yin, 2014).

As part of data collection, I examined artifacts including the school model, the school improvement plans and achievement data. Secondly, I conducted interviews via Survey Monkey to get demographic information. The beginning of the survey provided participants the purpose of the survey, survey instructions, and a notice that participation is not required. Respondents

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were then asked to complete the survey within one week. While the identity of the respondents remains confidential, demographic data were collected including:

1. Educator Respondents

- Position (Principal or Teacher)
- Gender
- Race of respondent
- Years of experience working in education
- Grade Level Teaching Currently
- Years of experience working at other schools

2. Student Respondents

- Gender
- Race
- Length of Attendance
- Year in College

All participants chose a pseudonym to protect their identity. To further protect the identities of the participants the results are stored in an encrypted folder.

In the final phase of the study, the interview protocol, the participants were asked questions around their experiences at Male Prep Academy and how these experiences influenced their college experience. The interviews are one-hour person to person interviews conducted via Zoom. The participants were informed of the possibility of a follow-up interview, if necessary, for clarifying answers. Once the interviews were transcribed, the participants reviewed the transcripts for validity. These results were then coded, analyzed, and themes identified. These themes were transformed into a written narrative.

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The interview protocol addresses assertions that creating successful schools for African American students requires high expectations, high-quality instruction, parental involvement, community involvement, peer support, relationships/ trust, acknowledgement of the role of culture, safe learning environment, commitment to the school/ students (Perry et al., 2010). The questions will also align with Fergus and Noguera (2010) models of effective single-gender schools for African American males which examine curriculum and instruction, social/emotional programming, positive school climate/culture, and college preparation. The Pedagogy of Confidence provided a theoretical framework for the study.

Research Questions

4. In what ways did students at Male Prep belong to a school community that normalizes high expectations?
5. What routines, policies, and practices occurred at Male Prep that supported academic achievement?
6. What factors (if any) emerge as central to college preparation?

Data Analysis

The next step in qualitative research is “coding of the themes and combining the concepts for an overall understanding of the culture being investigated” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 209). Coding is a systematic process of organizing the interviews into categories described by Rossman and Rallis (2011) as chunking and segmenting the sentences into categories and labeling those categories with a term, often a term based in the actual language of the participant. Saldana and Adorno (2001) maintained the researcher at this point, “transforms participants' everyday expressions into expressions appropriated to the scientific discourse supporting the research” (p. 21).

Initially, during the coding process I conducted open coding what Strauss and Corbin (1998) described as a process aimed at identifying concepts or key ideas hidden within textual data, which are potentially related to the phenomenon of interest. I examined the raw textual data line by line to identify discrete events, incidents, ideas, actions, perceptions, and interactions of relevance. From this examination, I identified some broad themes and categories. I then used axial coding, a process of relating categories to their subcategories. Strauss and Corbin argued that axial coding allows the identification of some central characteristic or phenomenon. Axial coding is a process of reassembling or disaggregating data in a way that draws attention to the relationships between and within categories. According to Creswell and Creswell (2017), these categories represent themes or the major findings of the research project. The themes are then shaped into a general description of the experience. The next analysis step included identifying overarching themes and connections. The final step in analysis involved interpretation of these data comparing the results with the Pedagogy of Confidence and transforming this information into a narrative.

Validity

To establish validity, I used triangulation and bracketing. Triangulation of qualitative data sources involves comparing and cross-checking the consistency of information derived at different times and by different means within the qualitative methods (Patton, 2002). To accomplish this, I compared responses in the participants with the extant literature. Another validity procedure employed in the study was a member checking process of sharing the identified themes with the participants. The participants were then asked to determine their perceived accuracy of the themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Summary

Chapter three covered the research methods used in the current study. Initially, I conducted sixty-minute one-on-one interviews with participants. Prior to the interviews the participants reviewed and signed Informed consent forms which outlined the study. The author used open-ended semi-structured interview questions. The research took notes and recorded the Zoom sessions. The interviews were transcribed to identify common themes. Thirdly, the identified themes were coded. Finally, the coded themes were used to create a narrative.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to examine the experience of African American males who attended a single-gender middle school. Specifically, the dissertation explored how these experiences influence their high school and college experience.

Male Prep Academy

Initially, the 6-12 public charter school with a 99% African American population where 83% of students received free or reduce-priced lunch was housed in an abandoned grocery store in a crime ridden area of Indianapolis. Despite the location of the school and the socioeconomic status of its students, strong academic outcomes yielded the network local, statewide and national acclaim. Mickey Accelerated received the National EPIC Award from the U.S. Department of Education in 2010-11 as one of seven charter middle schools honored. The Indiana Department of Education honored Male Prep Academy for exhibiting exceptional performance as a Distinguished Title I School and for closing the achievement gap between students in poverty and wealthier peers. The Indiana State Board of Education also honored Male Prep Academy as a model site for Early College programs, presenting the school with a Four-Star School Status, which placed Male Prep Academy in the top 25% of public schools in Indiana. Initially, the students were housed in the same building attended classes separated by gender.

To spinoff the success following the same academic and behavioral model to with a goal of addressing needs specific to Black male urban students, Male Prep Academy opened in brand new building in the same crime ridden area. Due to the academic reputation, without transportation, students from almost every school district in the city enrolled at Male Prep Academy. The message of excellence resonates in all aspects of the flagship Mickey Accelerated

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experience all schools in the network. The walls of the hallways and classrooms are filled with positive messaging towards excellence. Daily school wide chants and positive affirmations further promote excellence.

Academically in alignment with the flagship school model to increase mathematics and English proficiency leading to academic success, middle school scholars were enrolled in two mathematics and two humanities courses. To accelerate learning for students who entered behind or struggled on state testing, the school replaced electives like band or music with a third mathematics or humanities course. The school operated on an extended day, extended year model. The school day began at 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., and teachers are available on Saturday mornings for struggling students. Students who averaged 75% or better in every class earned 3 pm early dismissal. To accommodate students, many who arrived on public transportation and to working parents, the school was as safe haven. Limiting the time students were exposed to outside influences. Male Prep Academy was open most days from 6:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. Frequent academic monitoring included students receiving progress reach Friday. To provide teacher professional development, scholars had half days on Fridays. Male Prep Academy's faculty members and administrators were trained to assume that all scholars have distinct strengths and challenges and approach learning and teaching from a growth mindset. They are committed to provide each student with the knowledge and skills needed to succeed.

To support the needs of African American male middle school students, the school promoted success with academic accomplishments adorning the walls. Each classroom was decorated with artifacts of positive African Americans. Each student or group of students were partnered with a successful male mentor. The school added activities like 3-point basketball

shooting contests, spelling bees, rap battles, and water balloon fights centered around academics or as rewards for exceeding academically and athletically.

Participants Profiles

The participants in the current study were teachers, administrators, students, and families of students who attended a single-gendered all-male middle school. The students were currently in their second or third year of post-secondary education. I conducted one-hour semi-structured interviews with 15 participants. Some participants shared multiple roles as teacher/parents or school leader parents enabling them to give a broader perspective.

Participant Johnson: The school leader started in the network as a middle school mathematics teacher and was the charter principal of the school. At the time of data collection, the leader was working in educational philanthropy. This school leader shared with the students his challenges in school as an African American male providing the students a living role model to interact with daily. All study participants shared the importance of his role in the growth of the students and the schools' success.

Participant Allen: Served as Assistant School Leader for 3 years, started in the network as a Teach for America ELA teacher at the co-ed middle school. Has also worked as a member of the network curriculum team. The leader considered this his best job ever and shared the rewards of working at Prep. The leader also shared the challenges of the hours and efforts to make effective change and how this led to his eventual departure. At the time of data collection, Allen was working as a high school ELA teacher.

Participant O'Brian: Served as Dean of Students responsible for student culture. The leader considered this her best job ever and wished she could capture the magic in her current school. The leader wanted to immortalize the positive school culture that led to success. The

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leader started in the network as a 6th grade teacher to an all-boys cohort of students. At the time of data collection, O'Brian founded and led a local charter school.

Participant Wesley: Served as the first Assistant Principal of School Culture. She was able to share perspectives of lessons learned as the school grew. She was tapped to serve in the network as a turnaround principal. At the time of data collection, Wesley founded and led a local charter school.

Participant Adam: Served as a teacher in the first three years of the school and then transitioned into a dean position at the school. She started out in the network as the parent of a student at the flagship campus who became a teacher as a second career. The participant also served as an instructional coach. The leader's "style" won rave reviews from the students and was able to move numerous students from struggling to pass plus. The leader won a Kipp Fellowship and will be the founding principal of a new elementary school in the 2021-2022 school year.

Participant Kelly: Served as a first-year teacher as a second career. The leader represented a Black male role model to students. He would later start an elementary school in the network as a co-principal. Currently, serving as head of school for an Innovation School in the Indianapolis Public school portfolio of schools.

Participant Lewis: Served as a 6th grade teacher for an all-boys cohort at the flagship campus before serving as a 6th grade teacher at the all-boys middle school. As a White male teacher, he was able to see and develop the cultural competency necessary for success with Black male students. At the time of data collection, the teacher was homeschooling his 3 children in their Michigan home.

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Participant Walker: Served as a special education teacher and ELA teacher at the school. He was a member of the first graduation class of the flagship school. He has gone on to work in education philanthropy and at the time of data collection was working with The New Teacher Project.

Participant Reese: Parent to a student who attended the school. Parent also worked as a teacher at the flagship campus. This was the first school in the network that the son attended. At the time of data collection worked as an Assistant Director of Special Education at a local school district.

Participant Brown: Parent to a student who attended the school. Parent worked at the all-girls campus as an ELA teacher. At the time of data collection, she was still working as a teacher and recently earned a master's degree in Education.

Participant Goins: Parent to a student who attended the school. At the time of data collection worked as a school speech and language pathologist.

Participant Frazier: Student attended the single-gender middle school and successfully completed a rigorous high school and early college program. At the time of data collection, the student attended a highly competitive university and has just completed his sophomore year.

Participant Campbell: Student attended the single-gender middle school and successfully completed a rigorous high school and early college program. At the time of data collection, the student was attending a highly competitive university and has just completed his sophomore year.

Participant Martin: Student attended the single-gender middle school and successfully completed a rigorous high school and early college program. At the time of data collection, the student attended a highly competitive university and has just completed his sophomore year.

Student had multiple family members attend the schools

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Participant Lloyd: Student attended the single-gender middle school and successfully completed a rigorous high school and early college program. At the time of data collection, the student is attending highly competitive university and has just completed his sophomore year. The student credits Prep with changing his academic outlook.

The participants shared their perspectives on attendance at a single-gendered middle school. The interviews and documented review yielded seven recurring themes.

1. Scholar Identity – Teaching students to revere and define themselves academically and socially successful
2. Celebrating Academic Achievement - Creating a space where students are celebrated and rewarded for academic achievements. Exposure to colleges and careers beyond the locus of their neighborhood or community.
3. Otherfathering - Taking on a quasi-parental role with students to support and foster growth and academic growth beyond the classroom. Building relationships and teaching the soft skills associated with manhood.
4. Rigorous Curriculum/Strong Curriculum – Using an Accelerated Schools model to give all students access to gifted and talent curriculum without tracking students.
5. Participation in School Activities- Engaging students in programs beyond the school day to support community and connection with the school and classmates.
6. Strong Leadership – Leadership that is inclusive and reflective of the community around them. It's important that these young men could relate to a leader who help them to high expectations for achievement. It was also important that this was a professional Black male with similar life experiences to the students

7. Relationships with Teachers and Administrators – connection to the student body and the ability to create a family like culture where everyone is accepted and celebrated.

Scholar Identity/Celebrating Academic Achievement

Although the choice to enroll students in an all-male middle school varied for parents and students, with one student forced to go by parents, while other students chose to go to the new school in the neighborhood. Other students enrolled after struggling in traditional public schools with low expectations, academic or social challenges or school safety. Regardless of the reasons for enrollment, parents and students revealed how Male Prep Academy provided opportunities that traditional schools lacked in addressing the needs of this historically underserved population. The students and parents of students who, at the time of data collection, were Sophomores and Juniors in college, all agreed that attending Male Prep Academy benefited the students' journey to college success. Some parents explained how other schools missed the mark sharing how their students went from academic failure to academic success. The parents attributed teaching the students to believe in themselves because the school believed in them or the development of “scholar identity” as a contributor to success. As Llyod who like many others went from struggle to success summarized, “My experiences at another middle school before we came to Prep is that I was trying to get out of there.” Repeatedly, parents shared experiences similar to the Goins who maintained:

...and there was a complete turnaround in his first experience with middle school and then Prep. At prep he was a straight A student, but at the school before that he had D's and F's. The bar wasn't set very high. And because it wasn't set high, he didn't try. And I think it Prep, it was a complete opposite, like, okay, the bar is here, but we're gonna push you here. And he was successful in it.

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One of the benefits of attending a single-gendered middle school identified by all participants from scholars to administrators was excelling in a space where it was ok to be smart. Some of the studies argue and urban expectations decry academic success is not in alignment with masculinity. This development of scholar identity, as one participant shared, eliminated the ideology that “I’m too cool to be smart.” Instead, students attended a school that valued academics and motivated the students to strive for excellence. Students argued that instead of other stressing about what others think, they were allowed to “just come and do school.” In an all-male environment where there were no girls, young men could focus on academics, “and so and there were no girls, and so you don’t have to try to be cool for girls.” Participant Campbell agreed, arguing that the all-male environment “got rid of a lot of potential distractions.” He and other participants felt going to school without girls as beneficial, “Because that’s a natural born distraction.” In agreement shared,

I think that one of the most important things to realize is that we were going through this middle school, single-gender, male or female schools, while we’re going through. And puberty is a very confusing time for a lot of people and being in an environment where you have to where you can’t focus on the other gender, it really helps you kind of stay focused on your schoolwork.

In alignment, Brown credited the ability to focus with academic success.

I think the best aspects were focus. Because you didn’t have girls, we didn’t have distractions. We weren’t trying to impress anybody. We were just going there to learn. And we were focusing on our grades and really nothing else.

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The teachers and administrators, the students agreed that one of the critical benefits of attending a single-gendered middle school is an environment to focus on academics without having to deal with the pressures Black male teenage hood from girls to puberty.

Another student summarized the experience of the participants.

So, I was like, really paying attention to what the teacher was saying. You could answer questions. The students also credited the uniform policy with allowing students focus as everyone was dressed like “you didn’t have those distractions and could focus, Yeah. I guess. I don’t want to sound too superficial. Yeah, instead of trying to be fly for the girls.”

Enhanced Camaraderie

The participants in the current study promoted developing relationships between scholars as important in the development of scholar identity. The attitude was we are all in this together with similar goals around college preparation and the development of manhood. Leader Wesley compared it to the experience at an HBCU,

Like, my HBCU experience is such that everybody who is here all of us look alike, not a monolith. But we all are Black. Um, but everybody here is smart and wants to do well and is expected to do well. The same thing at Prep. Everybody here, most of our children at that time. I think we were 100% African American in our first year. So, everybody was Black. And the expectations were the same for everybody.

At Prep, male Blackness did not equate to less capable, instead methods were developed to support culturally inclusive African American male development he students were encouraged to share their talents and assimilated to except more unorthodox talents. The student who help pride in singing in church choir was as affirmed as the city championship basketball players.

Rituals to Identity

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The male scholars attributed the rituals and routines with developing scholar and male identities. The parents discussed how these rituals brought out lights in the students' eyes that were dimmed in other schooling models. Instead of feeling like an outsider within the school environment the scholars were actively engaged in their academic and social development. Lloyd maintained that,

And so, at the beginning of every morning, we had morning meetings, and they basically kind of tell us how to be men, how to be good men and good young men, good young, Black, African, good young African American men in a society that doesn't always want to see you succeed. Um, and being able to take our experience and then meet up with the young woman at collegiate and being able to share our experiences in high school really comes to a perspective that other people don't have.

Curriculum aligned with scholar development with several of the teachers sharing how they adapted the curriculum or expanded the curriculum. The teachers shared the enhancement of curriculum using "hands on opportunities" and engagement opportunities. The innovativeness and gender inclusive curriculum encompassed multiple tools from spelling with three-point shooting contests to video game mathematics competitions. Adam shared how they made school fun,

They were, it was really easy to get them to buy in. Because we did a lot of culture days where we would have activities centered around game shows, or TV shows, but incorporated the academics. Like we did. Jeopardy, they play Jeopardy, but we used mathematics, we did extreme home makeovers for science, and they had to figure out how to construct the home using decks of cards. We played the minute to win a game, we had Cake Boss, they had to build a cake out of the sponge cake in everything and do that.

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To make literature more interesting Adam shared:

And then for the literature part, we did um, Studio Movie Grill where we showed them a movie, they were able to eat lunch, and then they had asked questions and worked collaboratively on the questions and everything. Understanding the need for movement and boys. So, they were boys. We did a lot of activities that were hands on. We had them riding bikes, answering questions, and they had to ride bikes in the hallway race around. Once you answer the question, you had to jump on the bicycle and ride around the school to get back in. So, it was really about having them actively involved.

Instead of what students described as a boring classroom, KELLY shared, “every time I would have them read, I would try to find a video online that would make it real life make that real-life connection.” In agreement Johnson shared,

We had the kids read a lot. So, reading was huge. We had the kids read every day. We had and we're talking about just academics now we're talking about. We had the kids read a lot. So, we had something called Get Reading. It happened every Tuesday and Thursday.

Several students shared how the scholar identity developed at Male Prep Academy amassed to good habits continued in college, as Campbell summarized,

I think it was really the aspect of like, really having to study because I couldn't just like, there were some guys, I couldn't do my homework in and feel like absolutely prepared to pass a test necessarily. And I kind of started prep. So, like really having to study and read and reading was a big thing that we did a lot. We read a lot of books. And really, that's the dive into them. Like with deeper analysis, like and I still use some of those tools today.

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Some of the readings were cultural and gender inclusive where students read materials where their culture and gender were positively represented.

Gender Identity

In addition, a focus on gender identity academically, the participants shared how attendance at Male Prep Academy supported masculinity. Lewis maintained, “Yeah, so I think one of the things we wanted to really dig in with kids about is this idea of manhood that I think is underserved.” Instead of letting the negative depictions and absence of Black male role models, the leadership team created a climate that allowed the students to self-define from a positive lens. As Walker shared,

... like people talk about manhood all the time. But I think what has happened is the world is transformed in such a way, where what we had known as manhood is no longer explored, and in some ways is no longer needed, you know, in a weird way. And so, I felt it is the school's job to allow young men to experience my manhood in either new ways or in traditional ways.

To support “traditional” male bonding activities, the school promoted male activities that were often missing in urban youth from single mother households. Discussing the promotion of male activities, the leaders played on the male need for competition. As Lewis shared,

And so, we talked about traditional ways like taking them fishing, playing football in the yard, could be competitions, all throughout the building, we felt like testosterone was a huge thing to take advantage of. You have tons of that within a school you have to take advantage of, which is where the competitions came from.

The competitions were mentioned by all participants as a critical component of the experience at Male Prep Academy. The school created an environment where competition extended beyond

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athletics into academics. The student success was promoted with wall-sized achievement recognitions. These lists included pictures and grades or other accomplishments. Students took pride in showing their names and pictures in association with academic success. As Allen shared,

But at a more detailed level, we hung names, and all successes all the time, and kids just wanted to knock people's other scores at the park. They just always wanted to beat people's scores. And so that NWEA, like, I think, when I was a teacher, if someone had a 200, that was like, really, really strong, but you had people wanting to get 215. You had people on, and then you had them forming like almost cliques where you'd have like these five friends were all competing for two points. On these assessments, I just think, really healthy competition around performance.

The students and staff were enculturated to academic competition. As Allen shared,

And I think the staff, Miss Jones, in particular did a really good job of pushing kids, Tasha Jones that is pushing kids to want to do things more than their community. Like let's stop competing against Indianapolis. Let's stop competing against prep students. Let's go to Indy and see what the scores are. Let's stop competing against Indy, let's go to the state. Let's stop going to the same. Let's look at what they're doing in Boston. You know, like I mean, it just got so big to where they wanted to be the top students ever.

The students and staff were convinced to excel beyond Indianapolis and traditional public schools. “We were no longer talking about risk scores and averages we were talking about, like, how do you just get the best score that's ever been gotten on these assessments?” Participant Allen shared to promote college a college going culture, and “scholar identity, in tribute to Harry Potter, classrooms or “Houses were named after prominent colleges: Harvard, Princeton, Stanford, Yale, and grade level (e.g., Harvard 6, Princeton 7....).” To play on the competitive

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nature of African American males, the teachers and administrators created competitions under the assumptions that competitiveness “takes boys to another level.” These competitions extend “House Challenges” to all aspects of the educational experience. Allen shared,

... especially when you get large groups of them, so we could have the house challenges where we get boys excited about that. The nerdiest things like which group which house had the best organization score this week? And you've got prizes attached to it. And just those competitions, motivated boys. The competition for highest grades, test scores, homework completion rates or meeting behavioral or other expectations extended these houses would compete with each other.

The competitions-built comradery in by grade and schools or as the participant shared,” So, you build some camaraderie between the different ages. And also, you build some competition within the grade levels. So, Harvard, six, seven, and eight, could compete with Princeton six, seven and eight, on like, “Oh, I don't know, a certain mathematics test for a certain week or homework completion rates.”

The student participants felt this supported the development of dual identities “And so boys got to identify as Male prep boys, but they also got to identify as someone who's in the Stanford house.” Allen discussed, the end of the year celebration of which houses best met expectations,

And that was a yearlong competition, a giant, gaudy three-foot trophy, and the house that one got to have a celebration at the end of the year. I think they're like super soaker water guns and games and they had a ball, they loved it. And they the kids didn't know, maybe they did. They just didn't care. But they didn't realize we're just using games to make them learn to encourage them to learn.

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In agreement Kelly shared,

So, we did competitions every single week and those competitions, where houses against houses and at the end of the experience, whoever had the most points from the competitions, won the house cup. It is our job to get boys fired up about that, but also use it to our advantage. So, we knew that the competitions needed to be academic in nature for some of them, sometimes fun in nature, sometimes about organization because boys are notoriously messy in school. So then figure out like sometimes it could be how clean your binder is. Sometimes it could be Who had the best test scores?

The students credited their scholar identity supported by the competitions with pushing them towards academic success not only at Prep but as college students. The students maintained that attending an all-male school that promoted academic success without the distraction of trying to impress girls was beneficial especially the competitions. As Martin shared, “I think maybe the cohort kind of award thing that we have going on creates a little bit of bonding, because every class wants to win the class challenge.” Attending Male Prep Academy meant adhering to high expectations for behavior and academics. The students felt the challenges bonded them with each other, increased accountability and provided fun opportunities to learn and abide. Describing the challenge Lewis shared,

Um, so every, every class we separate into a cohort, so yeah, based on a different college, Yale, Brown are most schools like that. And then it would be different talents each week like least number of referrals or things like that, and you kind of just had to keep you're accountable for one another. And everybody wanted to win and have the field day at the end of the year. So, everyone held each other accountable for things like going into the office and stuff like that.

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The leaders shared the use of multiple tools to promote academic success including public recognition, competitions, one on one tutoring. But the pride the leaders and teachers displayed emerged from the concept that the students owned their own success Johnson shared, Well, they, I would say that we had them buy into their own academics and their own success. I think it just taught them to care about their own way they were invested in themselves. And there were no gimmicks. I mean we have accountability and the fact that they were able to do it. They because the last quarter when we took the NWEA last, I had a wall that said get on my level. And it was for everybody performing at 12th grade and above all in NWEA and that was a goal for everyone. They were striving to get on that board.

Strong Rigorous/Curriculum

Part of the experience of Male Prep Academy was academic preparation for high school and college. The participants explained how the structures and systems promoted and supported academic rigor. As part of the experience of Male Prep Academy was academic preparation for high school and college. Students entered sixth grade at various academic levels and the network motto was to “meet students where they are and get them to where they need to be.” To “accelerate: student learning, the model required students enroll in “double doses” of Mathematics and English. Several participants discussed the concept of “stealing time” where students still needed extra support to meet academic expectations instead of extracurriculars like music or band students were assigned to an “acceleration class” to focus on increasing those skills. In another example of “stealing time”, Male Prep Academy operated as an extended day and extended school year with school hours from 8:30 am to 5:30 pm. Students were required to maintain a “C” or better in every class in real-time. If the students maintained a “C” or better in

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every course, they earned “early release” and were allowed to leave at 3:30. During the 3:30-5:30 time frame, students practiced acceleration skills. In the accelerated model design students worked one grade level ahead.

The students and staff argued the model not only promoted academic rigor but academic integration into high school and college. Martin discussed how the model promoted academic success.

Yeah, I think so much of so there's, there's the academic piece, we had teachers that took it really seriously to teach that year ahead, right to expose them to things that other students would be saying a year in the future. But I also think they made it really applicable.

As schools attempt to close the ever-present achievement gap, Male Prep Academy offered a proven model for increasing academic outcomes for a historically marginalized population. Understanding the knowledge gap between college readiness and typical school expectations., the school challenged the students based on higher expectations. Adam detailed,

A lot of the things you see them doing with the stretches in the standards now I feel like we were already doing years ago, and not calling it but just calling it good mathematics, you know, just making sure that kids will be able to use it practically. So, I think that's one thing.

The students shared the teacher/leader assertions that the double dose of mathematics and language arts and the high academic and behavior expectations prepared them for college. The students developed study skills including the ability to share information with others. The students developed teamwork or the brother's keeper attitude. This attitude championed when I do better, we do better. Students were encouraged to study with and tutor other students. The

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students took pride in academic growth not only for themselves but the “House”. Student Frazier discussed the importance of rigor,

I do think that Prep prepared me for that just based on the classes they had. We're taking high school courses in eighth grade just because of the accelerated program. So, our mathematics, English science, we're all grade levels above our own. Um, and because we all had to take the same classes, we all could support each other when going through these challenging subjects. So, when I got accelerated, I was used to taking work that I was used to completing work that was a little bit more challenging. But it did take a while to get used to. But I was able to prove that I was able to do the work well enough in sixth grade that I was promoted during my winter break. And I was able to go to seventh grade during that transition. So, I was able to kind of experience prep in a short amount of time, but I was very much exposed to the rigorous content.

Student Campbell agreed,

I think that one of the biggest things that Prep helped me prepare for was the rigorousness of other courses because since it was an accelerated school, which means that we were taking classes that were several grades, levels above our own. So, in seventh grade, I was taking pre-algebra and I would move on to algebra in eighth grade. And so, I was learning all of these skills in middle school that lined up with the schools that the skills that we're supposed to learn in high school. So that transition from prep to accelerated was really smooth.

The student shared the opinions of other students that one critical component of the Male Prep Academy experience was teaching students organization skills and time management skills that lasted into college. Student Lloyd described how Male Prep Academy helped with college,

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Um, but I also think that one of the really big things that took away from the prep was organization, and my organization has not gotten really good until I got to college. But I will say that having to do all of the harder work and being in extracurriculars and things like that in middle school, really helped you figure out which one is due in high school in terms of time management. So, I think that those are the two big things that I got from Prep.

The teachers and leaders agreed that in addition to academic skills the students needed social skills to effectively navigate the high school and college experiences. Johnson discussed the multiple skills the students developed,

Another thing I think so much of school is soft skills, being a successful student is almost like a manual, right? So high school and further, we wanted to make sure they had good character we worked on character at all times, we worked on teamwork at all times, we worked on the soft skills that I think are important, such as using your planner seriously studying theory, like what does it mean to create a study tool for yourself for this assessment.

Allen shared that a major component of the advancement of academic rigor was “tricking” a demographic who heard mostly that they can’t believe that they could. Although students were awarded of the negative data the only thing, they heard in school was all the things they were capable of accomplishing with hard work. He summarized this concept, “But a lot of what we taught them as a school is kind of like a game. If you have a strategy, you can win.” The staff felt they encouraged the students to learn by redefining scholarship outcomes for Black males with high expectations and multiple supports. Johnson discussed confidence building and aligning skills with state testing,

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We always said that there was no question about their IQ and their intelligence. But it's really about having the skills to get through these, these assessments that the school system sets up for you. And once you master that you'll be successful. We just tried to teach them how to be a good student as much as we tried to teach them the content.

In their quest to prepare students for high school, the school leader shared that the exposure to curriculum promoted high school success. As O'Brian shared,

I think specifically the exposure to the curriculum. So, the rigor if we're talking about preparation for high school, I, we didn't sugarcoat anything, they would fall before we baby them through. I think we did talk about the soft skills. I think that's where people really struggle in high school. And we made sure that they had experience with the same format. Like I see middle schoolers nowadays don't have homework, like, we made sure that they had already experienced what they were going to face in high school. I think we did a good job, I mean, through a network of exposing them to high school like they had already been in, in the high school before, literally, they had stepped foot in a high school before because of the network.

The teachers felt the rigors of preparing their students for high school and postsecondary education. Students were prepared for high school by 6th grade academics and exposed to the high school curriculum beginning in 8th grade. "They'd already seen assessments like high school, they'd already seen the ECA. As Lewis shared,

I mean, they thrived at Male Prep Academy, and I was one of the toughest high schools in the city. We've got Male Prep Academy graduates who've gone off to like plenty of them have gone off to college. Plenty of them went off to good colleges. We think he's a senior now. No, he's a junior, who's starting for Purdue. He's on the basketball team. But

he also has zero problems with academics and a starting lineman for Alabama who has zero problems with academics.

Students on Rigor

The students shared how the rigor and structure of Male Prep Academy prepared them for the academic rigors of college. As one participant summarized, “Not even joking. It was like really rigorous.” The students discussed the rigor of both mathematics and English,

I just think the writing that we did was really, really rigorous in our humanities classes.

And I think, not mathematics, not so much because I'm not someone who really struggled with mathematics, but I know it was a high level of mathematics.”

According to the students, the accelerated model provided the opportunities for high school and college prep. Lloyd discussed how the middle school prep supported high school success.

Then, especially because we were taking it by the end of 8th grade, you were taking high school courses. So, I felt like once we got to high school, it really wasn't that difficult because I was already used to taking those types of courses.

Discussing the quality of the middle school preparation Lloyd continued sharing how the academic rigor prepared them for high school,

Um, in some ways, I feel like eighth grade year of middle school was a lot harder than freshman year of high school, just because like, all the things that they put us through and helped us prepare for high school, it made it a lot easier when I transitioned to high school.

Otherfathering

The concept of otherfathering refers to a dynamic relationship between students' lives, school personnel, and school culture (Brockenbrough, 2015; Brown, 2009; Lynn, 2006a).

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Otherfathering depicts the interaction between male school personnel and their students. The relationship defines the critical roles otherfathering plays in the holistic development of students' social, emotional, educational, and identity needs (Brockenbrough, 2015). Although not named as such, the students and staff of Male Prep Academy credited this concept with student success and staff growth. In a summary of the otherfathering/othermothering, one leader stated, "anything a kid needed, we made sure something happened to provide support." As an urban school with urban problems outside of school from deaths to drivers most staff provided students who society "othered" a path to academic success.

One of ways the school supported the needs of African American students was embracing their male tendencies instead of vilifying them. As an African American male who struggled to "sit still and be quiet" in school the leader and staff shared how they promote these "inabilities." "What they weren't able to do was enter a world in which people didn't honor the differences in boys, because they had been in a space where their masculinity had been honored, in whatever form that masculinity took shape, right. To honor masculinity in a semi-controlled environment by "whatever form that took shape, it was honored that you know, you played too much. You tell too many jokes in class. That's great." Instead of blocking these talents, Johnson shared how Prep encouraged the talent,

So, when lunch comes, we are going to see how funny you are. Because we're going to put you in the middle of the cafeteria, you're going to do a 15-minute set. And we're going to see how funny you are. Some of them were actually pretty fun. Some of them weren't right.

In other examples of embracing their perceived talents instead of punishments Johnson shared,

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You know, we had rap battles in the middle of lunch, like we see who quote unquote, this guy gets this guy, we have this guy, guess this guy. Remember, kids used to love drumming on the desk. So, what we did is during our end of the week, we had a community meeting, we would put a microphone on a desk, inside the gymnasium and have a kid drum with the pin so the kids can hear it. And he would play the drums on the desk to usher the kids into the room.

Johnson summarized “So we would use whatever they like to do to add to our culture.” Another leader agreed, sharing how they let young Black males be young Black males. Male Prep was known for strict rules like walking in straight lines quietly down the hall with sharp turns at corners created the opportunity for boys to be boys as O’Brian shared,

Yeah. Um, kids did silly stuff like they would not walk in the hallway all the time like they were they would sometimes run a corner. The boys like to jump and hit the top. The doorways, like those are the things that kind of like, brought the energy, though we didn't correct all of that, because we were just happy that they were jumping for joy in the school.

This sense of understanding of the needs to develop student self-worth motivated students to create their own bonding activities like House handshakes and “swag” moves. O’Brian offered other ways they encourage boys’ natural inclinations,

Yeah. And so there, there were just, there were just a lot of things you see, you see little handshakes and but there were school specific things that we would not try to cut out. But instead, like, try to embrace boys’ natural inclinations and that is just different, I would think there's just a lot of things of energy that boys come with, and we did not try to get rid of that energy at all.

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In support of the culture and the vast variety of student needs, the participants referred to the “unorthodox” way of schooling. The school leader shared how a student’s desire to be honored for achieving student of the week created what became a cultural icon at Male Prep Academy. Student of the week was a “big deal” for students. Johnson shared how a student created one of the schools most popular rewards,

A particular student was student of the week, and he had this chain. And I don't know why he brought it to school, but he had it around his neck. And he said, Mr. Jones, I'm wearing this chain. I said, No, you're not, it's not a part of your uniform. And he said, I should be able to wear the chain because I'm student of the week. And I'm on the wall here so I can wear my chain. And I was like, you know what? You can wear your chain. And so, I went to party city that weekend and bought gold chains for every grade level. And whoever wants to know that we got to wear gold chains from that point on. And they got their picture taken and put in the hallway.

Like an understanding father, school leadership rewarded good deeds with input into actions or as the leaders summarize “So that a lot of this came from some of it came from us. But a lot of it we would incorporate into what kids needed in one out of their school experience.”

This meant answering late night phone calls from parents, students, and even other staff members for support. This meant letting students stay at school as late as possible to protect them from the realities of home-life. It also meant exposure to mentors. The students developed one on one relationships with judges, officers, lawyers, engineers, architects, and other Black male role models.

The teachers and leaders went beyond the normal including picking students up or going to get students to address absenteeism or tardiness issues. This meant supporting student needs

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by attending athletic or academic events when parents couldn't make it. In addition, this meant providing resources or access to resources to families in a quest to level the playing field or remove obstacles to academic success. In summary, the above and beyond meant creating a culture of caring.

Over the course of the interviews the students, teachers and parents argued the importance of otherfathering in student success in middle school. The participants outline how these foundations influenced the high school and college experience. From the teacher and administrative staff demographics to the introduction of culture related materials and activities, all participants identified the importance of having a school-based mother/father to help guide the African American male experience. These experiences started with enrolment and were reinforced daily.

Acting as a role model of Black male success placed the administrators and teachers and other parents as role models. Sharing gender, race or both place real life role models in front of students who need the benefits of role models the most. As WESLEY shared,

And so, when you had a minority male teacher teaching in a predominantly minority male classroom, they were able to have a connection with that person, because of the two commonalities that they had: gender, and race, and it caused them to feel a part of whatever the teacher was using. So, if they use life experiences to help with their illustration, then that would be a topic that would then come home, my teacher spoke of blah, blah, blah, when they were younger, that would be so things that were relatable so if, if the educator was relatable to whatever was going on, then then it was impactful.

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Serving an urban population of African American males created multiple spaces for otherfathering. Understanding the importance of appearance to adolescents and the strict rule of hair only ¼ inch long combined with single motherhood. O'Brian shared real life otherfathering, I think one of my favorite memories of being a prep was Mr. Jones cutting hair in his office. That will always be one of my favorite memories. It was just special to me, and he actually has pretty good barber skills. So that was special too. But I had never for a while we had a barber that was coming and cutting hair in one of our restrooms would block off the restroom and he was doing haircuts on them. But Mr. Jones would literally bring his clippers in his office and cut people's hair. For children who wanted their haircut. It was like my mom couldn't take me or whatever the reason that they were dying for a haircut. It was like this secret thing that you would go to the office and come back with a crispy haircut. That was really special, and we did so.

The participants shared how as a result of providing foundational support and culture of caring was so critical for the students and families that, “our students didn't want to go home. And so that's the kind of culture you want.”

In most spaces, staying after school is considered a punishment. The extended day model of Male Prep Academy was designed to support students needing academic remediation. However, the school “family” became such an important part of their lives that students “didn't want to go home or miss school.” Adam shared

...where the kids are in trouble because they don't want to go home, or they go home, and they ride their bikes back to the parking lot. And, you know, or sneak back into the building. So that's a good thing for me.

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As a charter school without transportation, Male Prep Academy students walked or took public transportation from around the city. With no busses, the school provided public transportation bus passes. But more importantly to the identified family like culture, teachers, administrators, and other parents provided “transportation”, O’Brian shared, “I feel like I picked up kids all the way down 38th Street, if it was raining in the slightest bit. All the way down 38th Street all the way from German Church to Keystone, I’ll pick them up.” The uniform was more than just a way to “look nice” it also acted as a way to hide poverty. Teachers and staff provided clean uniforms to students and washed dirty uniforms. The uniforms also provided a way for staff to see those “needed a ride.” O’Brian continued,

And I’d literally been looking for them, right, like every step it was, so it was so easy to see the uniform. And even if they weren’t mine, they probably knew your name, you just rolled down the window. This is a student, right? And they would just hop in this truck.

The students and parents felt that having a school leader who looked like them and male specifically Black male teachers, provided a team of otherfathers who helped build the discussed “scholar identity.”

With the understanding the African American males needed role models plus, each student or group were provided with a “mentor.” These mentors were successful African American males who met with the students at least once a month. Some of these meetings were during the school day while others were after school. The participants felt these mentors provided positive male relationships for the scholars. The program was administered by a prominent retired executive with a rolodex of men wanting to support African American youth. The mentor coordinator used his executive experience and prior relationships to promote a prominent role in student success.

As Johnson shared,

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Having Mr. Crow there was I mean, I think these are the things you have in your family, right? You have like this older grandfather, like gentleman that's sneaking like vending machine chips to you all the time and encouraging you to do this in his office, and you don't really know what he does there, but he always has a treat for you. Those types of things were really special.

The cultural capital, exposure, and access to successful African American males was valued by students and staff. Examining the benefits of attending an all-male middle school, Martin shared,

I would definitely say mentoring. I knew what it was called. But the main training program they had at Male Prep Academy. We all had our specific mentors who taught me and like every couple of weeks, and just checked on us. I would say I was kind of lucky. I don't think about my friends who went to other middle schools. They didn't have anything like that.

The mentor coordinator also used his influence to expose the students to other cultural activities including the Steward Speaker Series.

The Mission of Steward Speakers is to inform, inspire, and invoke action by fostering meaningful dialogue and cultural exchanges. We do that with exceptional lectures and events designed to engage youth, families, adult learners and others who rarely have access to nationally and internationally renowned African American leaders.

This exposure was identified by the participants as a key component of mentoring the African American males. The males dressed in crisp uniforms attended these events as a group oftentimes with their mentors. One leader shared, “we partnered with the Steward Speaker

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Series. And so, the kids got opportunities to go see these phenomenal speakers.” The partnership also often allowed students one on one time with both mentors and speakers.

The leaders shared stories of different ways they acted as other parents, “I think about trips we tried to give them that were out of their realm of like what they normally would do.” In what a leader described as “my favorite part of my job”, these exposures ranged from movies to snow tubing. O’Brian continued,

When the movie Creed came out, and so I'm not like a Rocky boxing fan at all, actually, I disliked boxing. Somehow, I've been seeing the previews to this Creed movie, and I was like, this is going to be powerful for our boys, you know, and in the previews, they always have like the best quotes of the movie. And I just like this is just going to go hand in hand with what we try to teach them about perseverance.

The participants shared life experiences that were used to promote academic and social success.

In another shared example, they took the students snow tubing. O’BRIAN continued,

So, snow tubing was something that was really, really cool for them. They didn't have all the stuff, of course, I mean, like rarely do people have all this stuff, the gloves and the snow pants and we made sure they had all these layers, and they really, really enjoyed themselves. They really enjoyed snow tubing.

In summary of the importance of these bonding/ exposure activities leader asserted “snowtubing, go karting, whatever the trip was, it was cool that you had like this fraternity feel.” Although Male Prep Academy was known for its high behavioral and academic expectations, the staff felt the balance and what instilled the caring necessary was bonding in other ways. Allen agreed,

Students want to achieve when you have so much male staff doing silly things with these kids, right? Like there's no tubing so they're going to head down, you know, they're going

headfirst down these hills. They're go karting with these kids, and they're competing in these little vehicles. So, you know, their bumper cars like stuff that it just always felt like such good positive energy when they were together, and it just reminded me very much of a team mindset, like what my kids go and do with their teammates. That was always happening within the school.

Strong Leadership

The consensus of why Male Prep Academy worked was the leadership of the CEO, School Principal, and administrative staff. The overall consensus credited the leadership of the school leader with making Male Prep Academy work. One leader summarized in self-evaluation, But I'm a fairly organized guy. And I like working. So, like, I can hang in the Male Prep Academy system, but I couldn't run Male prep, because I couldn't connect with the boys from my like background, my biography. The leader of Prep was able to shine because he connected with like, the boys thought he was like the cool uncle. Male Prep Academy was known and criticized for its tough disciplinary practices and high suspension rates but the charisma and relationships with the students. Even when he had to suspend somebody, they still liked him a lot, because he could recite lyrics from memory from songs that they had listened to that morning on the way to school. And like I was before you before we called, I was listening to John Legend, right? I just can't make that connection.

The participants credited the school leader's straight-outta-Compton background and leadership style with swag as a major contributor to student buy-in and preventing mass exodus with the behavioral and academic expectations. Allen shared,

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He is coming out of Compton and can talk about experiences that they share. So, I think that Male Prep Academy was able to prevent that problem, that checkout problem and so many boys because the guy running the school just, he was cool to them. He was someone who they could see themselves as.

The leader, a White male from the south, shared

I didn't realize how important that idea of representation was. Not that I - not that I was against it. I just didn't realize how important it was until I worked at Male Prep Academy and realized, oh, well, these are kids who are growing up and the school leader who is very successful looks like them. The President looks like them. The guy who runs the district, or the network looks like them. The woman who runs the girl school and the high school looks like their mom. And so, like them, they just have a connection that I couldn't give them. But I can you know, I can follow what Patrick was doing and like, supplement, you might say, but I think they we were able to prevent a lot of boys from checking out because yeah, they thought their school leader was cool that there were some teachers who they just the kids thought they were cool guys.

The students agreed with the benefits of the school leaders' leadership style. By tailoring the school and adjusting to the needs the leaders was credited with created a space for “Black male excellence, as a student Allen summarized,

I feel like the atmosphere that Mr. Jones created there with all males, I think it allowed a lot of us to exhale in ways that if it wasn't all male, we wouldn't, we would not have had the opportunity to.

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Several parents agreed with the parent who shared how this leadership style and model components were the reasons she enrolled her son. Goins discussed how the leaders drove a culture of success,

...think it was a whole lot of intentionality around what works for boys, Black boys, particularly, I think there was just a lot of thought around things like, you know, what motivates boys? What would interest boys, you know, what, what things keep boys engaged in the classroom. So, I think that was really different that his teachers and his administrators did a lot of, I think professional development research and study around anything out there that would suggest higher outcomes for boys of color.

This unorthodox leadership style worked effectively for a population that was historically underserved. REESE shared,

Okay, from the top leadership demanded us to love on kids from the hardest from very top down by any means necessary. We were conditioned to treat these kids no differently than you would yours. The participants shared that oftentimes this meant out of the box thinking and changing according to student needs. This need I think that there was an energy so we allowed all the crazy I think people would come into the school and say, oh, this looks crazy. We kind of embraced that crazy.

According to Allen “As a leader in a small school, your job description included whatever the school or the students need.” All participants acknowledged the role of flexibility in leadership with advancing student outcomes. Former teachers who were now administrators shared their feelings around these efforts. Allen shared,

But I also got to teach. I stepped in as was that title one reading teacher. And so, I got to work with the students who'd struggled with reading, and I got to teach very small

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classes. And yeah, there was a lot of fun. The boys had a lot of fun. I enjoyed being able to teach the ones who struggled not because they were just not doing their work, but because they just kind of didn't get it. And they were on the cusp of getting it. And like, I got to be like the teacher guy who helped them understand it. And I got to use my teacher moves on them and get them to smile instead of just being like another administrator who you know, sees him for discipline.

In addition to the school leaders the consensus was that other leaders played an important role in school and student success. As Allen shared, "I think this is one that I was able to provide, since we had a small school like I knew all of them. He continued,

I knew all of their names, and I knew the ones who struggled like there's something going on at home, and it's causing and it's manifesting in the classroom, like, I knew what was going on at home. So, I could remove the student, or the teacher remove the student from the classroom, like I could sit with the young man, talk with young man, listen to him, and give him a place to like, get some emotions out before he heads back into the classroom or at the whole school level, I was able to look at whole school data to see trends that were a problem we had to fix.

To proactively support students' needs, Johnson shared,

Like I had an F list that I compiled every week to figure out like, how many F's do we have in this grade level in this class in this subject, And I was able to send that out to teachers and say like, hey, we can't curve grades, or we can't like, we can't pad grades. But we do need to give some support to this class because like 40% of them have F's. And why is it because they're failing tests and they need to be retrained? Or did they just boycott homework? And we have to fix that problem, bird's eye view?

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One of the key aspects of Prep's success was sweating the small stuff, Johnson explained,

The Prep had the kind of leadership that was intentional. So, folks, we're always looking at grades. I mean, you talk about sweating, the small stuff, if you don't do your homework today, you don't stay for detention tomorrow, you stay for homework, that tension today, and you do that homework today, because we believe this work is important. Today, and all of it is important. And so, what that means is you set the kind of culture around academics, you set the academic culture that says we achieve. And because that is such a part of the ethos of the school kids got to this place where Yes, they got to be prepared. Because if you're not prepared, you can't even go home at the end of the day.

The students described how the strong leadership exhibited by a man who looked like them and shared their interests contributed to their success in middle school by wanting to emulate the standards set by the leaders. This reverence extended into college as the students still maintained relationships with the leader and some teachers for advice and praise for academic success. The students also described how his leadership style promoted these relationships. Creating a spirit of competition was repeatedly cited as a credit to Jones's leadership style. Students and adults shared the feelings of Martin,

Because there it was, a lot of it was competitive. Because we each had our own cohort and Mr. Jones liked to put the course in each other who had the highest test scores, who could score the most, during this question. And you have to learn how to not only be competitive, but also don't let that competitiveness drop your focus. So, I think it's the ability to focus on my task and multitask or something else that led me to believe that to be the success that I know I am.

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As shared by the student and agreed with by other participants, competition produced more than just tangible academic results. The students felt these competitions developed the character aligned with college success. Campbell shared,

I think that anybody fortunate enough to attend Prep even if closed for a semester or definitely had a very unique experience that you can't find anywhere else. The experience, the community, the camaraderie that you really get from going to such a small single-gender school is really unmatched. The relationships that still carry to this day, the lessons that I've learned, it's really just shaped who I am. Like I said, I didn't have the choice of going to Mickey Prep. But if I had to go back, I probably would do it again.

Parents specifically argue that these dual roles advanced students who struggle in public schools and found success at Male Prep Academy. The participants argued that not only did Mr. Jones master leadership of a single-gender middle school, but he also provided opportunities for student leadership. As Frazier shared,

I do think one thing that was a good experience was the leadership program that Mr. Jones started that kind of put different students in his great leadership positions. I did it when I was in eighth grade. And we were like, sometimes we would tutor younger students after class, a little bit of homework. We have, like, wrote a children's book for when they had the elementary Renaissance open. And the different things that we would do with that really helped me evolve as a leader.

African American males were presented opportunities to be school leaders and role models to other students within Prep and in the elementary schools. The chorus of the student participants was Prep gave them the feeling that they could do anything and be successful.

Participation in School Activities

Adult participants credited participation in after school activities as being an anchor to academic and social outcomes for the urban African American males at Male Prep Academy. In alignment the students felt these activities from vegan culinary to championship basketball created a sense of belonging and motivation to achieve academically. The strict academic expectations and code of conduct demanded students achieve outcomes to participate in after school activities. If students failed to average close to a B- with no grade lower than C in any class at any moment, they were not allowed to participate.

The students discussed how the environment created a space where “nerdy” activities like Chess Club and Poetry/Rap were accepted. One student shared with all his experience in inner city schools, “the only school I know, I went to that had a Chess Club.” In alignment, another student shared how the chess club provided more than an opportunity for fun. Campbell described the importance of activities,

And I was also part of the chess club, which may not sound as glamorous as the other extra-curricular activities I was in. But I really appreciated the chess club. It happened every Friday after school. And it was a place where if you were going to be after school for a little bit longer than everybody else, you could go to a chess club and socialize and learn how to play the game. And for a group of African American young men, and the environment that we're in, it was a really good opportunity. Just to learn a little to be a little bit more cultured.

Several students also mentioned the influence of Tiger Café.

It was a thing called Tiger Cafe. We had a teacher there who was a vegetarian, and in the tiger cafe, he taught you how to cook vegetarian meals, as like great substitutes for - I

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can't think of the word could never eat - I guess you could say a great substitute. And I've never had any other school have that type of program.

School activities shared by the participants were vast and wide-ranging from archery and skating to woodworking and carnivals. All participants shared a reverence for class trips which intertwined academics with socialization and college exposure. FRAZIER outlined the multiple benefits of the class trips,

The first one that comes to mind are the class trips that we took at the end of the school year, every grade had their own class trip. And it was supposed to be a time where everybody could socialize, but still have an educational component to it. So, we would go in, we would go to sporting events, but we also tour colleges and go see businesses. So, we could see both sides of okay, we're having fun on this trip. But we still also have to be about our business. And there's a reason why we're here. And those trips are a highlight of I feel like every Mickey student's career, school career, it was a great time you had made a lot of friends and had a lot of memories. So that was definitely one of the better experiences.

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Relationships with Teachers and Admin

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The participants shared how relationships made the school work. These relationships included relationships between staffs and relationships with students. O'Brian shared,

Watching, working under Mr. Jones, because Mr. Jones was really like, unorthodox to me. He moved according to the students' needs and one thing I learned while working under him, he made real time changes. He didn't wait to the end of the year of the new school year, once he found out that the students needed this, then he gave them that, you know, and we, I remember, just in particular, they're so funny, I think about prep.

In discussing the importance of student teacher/student administrator relationships, one participant shared the pride the team took in “future male preparation” In one example the participants shared the excitement around “bow tie” Tuesdays as a way to bond with students and teachers. As Allen shared,

And so, you would see these gentlemen coming in. And you see the staff giving young men their ties and tying the ties for them and teaching them how to tie the ties. There's just something about the energy when people are like going out of their way to make sure kids have experiences and that you like you see like, big Mr. Jones and many Mr. Jones, right. Big Mr. Albonetti is a little Mr. Albonetti, as you see this modeling in the building, where there are role models, the kids want to be just like, and they get excited about knowing that there's a value in a bow tie.

Listening to the parents, students, and Male Prep Academy stakeholders, one can envision the pride and productivity of this what the participants described as a magical place. Student data showed massive increases and the stories of students failing in public schools and earning great grades at Prep acted as a window into how to improve academic and social outcomes for African

American males. One participant summarized the uniqueness of the “experience, the community, the camaraderie...is really unmatched.” The student continued,

The relationships that still carry to this day, the lessons that I've learned, it's really just shaped who I am. I didn't have the choice of going to Male Prep Academy. But if I had to go back, I probably would do it again.

Summary

Chapter Four provided an overview of the seven themes identified from the current study. The students shared how they developed scholar identity by receiving the tools to promote and the affirmations to engage in academic success. Secondly, the chapter discussed Celebrating Academic Achievement with the participants sharing what the school offered a space where students are celebrated and rewarded for academic achievements. The students also shared the importance of enrichment experiences and exposure to colleges and careers beyond the locus of their neighborhood or community. Fourthly the chapter discussed Otherfathering explaining how adults in a pseudo parental-supported and fostered academic and growth beyond the classroom. In addition, the participants shared how the Rigorous Curriculum/Strong Curriculum of the Accelerated Schools model prepared them for success in high school and post-secondary education. The students shared the benefits of participating in school-based activities in their growth and development. Another recurring theme discussed in the chapter strong leadership promoted high expectations and real-life role models. Finally, the chapter outlined how the participants valued relationships with Teachers and Admin in a family like atmosphere as a component of student and school success.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the experience of African American males who attended a single-gender middle school. Specifically, the dissertation explored how these experiences impacted their high school and college experience. Chapter one outlined the parameters for why a single-gender middle school is needed, provided background information, and introduced the research questions. Chapter two provided an overview of the extant literature around the schooling experiences of African American males. Initially the chapter discussed the achievement/opportunity gap focused on the historical and current barriers to success for African American males in schools. Secondly, the chapter provided an overview of the educational status of African American males in Indiana with the underlying data. Thirdly, the chapter provided an overview of solutions to support the improvement of academic outcomes for African American males in schools including: the role of teachers, the need for Black male teachers as otherfathers. Finally, the chapter examined single-gender middle schools. Finally, the chapter examined the Pedagogy of Confidence theoretical frame. Chapter three outlined the study methodology; interviews, coding, narrative transformation and comparing with extant literature. Chapter four discussed the study findings and highlighted the themes. Chapter five provides a discussion of the themes compared to extant literature and the Pedagogy of Confidence, implications, and recommendations. Finally, this chapter concludes the study.

The Pedagogy of Confidence was used as a theoretical framework to guide this study. Jackson (2011) argued that instead of using deficit model thinking which operates from the framework of focusing on school dependent students' weaknesses, educators should use pedagogies that stimulate the inner giftedness of all students. Jackson asserted:

The Pedagogy of Confidence is based on the fearless expectation that all students are capable of high intellectual performances when provided High Operational Practices that motivate self-directed learning and self-actualization. High Operational Practices are actually labels for the categories of supports fundamental for eliciting high levels of engagement and intellectual processing. The practices can serve to guide teachers in choosing effective pedagogical strategies to optimize learning. (p.26)

The art of applying the Pedagogy of Confidence is identifying strengths of underachievers and noticing the correlation with the strengths of gifted and talented student's and using this correlation to activate strengths. The fearless expectation and support for all students to demonstrate high intellectual performance, realizing their potential and becoming affirmed, productive contributors to society. Instilling Pedagogy of Confidence inspires self-directed learning and self-actualization. Jackson (2011) ascribes that instead of focusing on deficits urban educators should adopt the fearless expectation and support for all children to demonstrate high intellectual performance (HIP). This system includes (a) identifying and activating strengths; (b) building relationships; (c) nurturing high intellectual performances; (d) providing enrichment experiences; (e) incorporating prerequisites for learning; (f) situating learning in the lives of students; and (g) amplifying student voice (p. 71).

Jackson (2011) suggested that educators of "gifted students" facilitate the ability of students of students to explore their own potential to produce the high intellectual performances that can motivate self-directed learning, self-actualization and self-transcendence. The author argued for promoting the ideas of gifted education to all students. She suggests schools operate from a framework that considers all students gifted and deserving the opportunity to explore and expand

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these gifts. It is here assertion that this can be accomplish by instilling HIP. To implement these practices teachers must believe in the three science-based beliefs of High Operational Practices:

- Intelligence is modifiable.
- All students benefit from a focus on high intellectual performance.
- Learning is influenced by the interaction of culture, language, and cognition (Jackson, 2011, p. 89).

According to Bambrick-Santoyo (2012), the key levers of high-performing charter schools are data-driven instruction, observation/feedback cycles, and a strong school culture to build effective learning environments. The author asserts that these leveled supports provide parameters to change the academic outcomes in historically changing underserved communities. Previous research aligns with the findings in the current study that school culture represents a critical component in charter school effectiveness (Konald et al., 2018). Elements of positive school culture include a common mission, collaborative leadership, teacher collaboration, and professional development (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015; Ohlson et al., 2015). The model for Male Prep Academy ascribed to the high expectations outlined in effective school models: frequent teacher feedback, data-driven instruction, high-dosage tutoring, and increased instructional time (Center for Education Resources, 2020; CREDO, 2013). The following research questions were used to guide the study:

1. In what ways did students at Male Prep belong to a school community that normalizes high expectations?
2. What routines, policies, and practices occurred at Male Prep that supported academic achievement?
3. What factors (if any) emerge as central to college preparation?

Incorporating Prerequisites for Learning

Research Question #1: In what ways did students at Male Prep belong to a school community that normalizes high expectations?

The participants expressed how the school used the Pedagogy of Confidence framework by incorporating prerequisites for learning by creating an environment where academic success was valued and affirmed for all.

Jackson (2011) argued that to instill HIP requires incorporating prerequisites for learning. It is hard to learn what you have not been taught. Anti-deficit thinking means acknowledging the school's role in substandard student academic outcomes. Recognizing student challenges from prior school experiences in alignment with the research, Prep students received double dosages of the critical mathematics and humanities in their "acceleration" efforts. As effective schooling literature suggests, Prep used constant student data as feedback to inform lesson plans. As the Martin shared, "if the class failed to understand the material, teachers taught the lesson differently and/or scheduled one on one time with the student." The extended day models allowed for the increased instructional time. The students and teachers acknowledged the benefits of the smaller class sizes to ask questions or develop relationships. The students also discussed how the after school one-on-one time further supported their needs.

Nurturing High Intellectual Performances /Scholar Identity

Another way the school normalizes high expectations was by creating a scholar identity that nurtured high intellectual performances. Noguera (2008) argued the need to listen to students to inform their needs in the schooling experience. The Prep students shared how the single-gender middle school allowed them to focus on academics without distractions. In addition, the model allowed for male-to-male relationships to ask personal questions. Fergus et al. (2014)

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promoted protective factors including personal affirmation as keys to creating effective schools for African American males. As detailed by parents, students, and staff, Male Prep Academy students received multiple levels of affirmation including public recognition of displays of excellence with test scores and other academic achievements. In another tenet of HIP, nurturing high intellectual performances, scholars of the week receive an opportunity to wear the coveted gold chain with a picture displayed on the wall. Researchers assert characteristics such as self-esteem and identity play a critical role in student achievement (Fergus et al., 2014; Sax, 2017). The students received accolades in the morning meetings by House, grade level, and individuals. All the accolades the participants shared created what is described as scholar identity.

Like Jackson (2011) promotes, multiple scholars agree that the schools must have high expectations and a mission of academic achievement leading to college and career readiness and should be explicit about Black and Latino male achievement (Fergus et al., 2014). To share expectations and promote success, the academic mission and value statements were placed prominently around the building. Staff members in these schools are clear about this shared mission and have ways to monitor and hold themselves accountable to outcomes. The House competitions create an environment where not only students compete but increased staff competition. The participants discussed how the spirit of competition created an environment where no one wanted to be last. The leaders shared how teachers wanted to be able to share positive student data in the morning meetings. Teachers wanted student of the week or high achiever pictures outside of their classroom doors.

Research Question #2: What routines, policies, and practices occurred at Male Prep that supported academic achievement?

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Male prep established the school as a place for academic male success by recognizing differences as strengths and incorporating those difference both cultural and gender based into the school model.

Situating learning in the lives of students

According to leadership, the concept of Male Prep Academy evolved from noticing students were more attentive and asked questions when boys and girls were separated for hygiene discussions. The leadership realized that if students were separated from the distractions of the opposite sex, they could focus on academics. The school leaders decided to separate the students at the crucial middle grades as internal data aligned with the scholarship that argues college preparation begins in earlier grades.

As part of developing HIP, Jackson (2011) argued a need for situating learning in the lives of students. Warren (2016) asserted academic preparation begins long before young people go to college. The research argued that schools must provide social instruction and social support to improve academic effectiveness and improve student outcomes. Warren argued that schools designed for urban youth must account for how students live outside of school. Understanding these issues, the extended day model provided a space for students to come early and stay late limiting the students agreed that separation from girls allowed a focus on academics and character development.

Building Relationships/ Otherfathering

Jackson (2011) argued the importance of developing and building relationship in exposing the giftedness of urban students. One of themes in the current study, relationships with teachers and administrators, was championed by all participants. The most prominent indicator for success of Prep students identified by parents, teachers, students, and administrators was the

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prevalence of otherfathers. The concept of otherfathering refers to a dynamic relationship between students' lives, school personnel, and school culture (Brockenbrough, 2015).

Otherfathering refers specifically to the interaction of male school personnel with students and their critical roles in the holistic development of students' social, emotional, educational, and identity needs. Although not named as such, the students and staff of Male Prep Academy credited this concept with student success and staff growth. In a summary of the otherfathering/othermothering, one leader stated, "anything a kid needed, we made sure something happened to provide support." The students and staff shared the importance of having teachers and administrators who looked like them and could relate to their struggles. This aligned with the values the research shows that African American less attached to teachers provide lessons on manhood and masculine identities (Brooms, 2014).

Brooms (2017) found that students identified other fathers in their schools based on "pedagogical practices, care and concern and support" (p. 1). By this definition, the students were exposed to numerous other fathers from the principal whose gifts included an extraordinary talent for teaching mathematics, a brilliant mind who could quote song lyrics from religion to rap and a Compton, California based understanding of urban life. In alignment with the Broom's research, the students and the school leader understood the underlying struggles of poverty and how sometimes being smart conflicted with urban masculinity. He was able to use these talents to gain buy in around being smart and being cool. The principal understood the stress of dirty clothes or shoes or a "raggedy" haircut and made accommodations to meet student needs beyond academics. The leader understood the importance of students seeing representation and convinced African American males to teach at Prep and solicited volunteers. One of the benefits

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of school uniforms was the reduction of classism as all students dressed alike from shirt to shoes in some cases hiding poverty.

The presence of Black males in the building offered the youth the opportunities to develop relationships and bonds that were missing from prior experiences (Brooms, 2017). Like an old school dad, the principal also demanded high academic and behavioral expectations and refused to let students use them as a crutch. Instead, the school leader provided activities to keep the students focused and block out some of those environmental noises.

Numerous studies argue the significance of mentor relationships (Bayer et al., 2013). However, the mentoring program at Prep went beyond what Collins (2000) discussed as othermothering or providing students with the technical skills or network of academic or professional contacts. The mentor program at Prep was better illustrated as otherfathering. For example, a grandfather with snacks who acted as an otherfathers with the ability to diffuse student stress using a fatherly tone from a place of respect. He pulled students in his office, decorated with honors and pictures of prominent National African American leaders providing the students a real-life success story. The mentors who wanted to make a difference were African American men who not only developed a relationship with the students but also developed relationships with mothers and grandmothers acting more as a surrogate. When Wesley moved into a principalship at another network school understanding the need for othermothering, she sought assurances that the role would be offered to a female.

Research Question #3: What factors (if any) emerge as central to college preparation?

Jackson (2011) argued that instilling the Pedagogy of Confidence required adding enrichment experiences. In agreement, the participants felt both the academic and social experiences expanded their opportunities for post-secondary and life success.

Participation in School Activities

Jackson (2011) argued that instilling HIP involved providing enrichment experiences. The participants shared the importance of school-based activities from the perspectives of teachers, administrators, and parents. The common activities most cited were the House Challenges, the school trips, and the mentor program. Warren (2016) analyses of factors prior to college which contribute to postsecondary success for African American males detailed the importance of a schooling environment that regularly broadcasted what Black males are doing well with structures to reward progress. The House challenges reiterated high expectations for Male Prep Academy students by creating academic, social, and organizational skills competition. All deemed critical to postsecondary success for African American males (Harper, 2014, 2016). These instructional and social supports align with the research identifying these tools as a critical component in their success.

Fergus et al (2014) argued the importance of relationships leading to academic gains. The Prep kids were exposed to successful African American males with each student or group of students assigned a mentor. These relationships went beyond the typical “outings” instead these living role models shared lived experiences and directions with the students. The students had access to leaders who could relate to their struggles. Positive teacher-student relationships have been identified as a critical component in the academic success of African American boys. The class trips provided opportunities for the students to develop these relationships with teachers and administrators outside of the school day. For two to four days the students were immersed in a different type of learning.

Rigorous Curriculum/Strong Curriculum

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Instilling the Pedagogy of Confidence with enrichment experiences included supporting the academic needs of the Black male students with a strong curriculum with academic rigor. Multiple authors argue the importance of academic rigor in developing a culture of achievement (Brooms, 2017). Male Prep Academy aligned with the network to enshrine academic rigor into the foundation of the school model. This rigor was supported by double doses of Mathematics and Language Arts to both remediate and accelerate these critical skills. Students were exposed to academic work at least one grade level ahead. Students earned credits for Algebra I in high school, a key factor for the path to college enrollment. Brooms (2017) maintained that academic rigor meant access to academic programming where teaching and learning happens. According to Warren (2016), rigor indicates the quality of instruction, curricular innovation and variety, and exposure to instructional content and experiences of the caliber students will encounter at the collegiate level. The Prep students were prepared for college by exposure to a rigorous curriculum supported by a system of high expectations. The skills used to master this curriculum created systems the students continue to use in high school and college. Students were prepared for high school by 6th grade academics and exposed to the high school curriculum beginning in 8th grade. Reese shared,

They'd already seen assessments like high school, they'd already seen the End of Course Assessment. We always said that there was no question about their IQ and their intelligence. But it's really about having the skills to get through these, these assessments that the school system sets up for you. And once you master that you'll be successful. We just tried to teach them how to be a good student as much as we tried to teach them the content.

Identifying and Activating Strengths/Strong Leadership

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Strong leadership involves the ability to identify and activate student strengths. Prep's faculty members and administrators understand that all scholars have distinct strengths and challenges and approach learning and teaching from a growth mindset. They are committed to provide each student with the knowledge and skills needed to succeed. The theme of leadership emerged on two fronts: how the school developed student leaders and how the leadership of the school principal made the schoolwork. Warren (2016) argues that helping Black male school achievement requires understanding the environmental impacts in their lives. The author further suggests that the lack of attention to out of school factors complicates the school-based experiences leading to success for African American males. Warren argues that this understanding does not mean limiting their potential but expanding these potentials by considering their life experiences within the academic model. This aligns with what Jackson (2011) maintained as the need to inspire HIP: situating learning in the lives of students.

Researchers and the participants agree that including student lives and incorporating culturally inclusive schooling enables even those who do not share the same cultural or economic background the tools to respond to diverse student needs (Allen & White-Smith, 2014). Leader Johnson shared that although he had the leadership skills, organizational skills, and commitment to helping students his background interfered with the relationship asserting, “So like, I can hang in the system, but I couldn't run Prep, because I couldn't connect with the boys from my like background, my biography.” This ability to situate learning in the lives of students with and understanding of student and parent perspectives was repeatedly detailed as important.

All participants agreed with the “empirical link between school leadership and improved student achievement” (Mitgang, 2012, p. 3). To support the academic achievement of high-poverty populations, the participants concurred with the literature and asserted that choosing

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leaders of high importance was wholly aligned with the model (Farrell et al., 2012). As Peterson and Deal (2002) argued, “culture is a powerful web of rituals and traditions, norms and values that affect every corner of school life” (p. 10). As the driver of this culture, school leaders represent a key lever in school success (Huget, 2017; Sahin, 2020). The leader of Prep was a Compton, California born computer scientist, rap lyricist. As Allen shared, “The leader of Prep was able to shine because he connected with like, the boys thought he was like the cool uncle.” Male Prep Academy was known and criticized for its tough disciplinary practices and high suspension rates and the leader's charisma and relationships with the students. The participants credited the school leader's “straight-outta-Compton” background and leadership style with swag as a major contributor to student buy in and preventing mass exodus with the behavioral and academic expectations.

Principal leadership has been described as “possibly the most important single determinant of an effective learning environment” (Kelley et al., 2005, p. 17). In alignment, Fuller et al. (2017) attributed a school's success or failure to who is leading the organization. Campbell (2010) argued that this is especially true in the case of charter schools. Unlike traditional public schools, charter school success is contingent on their “fidelity to their mission” (p. 2). Therefore, one of the initial decisions in deciding to replicate is deciding on a leader as part of the replication team. The leader must have the skillset, or a team dedicated to the mission of the organization (Goss, 2011).

The leader Johnson understood the idiosyncrasies of Black males who struggled with the regimen of traditional schools, instead of discipline for rapping, or tapping, he examined ways to incorporate the natural behaviors of Black males into the school day. In keeping with the rigor and behavior expectations the student understood these things needed to be limited in the

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classroom. However, the multi-purpose room, lunchtime and after school were open to rap battles and tap battles. The students felt like the atmosphere that Mr. Jones created there with all males, I think it allowed a lot of us to exhale in ways that if it wasn't all male, we wouldn't, we would not have had the opportunity to.

Smith (2012) argued that Black leaders do things differently; it goes beyond what's written in books. It goes beyond all the theories about leadership, and it goes to the core of who one is. This statement summarized Mr. Jones. His leadership of understanding extended into incorporating the needs of students into the academic model. Adam asserted,

Mr. Jones was really unorthodox to me. He moved according to the students' needs and one thing I learned while working under him, he made real time changes. He didn't wait until the end of the new school year, once he found out that the students needed this, then he gave them that.

The participants maintained that Mr. J understood that as Black male students expected to survive in America, the students needed character development and interactions with African American male professionals. After year one, he incorporated these strategies into the school model. He also understood not only the need for academic rigor to create a college going culture but exposure to college campuses. Students earned the right to attend class trips consisting of educational experiences in other cities with college campuses.

Researchers emphasize the importance of academic rigor, social relationships and supports, and high school-university partnerships for preparing urban youth for college (Harper, 2012, 2015a). The students, families and teachers shared how school-based activities like balloon fights with teachers and the class trips promoted social support. The class trips also involved academic rigor or meeting academic and behavior expectations to be part of the trip. The

students shared how these year-end trips acted as an incentive meet expectations. The trips also provide an opportunity to socialize with an educational component to it. These memories filled trips included sporting events, college tours and the opportunity to visit business. Student 1 described these bonding activities as “highlight of I feel like every Male Prep student's career, school career, it was a great time you had made a lot of friends and had a lot of memories.”

Implications

With data continues to show African American male academic data at the end of the scale for academic outcomes, stakeholders increasingly seek proven models to promote their success. Fergus et al. (2014) argued that the creation of single sex schools has been “embraced as a strategy since 2003 for ameliorating the risk and hardships associated with the academy performance of Black and Latino males (p. 7). School design seeks to mitigate the circumstances of race and poverty that academically and socially condemn African American males, the success of Male Prep Academy rising to rank number 55 out of 2000 schools in Indiana despite serving a traditionally marginalized population. Prep students routinely exceeded state scores even when entering school behind. These results and the personal stories of these now successful college students should act as a national model for success with these populations.

Toldson et al.'s (2011) study of 1225 African American males found that the greatest indicator of college aspirations was academic achievement. Prep through a rigorous curriculum, high expectations, student engagement and celebrating academic achievement created and environment that promoted academic achievement. These are replicable aspects of a schooling model that can be developed to mitigate the challenges of existing in the dual identities of Black maleness for students. In another study Uwah et al. (2008) credited the importance of targeted invitations to participated in school programming with establishing a sense of belonging leading

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to success for Black males. The chants of Prep or cheers to accomplishments by House demonstrated the commitment to academics and belonging to a space that bred academic success for Prep students. The students not only described learning as fun but expounded on the importance of competition to support the learning of others.

All of the themes outlined in the currently study along with Brooms (2017) examination of otherfathering in the educational experiences of Black males in a single sex school in alignment provided significant insights into the perspectives of African American males critical to improving their school experiences. Black males need and want Black male teachers. Although those who embrace cultural relevancy are important, Black males value teachers and school leaders who not only look like them but can relate to and provide guidance for their lived experiences. The students valued these otherfathers as critical to their academic and social developments. Black educators represent more than just a teacher or principal. Not only does the present promote a gender and race connection. Seeing Black teachers and school leaders provided credibility to White Teachers and leaders. Because the students saw the White teachers working with Black teachers, especially Black male teachers, to support their needs, the students accepted the teachers and leaders as caring about their success. Scholars attributed the interconnection with Black males critical to their development into successful Black men. The students also felt their support and guidance provided the resiliency necessary to achieve in a society that often devalued their worth. Instead of being embarrassed and hiding their brilliance students joyfully expressed knowledge and the competitions and other engaged allowed for uplifting others.

Attending a single-gendered middle school provide space and personnel for otherfathering. This other father enhanced their critical consciousness and connected them their

racial and gender identities. According to Brooms (2017), otherfathering expressed as the holistic care, support, parenting, modeling and life coaching promoted both academic success and personal development. The students received care for their academic, social, and personal needs. From haircuts to school rides students knew the school would not embarrass but support. Even students who left the school still considered it a place to call home. The wall displays of student success was a constant reminder of what could be achieved. Whether it was the journey into manhood or the choice of high school or college the students embraced the school as a place for resources.

Recommendations for Future Research

What follows are six recommendations for designing and implementing a school model specific to African American males. Based on data and personal experiences of Prep students successfully matriculating on to selective college campuses.

Initially, stakeholders should examine other single-gendered middle schools as models of success for Black male students. Advocates of single-gender middle schools argue that proponents of single-sex education argue that single-sex education better addresses social and biological differences affecting learning between sexes (Whitmire, 2010). In fact, African American males are less successful in coeducational classes (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2010). In alignment with the participants in the current study, Fergus et al. (2014) argued the need for single sex designed to address for Black males are inclusive of their perceived needs (culturally relevant instruction, school climate, rigorous curriculum, teaching, and learning, focus on “male” identity, etc.).

Secondly, a need exists for more investments towards recruiting and retaining Black male teachers. Currently, these teachers represent a dismal 2 percent of teachers and a need exist to

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increase the 7 percent African American female teachers. Brooms (2017) posited that Black male adults “otherfathers” “based on their” pedagogical practices, care and concern, and support (p.1). Black male teachers in the current study and previous research were identified as helping Black male students more effectively navigate the dualities of Blackness and male hood. The extant literature and the participants felt that the fictive kinship or other fathering of Black male teachers provided a sense of understanding from the same life experiences and perspectives.

Thirdly, schools should work to create environment where African American students specifically Black males feel valued. Traditional schools often are based on a Eurocentric model. Black males are taught by teachers who do not share race or gender. These students experience racially biased disproportionality in suspensions and referrals to special education (Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015; Skiba et al., 2014). Black male students need spaces with protective factors including personal affirmation (Fergus et al., 2014). Student creativities need to be encouraged not stifled. To feel valued, African American males need to see themselves and their experiences reflected in the learning and exposures to positive role models. Schools should encourage their brilliance and represent a safe space from the often tumultuous outside world.

Fourthly, a critical need exists to amplify student voice or provide opportunities to hear what students need to improve academic and social outcomes. The perspectives of African American males are often ignored as teachers focus on teaching what has to be taught instead of the needs to optimize student learning (Jackson, 2011). The Black males in the current study and other studies outlined the need for high academic and behavior expectations with the supports necessary to achieve their goals. Students wanted teachers who supported their success and personal development as otherfathers demonstrating “holistic care, support, parenting, modeling, and life coaching” (Brooms, 2017, p. 1).

In the fifth recommendation, a need exist for additional anti-deficit research as deficit thinking is mired in student failure and student weakness. This mode of thinking justifies social conditions such as inadequate schools and poor educators by victimizing the student and blaming them for academic and social struggles. Instead, researchers should study successful Black males to identify despite the odds they find success (Harper et al., 2009; Harper, 2012, 2014).

Finally, more attention should be paid to instilling the Pedagogy of Confidence in Black male students. Jackson (2011) argues the ineffectiveness of increasing student outcomes when focusing on student weaknesses. Instead, she asserts educators should focus on activating student strengths, understanding their perspectives and inspire high intellectual powers. The participants in current study credited teacher and school leaders believing in them with making them feel they can accomplish anything from the inner school competitions to chess club, activate student strengths.

Conclusion

“It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences” (Lorde, 1932, n.p.). As Lorde challenged, and the adults and students at Prep shared in the current study, interrupting the academic struggles of Black males requires replacing the deficit model thinking of looking at their failures into embracing their differences and as Jackson(2011) states, Inspiring the Pedagogy of Confidence. Stakeholders should include natural tendencies of male into the curriculum. Black and brown boys need to see themselves reflected in the faces of their educators. We are in a generation where students are school dependent versus being school ready. This forces us as educators to look at the length of our school day and the services we provide specifically to our black, low SES, male students. We cannot ignore their gender specific or racial identities. As educators, we must provide safe spaces

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to our students to express both. Give Black boys voice and choice because they have been overly marginalized by society. Stakeholders should be intentional when pairing students with “otherfathers” or mentors to help expose these students to experiences beyond neighborhood. Teachers, regardless of race or social class, must learn to respect and honor students' home culture and whenever possible incorporate this into student learning. With 90% of the teaching population reporting as White and female, universities and educational philanthropic organizations will need to recruit and train a larger population of Black and brown males to enter the classroom. One of the challenges expressed by many of the school-based participants (staff) is the amount of work and time it took to make this model a success was not sustainable. If this model were to replicate, I would recommend adding additional staff to alleviate some of the pressures and time commitment. “In order for this to happen, your entire frame of reference will have to change, and you will be forced to surrender many things that you now scarcely know you have” (Baldwin, 2013).

In conclusion, deconstructing schooling systems that devalue Black male students and designing systems that support their needs requires a shift from deficit thinking to optimizing their strengths and talents. Single-gendered middle schools offer a model to improve academic thus life outcomes by supporting their identify development needs, increasing and enhancing their commitments to learning and providing otherfathers to support their journey.

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APPENDIX A – RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear Prep Alumni, former administrators, teachers, and parents:

I am writing to invite you to participate in a new research study being conducted by myself Nakia Douglas for my dissertation titled: African American Males: The Impact of Single-gender Middle Schools. (IRBNet #1401165-1) The purpose of the study is to examine the perceptions of African male students of how attending a single-gender middle school prepared them for high school completion and college success. This study will play an important role in advancing our knowledge of how single-gender middle schools support the high school experience and college preparation for African American males.

Participation in the study will require 1-2 virtual interviews. In the first interview, all participants will be asked questions about the Male Prep experience. This interview will last 45-60 minutes. If needed, a second interview will be scheduled for follow-up questions and/or review answers to ensure accuracy. The second interview is optional. Once the interview(s) are transcribed, all participants will be able to review the transcriptions for accuracy.

Participation in the research project is voluntary. Participants can leave the study at any time. There is no compensation for this study. All participants will be assigned a pseudonym and the identity of all participants will be kept confidential.

If you are interested in participating in this study and/or have questions, contact Nakia Douglas at nmdouglas@bsu.edu.

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Thank you in advance for your participation.

Ms. Nakia Douglas

Contact Information:

Ms. Nakia Douglas

African American Males: The Impact of Single-gender Middle Schools.

IRB 1401165-1

Ball State University Doctoral Student

Nmdouglas@bsu.edu

APPENDIX B – INFORMED CONSENT

Study Title: African American Males: The Impact of Single-gender Middle Schools

IRBNet #1401165-1

Study Purpose and Rationale

The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions of African male students of how attending a single-gender middle school prepared them for high school completion and college success. This qualitative study will use interviews with teachers, administrators and former students to examine the components of the schooling experience including test scores, scholar identity, parent, teacher administrator support, academic rigor and social development. The study will use interviews with former students who are now college second- or third-year college students to examine their perceptions of the African American male students on how this school model supported their academic and social integration towards school success.

This study will seek to identify effective educational practices in middle school learning environments. The study seeks to examine the perspective of successful African American male students what breeds school success. The results of this study may provide a guidebook for academic success and increase access to higher education for African American male students. This project will provide a framework and action plan to increase awareness and understanding of the strategies that could bring academic success from the perspective of academically successful African American male students.

Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES IN SINGLE-GENDER CHARTER SCHOOL

The participants will be adults over 18 with some relationship to the single-gendered middle school. The sample population will consist of former students, teachers, administrators and parents of students who attended a single-gender middle school.

Persons who do not have a relationship to the single-gender middle school are excluded.

Participation Procedures and Duration

Study participation will involve one to two virtual interviews will be conducted. The first interview will last 45 minutes to 1 hour and the second interview if needed will last 30 to 45 minutes. You will be notified in the first interview that a follow up interview may be requested to clarify and questions about the transcribed data. This interview is optional you may choose not to participate. In the interview protocol, you will be asked questions around their experiences at Male Prep and how these experiences influenced their college experience. Once the interviews are transcribed you will be allowed to review the transcripts for validity. These results will then be coded, analyzed and themes identified. These themes will be written as a narrative.

Audio Tapes

With permission of the participants, all interviews will be audiotaped and downloaded to an encrypted file. The audio information will be stored in an encrypted file for the duration of the study. Once transcriptions are approved, these data will continue to be stored for 5 years.

Data Confidentiality or Anonymity

AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES IN SINGLE-GENDER CHARTER SCHOOL

The identity of the respondents will remain confidential, demographic data will be collected including:

All participants will choose a pseudonym to protect their identity. To further protect the identities of the participants the results will be stored in an encrypted folder.

Storage of Data and Data Retention Period

The data will be stored electronically via flash-drive or data storage cloud. The raw and final data will be kept for a maximum of five years.

Risks or Discomforts

There are no perceived risks for participating in this study.

Benefits

There are no perceived benefits for participating in this study.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw your permission at any time for any reason without penalty or prejudice from the investigator. Please feel free to ask any questions of the investigator before signing this form and at any time during the study.

IRB Contact Information

AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES IN SINGLE-GENDER CHARTER SCHOOL

For questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact the Office of Research Integrity, Ball State University, Muncie, IN 47306, (765) 285-5052 or at orihelp@bsu.edu.

Study Title: *African American Males: The Impact of Single-gender Middle Schools*

Consent

I, _____, agree to participate in this research project entitled, *African American Males: The Impact of Single-gender Middle Schools*. I have had the study explained to me and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have read the description of this project and give my consent to participate. I understand that I will receive a copy of this informed consent form to keep for future reference.

To the best of my knowledge, I meet the inclusion/exclusion criteria for participation (described on the previous page) in this study.

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher Contact Information

Principal Investigator:
Nakia M. Douglas, Graduate Student
Educational Leadership

Faculty Supervisor:
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AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES IN SINGLE-GENDER CHARTER SCHOOL

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APPENDIX C – ADMINISTRATOR INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Why have you chosen to lead single-gender middle school?
2. How is this leadership experience different from your other leadership experiences in other schools?
3. What additional supports do you intentionally provide to students?
4. Do you feel your students are prepared for a rigorous high school experience? Why?
5. What type of specific social experiences do you provide to scholars that are unique to the school setting?
6. Tell me about your relationships with students, teachers, and families in the school setting? How is it different from other experiences that you've had in the past?
7. What extracurricular activities do you provide at the school for students?
8. What are the best aspects of a leading a single-gender school?
9. What school-based factors do you feel have the greatest impact on student success and their preparation for a rigorous high school experience? What types of things have you done to intentionally make sure the students have those experiences that lead to school success?
10. Is there anything that you would change about the school experiences your scholars have had?
11. Do you feel you had a successful leadership experience at the school? Why?
12. Is there anything additional you would like to tell me about your leadership experience at this school?

APPENDIX D – TEACHER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Why did you choose to teach in a single-gender middle school?
2. How is teaching here different from your other teaching experience?
3. What type of additional supports do you provide to your students?
4. Overall, how are your students grades and test scores in this program?
5. Do you feel your students are prepared for rigorous high school experience? Why?
6. What social experiences do you provide to your scholars that you feel are unique to the school setting?
7. Tell me about your relationships with your students in the school?
8. Do you sponsor any extracurricular activities for the students at the school?
9. What are the best aspects of teaching and learning in a single-gender environment?
10. What school-based factors do you feel have had the greatest impact on student success in their preparation for high school?
11. Is there anything you would change about the middle school experience for your scholars at the school?
12. Do you feel you've had a successful teaching experience at the school?
13. Is there anything additional you'd like to tell me about your experiences working in the school?

APPENDIX E - PARENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Why did you choose single-gender education for your student?
2. How has your students experience at this school been different from their experiences at other schools?
3. Do your students receive any special services at the school (special ed, speech counseling, extra tutoring)?
4. How has your students academic experience and performance been during their time at the school?
5. Do you feel that your student is prepared to be successful in a rigorous high school experience based on their attendance at the school?
6. What type of social experiences has your student had at the school that you feel are unique to the schooling experience?
7. What is your opinion of the staff relations with students and families at the school?
8. In your opinion what have been the best aspects of single-gender education for your scholar?
9. What school bass factor do you feel has had the greatest impact on your student's success and preparation for high school?
10. Is there anything that you would change about your scholar's middle school experience?
11. Has your scholar developed a scholar identity while attending this school?
12. Is there anything additional you'd like to share with me about your student's middle school experience?

APPENDIX F - STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Did you have a choice in which school you attended for middle school? If so, why did you choose the school?
2. Was your experience here in the school different than your past schooling experiences? If so, why?
3. Do you receive any special services at the school speech, extra tutoring, support from resource teachers?
4. How have your grades and test scores been since you've been here at the school?
5. Do you feel prepared for a rigorous high school experience based on your attendance at this school?
6. What type of social experience have you had at this school that you feel are unique to this school?
7. How do you feel about your relationships with your teachers and the administrators at this school?
8. Are you involved in any extracurricular activities?
9. In your opinion what have been the best aspects of attending a single-gender middle school?
10. What school-based factors do you think have had the greatest impact on your success and preparation for high school?
11. Is there anything you would change about your middle school experience?
12. Do you see yourself as a scholar and as someone be able to have a very successful high school experience and possibly go to college?
13. Is there anything additional you'd like to tell me about your middle school experience?