

“Let Them Speak Their *Peace*”

**A RETROSPECTIVE CRITICAL RACE EXPLORATION OF ADOLESCENT BLACK
MALE SOCIAL AND SCHOOLING EXPERIENCES, IDENTITY
DEVELOPMENT, AND EDUCATIONAL/LIFE OUTCOMES IN PITTSBURGH**

by

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University of Pittsburgh, 2013

How adolescent black males make meaning of their social and schooling experiences affects the development of identities that can serve as risk-factors for academic engagement, achievement, and life outcome. Although research on racial and ethnic identity among youth of color has flourished during the last two decades, little of that research has directly examined the relationship between identity, achievement, and life trajectory. There has been no research examining these relationships specifically in Pittsburgh, a city with historically deep racial educational and economic disparities. In order to better understand how identity influences academic engagement, educational outcomes, social choices, and life trajectories in Pittsburgh specifically and the U.S. more broadly, in-depth phenomenological interviews were conducted from a sample of 10 black men who attended Pittsburgh Public Schools. This exploratory study used the retrospective recollections of these men to examine the social and schooling experiences of adolescent black males in this context. Three respondents were selected from this sample and their respective interview data were crafted into narrative profiles. Critical race theory (CRT) was the primary paradigmatic lens through which these experiences were examined and the interview data analyzed and reported on.

Findings showed four salient themes of *respect*, *internalized racism*, *the power in words and names*, and the CRT construct *whiteness as property* at work in their adolescent experiences.

Two meta-themes of *multiple interpretations of black masculinity, achievement, and race*, and *differend* cut across all of the narratives. In a researcher reflection on *the power of voice*, the *counter-story telling* construct of CRT is discussed, revealing the positive affect and healing capacity it holds for black males. This discussion is a defense for maintaining the *differend* and is situated within an argument for the utility of CRT as an appropriate methodological and analytical tool to examine and disrupt the pervasive academic struggles of black males. Implications for the schooling of black males; why it is important to listen to what black men have to say about their schooling; new possibilities for educational policy and practice; and new ontological possibilities and ethical responsibilities for adults in schools are discussed as well.

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1.0. CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Almost all important quality-of-life and educational achievement measures indicate that black males are in deep trouble socially and educationally (Duncan, 2002; Ferguson, 2000; Noguera, 2008). Black males are currently suffering from an educational crisis, high rates of unemployment and poverty, poor health care, inferior schooling, delinquency, incarceration, disenfranchisement, violence, HIV/AIDS, suicide, mental health issues, and fatherlessness (Boyd, 2007; Howard, 2008; Noguera, 2008).

I am interested in how black males in Pittsburgh make meaning of their adolescent social and schooling experiences and the impact these experiences have on their lives. I am also concerned with how they interpret the dominant discourses that explain the often punitive (Ferguson, 2000; Noguera, 2003) and exclusionary (Howard, 2008) nature of their schooling as persistent, random, and inevitable, albeit problematic, outcomes of a reasonably fair aracial system (Duncan, 2002). The objective of this study is to use the retrospective recollections of black men who attended Pittsburgh Public Schools to examine the social and schooling experiences of adolescent black males in Pittsburgh. Recollections about this time period are couched within the context of the overall quality of life that these men have experienced and are currently experiencing.

The goal of this study is to better understand how identity influences academic engagement, educational outcomes, social choices, and life trajectories for adolescent black males in Pittsburgh, specifically, and the U.S. more broadly. This study would be best characterized as an exploration into these relationships and the way they play out in individual lives. Exploring the boundaries of these relationships is important to me because of my own

journey through adolescence into manhood. I believe that choices made during adolescence can establish life trajectories and these choices are often the byproduct of self-perception. Through this study, I also hope to shed light on how black males in Pittsburgh believe race and racism may have influenced their schooling experiences and the bearing those experiences had on the construction of identities. Critical race theory (CRT) is the primary paradigmatic lens through which I examine the narratives of these experiences. This study also explores the utility and appropriateness of CRT as a methodological and analytical tool to examine and disrupt the pervasive academic struggles of black males.

1.1 A DISTURBING BLACK MALE SOCIAL MILIEU

With the increased availability of guns and illicit drugs and the proliferation of gangs in areas where poor black males are overrepresented, violence in urban communities and large central cities has reached epidemic levels (Morris, 2009). Black males are the main perpetrators and victims of violence in urban areas and are at the highest risk of death by homicide (Morris, 2009). Black men less than 25 years of age are 15 times more likely to die by homicide than their white counterparts are; the murder rate for black males older than 25 is nearly 7 times that of white males (The National Urban League Policy Institute, 2007a). In Pittsburgh, black arrest rates for violent crime among juveniles and adults are, respectively, 7-20 times white rates (Center for Race and Social Problems, 2007). The vast majority of these arrests, as well as the victims of these crimes, are black males.

Concerning criminal justice, black men are overrepresented in the U.S. system due to deep and persistent inequities in arrests, convictions, and sentencing (Toldson & Janks, 2011). Black men are convicted at a higher rate and receive longer sentences than white males, and they

are 20 times more likely to be incarcerated than are black women (The National Urban League Policy Institute, 2007a). With the rapid expanse of federal prisons within an already large U.S. prison system, black males disproportionately fill these spaces as they have increasingly been incarcerated for nonviolent drug offenses (Toldson & Janks, 2011). According to the U.S. Census, of the 17,945,068 black males in the United States (roughly 6% of the population), approximately 841,000¹ (4.7%) are currently serving time in jail or prison, representing 40% of the total male prison population (Toldson & Janks, 2011). The National Urban League Policy Institute (2007a) reported that black men had the highest incarceration rate of any group (3,042 per 100,000)², nearly 6 times the white rate (487 per 100,000) and more than double the Latino rate (1,261 per 100,000). In 2009, The Bureau of Justice Statistics (West, 2010) indicated an even higher rate of incarceration for black males (4,749 per 100,000), at almost 7 times the white rate (708 per 100,000). In Pittsburgh, black arrest rates for drug related crimes among juveniles and adults are higher than arrest rates for whites, Asians, and Hispanics (Center for Race and Social Problems, 2007). Again, the vast majority of these arrests in Pittsburgh are black males. Data on black male incarceration rates vary depending on the source; however, it is painfully obvious that black men are overrepresented in the U.S. criminal justice system.

Edelman's (2007) Children's Defense Fund's Leave No Child Behind³ organization coined the phrase "America's cradle to prison pipeline" to describe the inordinate number of children who, by virtue of being born at the intersection of race and poverty, are trapped in a trajectory that leads to marginalized lives, imprisonment, and premature death. Speaking directly to the plight of black and brown males in the United States, Edelman observed, "That a

¹ This number is irrespective of age and does not account for black males currently on parole or probation.

² For every 100,000 black men in the U.S., 3,042 were incarcerated in 2007.

³ Marian Wright Edelman is Founder and President of the Children's Defense Fund, a private, nonprofit children advocacy organization established in 1973.

black boy born in 2001 has a 1 in 3 chance and a Latino boy a 1 in 6 chance of going to prison in their lifetime is a national disaster and says to millions of our children and to the world that America's dream is not for all" (p. 4).

In terms of pre-recession annual median income, black men earned less than three quarters of what white men earned (\$34,443 vs. \$46,807); roughly a \$12,000 gap (The National Urban League Policy Institute, 2007b). In 2011, the average black man with a full-time job earned only \$39,132 in the Pittsburgh Region. That's the second lowest average wage for blacks among the top 40 regions (only Cleveland has lower earnings for blacks than Pittsburgh), and it's more than 40% lower than the \$65,850 the average white man with a full-time job makes in the Pittsburgh region (Miller, 2013). In the current labor market black men are unemployed at a rate of 16.3% compared to 8.9% for white men (The National Urban League Policy Institute, 2010). The Pittsburgh Region had the 11th highest unemployment rate among blacks among the top 40 regions (Miller, 2013). Pittsburgh's black unemployment rate was 2.6 times the unemployment rate among whites, the 7th worst disparity among the top 40 regions in the country. This unusually high unemployment among blacks is not a new phenomenon and it is not due to the recent recession. Throughout the last decade, blacks in Pittsburgh have had one of the highest unemployment rates among major metropolitan regions in the country (Miller, 2013).

In health and wellness, life expectancy for a black male in the United States is 66 years, compared with 74 for a white male (Exworthy, Bindman, Davies, & Washington, 2006). Black men in Pittsburgh have a higher rate of serious mental illness than black women and white men and women (Center for Race and Social Problems, 2007). Disparities in economic opportunity and health care are reflected in the childhood obesity epidemic among black boys, of which 18.6% are overweight compared to 15.5% for white boys (The National Urban League, 2010).

Black males now have the fastest growing rate for suicide (Poussaint & Alexander, 2000) and are contracting HIV/AIDS at a faster rate than any other segment of the population (Auerbach, Krimgold, & Lefkowitz, 2000). Regarding the waning presence of black fathers in the homes of adolescent black males, black Pittsburgh has a disproportionately high number of single-female headed households. Of the 70 largest cities in the U.S., Pittsburgh has the second highest percentage of black female-headed households at 62 percent (University Center for Social and Urban Research, 2008). In assessing the overall conditions that characterize the life-chances for black males in the United States, Boyd (2007) observed, “It’s hard out here for a black man” (p. 3).

1.2 K-12 EDUCATION AND ADOLESCENT BLACK MALES

Given the social and economic privation the previous statistical indicators reveal, it stands to reason that “the experiences of black males in education, with respect to attainment and most indicators of academic performance also show signs of trouble and distress” (Noguera, 2003, p. 432). State tests show that fewer than half (43%) of the black 11th graders in Pittsburgh can read at grade level and less than one-third (29%) are proficient in math. Black females are outperforming black male students within these already abysmal performance indicators. In 2008, Pittsburgh had the 24th lowest percentage among cities for black men age 25 and over with a bachelor’s degree or higher, 12% (University Center for Social and Urban Research, 2008). Today, only 15% of black Pittsburgh residents over age 25 have a bachelor’s degree or higher, the third lowest percentage of any major region in the country (Miller, 2013) and these degree holders are disproportionately women. As a national trend, after elementary school black

males begin to fall behind or drop out completely (The National Urban League, 2010), never attaining a high school diploma let alone a bachelor's degree. The dropout rate has been staggering. Nationally in 2010, black males aged 18–24 dropped out at a rate of 13% compared to 10.8% for white males (The National Urban League Policy Institute, 2010). The percentage of dropouts has increased for both black and white males since 2008 when rates were at 9% and 5%, respectively (Lewis, Simon, Uzzell, Horwitz, & Casserly, 2010).

Unfortunately, given the well documented correlation between dropping out and incarceration (The Children's Defense Fund, 2007), more young black men are earning high school equivalency diplomas in prison each year than are graduating from college (Hanson, McArdle, & Rawlston-Wilson, 2007). Edelman (2007) argues that underperforming schools with low expectations, zero-tolerance discipline policies, and few positive black male role models are significant contributors to the aforementioned high drop-out/incarceration rate of black males (Edelman, 2007). Howard (2008) ponders if the plight of black male students is of any real concern to policy makers and analysts. Howard cautions that, "A close examination of the current state of education for African American males in PreK-12 schools reveals that these students' underachievement and disenfranchisement in schools and society seem to be reaching pandemic and life threatening proportions" (p. 956).

Ensuring that young black men are afforded equal educational opportunities and access that yield favorable outcomes is one of the most pressing challenges of contemporary U.S. schooling (Matthews & Williams, 2007). Despite the well-publicized educational struggles of black males in the United States, and a plethora of studies documenting their plight in public secondary schools (e.g., Ferguson, 2000; Howard, 2008, 2010; Lewis et al., 2010; Noguera, 2008; Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2010), they are still the lowest performing and yet

most disregarded student population (Duncan, 2002). Unfortunately, schools that serve black males have consistently neglected to nurture, support, and protect them (Noguera, 2003).

The aforementioned statistics and commentary confirm that adolescent black males are in trouble in K-12 schools in the United States. Howard (2008) criticizes what seems to be a lacking sense of urgency and care from policymakers, analysts, and educators given the predictably poor educational outcomes and correlated incarceration rates of black males. Adolescent black males in schools often make poor choices because of the lack of care and support they experience from the adults in these schools. These poor choices generally lead to academic failure.

With educational outcomes bordering on catastrophic and life chances in an increasingly globalized society diminishing daily for black males, one might query, *where is the outrage?* My experiences as a high school teacher in Pittsburgh resonate with Howard (2008), who suggested that educators, policymakers, and analysts may have accepted this widespread failure as business as usual, “Thus echoing an old phrase from Marvin Gaye’s famed song, *Save the Children*, in which he asks the poignant question about the fate of our children, ‘*Who really cares?*’” (p. 956).

1.3 PURPOSE AND FOCUS OF STUDY

Watch your thoughts, for they become words. Watch your words, for they become actions. Watch your actions, for they become habits. Watch your habits, for they become character. Watch your character, for it becomes your destiny.

~Author Unknown

The quotation above reminds us of the power our thoughts have over our words, deeds, and habits. Despite the many discriminatory hurdles young black men face in the United States, perhaps the greatest challenge to their success is not found in external forces within society and schools. In my experience as a teacher and mentor who has worked extensively with black males in a variety of contexts, the self-doubt and negative thinking that often burdens them has a deleterious effect on academic achievement and future success. I have seen firsthand the toxic effect negative thinking and self-doubt can have on academic engagement, performance, social choices, and subsequent life trajectories for adolescent black males. Frequently, with black male students, *spoiled identities* (Johns, 2007) and *oppositional identities* (Ogbu, 1987) are bred from this poor self-concept.

These identities, in turn, are exacerbated by ubiquitous negative images of black men in society, as well as the marginalization and exclusion they often experience in schools. Often this poor self-concept is masked by a false bravado that comes across as indifference and/or defiance to adults in schools and society. With many of the young men I have taught, this false bravado serves as a protective mechanism for social survival during adolescence and is presented and proliferated to insulate them from being revealed as academically incompetent and/or physically weak. In other words, adolescent black males often present academic disengagement and/or disruptive behavior as a personal predilection and/or conscious choice, instead of an acknowledged sense of incompetence and vulnerability. This sense of incompetence often becomes integral to their self-definition.

In response to this protective bravado, adults in schools often label many adolescent black males as apathetic troublemakers and behavioral problems because they do not understand the genesis of this protective mechanism. The troublemaker label is often internalized by black

males, also becoming integral to their self-definition. These identities ultimately undermine the importance black males attach to education (Noguera, 2003), as well as the belief they have in their own capacities. For this reason, I believe that empowering young black men with both a sense of self-worth and self-efficacy (*will*) and the academic/vocational competencies (*skill*) for success is critical for improving life chances and educational outcomes.

Because adults focus primarily on behaviors and skills in the United States, little educational research has probed the boundaries of identity construction as a primary determinant for educational outcomes in the schooling of adolescent black males (McClure, personal communication, February 12, 2009). Although research on racial and ethnic identity among youth of color has flourished during the last two decades, relatively little of that literature has directly examined the relationship between identity and achievement (Howard, personal communication, April 4, 2010). Efforts to improve academic outcomes for black males must begin with understanding the attitudes that influence how they perceive schooling and academic endeavors (Noguera, 2003). Noguera asserts that, “Investigations into the academic orientation of black male students must focus on the ways in which the subjective and objective dimensions of identity related to race and gender are constructed within schools and how these influence academic performance” (p. 441).

In my view, focusing on how adolescent black males construct racial, academic, and masculine identities as they encounter and navigate the prevailing diatribes and pejorative stereotypes that proliferate within schools and society about them, is as important as focusing on skill development to improve educational outcomes. The processes and influences associated with black male identity construction should be centered in any analysis of performance because it is on the basis of their identities that they are presumed marginalized, at-risk, and endangered

(Kunjufu, 1985; Noguera 2003). When conflated with a dearth of accessible positive black male role models that would counter many of these negative images of black masculinity, poor self-concepts serve as a backdrop for which social and schooling choices are made that place these young men *at-risk*. How young black males see themselves is often informed by pejorative stereotypical images cast throughout society and negative social and schooling experiences. Consequently, examining the impact that negative discourse and stereotypes have on black male self-concepts, as well as perceptions of black males that are held by others, is essential to understanding black male identity formation and the choices they make in schools.

As I reflect upon my 14 years of classroom teaching, I am reminded of how important it was for me to establish trust with my students. I would achieve a level of trust with my students, largely, by getting to know and appreciate them individually. Understanding adolescent black male academic orientations and the attitudes that influence their perceptions of schooling and their perception of themselves enables educators to engage with them where they are academically and allows educators to develop the necessary trust to inspire and motivate.

Furthermore, as a group, black male students have been virtually shut out of the educational discourse concerning them (Duncan, 2002). This muting of their collective voice, while racialized educational discourse about them is amplified and normalized, serves to affirm and solidify their sense of alienation, sustains oppressive structures, and subjects them to further injury (Duncan, 2002). I have often wondered why educators routinely fail to ask adolescent black males to describe their schooling experiences or seek their input on issues concerning them. Instead, it seems that most time, energy, and resources invested by adults in schools are channeled into efforts to modify maladaptive behavior and remediate academic deficits for black male students.

Administrators and teachers alike are seemingly content to speak *about* black males, *at* black males, or *for* black males, but rarely are inclined to speak *with* black males about their education. When this happens, a form of *cultural imperialism* (Duncan, 2002) takes place where adolescent black males are defined by others and stripped of their ability to define themselves. On the occasion that they reject this form of branding and seek to define themselves, their versions of behaviors and subsequent events are often dismissed and deemed incomprehensible and incommensurable with the versions of those in authority. These competing, yet unequal, views, and the disputes that often arise between black males and authority figures in schools create a *differend* (Delgado, 1996, 1988), or the notion of irreconcilable differences that deepen entrenchment, estrangement, and powerlessness. Allowing black males to express their grievances, on their terms, about the wrongs they have suffered and the choices they have made counters the powerlessness and alienation they feel from exclusion and marginalization in schools (Duncan, 2002). Furthermore, it provides educators the opportunity to see the world through their eyes, so they can begin to redress the conditions that led to this marginalization and exclusion.

Seeing the world through the eyes of adolescent black males' calls for an epistemological shift away from our reliance on meta-narratives and dominant discourses that frame how we come to know them. In order to address the ontological claims made about black males, emanating from poor sociocultural representations, we must solicit their perspectives. Capturing their perspectives requires a conceptual framework that recognizes the social construction of racially defined experiences, and the importance of historical context and contingency in the framing of racial categories (Omi & Winant, 2005).

Broadly speaking, CRT in education allows this shift to occur in our orientation toward the schooling of black males precisely because we are affording them space to name their own adolescent realities while challenging any dominant narrative that is inconsistent with their stories. Through CRT, we establish a new set of questions to ask and a new way of asking about adolescent black male social and schooling experiences in order to reveal new ways of conceiving their relationships with institutions such as schools. As with CRT, racial formation theory (Omi & Winant, 2005) provides a lens through which one recognizes the social construction of race and the meaning and salience of race and racial identity that is reconstituted over time in particular social structures such as schools, communities, and families. Racial identity development theories (Cross, 1991; Franklin, 1999; Helms, 1995; Tatum, 1992; Trimble, Helms, & Root, 2003) also help to inform our understanding of the subjective ways black males interpret and manage racialized experiences over the lifespan. No theory can illuminate everything (Maxwell, 2005), but CRT and other related race and racial identity theories will provide a framework for asking new questions and understanding the stories that black males tell about their adolescent experiences.

The retrospective recollections of black men who have had the benefit of space, time, and maturity to reflect upon their adolescent experiences tell us a great deal about black males' interactional patterns with schools and the consequence of those interactions on identities and life trajectories. Key to this reconceptualization is the impact that dominant sociocultural discourses about the capacities and proclivities of black men have on adolescent black male self-perception. As suggested earlier, how young black males see themselves is often informed by pejorative stereotypical images cast throughout society and negative social and schooling experiences.

The complexities and difficulties of negotiating emerging manHOOD for adolescent black males are very real. *Hood*, an abridged version of neighborhood, is emphasized to describe poor urban areas where black males are overrepresented. Youth in poor urban areas often refer to their communities as *hoods*. Construction of pro-social masculinity is particularly difficult in the *hood* where manhood is often staked on violence. For example, when conflicts arise black males often find themselves caught between the proverbial *Scylla*⁴ of carrying a good name in the streets as a fighter but being labeled as a thug, and *Charybdis* of backing down to stay out of trouble and maintaining a good community name, but being branded as a punk. As the elders in my community colloquially described it, black males are often stuck between a “rock and a hard place” as they negotiate masculine and racial identities during adolescence.

Often adolescent black males in poor urban communities have to make difficult real-time fight or flight survival choices that can have dire social and academic consequences. With very little time to deliberate, many adolescent black males have to conduct quick cost-benefit analyses of possible responses when facing potential physical confrontation. This complexity is largely overlooked by educators who mistakenly believe that the oppositional or even violent choices that black males often make are simply the knee-jerk responses of social and emotional malfeasance. Educators fail to consider that adolescent black males may be making conscious choices based upon myriad factors, which include, but are not limited to social survival and the lack of care they experience from adults in these schools. Adults in schools are often unaware of the difficulty and complexity associated with these decisions and the impact dominant sociocultural discourses have on adolescent black male self-concepts. Moreover, adults in

⁴ *Being between Scylla and Charybdis* is an idiom deriving from Greek mythology that refers to the dilemma of having to choose between two evils.

schools may not be aware of the impact these discourses have on their own perceptions of adolescent black males.

The prospects for positive educational outcomes for black males are directly related to their ability to surmount systemic schooling barriers and build a sense of self-worth and academic self-efficacy. In order to foster this kind of empowerment and self-determination in adolescent black males, adults in schools may consider a dual approach toward mitigating self-doubt and oppositional attitudes. Such an approach would *building from strengths* (Scales, 2007) that exist within the student and the student's culture, while addressing academic weaknesses that may exist; instead of simply doing the latter. In order to identify what those strengths are, as well as the ways black males make meaning of their schooling experiences, they must have the opportunity to "speak their *peace*"⁵ (Duncan, 2002, p. 141).

1.4 HIGH STAKES NEGLECTING

Let truth come out the way it wants to come out. Let the hearers utilize a different area of themselves to try to understand.

~Malidoma Patrice Some, *The Healing Wisdom of Africa* (1999, n.p.)

My study gives voice to black men in Pittsburgh who speak their truth about the talents, skills, and capacities they possessed as adolescents that may have gone unidentified or worse, misconstrued and described as maladaptive, disruptive, or dangerous. The imprint such oversights and misconceptions left on their self-perception will reveal myriad impediments to academic success and self-efficacy for adolescent black males in schools. Much can be gleaned from the narratives of adult black males speaking retrospectively about their social and schooling experiences. Listening to the stories black men tell about these experiences will provide much

⁵ Duncan (2002) called for educators to allow adolescent black males a chance to "speak their piece". I use *peace* instead to explicate the healing and transformative power that is harnessed when black males are provided affirming space to be heard and validated.

needed direction for educational practice and programming targeting black males; programming which has been largely ineffective and conspicuously devoid of their voice. Along these lines, bell hooks (2000) reminds us that, “The heart of justice is truth telling, seeing ourselves and the world the way it is rather than the way we want it to be” (p. 33). The quote opening this section reminds us that inviting black male students to tell their stories entails educators who are willing to listen and see the world through their eyes (Duncan, 2002). Lifting the *censure* of black male student voices (Duncan & McCoy, 2007) is vital to understanding the complexity of how they develop identities in schools and how those identities affect academic achievement.

Ultimately, my hope is that this study will provide impetus for changing the relationships between black males and the adults in institutions such as schools in Pittsburgh and beyond. Again, I believe that black male social and schooling experiences during adolescence have a profound impact on identity construction. Identities, in turn, affect how black males engage and perform in academic settings (Duncan & McCoy, 2007). Their performance in academic settings is intimately linked to life outcomes. Unfortunately the stakes for academic failure have been extraordinarily high for far too many of the young black men I have encountered. The title of this section, *high stakes neglecting*, is a slight variation on the catch phrase that has come to characterize NCLB–*high stakes testing*. I chose this title to underscore the tremendous cost of viewing the persistent academic struggles and predicably poor educational outcomes of black males as *business as usual* (Howard, 2008). The benign *neglect* of black male students in U.S. schools (Noguera, 2003) perpetuates a cycle of academic failure with dire consequences and very high costs.

As stated previously, the inordinate number of black males in the U.S. prison system (Toldson & Janks, 2011) and the aforementioned quality-of-life and educational achievement

measures indicate that black males are in deep trouble socially and educationally (Boyd, 2007; Duncan, 2002; Ferguson, 2000; Howard, 2008; Noguera, 2008). The precarious relationship between social and schooling experiences, identity, and life outcomes is tilted toward a trajectory that often leads to a nihilistic existence of marginalization, imprisonment, and premature death for adolescent black males (Figure 1).

I quote the hip-hop band The Roots (2011), from their album *Undun*, in a song entitled “Tip The Scale.” This song, I believe, gives voice to this precarious relationship and the high stakes of this benign neglect,

(Hook) Homicide or suicide; heads or tails; Some think life is a living hell; Some live life just living well; I live life tryna tip the scale; My way, my way; My way, my way!

Yo, I’m always early; I never take off; cause I got a job; rob Peter to pay Paul; Now I realize it’s the winner that takes all; Do what I gotta do because I can’t take loss; Picture me living life as if I’m some animal; That consumes its own dreams like I’m a cannibal; I won’t accept failure unless its mechanical; But still the alcohol mixed with the botanical; I gues I’ll be referred to the owners, manual full of loaner; Full of all the homeless, throwaways and the stoners; Soldiers of the streets with 8th grade diplomas; And the world awaiting their sholders as a bonus; Look, let he without sin live without sin; Until then, I’ll be doing dirty jobs like swamp men; Counting the faces of those that I might have been; It’s like living that life, but I won’t live that life again. *(Hook)*

Lot of niggas go to prison; How many come out Malcolm X?; I know I’m not; Shit, can’t even talk about the rest; Famous last words: “You under arrest”; Will I

get popped tonight? It's anybody's guess; I guess a nigga need to stay cunnin'; I guess when the cops comin' need to start runnin'; I won't make the same mistakes from my last run in; You either done doing crime now or you done in; I got a brother on the run and one in; Wrote me a letter, he said "when you comin'?"'; Shit man, I thought the goal's to stay out; Back against the wall, then shoot your way out; Gettin' money's a style that never plays out; 'Til you end up boxin' your stash, money's paid out; The scales of justice ain't equally weighed out; Only two ways out, diggin tunnels or diggin graves out! (*Hook*)

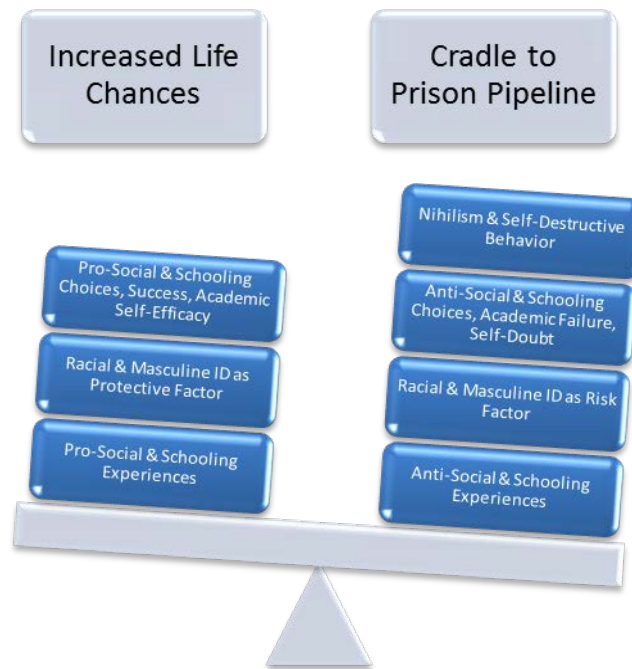


Figure 1. Experiences, identity, and outcomes for black males

As a deeply concerned black man who is also a father, teacher, mentor, coach, and member of several community-based organizations, it has been my experience that recurrent anti-social and negative schooling experiences for adolescent black males contribute to the

construction of racial and masculine identities that serve as risk factors for academic achievement and pro-social choices. Academic failure and anti-social choices, in turn, place many of these young men at risk of running afoul of the law and fueling America's cradle to prison pipeline in the overwhelming numbers indicated earlier (Edelman, 2007).

Broadly, I am interested in what educators can do to change this trend for black male students and tip the social scale in a direction that leads toward more positive life chances for this population. I am interested in how educators may empower adolescent black males to identify and overcome oppressive and restrictive structures in schools and develop a sense of academic self-efficacy so they can find success in schools and increase their own life chances. Specifically, this study is intended to explore:

1. How is racial and masculine identity development shaped by contexts such as families, schools, and communities in Pittsburgh?

In what ways do these identities serve as impediments for academic achievement?

In what ways do these identities serve as protective mechanisms for academic achievement?

How do community institutions such as barbershops shape positive identity development for adolescent black males?

How do adolescent black males negotiate the sociocultural discourses about them?

2. How does academic achievement during adolescence affect life trajectories for black males in Pittsburgh?

How do adolescent black males view their own academic capacities?

What impact do sociocultural discourses and schooling experiences have on identity and academic self-efficacy?

Identity designations may not necessarily reflect how these men perceived themselves during adolescence. In order to achieve the true intent of this research—to solicit uncensored and authentic narratives—identity designations were not imposed on or ascribed to respondents.

Instead, each respondent had the opportunity to express who they deemed themselves to be through *self-declaration* (Trimble et al., 2003).

Speaking with the adult black males interviewed for this study about their social and schooling experiences during adolescence afforded them the opportunity to reflect on this period of time and the impact of those experiences throughout their lives. These reflections produced counter-narratives that help us better understand how adolescent black males in Pittsburgh make meaning of such experiences and the impact of these experiences on identity construction, academic engagement and performance, and subsequent life choices and trajectories. Evidence of the profound residual effect that incessant negative social and schooling experiences have on identity, choices, educational outcomes, and life chances is present in the counter-narratives. However, equally salient findings from this exploration reveal the remarkable capability of young black men to navigate adolescence without withering under the weight of recurrent negative experiences and pejorative stereotypes. These counter-narratives indicate that these men were also able to reject the internalization of racist stereotypes about black males or reconfigure them in such a way that they became motivation for resistance against unfair or uncaring power structures. The counter-stories also indicate that the capacity of these young men to bounce back from negative experiences and avoid poor social and schooling choices was directly related to their self-concept and the presence and consistency of at least one positive and caring adult in their lives. Key to this resiliency were black and white men, and several black women, who gained their respect by giving them the benefit of the doubt instead of applying a stereotype. These adults provided structure, boundaries, and care that fostered pro-social and schooling choices instead of the permissiveness and disregard associated with adults who deem a child to be more trouble than they are worth.

The importance of listening to the stories black men have to tell about adolescence cannot be overstated for educational policy, practice, and programs targeting black males. It is critical and I believe that when educators listen to these stories, it will help them gain a better understanding of adolescent black males. These new understandings can alleviate many of the relational barriers and the *crisis of faith* (Lynn, Bacon, Totten, Bridges III, & Jennings, 2010) among teachers that often contribute to the pervasive schooling struggles of black male students, precisely because they will gain a better sense of who these young men are and why they do what they do. Listening to and theorizing from narratives of black male adolescence may open up new possibilities for educational policy and practice. These possibilities are revisited as the implications of the findings from this study are discussed.

Analysis of these counter-narratives was a collaborative effort between myself and each respondent. My task was to discover and reveal how these men developed racial, masculine, and academic identities and the impact those adolescent identities had on educational and life outcomes. Given the emancipatory and transformative nature of this study, each respondent was included in and integral to the analysis and interpretation of his respective story. Using a CRT lens, I invited each respondent to negotiate the meanings he made from his adolescent experiences and address the salience of race and racism in those experiences. Ideally, through these negotiations consciousness raising, emancipation, and transformation were to occur as each respondent compared the meanings they made of those racialized experiences during adolescence with the meaning they attach to those experiences now. In some cases this consciousness raising was quite evident, in others it was less. Given the method of inquiry for this study, there are limitations on the possibilities for and the depth of any emancipation and

transformation that may take place. These limitations are discussed in greater detail in the discussion of the research design.

As stated earlier, life trajectories are often confirmed by choices made during adolescence and early adulthood. The stations these men have arrived at in life are largely the result of adolescent choices and the consequences associated with those choices. However, it must be understood that many adolescent black males who make sound, pro-social and schooling choices are also constrained by limited access to opportunities by virtue of being born black, male, and too often poor. It would be irresponsible and disingenuous of me as a black man to claim all that is required of black males to succeed is to make good choices. The confines, pitfalls, and dangers for black males in the U.S. are very real, and they exist, albeit not to the same extent, for those born into relative comfort the same as those born into poverty. We have learned by the killing of Trayvon Martin by George Zimmerman and Oscar Grant by the Bay Area Transit Police that a black male only needs to be walking in a gated community with a bag of skittles or pleading his case of self-defense while being unlawfully detained, to be deemed enough of a threat to warrant extermination.

That said, I wanted to know how watershed moments during adolescence and early adulthood framed the present experiences of these men. While listening to black men sharing the seminal moments from their lives may afford them a level of healing and/or affirmation, it also provides a measure of guidance across generations. In the tradition of the African Griot who passes the history and knowledge of a people on to the young, the stories these men tell will benefit future generations.

In order to answer my research questions, I conducted in-depth, semistructured, phenomenological interviews (Seidman, 2006) with adult black males ages 38–42 who attended

Pittsburgh Public Schools. *Member checks* (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) with respondents were conducted to ensure that the proper *attention to voice* (Lincoln, 1995) was given and that the men spoke for themselves. Whenever possible, the stories were taken back to the respondents so they could clarify, refine, or change their stories. Particular emphasis was given to how they made meaning of the adolescent years.

In my first year of teaching, my mentor told me, “Kids don’t care how much you know, until they know how much you care.” When educators pay closer attention to their own preconceived notions about black males, as well as to the negative residual impact that chronic anti-social and schooling experiences have on adolescent black male self-perception and the choices they make, relationships can be strengthened and outcomes can change for the better. Listening to the stories black men tell about their adolescent social and schooling experiences and the wisdom shared from these experiences will serve to empower young black men to build academic self-efficacy and make better choices. Moreover, listening to these stories will inform educational practitioners and policy makers and analysts about ways to promote academic success through building trusting relationships with black male students.

However, my hope is that this study will reach beyond simple discussions of some interesting stories about a group of black men. Many of these men, like myself, are parents of school-aged black boys. This, I believe, makes what they have to say even more significant. These men have a vested interest in enhancing educational outcomes for black males in the schools that serve their sons. Furthermore, these men have unique, multi-generational insights that educators would be well served to tap in to. What these men have to say is important, relevant, and needs to be heard. The implications for educational policy and practice will not

only come from changed relationships between black male students and adults in schools, but also through stronger relationships between black men and the schools that serve black boys.

As a final note, because my study examines racial, as well as masculine and academic identity development for adolescent black males, I believe that the application of CRT, racial formation theory, and other critical and race-related theories will provide valuable theoretical frameworks and analytical tools for changing the aforementioned relationships. Furthermore, application of these theoretical frames will elicit consideration of new ontological possibilities and ethical responsibilities for adults in schools. I believe the value in applying such theoretical frames can be found in challenging what has been assumed as *real* and *right* in schools that serve black males.

2.0 CONCEPTUAL FRAME

If there is no contradictory impression, there is nothing to awaken reflection.

~Plato (The Republic)

This study would be characterized best as an exploration that is situated at the intersection of adolescent black male identity and academic engagement. I am probing the boundaries of identity construction to discover the effect that black male self-perception has on the social and schooling choices made during adolescence and the life trajectories emanating from those choices. The lens through which I view this area of inquiry is a critical one.

As I mined the literature for explanations of the pervasive struggles of black males in schools, I noticed a conspicuous absence of explanations from black males themselves within the discourse. Instead, I found explanations, which held varying degrees of resonance with my own experiences, offered by researchers who were not black males. I wondered if these explanations would hold water with adolescent black males in schools and/or adult black males who had actually experienced what these researchers were discussing. Consequently, I began to develop a conceptual framework that would allow me to approach this work unencumbered by the pre-conceived notions of those who attempt to speak *for* and *about* adolescent black males in schools. I solicit the stories of black male adolescence, from the retrospective recollections of black men, to unearth narratives that may run contrary to the dominant narratives of their experiences. In this chapter, I lay the theoretical groundwork for such an approach.

2.1 CULTURAL IMPERIALISM AND DIFFEREND

In examining the different stories students, teachers, and administrators use to explain the marginalization and exclusion of black males in schools, Duncan (2002) identifies points of conflict that widen the chasm between black males and other members within a school. Duncan contends that those who have the institutional power to describe marginalized minorities as *other* dismiss the marginalization and oppression of these minority groups as natural, and primarily of their own doing. When black males in schools are constructed as the *strange other*, they fall victim to *cultural imperialism* as they are defined by others and stripped of their ability to define themselves. Under *cultural imperialism*, the dominated group's versions of events are regularly dismissed and marginalized, or simply branded as incomprehensible by dominant group members, particularly when a conflict occurs between members of these unequal social groups (Duncan, 2002).

These polarized perspectives on the black male experience in schools give rise to a *differend*, or the sense that these opposing perspectives and the subsequent disputes they breed are largely irreconcilable. Accepting that these differences are irreconcilable tends to leave the dominant structures that cause oppression intact (Delgado, 1996). Drawing on the work of the French philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard (1988), Duncan (2002) defines *differend* as a case of conflict between two parties that cannot be equitably resolved for lack of a rule of judgment applicable to both arguments. Moreover, Delgado and Stefanic (2001) argue that *differend* “occurs when a concept such as justice acquires conflicting meanings for two groups” (p. 44).

According to Lyotard, when conflict arises between dominant and subjugated group members, the latter is deprived of the chance to express grievances in terms the dominant group understands, thus their perspectives do not resonate with those in authority and are not taken into full account in the decision making or resolution process. In these cases, their oppression continues at the hands of the dominant group and the differences between the groups remain irreconcilable.

Duncan (2002) chose this *differend* to illustrate how the dominant perspective of the black male experience, which is based upon meritocracy and competition, is incommensurable with their marginalized perspective concerning the structural impediments and lack of care offered by adults in schools. *Differend* captures the general disregard, marginalization, and exclusion of black male students in schools (Duncan, 2002). Dominant structures are made invisible when we ignore that a *differend* exists; thus, protecting the *differend* is essential for the eradication of oppressive structures.

Delgado and Stefancic (2001) frame *differend* as a dialectic in which the conditions for resolution are created by the narrative intervention of the oppressed when they are allowed to tell their stories on their own terms to the oppressor. Framed in this way, *differend* allows for the counter-narratives of black male students to stand alone without having to be reconciled with the meta-narratives that describe their social and schooling experiences. The purpose of my dissertation study is to give adult black males affirming public space to tell their stories, on their terms, about those experiences and the impact they have had on their lives. The *differend* working within these stories authorizes new ways of knowing adolescent black males. As stated

earlier, it also establishes new ontological possibilities and ethical responsibilities for adults in schools who are commissioned with the task of fostering positive development for this population. Therefore, as I call on teachers to respect the stories of their students, I also call on those who read this study to avoid the temptation to reconcile the narratives into any dominant frame.

2.2 RESPECTABILITY AND RACIAL IDENTITY

Conceptually speaking, my approach to this study rejects dominant theoretical frameworks and/or discourses that may undermine the lived experiences of the men who are sharing their stories. Any research instrument that may have inhibited or diminished a robust and authentic portrayal of these men could not be used. In this section, I challenge the utility of racial identity stage models that track racial identity development for black males in prescribed and rigid sequences.

Racial identity development for adolescent black males is shaped by contexts within schools and society (Duncan & McCoy, 2007). Social and psychological processes that shape racial identity are also culturally mediated and historically contingent (Duncan & McCoy, 2007). This shaping, however, does not take place on self-evident, fixed, and distinct entities. Instead, the way black youth negotiate life and form identities is fluid, flexible, and connected to multiple life worlds, including those related to other youth cultures as well as to larger black culture (Duncan & McCoy, 2007). In educational research, tracking racial identity development is typically accomplished by drawing on stage models that are informed by fixed categories that chart the movement of individuals in a prescribed and normative sequence (Duncan & McCoy,

2007). However, Duncan and McCoy argue that the lives of black youth defy easy placement within models of black identity.

In examining stage models of racial identity that educational researchers have used to explain the academic and social choices black adolescents make in secondary schools, Duncan and McCoy (2007) suggest that studies using stage models may be constrained by the notion of *respectability*. *Respectability* is an ideology of middle-class morality that is intimately linked to white nationalism in Western Europe and the United States (Duncan & McCoy, 2007). In other words, the standards for morality that black adolescents are measured by are not necessarily standards that are consistent with their lived experiences. Instead, the respectability of their behaviors is largely determined by jingoistic and xenophobic standards derived from dominant white middle-class culture. *Respectability* shapes the direction and ends of racial identity stage models, used in studies conducted with and about black students, in ways that theoretically determine what passes for healthy black identities (Duncan & McCoy, 2007).

According to Duncan and McCoy (2007), even when the research is intended to explicitly challenge forms of white dominance, racial identity stage models committed to standards of acceptable public and private attitudes and behaviors derived from norms of white middle-class morality have a tendency to suppress and denigrate black youth subjectivities. These standards are the tacit guidelines that define the normative manners, morals, sexual attitudes, acceptable forms of political expression, and notions of manhood and womanhood taken for granted in the United States (Duncan & McCoy, 2007). Furthermore, these standards take on color-coded meanings in the public domain where whiteness is associated with respectability and its opposite cultural corollary, blackness, is associated with licentiousness (Duncan & McCoy, 2007).

Take for example, the scope and sequence of Cross's (1991) black adolescent identity development theory of *Nigrescence*, or of becoming black, which tracks identity through stages and levels that are derived from dominant justice models of moral development. Educational researchers who study black adolescent identity development draw largely on the Nigrescence stage model (Duncan & McCoy, 2007). The identity-morality link to respectability looms large even within black identity models such as Nigrescence, because of its rooting in dominant justice models (e.g., pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional) of moral development (Duncan & McCoy, 2007) that map morality linearly across prescribed and normative domains. Duncan and McCoy suggest that respectability serves to undermine the ability of black adolescent identity research to inform policies and practices that affirm black humanity and support academic achievement. Educational research based upon racial identity models that are committed to values inherent in respectability may jeopardize its explanatory power and further marginalize adolescent black males in schools.

To distinguish between *respectability* and other notions of *respect* in mainstream black culture, Duncan and McCoy (2007) draw a distinction between attributes of *respect*, which foster a sense of community, and the constraints of *respectability*. These notions of respect include values of gratitude, generosity, helpfulness, a code of decency and fidelity, and an ethic that pursues care-fullness, fairness, hand-in-handedness, and even-handedness (Duncan & McCoy, 2007). Additionally, Duncan and McCoy discuss bicultural theories (Darder, 1991) and process models (Helms, 1995) of racial identity development that bring forth a more comprehensive and dynamic reconceptualization of racial identity theory. These theoretical models explain the range of conscious and unconscious responses of people of color as they navigate the continuum between primary and dominant cultural forms (Duncan & McCoy, 2007). The focus of these

models is on the interactional patterns between the internal perceptions of individuals and the socially defined characteristics and political forces that impose racialized identities on them (Duncan & McCoy, 2007).

As a former teacher, I have seen how this notion of *respectability* is played out in schools when black male behaviors are refracted through the lenses of white middle-class norms and quickly labeled as aberrant and rendered incomprehensible by *sensible* adults. Teacher perceptions of adolescent black males that are informed by values inherent in *respectability* inhibit teacher ability to relate to and engage with this population, leading to further estrangement and marginalization. Consequently, the adversarial relationships that are bred between black male students and adults in schools often confirm, for both groups, that black males are more trouble than they are worth in schools and society. This diminished sense of self-efficacy and self-worth for black males inhibits their ability to engage and perform in schools. Unfortunately, the difficulties of positive identity development for black males do not end with overcoming *respectability*. Negotiating black masculinity is also very complex for adolescent black males.

2.3 COMPLEXITY OF BLACK MASCULINITY

Black masculinity is also a complex notion (Matthews & Williams, 2007). As with respectability, limiting definitions of masculinity rely heavily on European models of manhood that over-emphasize capitalist precepts of economic success, individual competitiveness, and domination (Matthews & Williams, 2007). Correspondingly, these European models depict the related life outcomes of black men as deficient and deviant, creating a distortion around what black men value, experience, and do (Matthews & Williams, 2007). These distortions inform many of the pejorative sociocultural stereotypes that are held about black males and internalized

by black males. African models for human relationships stress the importance of group and community needs over individual aspirations, cooperation over competitive relationships, and interconnectedness (Roberts, 1994). Young black men have the complexity of navigating and drawing from both African and Euro-American cultural systems and ideals in defining masculine identity (Matthews & Williams, 2007) while negotiating the dominant, and often negative, sociocultural discourses about them. Young black men in poor urban areas must also contend with pervasive violence stemming from competition over limited resources. Bravado, swagger, and a capacity for violence are integral components of masculinity in these settings.

A more complex notion of black masculinity can be found in the works of Hunter and Davis (1994), who frame its multidimensional nature in three central areas: (a) identity and development of self, (b) connections to family, and (c) spirituality and humanism. In the first area, black manhood reflects a strong sense of self-direction. Black men walk through life with dignity and vision. Key to this area of black manhood is personal accountability and flexibility to adapt to life circumstances. The second central theme fosters the notion of seeing family as an extension of the male self. A third aspect of black manhood is the need for *spiritual groundedness*. This area stresses interconnectedness to the entire human family. Grounded notions of masculinity such as this have existed, but have been negligently overlooked in research on black masculinity (Matthews & Williams, 2007). Organizations like The 100 Black Men of America Inc. have also established aspects of positive black male identity that drive their mentoring programs.

The 100 Black Men of America Inc.⁶ (The 100) is an international organization dedicated to improving the quality of life and enhancing educational and economic opportunities for all black people. The organization seeks to empower black people to become self-sufficient

⁶ Visit: WWW.100BLACKMEN.ORG for the Mission, Vision, and Values of the organization.

shareholders in the economic and social fabric of their communities (The 100 Black Men of America Inc., n.d.). The 100 have articulated a notion of manhood that defines black men as (a) self-sufficient and intellectual role models and problem solvers, (b) social/economic shareholders and agents in the community, and (c) holders of values that underscore respect for family, spirituality, justice, and integrity (The 100 Black Men of America Inc., as cited in Matthews & Williams, 2007).

Considering the limitations associated with using narrowly framed, deficit notions of masculinity, Matthews and Williams (2007) draw from various ideas of black manhood to argue for a more culturally centered, multidimensional concept focused on the ideas of community leadership, economic viability, family responsibility, personal accountability, interconnectedness with spiritual direction, and interconnectedness among men. More complex and grounded ideas of black manhood serve as guideposts for young black men who are developing identities while navigating through multiple life worlds. Moreover, they mitigate the power of the pervasive sociocultural distortions surrounding what black men supposedly value, experience, and do.

2.4 A CRITICAL RACE THEORETICAL FRAME

The cultural meta-narratives that many educators currently subscribe to for explanations of the schooling experiences of black males tend to dominate the discourse; thus the language used in these meta-narratives has a profound impact on the construction of reality. Those who have the power and influence to create these meta-narratives also tout the authority to dismiss or mute any counter-narrative that may call western notions of meritocracy, competition, stratification, and compartmentalization in education into question. Duncan (2002) contends that, “Powerful

narratives that exclude and marginalize black youth are canonical and anything that deviates from or casts doubt upon them is put in question” (p. 141). The limited notions of what counts as real and acceptable in education stemming from these meta-narratives constrain possibilities for more relevant and successful approaches to the schooling of black males.

Listening to the ways black males make meaning of their schooling experiences requires an epistemological and methodological approach that brings their voices in from the margins to challenge the dominant narratives that create their exclusion. Critical Race Theory (CRT) within education allows scholars to ask the important questions about the impact of racism on inequities in education (Johnson & Howard, 2008). Through CRT, we establish a new set of questions to ask and a new way of asking about adolescent black male social and schooling experiences. In doing so, we reveal new ways of conceiving adolescent black male relationships with institutions such as schools.

Broadly speaking, CRT in education frames the plight of black males in schools as an expression of the racism that is endemic to North American society (Bell, 1992; Duncan, 2002), not the persistent struggles of a perpetually unprepared and unmotivated student population. Critical race theorists in education argue that racial educational disparities should be situated in a discourse that addresses the larger context of social impediments to school success as well as the embedded practices and values in U.S. schooling (Duncan, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2007). A CRT analysis of so-called *achievement gaps* suggests that centuries of social neglect in the areas of health and wealth (Feagin, 2000; Kozol, 1992) have hindered the school success of entire groups of students (Ladson-Billings, 2007). Exclusion from the political process through which underserved populations would have a say in what education looks like in their communities, denial of educational opportunities, and underfunding of schools in poor communities have also

negatively impacted achievement (Ladson-Billings, 2007). I believe the stories black males tell about their schooling experiences reveal myriad social impediments to academic success. A CRT analysis of these narratives reveal the ways in which racism effects schooling experiences and educational outcomes for black male students. It also shows the ways in which racialized masculinities play out for young black men, resulting from the internalization of pejorative racial stereotypes. Many self-fulfilling prophecies are manifest because of these negative expectations.

2.4.1 Historical Background and Theoretical Underpinnings

Many trace the foundations of CRT to the work of Derrick Bell in the 1960s and Alan Freeman and Richard Delgado in the 1970s and 1980s. Emanating from neo-Marxist critical legal studies (CLS) movements in the mid-1970s, CRT emerged in the legal academy in the late 1980s as a response to CLS' failure to adequately challenge the effects of race and racism in its critique of U.S. jurisprudence. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) are credited with introducing CRT to the field of education. CRT was introduced to investigate the sociostructural and cultural significance of race in education and has emerged as a powerful theoretical and analytical framework within educational research (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Duncan, 2002; Howard, 2008).

Focusing directly on the effects of race and racism, while simultaneously challenging hegemonic systems of white supremacy and meritocracy in the United States, CRT is a theoretical framework for the scholar/activist who is primarily concerned with initiating change that promotes social justice for marginalized racial groups (Crenshaw, 1995). Crenshaw describes CRT as *insurgent scholarship* because of its activist agenda to transform and redeem, not just to critique and deconstruct. Viewed through a CRT lens, race is always the central construct for understanding inequality (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006); however, critical race

theorists also recognize the complex ways that race intersects with ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, and other systems of power by drawing on scholarship that addresses other forms of subordination (Crenshaw, 1995; Delgado & Stefanic, 2001).

CRT draws on *post* perspectives [i.e., post-modern, post-structural and post-colonial theories] (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006) and decolonizing positions, epistemologies, and frameworks that involve deconstructing canonical Western scholarship and discourse (Hopson, 2009). CRT also draws on other critical, feminist, and queer studies while supporting indigenous epistemologies (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006). According to Hopson, “[As] part of the larger intent of the decolonizing framework, deconstruction involves taking stories apart, revealing underlying texts, and giving voice to the experiences and realities often glossed over in traditional scholarship” (p. 438).

CRT is interdisciplinary, benefiting from sociology, history, literary theory, and philosophy (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006). Dixson and Rousseau describe CRT as a problem-centered rather than a qualitative approach to educational research. When using CRT as a framework for analysis, the problem determines the method; thus, multiple methods may apply (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006). CRT works toward the elimination of racial oppression through theory and action, as part of the larger goal of eliminating all forms of oppression in order to bring about the necessary changes for social justice (Crenshaw, 1995; Delgado & Stefanic, 2001).

2.4.2 CRT Tenets and Constructs

CRT involves five foundational tenets or precepts. First, racism is endemic to American life (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). This tenet describes *the permanence of racism* in American life as a call to adopt a *realist view* of American societal structure (Bell, 1992). This *realist view*

requires recognizing the dominant role racism has played and continues to play in American society, as well as the racist hierarchical structures governing all political, economic, and social domains (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). According to DeCuir and Dixson, these structures allocate the privileging of whites and the *othering* of people of color in all societal arenas, including education. Racism is “deeply ingrained legally, culturally, and even psychologically” (Delgado, 1996, p. 16) in U.S. society. Lawrence (1995) posits that racist acts can be both conscious and subconscious because they are the byproducts of sociocultural and sociopolitical constructs deeply entrenched in U.S. society.

Second, *racism contributes to group advantage and disadvantage* in U.S. society and in schools (Chapman & Dixson, 2010). Feagin (2000) argues that black and white Americans have effectively been on two different social trajectories based upon the economic, ideological, and political structure of American racism. Third, CRT recognizes the *voice and experiential knowledge of people of color* in analyzing law, society, and educational inequality (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Legitimizing the counter-knowledge of people of color requires the solicitation of their personal narratives, which challenge the hegemony of white worldviews and epistemologies (Ladson-Billings, 2000). Ladson-Billings asserts,

The process of developing a worldview that differs from the dominant worldview requires active intellectual work on the part of the knower, because schools, society, and the structure and production of knowledge are designed to create individuals who internalize the dominant worldview and knowledge production and acquisition processes. The hegemony of the dominant paradigm makes it more than just another way to view the world - it claims to be the only legitimate way to view the world. (p. 258)

Fourth, CRT challenges dominant claims of *neutrality*, *objectivity*, *colorblindness*, and *meritocracy* in legal and educational scholarship, as well as in U.S. society at large (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Given the history of racism in the United States whereby rights and opportunities were both conferred and withheld based almost exclusively on race, colorblindness, neutrality, and meritocracy are desirable goals but insufficient (and arguably disingenuous) ideals for redressing rampant inequality in U.S. society and schools (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). In education, the myth of meritocracy posits that all students have an equal opportunity to succeed in life and in school, while supporting the notion that schools are neutral places where structural inequalities do not exist and fairness is commonplace (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2007). From the perspective of CRT, colorblindness ignores that inequity, inopportunity, and oppression are historical artifacts that must be confronted in order to redress the deleterious effects of race and racism in U.S. society (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Finally, CRT challenges *ahistoricism*, (i.e. a thin, biased, partial, or inaccurate analysis of history). CRT requires a comprehensive context/historical analysis of U.S. law, society, and schools (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Based on the history of racism and discrimination in the United States, the lack of historical and social context in analysis is a mechanism through which colorblindness can perpetuate inequity (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006).

CRT also includes six constructs or concepts that drive analysis of inequality. The first construct, *counter-storytelling* is an integral component of CRT. Counter-storytelling has been the most essential feature in educational research utilizing CRT (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Second, *whiteness as property* in CRT argues that whiteness can be considered a property interest (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). According to Harris (1995), the property functions of whiteness in education fall on three levels: (a) rights of disposition (i.e.,

rewarding or sanctioning students of color for conforming to or deviating from white norms of dress, speech patterns, conceptions of knowledge, etc.); (b) rights of use and enjoyment (i.e. whiteness allowing for specific social, cultural, and economic privileges and access to high-quality facilities, rigorous curriculum, and honors and/or gifted programs); (c) right of possession and exclusion (i.e. the myriad ways schools have been re-segregating via tracking, creation and maintenance of separate schools, and white flight). Third, *interest convergence* in CRT posits that civil rights gains for people of color should be viewed with measured enthusiasm because they only provided superficial opportunities to exercise the very basic rights whites have historically enjoyed (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Moreover, these very basic rights only came inasmuch as they converged with the self-interests of whites (Bell, 1992).

The fourth construct of CRT is a *critique of liberalism and incremental change* (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). This critique of liberal ideology rejects color-blindness and neutrality while arguing that gains for marginalized groups have historically come at a slow pace that is palatable for those in power (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). In liberal discourse, equality trumps equity and the processes, structures, and ideologies that justify inequity are not challenged and disrupted (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). A *restrictive vs. expansive view of equality* is the fifth construct of CRT. This is the notion that equality has generally been viewed either expansively (i.e., equality because of interventions, with an eye toward real consequences for marginalized people) or restrictively (i.e., equality as a process, with a view toward equal treatment instead of outcomes) (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). DeCuir and Dixson suggest that this is an important framework for analyzing the nature of equity and inequity in education. Finally, *social change* as a CRT construct calls for scholars to move beyond theory and criticism to identify strategies to combat racism (Ladson-Billings, 2006). This happens when reflection and action are coupled. When

theories are converted to action then praxis is developed (Stovall, 2006). Social change in CRT is based upon this notion of *critical race praxis* (Yamamoto, 1997). Educational researchers have primarily focused on *counter-storytelling* and the *permanence of racism* (e.g., Bell, 1992; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Solorzano & Yosso, 2000) although *the interrogation of whiteness* has emerged as a promising area for scholarly work in education (e.g., Singleton & Linton, 2006; Wise, 2008).

CRT offers three central propositions of school (social) inequality (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Ladson-Billings and Tate argue that race continues to be a significant factor in determining inequality in the United States thus, “The cause of [African American] poverty in conjunction with the condition of their schools and schooling is institutional and structural” (p. 18). Also, because U.S. society is based on property rights, those with “better” property are entitled to “better” schools with greater opportunity to learn (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 17). This entitlement also includes high quality curriculum, which is considered “intellectual property” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 18). Finally, the intersection of race and property creates an analytic tool through which social and school inequity can be understood (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solorzano & Yosso, 2000).

2.5 COUNTER-STORYTELLING

Counter-storytelling is a form of representation that reveals the impact of racism through the surfacing and understanding of how racism is experienced by those marginalized groups that are most keenly aware and conscious of its pervasive and oppressive existence (Singleton & Linton, 2006). Delgado and Stefancic (2001) define counter-storytelling as a method of telling stories that “aim to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the

majority” (p. 144). It serves the purpose of myth debunking; “a means of exposing and analyzing normalized dialogues that perpetuate racial stereotypes” (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004, p. 27).

Counter-storytelling challenges the privileged discourses of the majority as a means of giving voice to members of marginalized groups (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Furthermore, it represents a shift from the *meta-narrative* of the dominant culture to a *mini-narrative* approach of knowledge construction that brings formerly silenced voices and groups in from the margins. Beyond the centering of marginalized voice, counter-storytelling inaugurates an interpretive project of understanding that fosters an embracement of the *differend*. Counter-storytelling can be found in the form of personal stories/narratives, other people’s stories/narratives, and composite stories/narratives (Solorzano & Yosso, 2000). Counter-stories can also be found in the use of parables, chronicles, stories, poetry, fiction, and revisionist histories (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). In other words, counter-storytelling “help[s] us understand what life is like for others, and invite[s] the reader into a new and unfamiliar world” (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001, p. 41).

Allowing young black males to express their grievances, on their terms, about the wrongs they have suffered counters the powerlessness and alienation they feel resulting from the exclusion and marginalization they encounter in schools and society (Duncan, 2002). For this reason, I entitled my dissertation study *Let Them Speak Their Peace*. It is worth restating that it also provides those who have done wrong the opportunity to see the world through the eyes of adolescent black males so that they may begin to redress the conditions of marginalization and exclusion that constitute their schooling experiences.

CRT counter-stories privilege the narratives of marginalized black males as a method to expose and disrupt the conditions attendant to the oppression and domination that they

experience. Furthermore, allowing their voices to be heard provides black males a certain level of healing, because the stories that people tell have a way of *taking care of them* (Solorzano & Yosso, 2000). A level of *peace* comes from being heard and understood. Often a disrespected, devalued, and angry black male simply wants to be heard and validated for his humanity. Based upon my own experiences as a black man who is also a father, teacher, mentor, and former student; this statement is spot-on. Black male students often just need someone to truly listen to them.

Counter-storytelling is a way to give voice to the voiceless. It is a way to *name one's own reality* (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001), which provides members of out-groups a vehicle for psychic self-preservation (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Members of marginalized groups often suffer from self-condemnation because they internalize the stereotypical images that certain elements of society have constructed around those minorities in order to maintain their own power (Delgado, 1995; Taylor, 2005). According to Delgado, storytelling is a kind of medicine to heal the wounds caused by racial oppression. Telling the story of one's own condition leads to realizing how one came to be oppressed and subjugated and allows one to stop the self-infliction of mental violence (Delgado, 1995). Oppression can be rationalized in stock stories (dominant meta-narratives); however, counter-stories by people of color can catalyze the necessary cognitive conflict to jar *dysconscious* or *internalized racism* (Delgado, 1995). Internalized racism is manifest in the determining of whiteness as valuable or superior and the simultaneous acceptance of blackness as invaluable or inferior, creating a schism within the black psyche (DeCuir-Gunby, 2006; Taylor, 2005). Counter-stories serve to heal and transform and are "a first step on the road to justice" (DeCuir-Gunby, 2006, p. 20). The exchange of

stories from teller to listener also helps overcome ethnocentrism and the dysconscious conviction of viewing the world in one way (DeCuir-Gunby, 2006).

A CRT examination of how black males construct racial, academic, and masculine identities while making meaning of schooling experiences (experiences largely characterized by failure) requires solicitation of their counter-stories. Counter-story telling within CRT in education creates space for a shift to occur in our orientation toward the schooling of black males, precisely because it affords them the opportunity to name their own adolescent realities, while challenging any dominant narrative that is inconsistent with their stories. The voices of black males are required for a complete analysis of the educational system.

Much can be gleaned from the narratives of adult black males speaking retrospectively about their adolescent social and schooling experiences. Listening to these experiences will provide much needed direction for educational practice and programming, while healing the wounds caused by marginalization and exclusion. However, it is important to consider that there is no monolithic adolescent black male experience to inform educational practice and programming. Instead, the variation within this population and the stories these men tell challenge any notion of a single *differend* between dominant sociocultural discourses and adolescent black male experiences. Nonetheless, these *differend* insights reveal myriad ways that adolescent black males resist and systematically work against imposed and ascribed identities, as well as ways they embrace, accept, or simply wither under the weight of imposed identities. How each individual negotiates this process is an essential contribution of this study.

3.0 REVIEW OF RELATED RESEARCH

What we focus on we create more of. How we go about studying something will impact what we see. (Byrnes, as cited in Beckles, 2008, p. 190)

Claude Steele's (2010) research on stereotypes and identity reveals that the trend of minority underperformance in higher education involves more than just weaker skills. Stereotypes based on race, gender, age, class, or any other cultural classification deeply impact how we think about ourselves, our abilities, and the abilities of others (Steele, 2010). Steele (2010) indicates that the experience of *stereotype threat* can profoundly undermine performance, cause emotional and physiological reactions, and affect our life choices. In this review of relevant literature, I explore other explanations into the underperformance of adolescent black males in K-12 schools. Specifically, I focus on the influence of deficit discourse and pejorative stereotypes about black males on adolescent black male students as well as the school community at large.

3.1 DEFICIT FRAMING ON PERCEPTION, POLICY, AND PRACTICE

Notwithstanding images of President Obama and the rare black male portrayed positively by the media,⁷ black males in the United States have generally been derided for a supposed penchant for violence (Wilson, 1991), lack of motivation (Duncan, 2002), and unhealthy dependencies (Duncan, 2002) that run contrary to the American ethos of rugged individualism, meritocracy, and competition (Crenshaw, 1995; West, 1993). Crenshaw argues that this American ethos is undergirded by a hegemonic system of white supremacy in which a *false meritocracy* actually

⁷ Apart from the glut of athletes and entertainers who are routinely celebrated by the media.

exists. This false meritocracy, where rights and opportunities have been conferred and withheld almost exclusively based on race (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004), has historically been unkind and unforgiving to black males who have struggled mightily in almost every domain of life. These struggles perpetuate the aforementioned derisions.

Regarding stereotypes, Johns (2007) challenges the perpetuation of the alleged maladaptive nature of black boys and men who are frequently labeled as immoral, lazy, violent, mentally deficient, and criminal, while simultaneously being exoticized as supernatural athletes and sexual icons. According to Johns, these pernicious stereotypes were fashioned and codified prior to and during a societal shift upon the collapse of the American institution of slavery, as the lines of social identity became blurred because of emancipation (Johns, 2007). These stereotypes were designed to strip enslaved Africans of their humanity and justify slavery. Whiteness and maleness were categorically constructed as pure and superior, while blackness and maleness were categorized as evil, decadent and inferior (Johns, 2007; Taylor, 2005).

Unfortunately, these stereotypes still exist in American society. Consequently, when black males underperform in public schools, practitioners, policy makers, social scientists, and even black males themselves tend to view it as a function of their own social, cultural, or intellectual deficiencies. Instead, Duncan (2002) argues that this pervasive underperformance should be viewed as, “a manifestation of the racial politics that are intrinsic, even vital, to the day-to-day functions of U.S. society and social institutions such as schools” (p. 131). This *blame-the-victim* ideology is perpetuated by the proliferation and circulation of negative stereotypical images and deficit discourse about black males in the United States and abroad.

Deficit perspectives also frame the way social scientists approach racial educational disparities. According to Ladson-Billings (2007), the deficit language associated with *achievement gap* discourse locates the problem within black male students who lag behind and need to “catch up” at the expense of a more critical orientation toward the schooling and social barriers that impede success (p. 317). Instead of describing the racial educational disparities that exist in U.S. schools as a “racial achievement gap,” Ladson-Billings argues that the discourse within educational research should focus on the tremendous “education debt” that the United States has amassed on the backs of poor people of color and their subsequent generations (p. 317). Framing the academic struggles and diminished life chances of black male students as a call to double-down on a tremendous *education debt* (Ladson-Billings, 2007) instead of closing an achievement gap, situates the discourse in examinations and critiques of broken systems, not broken black boys. Critical race theorists in education argue that the plight of black male students in schools is a by-product of this *education debt*. According to Ladson-Billings, this *education debt* has accrued because of long-standing gaps in educational funding, (extra)curricular opportunities, health, employment, and housing between schools/communities of color and their white counterparts. Ladson-Billings posits that the *savage inequalities* (Kozol, 1992) between the kind of schooling made available to poor communities of color and white communities should be the focus of educational reform and reformers, not the predictable racial disparities in achievement outcomes.

The increasingly punitive and exclusionary nature of the schooling of young black males is quite peculiar when one considers the magnitude of extant literature focused directly on ameliorating their academic performance (Duncan, 2002; Ferguson, 2000; Howard, 2008; Jones, 2008; Noguera, 2003). Given the spate of educational research and scholarship on the struggles

of black males in U.S. schools, it seems that educators would be well informed about best practices for academic achievement. As the quotation at the beginning of this chapter suggests, the continued underachievement of adolescent black males calls into question what educational researchers are focusing on and how practitioners and policy makers are using this research.

Much of what educators and the public believe about the schooling experiences of black males is molded by media-driven conversations that speak to the bleak prospects for positive educational outcomes (Matthews & Williams, 2007). Commentaries that feature such terms as “plight,” “endangered species,” “at risk,” “lost generation,” and “victims” (Matthews & Williams, 2007, p. 188); and statistically inaccurate statements such as, “There are more black men in jail than in college” (Toldson & Janks, 2011, n.p.), paint a picture of deep despair. Unfortunately, these commentaries are largely supported by evidence of the persistent racial educational disparities that characterize black male schooling. However, the nature of this public diatribe has a deleterious impact on black male self-perception and attitude toward schooling. Although the impact of these commentaries and methods for negotiating them vary between individuals, they largely serve to reinforce victim status upon black males (Matthews & Williams, 2007), foster limited notions of masculinity (Matthews & Williams, 2007), perpetuate further marginalization and exclusion in schools (Duncan, 2002), and diminish their sense of academic self-efficacy (Johns, 2007). Due to a poor self-concept and negative attitudes toward schooling Noguera (2003) observed, “Black males often adopt behaviors that make them complicit in their own failure” (p. 437). Unfortunately, black males may not merely be passive victims but also active agents in their own educational demise (Noguera, 2003).

Notions of manhood for adolescent black males have proved problematic as well (Matthews & Williams, 2007). The poor self-concept that inhibits the potential of many young

black men is further exacerbated by the lack of positive male role models in their communities (Edelman, 2007). With a lack of positive male role models, many adolescent black males internalize negative images of manhood that are broadcast by the media and exist on the street corners of their communities. Equipping adolescent black males with positive, culturally centered, multidimensional images of black manhood (Matthews & Williams, 2007) to call upon as they construct identities mitigates the impact of self-doubt stemming from incessant exposure to and internalization of negative images of black masculinity (Akbar, 1991).

The quotation selected to open this chapter raises a red flag for those who would use deficit-oriented educational research and/or deficit-oriented socio-cultural discourses concerning adolescent black males to frame their approach toward serving this population. Based upon an overreliance on media-driven conversations and educational research about black males that catalogues deficits, it appears that many misinformed policy makers and analysts may be committing *Type III* errors in which the boundaries of the problem are inaccurately approximated and the wrong problems are solved (Dunn, 1997). Consequently, legislation is passed and funds are allocated for programming that has been largely ineffective. Dunn contends one must first accurately estimate the boundaries of the problem, beginning with the understanding that policy problems are complex. Deconstructing that complexity lies with the people for whom the issue is a problem (Dunn, 1997).

This popular notion of black male malfeasance and deficiency is representative of the prevailing lens through which educators design and evaluate programs and practices that specifically target black males (Matthews & Williams, 2007). This ideology renders many educational initiatives incapable of redressing the toxic effects of systemic racism on black male students' education (Singleton & Linton, 2006). Duncan (2002) suggests that most well

intentioned educational scholarship, informed by this *black-male-deficit ideology*, may inadvertently reinforce the marginalization and exclusion of the black male in schools. The kind of schooling that this perspective authorizes operates from a flawed *problem-solving orientation* (Duncan, 2002), which situates deficiency within the failing student instead of the educational structure (Ladson-Billings, 2007). Thus, the student needs to be fixed, not the system.

Racialized educational discourse about black males, emanating from this type of scholarship, can be *offensive* and counterproductive but may go unidentified and unchallenged because it is situated in seemingly objective social language (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Those who employ these discourses are typically insulated from accusations of racism (Duncan, 2002). Due to the reification of negative stereotypes that present black males as a *strange other* (Duncan, 2002), their condition of marginalization and exclusion is normalized by the majority. This majority may view their plight as neither new nor particularly interesting and mostly of their own doing; thus, there is no real cause for concern (Duncan, 2002). Howard (2008) argues that the pervasive failure of black males in schools has become *business as usual*.

3.2 ADOLESCENT BLACK MALE IDENTITY AND SCHOOLING

In reviewing literature specifically on black male identity and schooling, several themes cut across the studies. First, black adolescent racial identity is fluid and complex, so it should be viewed in context (Duncan & McCoy, 2007). This notion was introduced in the previous chapter in the section on *respectability and racial identity*. More nuanced conceptions of black racial identity are required to fully comprehend the complexity and fluidity of its construction (Nasir, McLaughlin, & Amina, 2009). Second, the prevailing negative sociocultural discourse and

pejorative stereotypes about black males affect identity construction and increase their marginalization and exclusion in schools. Third, the absence of opportunities black male students have to describe their experiences in schools results in a form of *cultural imperialism* (Duncan, 2002) and powerlessness that negates the transformative potential of these counter-hegemonic narratives and further exacerbates marginalization and exclusion. Defined in this context, *cultural imperialism* occurs when members of subjugated groups are subject to “the universalization of a dominant group’s experience and culture, and its establishment as the norm” (Young, as cited in Duncan, 2002, p. 134). According to Duncan (2002) oppression occurs when adolescent black males are denied the opportunity to express themselves in their own terms and to be heard in socially recognized ways. Oppression also occurs in those cases when they are granted permission to speak, but their stories are incorporated into dominant narratives which are incommensurable with their own. Finally, adolescent black male anxiety, which is typically associated with persistent negative social and schooling experiences, along with the powerlessness associated with being dismissed and misunderstood, is pervasive and indicates that this population feels highly disrespected in schools and society (Leary, Brennan, & Briggs, 2005).

Making reference to the strength of identities being co-constructed and managed in the school context, Nasir et al. draw the distinction between strong notions of blackness that are related to street activity for low-achieving students and those of high-achieving students that equate academic achievement with blackness. Hucks (2008) also argues that the home culture and community with which a black student identifies has a significant influence on school performance and notions of blackness. As discussed earlier, even more problematic for black

males are European ideas of masculinity that constrain positive racial identity development (Matthews & Williams, 2007).

Hucks (2008) asserts that negative stereotypes hinder the academic performance of young black males who adopt a *cool* stance in school, which is often connected with mirroring media images of themselves. Johns (2007) posits that the *spoiled identities* resulting from pejorative images cast upon black males inhibit social and educational achievement. Furthermore, Stinson (2008) suggests that pervasive negative sociocultural discourses coupled with a scarcity of success stories about black male academic achievement collaborate to diminish self-perception and inhibit agency. Black male academic success is attributable to the degree they identify with academics; however, Hucks (2008) argues that many adolescent black males question if the academic environment of schools identifies with them.

A salient relationship between adolescent black male angst, typically associated with persistent negative social and schooling experiences, and attitudes about respect, indicate that this population, in principle, feels highly disrespected (Leary et al., 2005). Leary et al. argue that the importance of respect in African culture is reflected in black youth and is of particular importance to black males. Responses to disrespect (i.e., assaults on their family, character, or self-image) often result in violence as a form of retaliation when access to other forms of power are shut off. Many young black men adopt artificial symbols of dominance such as violence to reinforce cognitive distortions and unworkable images of respect and success. The respect that young black men feel promotes psychological wellness and prosocial identity construction; however, disrespect compromises their identities and typically is viewed as a threat to safety (Leary et al., 2005).

The counter-narratives in the literature also speak to black males' ability to accommodate, reconfigure, and/or resist the identities projected upon them as they negotiate these hegemonic sociocultural discourses (Stinson, 2008). In examining the experiences of academically successful black males, both Beckles (2008) and Stinson (2008) found that students who rejected notions of deficiency and did not feel disempowered were regularly able to identify goals and pathways toward success. According to Stinson (2008), the uncharacteristically *robust* academic identity acquired by each participant in his study was partly found in their unique understanding and negotiation of the sociocultural discourses surrounding U.S. society and black males. Consistent across each participant's counter-narrative was recognition of the permanent and endemic nature of race in U.S. society. As an act of defiance (rather than submission) each participant perceived himself as a *discursive formation* (self-determining and empowered individual) who could, and did accommodate, reconfigure, or resist hegemonic sociocultural discourses (Stinson, 2008). For instance, revealed in my data were respondents' who rejected notions of black male intellectual deficiency and malfeasance during adolescence. In fact, one respondent found personal gratification in challenging what he perceived as unfair and harsh treatment of the black males in his middle school. He perceived this treatment to be a manifestation of the pejorative stereotypical beliefs of black males held by white teachers and administrators in the school. Clearly, this respondent rejected notions of black male deficiency and did not feel disempowered. Instead, he defined himself through demonstrations of resistance. He felt compelled and empowered to challenge authority figures that held and acted on negative beliefs about black males. This resistance, in no small part, defined this young man's identity and influenced many of the choices he made during adolescence and beyond.

Vital to the academic success of black male students are educators who recognize the links between racial and academic identity construction and educational outcomes for this population (Nasir et al., 2009). According to Nasir et al., the contextual complexity and fluidity of racial and academic identity construction and management for adolescent black males requires a more sophisticated conception of how these identities are developed. The varying strengths of identities that are neither self-evident nor distinct call for a more nuanced approach to conceptualizing identity construction (Nasir et al., 2009). Moreover, the harmful effect that prevailing negative sociocultural discourses and accompanying stereotypes have on black male academic achievement and their sense of self-worth, have fallen well beneath the radar as a determinant for educational failure (Beckles, 2008).

By rejecting the negative language in public discourse that catalogues deficits and by paying closer attention to examples of how young black men achieve success while overcoming historical, societal, and institutional barriers, may help educators develop more relevant and successful programs to build the academic self-efficacy of black male students (Matthews & Williams, 2007). These success stories provide models for educators and black male students themselves, of individuals who developed positive racial, masculine, and academic identities that engendered greater academic self-efficacy and better educational outcomes. From my experience as a teacher, mentor, and father, the importance of positive identity development for adolescent black males cannot be overstated.

3.3 BEYOND LOVE

Recent ethnographic research on adolescent black male experience in urban schools has produced compelling narratives that speak to a disconnection between the way this population experiences schooling and the stories others have to tell about these experiences. In order to examine the academic and social lives of black male students, Duncan (2002) conducted an ethnographic study to find the different stories students, teachers, and administrators use to explain the marginalization and exclusion black males often experience in schools. Duncan's study offers narratives that provide a greater understanding of the unique circumstances facing black males in our society and how these same societal experiences are played out in schools. More specifically, his study analyzed ways in which the schooling system institutionalized practices that not only marginalized but also criminalized adolescent black males.

Using critical race theory (CRT) as the paradigmatic lens, Duncan's (2002) study challenged the standard education story that explains the plight of young black male students as persistent and troublesome, but random, outcomes of a reasonably fair aracial system. In this critical race ethnography, Duncan reveals a tacit level of understanding black male students had of the hidden culture of exclusion and competition in a school cast as a sanctuary of caring and community. The narratives are replete with insights about the pervasive stereotypes that inform non-black peers' and teachers' perceptions of black male students. Duncan paradoxically concludes, "Perhaps it is true that young black men have no one but themselves to count on at the school" (p. 139) where there was an explicit mission to care for all students.

Duncan (2002) chose a magnet academy that was established in the 1970s in a mid-sized metropolitan setting in the Midwest. Approximately 300 students attended this racially balanced school with a national reputation for emphasizing a rigorous curriculum, producing exemplary

students, and providing a caring institutional culture. Duncan and his team of research assistants set out on a 2-year study. At first glance, the school represents excellence and equity; however, Duncan concluded the school held deep gender and color-coded disparities that marked the academic and social experiences of many students.

The title *Beyond Love* was chosen “to describe the condition of those who are marginalized to the extent that they are excluded from society’s economy and networks of care and expelled from useful participation in social life” (Duncan, 2002, p. 133). Duncan (2002) characterizes the black male student population studied as being *beyond love*. This operational definition was conceptualized by Delgado (1996) when describing the conditions of oppression that are intensified in a post-industrial economic order wrought with negative stereotypical images of marginalized groups. Delgado (1996) states,

The incessant characterization of blacks in demeaning terms means that the average member of society virtually equates any one of us with trouble. We come to be seen as absent fathers, welfare mothers, lazy office worker “quota queens”, and so on. Once this sets in we have little chance of appealing to the better natures of persons who hold this unconscious image of us. The image renders us “Other”. It means people simply do not think of us as individuals to whom love, respect, generosity, and friendliness are due. We are “beyond love”. (p. 51)

Other terms used to describe the lack of empathy that derives from the *beyond love* characterization, is what Anderson (1995) calls *ontological blackness* or the blackness that whiteness created. This explanatory term also articulates the notion that the black males interviewed and observed in this study were perceived as being fundamentally different from the

other students. *Ontological blackness* (Anderson, 1995) serves as a kind of adhesive that sticks many of the stereotypes about black males, held by dominant groups, to all black males. Anderson argues that these imposed ideas of *what is real* about black males and their experiences often renders them unknowable, as a *strange other* who is essentially *different* and ontologically *separate* from those considered to be normal. However, as the black male students challenge the dominant view of their experiences and find space to define themselves, it becomes clear that they constitute an *estranged* population instead of the *strange other*. They are *estranged* because, contrary to popular belief, these young men do value their education. Moreover, they interpret their social and academic experiences “as evidence of malevolence or neglect on the part of those in power, or to basic defects in the social system” (Delgado, 1995, p. 32), not to their own malfeasance or deficiency. Duncan (2002) makes use of Delgado’s concept of *beyond love* to describe the extent to which black males are often marginalized and *estranged* within the schools.

Ferguson (2000) offers further evidence that black males are both *beyond love* and criminalized in describing what she calls their *adultification*. As an interpretation derived from her ethnography study of elementary school children, Ferguson (2000) states,

As an *endangered species*, [Black children] are stuck in an obsolete stage of social evolution, unable to adapt to the present. As criminals, they are a threat to themselves, to each other, as well as to society in general. As Black children’s behavior is refracted through the lens of these two cultural images, it is “adultified.” By this, I mean their transgressions are made to take on a sinister, intentional, fully conscious tone that is stripped of any element of childish naiveté. (p. 83)

According to Ferguson (2000) common school practices, cultural differences between teachers and students, and underlying messages of black male deviance and deficiency, set black boys up for school failure. She also observed “It is my contention that this diminished motivation to identify [oneself] as a ‘scholar’ is a consequence of the inhospitable culture of school that African American children encounter, rather than a consequence of peer pressure” (Ferguson, 2000, p. 204). When *adultification* of school-aged black males occurs, teachers view them as predators [criminals] conjuring up images of violence, decadence, and mayhem. Ferguson (2000) goes on to describe the *normalizing judgments* that inform teacher practices as she claims,

African American boys are not accorded the masculine dispensation of being “naturally” naughty. Instead, the school reads their expression and display of masculine naughtiness as a sign of an inherent, vicious, insubordinate nature that as a threat to order must be controlled (p. 86).

Similar to Ferguson’s (2000) analysis, Duncan (2002) contends that the intransigence of racist stereotypes held by the nonblack students and teachers at the school he studied undermined the ability of the black male students to excel academically. The beliefs fostered by the embracement of these racist stereotypes created an inhospitable climate that “undoubtedly had an impact on their [black males] academic achievement at the school” (Duncan, 2002, p. 140). Using the narratives of black male students to research, the reasons for their marginalization within a school lauded for its equity and excellence, Duncan and his team unveiled a more authentic culture of exclusion and competition that was hidden from everyone but the black males themselves.

When I juxtapose my own experiences as a student (many years ago), father, mentor, and educator, with what this body of literature tells us about adolescent black males, I am disheartened. The literature speaks to a focus on *deficits* and *black-male-deficit ideologies* that inform the way practitioners, educational researchers and policy makers approach their schooling. The literature also speaks to the *adultification* of behaviors of black boys, which position them *beyond love* in schools. We learn about narrow and unsophisticated views of adolescent black male racial and masculine identity that are constrained by notions of *respectability*. We also learn about an unremitting sense of disrespect and disregard experienced by black males in schools and society, and the effect it has on their psychological and emotional well-being. The literature tells us about the negative consequences of pejorative stereotypes on adolescent black male self-perception as well as the perception others hold of them. Finally, the literature reveals a pervasive muting and dismissing of their *voice* on issues concerning them.

I am disheartened because the literature resonates with my own experiences. Ubiquitous negative social and schooling experiences for adolescent black males often present significant barriers to the construction of identities that would serve as protective mechanisms for academic engagement and achievement. I have seen the toll that pervasive negative experiences take on adolescent black male psychological, emotional and physical well-being, as well as the identities they construct. I too, struggled to overcome an adolescent identity that was more of a risk factor than a protective mechanism for academic achievement. Life, at times, can be overwhelming. Imagine trying to take a drink of water from a fire hose on full blast. This is what life can be like for young black men. Far too many adolescent black males are drinking life through a fire hose. My exploration into the meaning that adolescent black males make from such experiences reveals the profound effect they have on identity, choices, and life and educational outcomes.

4.0 RESEARCH DESIGN

My inquiry into the identity construction process for adolescent black males in schools is situated within a larger personal and professional commitment to bring the voice of this population in from the margins. I do this because I am looking for something. I want to know what black men in Pittsburgh have to say about the impact that racialized and negative social and schooling experiences had on their self-perception and the choices emanating from that self-concept. This is a discovery-based inquiry, not a hypothesis testing exercise. This counter-story work is descriptive, interpretive, and generative. To that end, I believe the methodology chosen to examine the identity construction and meaning-making processes of adolescent black males through the retrospective recollection of their adult selves, fits this exploratory study. In this chapter, I describe the elements of my research design.

4.1 RETROSPECTIVE RECALL

Although my ultimate objective is to better understand the way adolescent black males make meaning of their schooling experiences, this study relies upon qualitative data from in-depth interviews with adult black males speaking retrospectively about their social and schooling experiences as adolescents growing up in Pittsburgh. I chose to interview adult black males largely because adolescent males express limited awareness of the social and cultural forces at play around them while they are in school (Malaby, 2005). Malaby suggests, “Since young males

are often unaware of their locations within systems and may only gain an understanding of this lack of awareness over time, it is worthwhile to look at the recollections of adult men and their experiences with schooling” (pp. 5-6). While young men gain some understanding of the various cultural and institutional powers enacted within schools directly after graduation (Malaby, 2005), maturation has not allowed for the nuanced and profound perspective on their own identity development that I seek.

According to Tatum (1997), “Black kids know how to be black” because they have absorbed and reflect the stereotypical images of black youth from popular culture in their self-presentation (p. 60). However, black youth operate from a very limited definition of what it means to be black because of adherence to cultural stereotypes (Tatum, 1997). Although cultural stereotypes beleaguer black men as well, I believe we are more aware of the sociocultural, historical, and political roots of these misconceptions and the factors that were determinants in our life trajectories. As the men interviewed for this study consider the notions of masculinity that informed their adolescent self-concept and the racialized nature of that process, maturity affords them a greater capacity to analyze and assess the impact of those factors on their lives—a greater capacity than would be the case if they were asked to do this during late adolescence or early adulthood. The *conscious reckonings* of these black men do not reveal every determining factor for their social and schooling choices, but they do provide more nuanced and sophisticated explanations for those choices. Because of this understanding, I believe black men hold a great deal of wisdom from lived experience to impart to adolescent black males, their caregivers, community leaders, and educators.

4.2 SELF-DECLARATION

Sometimes the way I choose to identify myself makes it difficult for you to hear me.

~Audre Lorde(2000, n.p.)

More comprehensive and dynamic views of racial and masculine identity development that reject the suppression of black youth subjectivities may increase the explanatory power of educational research and loosen the stranglehold that *respectability* and limited definitions of masculinity have on individuals, institutions, and society (Duncan & McCoy, 2007; Matthews & Williams, 2007). Trimble et al. (2003) propose that racial identity is a construct defined by characteristics that are generally regulated by objectifying social and political forces. Racial identities are formed as individuals respond, subjectively, to those social and political forces that serve to objectify them. Racial identity, then, is constructed individually based upon the interplay between one's perception of self, which is historically contingent and contextually mediated, and those socio-cultural/political forces that supposedly define them.

Ideally, racial and ethnic identities would be forms of self-determination that subjects have the opportunity to express through *self-declaration* (Trimble et al., 2003) instead of imposed designations that do not necessarily define one's racial, cultural, or ethnic characteristics. Unfortunately, because racial identity models over-emphasize contextual factors at the expense of any notion of human agency, self-determination has been largely displaced in the construction of the black adolescent self (Duncan & McCoy, 2007) and replaced with imposed identity designations. In my research, I sought uncensored and authentic narratives of adolescent black males through the retrospective recollections of their adult selves. Of course, these recollections were filtered through the lens of adult understanding, so the narratives reflected more of an interpretive process instead of a comprehensive and accurate account of

events. Through these reflections, I gained a deeper understanding of the meaning and impact that the interplay between the fluid and multi-layered adolescent perception of self and forces that may have imposed racialized notions of masculinity had on the men interviewed.

Moreover, this research was intended to investigate the ways watershed moments and contexts such as families, communities, and schools affect identity and life outcomes. The most authentic declarations of racial and masculine identity emerged from reflections on that interplay between the respondents' perceptions of self and the socio-cultural forces and socially defined characteristics of identity embedded in their realities. My interest lied in the ways adult black males made meaning of that interplay during adolescence and the identities they constructed as a result.

In order to avoid the undermining effects of the identity-morality nexus associated with *respectability* and the imposition of sociocultural identity designations, this study did not rely on formal racial identity stage models. Instead, by *lifting the censure of black youth voice* (Duncan & McCoy, 2007), this study provided affirming public space for black males to *name their own reality* (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001) and *speak their piece* (Duncan, 2002) regarding the social and academic choices they made, as well as the racial and masculine identities they constructed during adolescence. My intention was to provide black males affirming public space to speak candidly about choices that may have been antisocial or incommensurable with academic achievement, but acts of survival, self-determination, resistance, or liberation, nonetheless. Therefore, oppositional or anti-social choices were not psychologized or pathologized as deviant because they are typically associated with underdevelopment on an identity stage model; instead, the respondents simply named and explained if, and to what extent, those choices were affected by racialized experiences and were significant determinants in their life trajectories.

Based upon their personal criteria for what it means to be a black man, the respondents for this study had the opportunity to declare the unique identities they constructed during adolescence. Because the naming of one's own reality entails having authorship over the terms of identification, each respondent named and defined their adolescent identities. Self-declaration also allows for ownership and recognition of the relationship between identities and life choices. I believe that self-authorship was empowering for these men as they were afforded the opportunity to tell their stories. The respondents co-constructed with me any descriptors used to name their realities or to categorize their declared identities. Respondents declared if their identities served as a risk factors or protective mechanisms for academic achievement. Respondents also declared whether their espoused identities promoted more pro-social or anti-social choices during adolescence.

Self-declaration (Trimble et al., 2003) is consistent with the empowerment and self-authorship found within the Counter Story Telling tenet of CRT. The naming of one's own reality retains interpretive control over the meanings made from lived experience within the speaker. The counter stories told by these men are their truths, which they have exclusive ownership over. The particular, contextual, and historical truth that each respondent spoke was his interpretation of reality, his *conscious reckoning* of the watershed moments in his life instead of some *transcendent, acontextual, universal story* (Delgado, 1995) of how adolescent black males experience life. Moreover, as each man told his adolescent *counter story* and made meaning of his experiences, he had an opportunity for psychic self-preservation and healing from the weight of dysconscious racism and the internalization of pejorative black male stereotypes (Delgado, 1995). Finally, because the voices of people of color are required for a complete analysis of the educational system (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006), *self-declarations* from black

males concerning their adolescent identities, further the epistemological and ontological shift that I believe is essential for educators to build better relationships with black males in schools.

4.3 BARBERSHOP SAMPLING

In the black community, the barbershop and the beauty salon have always been considered safe harbor for open and honest conversations about almost anything. This time-honored tradition has provided black people the opportunity to develop ideas and identities surrounding myriad societal and community issues. In 2009, actor and author Hill Harper released a book entitled *The Conversation* in which he solicited and chronicled the perspectives of black men and women on relationships. He gathered much of his data from unrestrained dialogue and interviews conducted in barbershops and beauty salons. In that same year, actor and comedian Chris Rock released the film *Good Hair*, in which he went to barbershops and beauty salons across America to solicit the perspectives of black men and women on the acceptable look of black women's hair in society (Rock, 2009). Rock focused on the historical underpinnings of black images of beauty, the politics, and economics of the black hair styling industry, and the contemporary sociocultural and economic implications of both.

Reverend Al Sharpton also puts the tradition of black barbershop discussion on display in his half-hour cable television talk show *Sharp Talk*. The activist and preacher reveals the secret forum that black males have relied on for years to tackle the important cultural, political, and economic issues of the day. Pop culture documentary films, books on the *Essence*⁸ book club recommended reading list, and cable television talk shows are not the only places to find

⁸ *Essence* is a cultural magazine aimed at black women that seeks to empower the lives of black people. The book club highlights books that fit in with the magazine's mission. Visit <http://www.essence.com/>

barbershop and beauty salon discourse. In academia, a number of studies have documented how the barbershop, as a social institution, is uniquely equipped and positioned to afford men the space for unfiltered dialogue about personal and social issues (Alexander, 2003; Bragg, 2011; Friedman, 2001; Releford, Frencher, & Yancey, 2010).

Bragg (2011) describes how appealing and safe the black barbershop is for addressing the special challenges that black men face. Bragg observed that, "The black barbershop has been a place where African American men could communicate without concern of judgement" (p. 2). Alexander (2003) describes the black barbershop as a cultural center where ideas are comfortably exchanged among men and deliberation over important social and community issues takes place. According to Alexander, the historical importance and bearing of the black barbershop in the lives of black men and boys cannot be overstated. Alexander (2003) argues that the black barbershop has been and continues to be a space that is essential for the validation and nurturing of black masculinity while also providing safe harbor for authentic *insider* conversations concerning issues impacting the black community.

Typically, these spaces are gender segregated, so men and women feel comfortable discussing family and relationship issues that would generally be more problematic in the company of the opposite sex. However, black men and women understand that when they enter the space of the other (i.e., black men in the beauty salon or black women in the barbershop), the gloves are off and conversations take place in their most authentic and unabashed form, regardless of the presence of the opposite sex. The same holds true for racialized, sociocultural, political, and economic discussions in the presence of whites or members of other dominant groups. If you are in the black barbershop, you are going to hear it "straight up with no chaser", whether you like it or not!

Unlike other settings, black males do not feel compelled to bite their tongues in the barbershop. They do not feel that their voices are muted or co-opted into some dominant narrative that supposedly explains their reality. Franklin (1999) argues that many black men suffer from a psychological phenomenon described as an *invisibility syndrome* where they feel their personal identity, abilities, and perspectives are undermined by racism in myriad interpersonal circumstances within U.S. society. Few public spaces offer the same reception for the hopes, thoughts, fears, and concerns of black men.

I have heard the barbershop called “the black man’s sanctuary” and a place where you can get a “nick-name that sticks with you” as a unique identifier, that situates you within the culture of that particular shop. This identifier stamps the inimitable voice of a sole black man, rendering him knowable in the barbershop in ways U.S. society generally dismisses and denies him. My experience in the black barbershop speaks to the notion that “everyone is a celebrity”, so fame and “long money” yield greater scrutiny and heightened levels of accountability, instead of preferential treatment. It is a place where respect is earned and a black man can truly feel like a man.

The black barbershop is also a marketplace where items from street vendors are bought and sold. Community members come to talk, to riff on the latest news from the sports world, political world, or community. Many black men do not only come to the barbershop for a haircut. Often they come to play chess, watch television, listen to music, or just decompress after, or in the midst of, a long day in a hostile society. The barbershop is a training ground for young black boys and adolescents who listen, watch, and learn from the discussions of elders about life during the ritual act of hair cutting (Alexander, 2003).

As a longtime patron of my community barbershop and a 25-year client of my particular barber, I have developed relationships with all of the barbers and the vast majority of the clients who patronize the shop. As an educator and former amateur boxer, when I enter my barbershop typically I find myself engaging in conversations surrounding social, political, and sports related events and issues. Many of these conversations are sidebar, mundane, and light-hearted, as issues of little social, cultural, political, or economic significance are discussed. Still other conversations captivate the entire shop as hot-button societal problems affecting the black community are considered. Opinions and perspectives offered may be challenged and/or affirmed, so there is some risk involved in sharing on the barbershop floor. What is understood is that entering a black barbershop conversation means you are willing to take that risk.

Some of the most enlightening and informative conversations I have ever had took place in intimate dialogue with my barber and friend, as I sat in his chair, or in the group dialogic and sometimes contentious space of the open barbershop forum. In early adulthood, I cut my teeth as a sociocultural theorist, debater, and philosopher in the barbershop long before I took my first graduate course. As I reflect upon my coming of age in the barbershop, my instructors had no credentials outside of the wisdom gained from living as a black man in a hostile society, but their tutelage was invaluable for my development. For example, an older man in the barbershop once told me that one could *buy* wisdom or *borrow* it. Those who *borrow* wisdom learn from the experiences of others, sparing themselves any heartache and regret. Those who *buy* it, learn from their *own* lived experience. Bought wisdom is indeed *owned* for life, because no matter how painful the lived experiences may have been, they are yours. He concluded that, “Wisdom is wisdom no matter how it comes, but a lifetime of regret can be avoided by simply listening to

and learning from the experiences of others”. Nuggets like this have stayed with me throughout my life, ordering my steps along the way.

However, as with any cultural institution, not all sites are the same. There are black barbershops that have the aforementioned characteristics, while there are others that foster a more street bravado where you do not find the same discourse surrounding cultural, political, and economic issues. These sites typically have a younger patronage with a different collective attitude and an atmosphere that engender different conversations than those you might find in an older black barbershop like my own. My barbershop is more consistent with those described in the narrative above. I think it is important to understand that conversations in younger barbershops are no less authentic, simply different. Moreover, not only do generational gaps exist between barbershops; regional differences exist as well. You will not find the same culture or discourse in a barbershop in Miami, as you will in Pittsburgh.

As suggested by the title of this section, I use *barbershop sampling* as a metaphor to describe the purposeful solicitation of authentic and uninhibited adult black male stories and the wisdom gleaned from their adolescent experiences. I employed this technique literally, as I went to my barbershop to begin the recruitment process for my interviews, but also as a metaphor to describe the emphasis and focus on providing and protecting *safe harbor* for open and honest dialogue with black men about their adolescent social and schooling experiences. Black men have something to say about the current state of young black males in schools. They also have a desire to tell their stories. Through this study, I believe I captured some of the same wisdom that proved invaluable for my personal development. My desire to do a narrative study of adult black male retrospective recollections from adolescence was born out of the numerous barbershop conversations I have had. I drew my sample from this fertile pool of experience and insight.

I shared the purpose, focus, and general research design of my study with the owner, barbers, and several patrons. The responses from the men were supportive, affirming, and inquisitive. They wanted to participate and learn more. I chose several men who fell within my sample age range and assured those who did not that I would be continuing this line of inquiry beyond this particular study to include men of different ages later on. I conferred with the men in the barbershop for referrals to other men I did not know who they thought had unique stories to tell. This proved valuable for the maximum variation I sought from my sample. The conversations with the men outside of my sample age range also proved valuable in molding my thinking toward this study. For example, a younger barber discussed the rise in gangs in Pittsburgh during his adolescence and the impact that had on his identity and choices. This helped me to understand the relative influence of gangs on black male adolescent identity across generations, which informed the analysis of interview data.

As the primary research instrument and principal investigator, I conducted in-depth, semistructured, formal and informal interviews with 10 black males ranging from ages 38 to 42. I chose this age range primarily because of the balance of maturity and passion that most black men of this age possess. There is no empirical evidence, that I am aware of, to support this assertion; however, it has been my experience that most black men in this age range are mature enough to engender even-handedness, fair-mindedness, contemplativeness, and wisdom; yet vibrant enough to engage in political, social, and community activism when called upon. These are middle-aged men with rich lived experience whose lives have begun to settle just enough to allow for reflection without the complacency that often comes from the fatigue of living as a black man in a society that can be quite hostile toward his very existence. Again, it has been my experience that black men younger than this age range are generally not quite as reflective, while

older black men can be very battle fatigued and worn down. Additionally, I am within this age range, so I will be familiar with more of the conditions and contexts that these men have experienced than I would have been otherwise.

Respondents are native Pittsburghers who formerly attended at least one Pittsburgh public high school. The adult sample includes 10 black males representing diverse backgrounds and current stations in life, as well as varying levels of academic engagement and achievement during adolescence. Additionally, every attempt was made to have as many Pittsburgh public high schools as possible represented in this sample so that variation of schooling experiences was maximized. This variety of contexts and experiences yields the richness and diversity within and among the stories that I seek. Although each narrative has its own unique social and schooling milieu, I believe they reveal many similar and recurring racialized experiences for adolescent black males that were consistent and pervasive in Pittsburgh during the mid to late 1980's. Having a variety of schools and personal stories as the backdrop for similar racialized experiences elucidates the more systemic and institutional nature of the problems that black males face in schools.

Using *criterion*, *maximum variation*, *critical case*, and *snowball sampling* techniques (Patton, 2002) as a component of my strategy of *barbershop sampling*, I identified those men who I believed yielded the greatest insights for answering my research questions. *Criterion samples* (Patton, 2002) include individuals who fit particular predetermined criteria. *Criterion sampling* calls for the identification of black men who are ages 38–42, native Pittsburghers, and attended at least one Pittsburgh public high school.

According to Patton (2002), individuals with different perspectives on the same phenomenon foster *maximum variation*. Precisely because there is no monolithic adolescent

black male experience, it is imperative to gain diverse perspectives on racialized occurrences and interactions within schools and society. Identifying black male respondents with different worldviews (e.g., concerning issues of race, politics, economics, religion, and culture) brought forth narratives that spanned this broad spectrum.

In order to maximize the chances of diversity within my sample, respondents were chosen who represented different communities and schools within the Pittsburgh public school system. To understand better the impact of identity on choices and life trajectories, my sample included men whose choices afforded them a high level of success professionally, economically, educationally, and socially alongside men who struggled in these domains (e.g., felony records, unemployment, poverty, and relationship and familial distress). Patton's *snowball sampling* was also used as respondents helped to identify other men who would be good to interview. This overall strategy provided me with the diversity I desired. Had I found difficulty maximizing diversity within my sample, I was prepared to use *critical case sampling* (Patton, 2002), in which individuals who represent dramatic examples of, or are of critical importance to, my line of inquiry would have been used. In order to protect and respect the privacy of all respondents, particularly those with criminal records, pseudonyms were used for identification of each respondent throughout the study other than Malcolm. With his permission, his name has been used because it is so intimately tied to his identity. Figure 2 below charts all of the respondents interviewed for this study.

Table 1. Interview Tracking Chart

<u>Respondent Identifier</u> <i>Pseudonyms</i>	<u>Community Pseudonyms</u>	<u>High School Pseudonyms</u>	<u>Number of Interviews Conducted / Length of Interviews (Total Time in Hours)*</u>	<u>Post-Secondary Educational Attainment</u>	<u>Non Schooling Adult Life Experiences / Stations</u>	<u>Family Status</u>
<i>Frantz</i>	Hometown	Bradley HS	3 / 3.5	Master's Degree	Lecturer/ Coach/ Greek Fraternity /Business Owner	Married, 3 Children (2 in home)
<i>*Malcolm (Actual Name)</i>	Rosewood	Highlands HS	3 / 3.5	Bachelor's Degree	Lecturer/ Educator / Mentor	Married, 2 Children & Stepson (1 in home)
Lance	Hoodtown	Warren HS	3 / 3.5	Associate's Degree	Respected Community Activist / Felon	Married, 2 Children
<i>Alan</i>	Capetown	Capetown HS	3 / 2.25	Bachelor's Degree	Educator / Coach	Single, Adult Son
<i>Ron</i>	Eastern Hts.	Andrews HS	3/ 2.5	Master's Degree	Successful Business owner	Married, 2 Children
<i>David</i>	Hometown	Scott HS	3 / 3.25	High School Diploma	Military / Coach/ Felon / Gravely Injured in Street Conflict / Son Murdered in Street Unsolved	Single, living with Significant Other and 1 Child
<i>Derrick</i>	Hometown	Scott HS	1 / 1.0	Master's Degree	Military / Community Activist/ Mentor	Single, 2 Adult Sons
<i>Walter</i>	Neverland	Davis HS	3 / 2.5	High School Diploma	Military / Barber/ Coach	Single, 4 Children
<i>Scott</i>	Oldtowne	Oldtowne HS	3 / 3.0	Bachelor's Degree	Foundation President	Married, 2 Children
<i>Jeff</i>	Neverland	Davis HS	1 / 1.25	High School Diploma	2 time Felon, Fitness Gym Manager	Single

As discussed in the following sections, reports crafted as profiles in the words of the participant, are the most consistent with the data-collection method used in this study. After comparing and contrasting all of my interview data, I chose the three stories that were most suitable for answering my research questions and constructing respondent profiles. In the following chapter, the reader meets the first three respondents from the chart above, Frantz, Malcolm, and Lance. I kept coming back to their stories as I read the others, seeing common threads embedded in moments of dilemma, conflict, revelation, and resilience, and in doing so, I knew that these were the stories I needed to tell. While the other narratives were not included in the report, they were also essential for my thinking about adolescent black male identity construction and its impact on academic achievement. Despite my choice to tell only Frantz, Malcolm, and Lance's stories, the other narratives are important, and they helped me to identify salient and recurring themes for analysis.

4.4 IN-DEPTH, PHENOMENOLOGICAL INTERVIEWING

I suspected there would be common racialized experiences across the stories these men had to tell; however, I was not necessarily testing any claim or hypothesis concerning the similarity in these experiences. Instead, I tried to learn more about the relationship between these black men's adolescent experiences, the identities they constructed based upon these experiences, and the effect these identities had on academic engagement, achievement, and life chances. This kind of inquiry derived from an interest in better understanding the meaning that adolescent black males make from their lived experiences. Seidman's (2006) structure for in-depth,

phenomenological interviewing proved a suitable method for this kind of inquiry. Seidman's model involves conducting three separate interviews with each participant.

This approach uses primarily open-ended questions that allow the interviewer to build upon and explore participant responses through follow up questions that probe for greater depth of understanding (Seidman, 2006). Ultimately, the goal of using this approach was to have the participants reconstruct their experiences within my line of inquiry (Seidman, 2006). Initially, three separate interviews were conducted with each participant to (a) establish the context of their experience, (b) reconstruct the details of their experience within that context, and (c) allow them to reflect on the meaning they made from those experiences (Seidman, 2006).

The first interview concentrated on *life history* and asked the men to tell as much as possible about themselves up through adolescence. During the first interview,⁹ I asked them to tell me as much as they felt comfortable sharing about their family, community, and school life during adolescence. I asked them to begin with their childhood years, to set the stage for reflecting on and talking about their adolescent experiences. I clarified that when I say adolescence, I was generally talking about ages 12-17, but if there were moments earlier that had a major impact on their identity, they should talk about those moments as well. I asked them to start with their nuclear family and the values they were taught concerning what it meant to be a black man; particularly, the role that the black men in their families played in molding their perspective of manhood. I asked about family traditions, extended family, and watershed moments growing up as a part of this family.

From there, I asked about the neighborhoods and communities they grew up in, specifically the connectedness of their family to the larger community. I asked about the racial makeup of their community growing up, and their awareness of the predominant socio-economic

⁹ See appendix B for the interview protocol

status of its members. I asked about the influence and presence of neighbors, community-based organizations, institutions, programs, and activities (i.e. YMCAs, recreation centers, banks, food markets, barbershops, and youth sports programs) on their lives. I asked about the men they looked up to in their communities, peer groups, the choosing of friends, and if they felt safe growing up. I asked about their level of exposure to resources, institutions, and activities outside of their community.

Concerning school, I asked if they valued education during early adolescence and to what extent their value families' valued education as well. I asked them what experiences led them to believe that education was either valued or devalued in their families. I asked what they remembered about teachers and classmates, what they liked and disliked about school, and how supportive their families were of their academics. I asked them about the influence that their fathers' and other black men (e.g. teachers, coaches, pastors, barbers, police officers, local business owners, neighbors, and extended family members) had on their level of academic engagement, achievement, and choices in school. I asked about their first exposure to race and racism in school and in the community, and how these experiences affected their perceptions of white people, their perception of self, and the perception they held of black males in general. Finally, I asked how they viewed their own academic and intellectual capacities during adolescence.

The second interview functioned as an opportunity to fill in any gaps from the first interview and inquire about experiences during late adolescence and early adulthood. Ideally, I hoped that the series of interviews for each respondent would be compelling and comprehensive enough to be crafted into a profile with a beginning, middle, and end. Therefore, the questions in the first interview focused primarily on the early years and the second on the later years of

adolescence in order to develop a chronology and sequence for each man's story. During the second interview, participants were asked to reconstruct the myriad *details of their lived experiences*.

I began by restating the most salient aspects of the first interview and asking for clarification on anything I did not understand. This allowed the men to fill in any gaps and provide the necessary details to reconstruct those years. From there I asked them to describe their experiences during the middle and high school years as I began to focus more on mid- to late- adolescent experiences, the identities they were constructing, and the direction they saw their lives going in based upon the choices they were making.

At this point, I asked them to reflect more deeply on how they saw themselves during these years and how to best define and describe the identity or identities they were constructing. I asked about both positive and negative social and schooling experiences and if they believed, adults in schools began to treat them differently because of these experiences. If so, how did this treatment make them feel about themselves? Did this treatment confirm or disrupt their burgeoning identity? I asked him about times when they believed they performed well during events and/or activities in the community, and if it gave them a sense of accomplishment and made them feel important. I asked about any experiences that made them feel insignificant, powerless, or worthless. I asked about the factors they perceived contributed to their choices and if racism may have played a role in their academic achievement or failure. If they did perceive racism to be an obstacle to their academic success at that time, I asked if they recalled rejecting it, accommodating it, reconfiguring it, or withering under its weight. Finally, I asked if they saw any connection between their self-perception during adolescence, the choices they made in school and in their communities and the impact those choices had on their life trajectories.

In the third and final interview, participants were asked to reflect upon the meaning they made from their experiences. The goal of the final interview was to discuss the intellectual and emotional connections between those experiences and the choices they made that brought them to their current life stations. Seidman (2006) describes the meaning making process of the third interview,

Making sense or making meaning requires that the participants look at how the factors in their lives interacted to bring them to their present situation. It also requires that they look at their present experience in detail and within the context in which it occurs. The combination of exploring the past to clarify the events that led participants to where they are now, and describing the concrete details of their present experience, establishes conditions for reflecting upon what they are now doing in their lives. (pp. 18–19)

This process actually began in the previous interview; however, the third interview was more of a dialogue than the previous two. I offered the visual aid shown in figure 2 below to begin the conversation. As discussed in the literature review, identity construction is a multifaceted and dynamic process that takes place on complicated individuals in complicated contexts. Although I did not want to oversimplify this process, the flow chart provided a visual representation of the relationships between experiences, identity, choices, and life trajectories that I was exploring in their stories. Using the visual aid for discussion and direction, I reminded the men of my research questions and that I was looking for something in their stories that would help me better understand those relationships. I reiterated that I was looking to discover and explore, instead of prove or disprove anything about the black male experience. Therefore, in asking questions that probed the boundaries of their identity construction process, any reflection

I offered from what I learned during interviews one and two was only to better understand or possibly challenge, but never to persuade or convince. By this time, the groundwork had been laid for very rich and authentic discussion. I introduced theories and concepts from the literature such as *differend*, *beyond love*, *internalized racism* and several of the tenets of CRT and asked the men if they saw the manifestation of these concepts in their lived adolescent experiences. I clearly voiced my concern about the possibility of imposing my own views or using some theory that may inadequately or inaccurately explain their experiences. The men assured me that they would not allow this to happen and in several cases, introducing these concepts initiated a desire to discuss beyond the scope of the interviews.

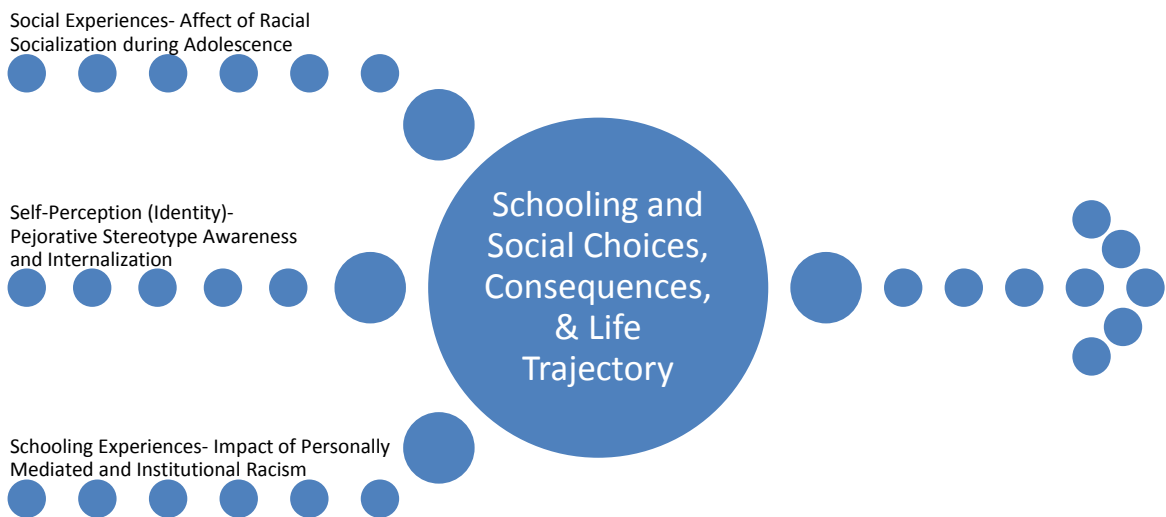


Figure 2. Experiences, Identity, Choices, Life Trajectory, Discussion Aid

Interviews were staggered to accommodate the personal schedules of each respondent and were conducted in an area of minimal traffic within their homes or other spaces where they felt comfortable sharing. Each interview session lasted between 60 and 75 minutes, usually totaling 3 to 3 and a half hours per respondent, although each interview was planned for an hour.

Personal notes recorded in a reflective journal were kept throughout the study. This data was utilized to chronicle my subjective responses throughout the study. I also debriefed and reflected upon my own experiences regularly with several trusted colleagues who are supportive of and committed to the academic integrity of the study.

I found it difficult to hold the men to the structure of the three interview series. Each of the respondents wanted to jump into the meaning-making and life-analysis process from the first interview. However, after reminding the participants of why it was important for them to resist the urge to interpret and make-meaning before we established the full context of their lived experiences, they were able to accommodate my request to adhere to the structure of the 3-step interview process. I also found keeping the interviews to an hour quite difficult. The men truly wanted to *speak their peace*. They really wanted to tell their stories.

4.5 ANALYSIS AND REPORTING

Given the emancipatory purposes and critical nature of this study, every effort was made to ensure that findings were solidly grounded in the data and not merely the byproduct of my own political agenda, sociocultural proclivities, and particular worldview. Hatch's (2002) *political* and *polyvocal* approaches to analyzing qualitative data provided a framework for thinking about, interpreting, and reporting findings from the counter-narratives. Hatch has reservations about using the term *political* to describe this kind of analysis because, to him, all research is political, involving the inductive thinking and personal interpretation of the researcher. I also have reservations about using the term *political* because of the potential complications arising from identifying my analytical approach as exclusively political. However, Hatch recommends using the steps in this approach "to provide a framework that builds in analytic integrity so that

findings are grounded in data while acknowledging the political nature of the real world and the research act” (p. 191). This framework served as a guide, not a lockstep plan. I tried and applied those steps that were of greatest utility and relevance to maintain analytical integrity throughout this process. Hatch’s steps include the following:

1. Reading the data for a sense of the whole, and reviewing entries previously recorded in research journals and/or bracketed in protocols.
2. Writing a self-reflexive statement explicating my ideological positioning and identifying ideological issues I see in the context under investigation.
3. Reading the data, marking places where issues related to my ideological concerns are evident.
4. Studying marked places in the data, then writing generalizations that represent potential relationships between my ideological concerns and the data.
5. Rereading the entire data set and coding the data based on my generalizations.
6. Deciding if my generalizations are supported by the data, and writing a draft summary.
7. Negotiating meanings with respondents, addressing issues of consciousness raising, emancipation, and resistance.
8. Writing a revised summary and identifying excerpts that support generalizations. (p. 192)

Steps 1 through 3 and Step 7 were especially beneficial for my analysis. Reflective journaling throughout the study ensured that I remained mindful of the potential relationships, which Hatch refers to in Step 4, between my ideological concerns and the data.

This study also solicits multiple voices telling multiple stories and speaking multiple truths that are local, historical, partial, and subjective. Listening to and interpreting multiple voices telling multiple stories requires an analytical approach that lends itself to working with such data. Hatch’s (2002) *polyvocal* analysis is a data-based approach that helped facilitate listening to multiple voices in the data so that I could tell multiple stories in my findings. Again,

the steps Hatch suggests, several of which overlap, were applied according to their utility and appropriateness as I analyzed the interview data. Hatch's steps include the following:

1. Reading the data for a sense of the whole.
2. Identifying all of the voices contributing to the data, including my own.
3. Reading the data, marking places where particular voices are heard.
4. Studying the data related to each voice, deciding which voices will be included in the report, and writing a narrative telling the story of each selected voice.
5. Reading the entire data set, searching for data that refine or alter my stories.
6. Wherever possible, taking the stories back to the respondents so that they can clarify, refine, or change their stories.
7. Write revised stories that represent each voice to be included. (p. 202)

Again, I used the most appropriate steps from both approaches throughout my analysis to identify salient themes, relationships, and meanings from the counter-narratives that offered answers to my research questions. Step 5, re-reading the data set for data that refined or altered the stories proved especially valuable. One reading or audio review of each interview set was definitely not enough. The second and third readings and/or reviews, usually brought forth things that made me rethink the respondent's full narrative relative to my research questions. As step 4 instructs, comparing each narrative helped me to confirm threads that ran across the stories, disconfirm similarities that I previously assumed existed, and decide which narratives to include in my report.

Outlying and disconfirming data that deviated markedly from the other narratives or my own ideological positionings, were accounted for so that a more complete story could be told. For example, several respondents rejected the notion that overt acts of racism levied by white teachers toward them had any real affect on their self-perception. In fact, these respondents believed that the social and psychological effect of fatherlessness, poverty, and peer pressure had

a much greater influence on their self-perception and subsequent choices than any racialized experience in school or society. These unanticipated findings were accounted for and are integral components of this collective story.

Data analysis did not conclude until my research questions were answered and findings could be organized into a coherent written report. My ideological positionings and perspectives on the sociopolitical issues related to this study were thoroughly and carefully identified and acknowledged for their potential influence over how I interviewed these men and how I analyzed the interview data. Although this study is more of an exploration than a hypothesis testing exercise, I did bring pre-conceived notions about these men's experiences into the study. The report clearly indicates what I thought going in compared to what I found coming out. Again, findings were shared and meanings were negotiated with the men to ensure that they reflected the experiences and perspectives of each and not merely my own interpretations.

Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Computer assisted qualitative data analysis software, such as NVivo8, was considered but not used as a repository for data and to assist in coding and content analysis. NVivo8 may have been beneficial in calculating the number of times particular words or phrases appeared in the data and displaying certain facets after coding that mark possible interrelationships. However, I didn't believe that this software was sufficient for analyzing the data at the high conceptual level that I sought. It proved to be more cumbersome and time consuming than useful. Therefore, after transcription, I relied on Hatch's (2002) *political* and *polyvocal* techniques to analyze, manage, and codify interview data.

In the following chapters, findings are reported as profiles in (counter)-narrative form. These results were expanded and theorized in what Van Maanen (1988) describes as *critical tale* and *jointly told tale* form. Hatch (2002) states that "*critical tales* use data excerpts to take the

reader inside the experiences of oppressed individuals or groups while making the case that the social, political, and economic conditions in which those experiences play out are stacked against those being oppressed” (p. 235). Findings are grounded in the data while situated within a transformative and emancipatory framework. According to Hatch, *jointly told tales* are texts that “ present the reader with multiple ‘truths’ by letting multiple voices, including those of researchers and participants, tell their own stories” (p. 237). Ultimately the goal is to allow each voice to tell its own story so that the reader will see the complex and, at times, paradoxical nature of the real lives being examined.

Although there is no right way to share interview data, constructing profiles or vignettes of participants’ experience is an effective way to open interview material up for analysis and interpretation (Seidman, 2006). According to Seidman (2006) a profile in the words of the participant is the research product that is most consistent with in-depth, phenomenological interviewing as a data collection method. It presents the participant in context, clarifies intentions, conveys a sense of process and time, and reflects the participant’s consciousness. Moreover, crafting profiles add an aesthetic component to the reporting that makes the researchers’ and readers’ work more pleasurable and enriching while, at times, touching the spirit (Garman, 1994).

Some interviews, however, do not lend themselves to display in the form of a profile (Seidman, 2006). Interviews that are not complete and compelling enough to be shaped into a profile that has a beginning, middle, and end, as well as some sense of conflict and resolution are more suitable for display as vignettes. Seidman (2006) describes vignettes as shorter narratives that cover a more limited aspect of a participant’s experience. Although vignette narratives are less storylike, they can be just as compelling. Not all of the interviews conducted sustained easy

display in profile form, although I tried to craft them uniformly, there is some diversity in the way that each man's story is told.

As stated previously, I kept coming back to the stories of Frantz, Malcolm, and Lance because they were so complete and compelling and because of the depth of personal reflection within each interview. In reporting, I wanted to design profiles and allow full counter-stories to be told. Seidman (2006) indicates that reporting the data in profiles is the research product most consistent with in-depth, phenomenological interviewing. It was very difficult to determine what stories to tell and which ones to leave out. All of the stories were important and themes were extrapolated from each. After comparing and contrasting my interview data, I determined criteria for which stories to tell. This determination was based upon: Seidman's (2006) idea that profiles can be shaped best by interviews that are complete and compelling enough to have a beginning, middle, and end with conflict and resolution; provided the most common threads that ran across each of the stories; and were best suited to answer my research questions. Using this criterion, I decided to report on Frantz, Malcolm, and Lance's stories.

4.6 LIMITATIONS

Because I am advocating for greater adolescent black male voice in schools, while interviewing middle-aged black men, the question of applicability to black male students today is legitimate. I acknowledge that there is a significant generational gap between my participants and the adolescent black males who this study is intended to benefit. My hope is that the stories these men tell provide impetus for practitioners to reject the pervasive deficit thinking about black males in schools so that they can better identify and build from the latent strengths that these young men often possess. However, my intent was not to have black men speak for adolescent black males today; otherwise, I too would have been imposing a form of *cultural imperialism* on

them. Additionally, the meanings that black men make from their adolescent social and schooling experiences and the impact those meanings had on the construction of identities and choices made during adolescence is conspicuously absent from the literature. A retrospective study of this kind helps fill this gap.

Retrospective methods also present difficulties when participants are asked to reconstruct events from 25 years earlier. After 25 years, the details of experience may be a bit blurred. However, my focus is on the subjective meanings that these men made of their adolescent experiences and the racial, masculine, and academic identities they constructed as a result of these meanings; not the accuracy of their recollections. Moreover, using in-depth phenomenological interviewing as a methodological tool, allowed for deep introspection and reflection as the participants went through the three-interview protocol. On several occasions, participants spoke words of sincere gratitude for the opportunity to participate in this study because it gave them an opportunity to reflect on aspects of their life histories and relationships from those histories that had remained dormant in their minds and hearts for years. I cannot overstate the therapeutic value of this kind of work. One respondent declared that he was going directly from the interview to let his mother know how deeply he loved and appreciated her for her strength during his adolescence. Moments like these during the interviews brought tears to my eyes.

Racial and masculine identity for black males are the constructs most central to this study. Constructs of racialized masculinities for black males have deep historical roots that reach back to chattel slavery in the United States. Conscious recollections of adolescent years from a three interview process may not fully reveal the depth of internalized and multi-generationally transmitted stereotypical and racist notions of black male physical giftedness and

mental and moral deficiency (Taylor, 2005). This must be recognized as a significant limitation. In-depth phenomenological interviewing does not permit a comprehensive enough historical review and analysis to reveal the impact of this racist and stereotypical notion of black masculinity on adolescent black male identity. If, in fact, the introspective process each of the men undergo yield some revelation concerning this impact, this research methodology is not sufficient to mend any internalized and multi-generationally transmitted stereotypical and racist wound that was previously *beyond his conscious reach*. The full development of *critical consciousness* (Freire, 2007) concerning the residual psychological impact of chattel slavery on contemporary black males was not the goal of this study. Although I believe that identifying and dismantling the *tacit and unconscious beliefs* about black male mental and moral deficiency is an essential component of the psychological and historical healing process for black and white people, it is beyond the scope of this work. So there was no explicit or direct attempt to identify one adolescent social and/or schooling experience or historical artifact as the sole determinant for the embracement of such racist and stereotypical notions. Any attempt to do so would have been short-sighted and ahistoric and would have diminished the integrity of this study. However, due to the emancipatory nature of this study and the emphasis on authenticity,¹⁰ there was an intent to raise consciousness through dialog, exploration, and reflection on the socio-historical forces that influence adolescent black male self-perception.

¹⁰ Lincoln & Guba (1996) claim that *consciousness raising* enhances the authenticity of qualitative research.

4.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Upon gaining University of Pittsburgh IRB approval for this research study, I adhered strictly to the ongoing review process required for the academic integrity of this study. The initial approval and ongoing review process ensured the protection of the men interviewed throughout the study. As I conducted the study, analyzed the data, and presented my findings I made every effort to bring forth the most authentic representation of the voices of the black men interviewed. In order to do this I utilized Guba and Lincoln's (1989) criteria for judging quality in qualitative research to guide to enhance the study's quality.

Citing the work of Guba and Lincoln (1989), Mertens (2005) lists and explains criteria for qualitative research that enhance the credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, authenticity, and, if the study is transformative, emancipatory nature of the study. I am chiefly concerned with the credibility, authenticity, and emancipatory qualities of this study. Mertens suggests that peer debriefing with trusted colleagues and member checks with respondents enhance the credibility of qualitative research. According to Mertens, ontological and catalytic authenticity are also essential to enhancing quality and must be built in to qualitative research design. This level of authenticity was achieved to the extent that my respondents' conscious experience of the world became more sophisticated and action was stimulated from the inquiry and co-construction process (Lincoln & Guba, 1996). I believe this was achieved. The emancipatory quality of this study was also enhanced to the extent that I, the primary investigator, acknowledge the contextual nature of the knowledge that I bring to this study. I do.

In addition to acknowledging my own positionality, Mertens (2005), drawing largely on Lincoln's (1995) work, suggests my knowledge of the community, attention to the *voice* of the respondents, my own heightened self-awareness for personal transformation and critical

reflection, and desire to establish a reciprocal/mutually beneficial relationship with my respondents were vital for the authenticity of this process. Along with Hatch's (2002) steps for analyzing and reporting data-driven findings from critical studies, this framework served as a guide to enhance the quality of this study.

Although I have no control over how this research will be consumed, it is my goal to challenge the prevailing negative discourses surrounding the education of black males; not to add to it. Unequivocally, I hope and anticipate that my findings will encourage the reader to reject notions of black male victimization, call into question institutional barriers that reproduce disparate educational outcomes, and spurn blame-the-victim discourses that describe the schooling of black males. Allowing black males to speak their *peace* elicits narratives that challenge the institutional conditions in schools and societal barriers that inhibit or prevent them from participating in determining their actions as well as the conditions of their actions (Duncan, 2002).

4.8 RESEARCHER SUBJECTIVITY

From a critical race, interpretivist, and constructivist perspective, the overarching objective of my study is to use the lived experiences of black men to expose and challenge oppression. Unapologetically, this is emancipatory work. I view this work as a thread within a larger social justice tapestry woven to create change in the world.

Although I am the biracial son of a white father and black mother, I am still objectified as a black male in U.S. society. My adolescent experience as one of only a handful of black players on predominantly white athletic teams in an all-white community made me hyper-aware, early on in life, that I was a *strange, exotic, and potentially dangerous other*. While my lighter skin rendered my presence and behavior a little less threatening and little more palatable for the vast

majority of the white adults who were charged with my education and care, I was not entirely insulated from the same threats of stereotype that beleaguered my more richly complected black friends. By virtue of this societal objectification and my adolescent experiences that were marked by it, I am fundamentally biased in favor of the black men participating in this study.

My theoretical perspective for this inquiry is far from value free. I have seen and experienced first hand the negative impact that race and racism can have on the social and schooling experiences and life trajectories of black males. It would be disingenuous of me to say that I am not angered by acts of racism and acutely aware of their sting. Unequivocally, I detest racism and racist acts and the arrogance and entitlement associated with privilege. I am, however, not always angry with individuals who perpetuate racism because its perpetuation does not always require malice (Singleton & Linton, 2006). Often an individual is just ignorant of their complicity and acquiescence within racist systems. Nonetheless, racism in all of its multi-faceted, nuanced, and complexed forms still elicit a visceral response from me. I am no shrinking violet in the face of racism and I am committed to revealing and eradicating the insidious manifestation and pervasive effect of all forms of oppression that emanate from difference, stereotypes, and racism. This I took with me into this line of inquiry.

Empowering young black men to overcome both real and imagined barriers to their success is at the core of my professional and personal commitment to humanity. As stated earlier, I am fully aware of the passion I bring to this research. Maintaining awareness of my subjectivity as I collected and interpreted the data was critical for the integrity and legitimacy of this study. Sharing the beliefs and values that form the foundational underpinnings of my own racial and academic identity with others who were committed to the integrity of this work helped me to interpret the data more clearly. The questions they raised when we met ensured that my

judgement did not become clouded and my study degenerate into a diatribe about the victimization of black males.

As I engaged with these men during the interviews I found myself rooting for them. I wanted to believe in them, excuse their shortcomings, and see them vindicated from any transgression. I wanted to hear about herculean efforts to overcome oppression, injustice, and discrimination. I wanted to romanticize them as tragic heroes and draw connections between my experiences and theirs so that I too could feel like a hero.

What surprised me was the honesty, humility, and self-deprecation that these men demonstrated during the interviews. On several occasions the men rejected statements from me that they interpreted as apologizing for them or portraying them as victims. Not one of the men cried foul or retreated into some pitiable victim stance, blaming *the man* or racism for any missed or foreclosed opportunities or painful social and/or schooling experiences. These were stand up men who clearly dispelled any misconception of black men as self-destructive, dependent, whiners who lack motivation. Personal responsibility and accountability were high among the respondents. In fact there were times when I felt that this accountability was too high. I believed that the men wrongfully denied themselves the benefit of the doubt in certain situations.

My sense was that at moments during the interviews, most of the men had not fully acknowledged and grappled with the socio-historical and socio-economic forces at play during their adolescent years. Nor did they understand the depth of the institutional racism that created many “savage inequalities” (Kozol, 1992) affecting their social and schooling experiences. Furthermore, of the ten men interviewed, only three acknowledged any residual affect of slavery and the multi-generational transmission of psycho-historical trauma on their own thinking and

actions throughout their lives. Most of the men recognized the presence of racist individuals in their lives, but struggled to draw connections between their adolescent and present realities and the institutionalized racism and stereotypical beliefs about black males that are endemic, intransigent, and historically rooted in U.S. society. They had not fully considered that the choices they made were among options that were drastically limited -- limited because they had been born male, black, and in most cases poor, into a racist society where they were often deemed more of a problem to be managed than a life to be nurtured. Most of the men understood and acknowledged the impact of personally-mediated racism by individuals, but only three seemed to fully understand and/or acknowledge the historically-rooted, institutionalized racism and the socio-historical trauma that affected their thinking, choices, opportunities, and social and schooling experiences. Much of this, I believe, was beyond their *conscious reach*.

I found myself wanting to argue with these men to get them to see the true nature of their oppression - to teach instead of learn, preach instead of listen, and affirm instead of acknowledge. I found myself falling into solipsism as their stories began to resonate with mine, only to remember that this is not a story about black male victimization, but a composite story of self-concept and its bearing on real life choices and real life consequences. Admittedly, there were times during this study when it was difficult to “dial it back” a bit and self-check, but I knew it was necessary to re-orient and reposition myself as researcher instead of counselor, and in doing so regain the capacity to separate these narratives from my own bias. As a new researcher, exercising that kind of restraint and professionalism was undoubtedly the most daunting aspect of this work.

The purpose of my study was to find out how black males make meaning of their adolescent social and schooling experiences and the impact these experiences have on their lives.

I used the retrospective recollections of black men to examine these experiences. Recollections about this time period were within the context of the overall quality of life that these men have experienced and are currently experiencing. Through this study I hoped to discover how adolescent black male identity is constructed and its influence on academic engagement, educational outcomes, social choices, and life trajectories. Exploring the boundaries of these relationships helped me to better understand the power of self-perception on choices and how choices made during adolescence can establish life trajectories. I also hoped to reveal how black men believe race and racism may have influenced their schooling experiences and the bearing those experiences had on the identities they constructed.

I conducted in-depth, phenomenological interviews with adult black males to collect the data. Findings were reported as profiles in (counter)-narrative form. These profiles are displayed in the following chapter. Van Maanen (1988) describes the type of profiles crafted for this study as *critical tales* where data excerpts take the reader inside the experiences of an oppressed individual while making the case that the social, political, and economic conditions in which the individual's experiences play out are stacked against them. Hatch's (2002) *political* and *polyvocal* approaches to analyzing qualitative data provided a framework for thinking about, interpreting, and reporting findings from the interviews conducted. I used the most appropriate steps from both approaches throughout my analysis to identify salient themes, relationships, and meanings from the counter-narratives to answer my research questions. Comparing each counter-narrative helped me to confirm threads that ran across the stories, disconfirm

similarities that I previously assumed existed, and decide which narratives to include in my report. I chose the three counter-narratives featured in the next chapter because they were the most compelling and best suited to answer my research questions as I explored the boundaries of adolescent black male identity construction.

5.0 MEET THE MEN

Qualitative research is often as much about the researcher as it is the phenomenon and subjects under study. My interest in understanding the lived experiences of the men I've interviewed and the meanings they made from those experiences took shape from my own journey through the complicated process of becoming a man. Throughout this process of sharing, reflection, discovery, and understanding, a kinship developed between myself and each of these men. Although it is never possible to fully understand another, when two people share intimate details of lived experience, bonds tend to develop. These bonds will not be easily broken because of the shared experiences, common understandings, and mutual respect gained during our time together. I consider each of these men to be a friend.

These men have entrusted me with their stories. I am beholden to tell their stories in a way that values and honors the investment they have made in my work, which at times, required the rehashing of painful memories. I do this by upholding my commitment to pay *attention to* [their] *voice* (Lincoln, 1995). In this chapter the reader meets these men and hears their stories. The following is an overview of who these men are as I came to know them during the interviews. In the next chapter, I delve more deeply into the individual stories to draw and analyze thematic connections between what I have discovered about the identities they constructed during adolescence and the literature. Each of the men, along with any named individuals or institutions have been given pseudonyms to protect their identities.

5.1 PROFILE #1: THE FIGHTER

Trapped, no shield, no sword; the unbeaten path go my soul so sore; Allured by the lust, somethin' money can't cure; the devil want me as is, but God, he want more...

Walk alone, walk alone, you know I walk alone; I always been on my own, ever since the day I was born; so I don't mind walkin' alone!

~The Roots, Walk Alone (2010)

5.1.1 Don't Come Home without Your Big Wheel

I was born in Hometown (pseudonym), up in the projects on Brick Street (pseudonym). At the time, it was me, my mother, and my older sister, who is four years my elder. So, it was just us for a while. Then around six, my mother had, you know, a significant other who...moved into our apartment with us. That will play a part a little later in my life... As far as the extended family... I really don't have a big family on my mother's side. At the time, my father was involved scarcely; I later found out that they had some problems, my mom, and my father, so he really wasn't around at the time. It was just me, my mother and my sister, and then, the significant other came into the house. At the time, you know, I just thought I was a normal kid... a normal adolescent, picking up on some things fairly fast. I understood the extended family was not bloodline, but it was just neighbors inside the environment where I lived, where they helped co-parent in certain situations. My mom, at that time, was a lunch aide at the

school, Washington School (pseudonym), and at the time, they went from K to eight; no, matter of fact it was from preschool until eighth grade.

You know, I found out early in life that nothing was given to you, and how to protect the things that you had. My mom worked a part time job to take care of us, and very early I found out that taking care of your things, be it through physically standing up for something that's yours or, umm, allowing people to take things off you just was unacceptable. There was an example where someone stole my Big Wheel when I was younger and I remember my mom telling me "don't come home without your Big Wheel". So, this was at the age of seven, you know, where I had to, understand that I couldn't allow people to take things from me. So I went out to go find my Big Wheel. It was my first adventure by myself, and I eventually found my Big Wheel...It was an older guy who stole it and I had to bring it back. So I tried means of communication to get my Big Wheel back, but he didn't believe in that...

So, I wind up picking up a stick and, you know it was a nice size stick, and threw it, hit him in his face and snatched my Big Wheel and started to run with it. Lo and behold, I brought my Big Wheel back and the learning experience that my mom told me really played part in my life... It was like 'we don't have much but what we do have, you take care of!' For a seven year old, that's a hell of a learning experience...because it just let me know that we live in an unforgiving society and you have to protect what's yours. So from there, I understood. That was my first introduction to, you know, physical violence in order to protect myself and my things. From that point on, I

wouldn't allow anyone to take anything from me or any one in my family. I would stand up for that type of stuff.

5.1.2 Family

Well, my father, he really wasn't involved. I mean, I used to idolize my father at that particular time because, you know, 'the grass is greener on the other side.' My father had material things that my mother didn't have. He had a sports car and he always dressed nice, so when my father would come visit, I would always get the "oohs" and "ahhs" and "whose father is that?" It was kind of a status thing for me, but, as for parenting, he really wasn't involved until... a situation I'll talk about later...

The significant other, when he came in, he was detached, really wasn't involved. I guess for him it was that "they're not my kids" you know what I mean? So, he was there, but as far as like modeling behavior or things like that, no. Nor did I look at him in that role... It was like; this was just some guy who was staying with us.

As far as discipline and stuff like that...I can remember times where he would say stuff to my mom, you know - "he's gettin' outta control", but as far as him being a true model, no, uh,uh...

My interactions with my father... I might see my pop maybe three or four times a year. He might come around for a birthday. Of course, there were the broken promises... I remember he told me that he was going to come and get me to take me out on a Saturday, so... On Saturdays, I had a routine. My best friend lived up on the third floor; we lived on the first floor. So I would wake up early, do my chores, and then I would go

up to their house. It was him and his three older brothers and their mom. So the older brothers were teenagers, so that's where I would have breakfast... They would make these huge pancakes! Saturday mornings...that was like my routine. I would go up there on Saturdays and I would eat. But this Saturday, I knew that my pop was supposed to come get me and, I'll never forget it, he was supposed to come get me at 12 noon... So my routine was, I would get up maybe about 7am and do my chores. This time I didn't go up to my best friend's house, you know, 'cause I was getting ready. I wanted to get ready for my dad so... like my dad used to dress real nice, so I had to put on my best, 'cause I was hanging out with my dad, so I put on my nice clothes... Around 9 o'clock, I went outside to wait for him. I remember my mom kept telling me "well, come on back in, you know, you still got time". I was like "No, I'll just wait for my dad out here." So I'm waiting...he was supposed to come at 12, so...around 11 o'clock came, some of the other kids were coming out; I would tell them I was going somewhere with my dad, so I couldn't play. Then, 12 o'clock came, my mom came back out and she was like "Why don't you come in the house and wait for him" and I was like "No, I'm gonna stay out here." He didn't come yet. She went back in the house; 1 o'clock came and he still didn't come, and I'm still standing out there, my friends playing...I'm still telling them I'm going with my dad. So finally around 2:30, it hit me that he wasn't gonna come...waiting on him, you know, 'because, again, that was my pop, you know what I mean? You know... at the time, I idolized him. So around 2:30 I'm crying, frustrated,

you know. I just went back in the house... So my mom tried to, you know, talk to me about it, but I didn't really want to hear it... So that was, my first, rejection...

Then I went through the thing of, you know, 'why me?' Then I was just like, 'all right, so if that's the game he gonna play, then if he do something, he do it; if he don't, he'll never hurt me like that again. From there, that was my mindset dealing with my pop, you know what I mean?

This is early. This is around seven years old. So, from there, it was just like, I'm done, so it was a strained relationship at that particular time. There was a strained relationship with him and my mom, so then it became a strained relationship between me and my dad. So with my friends, 'cause of the status that he had...you know...his car and the way he dressed...I didn't want to lose that...but as far as the whole relationship part, it was like, whatever... It is what it is. So I got kind of cold, you know.

Growing up... love was something that was unspoken. I didn't grow up in a family like "I love you" you know what I mean? It was something that you just knew, it wasn't something that was spoken. In that type of environment, you know...from my mom's standpoint, I understand now but I didn't necessarily agree with it... she's a single parent mom, trying to raise a young man, you know...So it just wasn't a loving environment. You know, like a warm, fuzzy, loving - "Ahh, love you! You did a great job!" - That type of thing; it was just more like, you just knew it. It was an unwritten norm in the house that you just didn't really talk about it, but you knew what it was at the end of the day.

Well, my older sister....she's four years older than me so the things I liked to do and the things she liked to do were different...so you figured, that's a huge gap...and her friends and my friends were totally different. She was into some things that, at the time, I wasn't into, so we never hung out or, you know, played with each other, or something like that...we would argue a lot, more than anything else...we would be at each other, because, it wasn't like, if I was going through some stuff, that my sister can come out and protect me...to be honest with you, if she was going through some stuff, I would probably have to go out to protect her...so that put me in some situations where I was in conflict with some guys that were four years or even older than I was that I had to stand up for my sister. So, you know...again, I didn't come up in a loving environment, so it wasn't like, you know, there were times where we would talk, or I could tell her some things; it really wasn't like that. So it was almost like she was there, but she really wasn't there...there was no life lessons that I can go back and say 'Ahhh, I remember when me and my sister went through x, y, and z'...

I do remember my mother used to give us money around Christmas time, and then you would use that money to go purchase gifts for the family...so we went to Zayre's, on the North Side, at the mall, and, I'll never forget...it was a big secret, what you were going to go buy people, so you would go off on your own, but you had money, so it was like, okay. We decided to meet back, and I remember my sister didn't come back, you know, so we were looking around and, I'm like 'yeah, she's gonna get in trouble'...so I remember it came over the intercom that they were looking for my mom. So we found

out that my sister got busted stealing something. So I remember in the car coming back, my mother was like “I can’t believe you did this, da, da, da”, you know, “this situation doesn’t leave this car.” It was like a family meeting... it was one of those things that we weren’t to tell that she had got caught stealing. So, she did get in trouble, she was on punishment and I remember my mom saying...that it was a family secret...That no one was supposed to know about.

So I remember some years after that, me and my cousin were collecting these, these Matchbox cars. So we used to take turns stealing these cars and I wind up getting caught... I knew the routine. I knew I was going to get in trouble for doing it, which I had no problem with...But, [my mom] told everybody in the world...and I was like ‘What the hell?’ ...Why is it okay for her to do it and nobody’s supposed to know, but when I did it, everybody knew. So again, I don’t forget stuff...

5.1.3 The Court

Now, when I say extended family when we lived on Brick Street, it would just be people that were in the neighborhood, in that court, that would look out. So my mom would go different places...I remember Ms. Burdas...she didn’t work, but she used to live on the second floor, in the first hallway, when you come into the court, so she her placement was excellent because she would stay there, and we weren’t allowed out of the court, so if you go past her window, she would call you back....we didn’t physically have

to go to our house, but she could just look out the window until my mom came back and then she would give the A-Okay....that extended family....that whole 'it takes a village to raise a child' type thing, you know what I mean?

Our court was kind of unique because it had a playground in the back...when you first come in, there were three hallways, and there were three floors with two apartments on both sides. So she lived in the first hallway on the second floor, I lived in the second hallway on the first floor, and my best friend lived up on the third floor in the same hallway; Then there's another set of projects right across facing each other and there was the same set up. So the court was big enough where, you know, you can play and you can get tired playing in the court, so...at that age the court was huge; to run in and out and go in hallways and hide and things like that, there was always something to do...always somebody to play with...playing football in the field behind our place...relay races in the court. We used to set up haunted houses in the court...that was the greatest thing ever.

Now, honestly, in the court alone there was only one family that their mom and dad were both in the same household, so other than that it was just mothers raising their kids. So you had to model some behavior off some of the things some of the older guys did, you know, like ride the mini bikes and, you know, playing instruments, and building cars. There was one guy, he lived in the court, his name was Stanley and he used to...work on cars and he would sup them up and all type of stuff. So you would be able to see, there was some different opportunities out there...

5.1.4 The Men in His Life and Discipline from Father

When asked about the presence of men and other potential role models in his life, the respondent who, we will call Frantz, only referred to his father, the older brothers of his best friend who lived upstairs, and his mother's live in boyfriend.

[*Concerning the live in boyfriend*] Ahh, the communication with him, naw, I couldn't really say that, it was good at any particular time...you know, to me, he was forced on me. As far as I was concerned, he was there, but he really wasn't there... So with our interaction, the whole..."Let's go out to the ballpark and throw balls" or something like that...it was never really like that.

[*Concerning the older brothers of his best friend*] Well, they were older teenagers...they were like, little role models... they were good guys...but as far as somebody taking me under their wing and saying, "Aww, this is a good kid", no. If I had some deep dark secrets or something like that, would I be able to confide in them? No. Would they protect me in a situation? No, not really.

[*Concerning his father*] So when I was in the third grade, I was acting up in school and I had been suspended a couple times, yeah. I remember my mom was getting fed up, so she said "I'm gonna tell your dad," and at that particular time I was like 'Okay, you can tell him if you want to.' So she winds up telling him. So I'm in class and I'm cuttin' up and he came in and saw me actin' up...I guess he wanted to make an example out of me and chastise me in front of the classroom. So, he pulled out his belt grabbed me by my left arm, and then he started to hit me with this belt. So, I looked at the class and was like

'I wish somebody would laugh' ...that was one of the first beatings that I got that I wasn't crying because I was frustrated or scared; I was more hurt from...this guy, you know... like, you don't come any other time but now you want to come? ...normally you get the tears like... you're shocked or scared to death, you know, 'I ain't doing that no more'; My tears were of anger, and it just made me even more bitter at the time. So I remember him hitting me and I wasn't running, trying to get away from him - I just stood there, he held me and he hit me and I was just pissed. I could feel, the rage, inside of me even more, and even to this day, there's certain things I don't forget; like, alright, you're gettin' this one but, eventually I'll get my turn to be able to do what I need to do... so that was another, true moment between me and him.

5.1.5 New School, Sports, and Mrs. Jones

Moving was a transition because we moved from living in the projects to living in a house and I remember hating living in the house, because there wasn't a lot of kids around in the neighborhood...So things slowed down a lot for me,I was always athletic. I would play, football a lot...I started picking up other sports like basketball, then baseball, at that time too. But because I moved I had to go to a different school, in the fourth grade...I remember the first day of school...my best friend who lived on the third floor, when we were in the projects had moved too, so he had to transferred too...it wasn't such a drastic change for me...like meeting new people and those type of things.

This was the first time I had a teacher [Mrs. Jones (pseudonym), black female] who had a lot of structure in her classroom and she cared...You could tell, she cared...this was the time I really started seeing some academic success...She would call home if I was doing right or if I was doing wrong and she would write little notes. I used to have to take a note home every day...We really developed a nice rapport, so that's when I really started doing strong academically. I also did well in citizenship...I don't think I was suspended during my fourth grade year...I was making a big turn.

5.1.6 Meeting his Brother

When I went to Brick Elementary (pseudonym) in the fourth grade, I found out that I had a younger brother; on my dad's side, he was in the third grade... So, when you go back and you do the numbers, I'm six months older than he is... now just imagine, he lived up in Ellis Circle (pseudonym) and I lived on Brick, so we were less than a mile and a half, two miles away from each other...the same community, in Hometown...but I didn't even know I had a brother until the fourth grade.

I guess what happened, when my mom told my dad that I transferred to another school, I guess he came out and said something...So, [*Frantz imagining dad speaking*] "let me at least introduce the two of them"....so we wind up meeting each other and we hit it off pretty well...Ellis Circle, was very similar to Brick Street, it's a project. So, we would take turns staying the night over at each other's houses...My pop wasn't even the go-between...my brother is the only child, so his mom didn't want to have any more

kids...it was a win-win. My mom and her, who are still close now, communicated with each other and stuff like that, so...me and him became close.

5.1.7 Respect and Intimacy: ‘You don’t have to like me but you’re gonna respect me’

In fourth grade, I really started to do the sports thing...but then again I always had an edge to me where I would fight...I would protect myself, you know...I wasn’t afraid to fight someone who was older than me... it didn’t really bother me because I knew I didn’t have anybody to depend on to help me out. Like my best friend, he didn’t have to fight because people knew he had older brothers...so it was like ‘oh no, I’m not messin’ with him’. Now me, on the other hand, people knew it was just me, so if somebody wanted to try me, you know, I had to take all comers. ‘You could try me if you want to’...I kinda developed a little mean streak or I developed a mindset where, ‘you might beat me, but you’d better damn near kill me or I’m coming back’!

My mindset was the same way with the Big Wheel, you’re not gonna start fear in me, I’m gonna do what I need to do, so if you’re gonna beat me up, you’d better make it good because I’m gonna keep coming back and you’re gonna respect me! Around that age, I really started understanding what respect was...and I yearned for respect...That was like the thing. ‘You didn’t have to like me, but goddammit you’re gonna respect me’!

So [at the age of 10] that’s where it really hit home with me [that] this respect thing is okay’...then what I found is that, (sigh) I was always having to *prove* myself, I

always believed that I had to prove myself physically, to keep people away from me...To keep people from wantin' to pick with me. I also took some of those characteristics from my family environment where I didn't want a lot of people *close* to me...like...really close, tight-knit friends... I didn't come up in a loving environment...so for me, too many people really close to me were irritating. I didn't really know how to handle that. Like my best friend, we just *meshed*. We had a good relationship...Just *that* relationship there was enough for me. All the other stuff and other people...didn't need that. I kinda wanted to keep people away from me.

5.1.8 Leadership and Untapped Potential

In the fifth grade, I was introduced to some leadership stuff...I was given the opportunity to be a Safety Patrol... that was *big* to me because it was the first time that I was really *acknowledged* for something that was positive. [They would say] “We need you to make sure that these younger kids get to school safe.” When kids used to have early dismissals, it was the Safety Patrol's job to walk them home...So if their parent wasn't gonna come get them, the Safety Patrol would have to walk them home...that was like the *thing*. I used to have to be to school early because we had our own posts, and I took that very seriously, because it was something that was *mine* that was *positive*, and I was like ‘this feels good’! I remember there was a time I left out of the house and forgot my Safety Patrol belt and I ran [all the way] back home to go get it because it was part of

the attire. We used to wear the little yellow thing around and snap it in the front...and that was everything to me, so I really took that as something that was serious...

As I sit back and I look at it, there were certain characteristics that I had, leadership-wise, that *other people* noticed but I really never noticed, so...I was ignorant of what I'm bringing to the table...Again, self-preservation was my mindset, so thinking about the collective, really wasn't something I was accustomed to doing...

5.1.9 Pivotal and Painful Learning Experience- “No wind for his sails”

In the fifth grade there were still some times where people would get under my skin...I still had the mean streak where I would get physical...with some people...I would lash out. So, I would run into some problems with teachers. But there was an assignment that we had that really was another...monumental time in my life. We had to do a writing assignment and it was about what you wanted to be when you grew up...

So, I never thought about what I wanted to be when I grew up...it was a major undertaking for me because it made me think about what I wanted to do...I remember other students being *so excited*. It seemed easy for them to say what they wanted to do. So I took the assignment home, and I was sitting in our dining room starting to write it out, and I was stuck. My mom came in and our neighbor's son was in the paper...he was on the front page of the sports section in the Pittsburgh Press, and he was in his catcher's outfit, and I remember my mom going *crazy* like, 'Leonard is in the paper, Leonard is in the paper!' I mean, she had to have at least six or seven papers in her hand...and she was

calling people saying ‘You have to get the paper! Leonard is in the paper! Leonard is in the paper!’ So I’m sitting there looking [at the paper]...and it looked like he was looking directly at me in the paper, so I was like ‘You know what? I don’t know exactly what I want to be, but I know if my mom reacted *this* way, I want to be in the paper! So for my assignment, what I basically said was I’m gonna be in the paper...You know, regardless of how I’m getting in the paper, I want to be in the paper...and I remember the teacher saying...and I wasn’t having the best of days, I guess (sigh); I remember the teacher saying “Yeah, you’re gonna be in the paper one day, but you’re gonna be in the paper because your either dead or going to jail.”

Mr. X, [the teacher]....he was a White guy...he was *fun* - he would show us magic tricks; he would make things exciting in our classroom, but I think he used to get frustrated when things didn’t really go the way he wanted it to go, so...you know, his statement, it *crushed* me, because this was the first time I really started thinking about my future and other people....and then he went on to say...“I hear all the things that you guys, you’re writing down on these papers and you’re talking about. But the reality of the situation is that some of you are not going to live past the age of such and such, some of you are going to get hooked on drugs, some of you *may* go to college, some of you may do some things, but there’s gonna be some of you that won’t be successful.” So, this was right after I read mine...now I’m pissed that he would say that to the other kids ‘cause I remember the excitement on everybody else’s face when they were talking about what they were going to be, and there was nothing that you could possibly tell them that

they *couldn't* do, so I'm looking at him like 'Why would he say something like that?...So, me and his relationship at that particular time, it *changed*... and I'll never forget it, I remember saying, in my head, 'He'll never break me'

So it reminded me of the beating I got from my dad. He thought he was beating me to deter me from doing what I was doing; it didn't work because now, in my mind he was just trying to break me. 'You'll never break me, regardless of whatever you do, you'll never break me.' So now I'm competing with him and I'm looking at this as a challenge, be it positive or negative...and that was the way I used to think about things. What it also did was put any dreams or aspirations to do something, on the back burner for me 'cause...if these are the cards life dealt me, I'm just gonna deal with them on their terms'...it made me retreat even more into a 'me against the world' attitude.

5.1.10 Middle School and Sports and Fighter Identity

In middle school, I started playing organized baseball...my first organized sport. I started meeting other people through sports, but it was...important because it was *organized*. There were *adults* there, there were *rules*, you know, so that was like, another, another good space for me. [Socially], I never really considered myself *popular* at the time...a lot of people knew me but through negative stuff, fighting or something like that...Sixth grade was a transition because I wasn't just going to school with kids from Hometown. There were kids that came there from different neighborhoods...that were the first time I interacted with White students. They bussed White students in from

other communities, to come to Hometown Middle School (pseudonym)...I was meeting new kids, new Black kids from different neighborhoods too...'whoa, wait a second...this is a little different."

I was already exposed to White teachers...no, let me go back...in *preschool*, there was a White kid in my class...I couldn't remember his name if you paid me (*chuckles*), but we were okay, 'cause we were just kids and I don't think I looked at it as a color thing, but...that was it...I remember [in middle school] that the *stereotypes* come out, you know, like '*White people are smarter than Black people*', that type of thing...So that was heavy then...if you had the chance to be partners with somebody on the test or with a project, you would choose a White student over the Black student because you would think that the White student was smarter.

So I'm meeting some new people and developing some new friendships but [academically] I would do just enough to get by. I still had some behavior problems...mouthin' off and stuff like that...but what I found was that I had built up a nice little reputation for myself as a fighter. So I'm meeting other kids from other communities and more people that may have *heard* of me but didn't really know me well and they would *try* me...So, I had to then assert myself...[speaking to a challenger] 'Let me let you know this real quick...I'm not the one; you're not going to be bullying me. You're not going to try to take something off me'.

Well, there was a group of people that were neighborhood bullies...So Jason, Jeff, Randy, [Frantz's best friends] and me we had a way of staying away from them...but, we

would attract them to us because their little girlfriends used to like either Randy or used to like Jason or Jeff. Now *Jeff*, was more of the...experimental type...we would say 'Alright look, if she likes you, man, you know she goes with such-n-such, so leave her alone.' Now, Randy would say, "Yeah, that is right" and Jason would say, "Yeah, that is right", but Jeff would be like "so what?" He would pursue the girl too...so we're trying to stay away from them and Jeff is attracting them to us. So one day, we were coming home from school, and one of these guys wanted to fight Randy. So I've never saw Randy fight, but he wasn't scared of nobody. Randy said "I don't care; I'll fight 'em"...so they started fighting and it was a good fight...Randy had him down on the ground, and his friend *kicked* Randy in his mouth and his mouth started bleeding. So my natural reaction was to fall on Randy so that they wouldn't kick Randy again...as I fell on Randy, Jason swung and hit the guy, and then one of them went after Jeff.

I grabbed Randy and we went to my house...he needed stitches in his mouth. Now, Randy was the attractive guy, so the next day at school...and this was like *the worst day* that I could ever remember in school....and you're the first person I'm telling this to...so I remember sitting in class...we had open classrooms.... so Randy's extremely popular...teachers love him, girls love him; so I remember some people saying 'What happened to Randy?' Some people started explaining and I remember they said my name..."So, where was Frantz at?" a young lady said, "He didn't do *nothing!*" I'm sitting there like 'Wow.' Then I can hear people saying "What? He didn't do nothing? Aww, that's a *shame!*" "Aww man, that's jive! And they're supposed to be *friends?*"

(sighs) So, I felt uncomfortable talking with Randy, and I've never had a conversation with Randy...I just went off what other people said'.

This was at the beginning of the school day, and I was just so hurt, at that particular time. I was like, 'I'm not going to be able to function the rest of the day in school.' So, I made up something where they sent me home around lunch time or something...It was the longest walk home *ever*...when I got home, I remember sitting in my room like 'Man, I'll never, *ever* feel this way again, ever in life., *Ever!*

No one will ever be able to say, if there was a fight, that I didn't fight." Or, if something happened, you'll always know where I was at...So, if there was a punch to be thrown, I'm gonna throw the first...win or lose, that was my mindset, because, that feeling there, that was the lowest I've ever been...From that day forward... fight upon fight, I would do some things just to make sure that everybody knew, to never, ever question my *loyalty* again. So my loyalty just went to a *completely different level* in the seventh grade...this is how it's gonna be. If we're friends, we're gonna be friends to the end. So that means, if its death, then we die together. '*Respect and loyalty*'...I *definitely* felt disrespected when that young lady said I did nothing. So the remainder of the year, I probably got into the most fights because now I was on a mission to prove myself. Me fighting started to get me a reputation as a bad seed. I was never slow academically, but I just did enough to get by, but I was starting to build a reputation...

5.1.11 Relationships with Middle School Adults, and Meeting another Brother

So I started to get a reputation with the principal [black male]...he would single me out...and it would be quick. There was no conversation...I couldn't explain to him what was going on. He would just send me home, suspend me...So, seventh grade was a dead time...I was on a mission.

Now in *eighth* grade, I started to get pretty good at basketball. I tried out for the team...that was a good thing, because it kept me focused...your grades had to be a certain way in order to play basketball, so I did what I need to do [to stay on the team]. I'll never forget we played Bedrock Middle School (pseudonym); this is a team in another community. It was a physical game...I didn't start anything, but the whole team, we were getting ready to fight... the referees break it up... it was done. Now, I'm playing sports, my pop was athletic, so that was a connection between the two of us... where we could have some conversation...so we're talking about the basketball game, and, lo and behold, I find out that I have *another brother!*

So, I met him in the eighth grade... and my younger brother in the fourth....now Larry [older brother] is a full year older than me...and I'm six months older than David...but me and Larry were both in the eighth grade and David was in the seventh...Now Larry played for Bedrock Middle School, the team that we were getting ready to fight. So, when we first met, he remembered me and I remembered him, from the confrontation... the way we met, we already had an adversary-type relationship....Now me and my brother David, were close...I was closer with David than

I was with my sister who lived with me...So my pop brought the three of us together...But, unlike me and David, me and Larry never became close...Larry and David got pretty close, but me and Larry never did... to the point where, later on, me and him got into a physical confrontation...I guess difference in personalities...but that comes back to play when I go to high school.

Now...the principal, for whatever reason, I can't make excuses for myself, we always had conflict with each other because ...he didn't understand me...so I think he would go out his way to go at me. So for eighth grade graduation...the whole class would go to Cedar Point [an amusement park in Ohio]. I'll never forget he called my down to the office and said, "There ain't no way in hell that you going to Cedar Point." Just like that; just raw...and I hadn't even done anything...So *again* here's another male that I'm looking at like, 'you trying to break me. You'll never break me, *ever*.' So, was I hurt? Hell yeah! I wanted to go to Cedar Point, 'cause I had a girlfriend and everybody was going...but I was like 'okay, that's cool; but you'll never break me'

[*Regarding teachers and administrators*] my language arts teacher, [black female]... she was straightforward and she had a good relationship with me...very structured, but you could tell that she cared, you know. So I could let my guards down, and be in her class and do what I need to do. So any teachers that I felt really cared for me genuinely, I did well in their classrooms. She was no nonsense; and she *understood* me. She didn't jump to a conclusion. She would *talk* to me...Anybody who I didn't see really cared and... there's not going to be a good relationship between us... If I felt that

you liked me and you were an up-and-up person, I would do what I need to do to make it in class...our experience [would be] good; if not, we're gonna have problems.

There was Mr. Arnold (pseudonym) [white male teacher]...he was a body builder...*huge*. But he *cared*...He taught history... I liked him...sometimes if I was getting upset, he would be able to understand me...as a teacher who *wasn't* Black, he understood. He didn't necessarily agree with everything, but he understood and he kept everybody in check...coming late to his class was unacceptable, so you don't come late to his classes...We would run to go to his classroom... I don't think he really saw color. He would *engage* us... he wasn't afraid, and people had a lot of respect for him. So those two teachers...were *damn* good...Behavior-wise, I was where I needed to be [in their classrooms]. They had rules, they cared...Then there was the [white male] the gym teacher who was also the basketball coach...I was on the team...he asked 'Who all wants to go on and play basketball in high school?' I was like, "I'm gonna play," and he said 'I don't think you have the *talent* to make the varsity team at whatever high school you go to.' So I was like, "Damn!" So, I put him in that [competition], 'you're not gonna break me' category.

We had Dean [black female], who was very good with structure and respect...and then you had [black male Dean]...he was from Brick street, he was from the projects too, so he used to have...a better understanding of how certain things would happen, and he would use slang to help a situation out...but he would also try to make an example out of me sometimes...there was a time when we were all watching a movie, and just being

adolescents we would count to ten and stand up...People would be like “Sit down! Why y’all standing up?” So we just laughed, tickled to death...but the *first* name he called was mine... and I was like “Damn! I *know* you saw everybody else stand up! Why me?” It was the Thanksgiving movie...he went on the little intercom – [Frantz], come over here!’ He didn’t call Jason, he didn’t call Jeff, he didn’t call Randy, he just called *me*...he said, ‘You know you got to go to the crib.’ I was like “Aww, are you kidding?” ...”You didn’t see *nobody* else stand up?” He said, “It don’t matter what I seen. Go on to the crib and help your mom with them chitlins.” I was kicked out, nobody else...so in my mind I’m like ‘you, too?’ ... ‘Well you ain’t gonna break me either.’ So now...even if I wanted to come to him for understanding or to explain myself...since he never gave me a chance to explain myself...well, (*sigh*) he drew a line in the sand, I drew a line in the sand. This is where we’re at...So with authority figures like him...if something was to happen, they come to me and asked questions, I would just look at them like they were crazy... like ‘alright, are you done?’ So if they were to suspend me...I got to the point where even when they wanted me to explain, I wouldn’t explain, because in my mind, they already knew what they wanted to do with me anyway...so if you’re going suspend me, suspend me. Did I want to be suspended? No, but I knew where they were going with it, so do what you gotta do.

He was another Black male that, to me, was trying to break me, so ‘later for him too’. Now there were other teachers.... [Black female] was the eighth grade reading teacher, who was excellent. She was mean, but I used to love me her! She reminded me

so much of Mrs. Jones in the fourth grade. The first day of class, you had to introduce yourself... 'I'm Frantz. She said 'Oh, *you're* Frantz? Oh, okay... So where do you think you're gonna sit?' I said 'I don't know.' She said, 'Here's my desk and here's your seat. So come on up here'... Right then and there she drew the line... this is what it's going to be, and I liked her, so I did well in her classroom... in eighth grade, she was the only one that really toed the line. The rest, were White teachers, that really didn't understand or seem to care... she was good people.

[*Regarding classmates*] the Blacks stayed with the Blacks, Whites stayed with the whites... but then you find out that some of the White students were pretty cool and they would ask you questions about how it is living here. They would miss their bus on purpose so they can come past and see the neighborhood... it was like the "in" thing to do to take a White guy, around the community. They looked in awe, 'Wow, this how y'all live?' So *ghetto life* was like the "in" thing... they want to explore and for us to teach them some different things, which was good...

5.1.12 Identity

I took that path of really *concentrating heavily* on, physically, being able to dominate other people because of what happened to me in the seventh grade. So that was my focus... I would never prey on somebody who I believed was weak; I would always prey on someone that I believed had some type of power... I was *characterized* as someone who would fight, but I also as a person that cared about other people... So I think

that was always my dominant personality, I cared about people, but I had to physically show people that I could dominate them. That seventh grade experience just eliminated any conscious about me doing something physically to somebody.

5.1.13 High School and the Difficulty of Re-Invention

[In high school] I was bussed from the Hometown to Bradford , to go to Bradley High School...the first day, the principal addresses the students. So, the principal gets on the intercom, I'm like "I know that voice from somewhere", and lo and behold, it's Mr. Nelson [black male]. He was transferred from Hometown Middle School to Bradley... [Same day] lunch time, walking down the hall, he sees me, pulls me in his office, introduce me to his secretary, and tells the secretary, 'Start a disciplinary card on him now.' She writes my name down...I hadn't done a thing. The stench of..." I can't even reinvent myself" was there! Even if I wanted to, I couldn't because of him...

I started getting heavy into sports...I had two lives [*dual identities*], I would play sports...I would fight, afterwards...I was building a reputation...and gaining more and more respect, even as a ninth grader... as I started to get older...I had to make a *choice*...it started to weigh me down a lot. So ninth grade...grades were average, just did what I needed to do. It was difficult to build relationships with teachers 'cause they were seeing so many students...you were on your own at this school.

5.1.14 Family Trouble and Gangs

[During the summer between the ninth and tenth grades] my mother and her paramour got into an argument...my mother had gone out one night with some friends...he came home looking for her... [*Frantz reflects*] sometimes he would get a little physical with my mom. So I remember tellin' him when I was younger "you ain't always gonna be able to put your hands on my mom without me doin' something"... he would say 'yeah, right, we'll see.' So, I remember I would practice swinging [a broken baseball bat I found] at home...I also knew that, one day, I would probably have to use it if he kept doin' it...I remember when I was around 11...he hit *me*. He had said 'if I was your age...' and I said "man, if you *were* my age, you couldn't beat me,"... walked out and he followed me up the street and smacked me in my face...I remember just *staring* at him; I was *crushed* that this person that I knew, really didn't like me, smacked me in my face...I stored that in my memory. [*Back to story*] So he started, *destroying* the house...breaking mirrors and stuff... so [my sister and I] woke up and just sat at the top of the steps watchin' him...he didn't like my sister too much...she said 'what are you doing?' He went, like he was going after my sister so I pulled my bat out...he looked up the steps at me and said 'so, what you gonna do with this?' I said, "Well, you come up these steps and I'm gonna hit you with it." I stood my ground like "you can come up these steps if you want to..." He put me in a situation where I had to protect my sister...and he never came up the steps...My sister called the police...they came, and

arrested him. My mom came home and said 'It's time to go...Grab what you can grab.' you know, so we grabbed our things and left.

We moved to Wesley Road where it was just me, my mom and my two sisters [*The significant other and Frantz's mother had a child by this time so he had a younger sister as well*]...he was no longer in the picture... this was just too much transition....I remember, the third day of school [sophomore year], sittin' on the bus... a guy threw something that hit me in my nose...so my nose started bleeding...He *never* apologized. So, [me being the] new guy, new neighborhood, I said, "Okay, I'll just see you when we get off the bus." So the bus leaves...we get into a nice physical confrontation, everybody is watching [which was] great for me because now I'm setting my territory in this new neighborhood, that I'm not gonna be the one that you're gonna play around with, so I hurt him *more* than I really wanted to, but I *had* to. It was a thing of survival that...I had to let you know that you're not gonna *play* with me. He had an older brother that came out...calling himself breaking it up and kinda roughed me up a little bit, because I beat his brother up...Now this guy's in his 20's, [I'm 14] so for me, even though we didn't get into a full-blown physical confrontation, the fact that I stood up to a grown person was even better for me because it pushed me to a whole other level in the eyes of the people in the community, that I wasn't afraid of nobody.

There was a gang called OSU...One of the leader of the gang came to this party, came up to me and said 'You know something happened with one of our members, some

of the people who did it are here, and I'm gonna have to handle this. If they try to jump me, you got my back?' So I'm thinking "What's the chances that somebody tryin' to do that?" and it gets me even *more* points if I tell him that I'll help him out... nothing's gonna happen to him...so I'm lookin' at my status and I'm like "Great!" So they start fightin', somebody kicked him, I approached the guy... he's older than me and I'm thinking, if I approach him and just tell him not to do it, he'll stop." So, when I approached him, he came after me, so I wind up fighting him. Now these are older guys, so I'm still a young guy fighting these older guys, so now people are looking at me in awe, like 'This young guy fightin' this older guy,'

Now, Jason [*Frantz's best friend from middle school*] was there; and he said, 'You puttin' us in, now. I don't want to be involved in that stuff,' I said, "You're right. Let me deal with this and, when this goes away, I'm done with that"...I was really close with Jason....his father was in the picture, my father was barely in the picture, so that's how I learned about being a man...There were certain things I experienced before him, and he experienced things before me... Like he was having sex *way* before I was...if there were sexual questions, I can go to him and he would tell me certain things about sex and girls, and I took it for the gospel...he was always like my *conscience*. He said 'Yo, come on man, that ain't got nothing to do with us'...you coulda told him *no*. You ain't have to jump in... You ain't have to say you would help him.'

So what I thought happened *did* happen, I received a lot more credibility, *but* now, I had to prove myself 'cause now people started seeing me as a threat...so [a few

days later as I was getting on the bus] some older guy came up behind me and said ‘Don’t turn around.’ I turned around, some guys from another gang, said, ‘we heard you did x, y, and z. If I were you, I would look into another neighborhood to move in to. So *now*, I couldn’t turn to Jason and say “ I need you to assist me in this situation,” I was on my own to kinda deal with the situation... but what wind up happening is the guys from OSU said ‘We appreciate what you did’ and I needed them at the time, ‘cause now I’m at odds with these guys, so joined OSU for some time...I *had* to or I wouldn’t be able to live where I was living or survive, ‘cause these guys were much older than me...so we got into this big fight and I was building a nice reputation for myself. Jason was a little pissed because I was putting myself in danger, fighting even more.

5.1.15 High School Sports and Academics

I never thought about playing...football at the high school level. [*In November of sophomore year, the quarterback on the football team*] said, ‘My main target is gone; you should come and play.’ Now I had to *focus* because, at this point, I was doing just enough to get by...in order for me to play football, I had to meet a certain grade point average so my focus became a bit more academic-centered, so I could play football.

Now I had a *goal*, I had something to shoot for. So it really didn’t matter about the teachers, or that...we’re in a bigger environment...it wasn’t an intimate setting like Hometown Middle School or Brick Elementary, but I had a goal in front of me...none of that mattered to me ‘cause I wanted to play football. So I finished my sophomore year,

still fightin' on the weekends and stuff like that (*chuckles*), but finished up strong [academically]... I didn't carry books...every day, I would come home with no books; I would have papers in my pockets, but no books...in my *pocket* were papers that had the homework assignments... I would do them at home, put 'em back in my pocket...I was living this double life, trying to do schoolwork, but then I'm still trying to fight... I didn't want people to know that I'm trying to focus on school. I was building up a personality...this mystique of Frantz and I had to play it out. I would *do* my work, but they wouldn't know...I would never show people my report card... when it [came time to] see if everybody's eligible [for sports]...people would ask 'you gonna be eligible?' And I would say, "I don't know, I gotta see if one teacher will change my grade, to make sure that I'll be eligible"...even though I knew that I was. So someone would ask 'So what happened?' I would say, "Yeah, they changed my grade." I would never say *which* teacher changed my grade (*chuckles*), but I would say somebody changed it, so I would still stay *average* in other people's eyes, but I knew I was doing much better in school...

The junior year saw a *transformation* in me...Also a couple guys from OSU came to watch me play, I did well and one of them came to me and said 'Yo, man, you can't hang no more' and I was like "What do you mean? You know, I'm always be down at the end time". He said, 'Naw, man. We watched you play ball, you need to play ball.' So, that was the go ahead for me...I loved that feeling of being connected with something positive ...so sports now became that lifeline for me and could change my reputation from

being this kid who was a fighter to a kid who was now an athlete, so people would start to look at me differently [*reinvention*].

[*Frantz had not considered college at this point*] Sports kept me focused. It kept me going to school; I never cut class that just wasn't me. It gave me something to look forward to everyday...but my engagement with teachers in Bradley...there really was none... there's no one really trying to build relationships with students. It was just like 'here's the work; you either do it or you don't.' You flunk, go about your business...I don't know if *other people* might have felt that, but I did. I didn't have a teacher that really took a liking to me saying 'I really want to help you out'; I never received that...up to that point [*when he began playing sports*].

Eleventh grade...during basketball season...I received a letter from Louisville, with a football helmet on it...my eyes are huge...I'm shaking...I'm sweatin...[*Frantz gives the letter to his friend and teammate to open*] I'm looking at him... 'Man, they want you to go to school...they lookin' at you to come to school there [to] play football!' I said, "Are you serious?" So that was the first time that [*he began to think*] 'I can go to college,' I'm thinking, smiling, like "I can go to college. I can *literally go to college now*. That was never a thought, before. So now I want to focus even *more*...so I'm really changing my reputation; I'm doing what I need to do academically... I'm focused, I've got scouts looking at me...A lot of people who just met me would have never known my past...[*Fighting*] was a done deal. I was an athlete now...I didn't need that anymore.

I was considered an athlete...I'm on a whole different track now...the big man in school...

5.1.16 'My Brother's Keeper', Differend, and Derailment

My brother Larry that I met in the eighth grade was at Bradley as well. It wasn't *fashionable* to say that was my brother from another neighborhood... we still weren't close, like me and David, but that was my brother. So, I'm standing in the hallway on Monday morning [during eleventh grade year], I'm talking to Jason and some other guys on the football team; my brother Larry comes up to me and tells me, 'You know, Davisville (neighboring community) and Hometown were fighting this weekend. I knew about it.' I was like "Yeah, I knew...I heard about it." He said 'you know the rumor is that they might...that people are coming up to Bradley to fight us up at school.' I told him 'Alright, don't worry about it, you know what I mean? So, he walks away; within *seconds*, there were like ten guys that swarmed on him, out of nowhere. WOOOM! So they hittin' him and I'm looking like "Damn!" I said, "That's my brother." So as I run over there I'm thinking...If I go over there and start swinging: 1) I'm from Hometown, then I'm gonna have to fight all these guys from Hometown; 2) I'm gonna get suspended from school. I can't allow that to happen...OR I can go in, snatch everybody else off him, and break this up so I can protect my brother. So I go in grabbing people off my brother. One guy said 'Man, that's Frantz! It's a Davisville / Hometown thing.' I said, "Man, that's my brother,"...some knew, but *he* didn't, so...I'm *escorting* him down to the

office...he's going crazy, security guards can't hold him...as we're walking he locks eyes with a guy from Hometown, they run after each other, a security guard grabs my brother, and another security guard grabs the other guy; my brother falls to the ground, this young lady comes out of nowhere, kicks my brother...blood squirts all over the place...So I go over...she gettin' ready to kick him again, I push her, she falls backwards, I grab my brother up and take him to the office. Mr. Nelson gets on the intercom and says 'Everybody involved with the situation, send them home *now*.' So, I'm in the office, trying to explain to the *dean*, I didn't have anything to do with this, I'm breaking it up...“I ain't have nothing to do with this!” He said, ‘Until I sort everything out, everybody involved gotta go home.’ ...So immediately, when I get home, I call Mr. Nelson up, and I spoke to him, I said, “Mr. Nels, I had nothing to do with this, this was my brother, and I was just breaking it up...the football coach even talks to him on my behalf. I had witnesses from players on the team...so, because it was considered a riot, we had a hearing that Friday...I can't *practice*, and I can't do *anything*. So... I'm thinking, hopefully I'll just miss one game...my pop brought me up to the school...Mr. Nels wasn't there, but they read a statement from him. ‘I, Douglass P. Nelson, saw Frantz, fighting [another black male student]. Recommendation: fifteen more days of suspension.’ ... I had already served five...I called back up the school and said, “Mr. Nels, you never saw me hit anybody...what are you *talking* about?” ‘Fifteen days suspension! So now, I'm star football player on the team; he just *crushed* that. I was being recruited by a Division I teams. (*Sighs*) There was a write-up in the paper, you

know...it goes back to Mr. X...and the write-up said...‘Frantz was suspended for discipline reasons. He’ll miss another four games.’

So, at that time, the *hatred* I had...because that’s the first time an *adult*, that I know of literally *lied* on me...flat out, *lied* on me, because what he wrote was untrue...now everything I was building was starting to go downhill, so the letters from Division I schools started to go out the window because I was looked at as being a problem...so I’m done with football; [I’m thinking] I’ll never play football again because of what happened. So there goes *college*. Now, I’m getting back into survival mode... the anger was building up in me... the *hatred* for him was like ‘you can do whatever you wanna do.’ But what am I gonna do now? There are no more goals, there’s no more football, there’s no more college. So I wind up relapsing into fighting again...I guess this is going to be my lifestyle.

The thing I learned during high school was that it’s a thankless world and people don’t really have to know you , they’re not really trying to get to know you...you were there and you either get it or you don’t, and you’re on your own...So that connections with...with teachers...it really wasn’t there. Someone really taking a *liking* to you, holding your hand, saying ‘let’s do x, y, and z’ it wasn’t there. We had a business teacher, Mr. Whitherspoon...he was a nice person...He was a Black too. Everybody loved Mr. Whitherspoon...he just loved everybody; so it wasn’t like a *special* relationship between me and him, but I never had any problems with him, he never had

any problems with me. I did my work in his classroom...So, in *high school*, I really couldn't say that there was *one* teacher that I just really connected with.

[During high school] people look at me as a leader, as a person who had some influence over others. But, if you understood *my* background, I never looked at myself that way...*They* looked at me as more of a threat; [*As if teacher speaking*] 'if I can't break *him*, then this whole class is gonna run amok'... So they would intentionally try to break me...but I've always been the type of person 'just tell me what I need to do' [*As if teacher speaking*] 'Frantz I like when you do x, y, and z. If you do this, this is what can happen'...I was fine with that. That's...that's what happen with Ms. Jones [in elementary school], that's what happened with Ms. Solomon [in middle school]. They took the time to understand me and my personality; and when you *did* that, I was very easy to deal with...that was always my attitude. Those teachers really took time to try to get to know me; we built a *beautiful* relationship, but when you tried to come at me aggressively or try to talk *down* to me that would just make me more competitive with you...As long as I get a fair shot... [Our] relationship is gold...don't judge me, give me an opportunity.

Frantz is now a 42-year-old husband and father of two young sons and a teen-aged daughter. He holds a master's degree in sociology and recently left a position as the director of several group homes for young women in the juvenile justice system. In his spare time, Frantz serves as regional president of a national fraternal organization, overseeing activities for the organization in several states. Currently, he works as an educational consultant and he has

recently opened a construction business. He lives in a sizeable four-bedroom home with his wife and his 10- and 8-year-old sons in a working class/working poor neighborhood in the west end of Pittsburgh. Frantz's 17 year-old daughter lives with her mother from a past relationship. Frantz spends a great deal of time with his older daughter even though she does not live with him.

As with many communities in Pittsburgh, Frantz and his family live in an area filled with older homes that have lost their property value because of demographic shifts in population, divestment of small business, job loss and an increase in crime. Twenty-five years ago, his community was largely working class white, with a generous sprinkling of working class black families. Now because of white flight, what was one of the more integrated communities in the city is now predominantly black. Although Frantz's street is relatively quiet, his community has definitely seen better days.

His wife, who works at a local university, also has a college degree. Frantz and his wife spend a great deal of time with their sons' activities inside and out of school. Both sons are involved in multiple sports. He is a doting father who spends as much quality time as he can with his children. Coaching his sons' football team, rarely missing a wrestling, baseball, or track practice, spending quality time with his daughter at high school basketball games, and the bi-monthly trip to the barbershop with the boys, are indicative of his commitment to be present as a father. Between his new construction business, his consulting, his work with his fraternal organization, and his family activities, Frantz maintains a very busy schedule.

Frantz is a former college football player who has been a competitive athlete in basketball, baseball, and football since early adolescence. He is a six foot-two, 235-pound, dark brown-skinned man who has a strong presence about him. His presence is somewhat imposing because of his size. He exudes confidence and has a former athlete's swagger, yet his humor and light-heartedness are very engaging and disarming. I have seen him interact with complete strangers at the barbershop where we both get our haircut and although I cannot speak for another, I suspect that anyone who may initially be intimidated by his size and swagger would become comfortable quickly because of his engaging demeanor. When he greets someone he does it in such a way that taps into whatever personal connection he may have with them. If he doesn't know someone, he greets them in such a way that makes them feel important. One feels comfortable around Frantz because of his humor and ability to strike up a conversation with complete strangers. This personality trait, you will find, runs contrary to a learned cold-heartedness that characterized his adolescence.

Although Frantz no longer competes athletically, he still has a very competitive personality. His competitive nature, in no small part, is the reason for his ability to overcome and achieve the goals that have enabled him to enjoy relative success in life, despite the significant obstacles he faced growing up. His master's degree is a testament to his tenacity and unrelenting drive to prove those who underestimate, doubt, or misunderstand him; wrong.

5.2 PROFILE #2: THE SCHOLAR

“If you knew him you would know why we must honor him: Malcolm was our manhood, our living black manhood! This was his meaning to his people. And in honoring him, we honor the best in ourselves...However much we may have differed with him or with each other about him and his value as a man, let his going from us serve only to bring us together, now...And we will know him then for what he was and is- a prince- our own black shining prince who didn't hesitate to die, because he loved us so.”

~Ossie Davis, *Eulogy for Malcolm X*, 1965

5.2.1 Family

I was born and raised in Pittsburgh...in Summer Hill (pseudonym), which is on the North Side, on Rawlings Street (pseudonym), and I lived there until I was six years old...In my family, I'm the oldest, and my father was the first person, in our direct line, go to college, so, there was always the expectation for me that I was going to school, from the earliest time I can remember. I grew up in a very literate household...I remember my father encouraging me to read the dictionary when I was six. And so, when I was young, I would ask many questions...my father and I had what I considered a very, very close relationship at that time, and I would always see him reading. My mother was a reader as well, as was my grandfather, and so I would read as a young child. That was a big part of my development. I mention that for a reason. Early on in school, I had a lot of academic success. I was seen as the standout student, when I was young, and I was given a lot of attention at the Hometown Haven (pseudonym) [Community Center], a lot of attention at Carson (pseudonym) [School] in... Kindergarten and first grade, as well as in elementary school at Shadyville (pseudonym) [School], where I went. We moved to Rosewood when I was six, my sister had just been born, and we had a fire. I was put in the Scholars classes, as soon as that was allowed.

I had close to a 4.0 through school, and so that was a big part of my *identity* as a child, was I was like the “smart kid”, so to speak...I was somewhat athletic as well, but I was kind of a shy person. Because I was relatively popular, many people did not know how shy I really was. And so I came to develop my social capital through my *mind* and my ability to...to *excel* and get attention that way. I was the valedictorian in my elementary school...at Sunnyside, and that was big for me, because I didn't realize the *importance* of that. So I was *promoted* by my father, in particular, and my family in general. He would refer to me as a *genius* or things like that...and because I looked up to him a lot, I believed what he said. I didn't necessarily know if I was a genius, but I felt that I did have some academic and intellectual ability that may be *unusual*. So that was a lot of my identity as a child, as I was considered *bright*.

My nuclear family was my mother and father, who did live together, and are *still* together, but we'll get to that; I'm the oldest, and my sister is 6 1/2 years behind me. My mother and father had an interesting relationship, because they're very dissimilar, *very, very* dissimilar. My father is very intellectual. He's a systems analyst, so he was like a brainy person; he was also a military guy. So he's very fastidious about certain things, very disciplined...kinda tough... no-nonsense. He's very blunting, straightforward; very intolerant of certain kinds of things. So there were very high expectations of me, particularly being the oldest and the only male...he really expected certain things from me. My mother is rather *quiet*. She was also an intellectual...she stimulated more of my *creative* side. I was an *artistic* person, as well...and that was probably seen as my number one talent, outside of anything academic, I could draw. My mother would also put me in *theater*...she put me into a local art center, which helped me develop a little bit of

confidence. I was in plays as a child. That was big for me, because it helped me learn how to stand in front of other people. So we were always in activities, up until high school, at least.

My father was very involved with me on a really close, personal level, up until high school. We had as close of a relationship as I had seen between a father and son, for the *early* part of my life. We spent a lot of time together. He would take me out to play basketball, take me to track meets. He would take me out to play golf with him. We would race...there used to be a show...I think it was called *Eddie and His Father*, or something to that effect. It had Bill Bixby in it, and I just remember always thinking, "That's like me and my dad." He would take me to *adult* environments, though... My father drank...*a lot*, and so he would take me to the bar with him... we would go to the bar and I would be the only kid in the bar, and, what would end up happening is, um, people would be like, 'Hey, Arnold (pseudonym)!' you know. 'That's your boy?' He would be like, 'I take my son with me everywhere I go.' He would always say that. So we spent a lot of time together.

My father was also the president of the PTA...So he was someone who I saw as like a leader. He was very involved, *encouraging* and very, very *clear* that the expectation was not for me to do things that were the norm. I remember in second grade, me and another student named Amy were the only students who did not *fail* a test, I got a C, maybe...I brought the paper home... and said, 'everyone else did poorly and we were the only ones who didn't', and my dad was like, 'Don't ever tell me what everybody else did, every again. You're not everybody else.' We weren't allowed to *underperform*. My father would take me to work with him, and I would see him at work and I would always see that he had a certain level of authority with people, so that was a big influence for me, because I

always saw my father as a person that was respected by...by Black *and* White people everywhere he went; he seemed to be a respected man, and that had a *huge* influence on me... he always seemed like a *leader*, and people would speak highly of him, you know. He carried a certain level of authority. It could even be almost *intimidating* sometimes, but he is...sort of a *forceful* person, but also had a very strong mind, so he always seemed *intelligent*. Of course, I was named after Malcolm X...So that was big...I remember my father saying, 'I knew if I had a son, he was going to be named after Malcolm X,' ...he had read the autobiography a short time before I was born...So that was an influence on me, because people would always talk about him to me, even one of my family members on his side used to call me "X." He used to talk about 'Yeah, that's a serious name' and what it meant to have that name.

My *mother* had a real strong interest in Black and African culture...she used to buy a magazine called *Ebony Jr* and have us read it. I remember reading about Kwanzaa when I was five years old. I didn't know what it was, and she would get us books on Dr. King...My mother would tell us a lot about the sixties...different things about Black people through history. She would have books on the Black Panthers...she would make us learn our family tree, all the way back five generations, into enslavement...She would make us recite it...She would always *emphasize* the importance of supporting Black businesses...we were never *Muslims*, but she would take us to the Nation of Islam place to get literature... She was not interested in being a *member*, but she was interested in some of the things that they talked about in terms of economic self-sufficiency and other things like that. She *really* emphasized history and culture, to a *huge* degree.

My mother would *constantly* kind of *drum home* things, going more back to *Africa*. He [father] *was* more so geared on being effective in the world, so he had the academic excellence, financial responsibility, being *disciplined*, being *organized*, being someone, as a Black male who is to be taken *seriously*...*Because* my parents did not have what I perceive as a *close* or *connected* relationship, there were never those messages being given simultaneously by them...It was very disconnected, you know, it's a big part of my development, so I have to say that I have very few recollections of them even having conversations, growing up. My parents have never gotten a divorce; they still live together, but...I can't remember the last time I saw them *speak* to one another... It was sometime when I was a teenager, I think, or maybe when I was in my twenties. They don't have any communication with one another at all, *on any level*, so...a lot of people don't know that. So it was a unique environment to grow up into because it was difficult to be close to both of them at the same time. There wasn't the *sense* that they had high respect for one another...rarely did either of them express a vote of confidence or support, vocally, of what the other person was saying or attempting to reinforce. It's not that they necessarily *detracted*, but it wasn't like 'yeah, you know, what your father says' or 'what your mother says,' that wasn't there with us. Not that it created anything *consciously* in my mind that made me reject what they were telling me...

My father was a heavy drinker; he was an alcoholic until I was about thirteen? And so, a lot of the time on the weekends, my dad was drinking, that I recall. He was like a fun person. He would be drinking, but when I was young, I didn't *understand* these kinds of problems with alcohol, until I got to middle school. Because he would take us out, my friends; of *all* of our fathers, he was most involved with all of us...but he was under the

influence of alcohol most of the time. So, once that changed, his *personality* reverted to the person that, on one hand, was *highly* dignified, intellectually strong, authoritative, disciplined and orderly...to a person who could be reclusive and kind of standoffish...when he was not drinking, it was hard for him, I think, to *tolerate* people. I used to think my father was kind of misanthropic, meaning he didn't really *like* a lot of what he saw in humanity, in people, and so I think drink as a *coping* thing, so...the important part about *that* is that it occurred *simultaneously* when I was about to enter high school; he became a little more withdrawn, *in general*, I think. He stopped drinking, which is why I've never had a drink in my life, because of that influence. My father made me a promise that he was not going to drink again, after a series of events occurred, where he had to get some help. I remember, it was emotional, and I said I wasn't going to drink either, so I never drank. I also had a fear that I would end up being an alcoholic...I was an addictive person who didn't know how to stop sometimes, and so I just thought I would become an alcoholic if I drank.

My sister and I *are* close. She was the person who really taught me what it was like for someone to be more important than you. When she was born, I was like 'Wow, I have a sister now. I have somebody to take care of.' I took the big brother thing seriously. I remember that influenced me a lot. The first time I fought someone who was bullying me, that I was *afraid* of, really, is because he did something to my sister. He said something to her and... I went to my father and I was like, 'Dad, I have to go fight him.' So-and-so said this to her and I have to go fight him, 'cause that's my little sister. I just want to let you know that I'm about to go fight him.' And I walked down the street and we started to fight. And I remember that was important for me, because it was the first time I understood what

it meant to *fight for someone other than yourself*. I felt like I wasn't afraid anymore, you know...so that's where I got that from; the ability to fight for others came from *her*. I felt like if I were protecting somebody, if I'm fighting for someone, the fear would go away, so I was always the type of person who felt compelled to challenge the bully. So she was a big influence on me as well.

5.2.2 Extended Family

We have a close family...on both sides...so I have a lot of first cousins...we were almost like brothers and sisters growing up. Even to this day, we are close. My *older* cousin, Marion (pseudonym), she was almost like a *sister* to me. We were raised around each other...I was *also* very close to my cousins on my *father's* side...we spent a lot of time together, but I would spend the summers with my grandparents. My grandfather is the *only surviving grandparent that I have*. I'm very close to my grandfather...my father's father. He's one of the people I most look up to in the whole world. He was a *huge* influence on me. My grandfather was born the same day as Nelson Mandela. Their birthdays are *exactly* the same day, July 18, 1918. He's just a *different kind of person*...it's not because he's my grandfather...even when growing up, it was almost like you couldn't *own* him all the way by yourself, because he was so many things to so many people. But because he treated *me* so special, I always felt that there was something *important* just to be in his family...Just the fact that, this man is my grandfather means that I have to be *somebody*...That's really how I felt, like I have to be *somebody* because of who he is. He was almost like larger than life to me. My grandparents gave us a *tremendous* amount of attention...I remember one time, I was with him...it's really influenced me working with kids...we were watching TV...a game was on...it might have

been the Heat [professional basketball team] or something...he turned his chair toward me (he was in a wheelchair), and I said, "Pappy, want to watch the game?" And he said, 'Yeah, that's fine, if that's what you want to do, but I just want to sit here and look at you and talk to you.' And he just looked at me and never looked at the TV one time. For about an hour, he never even *looked* at the TV. And I was just like 'what kind of human being is this?' I was there to see *him*, but he was just happy to see me.

There were many *affluent*, very successful men...one of my uncles was a Tuskegee Airman...we would see these kind of things. And so, it *influenced* me, 1) because I saw someone in my father, and in my grandfather... the *closest* two males to me, who excelled at *everything*...they were just recognized as leaders *all the time*. And they would give me so much attention and affirmation...they would say 'You're this kind of person' 'You're this...' I remember my father once told me something that shaped my whole life; he said 'I was smart, I was a smart cat. Your grandfather...he was heavy; he was the heaviest dude around. But you're the smartest person I've ever met.' He said, 'I'm not telling you this because you're my son. Even more important, you're good. There's a *goodness* about you.' I remember...I didn't know if I was good or not...but I *do* know that, whenever I was about to do something, even to this day, when I felt like I was about to go a little too far, I would hear that in my mind, you know, that I can't go too far. So he would always sow these things into my head; my grandfather would do that, too. He would be like, 'You're *this* kind of child, and you're *this* kind of person. One day you're going to do *this*.' So that influenced me a lot...and it was *huge*, and I could see the *grooming* that happens when you're just affiliated with that.

5.2.3 Friends and Community

Some of my friends were very aspirational. I was influenced a lot, probably by them. There was another family of boys in the neighborhood...who would probably be seen as very successful, by any standard today. One brother has been a CEO of different organizations and someone who has a book out and has been written about...voted “most likely to succeed” in school. The other, I think...at one point, was grossing close to a million dollars. He went to MIT, then to Cornell. I spent a lot of time with them as well, so I would *see* certain things that they did, in terms of money management and entrepreneurship. We even had businesses when we were little...

We were in a community, Rosewood, where everyone one of our parents knew everyone else’s parents. My mother and father knew *every single person’s mother and father* that we interacted with...had their phone numbers...it was a *strong* family network. In addition, Rosewood is a relatively decent neighborhood. Homeowners...a high standard of living...multi-racial...middle-classed environment. Very upscale environment, the most upscale environment that I knew of in Pittsburgh that was also *accessible* to people who weren’t making over a hundred thousand dollars a year. It was an insular kind of thing. Everyone played with kids in the neighborhood and it was cool. My friends... we all hung out in the neighborhood. Some of our lives had taken different *turns*, but even then, I was seen as kind of the academic, intellectual kind of kid. That was my identity as a child.

We never attended any particular church. However, my grandfather is an *extremely* religious person and *extremely* devout, but is not someone who references religion very often. Which was huge for me, because we spent a lot of time praying

together...that had a *tremendous* effect on me, spiritually, because he was also very unassuming; he never tried to impose religion on anybody. He didn't even talk about it a lot, but he would always be praying, and he didn't *talk* about praying for anyone. I never even heard him say to someone 'I'm going to pray for you' that I can recall, but he would do it. He would just go in his room and pray for them. So it was this...this *anonymous* service kind of person he was, where he was always doing things to help people, and I remember it having a *huge* influence on what I thought about, in terms of what a Godly person is like. He would take me to church with him on Sundays when I was there... and it really influenced me to want to be more Godly. He bought me my first Bible, with my name on it, which I still have, and that was important *because he gave it to me*, I would just read it and study it. I would keep it in my book bag in high school, because I wanted to be more like him. I would do it *quietly*, and I would just try to be a...a certain kind of person. I kind of lost that for a little bit, but when I was young, it was a *big* influence, the church and his involvement with the church there...he was, in *my* view, the most spiritual person that I knew, in terms of the way he lived his life.

5.2.4 Schooling: Lost in “Class Clown” Identity

My parents were very, very involved with my education. I would say a major influence was being in *schooling* environments, where I felt like I had a lot of friends. I *always* liked my school. I was always a relatively well-liked person in school. I was probably less well known in high school because I...adopted this *fringe* kind of personality, but as a *young* child, I was always relatively popular in school, and got a lot of recognition because of my academic achievement. I think it was the Salvation Army Outstanding Student Award...I felt like I was at the Grammys or something...I remember

being so *disappointed* when I didn't win the award...I was doing great up until eighth grade. Ninth grade, transitioning into high school...*really* was where I began to lose my way...

A major moment for me was, as I began to get *older*, I no longer wanted to be like the "bookworm" kid; I no longer wanted to be seen that way. I remember being *ashamed* of that. I remember feeling like I'm the light-skinned guy with the curly hair; thin...I don't want to seem like a *nerd*. That had a *big* influence on my behavior in high school, not wanting to embrace that identity, as an intellectual and academic achiever. I rejected that, *very consciously*, and tried, *hard*, to be seen as anything but that. It was *very* conscious, it was *very deliberate*, it was *very persistent*, and it was *very deep*. Because I was *ashamed* of that, and I thought that made me seem *weak*, like I wasn't even *Black*, you know...because we were always *light*, and so that was huge as well...

In the sixth, seventh, eighth grade now, you know, being seen as the boy a lot of girls in school liked, and getting that kind of attention... 'because of my hair' and because of things like this...and I remember being *very aware* of that; at one point *ashamed* of it, at one point *embracing* it, at one point wanting *more* of it, so it was kind of being confused at times...like, on one hand, I don't want to be seen as a little light-skinned boy; on the other hand, you know, you get some more *play* [from the girls]. Cats want to [try] you...you got to *prove* yourself a little bit. And so it's like, you get caught in a lot of different worlds with that. It was an interesting transition to go through...I remember being *very aware*, at some point, that we were *light*, and that we had so-called "good hair". ...some of my identity was based on the attention I got from girls at a young age, but I was not a *talker*...I didn't have that kind of *confidence*... So, because I had girls

who would approach *me*, I never *had to have it* as much as...as...but I really didn't have the social *confidence* to do that. I felt like I was out of my element. I was...I was very *shy* actually, painfully shy.

So that was important as well; because I was popular, people didn't *realize* that I was shy... So I worked a great deal on being able to speak, and that helped to develop my identity later in life, just working on my verbal communication ability. I worked on that almost *relentlessly, obsessively*, because I was *fascinated* with the idea that people can get up and *talk* and have people *listen* to them and not be afraid of what these people might think, and be effective. I just remember being *afraid* a lot of different things...just being afraid and trying to find ways to cover up being afraid. Knowing that I'm afraid, and I'm not sure of myself right now...because I got so much *attention* and I got encouragement from home, I could get through it and compensate for it...I remember a lot of my childhood was just feelings of being *afraid* and *nervous*. Like, I am nervous...and I don't know if I can do this thing. Somebody would always be there, like 'You can do it!' There's always some champion, but inside I was...really somewhat *timid*...Couldn't get past my nerves.

So that was big for me, learning how to cope with...*anxiety* and *fear* as a young man, and just what that means... My father seemed so *sure* and so *strong*, so *aggressive*, and I didn't *feel* like I was. I remember, he would be kind of tough, like 'Get up, stop crying!' I'd be like, 'I'm trying, Dad.' I'm trying to be harder, but I didn't know how. I didn't know how to be as *tough* as I wanted to be, when I was young. That was *very, very big*, up until high school. I didn't know how to be hard, because I was *soft*. People use that, but I really was soft. I was a nice guy... but I felt like I was *weak*,

really...because, I *care* about these things. I care about what people think of me too much. I was a people pleaser, and that's still with me to this day. I remember feeling like, I wanted to be *tougher*, but I didn't know how. So...going into high school, was a big thing. That's where I began to develop this identity where I want to be seen as the antithesis of the intellectual, you know, but as a young man, that's what I got rewarded for, was being the *kind* person, the person people thought was *trustworthy* and *kind* and *smart* and *helpful*.

Got to high school, and it was different for me, because I'm in the first CAS [Center for Advanced Studies] Program. It was the pilot group for CAS in the district. They were running it at Highlands. I remember the classes seeming *excruciatingly difficult* to me...the work was just hard, man. I felt like I got shell-shocked, ninth grade year. It just seemed like the work was so *hard*, and I was one of only a few African-American males who was in all CAS classes. I remember I got my first C, *ever* on my report card then. I remember, having greater autonomy and independence...and because I was so keyed in to how I was going to be received...people had talked about *hazing freshmen* at Highlands...I remember not wanting to have an identity of, a *nerd*, so to speak... being very, very conscious of that... [So] from the very first day, I'm breakdancing in class, I'm kind of the class clown...this one guy who was going to come in and *clown* and make everybody *laugh*. Some people used to call it the *buffoon*...the person who was there to *entertain* others, as how I saw myself, really. I *remember* at one point *knowing* I was getting a D in a class and *consciously* thinking that I'm trying to *impress* these people, but the joke is on *me*...that's the first time I really *thought* about it that way.

In the ninth grade, I remember thinking ‘Man, I’m trying to...be *popular* and fit in, but I’m not taking care of business at all’...some of my behavior was *probably* influenced by the fact that my father had stopped drinking a year before that. When he was drinking, um, he would spend a lot of time with me doing *fun* things like going out running, taking me here, taking me there. But when he stopped drinking, he became a little bit more *withdrawn*, in general, I think. I began to isolate myself from *him*...I probably exerted the majority of the effort in distancing him *from* me because I didn’t want him to be involved with what I was doing at school. So I began to have this dual identity. He would say ‘How’s school going?’ and I’m like ‘Okay,’ but I’m nervous because I don’t want him to know that I’m getting a D. I never had D’s...in *anything ever*. I was not *doing* anything to really be proud of for the first time ever, except the fact that I had a job as a paperboy. I remember thinking ‘I’m just a class *clown*, and that’s all I am’...not being proud of that, and knowing that that was not a badge of honor...So that was big for me, because I remember *consciously trying to avoid* my family all the time; so that they wouldn’t ask me *anything relevant* about my life. I would just be *consciously unavailable*, all the time. I developed kind of an *elusive* character...*evasive*, where you just could not pin me down. I remember I got my first poor work notice in ninth grade. I just remember the *anxiety* behind that...I would avoid my father all the time. So...from a gender standpoint, I became completely isolated from other positive males who were *older*, because I was *embarrassed* and *ashamed*, most of the time with what was going on. I had always been *defined* around *school*, and that was something that I was now trying to *hide*. I was trying to *hide* school. I didn’t want to talk about it.

First year was still fun. It was never a decision I made *consciously*, but looking back, I realize that's what I was doing...But it had taken so much root, I think it was my junior year, actually, that I didn't know how to get out of it now, because my grades were so bad. I had developed so many bad study habits; I had been *so* off-track for *so long*, and I was *so lost*... I remember feeling *lost*, actually. That's probably one of the most lost times I've ever been...it was in high school. I felt *lost*. Just whole periods of school time are just *vague* to me. I don't even remember what was going on because I remember being *detached* from it mentally...I was popular in my classes, but I didn't remember feeling particular popular in school. I mean everybody knew everybody, so people knew me all throughout school, but I just wasn't connected to *anything*. I wasn't in any groups, I wasn't in any clubs. I was in the band. I did swim team...tried out for the basketball team my last year, and got *cut*. I don't have many memories of being in class, because I was like, in another *world*, almost.

I remember *majorly* being preoccupied with girls...I remember being totally *absorbed* in those relationships...whoever it was, that was the whole focus of my life. So a big other part of my identity was this, you know, my relationships. I thought about it all the time...I remember seeing more than one woman *liking* me as something that I could exploit for the first time, that kind of mentality; something that I could really take advantage of. I remember consciously being aware of that, and not feeling shy anymore, in a way that I used to be. [*Concerning being light-skinned with so-called "good hair"*] By ninth grade, I remember feeling that that was an advantage of some sort. Whereas when I was younger, I used to feel like it was something that was a *weakness*...a *deficit* that I always had to compensate for in some way. I always had to show that I wasn't

weak...that I could hold my own...*get down* like everybody else...and that I was willing to go as far as somebody else was willing to go...And that was in the back of my mind. But in ninth grade, going into tenth...ninth especially, I began to feel like ‘Yeah, this is the *thing* to be.’ I remember, just trying *for hours* to get my hair to look right...I just remember the preoccupation with how my hair looked, and... And so that was a big thing there, in terms of my *male* identity, was this *ladies’ man* kind of thing. I remember, um, being totally influenced by certain images in popular culture around that...like *Prince*...I went to see *Purple Rain* and I remember wanting to be like Prince, right (*chuckles*)? So this whole image of Prince, which is not very *masculine*, not the prototypical image of manhood...that was my role model. Prince was someone I really looked up to. I used to have Prince pictures...like imagine a male, now, having pictures of *Prince* (*chuckles again*). Like now you might have pictures of, like, *Wheezzy*, or whoever, right? It might be D-Wade or LeBron or Kobe, you know what I mean? I had pictures of Prince in my room! Like a bunch of them, though! (*Laughing hard*) And my father despised that...he wouldn’t even come in my room, because he was just like ‘Wow, what happened to you?’ So that was my image of a man, because he had all the women, to me. That was my thing, is Prince had all the women. He was, you know, *the man*, in that way.

So that was a huge influence, as well. It seems peripheral, but it was central...how much I was influenced by Prince. So these are the images that began to *supplant* the other ones in my mind: my father, my grandfather. I don’t remember meaningful conversations I was having with my grandfather in ninth and tenth grade, not really. I don’t remember...it’s *blurry*, because I remember being *ashamed* going around him because he had such *high expectations* of me. The expectations were always very,

very high, and so...there was a *void* of positive male interaction for me. During those 2-3 years, I would try to avoid *anyone* who had high expectations of me

I don't think people, at that point, saw me as someone who was *incapable*, but I didn't *show* anybody any evidence to counter that. I didn't do work. I *prided* myself on being the one who would influence the class in a *negative* way. I had probably more of a *negative* influence, academically, on my classmates, than any other single person in my classes. I would say 'You know what? We don't have to do this homework.' I would come in and start breakdancing at the beginning of the class making jokes...but there was nobody...I didn't have any African-American male [academic] teachers, in high school...I had one African-American *female* teacher that I remember, and that was Ms. Peterson (pseudonym) and my typing teacher, Ms. Banks (pseudonym), and my Art teacher was the person I looked up to most in the school, Mr. Edwards (pseudonym). Mr. Ed... That was the one class I always got an A in, because I loved that and I was very artistic, and I looked up to Mr. Ed.

I think that people just kind of saw me as the person who was an underachiever. I think that, after a period of time, I worked, either unconsciously, sometimes very consciously, to establish that identity, as someone who was kind of *bucking* the system, and I wasn't trying to go along with it, and I think that it became a self-fulfilling prophecy. People just saw me as someone who wasn't trying to do anything, and they would kind of just leave me alone...the first person to really sit me down to talk to me about it was Mr. Edwards [black male non-academic teacher], who I had all throughout. I always tried to have his class every year...Ms. Peterson sat me down, a Black teacher, female, and she almost was in tears...and said, 'I've seen your record. I know what

you're capable of. Yet you don't do anything in my class.' She just became emotional and said 'I don't understand.' I was like 'Ms. Peterson, I'm sorry' and it was almost like my *mom* talking to me at one point.

I remember the *effect* it had on me. Up until then, I had never had a teacher talk to me about my performance at all...or even have a real, individual conversation with me. This is in high school. In middle school, it was different; because...I always did well...I had a different relationship with my teachers. And so, in high school, I really *needed* that, and I had the greatest dearth of positive interactions with *any* male, any *African-American* male...any authority figure *period*, because I was *so hard to access*. I became very remote. I think I might have been *depressed* almost, but you couldn't tell on the outside. I was *ashamed*. For the first time, I felt like I wasn't anybody of significance at all. I felt *insignificant* in high school [although] I *always* had people who *liked* me; I was always popular in my classes. I just felt insignificant, *except for that*, that social person, which later...we'll get to this later...when I got to college now, it led to me being extremely *serious and intense*, very much so. I was very *serious*, like I almost didn't want to joke at all. I didn't even *smile* at one point, because I wanted people to see me as very serious. I would *read* I would *study*; I didn't want to say anything that seemed like it was too superficial. I didn't want to be seen as someone who wasn't knowledgeable on things; I went to the other extreme, almost completely.

In *high school*, I didn't have any meaningful interactions with any, [adult] to counter the...downward spiral that I was on. Because I didn't have any teams, I didn't have any coaches. My grandfather was always around but of course, he's my grandfather; he lives in a different city. My *father* was always around, but I think he was

so *hurt*...I think that a part of it was, [because] he stopped drinking...and we used to spend a lot of time together...the peer group began to take over for me in a *major* way. I always had a girlfriend...I would do my paper route...with my dad...and my so-called maturation, or becoming older...I just didn't *seek* his company to the same degree. So that was a big part of it. Another part of it was because he was going through a process of just getting used to not drinking, because that was his whole *socialization*...even though he was always a father, drunk or sober, prior to that...My father was always the complement-giving kind of person, at least, when he wanted to be. So he would always *talk* about his son and how he was *this* and he was *that*...and so I was *none* of those things anymore...I was *ashamed*...I can't underscore enough, about how much I *avoided* him...it was a *huge* change, though, man. I went from being a 3.8 student...to at one point, by junior year; I got below a 2.0 for the first time. That was almost *inconceivable* in my family. That's like something...I don't think *anyone*, my grandfather or my father, had ever experienced for them or anyone else.

It was always the thing of 'that's what we do,' in our family, that's what we do. Your grandfather was here, I was here, but you have to be *here*...my father led me to believe that I had the greatest ability. 'Of all of us, you have something *different*'...and so it was something that, *in spite of his absence*, would still echo in my mind...and because it had been *sown* for almost fourteen years, it still makes up the *core* of who I am to this day. That was the crux of it right there, I didn't have any area where I was excelling, in *anything*.

The only place I would excel was in my very close personal relationships, because it was always *some girl* who, or one of my friends, who thought the world of me. But as

far as *adults* were concerned, there was no one who I was impressing who really *knew* what was going on...the whole standard of excellence as a core African-American tenet, that wasn't there anymore...my whole identity had been *formed* around that; being a Black man is the strength of your mind and the strength of your ability to achieve and excel, had always been really *drilled* in me. I felt, you know, I was *lost* in my identity. I was lost...I didn't know what it *meant* to be an African-American male now. What does it *mean* to be one of only a handful, I think there were only six of us who had any CAS class at all...but...what does it *mean*? Because, out of those guys, I was the worst student of the six, hands down, the worst. But the *fun* one...fun...funny...playful. So the whole idea of what it meant to be an African-American male? [(Sighs) *Confounded statement offered more as a question*]

5.2.5 Epiphany, Transformation, and Notions of Masculinity

In the formative stages of my life, I had so much bedrock that had been laid down...the roots had developed to such an extent, that you couldn't really uproot that...but, it took a while, even when I got to college, I remember just coming into my own identity...because my development as an African-American male really didn't start to happen in a very *conscious* way until I was eighteen years of age. It came back with a vengeance. As a senior, Ms. Ellis (pseudonym) gave me a book to read...she was *one* of the few teachers who would sit and talk with me as an individual...White woman...the substitute while my English teacher, who I *despised*, because she just...I just didn't relate to her at all...I don't even want to say her name... I was too young to even know what it meant to despise somebody, but I did not like her. I'm older now, but obviously, that was an episode, but...every single English teacher I had in high school was a White

female...So, anyway, she gave me a book called *Siddhartha*. I started to read it just 'cause she said so, and another teacher I liked a lot...Mr. Olson (pseudonym). He had a class called Philosophy. I remember really enjoying his class; that's when I realized that, I'm a kind of a *philosopher* type of person. That's the way my mind works. And so...I loved that class, I kept the book *From Socrates to Sartre*, but as a result of that, I took an interest in reading, and I didn't realize what it meant to *read* and really be literate. I also read the book *King Lear*.

So I got into Penn State. I think it was June of that year. I was Downtown, I think it was B. Dalton Bookstore and I had, \$4.10, the exact amount, and I was looking at the art work...I came across the *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. On the cover was a watercolor picture of him going down in stages...I remember being fascinated by the cover, just looking at it, and I sat there and I read the whole first chapter of that book, right on the floor...I had the *exact* amount of money that it took to buy the book in my pocket, to the penny. I took my *last* cent and I bought the book, after reading the whole first chapter. It was called *Nightmare*. That's when I developed this love of reading. *That* was like a watershed moment for me, that was a *breakthrough*. I remember feeling like something was shifting in my life. It was the first time I'd ever been somewhere where I'd literally *read* and lost track of time...I remember the store was going to *close* and I had been there for, like, an *hour*...I *bought* the book, and I took the book home. It was the only thing I did, *every day*, for the next week, is I read that book.

Everything seemed different; like I was looking at everything around me and...It was the most *powerful* epiphany...I can't explain the *impact* the book had on my life. Even when I talk about it, I feel *emotional* because I remember feeling like I understood

what my *purpose* in life was. It had such a *riveting*, electrifying effect on me, that all I talked about was Malcolm X every day, all day, to everybody who would listen. I would go down to Hillman [library] and I would go to the audiovisual department, and I would go to the library; I didn't have a library card, so I couldn't take books out there. I would go to Carnegie and I would get *every* book on him that I could find. I would go to Pathfinder Bookstore and I bought *every* book on Malcolm X in the bookstore...every single book. And I would *read* these books day and night, day and night...the autobiography really fell apart; my first copy of it I have it with rubber bands; it's almost like a...a *scriptural* book for me. I have it wrapped up in gum bands because the pages disintegrated because I wrote in it. I read it so much the pages came apart. That's when I began to feel like 'this is what it means to be a Black man,'...Malcolm X. That was the *key* for me. At that moment, there was *no one on this earth* that I looked up to more than him...

So by the time I hit college, the day I walked on the yard, I was different. All I did was read that whole summer, and I would get *Malcolm X* audios, and I would play them in the cassette player in the car. Everyone who rode in my car had to listen to that. I would get all the Brothers, that were my friends and my cousins and stuff, and we would sit in the alley and I would just play the tapes. I would say 'Listen to this!' We would sit there for an *hour* in the car. That would be...that would be us hanging out, we would be listening to *Malcolm X* tapes. I would play them *all the time*. I remember giving up eating candy. I remember giving up profanity; I said 'I don't want to use profanity anymore,' because Malcolm X didn't use profanity, and I remember consciously trying to change my language. That's when I really started to read the

dictionary. I had a pocket dictionary and every time I read a book and didn't know a word, I would look it up immediately and try to use it in a sentence. I would do this every day, because read the entire dictionary...I wanted to be like a scholar now, because Malcolm X was so *bright*. It had a *huge* impact on me; everything about him, the way he was disciplined, and the way he handled himself. I became interested in Islam...I don't even know if it was because I really wanted to be a Muslim. It was just because I saw that it was something *he* did, and it was *attractive* to me because of that. And so I would go down and talk to the Muslim brothers for *hours*. I was the only young Brother to be out there...talking to them, reading...talking about nationalism or Black economic development or culture, anything like that. History...I would study these things relentlessly. That was the first development of what people would call a *counter-narrative* to other things...I'm developing this *idea* that to be a Black man is to be excellent, to be disciplined, to be *righteous*. I had *lost* it [notion of black male excellence], so I was kind of *countering* the identity, I had developed for the prior four years..., and the kind of things I was feeding into. It was almost totally opposite from all that kind of stuff. So it was me *really* kind of returning back...

I never had the *confidence* to really be myself in a certain way. I was constantly trying to *impress* everybody...now I could be myself and be *strong* and be *scholarly* and not feel weak, and I *really* embraced that. The whole...I became relentlessly, almost fanatically studious. I would stay in the library until it closed every day, and I would just read all night long, read books. I would go on fasts, and I would do all these kind of things to gain control of my mind and my body...it was *huge*, man. I just was not the same person, at all, and that was. In terms of my identity really developing, it started in

June of '87, because, when I read that book, the *impact* on me was so *profound*...I really embraced what it really meant to be an African-American male for the first time. At different times, I hadn't embrace that fully...I remember being so *proud* to be an African-American male...I would almost have *tears* in my eyes, man, that's how *deep* it was, just being so proud. I felt like I understood *everything* about my life; everything was clear and I had, like, a path, for the first time, where I was marching *towards* something and everything was headed towards something, so much so that I was able to make sense of everything that happened previously. I was able to string all that together, see how I deviated...I saw that in Malcolm X...a person that deviated from a certain path. I saw him as someone who was an academic, a gifted child, a scholar, and he had kind of gotten *away* from that, and then returned. So I used that as a narrative to construct my own life...the whole idea of how you recover once you get off track.

If you said 'What is a Black man supposed to be like?' To me, it was Malcolm X. That was the quintessential man to me. There were other people that I read about, admired...always my father, always my grandfather...but, to me, he was like the *pinnacle* of what it meant, someone who was *confident* yet *humble*...*articulate* yet *sincere*....*courageous* yet *compassionate*. Someone who was extremely talented, yet always working to improve himself, in a learning mode. Someone who was a leader, but was also a follower...somebody who...really, really, really, more than anything, showed how to *recover* when you get off-track. That was the biggest thing for me. I looked at my life as a process of recovery...that's when my identity as a social activist began to take shape...I began to *pour* myself into social activism type of things...what am I doing to contribute to the community, and how does my personal development translate into

social contribution? That was the big thing for me. What am I doing...how does what I'm becoming or what I'm working on translate into service? I began to define myself in those terms. [*Upon entering Penn State as a freshman*] I joined the Black Caucus, I joined the Reeducation Committee. I was at every single meeting, every single rally, every single political event on campus that was going on. I was so fired up. I would keep books with me in a knapsack. Everywhere I went I would read every day...always saying 'What are we doing for this?' 'What's the next program?' 'What are we doing here?' 'What are we doing for the school?' 'What can we do back in the community?' 'How can we go home and help?' I changed...and so the major thrust and shift around my identity development and my self-perception, [took place] in 1987...it almost felt like the earth shifted for me...a part of me that *died* up there and it never came back home. When I came back home, there was a part of me that was never the same again after that.

I felt like I was a *totally new person*. I saw myself differently, I *carried* myself differently...to have an identity that was significant...that wasn't just *academic* but it was academic with social relevance. It wasn't just book smart, but it was someone who I felt was using knowledge as a means of helping other people and being able to relate to various types of people, White and Black, of all demographics, ages...whatever the case may be; for the first time ever that I ever felt like that. I never had that much confidence, that much self-assurance, that much of a sense of purpose, a sense of identity as I had starting in '87... I can *mark my life* by those two periods...'83...everything up to '83 and then everything after '87. It was like BC and AD...right there...that was rebirth.

Malcolm is now 42 years old. He is newly married and lives in two-bedroom home in a working class neighborhood just outside of Pittsburgh. He lives with his wife, teen-aged

stepdaughter, and a new baby. His wife just gave birth to a healthy baby girl within the last year. He also has a teen-aged daughter from a previous relationship and a stepson who is in his first year in college. These two children do not live with him. It is rare that you will find Malcolm without one of his own children and/or a young person from his mentoring program. He is a committed father and community leader.

He graduated from college with a degree in Education and a non-major concentration in Black Studies. During his time in undergrad, he was intimately involved with many activist and afro-centric groups. Immediately after graduation, he worked as an Instructor for a Young Mother/Young Fathers Program where he also coordinated a Mentoring and Rites of Passage Program for young black men. He teaches on African History and Philosophy, Health and Stress Management, performance enhancement, and holistic health and substance abuse recovery for community and school based groups.

He is also the founder of ONE Nation Education and Leadership Training, a program for and about youth. He sits on various community advisory boards and is the Program Director for the Reaching Back Male Mentoring and Manhood Development Program that has served over a thousand students in over fifteen local schools.

He's passionate about working with black males, and is particularly invested in Rites of Passage work, which seeks to build core character strength through the development of identity, purpose and 'vital skills/assets' for living. He believes that black males face both an identity and 'energy' crisis simultaneously, where they do not know who they are, nor do they have the fundamental wellness or vitality to function at the highest levels. He views both elements of this crisis as consequences of negative educational and social experiences across generations.

5.3 PROFILE #3: THE LEADER

Re-demp-tion: (noun) an act of atoning for a fault or mistake, or the state of being redeemed...Deliverance; rescue...Atonement for guilt

"My lack of fear of this barbaric methodology of death, I rely upon my faith. It has nothing to do with machismo, with manhood, or with some pseudo former gang street code. This is pure faith, and predicated on my redemption. So, therefore, I just stand strong and continue to tell you, your audience, and the world that I am innocent and, yes, I have been a wretched person, but I have redeemed myself. And I say to you and all those who can listen and will listen that redemption is tailor-made for the wretched, and that's what I used to be...That's what I would like the world to remember me. That's how I would like my legacy to be remembered as: a redemptive transition, something that I believe is not exclusive just for the so-called sanctimonious, the elitists. And it doesn't—is not predicated on color or race or social stratum or one's religious background. It's accessible for everybody. That's the beauty about it. And whether others choose to believe that I have redeemed myself or not, I worry not, because I know and God knows, and you can believe that all of the youths that I continue to help, they know, too. So with that, I am grateful...I say to you and everyone else, God bless. So take care."

~Stanley Tookie Williams, *Last Words before Execution* (2005)

5.3.1 Family Values

Nuclear family for me was...I [*Lance, a pseudonym*] have an older brother; he's seven years older than I am... my mother, and my father. So I grew up in Hoodtown, on the corner of Findley Ave and Moor Street (pseudonyms). Also, I have a half-sister, she lived with her mother just a block away from us so we grew up with our half-sister right around the corner from us...[at times] she lived with us, due to some of the things that were happening in her household...looking back, [*considering his current work in the community*] and working with the African-American males especially at risk...none of

my friends had a father in their home, so I could rip off names...No, one of my friends just had his father, didn't have his mother...so my father, in some cases, was like a father to all of my friends...my parent are older...I'm forty years old, my father is eighty-three and my mother is seventy. So my parents were old enough to be the parents of my friends' parents...my parents were as old as some of my friends' grandparents...

There was a difference in how I was raised because my parents grew up in the Civil Rights movement. My father knew Black Panthers. He lived it. They wore the Afros back in the day...So there were things that I wasn't able to do, in some cases, or there was a little bit of a strictness because of my parents being older and seeing a lot more than some of my other friends' parents... I can remember, my father was actually the *friend* of [my elementary school] principal. I mean, they *hung out*... They went to the juke joints and those types of things. So if I acted up...he knew my dad by his nickname!

My parents knew a lot of people in the community, so I was raised with the *notion* of accountability, that I'm going to be held accountable, and whatever I do is going to get back home...There was a sense of leadership there as well...with my friends, we always jockeyed to be leaders...the old saying that 'it takes a village to raise a child' was *true* back then because mothers identified with Black men who *were* doing positive things. So it might have been the Little League baseball coach that the moms *allowed* to be that father figure for their sons, because they did not have the father in their lives.

My mother has six brothers...no, six sisters, seven brothers..., and they all had boys, so we grew up kind of a boy-cousin thing... so we *have* a lot of boys in the family. There was also that sense of [*competing*] leadership amongst them as well...some of

them moved out of town; every *year* we came back in the summer time to get together... so I spent time with my cousins in D.C... they came up here and spent two weeks. They would stay at *every cousin's home*. We would all stay, so we all stayed at my house for three days, then we'd all go and stay at my other cousins house in Waltersburg (pseudonym) for three days; in Hometown in the projects for three days, then we'd go up Gardenview (pseudonym) and stay for three days. So we moved around over the summer so that we all kind of were known. I could talk about Hometown because I stayed there...and what it also did is it created *friendships* for me across the city of Pittsburgh as well...So, when we even talk about violence at that age, at that time, we were never in it because we *knew* guys from all over.

It wasn't like because I'm from Hoodtown, I couldn't go up on Franklin Street (pseudonym) in Hometown and watch Jeep Kelly play, because of my cousins...Same thing when he came to Hoodtown, was no sense of territory.

Personal responsibility, my father was big on that. We weren't allowed to *lie* in my house. My mother was big on that. You lie; I'm coming down on you. I ask you something about school, tell me the truth. If you ain't doing well, let me know that so I can figure out how to help you get better. Don't tell me things are peachy keen and then I find out *behind you* that they're not. So, *responsibility, accountability* was very big with my parents. And the push to do well in school...my parents did push education because my father dropped out of school when he was in eighth grade. My mother actually did two years at Pitt, but didn't finish, so for them, for us education was *very* big.

Also, I saw my older brother...I saw *his* struggles, him being the oldest brother, me being younger, some of the challenges he had with school. I remember I used to sit

up all night and watch my mother like *hammer* my older brother...get with him about his school work, and I told my mom one day, I said 'You know, mom, when I go to school, I'm not going to give you those troubles. I'm gonna get all A's.' ...And for five years of school, I think I might have got one B in elementary school. So she would stay up at night, she would go over coursework with him...for all the time that she was spending, she was tired. I didn't want her to be tired, kind of running behind me to see if my work was done, so, to calm all, I'm just gonna bring home A's. I'm gonna do my homework. I'm gonna get a routine that doesn't put so much pressure on *her* to put pressure on me. I didn't *want* that type of pressure. (*Chuckles*) Some folks may *need* someone over their shoulder; my attitude growing up, and this sense of wanting to be a leader, I didn't *want* my mom over my shoulder. I didn't want her like 'Well, did you do your work?' I didn't want that added *pressure*, so you know what, I'm gonna get it done'...I was about five or six years old when I told my mother this.

5.3.2 Community

Hoodtown is...it's an enriched place, man. It has history. I think from the standpoint of Warren High School, you know. Hoodtown and Warren are one in the community, for better or worse. I've seen a lot of different things through different ages. As I got older, I started seeing the worst. I was born 1972; before 1980, there was still a farm with a gentleman, Mr. Virgil, who owned horses, on Findley. We used to ride them in the city, right there on Findley and Moor. We used to feed and water them when I was a kid...growing up, there was visible play space in Hoodtown. There's less visible play space now, and what I mean by that is, play space for kids to maneuver, to go, to be free in the community...There wasn't a lot of [violence] when I was coming up in Hoodtown.

It had its share...one of the Virgil kids was actually shot after a party back then...you might have had five murders a year in Hoodtown. Now you got fifty-five.

Hoodtown community is predominately Black. When I was growing up, I can remember there being a White family on Iliad Street (pseudonym). They were one of the last White families in Hoodtown...the streets in Hoodtown were much cleaner. I mean, the housing was not as dilapidated...it looks worse now than it did when I was growing up. There was a sense of community...we lived in an apartment complex it had a fence around it, it had a basketball hoop, it had monkey bars. There was another housing apartment complex right next to mine, with a parking lot in the middle, where there was another fenced-in playground area...it wasn't a housing project, but it was low-income housing. Everyone on the right side of the street we played with; everyone on the right side of the street we played with. Everyone down to the end of the corner on Findley, we all played together. So all of the kids a little bit older than me, my brother's age, grew up together, and then all the younger brothers, we all grew up together, (*Chuckles*) we all played sports together, we all went to school together, so we all knew each other, and, to this day, we all are connected because of that. Our parents knew each other too. My mom could get on the phone, if I wasn't home yet and make three phone calls, and she was going to find out where I was going to be at... So it was definitely a more enriched sense of community, you know, in Hoodtown, where folks took care of each other.

Hoodtown itself never had much, but what I talk about is that play space. I grew up playing in the streets. I learned how to play football in the streets of Gardenvue, on Franklin Street in Hometown, on the streets of Hoodtown...we played in the fields at

Warren, in Hoodtown...we played football on the side of the YMCA...basketball in the court at School, so that's what I'm talking about. We would play in the street. I've seen some of the best football games played on a one block, you know, with two sidewalks with cars on them...community play space. We had Hoodtown Elementary School (pseudonym), which I went to, and we had Warren High School, when I was growing up. At the time, the middle school was Rendell (pseudonym), and it was created in support of desegregation...Billings (pseudonym) was [originally] the Hoodtown middle school. So my brother and I didn't go to Billings...all I knew was Rendell. So the elementary school, middle school and Warren in itself, were very much connected. When I was eight years old, I used to be the football manager at Warren, so I used to go right from school, even let out earlier, so I could go down and be with the football team. When Warren played back then, the whole community shut down, like you would see in Mountainview High School (pseudonym) ...in these *White* neighborhoods, when they have football games. I mean, we're talking about at 3:30...folks and parents would take off from work *early* to come to football games. Warren football at Warren field was like going to *Three Rivers* [old professional football stadium in Pittsburgh] when I was coming up...folks all over the fence, all over...standing room only. [*Sidebar comment concerning underlying racism*] This is an understanding I'm gathering now...but the City League had football games at 3:30 so that the White teachers could go to see their kids play at 7 o'clock. That's the history behind City League football in Pittsburgh...we had to play at 3:30. We are the only football league in Western Pennsylvania that plays the games, on a Thursday or Friday at 3:30; and did it for years. We just started having night games here in the city...History. I think I had *one* night game when I was in high school and that was a

playoff game. But when my brother played, the only night games where when we went to go *play* the White teams, and when we went outside the city to play. [*Regains train of thought*] So, anyway, it was... very much a sense of community back then. My parents knew everybody's parents in that block. We were able to go in and out of each other's houses, spend the night...less violence and folks felt safer.

Growing up, Hoodtown only had the YMCA...We did not have recreation centers in Hoodtown like they had in Hometown. We didn't have a Pittsburgh parks and recreation center in Hoodtown. At that time, there was no CCAC in Hoodtown. A YWCA...has always been there. At that time, there were no afterschool programs where I could stay until my mom picked me up at six or something...when I left school at 2:30 from Hoodtown elementary, I went home and then I played after school basketball down at the Y[MCA] at 4 o'clock. So we did have the Hoodtown Little League Association, where we played baseball and football...the communities were in transition, for a period of time, we did not have a football program. Everyone went to Latimore (pseudonym) [a neighboring community] until Hoodtown kind of re-energized itself and then folks came back...[at the ages of] eight and nine I played for Latimore, ten I played in Hoodtown for one year, and then I played in Waltersburg. I had to go outside the community.

We did have a Savings & Loan, which was in the old Operation Better Block building...There used to be a Chamber of Commerce in Hoodtown too, and the Chamber of Commerce in Hoodtown, which was an African-American Chamber of Commerce, was right there on Hoodtown Avenue, where the Rite-Aid is now. So, long before the CCAC was built, that was all kind of the political hub of Hoodtown, was right there. But, when I was younger, I didn't know much of those places, in terms of how they supported

the community, not until I got older, I didn't really know that Operation Better Block had been doing a male mentorship program in our community...it was around my ninth grade year, when the level of violence started to become a little more heightened in the community. Operation Better Block recognized that, so they ran an after school program, in our school, for Black males. I ended up *working* that same program twenty years later as a Rites of Passage program for Operation Better Block, in Warren.

[Concerning social institutions] The barbershop was kind of exclusive at that age. See at that age, we didn't go to the barbershop. You wore an Afro or you got cornrows, you didn't go to the barbershop. I didn't start going to the barbershop until I was in middle school, the sixth grade...it was up on Latimore Avenue, Jackie's Barbershop. Will's barbershop in Hoodtown opened right after Jackie's had opened, on Latimore Avenue. Prior to that, Warren had a *cosmetology program*, so we used to get our haircut at the school. So, the barbershop for *us* growing up in Hoodtown, as young guys, it was almost like a rite to passage...you didn't cut your Afro until sixth grade. That was kind of the rite to passage in Hoodtown...If you had it *cut*; it was like 'Okay... 'You were going to sixth grade.' You knew who was going to middle school...who was going to Rendell...like 'you supposed to go to the sixth grade, but you still have that Afro? Naw, you gettin held back.' (*Chuckles*)... It was like that Afro and cornrows getting cut were definitely a rite of passage. The barbershop, for me and a lot of my friends...we didn't really experience that until middle school.

5.3.3 Early Identity Development

Growing up as an African-American male, there was a little bit of an identity issue for me...Black has always been part of my vocabulary because of my parents, you

know; Black Power, Black this, Black that...the Black Movement, you know, Black comedians; everything was Black. It is funny because in my adult life, I identify myself as a Black man in America. Now I understand the African-American, I get that; but when I walk in a room, people see me as a Black man, and that's what they have to deal with, and that's I have to deal with them...that goes back to me identifying when I was little, and really saying that 'I'm Black.' I remember I struggled with "African-American" when I was younger; people were like 'Oh, you're African-American,' I remembered 'I'm Black.'

Also, I remember having another identity experience...the school I went to, my brother had gone through and, for me, there's always been this little bit of anxiety because all my life, I was called by my older brother's name I was "little" him. 'Hey, little so-and-so' and for me, in fifth grade, a remark was made to me as 'Hey, little so in so!' and I just said 'No, I have a name and my name is Lance.' I felt, at that time, I had to start being identified *as who I was*...I didn't feel I was in the *shadow* of my brother, I just felt they didn't know my *name*. Because, with him being seven years older than me, there were a lot of things that he did that I didn't do. So I never felt in his shadow... I *loved* my brother growing up... idolized him. It was just the fact that, folks didn't know my name. People in the community just didn't know my name; they knew who I *was*, but it was the 'brother of' or 'you are so n so's son' 'your dad is such and such'. So I had to push what my name was, 'My name is Lance. Call me Lance; because, once you get to know *my name*, then you'll know me.'

5.3.4 Schooling, Racial Tension, and Leadership

I was exposed to two Caucasian teachers in elementary school. That would be kindergarten and fifth grade; those were my two experiences with Caucasian teachers. My kindergarten teacher I can remember as being a very nice lady. *No* bad experience with my kindergarten teacher. All my teachers in between were African-American. I remember having a White science teacher, and he was like Sid the science guy [*actually referring to Bill Nye*], kind of nerdy, wore glasses, and *challenged us* on a lot of different things, so...

My experience was a great. I remember my first grade class was in the basement of the school. It was in the basement of the school. You actually were let out from school from the basement; you entered the front door and left through a hinged basement door...but I never felt like I was in a dungeon. I never felt like I wasn't being *educated*...or felt like someone was not being responsible for me being a better student. I felt all those teachers, White and/or Black, *all* wanted me to do well.

Rendell is where it got a little different. Elementary school was all Black school, so I didn't experience White kids until I went to Rendell. Rendell was *segregated*, I found some things out later (*chuckles*), but when I was *there*, it started to become an issue of race and racial tension, for me with teachers. My *intelligence* was seen as *laziness*, now that I look back. [*For example*] Because I was able to do certain portions or steps in my head, and count ahead, and get the same answer, I was told by my math teacher that I wasn't doing it right. I was told *I couldn't do it like that*. I was told I was *cutting corners*. I was told '*that will never work in the real world*' even though, I got the same answer...*and*, I was able to *tell* you how I got it. I always looked at math problems like,

how much of it I can do in my head, how much do I needed to write down, and then get the answer. And I asked ‘Is the answer right?’

So my mother had to come to the school and say to them, ‘Listen, I want to know *are these answers right* that you’ve marked wrong on my son’s sheet?’ and she said ‘Yes, he did not do the steps in between, but can my son *explain* to you the steps?’ Can he explain...he knows the work?’ The teacher said, ‘Oh yeah, Lance knows the work, but I think he’s just taking the short way out and he’s trying to finish up faster...’ all these other things started coming out...and my mother said ‘Well, if you’re telling me he knows the work, then what additional work can you give him?’ She was asking for enrichment type of work and the teacher told her ‘well, I need him to do it this way.’ So my mother had a conversation with me, and said ‘Understand something, *I* know you can do it and she recognizes that you can do it, but if you don’t start putting it down on paper, she’s going to continue to be difficult.’ So this White woman teacher was having me jump through hoops. [*Reflecting*] That conversation with my mother taught me...what I know now to be jumping through hoops for White folks...‘if you don’t do’, in some cases, what they ask you to do, that they can control your destiny...that’s how I felt in that classroom. That was my first difficult experience.

Seventh and eighth grade I had my experience with more White teachers, and my first Asian teacher...what did Ms. Wong (pseudonym) teach? Having our first Asian teacher [*noticeably speaking for his black classmates, the collective, throughout*], never knowing a person of Asian descent before, whether she was Chinese, Korean, or Japanese, I did not know at the time...but it *shaped* my better understanding of cultural diversity...at that point in time too, we started to see more culturally diverse

classmates...in the seventh grade I met a Chinese kid...not just White students. Also I remember a White teacher, Mr. Shelton (pseudonym), who was our History teacher...World Cultures...he was very slender...gentleman type dressed in khakis, button-down shirt every day, and he came to work prepared. He always pushed us...

There was a lot of cultural diversity with teachers and students...I had *more* Caucasian kids in my seventh grade class than I had in my sixth grade class...I started to have some foreign teachers, I was able to take a foreign language in seventh grade...I learned how to speak German, which then exposed me to the German language...a German teacher...like I said, I had an Asian teacher and I also had a White male, who was hard but fair. I mean, he was just as hard on the White kids as he was on us, so...I never, I never thought he was racist. I just thought he was a hard teacher...He got on everybody! For some reason, he got on the boys a little bit harder than he got on the girls...but whether you were White or Black, it really didn't matter, there was a sense of accountability for everybody. So even though I had this White [female] teacher in math in the sixth grade, who I felt was a little racist, in some cases, a little *too* hard...my experience with him was, this White male teacher is even getting on the White kids. The White math teacher didn't get on the White kids; I just felt like she got on *me* all the time. I finished first, I did well...kids would ask 'Could you help me?' and I just felt like I was *ostracized* because I did well, you know, in sixth grade.

Now when I got to *eighth* grade, I saw *racism* as an adolescent...we had a teacher that called us 'boy' all the time...this man was always calling us a boy,' this and that, and I talked to my mom about it. Too many times he called me a 'boy' and not my name...to the point where, he called me a 'boy' and I told him, 'I ain't no goat. Goats are boys.

My mother told me, I ain't no goat. I'm a Black male' and I walked out of his classroom...He threw a book at me! When I was leaving out his door, he threw a book and hit the wall and everyone witnessed the book being thrown. I could understand if we were maybe loud or we were talking, maybe we weren't focusing in class, but his *deliberate* sense of calling us out, and it being very *racial*, was a problem. Also, in the eighth grade our history teacher never called on the Black boys; always called on the White boys. I'll never forget that, as well. Every time I'd raise my hand, he'd call on somebody else....or, I'd raise my hand and he'd tell me 'Put your hand down.' And, if a White kid didn't raise their hand, then that meant he didn't want an answer and he'd just move on to the next thing, until a White kid put their hand up to answer, especially a White boy.

We had a teacher, a Science teacher in the eighth grade who used to sit behind all the Black girls with his legs open. I *noticed* and we *said* something about it, you know, to the point where we *reported it*, and it became like this *non-issue*... He would sit in his chair so that when he would do presentations with the kids, he would sit, and he would sit with his legs up like this [demonstrating]. If your chair were there, he would sit with his legs open like this. *All the time*. These were little girls at this point, and these were girls I went to elementary school with...I never forget. I knew it *back then* and I said something to him about it. 'Why do you always sit behind the girls with your legs open?' He said, "Get out!" I would get kicked out. That's when; I started to *push back* on the system, on the educational system. When I started to push back on what was right and what was wrong...I would get kicked out of class for being associated [with other black students] *no proof*; literally, by association...and I would go to the office and say 'I

didn't do it. I was not even *over* near them...but because we're all Black kids, you want to kick out all the Black boys.' Oh, I had to call out the elephant, but didn't feel racism from all white teachers...[*Reflecting on other white teachers*] I had a White, Phys. Ed. teacher, he was a military guy...I never felt any racial issues or racism from him...he was just a military guy...he treated *all* the kids the same...even the White kids. There was *definitely* a difference as to the teachers, who they were, and how *I* felt they were.

Through my experience in middle school, I had one African-American teacher, who taught math, an African-American health teacher, and I had an African-American Dean of Students, that was it. Now, Rendell was a *segregated* middle school, in reference to the segregated neighborhoods within the middle school. Rendell was big enough to house *three schools* in itself. I was in House C, which was all of the kids from Hoodtown, West Freedom (pseudonym), and Latimore...and then you had House B, which was the West Top (pseudonym) community kids that were also Black kids...and you had the lower part of, Point Bell (pseudonym), some of Shantytown (pseudonym), and parts of West Freedom as well. Then in House A was your predominately-White students who were from Shanty Hills (pseudonym) and Shantytown.

So House A was predominately-White house, sprinkled in with maybe a couple of Black kids. Then you had House B, which were the West Top kids, African-American kids, filtered in with the Point Bell kids and some of the West Freedom kids, which made that a little more diverse, but then House C was all Black. For me personally, overall it was a good experience...although I think educationally, there was a lot that *we* thought happened in the other Houses that didn't happen in House C. For example, we would seem to have *less* activities than the other two Houses...we wondered why there were

things that House B and House A would do, that House C wouldn't do. We also knew as a group, that there was a difference because we only saw the other kids during recess time outside of school. We never integrated anything during the school day, unless you played a sport, so there was never a House C/House B mixture of getting to know kids...there was never a collective mixture of the entire school working as one school; we actually worked as three different schools, and that was *very, very obvious* to us, that there were *three different schools within a school*...I never saw the principal...I only seen my *dean*...when I was going through school at the time, I couldn't tell you the principal was.

Now going into *high school*, it was like, I was going right back into my neighborhood...all those kids in House C went to Warren, basically, because it was all of Hoodtown, and it was all of the Latimore kids, so the whole House moved, as eighth graders, right into Warren High school. [*Although in House C Lance was segregated from the other students, he reflects*] for me it was positive because it gave us that *time* that we didn't have *together* collectively, or that I didn't have together collectively with those guys...it [*the segregation*] made it that much more of a *need*, as African-American males, to know each other outside of that building. I *knew* that I was going to achieve; when I was in Rendell, that was my goal, and even with some of the racial issues that arose, I felt very prepared to deal with them, as a *young leader*. Often, I was *picked* as the leader when not *identifying* myself as a leader, and my *peers* pushing me forward to voice and support their big concerns or issues. Then what I *did* recognize is that I always spoke up, too. I would speak up for other students...I remember challenging one of my teachers, 'Why don't you call on *those* guys? Why do you always call on me?' Teachers

were calling me out, but I never wanted that tension as if, ‘Hey, I’m smarter than you guys’ or ‘I’m doing my work’...We all shucked and jived at times and did work in others, but at the same time, I wanted *them* to also be called on, I wanted them to be a part of things...When I would get selected for achievement stuff...I would ask ‘Well, was there anybody else selected?’ I always challenged the individualism that I believe educators sometimes imposed when they recognize young African-American men who are smart...when they *do* recognize it, they tend to separated them from other black males...which I started to *recognize* early on...when you *did* get pulled out, you always got pulled out if it was something academic, or some achievement that you were being recognized for; you only got pulled out to go to classes with the kids in House A, who were “the smarter kids”, if you were supposedly smart too. So, whether it is some type of program or some type of special thing, they always pulled you *out*.

Going into the ninth grade, again, from a leadership standpoint, I didn’t ask to be a Junior Varsity captain or anything like that, but I was told ‘You *have* leadership qualities that enable you to support your peers and do some different stuff’... so understanding the racial *dynamics* that I had to go through at Rendell, I think it made me stronger...it went back to my parents preparing me for it...*preparing* me for leadership...it wasn’t a *bad* experience, it just built resilience. I think, at that time, socially and emotionally, I was *equipped*, even though there were things that were happening around the community and in school, it didn’t affect my *drive* to know that education was real important, so I *had* to go to school, I *had* to get good grades, *had* to go to class etc... I had to minimize my negative behaviors and make good choices. I think, as a *whole*, we all did, in that day...I didn’t see a lot of my peers getting *held back* or

fighting in the hallway. The issues were *socially systemic*...if you looked at them, you could see there were racial issue; that's how I looked at it, in middle school. You could clearly sit back and *see*...when I look at some of my classes and the things I talked about earlier, there were racial issues.

5.3.5 High School and Leadership

It was very *prideful* to go to Warren. When you went to Warren, the expectation was to succeed, in all levels. From a leadership standpoint, I think it was not just in the classroom, but also in athletics. It was also meaningful for me to attend an all-Black high school, which was probably one of only maybe *ten* in the country at that point. Disciplinary wise; you know, there were a lot of folks at the high school who knew my parents. I only lived one block away from the high school, so it was very meaningful for me. I think, in some aspects, we understood that we didn't have some of the resources. We knew friends that went to Scott [High School] and they would tell us the things that they did, but they were in magnet programs...guys who went to Percyton High School (pseudonym) were in magnet programs. We had *our* programs at Warren, but they weren't magnet programs. Kids from outside of *Hoodtown* did not come into Hoodtown to go to school, but kids in Hoodtown went outside of Hoodtown to go to school...everybody at that time *wanted* to go to Warren...as a young Black man, I felt pride attending a Black high school, which made me want to go to a Black college after that, more specifically. I could have gone to some predominately-White institutions but I chose a Black school because I wanted the historical Black college feel. But high school is where I really started to shape my thinking.

In the classroom, I led by example, in reference to doing my work and trying to *seek* help for others. [*Being considered a leader*]...made me work that much harder...It gave me a work ethic...[if] people who knew that if Lance is working that hard, that it must have some meaning to it...*I* was hoping it would then encourage other people to worked just as hard...you know, *on or off the field*...[when asked to party] I would say 'I'm not doing this because I need to study or do some things,'...It was like 'Oh, okay, well then maybe we *all* need to study.' So I always tried to work under a context that other people would see it and want to work in the same manner. I can remember, in some of my classrooms, being told 'Well listen, you're going to get in trouble trying to help someone else, as a teacher, I can't identify what it is you guys are really talking about; therefore, do your own work.' I've *never* been about leaving other people behind. I think, as I moved through school and as I became more integrated into sports and more integrated into trying to prepare for college, I hit your road bumps...community stuff that kind of happens; there were things that were going on, but I was able to *weather* the transition. When I look at my ninth grade experience, the make-up of teachers was pretty balanced.

At that time, I remember having a teacher who I had in middle school...she became one of my high school teachers in one of my classes, and I remember her feeling as though I used my leadership in athletics to...how did she put it... *render myself things in the classroom*...she thought that I was faking an injury that I had. I got in trouble for it...my football coach, had to explain to her that I was really...hurt. But she took it as 'Well, Lance is the quarterback' [*suggesting preferential treatment*]. At that point, it made me really want to float under the radar and *not* be the person out in front. So that,

for me...it changed my whole life, even in my everyday adult life, it changed how I go about doing business, working with folks...

I was still that guy who, when I got football scholarships, would tell other coaches 'Hey, I want to bring my friend' or 'What about him?' 'What about that guy?' Same thing in academics, when I would get academic opportunities or privileges to go to dinners or things, I would always ask 'Well, why not this guy or why not that guy?' But those experiences...how I was seen...really shaped me...

I ran for student class president, *not* because I merely wanted to be the senior class president, but so that I could make sure that, my student body got the things that they wanted. *That's* why I ran. I really felt that, if I *ran*, my peers would be heard... this was going to be an opportunity to do the things that we really wanted to do because I had an agenda of for my friends. I ain't have an agenda for *me* or *this is what I'm going to do*...I don't think I even put it on my college applications. I viewed the position differently. I didn't see the position as mine because I was captain of the football team, or captain of the basketball team...African-American males as senior class president at Warren hadn't happened in the last 3 years. I know the three years *prior*, every senior class president was a young *lady*...for the African-American males, it also showed that we could be in leadership roles and really be able to do and get some things done with the principal, and those types of things you do as the senior class president.

If I go back to all of my achievements, I attribute them to the people who actually had my best interests at heart...those people who continued to push and continued to inform me of opportunities, taught me how to balance...and not make those choices that put you in jail or *dead*. So I was kind of molded in that way; I never forget...my baseball

coach rode me all around Hoodtown, West Freedom, Latimore, showed me all the worst places in the neighborhood. He said to me, ‘See that guy right there...he was *this* when we were in school. See this other guy right here? I remember him,’ he was this and that. He said, ‘Don’t be that guy.’ He said, ‘I’m not saying to be like me or to be like anyone else, but don’t be *that* guy who had opportunities, but made decisions to land *here*, to live *this type* of a lifestyle; to be in these type of places.’ ...It was folks like that who really molded me. My English teacher, Dr. Spells (pseudonym) [black female]; we used to call her “Big Mama” who would *always* keep me after class or keep me after school to work on my *writing*. Dr. Spells and Mrs. Lancaster (pseudonym), [white female] who was my *ninth* grade writing teacher, taught me how to write from a *placement* standpoint –She would teach us how to write poems...she was real good...very *earthy*, I’d never heard of any one not having a TV in their home (*chuckles*) *but* she came to school every day and prepared us.

Mrs. Lancaster would *talk* to me about the community, what was going on with my friends...*both of them*, Dr. Spells and Mrs. Lancaster. The conversations I would have with them...‘Well, hey, what are you doing this weekend?’ ‘How’s everything at home?’ They would have different conversations with me. They were the ones who continuously put me in leadership positions. Also...my football coach and the athletic director, he was a science teacher... there were other folks in the school who really helped me *identify* myself. Also...at Warren, my peers, other African-American males, we would hold each other *accountable*. I can remember, my friends...you just didn’t *walk* to school, you walked to school and picked up whoever was in route to school. So, everyone who walked past my house knocked on my door...there was

accountability. I felt, at one point, ‘Oh my God, this high school thing...it ain’t gonna work. They came to pick me up at my *house!*’ It was like...that’s not an option. That kind of accountability of *young* men my age was instilled through the older men in the community.

5.3.6 Fall from Grace: Personal Responsibility and Redemption

It wasn’t until my *eleventh and twelfth grade year* when it really became difficult keeping on track because of the gang issues came into our neighborhood. ’88 is when drugs really started coming in to the community...it was very evident in the eleventh grade, who *got* involved and who *didn’t* get involved. [*Regarding gangs in Hoodtown, the Crips were dominant but there were different sets (factions)*] ‘I’m not gonna lose friends over this...I’m not gonna pick sides,’...as long as I could stay neutral, keep my friendships, move on, do the things I wanted to do...that started to become difficult around that time, I mean it really did. You know, you just saw a different community at that point. Folks who instilled positive things in me got caught up in those types of things, and it just made you think, ‘Wow, I remember when I fell down the hill; he was the one that took care of me, and now he’s on drugs or doing something he shouldn’t be doing.’ Meanwhile, I’m still trying to push forward, trying to keep my academics up, playing football, wanting to go on to college and do things...but, at the same time (chuckles) the streets are watching and wondering when that opportunity is gonna come for the streets to come get you. Now, I *did* have two parents, I did have a lot of those folks rooting for me. I did have a lot of things in place, but at that same time, once you get a certain age...trying to make your own decisions, you’ve got to figure it out.

It was at that time that I started to, not think so much about, ‘Well, this is going to *jeopardize* my leadership or this is going to jeopardize my friendships or this is going to jeopardize something else, so I became a victim of my own community just like everybody else...and it was real hard for a lot of people to take, but at the end of the day, going through my experience at that point in time and hitting rock bottom, being incarcerated, made me understand that, in this second life [speaking about his current life], this second opportunity, those same folks that continuously helped me along are still around, so if the bridge was burnt, but it was rebuilt...

Those who helped really pushed me in directions where I could help *myself*. I think for a long time they assumed, ‘Well, that’s Lance. Lance will get it, he always does.’ ‘You tell Lance, he’ll pick it up.’ ...but when I graduated and went on to *college*, that’s when I realized that, academically, I wasn’t as prepared as I *thought* I was... I received a football scholarship to go on to college, but after graduating and being voted ‘most likely to succeed’, I ended up becoming academically ineligible after my first year,

I needed money at that point, to go to summer school and I wanted to go back to Maryland instead of doing it here and transferring credits because, at that time, it was *bad*. It was bad. I came home from school and was told that in our neighborhood, ‘red is dead here.’ The gangs were running rampant, so I’m like, ‘Okay, let me go back to school early!’ (*Chuckles*) Well that never happened...I ended up getting in trouble, not going back to school, and was then encouraged, by my attorney, *not* to go to school, and to stay *here* and, if I could, go to school and work. I said, ‘No, I really don’t want to,’ but, I didn’t have the money to go to back to school...so I figured if I could get enough money, I could go back to school, pay my *own* bill, and everything would be alright!

(*Chuckles*) That's the late adolescent mind working for you! Again, not thinking that it was going to jeopardize anything, I thought, okay, well if I can just make some good out of bad, I'll be fine. It didn't work out.

I'll never forget it to this day, that's just how I looked at it. It was a simple quick cost/benefit analysis. I said, 'All right, if I can get this amount, I can go back to school, I can pay my bill, and I won't become a statistic to my neighborhood.' Ended up becoming a statistic anyway...which had a very bad ripple effect in the community and... it set my life back about five years. I think it made me that much stronger, though. It really did. I can remember, after going away, and coming home after being incarcerated, I really just tried to focus on myself and my *son*, who was born right before I went away...I said to myself, 'When I come home, I'm gonna do everything in my power to make sure that he doesn't *have to* resort to the things I had to...having to make those type of cost/benefit analyses...I don't want *that* to be an option for him.' I didn't want that, mentally, to be an option for him.

So when I came home, I worked for about a year...I'll never forget going to a couple of my buddies, who also got in trouble at same time, who also were home, and I said, 'You know, I'm gonna go into the new year broke.' They said, 'What you mean?' I said, 'I'm gonna spend every dollar I got. Every dollar I got the before the new year, I'm gonna go into the new year with whatever that check is that I get in two weeks after I go to work...that's what I'm gonna start my life with.' It was a \$253 check. That's what I started my life with...Eighteen years ago...Ain't ask my mom for a dime, ain't ask nobody for a dime. My mom let me stay with them until I could get on my feet,

but...yeah, I started off...broke. The next year I earned six thousand dollars; then the next year it was seventeen thousand...it just kept moving up...

I *attribute* the resilience of my second life, in a sense, to all the things that I was taught as an adolescent that would move me forward in the second life. The road bump in between, I think, was really a *test* of...a test of my *integrity*. I accepted the fact that I had done some wrong and understood that, once I got a chance to do it right by any means, it was going to be done right. It *has* to be about personal responsibility...to know that I am *still* trying to show gratification to folks, letting them know that I regret being a bad influence at that time. I was nineteen...twenty-one, I mean, at that time when you're trying to find yourself and all that stuff... I remember when I came home, folks wanted to hear from me...but I had to take care of me *mentally and emotionally first*, before I could really start reaching out to folks who I were the people who helped me, who did for me, who didn't want to see these things happen in my life.

Before I went away my son's mom became pregnant, and my mother said to me, 'I want you to do something for me,' I said, 'What's that?' and she said, 'I want you to go and look outside.' I said, 'What you mean?' She said, 'Just go to the front door and look outside, and then come back and tell me what you saw.' So I go outside, I see friends, people selling drugs, the whole nine...that's just what was happening outside. So I came back in and said, 'You know, there's the same people out there,' I said, 'I don't understand, Mom?' She said, 'Are you ready to raise your child in that life?' Are you ready to raise a child in that world? I said to myself, and I said to my mom, 'You know what Mom, I don't know if I'm ready, but I guess I'm gonna have to get ready,' and that's *just what it was*. I had to get ready to become a parent, I had to get ready to

become a father...And as an African-American man now, raising two...and my oldest boy is in college, my youngest son is in the first grade, it's really now, for me, just a matter of being a better person. But I'm just saying that an African-American male in a White society with no breaks, I get that...I get that.

Lance, which is a pseudonym, was named after a two-time Olympic gold medalist turned philanthropist who works with disadvantaged youth in his native Kenya. Lance has strived to emulate his hero. Like Malcolm, Lance has tried to live up to the image and model of his namesake. A favorite quote from his hero reads, "*We come into this world with nothing...and depart this world with nothing ... it's what we contribute to the community that is our legacy.*"

Now 40 years old, Lance is the father of a daughter and two sons. He is married to the love of his life, who is also the principal of an elementary school right outside the city of Pittsburgh. He and his family reside in a middle class, predominantly black neighborhood, which is also just outside of the city. His oldest son, who was born while Lance was incarcerated, is now a standout football player at a prominent division I university in Pennsylvania. As a sophomore, he is already an NFL prospect. He and Lance are very close.

For the last fifteen years, Lance has worked as a community organizer, mobilizing and managing parents and community members to improve public education in Pittsburgh through volunteer work, advocacy, and educational opportunities. Prior to his current position, he served as the Health and Wellness Program Manager and At-Risk Youth as a Case Manager for several local non-profit organizations. He has volunteered in a depressed community just outside of Pittsburgh, helping community members seek revitalization funding, and served as a trustee on a local Community Service Board and a Community Advisory Committee in Hoodtown and the

surrounding communities where he spent his childhood. He also helps coach high school football in the City League and WPIAL.

A graduate of the teacher education program at Community College of Allegheny County, Lance currently is pursuing a bachelor's degree in applied developmental psychology and education at the University of Pittsburgh. Today, he works for a non-profit organization that works directly with and for parents, families, and communities served by the Pittsburgh Public Schools. He is truly giving back and "paying it forward".

These three stories of black male adolescence include a self-proclaimed *fighter*, *scholar*, and *leader*. These men existed in multiple life worlds during adolescence; hence, their identities shifted, morphed, and took on different characteristics in different spaces at different times. In one world, Frantz was a fighter, by most accounts destined for pre-mature death or jail, in others he was a promising athlete, and at times when he was most comfortable, he was just Frantz a loyal friend and protective brother and son. In certain spaces, Malcolm was a caring and brilliant young man who was celebrated for his intellectual gifts and compassion although he was penalized, at times, for his lighter skin and "good hair" within narrow views of black masculinity. Still in other spaces, he was a class clown who was labeled as an under-achiever and largely left to his own academic devices. Lance was a standout student/athlete, a trusted leader who was raised to be responsible. He always seemed to have it all together, yet upon closer review; Lance was withering under the mantle of leadership, during a societal shift that devastated his community with a flood of drugs and guns and a proliferation of gangs that enveloped most of his friends like a black hole.

These narratives clearly defy the constraints of any deterministic foreshadowing of life outcomes, while demonstrate both diversity of experience and meaning making during the

adolescent black male identity construction process. The *fighter* identity posed the greatest risk factor for academic achievement, yet paradoxically, over the life span, only Frantz has attained a graduate degree and only the *leader* Lance went to prison. Currently Frantz has a Master's degree in Sociology, Malcolm a Bachelor's degree in Education, and Lance is working toward his Bachelor's degree in Education. Clearly, this would not have been the comparative educational attainment outcome expected from these young men 25 years ago. These, like the other narratives not featured in this report, are important stories that teach us many things about the social and schooling experiences of adolescent black males. In and of themselves, these are stories of resilience and perseverance that challenge the dominant, deficit narratives about the black male experience that constrain possibilities for adolescent black males in schools.

6.0 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

My analysis of the data revealed four important themes or statements of meaning that can be found through most of the data or deriving from more specific data surrounding a significant emotional or factual event. The four themes are: *respect*, *internalized racism*, *the power in words and names*, and *whiteness as property*. In addition to an analysis of the four themes drawn from the data, I close the chapter with an analysis of two significant meta-themes that cut across all of the narratives, and a researcher reflection on *the power of voice*. These overarching themes emerged from the experiences and insights shared in these *critical tales*, as well as my own reflections on the interviews. The first meta-theme is an analysis of the *differing interpretations of black masculinity, achievement, and race* and the second is an analysis of *differend* insights gleaned from the narratives. The researcher reflection is on the deep sense of gratitude shown by each man for having the opportunity to *speak his peace*. This sense of deep gratification resonates with the *counter-story telling* construct of Critical Race Theory.

Multiple themes emerged during analysis. I chose the themes to report based upon the frequency with which they appeared in the interviews and the salience of each across the interviews. Other themes emerged that were prominent in two or three of the interviews, but either less prominent or non-existent in the others. Themes such as: *The Invisibility Syndrome* “*Unless I’m on the Field, Court, or in Trouble, You Don’t See Me*”; *Intimacy* “*In-To-Me-You-See*”; *Trust* “*Guilty Until Proven Innocent*”; and *Neglect* “*Who’s Taking Care of Me?*” were resonant, but not recurrent enough in the data to include in the report. Also, because I wanted

my analysis to have sufficient depth, I chose to minimize the number of themes to cover in this report. The additional themes will be discussed briefly in chapter 7 with respect to future research.

A brief discussion of these meta-themes and their implications are found in the following chapter. This discussion is a defense for maintaining the *differend* and is situated within an argument for the utility of CRT as an appropriate methodological and analytical tool to examine and disrupt the pervasive academic struggles of black males.

6.1 RESPECT: “YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE ME, BUT YOU’RE GOING TO RESPECT ME!”

Duncan (2002) argues that persistent negative social and schooling experiences of marginalization and exclusion and a sense of powerlessness from the muting of their collective voice concerning these experiences leads to anxiety for adolescent black males. According to Leary et al (2005) the pervasive nature of these experiences indicates that this population feels highly disrespected in schools and society. There is a salient relationship between adolescent black male angst and attitudes about respect (Leary et al., 2005). Respect is of particular importance to black males. Responses to disrespect (i.e., assaults on their family, character, or self-image) often result in violence as a form of retaliation when access to other forms of power are shut off. When feeling disrespected, young black men often adopt artificial symbols of

dominance such as violence to reinforce cognitive distortions and unworkable images of respect and success.

We see this very clearly in the adolescent experiences of Frantz. Growing up in an impoverished black community with limited resources and no consistent positive black male role model, Frantz developed notions of black masculinity based upon the images he had at his disposal. Images of masculinity more associated with survival and violence as a means for self-preservation, than peace and the collective good in the community. Frantz's experience at the age of seven, when he was told by his mother not to come home without his big wheel, speaks to the necessity to protect the limited resources one has when one is poor. It also speaks to a lack of other more peaceful means to settle disputes:

I found out early in life that nothing was given to you, and how to protect the things that you had...allowing people to take things off of you was unacceptable.

As a single mother, understanding that Frantz's social survival in such an environment was going to be determined by his ability to exact his own justice, she gave him an ultimatum to either face the person who took his property, or face her when he got home. Either way, violence was a distinct possibility and Frantz understood that:

There was an example where someone stole my Big Wheel when I was younger and I remember my mom telling me "don't come home without your Big Wheel"

What he also understood was, if the capacity for violence is a prerequisite for self preservation in an environment with scarce resources and no other viable means to exact justice, then the better you are at it, ultimately the safer you will be. Upon retrieving his big wheel from

an older and bigger boy, Frantz was introduced to the value of physical violence as a mechanism for self preservation:

...at the age of seven, I went out to go find my Big Wheel...It was an older guy who stole it and I had to bring it back. So I tried means of communication to get my Big Wheel back, but he didn't believe in that... So, I wind up picking up a stick and, you know it was a nice size stick, and threw it, hit him in his face and snatched my Big Wheel and started to run with it...I brought my Big Wheel back and the learning experience that my mom told me really played part in my life...For a seven year old, that's a hell of a learning experience...because it just let me know that we live in a unforgiving society and you have to protect what's yours.

Moreover, this capacity would also be associated with a certain status or level of respect in that environment. Frantz also talked about realizing the capacity to be violent and the ability to dominate others could be used to gain the respect necessary for self-preservation in the community:

...I wasn't afraid to fight someone who was older than me...because I knew I didn't have anybody to depend on to help me out... so if somebody wanted to try me...I had to take all comers. 'You could try me if you want to'...a mindset where, 'you might beat me, but you'd better damn near kill me or I'm coming back...'you're not gonna start fear in me...and you're gonna respect me! Around that age, I really started understanding what respect was...and I yearned for respect...That was like the thing. 'You didn't have to like me, but goddammit you're gonna respect me'!

So [at the age of 10] that's where it really hit home with me [that] this respect thing is okay'...then what I found is that, (sigh) I was always having to *prove* myself, I always believed that I had to prove myself physically, to keep people away from me...To keep people from wantin' to pick with me.

As a protective mechanism, Frantz fought. He yearned for the respect that came from his willingness to fight and his ability to dominate others physically. It not only protected him, but it gave him a feeling of self-worth when other means of establishing personal value and self-efficacy in school and other domains were out of reach. This became his identity, his reputation, his label. In listening to him, discuss this period of life he *sighed* when he discussed always having to prove himself. Just the thought of those adolescent experiences seemed to make him mentally weary. He did not want to be this way, but he believed he had no choice. He 'walked alone' as the lyrics from *The Roots* song that opened his profile suggest. This lack of support and protection certainly informed another *risk-factor* decision surrounding his *fighter* identity and his ongoing quest for the status and safety associated with *respect*. His decision to join the OSU gang:

So *now*, I couldn't turn to Jason and say "I need you to assist me in this situation," I was on my own to kinda deal with the situation... but what wind up happening is the guys from OSU said 'We appreciate what you did' and I needed them at the time, 'cause now I'm at odds with these guys, so I joined OSU for some time...I *had* to or I wouldn't be able to live where I was living or survive...

The weight of this identity was evident. Although he was making choices that perpetuated his fighter identity and the respect that came along with it, he was also looking for a way out. Unfortunately, when he tried to reinvent himself as he transitioned into high school his efforts were thwarted by the principal, a black male authority figure:

[In high school] He [black male principal] was transferred from Hometown Middle School to Bradley... lunchtime, walking down the hall, he sees me, pulls me in his office, introduce me to his secretary, and tells the secretary, 'Start a disciplinary card on him *now*.' She writes my name down...I hadn't done a thing. The stench of, 'I can't even reinvent myself' was there! Even if I wanted to, I couldn't because of him...

I started getting heavy into sports...I had two lives [dual identities], I would play sports...I would fight, afterwards...I was building a reputation...and gaining more and more respect, even as a ninth grader... as I started to get older...I had to make a *choice*...it started to weigh me down a lot.

Although this violent identity gave him *respect* and protected him in some ways, it was definitely a risk factor for academic achievement and engagement. It also put his life on a social trajectory that could easily have drawn him into the *cradle to prison pipeline* (Edelman M. W., 2007). Recalling his suspension in high school when he was protecting his brother:

...now everything I was building was starting to go downhill...letters from Division I schools started to go out the window because I was looked at as a problem...so I'm done with football; [I'm thinking] I'll never play football again because of what happened. So there goes *college*. Now, I'm getting back into survival mode...what am I gonna do

now? There's no more goals, there's no more football, there's no more college. So I wind up relapsing into fighting again....I guess this is going to be my lifestyle...The thing I learned during high school was that it's a thankless world and people don't really have to know you, they're not really trying to get to know you...you were there and you either get it or you don't, and you're on your own...

Again, this identity weighed heavily on him. He wanted to change, to be identified with something positive, but he was thwarted. He uses "stench", to describe the aura around him as an incoming freshmen in high school when he was denied an opportunity for redemption, by a black male authority figure no less. Frantz saw this as confirmation that he was more trouble to most adults than he was worth, that school and society were both unforgiving places of competition, and that he was destined for a way of life that he did not choose, nonetheless, accepted for a lack of other viable alternatives.

Malcolm also talked about the pressure to be viewed as tough growing up as an adolescent black male. In his story, we see his struggles with the pressure to be tougher like his father but feeling as if he is weak and *soft* and, like Frantz, trying to find ways to cope with and compensate for being afraid:

I just remember being *afraid* a lot of different things...just being afraid and trying to find ways to cover up being afraid. Knowing that I'm afraid, and I'm not sure of myself right now...because I got so much *attention* and I got encouragement from home, I could get through it and compensate for it...I remember a lot of my childhood was just feelings of

being *afraid* and *nervous*. Like, I'm nervous....and I don't know if I can do this thing....really kind of *timid*...couldn't get past my nerves.

So that was big for me, learning how to cope with...*anxiety* and *fear* as a young man, and just what that means... My father seemed so *sure* and so *strong*, so *aggressive*, and I didn't *feel* like I was. I remember, he would be kind of tough, like 'Get up, stop crying!' I'd be like, 'I'm trying, Dad.' I'm trying to be harder, but I didn't know how. I didn't know how to be as *tough* as I wanted to be, when I was young. That was *very*, *very big*, up until high school. I didn't know how to be hard; because I was *soft*...I really was soft. I was a nice guy...but I felt like I was *weak*, really...because, I *care* about these things. I care about what people think of me too much. I remember feeling like, I wanted to be *tougher*, but I didn't know how. So...going into high school, was a big thing. That's where I began to develop this identity were I want to be seen as the antithesis of the intellectual, you know, but as a young man, that's what I got rewarded for, was being the *kind* person, the person people thought was *trustworthy* and *kind* and *smart* and *helpful*.

We see a dilemma in Malcolm's story where much of his adolescent anxiety was associated with trying to mask who he really was, a *nice guy* who cared about things beyond himself. Moving into high school, he no longer wanted to be viewed as *trustworthy*, *kind*, *smart*, and *helpful*. He had been celebrated for these things early on, but found there was very little social capital to be gained as a kind-hearted, intelligent adolescent black male who was also light-skinned with curly hair. Instead, he portrayed himself as the *antithesis of the intellectual*,

the indifferent, apathetic, and at times disruptive *class clown*. Malcolm believed that this *way of being* would insulate him from being viewed as weak. Black masculinity obviously took on a different meaning as he entered high school. Malcolm was *light skinned* with *curly hair* and smart, and in this new environment, a new racial and masculine socialization led him to view these characteristics as weaknesses. He did not want to be viewed as a “nerd” and a “*soft, pretty-boy*” because those were not respected identity designations among his new black male peers:

I no longer wanted to be like the “bookworm” kid; I no longer wanted to be seen that way. I remember being *ashamed* of that. I remember feeling like I’m the light-skinned guy with the curly hair; thin...I don’t want to seem like a *nerd*. That had a *big* influence on my behavior in high school, not wanting to embrace that identity, as an intellectual and academic achiever. I rejected that, *very consciously*, and tried, *hard*, to be seen as anything but that. It was *very* conscious, it was *very deliberate*, it was *very persistent*, and it was *very deep*. Because I was *ashamed* of that, and I thought that made me seem *weak*, like I wasn’t even *Black*, you know...because we were always *light* and...‘because of my hair’ and because of things like this... I remember being *very aware* of that; at one point *ashamed* of it, at one point *embracing* it, at one point wanting *more* of it, so it was kind of being confused at times...on one hand, I don’t want to be seen as a little light-skinned boy; on the other hand, you get some more *play* [attention from girls]. Cats [other black males] want to [try] you...you got to *prove* yourself a little bit...I used to feel like it was something that was a *weakness*...a *deficit* that I always had to compensate for in some way. I always had to show that I wasn’t weak...that I could

hold my own...*get down* like everybody else...and that I was willing to go as far as somebody else was willing to go...And that was in the back of my mind. It was an interesting transition to go through...I remember being very aware, at some point, that we were *light*, and that we had so-called good hair.

These limited notions of black masculinity, where so-called toughness, darker skin, courser hair, and the willingness to be violent are laudable characteristics and proclivities, while lighter skin, compassion, and intelligence are considered deficits; are associated with and deeply rooted in elements of internalized racism and the weight of racialized stereotypes. There is an old saying within the African American community ‘if you’re light, you’re alright; if you’re brown, stick around; but if you’re black, get back”. This saying speaks to the impact of a *color-coded consciousness* among African Americans that was borne out of slavery and its insidious racial socialization. Lighter-skinned enslaved Africans were often given more privileges and resources on the plantation than those who were darker-skinned, and typically enjoyed relatively better access to the comforts and ease of white society, as well as greater acceptance within white society than darker skinned enslaved Africans enjoyed. Generally, any social capital gained from lighter skin was inaccessible to darker-skinned enslaved Africans. The notion that lighter-skinned African Americans are somehow less tough, hence less threatening, was internalized by many African Americans and the multi-generational transmission of this notion perpetuated a stereotype within the black community that was pervasive during Malcolm’s

adolescent years. This color-coded consciousness was played out in the Spike Lee film *School Daze*¹¹.

Malcolm was functioning within an inverted hierarchy of black racial socialization when he reached high school, where his lighter skin and curly hair were attributes associated with weakness among his non-gifted peers, which comprised the majority of the larger school population. Malcolm understood this and in order to gain respect, or at least reduce the possibility of becoming a target, he made a conscious choice to abandon the protective academic identity of *scholar* and adopt the social identity of *class clown* to accommodate this inverted hierarchy of black racial socialization. Despite not necessarily being viewed as tough, Malcolm's *class clown* identity did position him, for those who were watching, in opposition to the privilege of the exclusive, predominantly white space of the gifted classes. This, for him, was enough to gain the requisite social capital within the school to keep him safe. Unfortunately, it also hindered his capacity to engage and achieve in the advanced academic program.

6.2 INTERNALIZED RACISM: “WHITE PEOPLE ARE SMARTER THAN BLACK PEOPLE”

Members of marginalized groups often suffer from self-condemnation because they internalize the stereotypical images that certain elements of society have constructed around those minorities in order to maintain their own power (Delgado, 1995; Taylor, 2005). Internalized

¹¹ In the film, the “paper bag” test was administered as a way to determine acceptance into certain Black Greek organizations. If the candidate was lighter than the paper bag they were admitted, if they were darker they were not.

racism is manifest in the determining of whiteness as valuable or superior and the simultaneous acceptance of blackness as invaluable or inferior, creating a schism within the black psyche (DeCuir-Gunby, 2006; Taylor, 2005). As adolescent black male identities are being constructed and managed in the school context, Nasir et al. (2009) draw the distinction between strong notions of blackness related to street activity for low-achieving students and those of high-achieving students that equate academic achievement with blackness. Hucks (2008) argues that the home culture and community with which a black student identifies has a significant influence on school performance and notions of blackness.

Malcolm, for example was raised in a home culture and community where black male high-achievement was expected, and the capacity for excellence was fostered, and celebrated. He was surrounded by friends who were also high achievers and whose parents also modeled and fostered excellence. Clearly, early on, Malcolm equated academic achievement with his blackness:

There were a lot of *affluent*, very successful men...one of my uncles was a Tuskegee Airman...we would see these kind of things. And so, it *influenced* me...because I saw someone in my father, and in my grandfather... the *closest* two males to me, who excelled at *everything*...they were just recognized as leaders *all the time*. And they would give me so much attention and affirmation...they would say 'You're this kind of person' 'You're this...' I remember my father once told me something that shaped my whole life; he said 'I was smart, I was a smart cat. Your grandfather...he was heavy; he was the heaviest dude around. But you're the smartest person I've ever met.'

So he would always sow these things into my head; my grandfather would do that, too. He'd be like, 'You're *this* kind of child, you're *this* kind of person. One day you're going to do *this*.' So that influenced me a lot...and it was *huge*, and I could see the *grooming* that happens when you're just affiliated with that.

However, in spite of this supportive upbringing, his ideas about his own capacities were shaken by his experiences in the exclusive, almost all white CAS program in high school. He talks about the difficulty of the work, but what stood out to me was his interpretation of the lack of supportive African American academic teachers who would have served as a buffer against the socio-cultural and socio-historical forces at work during this time that compromised his *scholar* identity. His home culture and community did significantly influence his school performance and notions of blackness up until high school, but his masculine, academic, and racial identity were all disrupted in this highly competitive academic space with few, if any, African American role models:

I remember the classes seeming *excruciatingly difficult* to me... It just seemed like the work was so *hard*, and I was one of only a few African-American males who was in all CAS classes...I didn't have any African-American male[academic] teachers, in high school...I had one African-American *female* teacher that I remember, and that was Ms. Philips...the whole standard of excellence as a core African-American tenet, wasn't there anymore...my whole identity had been *formed* around that; being a Black man is the strength of your mind and the strength of your ability to achieve and excel, had always been really *drilled* in me. I felt *lost* in my identity...I didn't know what it *meant* to be an

African-American male now. What does it *mean* to be one of only a handful...so, in high school, I really *needed* that, and I had the greatest dearth of positive interactions with *any* male, any *African-American* male...any authority figure *period*.

In retrospect, Malcolm recognized just how much he needed the examples of black male excellence and affirmation at home to be duplicated in high school. Because of this dearth, his sense self-efficacy was compromised in this elite, almost exclusively white academic space where he was one of only a handful of black students. Furthermore, he too, began to feed into stereotypical notions of Black intellectual inferiority. [In order to maintain the flow of his narrative, I chose to leave the following portion of Malcolm's interview data out of his profile however, it is critical for the analysis of this theme]. Here, Malcolm talks about beginning to question the Black intellect during high school:

I felt like 'I don't know if I'm supposed to be in this program,' ...it was the first time that I ever felt a clear difference in my mind, when I began to notice [*comparing the number of black students in the school proportionately with the number in his advanced classes*]...how many students that were African-American in the school... the school was racially...about 50:50. I remember thinking, 'maybe this is because we're not as smart...I had never had that thought before. I never told anyone that. I would have never said that out loud...I began to associate academic success, academic achievement with...I guess, being White, to a certain degree. I mean, I really did...I really did...I remember thinking to myself, 'I don't even want to be a Scholar, I don't even want to be Gifted' ...maybe this is not something we're as good at...'this is not my element, this is not our element.'

...I never in my life thought that I wasn't intelligent until high school, and I really felt like 'I'm not as smart as I thought I was.' ...if I was supposed to be the best or among the best...this is just not our thing.' I had always been one of the, if not the, outstanding African-American male student; or the outstanding male student or student period, White or Black, all through my life... [I began to think] there's a difference between someone White and someone Black when it comes to things like this...I felt like school was not our thing. So as a result, the big thing for me was trying to stand out in other areas, many of which were negative and insignificant...

In this space, even the family *grooming* of black male excellence was not enough to anchor him and mitigate the *affect of pavorative stereotypes* (Steele, 2010) concerning black mental deficiency (Taylor, 2005). His grooming was rendered meaningless in this space of competition and *false meritocracy*. The racial make up of his advanced studies classes compared to that of the rest of the school offered overwhelming evidence of White intellectual superiority, for a brilliant adolescent black male whose ideas of achievement were inextricably tied to blackness. This, along with the difficulty of the work made it impossible to maintain the sense of academic self-efficacy he brought with him from middle school. How was he to sustain the required sense of academic self-efficacy to excel with no examples of Black male intellectual excellence to call upon? This, I think, was instrumental in his development of the fringe *class clown* identity that ultimately posed a significant risk factor for his academic success.

Unlike Malcolm, Frantz wasn't groomed for black male excellence and expectations for academic achievement. His experiences growing up left him at the mercy of the expectations

of the adults in schools that were charged with his care. Notions of black male mental deficiency but physical giftedness (Taylor , 2005) are laid bare as he recalls his first experience with white students:

Sixth grade was a transition because...it was the first time I had interactions with White students. They bussed White students in from Bradford and Brookline, to come to Hometown Middle School...I was already exposed to White teachers...I remember that the *stereotypes* come out, you know, like ‘*White people are smarter than Black people*’...So that was heavy then...if you had the chance to be partners with somebody on the test or a project, you would choose a White student over the Black student because you would think that the White student was smarter.

Frantz recollection of his embracement of this stereotype speaks to its power. The unfortunate by product of such internalized racism became manifest in his privileging of all things physical and athletic over those enterprises and exercises that were academic and intellectual. Frantz was and is a very intelligent individual who, like many black adolescents, at times was purposeful about his anti-intellectualism and at others, unwittingly withered under the weight of racist stereotypes concerning the intellectual capacity of black people.

6.3 POWER IN WORDS & NAMES: “YOU’LL BE IN THE PAPER-DEAD OR IN

JAIL”

The tongue has the power of life and death...

~Proverbs 18:21

"I am not what I think I am. I am not what you think I am. I am what I think you think I am."

~ Robert H. Schuller (1982, pg. 159)

The notion of black male malfeasance and deficiency is representative of the prevailing lens through which educators design and evaluate programs and practices that specifically target black males (Matthews & Williams, 2007). Duncan (2002) suggests that this view is informed by a *black-male-deficit ideology* that reinforces the marginalization and exclusion that black males experience in schools. Racialized educational discourse about black males, emanating from this type of scholarship, can be *offensive* and counterproductive but may go unidentified and unchallenged because it is situated in seemingly objective social language (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Those who employ these discourses are typically insulated from accusations of racism (Duncan, 2002).

Frantz's story indicates that there are times when what is said to and about black boys in schools is not situated in seemingly objective social language. In fact, the comment made directly to him by his fourth grade teacher was quite subjective and damaging:

I don't know exactly what I want to be, but I know if my mom reacted *this* way, I want to be in the paper! So for my assignment, what I basically said...regardless of how I'm getting in the paper, I want to be in the paper...and I wasn't having the best of days, I guess (sigh); I remember the teacher saying "Yeah, you're gonna be in the paper one day, but you're gonna be in the paper because your either dead or going to jail."

Mr. X...was a White guy...he was *fun* - he would show us magic tricks; he would make things exciting in our classroom, but I think he used to get frustrated when things

didn't really go the way he wanted them to go, so...his statement, it *crushed* me, because this was the first time I really started thinking about my future and other people....So, this was right after I read mine...I remember the excitement on everybody else's face when they were talking about what they were going to be, and there was nothing that you could possibly tell them that they *couldn't* do, so I'm looking at him like 'Why would he say something like that?...

This careless, racialized condemnation of Frantz by an adult, who was commissioned with responsibility for he and his fellow classmate's care and education, shows the profound influence that words can have on a young person's self-perception and life-trajectory. Of course, there is no way we can accurately attribute Frantz's anti-schooling/social choices to that lone comment, however, his narrative indicates just how significant it was. Frantz describes the write up in the paper concerning his suspension resulting from him defending his brother almost 10 years later during high school;

So now, I'm a star football player on the team; he just *crushed* that. I was being recruited by a Division I teams. (Sighs) There was a write-up in the paper, you know...it goes back to Mr. X...and the write-up said...'Frantz was suspended for discipline reasons. He'll miss another four games.'

My over twenty years of experience in education reminds me that students will typically rise or fall to the level of expectations of the adults around them. I believe there are many self-fulfilling prophecies that become manifest in the lives of black males because of the internalization of pejorative stereotypes, negative experiences, and *spoiled* identities. Many of

those negative experiences are associated with words of condemnation spoken by uncaring and irresponsible adults in schools who, unwittingly at times and purposefully in others, use their tongues as weapons to harm instead of tools to build up and heal. Arguably, Mr. X's comment was a determinant for many of the choices Frantz made that established his risk-laden identity and reputation as a fighter. It certainly took the wind out of his sails.

Conversely, Malcolm's story speaks to the empowerment and self-efficacy fostered by words of purpose and affirmation from trusted adults in the lives of young black males. Not only was he constantly affirmed and surrounded by images and expectations of black male excellence, his name also anchored him in an identity that directed his path, informed his choices, and ultimately enabled him to recover and "find his way". Lance's story speaks to this same power. Due to his parents' grounding in The Civil Rights movement, they fostered values of honesty and justice, as well as personal and civic responsibility. There were high expectations for leadership held for him from his parents and several of his teachers, particularly in elementary and high school. Moreover, Lance's namesake provided a roadmap for manhood and a constant reminder of his call to leadership and service; an identity that he would ultimately have to recall in order to "get back on track".

In looking at the life trajectories of these men, I am struck by the power of both words of affirmation and condemnation that were spoken to them and about them. The words of condemnation spoken to Frantz, coupled with incessant negative social and schooling experiences could have easily derailed him, but they did not. What does this say about personal agency, and resilience among adolescent black males? The words of affirmation, images of

excellence and responsibility, and even the names given to Malcolm and Lance anchored them, yet were not enough to insulate them from the impact of negative social and schooling experiences that would ultimately derail Lance's life and hinder Malcolm's progress. What does this say about words of affirmation and images of black male excellence alone, without an accompanying focus on the structural impediments to adolescent black male success?

As an educator whose maturity and patience has been tested by uncivil, disrespectful, and defiant students over the years, I know how easy it is for the tongue to slip. However, I wonder if we as adults have considered the damage that can be done by such slips and conversely, the tremendous benefit that timely and sincere words of praise, affirmation, or care can have as well.

6.4 WHITENESS AS PROPERTY: [IT] “WAS VERY, VERY OBVIOUS TO US, THAT THERE WERE THREE DIFFERENT SCHOOLS WITHIN A SCHOOL”

Whiteness as property in CRT argues that whiteness can be considered a property interest (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). According to Harris (1995), the property functions of whiteness in education fall on three levels: (a) rights of disposition (i.e., rewarding or sanctioning students of color for conforming to or deviating from white norms of dress, speech patterns, conceptions of knowledge, etc.); (b) rights of use and enjoyment (i.e. whiteness allowing for specific social, cultural, and economic privileges and access to high-quality facilities, rigorous curriculum, and honors and/or gifted programs); (c) right of possession

and exclusion (i.e. the myriad ways schools have been re-segregating via tracking, creation and maintenance of separate schools, and white flight).

Lance's story reveals a de facto segregation within a school that was lauded for being a multi-cultural environment designed to bring students from different communities and different ethnic backgrounds together. He describes the segregation in his middle school:

Rendell was a *segregated* middle school, in reference to the segregated neighborhoods within the middle school. Rendell was big enough to house *three schools* in itself. I was in House C, which was all of the [Black] kids from Hoodtown, West Freedom, and Latimore...and then you had House B, which was the *West Top* kids, which were also Black kids..., and you had the lower part of, Point Bell, some of Shadyside, and parts of West Freedom as well. Then in House A was your predominately-White students who were from Squirrel Hill and Shadyside... sprinkled in with maybe a couple of Black kids...House B, which were the West Top kids, African-American kids, filtered in with the Point Bell kids and some of the West Freedom kids, which made that a little more diverse, but then House C was all Black...there was a lot that *we* thought happened in the other Houses that didn't happen in House C. For example, we would seem to have *less* activities than the other two Houses...we wondered why there were things that House B and House A would do that House C wouldn't do. We also knew as a group, that there was a difference because we only saw the other kids during recess time outside of school. We never integrated anything during the school day, unless you played a sport, so there was never a House C/House B mixture of getting

to know kids...there was never a collective mixture of the entire school working as one school; we actually worked as three different schools, and that was *very, very obvious* to us, that there were *three different schools within a school*...I never saw the principal...I only seen my *dean*...when I was going through school at the time, I couldn't tell you who the principal was...Also, in the eighth grade our history teacher never called on the Black boys; always called on the White boys. Every time I'd raise my hand, he'd call on somebody else....or, I'd raise my hand and he'd tell me 'Put your hand down.' And, if a White kid didn't raise their hand, then that meant he didn't want an answer and he'd just move on to the next thing, until a White kid put their hand up to answer, especially a White boy.

[High school experience] It was also meaningful for me to attend an all-Black high school...I think, in some aspects; we understood that we didn't have some of the resources. We knew friends that went to Schenley and they would tell us the things that they did, but they were in magnet programs...guys who went to Perry were in magnet programs. We had *our* programs at Warren, but they weren't magnet programs...

Lance questioned the *right of possession and exclusion* that seemed to be at work in his school for the benefit of students in the predominantly White House A, and the privileging of White students in his eighth grade history class. According to Lance, the White male teacher in his history class only called on white students, and students in the predominantly White House A took field trips, had greater freedom, and had access to more interesting and rigorous academic courses than his almost exclusively Black House C. He also mentions the lack of integration

within the school where there was limited interaction between the houses. Even as an adolescent it was clear to him that there were three schools functioning separately within the school and his predominantly Black space was not as privileged as the predominantly White space.

Although Lance did not explicitly say this during his interview, he intimated that this limited interaction was intentional to protect the White kids from the Black kids. Johns (2007) reminds us of the perpetuation of the alleged maladaptive nature of black boys and men who are frequently labeled as immoral, lazy, violent, mentally deficient, and criminal, while simultaneously being exoticized as supernatural athletes and sexual icons. I suspect that the embracement and perpetuation of such stereotypes demonstrated in the structural inequities and perceived racialized slights that he mentions, confirmed the antagonistic and resistant *leadership* identity that took shape within him during his middle school experience. Lance also questioned what he perceived as systemic inequities within the school district and the *right of use and enjoyment* that seemed to be at work under the guise of magnet programs. This inequitable distribution of resources and opportunities between his all Black Warren and other schools in the district did not go unnoticed. These *savage inequalities* (Kozol, 1992) were apparent to Lance as he moved into high school. Although, both Lance and Malcolm were brought up to equate blackness with responsibility and excellence, I believe, Lance's racial and masculine identity began to take shape around issues of resistance to oppressive structures, not necessarily academic excellence like Malcolm. The meaning he made from his schooling experiences, the strength of his parent's values, and his social experiences in the community fostered a champion identity, of

sorts, within Lance. By virtue of his identity, Lance felt compelled to address issues of social justice and represent the collective in doing so.

Of course, Malcolm's story also speaks to the *right of use and enjoyment* at work in his almost exclusively white advanced classes during high school. To avoid bogging down my analysis with unnecessary redundancy, I refer you back to the piece of data from Malcolm's narrative that I used to analyze the Internalized Racism theme, where he questioned if advanced classes were actually for black people. Although Frantz makes no mention of de facto segregation in his schooling experiences, it is clear that during adolescence he generally viewed intelligence and academic achievement as the exclusive property of white people. As I reflect upon my interaction with Frantz and my interpretation of the meanings he made from his adolescent experiences, I believe that he clearly understands internalized racism and the affect that it has on Black self-esteem and self-efficacy. However, Frantz, not unlike other men interviewed for this study, gave me no real indication that he fully acknowledged or understood the endemic nature of racism in the U.S. or its largely covert institutional manifestation. Possibly, he just does not agree with this assertion. I have struggled to make sense of how he, as well as other respondents, can believe that one could patently exist without the other; still this seems to be the case. What does make sense is that all of these men strongly believe in personal responsibility and accountability and none of them believes in victimhood. Because of Frantz's competitive nature and his experiences in environments that were devoid of care, he has a "no excuses", "sink or swim" mentality, so it is reasonable that he would not look for or readily embrace the idea that his experiences and choices were significantly affected by racism. The

American ethos of rugged individualism, competition, and meritocracy is clearly ingrained in Frantz's worldview. Either way, what seems to be conspicuously absent from his narrative is his acknowledgment or awareness of the manifestations of institutionalized and covert forms of racism in his social or schooling experiences. Outside of his mentioning, a football coach during high school that he thought might have been racist; he made no other reference to racism as a factor in his experiences.

6.5 DIFFERING INTERPRETATIONS: ACHIEVEMENT, MASCULINITY, & RACE

My interview data revealed respondents' who rejected notions of black male intellectual deficiency and malfeasance during adolescence and others who unwittingly succumbed to it. Lance found personal gratification in challenging what he perceived as unfair and harsh treatment of the black males in his middle school. He perceived this treatment to be a manifestation of the pejorative stereotypical beliefs of black males held by white teacher. Clearly, he rejected notions of black male deficiency and championed, in his own way, the cause of speaking up for his classmates and speaking out against mistreatment. He defined himself through demonstrations of pro-black resistance. He felt compelled and empowered to challenge authority figures that held and acted on negative beliefs about black males. This resistance, defined his identity and influenced many of his choices. As we know from his story, his choices were not always driven by some noble fight for justice. Admittedly, immaturity and recklessness allowed him to be sucked into a way of being that was more closely associated with street life than the community leader he was groomed to be. His notions of black masculinity were clearly

associated with leadership, community, and resitence. These concepts seemed to be integral to his adolescent identity and they framed his ideas about what it meant to engage and achieve in school. He was considered an intelligent and capable student, however, he didn't measure his own achievement by grades, affirmation from teachers, or awards alone. Even being kicked out of class seemed to symbolize for him a successful disruption of an unfair and racist status quo:

We had a...Science teacher in the eighth grade who used to sit behind all the Black girls with his legs open. I *noticed* and we *said* something about it, you know, to the point where we *reported it*, and it became like this *non-issue*... He would sit in his chair so that when he would do presentations with the kids...*All the time*. These were little girls at this point, and these were girls I went to elementary school with... I said something to him about it. 'Why do you always sit behind the girls with your legs open?' He said, "Get out!" I would get kicked out. That's when; I started to *push back* on the system, on the educational system. When I started to push back on what was right and what was wrong...I would get kicked out of class for being associated [with other black students] *no proof*; literally, by association...and I would go to the office and say 'I didn't do it. I was not even *over* near them...but because we're all Black kids, you want to kick out all the Black boys.' Oh, I had to call out the elephant...

Calling out the elephant, so to speak, was becoming an integral component of Lance's racial and masculine identity. His resistance to perceived unjust or unfair treatment and the existence of oppressive or restrictive structures was becoming reified in his early adolescent *leader* identity. He viewed *speaking his piece* and maintaining or defending the *differend* as a

responsibility, the duty of an emerging *leader* even if it resulted in his own marginalization and exclusion in school. There was a resolve within Lance, in no small part due to his parents grooming, which would not allow him to sit by while a truth remained unacknowledged and unexamined by those in power. I believe this framed his early understanding of black manhood. Standing up and being counted for what he believed was right and standing up for those who could not stand up for themselves. In comparing Lance and Frantz, we see that Frantz stopped defending the *differend* during middle school and withered under the weight of the dominant narrative concerning him, where Lance sought to protect it and speak his truth. Although Frantz believed in loyalty and sticking up for his friends, his resistance was not, consciously, for what he deemed to be the collective good or disrupting unjust or unfair practices. This will be discussed at greater length in the following section.

Malcolm's notion of black masculinity was born out of the ever-present images and models of excellence in his family. His father, grandfather and uncles all provided him with a standard of black manhood and a high level of expectations that he aspired to uphold and maintain. Achievement to Malcolm meant being the best academically. However, like Lance, in high school Malcolm developed an *oppositional identity*, which included constant agitation against what he deemed to be uncaring environment:

I don't think people, at that point, saw me as someone who was *incapable*, but I didn't *show* anybody any evidence to counter that. I didn't do work. I *prided* myself on being the one who would influence the class in a *negative* way. I had probably more of a *negative* influence, academically, on my classmates, than any other single person in my

classes. I would say ‘You know what? We don’t have to do this homework.’ I would come in and start breakdancing at the beginning of the class making jokes...but there was nobody...I didn’t have any African-American male [academic] teachers, in high school...I had one African-American *female* teacher that I remember, and that was Ms. Philips, and my typing teacher, Ms. Butler, and my Art teacher was the person I looked up to most in the school, Mr. Edmonds. Mr. Ed... That was the one class I always got an A in, because I loved that and I was very artistic, and I looked up to Mr. Ed.

I think that people just kind of saw me as the person who was an underachiever. I think that, after a period of time, I worked, either unconsciously, sometimes very consciously, to establish that identity, as someone who was kind of *bucking* the system, and I wasn’t trying to go along with it, and I think that it became a self-fulfilling prophecy. People just saw me as someone who wasn’t trying to do anything, and they would kind of just leave me alone...

Although Malcolm was not pushing back against what he perceived to be overt acts of racism or injustice like Lance, he was, in his own way, standing in opposition to an environment that was devoid of images and models of the black excellence that he had grown accustomed to. Unlike Lance, his notion of achievement was associated with stellar grades. Clearly, he was not performing according to his notion of achievement. Like Frantz, Malcolm viewed high school as a place of competition where one had to sink or swim on their own. He describes the dearth of black adults in his academic classes and having only a handful of caring black teachers in his non-academic classes. Even though his adolescent identity had been directly associated with

black male excellence, it was compromised by an uncaring and competitive environment bereft of images of black intellectual excellence. As I think about Malcolm's ideas about Black masculinity and the meanings he was making from his high school experiences, I see his waning academic self-efficacy as a function of a hidden lack of confidence in his own ability to achieve at a high level and meet the expectations of his father and grandfather in this elite academic space. He was affirmed and given multiple images of excellence growing up. He was also celebrated for his achievements throughout elementary and middle school. However, when the *rubber hit the road* in high school, because he had not fully internalized all that he had been told about black male excellence and his ability to achieve it, and because he had not really experienced any academic adversity for which he had to overcome, without his father or grandfather there to edify and affirm him, he faltered. I also, see the lack of Black academic teachers and the benign neglect of his White teachers looming large in his adoption of the fringe, *class clown* identity and his subsequent academic decline. I do not know if I can make a causal claim about the benign neglect of his teachers being the reason for his decline, but I do believe that there was certainly a missed opportunity for his teachers to get to know him and tap into his brilliance. Instead, they left him alone and labeled him as an under achiever.

Frantz's ideas of black manhood seemed to be less clearly defined than Lance and Malcolm's were. To Frantz, black masculinity was associated with physical prowess and dominance and the standard for academic achievement was simply eligibility for athletics and passing to the next grade level:

I was doing just enough to get by...in order for me to play football, I had to meet a certain grade point average so my focus became a bit more academic-centered, so I could play football.

Now I had a *goal*, I had something to shoot for. So it really didn't matter about the teachers, or that...we're in a bigger environment...it wasn't an intimate setting like Hometown Middle School or A. Leo Weil, but I had a goal in front of me...none of that mattered to me 'cause I wanted to play football...I loved that feeling of being connected with something positive ...so sports now became that lifeline for me and could change my reputation from being this kid who was a fighter to a kid who was now an athlete, so people would start to look at me differently [*reinvention*].

[*Frantz had not considered college at this point*] Sports kept me focused. It kept me going to school; I never cut class that just wasn't me. It gave me something to look forward to everyday...but my engagement with teachers in Bradley...there really was none... there's no one really trying to build relationships with students. It was just like 'here's the work; you either do it or you don't.' You flunk, go about your business...I don't know if *other people* might have felt that, but I did. I didn't have a teacher that really took a liking to me saying 'I really want to help you out'; I never received that...

Eleventh grade...during basketball season, I received a letter from Louisville...So that was the first time that [I began to think] 'I can go to college,' I am thinking, smiling, like "I can go to college. I can *literally go to college now*. That was never a thought, before. So now I want to focus, even *more*...I'm doing what I need to do academically...

So for Frantz and his family, academic achievement was only associated with doing enough to “get by” and graduating on time. Getting A’s on his report card was a bonus but not required. For the sake of narrative flow, some of the minor comments made during our interview did not make it to his profile. Still, I indicated the importance of such comments in order to return to them during analysis. One such comment from Frantz had to do with his idea of academic achievement during adolescence. For him it was to simply graduate and not be punished. In middle school, his mother would punish him for anything lower than a C on his report card. Once Frantz began playing sports, his definition of academic achievement was aligned solely with staying academically eligible so he could play ball. College had never been a thought for him or his mother. Unlike Lance, Frantz did not view himself as a leader and was not interested in the collective. Moreover, unlike both Lance and Malcolm, his idea of manhood had to do with physical prowess and based upon his internalization of the racist stereotype that “whites are smarter than blacks” his view of blackness was based on notions of intellectual deficiency. What seems to cut across the adolescent identity of each man is one of *opposition* to perceived oppressive or unjust schooling structures. Intentionally at times, and unwittingly in others, each man stood in opposition in some way. For Frantz, with few exceptions (e.g. Mrs. Jones and Mr. Ambrose), standing in opposition to adults was a consistent theme throughout his schooling experiences. Frantz admittedly had some behavioral problems but he fell in line when he felt cared for and safe within a classroom that had healthy but non-negotiable boundaries and high expectations. When this was not the case, he would immediately stand in opposition to anyone that he perceived might ‘peg him guilty until proven innocent’ or judged him. He saw

this as a threat, or as another person who was trying to “break him”. It seems as though it was a way of being for Frantz. For Lance and Malcolm it was less routine and generally intentional. Lance “pushed back” and “called out the elephant”, whereas Malcolm intentionally “bucked the system” and purposefully disrupted class.

6.6 DIFFEREND INSIGHTS: “IN MY MIND, THEY ALREADY KNEW WHAT THEY WANTED TO DO WITH ME ANYWAY”

Under *cultural imperialism*, dominated group’s versions of events are regularly dismissed and marginalized, or simply branded as incomprehensible by dominant group members, particularly when a conflict occurs between members of these unequal social groups (Duncan, 2002). These polarized perspectives on the black male experience in schools give rise to a *differend*, or the sense that these opposing perspectives and the subsequent disputes they breed are largely irreconcilable. When conflict arises between dominant and subjugated group members, the latter is deprived of the chance to express grievances in terms the dominant group understands, thus their perspectives do not resonate with those in authority and are not taken into full account in the decision making or resolution process. Their versions of behaviors and subsequent events are often dismissed and deemed incomprehensible and incommensurable with the versions of those in authority.

Conflict can be viewed as an obstacle or an opportunity. Viewed as an opportunity, conflict can stimulate deeper understanding between disputants and begin the process of healing

wounds and dismantling restrictive and oppressive practices and structures. Viewing conflict as an opportunity helps us better understand why it is so important for members of dominated groups, like adolescent black males, to express grievances on their own terms concerning the frequent conflicts that arise between them and authority figures in schools instead, of having their versions dismissed or branded as incomprehensible. We see both *cultural imperialism* and *differend* at work in Frantz and Lance's experiences.

Frantz recalls the experience of being 'guilty until proven innocent' and having his version of events readily dismissed by authority figures in school. Ironically, these authority figures were generally black males. One would think that there would be no other person who would be more sympathetic to the conditions that an adolescent Black male has to contend with than an adult Black male. It should not be taken as a foregone conclusion that black men would always be the adults who are best suited to reach, support, and empower adolescent black males, although in my experiences this has generally been the case. Clearly, throughout Frantz's story, the main antagonist was a Black male authority figure who Frantz believed had it out for him. All we have as evidence concerning their interactions are Frantz's adult recollections of events that took place 25 years ago, which may not be fully accurate. Still, the meaning that Frantz made from these experiences clearly indicates that he did not feel protected or particularly cared for by the black men in his family nor the black men throughout his schooling experiences. Frantz reflects on his middle school experience:

So I started to get a reputation with the principal [black male]...he would single me out...and it would be quick. There was no conversation...I couldn't explain to him

what was going on. He would just send me home, suspend me...So, seventh grade was a dead time...I think he would go out his way to go at me. So for eighth grade graduation...the whole class would go to Cedar Point. I'll never forget he called my down to the office and said, "There ain't no way in hell that you going to Cedar Point." Just like that; just raw...and I hadn't even done anything...[regarding another Black male authority figure] So now...even if I wanted to come to him for understanding or to explain myself...since he never gave me a chance to explain myself...well, (sigh) he drew a line in the sand, I drew a line in the sand. This is where we're at...So with authority figures like him...if something was to happen, they come to me and asked questions, I would just look at them like they were crazy... like 'alright, are you done?' So if they were to suspend me....I got to the point where even when they wanted me to explain, I wouldn't explain, because in my mind, they already knew what they wanted to do with me anyway...so if you're going suspend me, suspend me. Did I want to be suspended? No, but I knew where they were going with it, so 'do what you gotta do'.

Based upon his experiences with these authority figures, Frantz did not believe that he was going to get a fair chance. He had grown accustomed to being spoken *at*, *about*, and *for* but not spoken *with* concerning his experiences and the conflicts that were occurring in school. Obviously, he grew tired of this muting and the denial of opportunities to explain himself. He grew tired of being found 'guilty until proven innocent' so he shut down in *opposition*. Frantz recalls a similar experience in high school:

So, I'm in the office, trying to explain to the *dean*, I didn't have anything to do with this, I'm breaking it up..."I ain't have nothing to do with this!" He said, 'Until I sort everything out, everybody involved gotta go home.' ...So immediately, when I get home, I call Mr. Nelson up and I spoke to him, I said "Mr. Nic, I had nothing to do with this, this was my brother, I was just breaking it up...so, because it was considered a riot, we had a hearing that Friday...Mr. Nic wasn't there, but they read a statement from him. 'I, Robert E. Nicholas, saw Frantz, fighting [another black male student]. Recommendation: fifteen more days of suspension.' ... I had already served five...I called back up the school and said, "Mr. Nic, you never saw me hit anybody...what are you *talking* about?" 'Fifteen days suspension!

Clearly, Frantz saw the necessity to *speak his truth* and defend the *differend* in this case because of the stakes. However, his version was not taken into account in the decision making process and he was forced to serve a 20 day suspension for making a real-time *Scylla and Charybdis* decision to protect his brother who was from the community that rivaled his own. According to Frantz, other eyewitness accounts were not taken into consideration, his father's (*Both Frantz and Larry's, the brother he was protecting, father*) presence at the hearing was not taken into consideration, his football coach's intercession on his behalf was not taken into consideration; only his reputation, the malevolence of his Black male principal, and zero tolerance discipline policies were considered. Because of his suspension, many of the Division I football programs that were interested in Frantz also began to view him as being more trouble than he was worth and turned away. This event had life altering implications. As I thought

about Frantz's story, I pondered what if his version had been considered and he had been vindicated, even celebrated for breaking up a fight, protecting his brother without throwing a punch, and fending off what surely could have turned into a full-scale riot between these rival communities inside of the school. Possibly those Division I schools would have remained interested and his life may have gone in a completely different direction. This reminds me of the power that adults in schools have over the lives of students.

Recalling Lance's middle school experiences, he also felt unfairly targeted while his version of events was disregarded. He talked about being found guilty by association without any proof of wrongdoing:

I would get kicked out of class for being associated [with other black students] *no proof*; literally, by association...and I would go to the office and say 'I didn't do it. I was not even *over* near them...but because we're all Black kids, you want to kick out all the Black boys.'

Admittedly, Malcolm was a 'people pleaser' during adolescence. His retrospective recollections do not offer examples of disputes or events in school where his version and perspective may have been dismissed or deemed incomprehensible and incommensurable with those of authority figures. Although he was a self-proclaimed 'class clown', he made no mention of facing any of the same disciplinary actions (e.g. being kicked out of class and suspensions) that Frantz and Lance faced. However, his story does provide insights into a form of *cultural imperialism* that he experienced in his advanced classes during high school, which reduced him to a classification of 'under-achiever' instead of the brilliant young scholar that he

was. He indicates that he was largely left alone because of this misidentification. He was rendered unknowable by the teachers in the advanced classes, labeled as an under-achiever, and left to his own devices as he retreated further into the fringe identity of class clown. He was ultimately left alone and deemed more trouble than the effort to get to know him was worth to the teachers in his advanced classes. The dominant story about him was that he was an under-achiever and in that highly competitive and meritocratic intellectual space, that designation was enough to warrant casting him aside. His perspective concerning the lack of support and understanding from the teachers was not solicited. His voice was not heard. To the all-white teaching staff in his advanced studies courses, he was left outside of the community of care. He too was *beyond love*.

Frantz's reputation and Lance's agitation may have been red flags even for the most caring teachers in their respective schools. However, what is most telling about these notions of *cultural imperialism* and *differend* regarding the schooling of adolescent black males is that even with Malcolm's people pleasing nature, lighter-skin, and stellar academic record, he still wasn't fully insulated from becoming a *strange other* in his elite advanced studies classes. I see the *differend* at work in the dissonance between the identity of black male excellence that Malcolm brought with him into these classes and the label of under-achiever that was ultimately imposed on him. Without the presence of caring adults in his classes to bolster and re-affirm his identity of black male excellence, Malcolm withered under the weight of the under-achiever label and became the *class clown*.

Dominant structures are made invisible when we ignore that a *differend* exists; thus, protecting the *differend* is essential for the eradication of oppressive structures. Maintaining the *differend* as a dialectic through the narrative intervention of students like Frantz, Malcolm and Lance, can create conditions for resolutions between black males and adults in schools precisely because they are allowed to tell their stories on their terms about their experiences, requiring that adults try to *see the world through their eyes*. *Differend* allows for the counter-narratives of black male students to stand alone without having to be reconciled with any meta-narrative that describes their social and schooling experiences for them. *Differend* authorizes stories from black males that call competition and *false meritocracy* in schools into question, illuminate hidden structural impediments and “call out the elephant” concerning the lack of care offered by adults in schools.

6.7 RESEARCHER REFLECTION: ON “*SPEAKING THEIR PEACE*”

Counter-storytelling within CRT recognizes the *voice and experiential knowledge of people of color*. As stated in chapter two, legitimizing the counter-knowledge of people of color requires the solicitation of their personal narratives to challenge the hegemony of white worldviews and epistemologies (Ladson-Billings, 2000). Challenging hegemonic worldviews is critical, but as important in allowing the voices of black males to be heard is the level of healing that comes with it, because the stories that people tell often times have a way of *taking care of them* (Solorzano & Yosso, 2000). Again, a level of *peace* comes from being heard and understood

and often a disrespected, devalued, and angry black male simply wants to be heard and validated for his humanity.

Counter-storytelling provides a vehicle for psychic self-preservation (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) and it is a kind of medicine to heal the wounds caused by racial oppression. Telling the story of one's own condition leads to realizing how one came to be oppressed and subjugated and allows one to stop the self-infliction of mental violence (Delgado, 1995). Counter-stories by people of color can catalyze the necessary cognitive conflict to jar *dysconscious* or *internalized racism* (Delgado, 1995) in order to heal and transform.

As I alluded to in chapter four, on several occasions, participants spoke words of sincere gratitude for the opportunity to participate in this study because it gave them an opportunity to reflect on aspects of their life histories and relationships from those histories that had remained dormant in their minds and hearts for years. I cannot overstate the therapeutic value of this kind of work. One respondent, whose very compelling story was not actually featured in this report, declared that he was going directly from the interview to let his mother know how deeply he loved and appreciated her for her strength during his adolescence. Malcolm and I both teared up when he told me that because of this interview he was going back to his grandfather's home town and high school to begin the process of having his grandfather honored and acknowledged as the true validictorian of his high school. A monumental recognition that had been denied him because of was black. Frantz mentioned several times that this interview was the first time he had ever really reflected on his adolescence and because of the interview process he was forced to confront some things from his past that really needed to be unpacked. Frantz is truly a 'mans

man', but this experience even had him pause and looking away in order to collect himself at one point during the interview. Again, I had to hold back tears. Upon reviewing his profile, Lance exclaimed "Wow, we need to talk about book rights...this is the first time I've ever seen my true life reflections!" This was a release that provided these men a certain level of peace.

During the first interview I noticed that the men were looking away to gain some mental traction in their long-term memories. They wanted to be authentic and paint as accurate a picture as they could of their pre-teen and teen-aged selves and the experiences they had. During the second interview there was always some repetition as the men tried to fill in gaps from what they shared during the first interview and answer my questions that probed a little deeper into the meaning they made from the experiences they were sharing. In the third interview we wrestled, never contentiously, but we grappled as we tried to reconcile their interpretations from their experiences with mine. I always deferred to their interpretations if we extrapolated different meanings from their experiences and they insisted that I didn't fully understand, but only after I gave them some push back. There were times during these dialogues, particularly with Malcolm, that their interpretations were so accurate and sophisticated that I was compelled to abandon any alternative interpretation that I may have had and simply listen and learn from their wisdom. Frantz had a tendency to keep things crystal clear and simple. I saw the value in that as we grappled with his experiences. Alan, whose name appears as an interviewee on the chart of respondents in chapter four, insisted that race and racism was never really a factor in his life and no matter how many times I revealed aspects of his racial socialization or instances of systemic or personally-mediated forms of racism in his experiences he rejected it. Once he even talked

about being chased by a group of white boys for walking through a white community as a child. He called upon his older brother when it happened and his older brother went to the community and threatened the white boys. It stopped. What was interesting was the conspicuous absence of his acknowledgment that his being chased was racially motivated. In fact when I brought it to his attention, he suggested that it had more to do with simply being an unfamiliar face in that community than being black. I left it alone. Derrick, another interviewee, spoke so candidly and passionately about the value and importance of fathers in the black community that it inspired deep introspection within me concerning my own children and the impact of my parenting over the years on them. I was inspired, but also concerned that he was placing the struggles within the black community solely on the shoulders of absentee fathers without a broader recognition or analysis of other factors. Unfortunately, he was unable to complete his interview so I was unable to gather a more complete understanding of his worldview.

These wise and dynamic black men opened up freely and shared their stories with me. There was never a need to probe deeper or to use savvy interview techniques to get the men to open up. I probed for meaning, but I never had to probe to get them to share. Our interview sessions were like heartfelt discussions between close friends. Had this sharing gone no further than our meetings, the men said they would have felt gratified simply for the opportunity to share their stories with someone who ‘gets them’. The three men profiled are anxiously awaiting the completion of this dissertation because their story’s will not only have been told, but their voices heard, and their wisdom shared. The other men know that this line of inquiry does not end with

the completion of this dissertation and their stories will be told as well. They expressed feelings of gratification because they know that their struggles and experiences will not have been in vain and will serve the purpose of enlightening others about the meaning that adolescent black males make from their social and schooling experiences. This is about legacy for these men, making a difference, and being a part of positive change. Not self aggrandizement or complaining or whistle blowing. In the words of Lance, this is about “paying it forward” for future generations. Whatever sharing their experiences can do to help is what is important to them.

7.0 CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

In this final chapter, I discuss what I think are the most significant conclusions that can be gleaned from this study and the implications for the schooling of black males and future research. The chapter begins with an overall summary of what I have learned from these men with respect to my two over-arching research questions. That is followed by a discussion of why I believe it is important for policy makers and analysts, practitioners, and adolescent black males to listen to what black men have to say about their schooling experiences. From there my discussion of implications focuses on new possibilities for policy and practice, as well as new ontological possibilities and ethical responsibilities for adults who teach adolescent black males. I conclude with recommendations for future research and some final thoughts from this experience.

7.1 WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED FROM THESE MEN?

Racial and masculine identity development for adolescent black males is shaped within families, communities, and schools. Within families, communities, and schools, the experiences that black males have, significantly influence the identities that they construct. These identities, in turn, inform how they relate to and engage with schools and the choices they make outside of schools. How these young men relate to and engage with schools affects academic success and educational outcomes. Educational outcomes and social choices are intimately tied to life chances and trajectories for adolescent black males. Positive social and schooling experiences typically engender the development of identities that serve as protective mechanisms for academic success and lead to choices that promote positive educational and life outcomes. On the other hand, incessant negative social and schooling experiences often produce *spoiled* and *oppositional identities* that can serve as risk factors for pro-social and schooling choices, academic success, and increased life chances.

However, we learned from Lance's story that even strong identities that breed leaders who become valedictorian and senior class president can be compromised by even stronger social forces. Social forces that influence the kind of choices that fuel the *cradle to prison pipeline*. Hoodtown was inundated with drugs, guns, and a proliferation of gangs during Lance's high school years. As with many poor and working poor black residential spaces, drug abuse had always been a blight in Hoodtown even though it was a proud community with a rich heritage. However, drug dealing began to run rampant in the late 80's and early 90's as the

vocation of choice for many young black men in Hoodtown, as well as other communities in Pittsburgh, became drug sales. Simultaneously, Hoodtown and the Latimore Avenue communities saw the emergence of the Crip street gang, which immediately broke into rivaling factions as an extension of the rivalries that already existed between these communities. Other communities like Gardenview, West Top, and the Hometown adopted the Blood street gang as an extension of the community rivalries that already existed between these communities and Hoodtown. The multi-headed hydra of drugs, guns, and gangs, went hand in hand feeding off of one another and conspiring to debilitate communities and fuel the *Cradle to Prison/Morgue Pipeline* for Black males in Pittsburgh. Violence became synonymous with Hoodtown as many young men began to protect their drug selling enterprise. Streets in Hoodtown, like Familiar Way (psuedonym) became dead zones, areas where the police were cautious to terrain without significant back up.

By virtue of living in Hoodtown as a young black male at that time, you were either officially a Crip or, by association, considered a friend of the Crips; hence an enemy of anyone who was not from a Crip community. As much as Lance tried to stay above the fray, he succumbed to the draw of fast money when faced with the challenge of paying a college debt. As we know from his story, he wanted to go back to college to escape the violence that was destroying his beloved community. In order to do that, he had to pay a debt that he nor his family could afford. He poorly chose to sell drugs to get enough money to pay his debt. Unfortunately, the draw of fast money was stronger than values that Lance was raised with. However, as a leader who adopted a mindset of self-reliance, his choice to try to handle this on

his own and temporarily do something that he knew was wrong, in order to achieve a positive goal and possibly save his own life; makes perfect sense.

Malcolm's story also indicates how easily a strong scholar identity can be compromised by negative schooling experiences, and digress into a class-clown identity. The identities that adolescent black males develop are also very complex, fluid, and connected to multiple life worlds. Frantz's story tells us that adolescent black males can have dual, even conflicting identities that, at times protect academic achievement, while undermining it at others.

I can't say that I leave this experience with a set of strategies or ideas, a recipe if you will, that educators can use to ensure that young black men develop identities that foster academic achievement and promote positive choices. What, I think, can be said is that educators should pay greater attention to the identity construction process for adolescent black males and find ways to develop closer relationships with them. The meaning making and identity construction process for adolescent black males is challenging enough in a society and within institutions that are often hostile to their existence. Even when there are positive male figures in the home, Malcolm's case is a prime example, when adults in schools are actively or benignly neglecting, misreading, or worse condemning them, fostering high academic achievement and promoting positive choices becomes problematic. Furthermore, when dominant discourses are locating the problem within the black male himself or attributing his academic struggles to dysfunction within his family and/or community, adults in schools can more easily divorce themselves from accountability and dismiss these academic struggles and marginalization as problematic, but inevitable, hence beyond their control.

However, we find glimpses of hope in these stories where schools did help and teachers took the time to get to know these young men. There are examples where teachers identified and drew from the strengths within them, provided them with opportunities to cultivate their strengths, offered them healthy boundaries so that they could feel safe, and asserted their dignity. Mrs. Jones (Black female, 4th grade teacher), Mr. Arnold (White male, middle school History teacher), and Mrs. Solomon (Black female, middle school Language Arts teacher) showed Frantz that they cared about him and held high academic and behavioral expectations of him. Mr. Edwards (Black male, high school Art teacher), Mrs. Peterson (Black female, high school Typing teacher), and Mrs. Banks (Black female, high school Language Arts teacher) pulled Malcolm aside and challenged him on his under-achievement and talked with him about his future aspiration. Dr. Spells (Black female, high school Language Arts teacher) and Mrs. Lancaster (Black female, high school Language Arts teacher) met with Lance after school, pushed him to be a better writer, and asked him about what was going on with him in his home and in the community. These teachers paid attention to who these young men were and who they were becoming, not just how they were performing or behaving. These teachers looked for the needs behind the deeds and suspended judgment about these young men. These teachers got to know them.

I think we also learned from these men that pejorative stereotypes and deficit thinking about black males not only affect how they are perceived by others, but often influence how they view themselves. We learned that the internalization of racist stereotypes inhibits academic self-efficacy. We learned that adolescent black males often wither under the weight of stereotypes and negative self-concepts, but we also learned about the extraordinary capacity of

young black men to navigate adolescence without ‘breaking’ from recurrent negative experiences and the ability to bounce back in spite of the odds being stacked against them. Key to this resiliency was the presence of both black and white men, and several black women, who gained their respect by giving them the benefit of the doubt instead of applying a stereotype or pre-judging them. These adults provided structure, boundaries, and care that fostered pro-social and schooling choices instead of the permissiveness and disregard associated with adults who deem a child to be more trouble than they are worth. We learned that some were able to reject the internalization of racist stereotypes about black males and reconstitute them in such a way that they became motivation for resistance against unjust treatment.

Finally, I think we learn from these men that adolescent black males, like other adolescents, are just kids. They are kids who have, at times, unique sets of obstacles to overcome, but they are just kids who, have historically experienced benign neglect in schools. They are not lazy, violent, apathetic *strange others* who don’t value their education. Mostly, they are just young men who often struggle with their own sense of self-worth and academic self-efficacy and who do cost/benefit analysis and making real-time decisions in schools where they often feel misunderstood and not cared for. Of course there are other systemic, curricular, pedagogical, and resource barriers to achievement for black males in schools. I make no claim that getting to know black males better will turn disparities in achievement outcomes around over night. However, knowing and genuinely caring about *all* black males in schools is a good place to start. My data speaks directly to the profoundly positive affect that caring adults can have on adolescent Black males in schools. Conversely, I believe my data speaks to the

profoundly negative affect of expelling adolescent Black males from communities of care in schools. When they are marginalized, excluded, neglected, and/or condemned, by adults in schools, existentially they become *beyond love*. They understand this, and like Frantz, they respond accordingly. *Kids don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care.*

7.2 WHY SHOULD WE LISTEN TO BLACK MEN CONCERNING THE SCHOOLING OF BLACK BOYS?

I believe that the implications for educational policy and practice will not only come from changed relationships between black male students and adults in schools, but also through stronger relationships between black men and the schools that serve black boys. Each of the men interviewed for this study are either the parent of school-aged black boys or have sons who have since graduated. Like me, each of the men interviewed for this study also has some personal and/or professional commitment to education. Again, like me, these men have a stake in improving educational outcomes for black males. This makes what they have to say even more significant. They are fathers, uncles, big brothers, neighbors, and mentors who know adolescent black males outside of school in the home and in the community. They are coaches who know them on the field and on the court. Malcolm has his own mentoring program. Frantz's work as a youth football coach and within his Fraternal Organization is directly associated with improving the lives of black boys and girls. Lance is also a football coach and still mentors in the Hoodtown community and touches children's lives through his community organizing. Beyond

Frantz, Malcolm, and Lance, there are Pastors, Imams, Deacons, and Ushers who know young black men and their families in the Church and Mosque. There are barbers, bus drivers, and police officers who regularly talk with and mentor young black men in organic and unofficial ways, listening to these young men and offering them guidance. These are courageous and kind men, who are not afraid of young black men, who do not believe that they are more trouble than they are worth, who do not relate to them as if they are a problem, and who truly believe that “it takes an entire village to raise a child”.

In general, the retrospective recollections of black men who have had the benefit of space, time, and maturity to reflect upon their adolescent experiences in schools helps us better understand adolescent black males and the consequence of those experiences on identities and life trajectories. Fish do not see water. Often times when one is in the midst of an experience, they are incapable of understanding it fully. What these men thought about their adolescent experiences back then is on one level. What they understand about those experiences as adults is more panoramic, sophisticated, and clear. These new understandings can help educators to alleviate many of the relational barriers and the *crisis of faith* among teachers that often contribute to the pervasive schooling struggles of black male students, precisely because they will gain a better sense of who these young men are and why they do what they do. Obviously a generational gap exists so it would be irresponsible to assume that black men today fully understand the meaning that adolescent black males from their experiences, but black men do have unique, multi-generational insights to offer educators. What these men have to say is

important, relevant, and needs to be heard by policy makers and analysts, superintendents, principals, teachers, and other parents, as well as adolescent black males themselves.

7.3 IMPLICATIONS: NEW POSSIBILITIES FOR EDUCATIONAL POLICY AND PRACTICE

The prospects for positive educational outcomes for black males are directly related to their ability to surmount systemic schooling barriers and build a sense of self-worth and academic self-efficacy. In order to foster this kind of empowerment and self-determination in adolescent black males, adults in schools should consider a dual approach toward mitigating self-doubt and oppositional attitudes by identifying and building from strengths that exist within the student and the student's culture, while also addressing academic weaknesses. Too often, the latter happens without the former. In order to identify those strengths, black males in schools must be spoken *with*, not spoken *about*, *at*, or *for*. The absence of opportunities to describe their experiences in schools further exacerbates marginalization, exclusion, and feelings of disregard and disrespect. Disrespect compromises their identities and typically is viewed as a threat to safety, while feelings of respect promote psychological wellness and the construction of identities that serve as protective mechanisms for academic achievement. Black males in schools must have opportunities to be heard and validated. Furthermore, they should also have input concerning the institutional policies and practices that directly effect their schooling. Policy makers, analysts, and practitioners can avoid making the *Type III* errors discussed in chapter one by simply

consulting black men as well as adolescent black males about their schooling struggles, instead of automatically *constructing them as a problem* (DuBois, 1903, 1953) that needs to be fixed.

Also, I believe that any effort to improve academic outcomes for black males must begin with understanding the attitudes that influence how they perceive schooling and academics. Focusing on how adolescent black males perceive schooling and their own intellectual capacities is as important as focusing on skill development to improve educational outcomes. As stated in chapter one, the processes and influences associated with black male identity construction should be centered in any analysis of performance because it is on the basis of their identities that they are presumed marginalized, at-risk, and endangered. Identities that are risk factors for academic achievement ultimately undermine the importance black males attach to education, as well as the belief they have in their own intellectual capacities. Racial identity development theories that are not constrained by notions of *respectability* will help to inform our understanding of the subjective ways black males interpret and manage racialized experiences during adolescence and develop identities.

Due to a lack of positive male role models, adolescent black males often internalize negative images of manhood that are broadcast by the media and exist on the street corners of their communities. Equipping adolescent black males with more positive, culturally centered, multidimensional images of black manhood to call upon in schools as they construct identities will mitigate the impact of self-doubt stemming from incessant exposure to and internalization of negative images of black masculinity. This means increasing the number of adult black males in schools that would serve as mentors and increasing the number of black male teachers in

academic and advanced courses. Efforts to recruit and increase the number of black male teachers should be supported and expanded. One such program in the Greater Pittsburgh area is focusing on this work. There has recently been a concerted effort to recruit more black male teachers into the STEM disciplines. Educators can visit www.blackmenteaching.org for more information on this project. According to data provided on this site, out of 7 million teachers in 100,000 U.S. schools, less than 2% are black males. Providing more images of black manhood in academic courses is key, however, I am not advocating that role models should replace fathers. On the contrary, empowering fathers within schools to better support and advocate for their sons', is critically important.

In order to foster greater resilience, I think this also means that Black men who have criminal backgrounds should not be automatically denied the opportunity to serve as mentors in schools. As long as these men have no record of abusing children their presence and stories are extraordinarily valuable for adolescent Black males. Men like Lance should not be shut out of our schools. Most Black men have had to *swim upstream* at different times in their lives. Their shining examples of resilience and redemption should be celebrated and promoted instead of discarded. Moreover, those who mentor young black men, do not have to be black men. From the narratives it is quite clear that there are others who can fill voids in the lives of adolescent black males. In fact, Frantz's principal lets us know that, at times, we need to protect adolescent black males from the malevolence of mean-spirited black adults who subscribe to notions of black male deficiency and deviance.

Greater utilization of CRT in educational research and evaluation allows a shift to occur in our orientation toward the schooling of black males. As stated previously, through CRT, we establish a new set of questions to ask and a new way of asking about adolescent black male social and schooling experiences in order to reveal new ways of conceiving their relationships with institutions such as schools. CRT is an interdisciplinary and problem-centered theoretical framework for the scholar/activist who is primarily concerned with initiating change that promotes social justice for marginalized racial groups. It is considered *insurgent scholarship* because of its activist agenda to transform and redeem, not just to critique and deconstruct. Therefore, CRT scholarship is well suited to inform policies and practices that disrupt the pervasive academic struggles of black males.

Deficit and *problem solving* orientations toward the schooling of black males are challenged when viewed through a CRT lens. One recognizes the social construction of race and the meaning and salience of race and racial identity that is reconstituted over time in particular social structures such as schools, communities, and families when viewed through a CRT lens. Again, no theory can illuminate everything, but CRT and other related race and racial identity theories provide a framework for asking new questions and establishing new ontological possibilities and ethical responsibilities for adults in schools.

I read the *Autobiography of Malcolm X* my sophomore year in college and it had a profound effect on me. We know the effect that it had on Malcolm. I suggest that schools that serve Black males should consider making Alex Haley's version of Malcolm X's life required

reading. The capacity of his story to inspire resilience and redemption for adolescent Black males is tremendous.

7.3.1 New Ontological Possibilities and Ethical Responsibilities for Adults in Schools

“The heart of justice is truth telling, seeing ourselves and the world the way it is rather than the way we want it to be” (hooks, 2000, p. 33). Allowing black males to express their grievances, on their terms, about the wrongs they have suffered and the choices they have made counters feelings of powerlessness and alienation from exclusion and marginalization in schools. As bell hooks (2000) reminds us, it also provides educators the opportunity to see the world through their eyes, so they can begin to redress the conditions that lead to marginalization and exclusion. Seeing the world through the eyes of adolescent black males’ requires an epistemological shift away from our reliance on dominant stock-stories that frame how we come to know them. In order to challenge the ontological claims made about black males that emanate from stock-stories and poor sociocultural representations, we have to begin to see the world through their eyes, and in order to do this, we have to talk with them and get to know them.

I believe educators have to acknowledge and even defend the *differend*, when it emerges in the stories that black male students have to tell about their experiences in schools, because oppressive structures remain invisible when it is ignored. Once again, protecting the *differend* is vital if we are to eradicate any oppressive structures and deficit orientations that constrain possibilities for black males in schools, precisely because it captures the general disregard, marginalization, and exclusion that they experience. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) frame

differend as a dialectic in which the conditions for resolution are created by the narrative intervention of the oppressed when they are allowed to tell their stories on their own terms to the oppressor. Framed in this way, *differend* allows for the counter-narratives of black male students to stand alone without having to be reconciled with the popular belief or the dominant-narrative used to describe their experiences. Administrators and teachers alike are seemingly content to speak *about* black males, *at* black males, or *for* black males, but rarely are inclined to speak *with* black males about their education. Adults in schools have to do a better job of listening to and respecting the stories of their black male students.

Also, it is incumbent upon educators to pay closer attention to their own pre-conceived notions about black males. I have seen how notions of *respectability* are played out in schools when black male behaviors are refracted through the lenses of white middle-class norms, then quickly labeled as aberrant, and rendered incomprehensible. Teacher perceptions of adolescent black males that are informed by *respectability* impede that teacher's ability to relate to and engage with black males, which leads to further estrangement and marginalization. Teachers, like students, are cultural beings who often base their beliefs about others on inaccurate and incomplete information generated from biases learned within their families and communities growing up and pejorative stereotypes cast in society. Black teachers are also affected by biases that constrain relationships between themselves and black male students. Frantz's relationship with his Black male Principal and Black male Dean is a testament to that. Consequently, when biases are not checked, adversarial relationships between black male students and adults are bred

that often confirm, for both groups, that black males are more trouble than they are worth in schools and society.

There are tool kits that educators can use to engage in, deepen, and sustain the open and honest discourse that is required to address the persistent academic struggles of adolescent black males. One such tool kit is *The Courageous Conversation* (Singleton & Linton, 2006). This model for achieving equity in schools sets boundaries for and empowers educators to have open, honest, and productive inter-racial dialogue at the intersection of race and achievement. This model was adopted by the Pittsburgh Public Schools in 2009. I was a part of the development of a district-wide training and planning to utilize Courageous Conversations as a tool to address the pervasive racial educational disparities that exist within the school district. This initiative has yet to produce the change in educational outcomes for black students in the Pittsburgh Public Schools that it was intended to. Greater utilization of CRT in conjunction with the Courageous Conversation model to critically analyze and discuss achievement disparities within schools and schooling systems is highly recommended.

The influence of internalized racism and historical trauma on self-perception has been understudied and largely disregarded as a determinant for the educational and social struggles of adolescent black males. When conversations concerning notions of *Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome* (DeGruy-Leary, 2005) or the *MAAFA* (Taylor, J, 2005) experience arise in educational circles, they are often dismissed by non-blacks because of the historically remote nature of their genesis. However, the multi-generational transmission of coping mechanisms and responses to

oppression and discrimination that are unique to the progeny of slaves must be taken into account when considering the relationships between black males and institutions such as schools. The *Courageous Conversations* (Singleton & Linton, 2006) tool kit creates productive and safe space for this dialog to take place in professional development for teachers and educational leaders, as well as in classrooms with students.

7.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study is the beginning of a line of inquiry that I plan to pursue. The three men featured in this study are truly just the “tip of the iceberg”, so to speak. There are more stories to be told from men about their experiences during adolescence, the identities they constructed, and the choices they made, especially from the respondents who I chose not to feature in this study. More themes would emerge to analyze, theorize on, and discuss. Also, the themes mentioned but not featured in the report deserve indepth analysis and discussion. The other themes mentioned in chapter 6: *The Invisibility Syndrome* “*Unless I’m on the Field, Court, or in Trouble, You Don’t See Me*”; *Intimacy* “*In-To-Me-You-See*”; “*Trust* “*Guilty Until Proven Innocent*”; and *Neglect* “*Who’s Taking Care of Me?*” would provide additional windows into the affect of negative social and schooling experiences on adolescent black males.

Additionally, there are younger men, who are not that far removed from adolescence that have valuable insights to share, as well older men who have school-aged grandsons. I plan to use more focus group interviewing along this line of inquiry. I want to hear black men dialogue, deliberate, and debate on the issue of black male schooling. I want to take this line of inquiry

back to the barbershop floor as the forum for focus group discussions and bring that data back to the policy makers, analysts, and practitioners who need to hear it. Very similar to my third interview with Malcolm, which was much more dialogic than the first two, the capacity for growth, understanding, problem identification, and problem solving in the *fertile soil* of the barbershop floor is immeasurable.

Gender specific studies like mine can and should be modified to accommodate the opposite sex. Explorations into the racial, feminine, and academic identity construction process for adolescent black females would provide important insights into the meaning they make from their schooling experiences. Although adolescent black girls have to contend with a significantly different set of socio-cultural factors related to their development into womanhood, they are not immune to negative influences within their homes, communities, and schools. In fact, they may be even more vulnerable to such influences. Teen pregnancy is a major problem for black girls, particularly for those that live and attend school in poor urban areas. Becoming a mother early, often gives them an identity that makes them feel significant. Obviously, having a child while in school is a significant risk factor for academic success. Discovering more about this process through the retrospective recollections of black women who were teen mothers, I think, is very fertile soil for future research. This is, of particular importance to me as I was a teen-aged father, who is now also a young-grandfather. My older daughters, who incidentally, are both very responsible mother's, both became parents by the time they were eighteen.

Duncan (2002) and Ferguson's (2000) respective ethnographic studies of adolescent and elementary aged black males in schools, can and should be duplicated. Both studies took place

more than a decade ago in specific contexts. The research design used in both studies would provide a template for future research on black male experiences in schools across the country. Additionally, I think an International Comparative study that probes the boundaries of identity construction and academic achievement for adolescent black males in other countries would prove valuable. For instance, comparing racial, masculine, and academic identity construction processes for adolescent black males in the Caribbean, South Africa, or Brazil with black males in the U.S., may provide important insights into how identities are constructed in other context. I would like to expand on an ethnographic investigation that I conducted to compare adolescent black male academic, racial, and masculine identity construction in the Caribbean with the U.S. (Serrant & Luck, 2011). Possibly, there are models and best practices utilized in other countries that foster positive racial, academic, and masculine identity development for adolescent black males.

I think that a study that investigates and compares the racial, masculine, and academic identity construction processes for both high achieving and low achieving black males in the U.S. would help us find ways to redirect the processes that lead to risk-factor identities and bolster processes that lead to protective-mechanism identities.

Finally, I plan to conduct an auto-ethnographic study of my own social and schooling experiences during adolescence and the impact that those experiences had on my educational outcomes, the choices I made, and my life trajectory. I have done a great deal of reflection during this process and I too, want to tell my story. I share a little of it in the epilogue.

7.5 EPILOGUE

As I engaged with these men during the interviews, I found myself rooting for them. As I said in chapter four, I wanted to believe in them, excuse their shortcomings, and see them vindicated from any transgression. I wanted to hear about herculean efforts to overcome oppression, injustice, and discrimination. I wanted to romanticize them as tragic heroes and draw connections between my experiences and theirs so that I too could feel like a hero. Because the men were so honest, humble, and self-deprecating, at times, I found myself wanting to argue with them to get them to see the true nature of their oppression - to teach instead of learn, preach instead of listen, and affirm instead of acknowledge. I found myself falling into solipsism as their stories began to resonate with mine, only to remember that this is not a story about black male victimization, but a composite story of self-concept and its bearing on real life choices and real life consequences. Furthermore, it is not my story it is theirs. Therefore, this epilogue rightfully belongs to them. I would like to leave you with their parting comments. However, before I do, I want the reader to know why I chose to study adolescent Black male identity and its power over academic achievement, life choices, and life trajectories.

Like Malcolm, I too, struggled under the weight of the *soft* stereotype associated with the light-skinned, curly-haired, gifted, *nice guy* who was in the advanced studies academic program. I understand Malcolm's dilemma and the choices he made. However, unlike Malcolm, I chose to distance myself from this stereotype through semi-immersion in the tough street culture and fistfight my way out from underneath the weight of this imposed identity designation. Like

Frantz, I yearned for the kind of respect that would keep me safe. We grew up in the same community. This choice ultimately affected my academic performance in such a way that I was removed from the advanced studies program, became academically ineligible for the sports I played, and upon graduation only gained provisional acceptance into the University of Pittsburgh, where I landed on academic probation by the end of my freshman year. Socially, my quasi-street identity elicited choices that made me a father at 17 years old and implicated me in an armed robbery that could have resulted in a mandatory 5-year prison sentence. Fortunately, this did not happen. My schooling experiences were generally positive because of my gifted status and the unearned social capital that I had from having a white father who was also a well-respected schoolteacher, yet my social experiences and my family culture during adolescence were significant factors in the construction of a *risk-laden* identity that almost derailed my life. There is more to be said about my experiences. As I indicated above, I plan to tell my story. For the purposes of this study and in honor of the men who shared their lives with me, Frantz, Malcolm, and Lance have the last word.

At the end of each interview, I asked the men to consider what is important to them now, given their life experiences. After he considered for a moment, I asked Frantz what he wanted for his school-aged sons and he said:

The key thing is for them to have an opportunity to be who they *need* to be, and not put them in a situation where *other people* dictate who they are...I think a lot of times kids are labeled, rightly or wrongly, by other people, and if they're going to be labeled, I want them to be labeled as good kids. Just give them the opportunity to make or break

themselves, not force them down a certain path. So [as a father] look at the school to make sure it's the *right* type of environment where there are people who care and that means more to me than anything else...I don't want them to have to build their identity off of sports; I want them to build their identity off of fighting...I don't want them to have to go through a lot of stuff...growing up fighting or scratching and clawing... If something happens, I want them to know that, there's somebody there...if their Big Wheel gets taken...they'll know I'll be there to take care of it...they'll have that support mechanism there...because I understand what *I* went through...That's the goal now.

Because of Lance's work in the community, I asked him what he has to *say* to parents, practitioners, policy makers, about the way to change the game for adolescent Black males who are flying *blind*. He said:

Be visible in young African-American males' experiences. Be visible in their daily experience...Go to an afterschool program even if you have no connection to it. Stop at a local Y [MCA] and be visible amongst young African-American men, and with folks that you may know who are running those programs. Go to a football game and ask to meet the kid that plays quarterback or the kid who plays receiver, that you've seen some potential in, and say 'Hey, man, I see something in you. My name is so-and-so...maybe you can make a connection. If you need any help, give me a call...and I'll talk to your coach.' I think we need...that *urgency of now*...being at the face of what young people are doing, and not always from a [behind the scenes] programmatic standpoint...In the work that I do, I'm there afterschool or the lunchroom. I remember I

used to show up at Warren after school, just so kids would know my face...Just start putting a face in the place...I think that credibility comes *outside* of the daily routine...I know that we *all* have lives, but I think we have to somehow be *flexible* in doing that... *Identify with them*...that's what it is for me. I really try to make myself identifiable in speaking to kid...I *speak* to children. I speak to *young Black men* especially, and if I can, and the opportunity presents itself, I shake their hand, I give them a hug...I would say is that we have to find...we have to find a systematic structure that puts us at the *core* of a young Black man's experience. And we have to continuously try to figure out where that core root is...if in sports, if it's within schools or outside of schools...we have to start finding out what that core piece *is*, and really allowing ourselves to be *vulnerable* as adults...we have more *experiences* than they have...but we don't know what *they've* experienced...how *they're* viewing it, how *they're* dealing with it, and how *they're* navigating through that system...we need to ask ourselves, how can I support a young black man? How can I make sure that nothing gets him off track? I think that...can be key.

Finally, I asked Malcolm how he deals with his stepson and the young men he works with to counter pejorative stereotypes and limited notions of Black manhood, and he said:

I read a book called The Talent Code...and it talked about one of the keys for greatness, success or breakthroughs, is a thing called *ignition*, meaning something that ignites something in you because you see an example of it in someone else. Like someone who decides to become a forensic psychologist, they saw someone, either on TV or elsewhere

else who was a psychologist...some example. I'm a big believer in examples. I believe an example is worth a million words...Almost every young Brother will be able to provide an example of a male who has made a lot of money that doesn't necessarily have anything to do with education...there intellectual capacity or their academic achievement had nothing to do with it... all of their success was attributed to something other than education...And so a lot of people no longer see school as a means to an end, so it's very important for me to begin to connect, not only my son, but all the young men I work with, and youth in general, to multiple examples of success...not just bringing in people from the athletic world...but examples where academics, and/or socially responsible behavior was a major factor in their rise. There's something powerful in examples...where their overall achievement, discipline, and social contributions, are determinants of their worth as men. I believe we don't have enough examples. That's why young black men run through two doors, sports, or entertainment, so often, because those are the examples that are most pervasive...

I believe we also need to redefining manhood according to the principles of service and self-discipline. You know, who are you serving and how are you able to resist the social, emotional, and environmental forces, internal and external forces that would cause you to deviate from your goals or your standards? I believe that a man is defined by his self-discipline, and his goals...standards...and contributions to others. I began to see that the best students in school were not the smartest, but they just had more self-discipline. So that is something I instill in the guys...how school is a barometer for

overall success in life, by your ability to do things that you have to do, or that are consistent with your overall objective, even when you don't feel like it, or even when no one else is doing it. A big part of being a man is being able to deal with things that are not necessarily desirable or not necessarily comfortable...So just to reestablish the standard that we've kind of gotten away from... 'To be a man, you must see a man.' And so, I just believe that we have to really redefine what manhood is, what it means to be a Black man, what it really means to...what success really means...

I believe that success is extracted from and immersed in a group; it always comes from and leads back into some group. There is no individual success; the success is because of systems, because of teams, Success comes from a team and feeds back into a team, if you have succeeded and you are not feeding somebody else with your success, then you are not as successful as you think you are.

PEACE

APPENDIX A

Open-Ended Interview Guide Protocol

For the purposes of my study, I seek answers to the following **research** questions:

- How is racial and masculine identity development shaped by contexts such as families, schools, and communities?
 - In what ways do these identities serve as impediments for academic achievement?
 - In what ways do these identities serve as protective mechanisms for academic achievement?
 - How do community institutions such as barbershops shape positive identity development for adolescent black males?
 - How do adolescent black males negotiate the sociocultural discourses about them?
- How does academic achievement during adolescence affect life trajectories for black males?
 - How do adolescent black males view their own academic capacities?
 - What impact do socio-cultural discourses and schooling experiences have on identity and academic self-efficacy?

Individual Interview Questions:

1. Life History (Context of Experience) - Tell me as much as you feel comfortable sharing about your family, community, and school life during adolescence. You can begin with your childhood years, but only to set the stage for reflecting on and talking about your adolescent experiences. When I say adolescence, I'm generally talking about ages 12-18, but if there were moments earlier that had a major impact on your identity, please talk about those moments as well:
 - a. Let's start with your family:

- i. Tell me about your nuclear family.
 - ii. Were extended family members a big part of your early years?
 - iii. What were the values your family taught you about being black? What did your family teach you about what it meant to be a man?
 - iv. What traditions did your family hold?
 - v. What were some of the watershed moments (Pivotal Events) in your life growing up as a member of this family?
 - vi. Tell me about the men in your family. Who were/was the most important men/man in your life?
- b. Tell me about your neighborhood/community growing up:
- i. Do you feel your family was connected to and within your community? If so, how?
 - ii. Were your neighbors influential in your life growing up?
 - iii. Tell me about some of the institutions/organizations within your community. Were they influential in your life growing up?
 - iv. Did you feel safe in your community? If so, what or who made you feel safe or unsafe?
 - v. Tell me about some of the regular activities in your community.
 - vi. What were some of the resources (i.e. banks, food markets, recreational centers, etc.) in your community?

- vii. Looking back now, what was the SES of your community? Did you see your family as (poor, middle class, etc.) growing up?
- viii. What was the racial makeup of your community?
- ix. We cannot choose our family or the neighborhood/circumstances we were born into, but we can choose our friends. Tell me about your childhood friendships. Why did you choose these friends?
- x. Tell me about the men in your community. What do you remember about the impact of their presence in your life?
- xi. Who did you admire and want to be like the most in your family/community?
 - 1. Tell me about your local barbershop(s). How would you describe the influence that the men and the conversations in the barbershop had on you growing up?
- xii. What was your level of exposure to outside communities, and other resources, institutions, activities that existed outside of your community?
- c. Tell me about your growing up and going to school. What was important to you about your schooling?
 - i. How did your family feel about your schooling?
 - ii. What do you remember about the teachers and other students in your class?
 - iii. What did you like or dislike about school?

- iv. How did your family support you with your schooling?
 - v. Tell me about a perfect day at school.
 - vi. Tell me about a bad day at school.
 - vii. At this time in your life, was school important to you? If so, what were some of the factors that lead to you believing that it was important? If not, what factors contributed to you seeing school as unimportant?
 - viii. What role do you remember your father and other important black males in your life playing in your schooling?
- d. What was your first exposure to race and racism?
- i. How did that experience affect your self-perception at that time?
 - ii. How did it affect your perception of black males in general?
 - iii. How did it affect your view of white people and society?
2. Details (Present lived Experience): *Revisit most of the interviewee's responses to the previous questions concentrating on the concrete details of their adolescent experiences. Fill in the gaps first so that the respondent can reconstruct details. Look for details of experience not meaning making or opinions yet!
- a. ***Begin focus on adolescent social and schooling experiences and life trajectory from choices made during adolescence.***
 - i. Describe your experience as a black male student in middle and high school.
 - ii. Tell me about a time when you feel you performed well.
 - 1. What factors or what people do you think may have contributed to this success?

- iii. Tell me about a bad schooling experience.
 - 1. How did the adults in the school treat you because of this event?
 - 2. How did this event and this treatment make you feel about yourself?
- iv. How do you think racism may have played a role in your academic achievement or failure?
 - 1. Were you able to overcome this racism and eliminate those obstacles to your academic success or do you think you struggled under its weight? If you were able to overcome it how, if not, why?
- v. What activities or events in the community made you feel a sense of accomplishment? This could be any action you took, positive or negative, that made you feel important.
- vi. Tell me about any social experiences that made you feel insignificant, powerless, or worthless.
- vii. How did this combination of social and schooling experiences make you feel about yourself?
- viii. Is there a connection between how you saw yourself and some of the choices you made in school and in your community? If so, tell me about some of the choices you made, because of this self-perception, and the impact of those choices on your life.

3. Reflection on Meaning of Experience: *Revisit the social and schooling experiences from the previous set of questions and ask the participant to reflect upon the meaning of those experiences for his life.

a. *Make it clear that meaning making does not necessarily entail finding satisfaction or reward from those experiences. Let them know that I am simply looking for them to make the emotional and intellectual connections between how they saw themselves and the choices they made resulting from that self-perception. From there I want them to reflect upon those choices, as well as the other factors in their lives during adolescence, so that we can discuss how they interacted to bring them to their present situation. I also want them to look at their present experience as middle-aged adult black males as simply the present moment within their total life span. Let them know we explored the past to clarify events and choices that led them to where they are at now. This is their story, with a past and present that we are trying to make meaning of. This meaning making is the focus of what is now less interview and more dialogue between myself and the respondent about key (water-shed) moments from the previous interviews.*

b. **Using excerpts from the participants responses to previous questions, ask them to draw these connections. Use the diagram below as a visual aid to begin the discussion, but explain the fluid and multi-faceted dynamics of identity construction that takes place on complicated individuals in complicated contexts, so this diagram is not a hard and fast blueprint for how they made their choices.**

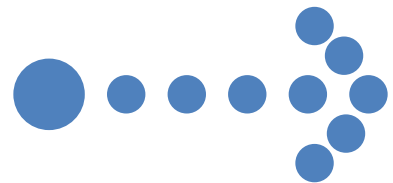
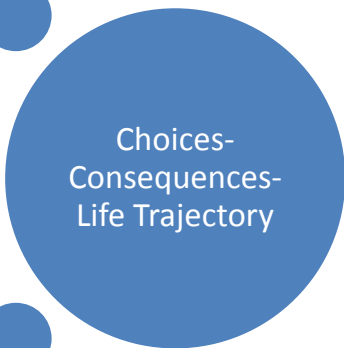
Social Experiences- effect of race & racism



Self-Perception (Identity)-
effect of race & racism



Schooling Experiences- effect of
race & racism



APPENDIX B

Informed Consent Form

Title: “**Let Them Speak Their Peace**” *A Retrospective Critical Race Study of Adolescent Black Male Social and Schooling Experiences, Identity Development, and Educational / Life Outcomes*

Principal Investigator: Michael Quigley, Ph.D. (Candidate)

University of Pittsburgh School of Education, Administrative and Policy Studies
Department

Date: January 20, 2012

PURPOSE OF RESEARCH STUDY:

I am interested in how black males make meaning of their social and schooling experiences during adolescence and the impact these experiences have on their lives. I am also concerned with how black males interpret explanations of their often poor schooling experiences as persistent, random, and inevitable, albeit problematic, outcomes of a reasonably fair non-racist system. The purpose of this research study is to use the retrospective recollections of black men to examine social and schooling experiences of black males during adolescence. Through this study, I hope to shed light on how black males believe race and racism may have played as factors in their schooling experiences and the impact those experiences had on the construction of identities. Furthermore, I hope to show connections between black male identity and the

social and academic choices made during adolescence. Choices made during adolescence can be significant determinants for life trajectories and these choices are often a byproduct of self-perception. Recollections about this particular period of life will be in the context of the overall quality of life that these men have experienced and are currently experiencing. I anticipate that approximately 10 black men ranging from ages 38-42 will participate in this study.

PROCEDURES AND COMPENSATION:

You are being asked to participate in a series of three, approximately hour-long, in-depth, face-to-face interviews conducted by Michael Quigley, principal investigator. Interviews will be staggered to accommodate the personal schedules of each respondent and conducted, preferably, in an area of minimal traffic within their homes or other spaces where they feel comfortable sharing.

For your participation in the study, you will be contributing to a research area that has been under-examined and funded. Thus, I thank you and appreciate you for participating. If you satisfactorily complete the study you will receive a \$30.00 gift card as a token of my appreciation and thanks.

RISKS/DISCOMFORTS:

The risks associated with participation in this study are no greater than those encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical and/or social activity. Although rehashing past experiences that may be painful is difficult, the interviews will be dialogic and in no way interrogating. Participants will only share what they are comfortable with and at any time can strike anything said from inclusion in this study. In the unlikely event, that keeping

information confidential puts you or someone else, especially a child, in serious danger such as from suspected child abuse or neglect; I am obligated to contact the appropriate authorities.

BENEFITS:

There are no direct benefits to you from participating in this study. This study may benefit schools and society if the results lead to a better understanding of how and why adolescent black males make meaning of their social and schooling experiences and make the choices that they do. This information may improve schools' efforts to identify with and educate black male students.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND RIGHT TO WITHDRAW:

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You choose whether to participate. If you decide not to participate, there are no penalties, and you will not lose any benefits to which you would otherwise be entitled during the normal course of your life.

If you choose to participate in the study, you can stop your participation at any time, without penalty or loss of benefits for the normal course of your life. If you want to withdraw from the study, at any time you may let the principal investigator know of your decision.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

Interview data and study records will not identify you in any way. Anonymous identifiers will be used for you and each participant to ensure that your personal stories are told while your privacy is respected to the greatest extent possible by law. The records from your participation may be reviewed to ensure that the research is done properly, by members of Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of Pittsburgh.

Otherwise, no records will identify you and will be available only to this investigator and my doctoral advisor, Michael Gunzenhauser, Ph.D. Study records will be created, stored, and maintained to protect confidential information. Each transcribed interview will have a code on it for the purposes of identifying the respondent only. Again, no subject names will be used on the interview documents. Consents forms, and other research related materials will be kept in a locked file cabinet.

IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS:

You can ask questions about this research study now or at any time during the study, by contacting the principal investigator, Michael Quigley, Ph.D. (Candidate), at mwq1@pitt.edu or 412.860.4120.

APPENDIX C

Gunzenhauser, Michael G

From: mwq1@pitt.edu
Sent: Monday, February 06, 2012 12:37 PM
To: Gunzenhauser, Michael G
Subject: Fw: PI Notification: IRB determination

Hey Mike, does this mean I have IRB approval?
Mike
Sent from my Verizon Wireless BlackBerry

From: irb@pitt.edu
Date: Mon, 06 Feb 2012 12:32:32 -0500
To: <mwq1@pitt.edu>
ReplyTo: irb@pitt.edu
Subject: PI Notification: IRB determination



University of Pittsburgh *Institutional Review Board*

3500 Fifth Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15213
(412) 383-1480
(412) 383-1508 (fax)
<http://www.irb.pitt.edu>

Memorandum

To: Mr. Michael Quigley
From: Sue Beers, Ph.D., Vice Chair
Date: 2/6/2012
IRB#: PRO10020306
Subject: Title: "Let Them Speak Their Peace" A Retrospective Critical Race Study of Adolescent Black Male Social and Schooling Experiences, Identity Development, and Educational / Life Outcomes

The above-referenced project has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board. Based on the information provided, this project meets all the necessary criteria for an exemption, and is hereby designated as "exempt" under section 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) Tests, surveys, interviews, observations of public behavior

Please note the following information:

- If any modifications are made to this project, use the "**Send Comments to IRB Staff**" process from the project workspace to request a review to ensure it continues to meet the exempt category.
- Upon completion of your project, be sure to finalize the project by submitting a "**Study Completed**" report from the project workspace.

Please be advised that your research study may be audited periodically by the University of Pittsburgh Research Conduct and Compliance Office.

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