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BLACK MALE PARTIAL (IN)VISIBILITY SYNDROME:
A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE NARRATIVES OF BLACK MASCULINE
IDENTITIES AT THE PEBBLES SCHOOL

BY

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DISSERTATION

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Abstract

This dissertation explores how 12 diverse Black males who attend or graduated from the Pebbles School—an urban all-male public combined middle and high school—constructed, perceived, and negotiated their identities as males. Examining the relationship between masculinity and education, my study is situated at the intersection of education policy, gender and ethnic studies, and draws on work in Black Masculinity Studies for analyzing narratives and messages of participants. I found that these Black males faced enormous pressures to adopt hegemonic traits of masculinity, but also had to regularly define their own, complicated masculinities, which was relational to family, peers and teachers' expectations for their masculinity constructions. Additionally, this study uncovered that many of the stereotypes that routinely define Black males' perceived masculinities in co-educational schools didn't lessen because of their enrollment in an all-male, majority-Black male school. By focusing on the diverse experiences of young Black males in single-gender schools designed for their educational needs, I argued complex masculinities needs to be reflected in curricula, pedagogy, and policy.

*This dissertation is dedicated to my nephews and Black male mentees
I also dedicate this work to my brother Juanzel LaNel Rennick and
to my mentor/second mom Ruth Ann Stewart
May you both rest in peace*

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Prologue

Journaling Black Masculinity and Certain Social Forces in Life

To situate myself within this discussion of gender and identity constructions among Black males, this prologue shares certain aspects of my personal journey as a Black male who both grew up in a majority-Black neighborhood and attended an all-White high school (outside of my respective community). It also details my personal struggles with masculine identity perceptions inside and outside of my community. The reflection within the prologue is drawn from my personal experiences from childhood to adolescence, and it is written in a voice that combines academic and familial discourse about gender and identity, race, and perceptions of others (myself included) who have shaped my personal understanding of masculinity.

This prologue has two purposes. It provides one example of the perspective of a Black male from a predominately Black urban community, who attended a high school where the majority of the teachers and students were White. This prologue also shares some personal accounts of the various social forces, such as specific people and institutions that led to certain emotional and psychological difficulties I encountered while traversing different community and educational spaces. At the same time, these encounters posed certain dilemmas for me when I was seeking to be accepted by peers and adults, which led to personal challenges I faced as a young male. What I didn't know at the time was that I was chronicling my own path and unique perspective on the issue of what it meant to be a Black male.

I grew up in Boston's Dorchester section, a predominately Black inner-city neighborhood, and noticed that there were differences in how Black males negotiated masculine identities inside and outside of school. It was not initially obvious to me that the media placed enormous pressures on many Black males that induced them to adopt a specific form of expression of

machismo (Mercer & Julien, 1988; Staples, 1982; West, 1993). More specifically, in my neighborhood, some of my peers sought to embody many stereotypical traits that parts of society deemed characteristic of being “young,” “Black,” and “male.” They played sports, had multiple girlfriends, misbehaved in school, and/or were involved in gangs. Fortunately, my mom was determined that all of her children would graduate from high school and attend college. My educational opportunities, identity/ maleness, and creative abilities were nurtured, appreciated, and supported by my mother. More specifically, the familial capital (Yosso, 2005) my mother instilled in me involved having the confidence in myself to counter stereotypes held by others and also helped me set my own course in life, a course that did not conform to the dominant masculinity perceptions of the local community and peers.

Despite the support that I personally received at home by my mother, this was not the case with one of my older brothers, who served as a surrogate father to me and routinely disciplined me when he thought I exhibited weaknesses or failed to exhibit what he regarded as dominant masculine characteristics. Growing up was both psychologically and emotionally difficult for me due to the constant pressure to exhibit what the locals defined as masculine traits (see Chapter Two) or face disciplinary actions or taunts from family and peers. I struggled with my understanding of my own sexuality as a male.

I found it equally upsetting to see so many Black males around me choose to discontinue their educational pursuits at the secondary level. I observed several factors that influenced the decisions of those Black males to discontinue their education: stereotyping by society; perceived, unwritten, “acceptable” rules related to Black masculinity; inadequate schooling resources; lack of positive role models; and the allure of street gangs. This realization shaped my early perspective on educational inequalities, access, and opportunities, and this led me to develop

coping mechanisms for dealing with people who either did not share my educational and professional pursuits or questioned my manhood. This experience led me to reflect on my school experiences and interactions with Black males and other parties.

I was a Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity (METCO)¹ student at Concord-Carlisle Regional High School (CCHS), an elite public co-educational suburban high school (located 17 miles northwest of Boston in Concord, Massachusetts). I observed that there were many differences between the quality of education and resources afforded to me that were not made available to many others who remained in Dorchester schools. As in my own community, I also experienced firsthand the social pressures to adopt specific masculine qualities (e.g. playing a varsity sport, joining gangs, playing street ball, engaging in petty theft (through peer initiation), wearing brand name attire, etc.) and fit in with many of the other METCO students, my White peers and other students of color at CCHS. Very few Black students participated in the CCHS-METCO program. This added to the social divisions between upperclassmen and underclassmen, and placed unspoken restrictions on how we should act, whom we should communicate with, and the classes we took.

Few Black students were enrolled in enriched or Advanced Placement courses at CCHS when I was a student. I found it upsetting that I had to deal with the repeated challenges to re-define myself as a Black male who was smart, as opposed to the often-negative portrayals of Black males at the time as being dumb. I was armed with confidence and self-determination to succeed academically, despite the envious opinions of others who disapproved of my objective.

¹ METCO is a busing program that provides educational opportunities for urban city youth to attend suburban schools in Massachusetts, as an alternative to attending local public schools in one's own neighborhood. One objective of METCO was to increase the diversity in many of the white homogeneous schools, and to expose inner-city youth to quality education (particularly if families had opted to not send their child to exam/private schools in their community). For more information on the METCO program, visit: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/metco/>

² For example, as mentioned earlier, one of my older brothers instilled in me his definition of what it meant for him to be a strong Black male; this often meant concealing my emotions. I suspect he may have learned this behavior

My experience was reflective of Franklin's (2004) words, "Already cataloged in the back of my mind was every useful lesson I have ever gleaned about [B]lack men and how to be one—or not" (p. 25).²

I had few Black male friends at CCHS, kept to myself, and did not play what some peers deemed to be "real sports" such as basketball and football. My sport of choice throughout middle and high school was (varsity) track (I was co-captain during my senior year of high school, and won several invitational state meets). After high school, while enrolled at Wheaton College in Massachusetts as an undergraduate student, I developed a greater awareness and confidence in my manhood and myself, and decided to define my own path and identity, which rendered me "visible." Franklin (2004) wrote, "invisibility involves: adjusting our criteria for being seen or not seen, scrutinizing other's criteria for inclusiveness, and discerning the difference between tolerance and acceptance" (p. 35).

I also did not subscribe to stereotypes assigned to many Black males by members of society such as misbehaving in class, having multiple girl friends, or being involved in a gang; these unwritten male codes led to some of my peers inside and outside of CCHS picking on me repeatedly. They considered me to be an outsider or weak.³ They also questioned and/or challenged my manhood and repeatedly called me "fagot." Unfortunately, I was not yet aware of Franklin's (2004) encouraging words: "the survival goal . . . to preserve . . . dignity and maintain . . . respect—particularly . . . self-respect—and . . . gain recognition, satisfaction, validation, and a sense of identity" (p. 25). I was, in essence, invisible (based on class division), a subtopic that will be revisited throughout this dissertation.

² For example, as mentioned earlier, one of my older brothers instilled in me his definition of what it meant for him to be a strong Black male; this often meant concealing my emotions. I suspect he may have learned this behavior and expectations from my mother or from peers.

³ See Mutua, 2006, p. 87: "Black men who understand Black masculinity through the lens of physical dominance often demand respect from those they see as being weak."

Obviously, I was not literally invisible, but I did not feel myself as being seen by others. I also use the term invisibility to signal complete recognition and acceptance by others for whom I was as a Black boy. This trope of visibility is necessary (as opposed to simply using the word “recognition,” “knowledge,” and/or “respect”) to highlight and impart value to my personal experiences and those of other males, who may have experienced similar taunts growing up from members of certain social classes.

I realized that I was infuriated by some of my peers’ perceptions about me to the effect that I was utterly insignificant. “Invisibility is an inner struggle with feelings that one’s talents, abilities, personality, and [self] worth are not valued or recognized” due to subtle or overt prejudice, racism, and non-acceptance by others (Franklin, 2004, p. 4). “Conversely, we feel visible when our true talents, abilities, personality, and [self] worth are respected” (p. 4). Thus, I became visible when I looked past my desire for “acceptance” from others, and “recognized” the value in my own identity and self-worth. Until I realized, however, the repeated taunts I endured reinforced my desire to stay the course in my educational and professional pursuits.

Participation in the METCO program was emotionally and academically challenging. Each weekday, I woke up at 5:30 a.m. to catch the bus to arrive at school by 7:00 a.m. At the start of high school, I questioned why I chose to participate in the METCO program, when many of my neighborhood peers, especially Black males, did not have or did not choose to have similar options. My answer to the quandary was five-fold, part fact and part assumption:

1. They were unable to connect with different educational opportunities (fact),
2. They did not have a relative who worked as placement coordinator for the METCO program [which was true in my case] (fact),
3. They did not have guardians concerned about their education (assumption),
4. They had no knowledge of educational alternatives such as METCO (Social capital; see Yosso, 2005) or made no effort to connect with such opportunities (assumption), and/or

5. Taking part in METCO would have also given many of my peers less street credibility with peers, and they potentially valued what peers thought more than they valued their futures (assumption).

As regards points 3 and 4: I say assumption because I, in essence, made the other boys in my neighborhood invisible by unconsciously making certain claims about them. I held false theories related to why they didn't follow the same educational path I did, such as having the same social and familial connections as I made use of to obtain admission the METCO program.

From the start of my 9th grade year at CCHS, I found that some of the guidance counselors viewed the inner city middle school I attended as having been educationally inadequate due to the students' overall academic performance and the low graduation rate of those students who attended that inner city middle school. Many students did not graduate from the middle school I had attended at the same rate, or with the same academic standing, as the suburban middle school students in the town of Concord with higher grades and access to better facilities and teachers. These perceptions helped to explain why some of my African American peers dropped out of my high school or transferred to other high schools. They did so as a result of the treatment some of us initially received in the suburban environment. They dropped out of school because some teachers and counselors paid them little attention and/or thought they were dumb. These perceptions also explained why I was initially placed in special education classes and remedial classes during my freshman year (as is often the case for Black male students). Academic labeling and tracking defined my initial schooling in high school.

In response to some guidance counselors' views of my academic preparation, I decided to prove I could compete academically with my suburban peers in high school. During my sophomore year, to the surprise of some of my teachers and guidance counselors, I made a request to be enrolled in more challenging college preparatory, enrichment, and honors-level classes. This move to more advanced classes was not easy, and my mother played a role in

facilitating this request. It helped that my mother was a college graduate and was concerned about how the quality of my educational experience might limit the professional and academic options provided to me. She was also concerned about whether future educational and academic opportunities might not be afforded to me if I were to continue in special education and remedial classes. My mother advocated in favor of a form of resistance capital on my behalf as part of her support for a family member, and resisted inequitable institutions that have historically placed male students of color, particularly Black males, in remedial classes.

While educators will often deem such interest in improved educational access as a sign of genius on the part of a White male, they tend to often view it as troublemaking when expressed by a Black male (hooks, 2004). In my case, however, this request helped redefine me—I was becoming “un-visible” (Ellison, 1952, p. xv). Making this move eventually upset some other Black students who were not enrolled in Advanced Placement classes in large numbers. Their antagonism led me to question my identity and “my Blackness,” and led me to also ask myself, “Could I embody both: a quest to do well academically and develop an identity as a Black male?”

I made a transition from special education and remedial classes to a more advanced, college-preparatory curriculum. I also came to realize that I was becoming bidialectal (Godley & Escher, 2012) in the classroom. This strategy enabled me to use a particular linguistic capital (e.g., Standard English) that the teachers valued while in school, and one valued by my peers (e.g., African American Vernacular English or slang) when I was in my neighborhood. Dillard (1973), Smitherman (1980), Brown and Nelson (2009) and Hill (2009) labeled this ability to traverse different linguistic spaces as “code switching” (see also Rodriguez, 1982; Carter Andrews, 2009).

Although “code switching is contested” (Auer, 1998; Brock, 2010; Gilyard, 1991; Heller, 2007; Myers-Scotton, 2006) due to its use and importance as a dialect, I will use this concept to explain my specific conversations with teachers and adults that shaped my communicational coping strategies inside and outside of school. I also will explore how this idea plays out with contemporary Black males.

In attempting to deal with systemic racism (i.e., academic tracking and stereotypical assumptions made by some adults) about my presence as a young Black male in high school, I had to simultaneously deal with how others—male and female—in my all-Black neighborhood viewed/treated me differently as a result of my participation in METCO. This experience proved both physically and mentally exhausting. I often felt like no one understood me. I repeatedly attempted to “fit into both worlds” and sought acceptance by others, to be visible, appreciated and understood—and simply be “recognized.” My years as an adolescent were a pivotal period in my life that added to my identity development-victimhood—not literally through physical violence, but emotional and psychological scars. I repeatedly became the target of verbal abuse, and taunts by some Black peers, within both my elite suburban high school and my inner-city neighborhood. Unfortunately, at the time, I never consciously sought to develop any coping mechanisms to help me challenge stereotypes related to my self-defined masculinity.

Looking back, I see that I used two coping strategies to confront the taunts of these peers (albeit I didn’t really know it at the time): I put up a personal front (an external toughness-image) and began scrutinizing others’ definitions of Black masculinity. Even when I used these coping mechanisms, I often struggled socially with some of my peers and academically in high school, as I had to encounter one set of boys at school and on the bus to school and a different set of boys as I got off the bus while walking home. Because of these uncomfortable exchanges, I

continued to periodically question what it meant to be Black, including developing an outward toughness or personal front.⁴

My own experience of seeing the relationship between Black masculinity and school-based pressures led me to this study. I wanted to explore whether or not young Black men in all-male academies had different, more educative relationships to the pressures related to their own masculinity and their academic studies. I wanted to understand Black masculinity constructions as seen from the perspectives of younger Black males and through the lenses of others such as alumni. I also wanted to determine whether Black males attending majority Black male public high schools experienced the same challenges that I faced while attending a predominately White high school.

I also realize my own personal experiences do not diverge from those of other Black males. The problems I experienced with my family, peers and community inside and outside the CCHS-METCO program need not be obstacles for younger African American males who came after me. I have also purposely chosen to study at the Pebbles School hoping that this all-male school would be attentive to these boys' particular, unique needs. I realize that I may need to continue to have questions about which forms of Black masculinity are visible in schools and have the potential to lead to academic success, while also instilling the confidence to overcome societal ills that have been a part of their course of life.

⁴ Majors and Billson (1992) wrote about this "toughness-image" in *Cool Pose: The Dilemmas of Black Manhood in America*. "Coolness" is so important that some Black males reject the friendship of others who play a particular sport or engage in activities that can be construed as a sign of softness or hypersensitivity.

Chapter One

Rationale for Study, Problem Statement, and Significance

The educational attainment of young Black men is lagging behind their White counterparts.⁵ In an review of math and reading scores among 4th and 8th graders conducted by the National Assessment of Educational Progress, “White students had average scores at least 26 points higher than Black students in each subject.” In 2008, less than 60% of Black students (male and female) graduated from high school on time, compared to 83% of their White counterparts (Education Week, 2011). This finding was similar to their Hispanic peers, where fewer than 10% participated in rigorous academic courses designed to prepare them well for education beyond high school (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009).

Black males are also overrepresented in prison. The school-to-prison pipeline suggests that many schools are unable to provide struggling Black students with enough skills and support, thereby increasing their likelihood of entering correctional facilities. In fact, unfortunately, 60% of Black school dropouts have spent time in prison. Those former students most trapped in the school-to-prison pipeline are Black males. There have also been several recent high-profile cases of armed White men killing unarmed young Black men illustrating that young Black males in the United States continue to be plagued by a dominant stereotype of them being violent and threatening. For example, prior to killing Trayvon Martin, the assailant referred to the 17-year old on a 911 call as a “real suspicious guy” and that he “looks up to no good” when, in reality, the young man was walking home from the store.⁶ The climate for young Black

⁵ According to <http://blackboysreport.org/urgency-of-now.pdf>: In 2010, 5.1% of White students dropped out of high school compared to 8% of Black students. However, the recent School Enrollment Supplement of the Current Population Survey places the dropout rate for Black males at 9.6%, and 60% represents the percentage of Black dropouts who spent time in prison.

⁶ For more information, visit: <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/326700-full-transcript-zimmerman.html>. Further, even more troubling was how some of the media then supported the assailant’s claim that the young man looked threatening (citation from Fox news).

males is alarming, yet discussing Black males as a homogenous group fails to capture the diversity of Black masculinity.

A key issue discussed in this dissertation is the diversity and complexities of Black masculinities within all-male single-gender schools. Factoring in the social ills referenced above with hypermasculinity traits within school settings, it becomes clear that not all complications go away because Black males attend all-male schools; in fact, this study found that they still persist. This study also shares that Black males encounter many restrictive, unchallenged masculinity expectations from various people: their peers, family, and older adult male teachers at schools.

Single-gender schools (public or charter) are a viable educational option for Black males to attend and have been successful at helping students gain acceptance into colleges and universities. This fact is evident by the ongoing public recognition of all-male schools like Urban Prep in Chicago, Illinois. However, these schools are not a one-stop solution to many of the persistent educational problems that have routinely cast Black males as being deviant, criminal, “uneducated,” and bound for prison.

Although these schools have had success in educating and graduating Black males, but they can't single-handedly fix society's stereotyped perceptions. Even so, students and alumni of Pebbles School gain keen insights into masculinity from some teachers, although it's not something that is reflected in their classes. This is also because they learn to navigate the all-male school system and all the definitions of maleness that can be found there.

Reflections and conversations of Black masculinities, as seen, the shared narratives of 12 Black males (Eddy, Lex, Max, Franky, Kevin, Henry, Samuel, Kyle, Brian, David, Jay, and Dion), provided a fuller sense and contextualization of how some of today's Black males fit into or are excluded from the brotherhood of Black men. These narratives also showed how Black

males may relate to Black women and Black communities and, further, how they view their own masculinity regardless of their style of dress, size, sexuality, or gender identity.

The study extends contemporary work that is written on Black Masculinity Studies to the work of Black theorists across the last century. By examining the lives of adolescents qualitatively, I illustrate what the diversity of Black masculinity and its complications (such as body size, sexual orientation, and national origins) argued by contemporary work actually look like on a day-to-day basis. For the youth in my sample, this diversity was both a resource and often hidden by larger cultural narratives of what Black men are and do. By interviewing young people today who are living in a very different historical climate, I am able to shed light on how theories discussed in the first half of the 20th century are still in play today.

My interviewees discussed the difficulties in achieving self-understanding in hostile contexts and also critiqued or embodied hegemonic forms of Black masculinity. This study also revealed Black masculinities as being relational to others, including family, peers, and other adults who influence them. These narratives represent the multiplicity of masculinities, as expressed through body markers and sexualities. In contrast to the school, interviews revealed that alumni and students fashioned masculinities that challenged traditional definitions of gender norms. This study has implications for educational institutions working with Black males in today's climate.

I too was once a young Black male myself, and I understand, albeit not completely, many of the issues that contemporary Black boys face with regard to defining their masculinities. I once faced similar difficult tasks (as identified in my prologue with self-perception of invisibility syndrome) in attempting to understand what it meant to be a Black boy, peer relations, and social

pressures. My personal definitions of masculinity meant that I had to develop a personal front or masculine identity for peer acceptance and to challenge others' expectations.

Problem Statement

Black males are both overly visible (as a collection of stereotypes) and invisible (as complete human beings). Thus, perceptions of Black masculinity serve to define restrictive groupings that delineate how Black males are expected to perform in society. In their efforts to adhere to these standards of performance, some Black males act out social roles to gain acceptance from others, particularly their peers. These defined compartments often affect the lived experiences of Black boys and men as they traverse different educational and community spaces. Common perceptions of masculinity have ignored exploring many Black males' personal constructions of identity while limiting their unique voices.⁷

There are arguably more socially acceptable forms of Black masculinity today than in previous generations. These masculine representations offer opportunities for alternative articulations or acknowledgement of diverse Black masculinities. Still, not all of these forms of masculinity ensure total acceptance from friends, peers, and family members. The reason is because different groups have different values, unwritten masculine codes, and social norms. The choices people make in life can lead family members and peers to simply tolerate, or even reject outright, those individuals' carefully constructed identities. My work thus examined the process of gender identity development construction/perception among young Black males.

⁷ Our current understanding of males draws from modified surveys originally designed for older males. These surveys often use a controlled, select group to represent all males. The common understanding of Black male masculinity developed in response to research studies largely focused on various subgroups within our culture—e.g., male prisoners, gang members, or athletes (Howard, 2012).

Research Significance and Guiding Questions

My dissertation adds complexity to existing literature on Black male identity developments by focusing more intently on young Black males who come of age surrounded by restrictive, popular, and decidedly negative cultural images that portray them as thugs and gangsters. This study points out that more public discussions about differing masculinities in all-male schools need to take place, where gender issues are not immune to the complications of socialization and/or stereotypes from students and adults, as also experienced in many co-education institutions. Conceptualizations about the traditional role of males typically are both paternalistic and patriarchal and often deal with issues of “gender” identity, such as being gay.

To help undertake this study, I looked at how race, gender, and sexual orientation intersect to explain masculinity at one single-gender school. Consequently, this study points out that successful schooling experiences require that male students—straight, gay, or bisexual—adopt a kind of identity formation or accommodation that only privileges a heterosexual masculinity, which leads some males to ascribe to a sexual identity or orientation that their peers, family, or colleagues deem acceptable. Single-gender education facilitates such expectations, explaining why this type of environment is both supportive and restrictive in the types of masculinity discussions that take place at these schools with respect to differing masculinities.

Four overarching research questions guided my dissertation study:

- RQ1: How do Black youth define their masculinity?
- RQ2: How do Black males experience and understand masculinity in all-male schools?
- RQ3: How do the perceptions of peers and adults impact Black males’ definitions of masculinity?
- RQ4: What strands of masculinity do Black males adopt inside and outside of school settings?

These research questions allowed me to focus on how young Black males believe their masculinity is perceived and how they construct their own masculinity. Most importantly, the study revealed the level of tension (and/or congruence) between these two and how their construction interacts with what they view as the perception of Black masculinity by society and different groups.

As such, this study extends W.E.B. Du Bois's double consciousness theory to explain how some Black males view themselves and others differently by gender identity and sexual orientation. Black masculinity has always been in a state of double consciousness. Understandings of Black masculinities have been pushed and pulled between White dominant constructions of model masculinity, Black opposition, and even exaggeration of those dominant constructions and community-based self-definition of Black masculinities. There are educational opportunities lost by not exploring Black masculinities as education about possibility, education about opposition, and education about the pressures to conform to White and Black expectations.

The complexities I examine have long been part of theoretical discussions of blackness. Frantz Fanon's signature *Black Skin, White Mask* (1952) tells us that "not only must the Black man be Black; he must be Black in relation to the white man" (p. 110). He, too, draws on a longer tradition of these complexities such as double consciousness. Invisibility is relative and shifting. Visibility can be achieved, but there are social forces of racism and classism always operating to obscure the kind of masculine visibilities and identities that these young men are creating and inhabiting. My work links together these conversations about Black men with very specific concerns about educational aspirations and attainment through its study on gender and sexualities.

The State of Black Males in Schools and Culture

The current state of Black young men in public schools deserves attention, as do the cultural representations of Black masculinity in dominant and Black cultures. The dominant constructions of masculinity in the United States includes a degree of mastery over one's environment or home, competitiveness, independence, toughness or strength, suppression of feelings, and dominant control over relationships and others (Jakupcak, 2003; Khoja-Moolji, 2012; Seal & Ehrhardt, 2003; Ward, 2005). Collectively, these constructions represents various nuances for the types of masculinity that have historically define maleness either as stereotypical fronts or as adopts of unwritten male rules that define types of behaviors. These constructions also get manifested in all-male Black schools, where some males counter the dominant form of masculinity; yet also continue to mask the diversity of their own Black masculinities. Carby (2009) states,

While contemporary Black male intellectuals claim to challenge the hegemony of a racialized social formation, most fail to challenge the hegemony of their own assumptions about masculinity and accept the consensus of a dominant society that conceives African American society in terms of a perennial "crisis" of Black masculinity whose imagined solution is a proper affirmation of Black male authority. (p. 12)

Such authentication of gender is observed through the ways different forms of masculinity are scripted or performed by individuals given the context or communicational exchanges between males. Further, the pressure to conform to White male patriarchal standards of manhood—as protector, procreator, disciplinarian, and family provider—is a masculine dilemma for many Black males in their quest for recognition as males. Despite the unconscious internalization and acceptance of the White male patriarchal standards, inequities in education and employment and limited access to educational opportunities have prevented the expression of validation in these behaviors.

However, I agree with Moffatt (2012), who stated that “[i]n the contemporary urban environment [all-male schools included], the once-dominant concept of masculine identity is being replaced by alternative ideas of what it means to be a man” (p. 1). For example, during a 2012 interview titled “Tongues Untied: ‘Man Hugs’ and Manhood With Sylvia Harvey” featured in the Huffington Post Gay Voices,⁸ Rutgers University lecturer, writer, and gay activist Darnell Moore and former professional football athlete, writer, and gay activist Wade Davis, Jr., offered unique interpretations of gender identities and the challenges Black males must face to “fit in” or “act out” (hooks, 2004). Moore states,

masculinity and femininity, gender expressions in general, are scripts (like the scripts, full of various [social] roles, which are written for plays or movies [see hooks, 2004] that are created by people and institutions. . . . We [society] create the [role] scripts.

Essentially, what he contends is that as individuals in society, “we are [all] performers in a play, we act out the roles in the scripts that have been written for us” (p. 1).

Likewise, Davis, Jr. states,

[masculinity is] a concept that society creates that reinforces the belief that there are assigned, natural behaviors that men should enact [B]lack men have a specific standard of masculinity to perform in order to be respected in many circles. It is a standard set by [groups of] others and never the individual. . . . The rules are determined largely by our families, communities, and media. (p. 1)

Essentially, he concludes that emulation takes place because we desire to be accepted.

One take-away message from Moore and Davis’s commentary is that gender identity is most salient from a developmental standpoint, and there is significant influence from their peers when it comes to the expected male-female roles and norms. Moffatt (2012) adds that “[g]ender is both constitutive (constructing the limit of what it is to be a male) and productive (creating

⁸ For more information, visit http://www.huffingtonpost.com/darnell-l-moore/tongues-untied-manhugs-an_b_1776489.html.

practice for the production of masculinity) and is enacted daily expectation and everyday activities” (p. 12).

Further, the experience of masculinity is fragmented, contradictory, and subjective in nature. By this, comprehending the process of masculinity involves acknowledging that it draws upon multiple subjectivities that can be both troubling and therapeutic for the male in question. Thus, “gender is a social terrain defined [individually] by competing images, cultural and social practices that construct both femininities and masculinities” (Moffatt, 2012, p. 14). It is often the case that when young males fail to meet family or peer groups' expectations or display behavior considered feminine, they become victims of backlash, taunts, or social isolation (Howard, 2012). This backlash can seriously affect the emotional, physical, psychological, and educational development of such children and helps explain gender expectations set up by society, family, and peers. These challenges also shape educational experiences of males in school settings.

Given the intention of the Pebbles School to improve educational outcomes of young Black and Latino men, I chose the school because of its attention to masculinity provided me with a context in which such discussions would not seem remarkable. In what follows, I show, in fact, how remarkably adept my research subjects were at discussing the relationship between their negotiation of masculinities and understandings of their social positions and educational goals. I also add to my study by providing some educational context on the history of co-educational, single-gender or charter schools that follows.

Co-Educational, Single-Gender, or Charter Schools

American public schools have failed to educate many urban Black males in K-12 settings (Prager, 2011). Within these educational spaces, there is academic mislabeling and stereotypes of

these young men as well as their perceived threat persist. As a result, parents and concerned advocates for the education of Black male students call for the development of alternative educational options such as home schooling, charter schools, or all-male public schools. However, the stark need for Black male students to overcome historically low rates of educational performance has led to deserved focus on their academic and career achievements.

Such attentions have been the initiatives of all-male, primarily Black schools that have found unique ways to meet the educational needs of these students. These schools are in a unique position to help Black male youth, whatever their socioeconomic status, academic level, or cultural background might be. These schools can push past stereotypes and obstacles that are too common in traditional public schools, instead helping Black males find academic and personal success. “Yet there is no solid empirical support for this view, and there are little data on the effects and efficacy of single-sex public schools, particularly for students of color” (Goodkind, 2013, p. 3).

District courts throughout the United States have debated the constitutionality of all-Black male schools, citing the historical *Garrett v. Board of Education* (1992) as a pivotal example. The *Garrett* case, filed on August 5, 1991, by Shawn Garrett (on behalf of Crystal Garrett, a minor), and Nancy DOE (an anonymous mother on behalf of Jane DOE, Judy DOE, and Jessica DOE, minors) under the legal counsel of the National Organization for Women (NOW), The Legal Defense Fund (LDF), and Michigan American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), was against the Detroit Board of Education’s (DBE) pending decision to open all-male academies in Detroit. The plaintiffs alleged that DBE violated U.S. Constitution Amendment XIV, Michigan Constitutional Article 1 & 2, the Equal Educational Opportunities Act, Title IX

of the Education Act Amendments of 1972, Michigan's Elliott-Larsen Act, and Michigan's School Code through its approval of several male-only academies.

On August 26, a settlement was reached between the DBE, NOW, LDF, and the ACLU, which resulted in the allotment of 136 seats out of 560 to girls. However, "Out of 453 students [who would eventually enroll], 39 were girls, including 1 white student" (Pratt, 1997, p. 5).

"Since *Garrett v. Board of Education*, single-gender schools [particularly those for urban Black males] have begun to proliferate in communities of color throughout the United States" (Goodkind, 2013). The proliferation of such schools was made possible following 206 amendments by the 2001 reauthorization of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The current reauthorization of ESEA—known also as the "No Child Left Behind" Act (NCLB), named and proposed by President George W. Bush—allowed for the establishment of both single-gender schools and single-gender classes within co-educational schools. Additionally, the National Association for Single-Sex Public Education (NASSPE) reported that during the 2012 school year, 116 public schools in the United States were single sex and an additional 390 offered single-sex educational opportunities; in 2002 only 12 provided such opportunities (NASSPE, 2012). The term single-sex education refers to any educational setting in which male and female students attend exclusively with members of their own sex.

New law regulations passed in 2006 clarified the legal status of single-gender education but also encouraged school districts to establish single-gender schools rather than simply offer girls-only or boys-only classrooms within co-educational schools.⁹ One clarification in these new regulations is that the Equal Educational Opportunities Act prohibits the involuntary assignment of students to separate-gender schools.

⁹ Three types of single-gender public schools exist: (1) public schools that have separate boys' and girls' schools located within the same facility; (2) public schools that are entirely female or males; and (3) public schools that offer select grade levels entirely single-sex (Nappen, 2005, p. 3).

Following the amendment changes in NCLB, the number of public schools offering single-gender education grew. As its inclusion in NCLB revealed, single-sex public schools are viewed to improve the educational experiences and performances of low-income students of color. Many public schools offering single-sex education have high proportions of such youth (Hubbard & Datnow, 2005; Klein, 2012). In addition to single-sex public schools, there are single-sex charter schools. According to Lubienski and Weitzel (2010), few people suspected that within two decades of when charter schools first arrived on the American educational landscape, thousands of these schools would be established across the United States.¹⁰

The charter school movement is an outgrowth of the economic fears in the United States, exemplified in *A Nation at Risk* due to the mediocrity in American schools and exacerbated by poor test scores of students in math and science. Additionally, “since the inception of the charter school movement in the late 1990’s three major goals have been set out for them: equity for students, innovation in education programs and competition. These goals are not exclusive; nor should they be presented in isolation” (Lubienski & Weitzel, 2010, p. 15). The following describes some advantages and disadvantages to charter schools.

Charter schools have both critics and proponents. For example, critics state that charter schools group students by academic abilities because these schools are expected to be elite institutions. Specifically, they tend to enroll academically talented students to the detriment of academically disadvantaged students left behind in districts (defined as cream-skimming students).¹¹ Critics also claim this segregation can actually do harm by turning out students who are unprepared for the real world in which men and women must work together. They contend that single-gender school environments are a reversal of the educational gains made since the

¹⁰ As of March 2010, there were about 5,000 charter schools operating in the United States (Eckes, 2010, p.1).

¹¹ Research has showed that charter schools are serving academically disadvantaged students in proportions comparable to district schools (Garcia, 2010, p. 34).

Civil Rights Movement. They also contend that these schools represent a return to segregated schools (Rich, 2012) and fail to educate Black males. They may also have strict admission requirements that may discourage certain students from applying.¹² In this study, however, the Pebbles School regularly attempts to meet the educational needs of its students, as reflected in the shared narratives and its mission.

In making the case for single-sex charter schools, Meyer (2008) argued that single-sex charter schools improve students' academic performance through three mechanisms: minimizing distractions and harassment from the other sex, addressing gender differences in learning, and remedying past inequities by providing low-income youth of color with opportunities previously afforded to more privileged youth. However, as Fergus and colleagues (2009) note, this advocacy seems to be based more on assumptions about the needs of low-income youth of color than on empirical research.

Proponents of charter schools also point out that there is a preponderance of available evidence that refutes the claim that charter schools only enroll larger percentages of academically talented students than district schools (Garcia, 2010). They instead argue that these schools, even within the homogenous populations they serve, have a clear sense of mission that is beneficial to their students' holistic, academic needs.

Goodkind (2013) offers these advantages to charter schools. One of the primary arguments of single-sex education, especially for low-income youth of color, is that it will minimize or eliminate distractions from the other sex and reduce boys' sexual harassment of girls, "claims for which there is some supportive evidence" (p. 397). Another argument for single-sex public schools for low-income youth of color is "they are more prone to sexual

¹² Read more at <http://www.quickenloans.com/blog/advantages-disadvantages-charter-schools-complete#dykOIrBT5dfEAp0w.99>

distraction than their White and more affluent counterparts, who, it is implied, do not need to be separated in order to concentrate on their work” (p. 398). This argument, Goodkind (2013) further contends, invokes stereotypes about Black hypersexuality. Single-sex schools are also a “means to reduce sexual distraction and harassment [and] reflects heteronormative assumptions that all students are sexually attracted only to members of the other sex” (p. 398).

As uncovered in my study at the Pebbles School and likewise from Drury et al’s (2012) findings on single-gender schools, “pressure to conform to gendered ideals are heightened in the single-sex school” (p. 21). Gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, transgender, questioning and intersex (GLBTQI) youth may feel further marginalized in single-sex environments. Homophobia serves to enforce normative masculinity and femininity.

As the racial demographics point out in Chapter Three of this study, my research site has a large percentage of Black male students and high matriculation and graduation rates.¹³ The 2012 Schott Foundation for Public Education statewide report on male students of color¹⁴ stated, “only 52 percent of Black male and 58 percent of Latino male ninth-graders graduate from high school within four years compared to 78 percent of White, non-Latino male ninth-graders” (p. 1). The report revealed that the gap for Black males is growing. According to Jackson, president of Schott,

These graduation rates are not indicative of a character flaw in the young men, but rather evidence of an unconscionable level of willful neglect, unequal resource allocation by federal, state and local entities and the indifference of too many elected and community leaders. It’s time for a support-based reform movement. (Holzman, Jackson, & Beaudry, 2012, p. 1)

¹³ According to school material, over 90% of the students have passed the state’s examination in mathematics, science, and global history, coupled with an 87% graduation rate of students while sending 95% of alumni onto colleges.

¹⁴ To view the 2012 Schott Report entitled, “The Urgency of Now,” visit: <http://blackboysreport.org>.

The Schott Foundation (2012) suggested that educational leaders nationwide should consider implementing a moratorium on school suspensions, because minority children (and children with disabilities) receive suspensions at disproportionately higher rates than other students. According to the study, during the 2009-2010 school year, Black male students accounted for 46% of those suspended more than once in public high schools, while Black and Hispanic students with disabilities have been secluded or restrained in their schools due to misevaluations by school administrators (Holzman, Jackson, & Beaudry, 2012, p. 8).

Department of Education (2012) data show that students with disabilities make up 12% of the student body nationwide but account for 70% of those subjected to physical restraints (due to behavioral issues).¹⁵ The Schott Foundation report has called for individual assessment and tutoring, as well as an increase in art, music, and physical education instruction, among other disciplines.

Dissertation Overview

This study provided a space for some personal self-reflection of past social and academic experiences to reconnect with and understand the broader social forces that influence how I personally described myself and other Black males. Personal reflection helped me problematize how to understand contemporary Black masculinity; its inclusivity and exclusivity of diverse males who are not all heterosexual, athletes, or in gangs; and its variances. In addition to providing a personal narrative, I shared narratives of my interviewees and created a composited picture of others and myself including identifying some personal stressors related to masculinity.

¹⁵ The Department of Education (2012) states that Black boys face harsher discipline in public schools than other students. They accounted for 35% of those suspended once, 46% of those suspended more than once, and 39% of all expulsions, according to the Civil Rights Data Collection's 2009-10 statistics from 72,000 schools in 7,000 districts, serving about 85% of the nation's students. For more information, visit: http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/06/education/black-students-face-more-harsh-discipline-data-shows.html?_r=0

Conducting these interviews as part of the study (and the self-reflection that came with it) made me more receptive to the viewpoints of my interviewees.

Chapter One. This chapter sets the stage and background for the study, the problem statement, the significance and purpose, and a general discussion of the educational status of Black males. The chapter explores each topic from an educational standpoint, using Black masculinity as a lens to interpret and understand gender and identity. I present a summary of the key components of the dissertation and briefly touches upon the following: the 12 Black male interviewees, the methods used within this study, methodology, and the reasons why this study is important. The chapter also presents the four research questions that guided this inquiry.

Chapter Two. In this chapter, I discuss and analyze the current literature about Black masculinity in order to ascertain the existing knowledge base regarding Black masculinity as seen by various theorists. I also introduce four masculinity theories of constructions derived from the literature review from various empirical and social sciences literature. These four theories of masculinity touch upon how identities have been framed throughout the United States. Specifically, this study's use of intersectionality explores how gender, race, sexual orientation, social class, and other axes of identity for Black males interact as young and older men negotiate their diverse masculinities. I mention the conceptual framework and theoretical frameworks (Progressive Black Masculinities Studies, Black feminist theory, and queer theory) that guide this study. The chapter concludes with a discussion that revisits the importance of Black Masculinity Studies and identifies certain gaps in the literature.

Chapter Three. Numerous qualitative methods of inquiry are introduced and interconnected in order to shape the development of this chapter. First, this chapter provides information related to my research site, research design, and the field study procedure. Second, I

document how current students and alumni (Eddy, Lex, Max, Franky, Kevin, Henry, Samuel, Kyle, Brian, David, Jay, and Dion) understood and made meaning of themselves as males. This quest for sense of meaning helped me shed light on how these same individuals define and negotiate their masculine construction in relationship to their peers, family, and school. Third, this chapter details the qualitative research methods approach employed in this study, such as participant recruitment, data collection processes, and sample selection, and shares brief composites of participant characteristics. Fourth, the chapter presents a discussion of the motivating theory and methodology used in this dissertation. I include a general overview of the data collected through field observations, interviews, and group meetings. Finally, this chapter outlines how I analyzed the data collected. In doing so, I cite relevant qualitative methods literature related to my study.

Chapter Four. In this chapter, I share key interview themes and highlight participant profiles that illustrate some challenges of negotiating Black masculinity: common experiences identified by respondents as part of their personal struggles. Respondents were simultaneously aware of their responsibilities as individuals and as marginalized Black males. They understood the importance of role-modeling positive masculine behavior and providing support to others. In short, interviewees worked against the dominant model of masculinity constructions and exhibited a form of masculinity as respectability that was relational to others' expectations and as a responsible Black male. They also discussed some personal problems associated with restrictive definitions of masculinity and their challenges to these expectations. The themes yield a more complex understanding of Black masculinity than a dominant cultural representation. The participant profiles provide a descriptive picture vis-à-vis the narratives of these particular young adult Black males.

Chapter Five. This chapter shows how brotherhood can serve as a form of inclusivity and exclusivity between males who have diverse masculinities. I incorporate findings (enhanced by observational data at the school) from eight students including the interplay between an interviewee and myself. These young males described approaching Black masculinity identities from a variety of sources, both personal/interpersonal and community based. These approaches appeared to be linked to their respective sexualities as self-defined heterosexual male students. All discussion points coalesced to describe how young males define not only their sexuality and heterosexism but also homosociality, based on indirect messages that often took the form of regimented gender norms.

Chapter Six. This chapter builds on the themes of the previous chapter to give a description of navigational processes around Black masculinity. In this chapter, I describe the process alumni used in terms of navigating Black masculinity expectations. First, I discuss the body marker of the strong, responsible Black man and the benefits and burdens this had on interviewees' respective masculinity constructions. I then discuss how Black male bodies are targets of routine surveillance where their gender, size, and behaviors are monitored inside and outside the home based on prevalent gender norms or stereotypes. Finally, I describe the Black masculinity expectations associated with sexuality assumptions, including observations of peers teasing others who were perceived as being gay and being questioned themselves about their sexual orientation because they attended an all-male school.

Chapter Seven. This chapter provides a discussion on how the topic of masculinity is important for educators, parents, and teachers to consider when working with Black males inside and outside educational spaces. Within this chapter is the main finding in summation, the contributions this study makes to the field of Black Masculinity Studies, references to the study's

limitations, possible directions for future research, and a concluding summary. The chapter also poses new research questions as a result of the undertaken study and what they mean for the fields of education and Black Masculinity Studies.

Chapter Two

Literature Review of Differing Black Masculinity Perceptions

Nor am I one of your Hollywood movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids—and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible; understand, simply because people refuse to see me. . . . When they approach me, they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination—indeed, everything and anything except me. Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (1952, p. 8)

Single-gender schools are one educational option for Black male students who are being poorly served in co-educational public schools. In traditional co-educational public schools, “only 52 percent of Black male ninth graders graduate from high school within four years compared to 78 percent of White, non-Latino male ninth-graders” (Schott, 2008, p. 1). Single-gender schools help improve graduation rates for Black male students, including those who have been misdiagnosed as having a learning disability and are in special education classes (Kunjufu, 2005; Losen & Orfield, 2002; Milofsky, 1974; Rich, 2012) compared to their White counterparts in public K-12 schools. These schools are successful at helping male students overcome stereotypes about low academic potentials.

Limited data is available on Black male students who embody diverse masculinities at these schools and their navigational processes and graduation rates. If Black male students are not faring well academically in co-educational contexts, could single-gender public schools or charter schools serve as more supportive environments to better prepare them to excel academically, adopt their own diverse masculinities, and negotiate racism?

This chapter illustrates how Black masculinity is simultaneously visible and invisible and how researchers point to diverse forms of masculinity. The public understanding of Black masculinity and the damaging limitations that such expectations place on Black males, both from

White dominant representations and Black community helps explains the White-Black masculinity binaries that form discussions of masculinity.

The study's use of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) explores how gender, race, sexual orientation, social class, and other axes of identity for Black males interact as young men negotiate their diverse masculinities.¹⁶ This negotiation is likely to reflect what I reference to as the (in)visibility syndrome¹⁷ (Ellison, 1952). The term "(in)visibility" was adopted from Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) to explain some of the social, cultural, and educational challenges that present day young Black males are likely to confront as they construct their masculinities.

The salience of identity categories varies from context to context and from different perspectives. Thus invisibilities come up from Black male youth from the outside when the White dominant version of Black masculinity covers up their intentions or when their attempts to remake dominant forms of Black masculinity in new and creative ways go unrecognized. Within this study, I complicate the use of intersectionality by adding in these perspective and relational qualities that are reflected in Du Bois, Fanon and Ellison.

I also note that when studying diverse forms of masculinity within contemporary society one may find that this diversity exists alongside the notion of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005) or that some Black males may be viewed as having more masculinity than others based on issues like sexuality (Brittan, 2001). Scholars agree that the virtual masculinity continuum excludes males with complicated or multiple masculinity constructions such as, but not limited to, sexual orientation. Regarding Black masculinity constructions in general, Progressive Black Masculinity scholars (Harris 2006; Kimmel 2006; Mutua, 2006; Neal 2006) call for greater recognition of these subgroups of males as "individuals" and recommend against comparing

¹⁶ I intentionally distinguish between "maleness" and "masculinity." Maleness pertains to sex as determined at birth, whereas masculinity is a social construct that denotes types of expression.

them with White male hegemonic counterparts with respect to their masculinity. (This holistic way of looking at masculinity guides this study because I share the conclusion that, irrespective of race, masculinity in its simplest form does not exist except in contrast with femininity.)

What follows next is a review and discussion of the basis for the term “(In)visibility Syndrome” that I use in this dissertation.

Black Males and the (In)visibility Syndrome¹⁸

Ralph Ellison’s three theories of Black males and the Invisibility Syndrome are useful for educators to consider because they illustrate how Black males can be both partially invisible and visible at the same time. Today’s Black males confront the realities of invisibility in three ways: counteracting societal masculine expectations, navigating glorified masculine stereotypes, and filtering media portrayals of masculinity.

Ellison contributes to Black Masculinity Studies by representing the invisibility of Black males, although visibility and invisibility were not used when his book was published. The dual (in)visibility denotation signifies Black males’ perceived social invisibility and journey toward self-discovery, experiences with racism, and full recognition as Black males, ultimately leading to “visibility.” His work is noteworthy because it depicted the Black male protagonist’s continuous quest for recognition, acceptance, and acknowledgment as a man. Ellison offers compelling intersectional insights into the intricate roles of race, gender, and social class to illustrate some of the nuances of Black masculinity.

¹⁸ The term “(in)visibility” was adopted from Ellison’s book, *Invisible Man* (1952), which explains some of the social, cultural, and educational challenges that Black males frequently encounter inside and outside of educational spaces and seeks to capture how society views them as males and how they view themselves.

Ellison's three stages invisibility include different nuances of identities that may be relevant to contemporary Black males. He discusses how Black males negotiate their masculinity in a society that they realize has deemed them as invisible.

The first of the three stages of the invisibility syndrome involves the Black boy, and the man he will develop into, becoming fully aware of how society views him and intentionally seeking to counter negative images of himself.¹⁹ During this stage, the invisible male draws false conclusions about the world from his distorted view of those around him.²⁰ He does not know how to interpret signs from others, limits his possibilities through his incomplete understanding of the world, and yields his identity to being defined by the beliefs and expectations of others.

Ellison's second stage centers on Black male adolescence and involves a struggle with invisibility while dealing with racism. During this journey of critical consciousness, the Black male begins to learn about a racially hostile America and fall victim to the many historical injustices inflicted by White society.²¹

Ellison's third stage of the Black man's struggle with invisibility involves his eventual self-awareness of his identity as a Black male and individuality with respect to other men. During the transition from invisibility to visibility, the Black male accepts his past faults and becomes critically aware of how society views him.²²

As Black males navigate invisibility, they realize their own identity as a radicalized masculine males compounded by realities of living in a racist society that regularly stereotypes

¹⁹ Franklin (2004) also wrote of Ellison's idea of stages that lead to visibility as: "confusion, then self-doubt in association with racial identity and gender, because of age" (p. 12).

²⁰ See Charles Horton Cooley's (1902) idea about the looking glass self/social self. McIntyre (2006) also discussed this concept. The term refers to people shaping their self-concepts on how others perceive them.

²¹ Franklin (2004) wrote that the second stage of invisibility entails levels of uncertainty because the individual, who is typically a teenager, has a "chip on his shoulder. He tries to be cool, but has difficulty manipulating the way he wants to be seen as a male" (p. 12).

²² Franklin (2004) added that as invisibility becomes a theme in the lives of these men, so does denial and guilt as they wrestle with their indignation and present and future prospects, masked by the adoption of different dominant gender constructions.

them. Ellison concludes that the Black male is invisible because the world is filled people who don't recognize his potential. He remains unable to follow his own masculine personality or construct. Thus intersectionality helps to explain all forms of racialized gender, in all its complexity. The Black male also attempts to exert power on a world filled with prescribed roles about gender and race.

Analysis of Ellison's Invisibility Syndrome and the Black male identity constructions reveals that Black females and males hold expectations of Black males regarding professional or educational paths. For example, educational and other social institutions such as media industries have not given Black males space, time, validation, and educational resources to think about who they want to be and how they want to act in the world as Black males. These expectations are expounded upon by theories that describe how Black males routinely challenge the invisibility syndrome. These theories do not negate past experiences of Black males.

Black males counter societal masculine expectations from within and outside of the Black community when they pursue a unique path that is contrary to others' expectations. This typically manifests as the fear of being threatening. These paths may also be distinctly educational or professional. For example, when Black youth "talk back" (Morris, 2007) in educational settings or challenge adult authority through words or actions, they are labeled a threat or deemed unintelligent. Many Black males are thus categorized into restrictive boxes for who they should be and what they do.

Black men are routinely glorified and praised dually for athleticism and presumably high sexual libido. This grouping does not privilege the individuality of Black males but rather is a stereotype that does not recognize differences among Black males, requiring them to navigate these routinely glorified masculine stereotypes. This stereotype defines Black men's often-feared

race, perceived abilities in sports and appearance, and sexual preferences inside and outside of educational spaces. Black men, who find success in various arenas of life, particularly but not exclusively in predominantly White environments, face the challenge of being the model minority and being asked to serve as the spokesmen for their race (Thurston, 2012). This experience reinforces invisibility through the personal narratives.

Young Black males simultaneously view media that includes an image of Black masculinity that is visible, yet also keeps the multiplicity of positive Black masculinities invisible. Although Black males are visible in media depictions (as subjects of conversations mostly), they are not truly visible because media images of them can be quite restrictive. The representations of Black masculinity in popular culture have been the focus of a great deal of social commentary (Stabile, 2006; Tyree, Byerly, & Hamilton, 2011).²³ Stacey Patton (2012) decried that “television repeatedly offers sexualized images of Black men, while parodying the half-naked (but not threatening) body of Black males” (p. 1). This study finds that young men need media with a better filtering of more accurate and diverse Black male representations. They are inundated with images of the Black male rapper or athlete or the “maladaptive and transgressive [Black] male subgroups” depicted as “prisoners, criminals or gang members” (Howard, 2012, p. 2). These stereotypes play out in both Black and White communities as exaggerated forms of masculinities (Opportunity Agenda, 2011, p. 18).²⁴ Butler (2009)²⁵ states that these images continue to explain contemporary masculine stereotypes of Black males.

²³ Traditional and social media (television, MySpace, Facebook, and YouTube) have served as vital information networks that have shaped perceptions, ideas, and attitudes of people who use them.

²⁴ Visit the Opportunity Agenda: <http://www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/Media-Impact-onLives-of-Black-Men-and-Boys-OppAgenda.pdf>

²⁵ For more information, visit: <http://marleybutler.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2009/08/Contemporary-Complexities-of-Black-Masculinity.pdf>

The three above examples have intersecting impacts on how Black males form their masculinity and are interpersonal. The above supports my study given:

Much of what audiences know and care about is based on the images, symbols, and narratives in radio, television, film, and other media. How individuals construct their social identities, how they come to understand what it means to be male, female, black, white, Asian, Latino, Native American—even urban American- is shaped by codified text produced by media for audiences that are increasingly segmented by the social constructions of race and gender. Media, in short, are central to what ultimately comes to represent our social realities. (Brooks & Herbert, 2007)

The media needs to offer a better public reflection of broader race/gender discriminations that narrowly defines Black masculinity.

Ellison's Invisibility Syndrome and theories suggests that contemporary Black males at single-gender schools may experience phenomenon of perceptions of Black masculinity that connect to the experiences of past Black males in regards to their gender, identities, and exclusions or acceptance from others. However, these experiences may differ because of the dual visibility and invisibility during the present-day. This is likely to create (in)visibility, which expands constructs and theories about masculinities that make up the rest of this dissertation.

While all males express their masculinities differently, the United States has countless Black males with opposing masculine ideologies and dispositions. For example, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., used the pulpit as a Baptist preacher to model a masculine behavior of nonviolence. Malcolm X represented Black masculinity as a reinvention from a once criminal persona to a leader of the Nation of Islam. James Baldwin, publically acknowledged his sexuality as masculinity through his writings, and through public discourses on Black life, male identity politics, and sexuality. These examples represent diverse viewpoints in examples of masculinity theories and disagreement in debates about gender.

The public fronts Black males adopt serve as identity negotiations and explain four major constructions of masculinity identities that have historically defined maleness within the United States. These major constructions form the basis of the literature review, comprised of opposing theories of masculinity, which concludes with a review of the study's conceptual framework. This chapter provides context for this study, which seeks to see how the interview sample negotiates and constructs their own masculinity.

Masculinity and Mastery Over One's Environment or Home

Hegemonic or ideal²⁶ masculinity, homosexuality, and having a reputation represent types of control over the home and masculinity constructions adopted or challenged by males. It is important to note that mastery over one's environment is one type of masculinity some males exhibit. These characteristics are monolithic masculinities. They illustrate how masculinity is theorized and constructed from the literature inside and outside of one's environment or home.

Old and new complications continue to shape the masculine identity formations of males, such as sexual orientation or standards of heteronormativity, just another intersectionality form of Black masculinity that brings in sexual orientation and gender more firmly into view. Theodore Ransaw (2013) and Antonio Gramsci's power as hegemonic theory²⁷ influenced masculinity scholar R.W. Connell's hegemonic masculinity theory. Connell's theory postulated masculinities among White, heterosexual, economically successful males who have historically been the benchmark for measuring masculinity, which ignores the oppression of groups that do not fit the preconceptions. Paulo Freire stated, "The oppressed (male) finds in the oppressor their

²⁶ During the Men's Movement in the early 1970s, R.W. Connell and colleagues developed the term *hegemonic* to describe a particular trait of maleness. Progressive Black Masculinity scholar Athena Mutua redefined this term as *ideal* masculinity. Both terms mean the same thing and appear together.

²⁷ Chander (2000) stated: "Gramsci used the term hegemony to denote the predominance of one social class over others (e.g. Bourgeois hegemony).

model of ‘manhood’” (Freire, 1993, p. 46).²⁸ I contend that the expectation that men are supposed to adapt explains the ideal masculinity trope that is also opposed to women and homosexuals (which might explain some personal and emotional challenges same gender loving persons conformity with hegemonic or ideal masculine constructions).

Scholars (Skelton, Francis, & Smulyan, 2006; Ward, 2005) offered opposing theories and challenges for males who embody different identities that do not fit with the hegemonic or ideal strand of maleness. These reasons include restrictive gender norms that define behavior. This ideal male is not an actual person, per se, but rather an archetypal, fictional social construct.

Where do Black males fit into the discourse on ideal masculinity decided by Athena Mutua (2006)? This perplexing question lingers. However, persistent racism and stereotypes prevent many Black males (boys and men) from enjoying the privilege of masculinity, from being “real men,” and help explain why and how Black males experience gendered racism because they are both Black and male. The concept of gendered racism explains the existence of assumptions and societal regulations that are aimed directly at Black men.

Mark Anthony Neal challenges traditional definitions of masculinity and gender scripting concerning the Black males as defined by Mutua. Neal’s work has been heavily influenced by feminist theory. He calls for newer definitions of Black masculinity and a reconceptualization of existing perceptions or ideals of Black males. He writes about the NewBlackMan (sic), a person who is “resisting being inscribed by a wide range of [social] forces and finding comfort with a complex and progressive existence as a Black male in America” (p. 27). Neal describes Black masculinities as “dichotomous masculine performances” that are enacted individually. I interpret

²⁸ See also the theory of Identification With the Aggressor, which was originally formulated by Anna Freud in her paper titled *The Ego* (1936). According to Freud it was a defense mechanism that was used to “protect the self from hurt and disorganization.” Visit: <http://www.parkerphd.com/PDFs/Identiciation%20With%20the%20Aggressor.pdf>

this to mean that the person individually scripts masculinity or acts out different identities to fit interactions between people and takes on different social roles for various social audiences.

Masculinity scholars Mutua Athena and Mark Anthony Neal are referenced in this study because they advocate for a diversity of masculinity that extends beyond hegemonic males. Such research compliments Ralph Ellison's discussions on invisibility, through their attention to homosexuality, feminist and masculinity theories, while advocating for new definitions of masculinity that does not overlook the experience of males with multiple identities. One takeaway from these scholars' work is how males enact different performances of scripted masculinity.

When considering how masculinity may play out inside and outside single-gender schools, one must understand what constitutes masculinity. Several scholars (Cerulo, 1997; Collins, 2004; Collins, Hall, & Jefferson, 2006; Courtenay, 2000; Klinenberg, 2003; Wood, 2012) point to R. W. Connell's (2005) theory of masculinity centering on how masculinity has historically meant issues of dominance, the negation of weakness (or gay males).²⁹

My analysis of the literature on masculinity is how past harmful messages about lifestyle choices perpetuate silence around sexualities.³⁰ With regard to traditional definitions of Black males, opposing views as long-held beliefs regarding homosexuality suggest that Blacks disapprove of homosexuality more strongly than Whites (Moore, 2010).³¹ Anti-gay sentiments

²⁹ During the gay liberation movement, the term *homophobia* was coined due to the pervasive dominant and hegemonic forms of masculinity. Gay advocates argued that being gay is just as important as heterosexuality.

³⁰ Being gay is considered anti-Black and anti-masculine (Connell, 2006; Skelton, Francis, & Smulyan, 2004). These one-dimensional views confirm that, within the realm of Black masculinity, some Black men must play a certain role in society or *act out* a role (Moore & Davis, Jr., 2012). Existing concepts of Black masculinity encourage Black males to reject homosexuality, reinforcing the societal belief that being gay is wrong (Dube & Savin-Williams, 1999; Eguchi, 2006).

³¹ Egan & Sherrill (2009), "California's Proposition 8: What Happened, and What Does the Future Hold?" Unpublished paper commissioned by the Evelyn and Walter Hass, Jr. Fund in San Francisco. National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. See also Lewis (2003), Black-white differences in attitudes toward homosexuality and gay rights. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 67, 59-78.

are exacerbated by the absence of positive gay role models among Black men as well as among other groups. Mark Kimmel (2001) argued,

Homophobia is the fear that others will unmask us, emasculate us, reveals to us and the world that we do not measure up, that we are not real men. We are afraid to let others see that fear. Fear makes us ashamed. (p. 147)

Mark Kimmel essentially writes that men are socialized into a rigid and limiting definition of masculinity. Men fear being ridiculed as too feminine by other men, and this fear perpetuates homophobic and exclusionary masculinity. He calls for the broadening definition of manhood to end gender struggle.

Homophobia is more than the irrational fear of gay men, more than the fear that we might be perceived as gay. Fear makes us ashamed, because the recognition of fear in ourselves is proof to ourselves that we are not as manly. (p. 7)

Given that adolescents are developing their sexual identities, youth in single-gender and co-education schools, may face challenges to their masculinity constructions, especially when constructing diverse masculinities. Such negotiations or negation of hegemonic masculinities could perpetuate fear from peers or result in preconceived notions about masculinity reputations describing sexual orientation, status or gang affiliation, as discussed in the following section.

A good or bad reputation can be a status symbol that shapes how others perceive us. This identity marker facilitates the examination of different types of Black masculinities. One critique of the research on reputations is the value that Black males in particular assign to their own reputations.³² A Black male's reputation evolves from a variety of sources such as whispers and chatter, the media, Black males themselves, and Black women.³³ The literature explains that the ideal reputation that some Black males desire is that of coolness, swagger,³⁴ or being a

³² Visit: <http://www.genderforum.org/issues/historical-masculinities-as-an-intersectional-problem/>

³³ Visit: <http://ashyradio.blogspot.com/2011/08/Black-man-reputation.html>

³⁴ "Coolness" represents a form of swagger, which is a term that means self-esteem, whereas coolness is an act of confidence (Butler, 2009). The "coolness" and "swagger" trope of masculinity explains some types of reputations.

competent player. In this context, the term “player” does not refer to an individual’s involvement in sports, but rather a particular way of acting out social roles inside or outside of the neighborhood for audiences consisting of peers and other adults.

Literature within this subsection illustrates that young Black males may face tropes of masculinity that lead to their perceived invisibility, where they are not able to fully embody masculinities that represent their respective identities. For example, the literature illustrates that choosing to withhold the truth about one’s sexual identity from others can preclude validating the experiences and opportunities to avoid negative experiences with others. Such scholarship advantages my study, whereas it helps to further explain why males might not adopt lifestyles that others deem inappropriate or “deviant” (Crawford et al., 2002). These traits of masculinity, coupled with the potential adoption of criminal personas or good or bad reputations help to explain the importance of dominance and control over relationships and other people as manifested of one’s identity or against others who do not subscribe to traditional definitions of masculinity.

Masculine Dominance and Control Over Relationships and Others

Dominance as control constitutes another example of masculine stereotypes or signifiers of kinds of gender-scripted norms. These masculinity strands cut across ethnicities in which acts of masculinity have been defined individually or by the group as norms related to behavior. Attention is given to the literature that guides this discussion and to opposing theories related to masculinities. Research revealed that dominance subordinates other types of masculinities not deemed as being ideal. Scholars have written that gender norms also induce “many males [to]

fear being perceived as weak.”³⁵ Having control over others or their environment negates the appearance of weakness where others might perceive males as gay.

For example, a focus on high school adolescence represents locations of peer-to-peer control and pressures to conform to masculine expectations. C. J. Pascoe (2011) asserted that high school is also “where sexuality and gender identity [among adolescences] are being developed, defined” (p. 13). Pascoe (2011)³⁶ introduces the voices of several male students to describe their respective notions of male sexuality.

Pascoe’s theory specifically centers on the use of the “fag” epithet as involving peer scrutinization of males who are openly gay or perceived to be gay. This word, unfortunately, is used to reinforce strict gender systems and heteronormativity norms and explains the racialized masculine ideal. Pascoe’s discussions of masculinity and the exclusion of gay male groups by other males represent examples of controlling behavior as practiced by self-described heterosexual males.

In reflecting on Pascoe’s theory, I offer that use of the word “fag” constitutes both a form of exclusion and a verbal example that publically recognizes different strands of masculinities, albeit not in the most tactful or sensitive manner. This challenge to the status quo serves to represent how homosexuality as masculinity is an important strand that has historically been deemed to be separate from heteronormative forms of masculinity. The word historically connotes hatred and ostracism of persons who have been ridiculed for their sexual orientations, but it still publicly affirms the presence of those males who challenge traditional definitions and gender norms of maleness. The use of the word is an indicator of the perceived type of reputation

³⁵ Visit: <http://goodmenproject.com/ethics-values/brand-the-argument-for-male-weakness-and-failure/>

³⁶ Pascoe also noted that this word served as a disciplinary mechanism to regulate heterosexuality and control the behaviors of homosexual boys. Masculinity was measured in a variety of settings: a social science classroom, the weight room, the auto shop, and the drama classroom.

a person has based on impressions, rumors, or unwritten gender norms. Ryle (2011) writes, “These [gender norms] are sets of rules for what is appropriate masculine and feminine behavior in a given culture” (p. 120). The literature shows that adolescents are encouraged to conform to gender norms, and such conformity led to the adoption of dominant norms of femininity and masculinity (Bohan, 1993; Deaux, 1984; Eagly, 1983).

The literature on gender norms also mentions that conforming to gender expectations reinforces self-fulfilling prophecies regarding such behaviors (Crawford, 1995; Geis, 1993). This information helps advance my study, whereas it explains specific types of aggressive behavior that might explain different types of dominance exhibited through physical and verbal actions. These behaviors take place in multiple settings, such as the home, educational settings, and areas outside.

Research on gender norms, emotional resistance, identity labeling or conformity as shared within this subsection, considered in conjunction with other research (Kindlon & Thompson, 2000; Stevenson, 2004) led to the conclusion that some boys remain conflicted about whether, or how, to respond to gender-scripted norms or expectations. As such, the period of adolescence is particularly important where there is renegotiation of social relations and power dynamics, and redefining themselves. These findings were reflected in the lives of my study participants. They too were continuously negotiating and challenging gender norms and expectations held by others. Research also articulates dominance or control, negation of perceived effeminate behaviors, and unwritten codes of maleness as repeatedly measures of maleness. Resistance to gender norms explains why some males adopt criminal or violent behavior.

Black Masculinity Perceived Criminality and Violence (and White Masculinity as Nonviolent)³⁷

Black males are frequently defined as being criminal and violent. The media plays a role in these perceptions, as do some segments of Black communities. One consequence has been that many Black males are thought to be “impulsive, hyperactive, and untrustworthy” (Powell, 2008). Andrew Franklin (2004) and L. Howard (2012) extend this discussion by noting that such stereotypes lead to the misreading of Black males. Marley Starkey Butler’s (2009) theories about violent and criminal masculinities provide a different slant on the discussion of acceptable forms of violent masculinities among Black and White males. These distinctions are byproducts of how media images involve gender. The media images that define Black males as violent are socially constructed while also being limiting. For example, Butler offers the example of the image of a White heterosexual man protecting his family with a gun as representative of an all-American, traditional male figure. This theory about masculinity concludes that violent and criminalized White masculinities are more acceptable in society as a measure of maleness than Black masculinities (Campbell, 1995).

I speculate that one can take the same image of a White male protecting his family with a gun and replace it with a Black male in the same situation. The resulting masculinity image will have a different effect on how that particular male is perceived. The Black male will be seen primarily in terms of being violent. These descriptions, although stereotypical, add to analyses of masculinity and how individuals construct, understand, and challenge images of masculinity. Further, some Black males develop criminal tendencies to escape problems in their quest to obtain their version of the American Dream (Jenkins, 2006) or upward mobility.

³⁷ Subsection title is adopted from Jackson, R. L. (2006). *Scripting the black masculine body: Identity, discourse, and racial politics in popular media*. SUNY Press.

Analyzing the perceived violent or criminal trope of Black masculinities often assigned to Black males requires examining the damage and influence of these views on Black males. For example, these media images and perceptions demonize Black males and glorify them for their maleness, reinforcing one-dimensional violent views. The opposite effect occurs with images of White males and their association with violence. Such images serve to instill incorrect perceptions in some Black males, who may imitate negative stereotypes seen on television (Cushion, Moore, & Jewell, 2011). It is not difficult to understand why some Black males seek to adopt glamorous images depicted in the media, espoused by their peers, and found in their respective communities. These adoptions of masculinity are examples of how one form of masculinity can serve as a form of control. In this case, control is exerted over the Black male, though not necessarily in terms of strength or toughness exerted through aggression.

Discussions shared within this subsection advance the study's attention to masculinity, as these illustrate the duality of gender, specifically, how Black or White masculinity connotes different stereotypical images of both positive and negative males either as breadwinners or criminals, depending on the male who is depicted. Further, discussions on various representation of masculinity explain the Black male victimization, not as victims of crime, but as stereotypical representations that do not reflect their masculinity.

Masculinity and Toughness or Strength

Majors and Billson (1992) offer one view that the ability to keep cool and monitor one's temper, anger, frustration, pent-up aggression, and various emotional and social anxieties is a critical skill in Black communities. However, I posit that although Black males must learn how to keep a tight rein on their feelings in some situations so as not to appear threatening to Whites,

maintaining control over one's emotions only reinforces and complicates Majors and Billson's findings. In addition, the perpetual quest to not appear weak to their peers (a form of toughness like hypermasculine), in their community, or in public (Jones & Jones, 2006) explaining burdens of masculinity to conform to gender norms.

Film director Jackson Katz (1999) discusses the "tough guy" image as depicted in the film *Tough Guise: Violence, Media and the Crisis in Masculinity*. Katz claims that violent masculinity constructions are cultural norms leading to a crisis in masculinity when a tough-guy persona is enacted. This persona serves as an external projection, a pose, an act, or a mask that is used to induce others to formally recognize, acknowledge, and accept them as "real men." Unfortunately, entertainment is mistakenly used as a place to identify role models of behavior.

The literature on tough-guy masculinity offers equally insightful information. Theories about hypermasculinity describe a personal front as a form of toughness. I extend this discussion on masculinity constructions slightly by analyzing two theories on coping in school environments to draw parallels to my field study on masculinity, which is presented in later chapters.

Hypermasculinity is a socially accepted category used to define male behavior. The literature describes hypermasculinity as being "macho," a term derived from the Spanish word *machismo*, meaning to embody "the essence or spirit of masculinity" (Horowitz, 1967; Scharrer, 2001; Zaitchik & Mosher, 1993). The term *machismo* also refers to a constructed gender norm regarding what it means to be "manly" and includes elements of exaggeration. Hypermasculinity refers to a male who eschews and even rejects softhearted emotions; blocks attempts by women in particular, and other males in general, to appeal to his emotions; and exhibits sensation-seeking behavior that reinforces his vigor or desire for thrills (Scharrer, 2001).

Hypermasculinity helps explain often negative labels ascribed to men (not just Black males) as a form of categorization for behavior traits such as violent, aggressive, thuggish, and threatening (Ferguson, 2001). Hypermasculinity is also at the top of the virtual masculinity continuum and represents characteristics of certain types of males (i.e., macho males). Such behavior poses a particular risk for males who might vie for attention using aggressive emotions that are hypermasculine in nature (Spencer, Fegley, Harpalani, & Seaton, 2004).

This unfortunate reality for many Black males (irrespective of age) is exemplified by encounters with law enforcement that often result in hypermasculine behavior. This is seen as a challenge to authority due to feelings of disempowerment, which are often expressed by many Black males. Hypermasculinity can also be seen as the result of prejudice and negative stereotypes associated with Black masculinity, and these factors can lead to resentment and agitation by Black males (Spencer, 1999; Spencer et al., 2004; Stevenson, 1997).

Many Black males have developed coping measures to counteract the myriad negative stereotypes they face each day. Scholars who study coping measures of Black males have cited two theories, stereotype threat and cultural ecological theory. Both are examples of how coping can serve as a form of strength with respect to how young Black males are seen by teachers.

Claude Steele's Stereotype Threat (1999) explains why disadvantaged students (boys of color in particular) chronically underperform. He claimed that a social-cognitive dynamic takes place when schooling these students. Steele and Aaronson (1995) argued:

Schooling and [the] school environment is aversive to members of groups for whom there is a negative group stereotype long before the achievement gap manifests because of negative stereotypes concerning the intellectual ability of group members. (p. 46)

Steele's point was that educational spaces have historically served as sites where false assumptions about the performance of students are manifested.

The second theory on coping is John Ogbu's Cultural Ecological Theory (1994), which explained the realities that students of color (not just Black males) experience in schools and society and that some Black males purposely reject academics because teachers stereotype them.³⁸ Lance McCreedy (2010) shares Ogbu's classifications: "This typology is used to explain differential problems of school adjustment and academic performance associated with some minorities" (p. 11). These explanations also address unique challenges for students of color inside and outside of schools. Ogbu argued that the social realities for students from these two distinct populations lead to different coping mechanisms and outcomes in their experiences and circumstances.

Research presented within this subsection advances this study on masculinity, as what is written is that boys, irrespective of ethnic background and ethnicity, continually encounter beliefs and gender role expectations in their classrooms (single-gender or co-education). Equally important, many educators in co-educational settings do not take into account male emotions, their need for advice, and the problems of masculinity they face. Although society maintains restrictive gender categories, space exists for acknowledging a greater diversity of identities. Future discussions of this topic must recognize that the broad range of masculine constructions extend beyond categories of Whiteness and heterosexuality binaries and include other academic, sexual, and ethnic identities. Hypermasculinity and physical appearance also dictate a perceived form of competitiveness and potential interest in sports. This final strand of masculinity serves to round out this literature review on masculinity constructions.

³⁸ See also Fashola, 2005, p. 158.

Masculinity and Physique

Black men's skin color, body size, physical build, and aura of masculinity inspire stereotypical assumptions that can cause constant turmoil for Black males. Physical appearance is another dimension in theories of masculinity. It comes into play when people make false assumptions about what Black males can accomplish or are likely to do, such as play sports, despite indications to the contrary. For example, some Black males who are extremely tall or who have a large physique often encounter the misguided assumption that they play a particular sport, such as football (Franklin, 2004).

Researchers (Franklin, 2004; Frost, 2003; Taub, Blinde, & Greer, 1999) have demonstrated that physical appearance can be misleading in ways that do not truly represent Black males leading to undue pressure to conform to societal expectations or the reinforcement of gender norms based on their presence or another physical factor such as height.

Pressures from family members to play a sport, potentially based on physical appearance, regardless of a person's preference for doing things other than sports, can create lifelong internal conflicts when an individual struggles to pursue his or her personal interests that conflict with the expectations of others. For example, many children and youth find it difficult to act against the wishes of adults, particularly when the adults have made up their minds about particular expectations. Because of socialization and pressures to adhere to adult expectations, it isn't easy for youth to challenge adults' wishes, particularly if the youth believes the adult has his or her best interests. Black males surrender to parental expectations, which lead many to greater invisibility and explain why some Black men tend to fulfill these expectations while disregarding their preference for other pursuits. The quest to please adults reinforces obedience and incites the Black male's fear of punishment, rejection, and alienation from adults and friends.

This literature review within this subsection provides multiple perspectives for understanding Black males and their masculinities. Newer, more inclusive images of Black males in roles other than gangster, heterosexual, or athlete provide a more holistic representation of the group. The latter two images are not necessarily negative, but few Black males actually make it as professional athletes, and not all Black males are heterosexual. New images will provide new identity models for emulation by Black males that extend beyond traditional, confining definitions of masculinity. The literature review is also important to the development and presentation of this dissertation's framework and is a tangible example of looking for holistic ways to study Black masculinities.

Following is an elaboration on this framework: what it is, how it is used, and why it is important.

Continuing Contemporary Work on Complex Black Masculinity

Progressive Black Masculinities is interdisciplinary with links to Black feminist theory and queer theory³⁹ theoretical frameworks. In my study, I too focused on providing more holistic representations of all males while being inclusive of their diversity and distinct lives. At the same time, Black Masculinity Studies disrupts the notion that there must be a White masculinity. Further, masculinity scholars critique patriarchy, offering different examples of Black masculinities such as homosexuality coexisting with definitions of heterosexual masculinity. This finding was equally highlighted in my study.

Further, scholars (Hammond & Mattis, 2005; Wallace, 2007) express dissatisfaction with the existing definitions of Black masculinities. They argue that these definitions are limited in

³⁹ See works by Collins, bell hooks, Lorde, and Jordon. Note that in the late 1980s and early 1990s, there was growth in critical masculinity and schooling scholarship (Connell, 1985, 1995; Davison & Frank, 2006, p. 156; Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998; Mac an Ghail, 1996; Martino, 2000).

scope, oppressive and prejudicial, and based only on gender norms. How an individual Black male acts inside and outside of the Black community may determine his perceived masculinity. For some Black males, Black masculinity incorporates certain physical attributes, personas, and material possessions. However, for others, Black masculinity refers to intrinsic male characteristics based solely on gender.

Scholars such as Athena Mutua, Patricia Hill Collins, and Mark Anthony Neal collectively offer a roadmap for new, progressive models of Black masculinity that seek to liberate themselves and others to “eschew relations of [male] domination in their personal and public lives” (Mutua, 2006, p. xi).

This chapter incorporates a brief discussion of the interconnections between Men’s Studies and masculinity. Progressive Black Masculinities is a recent extension of both topics based initially on three distinct developments in the analysis of masculinity studies that emerged from the 1970s through the 1990s. There are three reasons for this emergence. First, research by African American women (Black feminists) who questioned the role of gender in the lives of women opened the door for discussions of male roles. Second, this field broke away from mainstream interpretations of masculinity. Men’s Studies emerged as a new academic field of study and rejected the term “patriarchy” as being overly simplistic. The field developed terms such as “hegemonic masculinity” and ideas of marginalized and subordinated masculinities. Masculinity scholars also viewed masculinity as a gendered, socially constructed structure of power. Third, the development of Queer Studies rejected sexuality as a social construct while positioning it as being integral to the idea of masculinity. These three developments created space for contemporary discussions and acknowledgments of diverse masculinities such as Black, Latino, and gay representations and identities that had neither been openly discussed

during the 1970s nor received much attention before then. I too write and conduct research from the standpoint of a Black male and share the narratives of Black males from different backgrounds, family statuses, and sexual orientations. This framework provides one way to analyze the personal lives of interviewees reinforced by my shared experiences.

Equally important is the notion that “real men” are not supposed to act in a feminine manner, or act gay, so they must act like men (i.e., must be responsible, older individuals) and not Black. The idea of a real man, Mutua (2006) contended, is inherently racist. There is social pressure for Black men to demonstrate the aggression and dominance that the male ideal demands. That pressure limits the full expression of male individuality while reinforcing negative stereotypes of Black men articulated throughout this dissertation. Present-day Progressive Black Masculinities scholars extend the work of previous masculinity scholars to include multiple perspectives on maleness. Mutua (2006) stated:

Progressive Black Masculinities scholars [men and women] take an active and ethical stance against all social systems of domination and who act personally and in concert with others in activities against racism, sexism, homophobia and heterosexism, class and economic exploitation, and other systems of oppression that limit potential. (p. 7)

Progressive Black Masculinities challenges dominant norms of masculinity and helps bring analytical order to, and make sense of, the information that I gathered from the research participants. For example, there was the issue of why certain young men embodied hegemonic dominant standpoints and theories regarding manhood and masculinity (in part due to messages received from peers and parents).⁴⁰ Armed with the knowledge and theoretical grounding to look more inclusively at Black males, the collection of data from the field was oriented by several broad and ancillary research questions.

⁴⁰ For example, as explained in Chapter Five, some of the participants interviewed in this study said that attending an all-male school reduced the pressure to impress girls, a pressure traditionally experienced at co-educational schools.

Concluding Summary

This literature review offered four overarching themes for understanding masculinity in general and Black masculinity in particular. These themes present different paradigms for understanding masculinity, ranged from having a reputation to perceived criminal or violent characteristics. This review was intended to examine research in Black Masculinity Studies, gender and sexuality, education policy, and urban education. It also encompassed a discussion of specific issues such as male pride, identity development, schooling, and perceptions of the “perplexities of race and gender” (Gates, 1997, p. xiv). Discussions of these themes included details of masculine constructions and dilemmas, contestable theories, and examination of some theories concerning masculinity and (in)visibility.

This literature review highlighted a crisis in gender representation and expanded the definition to include multiple crises among Black males. The term “masculinity” is used ad nauseam to define maleness, but it is too complex a subject to generalize because not all males define masculinity in the same manner. This subject is not divorced from the educational and cultural realities that have resulted in limiting educational and professional opportunities for many Black males.

The literature on Black masculinities should also be seen as an interrogation of the differing ideologies and ideological representations of males. The social categorization of Black maleness, Black masculinity, and Black male identities has led to deliberations centered on Black males’ presence. Theories of Black masculine identities stem from Americans’ embattled racial history as well as misinterpretations and stereotypes of Black males. These theories have been socially constructed in relationship to White maleness. The debates over accurate, more inclusive depictions and ideologies about Black males are politically charged.

These debates stem from critiques of patriarchal codes by both male and female scholars who questioned how Black masculine identity constructions have been categorized and discussed. The scholarship on Black Masculinity Studies centers on theories about Black maleness as being inextricably linked to American history, how Black males perceive themselves, and how Black males are perceived in educational spaces. This tripartite exploration makes reimagining gender identity varied and complex. Emerging nuanced forms of Black masculine identities seek to disrupt and replace older negative depictions of Black males. Further, understanding how one's identity impacts or shapes definitions of masculinity can explain the writings by male and female scholars about Black masculinity.

Chapter Three

Methodology and Research Design

This chapter provides a detailed examination of my research site and the qualitative methods approach employed in this study like participant recruitment, data collection processes, and participant selection. I also document how a diverse interview sample provides more thoughtful and complex discussions on the possibilities for Black masculinity constructions. Because I was after diverse masculinity representations in my study, purposive sampling involved asking participants to recommend some of their peers for my study, as well as working with the school to recruit students. My interview sample includes both individuals who self-identified as heterosexual and those self-identified as homosexual. The sample includes American, African American and Caribbean males. Together, this diverse group of young Black males provides a fuller picture of the potential pressures and some cruelties of masculine influences and how the negotiation of gender roles is very complex. This chapter also shares brief composites of participants' characteristics as well as data analysis. Lastly, this chapter presents a discussion of the motivating theory of double consciousness and the complexities of (in)visibility theories used in this dissertation.

Research Site

The idea to establish the Pebbles School was first conceived when the school's first principal, Mr. Sinclair and members of the One Hundred Black Men, Inc., met as both were concerned with low graduation rates of Black and Latino male students compared to their school-aged peers within the same local community. The Pebbles School was the outgrowth of such discussions between Mr. Sinclair and members of the One Hundred Black Men, Inc. who created

a school that would work to improve the academic achievement gaps of Black and Latino male-aged students.

Since the founding of the Pebbles School in 2004, Mr. Sinclair and his son, in addition with members of One Hundred Black Men, Inc., serve on the school's advisory board. They are financial supporters. The entire school is affiliated with One Hundred Black Men, as this organization regularly develops cultural and social program at the school and engages in mentoring of Pebbles students while being equally committed to the school's mission.

The Pebbles School's mission is to "challenge students to become citizens of integrity who will become lifelong leaders committed to servicing their community." The mission statement also shares this goal: "We uphold and honor The Pebbles School as a nurturing learning environment for students [Black and Latino male students]." Further, the faculty and staff, and community work together to develop academic excellence, ethical behavior, and personal responsibility.

The school is represented inside and outside of the broader community from which it is housed though hosting open house events, college recruitment events, parent-teacher open houses, and special fundraising initiatives to its various constituencies. At many of these events, students recite out loud and in unison (or when asked by school teachers to do so), the school's creeds⁴¹ that speaks about overcoming adversity and pride as males.

Families who send their son(s) to the Pebbles School are required to be present for their son(s) at monthly school meetings, various convocations and celebrations, and to support hard work of their child and foster intellectual growth at home through schoolwork. This quest affirms

⁴¹ The two school creeds are "Captain of My Soul"⁴¹ (recited in grades 9-12) and "Humble Confidence"⁴¹ (recited in grades 6-7). Both creeds, center on developing stronger character in men.

the school's guiding principle that "every young man is an integral part of his community, and has a moral responsibility to it."

The staff at the Pebbles School continuously work to develop young Black and Latino male students into future leaders who are agents of change or "pebbles in the pond" who can also counteract the often-negative images of Black and Latino males found in broadcast media by serving as positive role models committed to service to community and excellence in scholarship and professions.

At the time of this study, the Pebbles School comprised three campuses: The Pebbles One School—grades 6-8 and 9-12; The Pebbles Two School—grades 6-10; and The Pebbles Three School—grades 6-8. Throughout parts of the dissertation, I refer to the site as "The Pebbles School." I chose this name because one of my participants (Jay) spoke about being a "pebble in the pond" that ripples inequalities experienced by many Black males.

This metaphor symbolized Jay's continuous quest to redefine the often-bleak statistics (and stereotypes) concerning Black males' underachievement and constant media depictions of criminal personas. Jay sought to counter these unfortunate realities and serve as a positive role model for other people, particularly Black males. Jay also spoke at length about his desire to be a leader; a role he said was ingrained in him while in high school at the Pebbles School. Thus, I found it fitting to name my research site collectively as "The Pebbles School." Next, I present information on the specific campus (The Pebbles One School) where my study took place.

Pebbles One School

What follows is a detailed explanation of the Pebbles One School, my research site, as well, the first of three campuses to be established, including number of teachers by gender

breakdown and racial makeup of the students. This school is reportedly the first all-male public school for young men of color in this large metropolitan city in over 30 years.

Since 2004, Pebbles One School developed into a full 4-year high school when it moved into the current facility in 2010. This facility is a five-story building, including several smart classrooms, a weight room, a recording studio, administrative offices, a lunchroom, a library, and a gymnasium.

During the 2011-2012 school year, the school added 6th grade and subsequently, during the 2013-2014 school year, the total student enrollment was composed of grades 6 through 12. There are approximately 451 students enrolled in total throughout these grades with the following ethnic makeup:

Domestic and international Black (291/64.8%)
Hispanic/Latino (150/33.4%)
Asian (7/1.6%)

Published data reports online highlight that approximately 80% of students receive free or reduced lunch. There are 35 full-time teachers, approximately 90% of which are male. There is a student-to-teacher ratio of 17:1, and the research site has support personnel and student/teaching interns.

The Pebbles One School gives some priority to prospective students for admission to the school who attend an information session in the community where the school is located. The staff noted to me that no cream skimming of the best students takes place from the list of recommended students for admission submitted by the Department of Education and these informational sessions.

Students are also assigned to residential day theme houses named in honor of four famous male leaders: Malcolm X, Barack Obama, Roberto Clemente Walker, and Che Guevara. Within

these housing assignments, students compete on a regular basis with other residents of their theme houses to win points for field trips based on their overall academic excellence and collective house attendance.

As part of the school customs, students are required to wear smart uniforms (i.e., dress shirt, grey slacks, black shoes or boots, and a black belt), and seniors receive a blue blazer “to symbolize their pursuit of knowledge.” The boys also wore different class-specific ties, together with a Pebbles School shield pin, to denote their respective class years, and a short- or long-sleeved shirt. The 9th graders wore a solid blue tie, the 10th graders wore a silver tie, the 11th graders wore a blue-striped tie, and the 12th graders wore a blue-and-gold striped tie.

On Fridays, the school’s personnel are a little lax on the tie requirement, and permitted students to wear the Pebbles School’s blue polo, khaki pants, a black or brown belt, and black or brown shoes or boots. The school rules forbid students from saying the racially contested and politically charged “N-word” while on the school premises, wearing sneakers (except during gym), caps or hats, and cargo pants. Students are required to have their shirts tucked into their pants. Most students participate in a Saturday activity. I also selected the Pebbles Schools as my study site because:

1. There was a large Black male student enrollment (64%) reflective of many urban schools with substantial populations of Black, Latino and bilingual students;
2. The Director of Student Relations was excited to have me volunteer and it seemed like a good fit where I could give something back in return;
3. The school had a success rate of teaching excellence. A large percentage (87%) of its alumni graduated and matriculated into two- and four-year colleges (approximately 90%) while maintaining an 84% college retention rate through graduation; and
4. Alumni have gone on to higher education institutions such as the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, Carnegie Mellon University, Skidmore College, Morehouse College,

Buffalo State, Wheelock College, Lawrence University, Syracuse University, and other two- and four-year state and private colleges and universities.⁴²

Interviews, Data Collection, Procedures and Limitations

In order to understand the process of gender identity and making meaning of Black masculinity, I initially interviewed alumni of the school while in the field. The reason I interviewed alumni first was because it required time to obtain access to current students, given that I needed to obtain permission from the parents of student. Meeting with the alumni provided invaluable background in the form of broader contextual information regarding the school's history, culture, and certain practices such as informal conversations about male pride. These interviews also honed my understanding of certain past and current school practices such as town meetings and the environment.

Data Collection and Procedures

I then applied a three-fold qualitative method of inquiry approach in this study while interviewing students. First, I began with meeting an individual participant and greeting him, followed by individual interviews with the participants. The Director of Student Relations⁴³ at the Pebbles School and guidance counselors facilitated the initial meetings and greetings with some of the alumni and some current students. This meeting was advantageous. I met with all of the initially pre-selected participants identified by the school, introduced myself, sought to establish general rapport with each of the participants, and collected contact information such as e-mail addresses and mobile phone numbers for the purpose of setting up interviews.

⁴² I obtained the above student demographic and statistical information (and colleges enrolled) from various promotional materials, the Pebbles' student handbook, and other onsite and online materials.

⁴³ Pseudonymous title.

The second phase of my qualitative approach included four 40-minute in-classroom observations with of some of the students who had participated in my individual interviews⁴⁴. During these observations, I observed student participants' communication exchanges with peers and teachers, where they sat in class, and their overall performance (e.g., their attentiveness), as well as how they responded to teacher instructions or questions asked by instructors.

The final component of this approach included group observations of the inter-peer relationships between individuals from the same set of boys I had initially interviewed (and observed in their classrooms). The group meeting provided me with an opportunity to ask questions of a group of three male students previously interviewed for my study. I eventually interviewed eight students who expressed an interest in the study, and returned their assent/consent forms.

As regards to the non-traditional students who took part in this study, some of them reached out to me for participation, after one of their teacher mentioned to them what I was doing at the school and my interest in talking with students. The reason for multiple non-traditional students in the participant sample is because these students were able to sign consent forms, did not need parental approval to take part in the study, expressed an interest in my study, added additional representation with respects to age to my sample as well as diversity in their responses regarding masculinity constructions. All participants offered very meaningful and insightful views into their lives, and their thought processes based on self-reflection and storytelling.

⁴⁴ Due to delays in commencing my data collection process (and additional clearance requirements), I was unable to observe the entire student participants. I only observed students in the 11th and 12th grades, because only some of the parents gave consent for observations of their children to be conducted.

Research Procedures

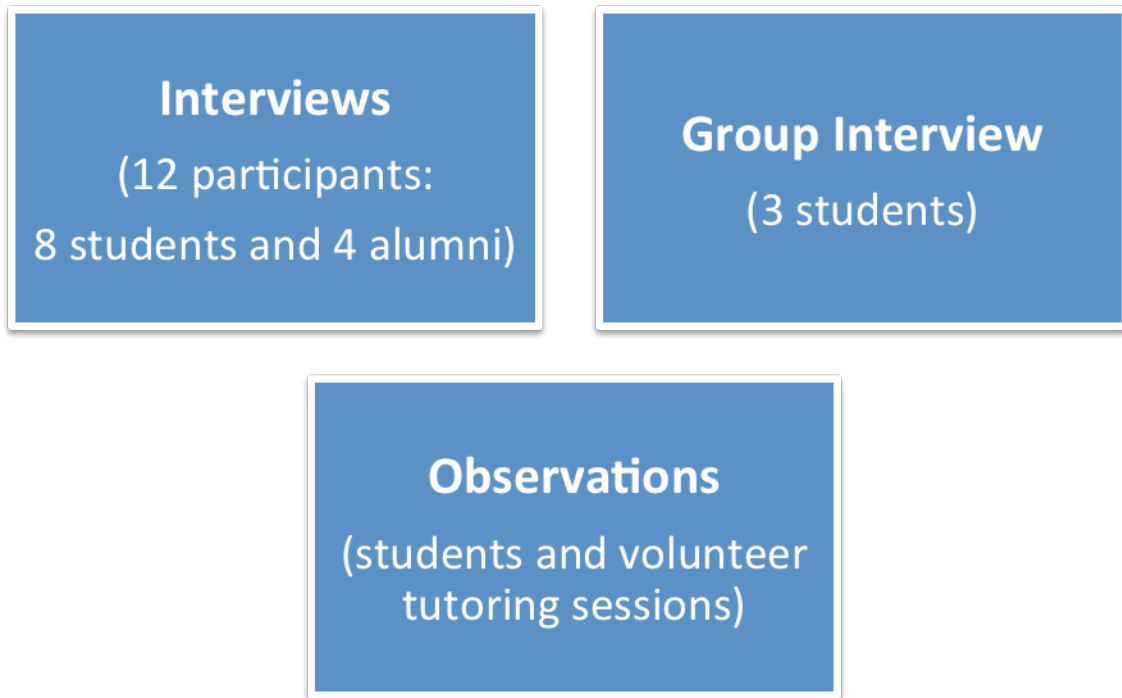


Figure 1. Research procedures.

Data collection. As reflected above, the research procedure included three main components (and field notes); one-on-one interviews ranged in duration from 20 minutes to 1 hour and 20 minutes (depending on whether it was a first or follow-up interview). One purpose was to learn about the participants' personal and academic experiences. I also wanted to uncover how they defined themselves as Black males and find out about their impressions of other males. These interviews provided a space for me to grasp the personal meaning these males provided about their social, academic, and gender identities. The participants shared their unique stories, including their social, familial, academic, and community experiences, during their interviews.

The interview structure was nondirective, open-ended, and semi-structured in nature, so as to encourage Brian, David, Jay, Dion, Eddy, Lex, Max, Franky, Kevin, Henry, Samuel and Kyle to talk freely. I asked a number of ancillary questions. They were asked using layman (non-

academic) terms, and helped me find answers to my four, overarching broad research questions. I used the same interview protocol during all of my interviews. I was flexible in following a pre-arranged script while also seeking to allow the interviews to flow organically. I thus made it a point of sharing my personal stories with each student in order to build a sense of rapport and comfort, while also attempting to relate to my participants.

Group interview. My goal for the 40-minute group interview was to create a familial, nurturing, and non-threatening space for the students to discuss Black masculinity topics with each other, share their stories and hear from their peers. Another goal of the group meeting was to understand their group dynamics and observe how the boys acted in the group setting and their inter-peer relations and their interpersonal exchanges.

I engaged these participants in an activity where they were asked to tell me what they think of some key words that arose during my individual interviews. I also asked questions such as: (a) how the school could be more inclusive for students of different sexual orientations, and (b) if they had the chance, what would they say to school administrators, policy makers, and community leader regarding what it means to be a Black male attending a contemporary all-male school. In order to encourage respondent participation, I set ground rules and asked for input from each boy, even if their remarks countered or challenged their peers' comments/theories. I also asked open-ended questions and encouraged the boys to redirect their questions to each other or me.

Classroom observations. During my four in-classroom observations, I monitored several students in their classroom settings as an unobtrusive observer. The in-classroom observations lasted 40 minutes. During these observations, I witnessed the respondents in various contexts within the school. The data collected during these observations helped me triangulate the other

data collected during the study (see triangulation section). In my own work with students, including those not directly interviewed in this study, I have seen how important a Black male role model instructor can be. I co-taught a weekly tutoring session and saw firsthand how young male emulating me in ways they never did with their Black female teacher. Overall, these field observations captured my perceptions of how the younger and older males interacted with each other in class, the peers with whom they interacted, their displays of masculine traits such as athleticism, and their participation (or the lack thereof) in class. Collectively, these field experiences, and the information I jotted down in my field notes helped me develop a picture of these males, their lives, and how they expressed themselves.

Field notes and participant-researcher. I took field notes to capture how the students behaved, dressed, and interacted in classrooms. These notes included some initial thoughts and reflections about my daily or weekly experiences and observations of what I saw at Pebbles. It served as a useful way to record the emotions of my participants as well as my direct observations of their body language. My collection of field notes was the result of studying groups and people. It involves carrying out distinct activities, such as occurs when the researcher enters into “an unfamiliar setting and gets to know the people in there” (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1985, p. 1).

As part of my field study, I also co-taught a weekly tutorial session and wore a tie, as requested by the Director of Student Relations, while at the school. I also sat in on an Open House College Day event and a school-wide meeting. I became acquainted with both students and the culture at the school while mentally “jotting down,” and later recording in a journal, what I learned. In the end, I produced a written record of observations and experiences in the form of two-sided notes that aided in the construction of coded themes.

Being a Black male participant observer allowed me to apply a double consciousness to how others viewed me. When describing double consciousness, W.E.B. Du Bois articulates that African Americans are gifted with second sight and view themselves from multiple perspectives:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness,—an American a Negro; two souls, . . . two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (p. 3)

Part of the “twoness” might also be the vacillation between invisibility and visibility as discussed by Ralph Ellison. Thus, the double consciousness I employed in this study was the clashing of my two identities; one through a shared race and gender with interviewees and being able to process clearly what they were articulating to me as Black males, and the other identity comprised that of an outsider not affiliated with the Pebbles School and my personal grappling with how these males viewed me. Hence, as Du Bois further states, the second sight can be both a gift, as it helps to explain how Black people are viewed through the lens of others, and also quite painful, as it can never be turned off—“one ever feels his twoness” (p. 3).

Field meeting and independent research. Before starting my field observations and interviews, I met with the school's Director of Student Relations (and with the guidance counselors later on). I initially sent e-mail to the Director requesting approval to conduct my study at the school site. I then engaged in a subsequent follow-up meeting at the Pebbles School in mid-October of 2012 to work out all the details for my study.

I also conducted independent research prior to entering my fieldsite at both the University of Illinois and at New York University (as a visiting research scholar). This initial research helped me understand what to look for during my research site visits. Preparation included separating my site visit days for observing students, and interviews once per week (Wednesdays)

and engaging in volunteerism at the Pebbles School once per week (Thursdays). As the weeks progressed and my time at Pebbles drew to a close, I increased my visits to the Pebbles School to four or five days per week. I also utilized a variety of qualitative approaches and research methods in this study. These methods ranged from independent, informal meetings with professors at New York University and my advisor at the University of Illinois, to a review of course readings materials from my classes to direct field observations, interviews, conversations and field notes.

Participant sampling. Purposeful sampling entails “selecting information-rich cases for study in depth” (Patton, 1990, p. 169). Purposeful sampling is a common approach in qualitative studies where the researcher places participants in groups using a set criterion that fits the research question(s). Purposeful sampling also involves the selection of a sample of individuals with a particular ‘purpose’ in mind. For example, the population meets a particular criterion of interest set by the researcher or may show wide variations in their knowledge. Therefore, I sought to select a sample size that would capture the range of experiences, ages, social classes, student grades, and strategies explored by the various males who participated in my study.

Selection, criteria, and inclusivity of sampling. I applied purposeful sampling in my study. I selected research participants (alumni and students), with input from the school, based on their experiences (e.g., participating in sports, extracurricular activities, academic suspensions) and out-of-school activities (e.g., holding multiple jobs; being a single parent, having family support and dual/single parent households). Patton (2001) suggested that during the sample selection process, the researcher should select participants “from which one can learn a great deal about matters of importance and [who] therefore [are] worthy of in-depth study”

(p. 242). The participants in this study embodied a wealth of knowledge and background experiences, and offered great insight into their personal understandings of masculinity and their impressions of others.

While working in the field, I worked with two guidance counselors at the Pebbles School to identify a broad range of students who were initially in grades 9-12. One guidance counselor helped by placing calls on my behalf to the potential participants' homes and encouraging parent(s) to return the required signed waivers. I sought to select a diverse group of students and alumni based on direct referrals from guidance counselors and eventually from participant referrals.

Age was one factor in my participant selection process. I initially intentionally sought students in grades 9 to 12 (ages 17-23, with no age criteria for alumni) to take part in my study. However, I was unfortunately unable to recruit any students who were enrolled in the ninth and tenth grades. All were either too busy to participate in my study, had multiple scheduling difficulties, or declined my initial invitation to take part in the study. It is important to note that the literature (Oysemar, Grant & Ager, 1995⁴⁵) on adolescent development confirms that late adolescence is the ideal age group for studying identity. According to Oysemar, Harrison, and Bybee (2001) older students typically have had more opportunities to explore aspects of their racial-ethnic identity.

I also interviewed each participant once individually (and invited some students who had been previously interviewed to follow-up interviews) and scheduled follow-up conversations with alumni in order to seek clarity regarding certain key points. I conducted the interviews in

⁴⁵ Despite this recommendation being based on existing research, my informal conversations and tutoring experiences with younger students revealed that they do, in fact, have some identity awareness and exhibit an understanding of factors that influence their decisions and self-concepts.

two parts: an informational, get-to-know-you exchange between the participants and myself and a formal interview, where I asked several ancillary research questions relating to my four overarching research questions.

I conducted all of the interviews with the students at the school. Before beginning my interviews with the students, I met with a group of students whom their guidance counselors identified as being good candidates for participation in my study during the 6th-period lunch (9th and 10th grades) and 7th-period lunch (11th and 12th grades).

During these meetings, I practiced my recruitment script and formally asked each student for permission to have him take part in my study. I wanted to give them the option of accepting or declining my formal invitation, regardless of whether their parent(s)/guardian(s) gave approval. I was unable to meet with all of the students initially because some were absent and others, particularly the upperclassmen, did not always choose to attend lunch. I did not know in advance what the boys looked like. I asked the lunch monitors on a few occasions to call out each boy's name aloud in the cafeteria to meet me, after which I met with them in an adjacent, private room where I described my study and attempted to recruit students.

These meetings proved to be important, from both a research and personal viewpoint, because some of invited students with whom I met immediately declined to join the study. I suspect they did so because they were busy and/or did not feel comfortable with participating in my study. During the subsequent weeks and weekends, I reminded each participant who had expressed interest in my study, via cell and e-mail, to return the assent/consent forms to the main office (I had to repeat this process several times because several student participants forgot to return their forms). Several of the students who were initially interested in my study were 18 years of age and older. I sent each person a consent form instead of an assent form. Once the

form was obtained, I was able schedule a meeting. In the end, my selection of student participants was based partly on student self-selection and partly on their parents' and/or guardians' willingness to return the required assent/consent form.

After conducting interviews with the alumni in my study, it became apparent that no one I initially interviewed had identified himself as being gay, bisexual, questioning, or transgender (GBQTI).⁴⁶ This shortcoming in the sample represented a potential limitation of the study.

The Director of Student Relations at the Pebbles School mentioned that there was no GBQTI-alliance organization at the school.⁴⁷ When seeking participants from gay, bisexual, questioning, or transgender populations, I focused primarily on alumni participants, because during an interview with an alumnus and a staff member at the Pebbles School, it was stated that the school personnel intentionally did not discuss GBQTI and men's issues together. It appeared that the past and present student population was not receptive to discussing such issues. The Director later confirmed this hunch. He shared that some closeted GBQTI students did not feel comfortable discussing their sexual orientation with me.

Sexual orientation is a sensitive issue. I initially requested that each alumnus think of, and then send an e-mail of introduction concerning my study to, any friends they thought might be interested in participating in my study. I did not want to simply request that the alumnus provide me with the names of friends to whom I could reach out to directly. However, weeks elapsed before I heard back from my interviewees for assistance with this request. All but one person forgot to contact their friends. After I received the names of some alumni who self-identified

⁴⁶ Note that the complete acronym is LGBTQTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, questioning, transgender and intersex). In this study, I focused on GBQTI (gay, bisexual, questioning, transgender and Intersex) persons because my study deals with males who meet this criterion.

⁴⁷ I chose this approach after initially reaching out to the one organization in the area that supported gay youth. The Executive Director of the organization stated that her staff did not keep up-to-date records on their participants, particularly for students who were not attending school or did not voluntarily provide the information. The Director was thus uncertain whether any of her clients attended the Pebbles School.

themselves as gay, bisexual, questioning, I asked the Director of Student Relations at the Pebbles School to determine whether this information was correct in some of the cases.

A Pebbles School administrator, with whom I sent a joint e-mail to these self-identified alumni about my study, explaining what I was seeking, assisted me. Specifically, I asked whether they were interested in participating in my study or if they could recommend potential subjects. Finally, the one alumnus who eventually took part in my study replied to me through email. He came out as gay in high school, and both teachers and other alumni confirmed this.

With respects to students, I chose to interview Black male students who were at various stages of academic development (see participant criteria table), who had different interests such as sports, and who were in attendance at the school or transfer students, their length of time enrolled, in some cases beyond four years at the school, and because their understating of masculinity was not completely reliant upon their academic performance.

Table 1

Participant Characteristics

Name ^a	Age	Grade level	Academic status/Profession	Family structure
Brian	23	Alumnus	College graduate Working professional	Single parent (mother) household
David	21	Alumnus	Working professional. Didn't graduate college	Single parent (mother) household
Jay	21	Alumnus	Fulltime college student	Two parent household
Dion	20	Alumnus	Fulltime college student	Single parent (mother) household
Eddy ^b	20	10, 12	Nontraditional age student. Transferred into Pebbles	Two parent household

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

Name ^a	Age	Grade level	Academic status/Profession	Family structure
Lex	19	12	Nontraditional age student. Transferred into Pebbles	Single parent (mother) household
Max	19	12	Nontraditional age high school student	Single parent (mother) household
Franky	18	12	High school student	Single parent (mother) household
Kevin	18	12	High school student	Two parent household
Henry	17	12	High school student. Transferred into Pebbles	Two parent household
Samuel	17	11	High school student	Single guardian (grandmother) household
Kyle	17	11	High school student	Single parent (mother) household

^a Pseudonyms used.

^b At the time that this study was conducted, this student had earned only passing grades in 10th grade. Technically speaking, from an academic standpoint, he is still in the 10th grade, despite his age.

In addition to the above participants' characteristics, below are brief summaries of each interviewee.

As a preface to this section and as articulated in this dissertation, there are multiple forms of Black masculinities; my sample reflects this diversity in student and alumni compositions. For example, students were initially recommended to me with the initial assistance of the school guidance counselors through a cross-representative sampling based on multiple factors such as but not limited to ethnicities, familial statuses, and interests.

After meeting with all students to gauge their potential interest in my study, a smaller subset of students emerged. The teacher of the nontraditional students who took part in the study asked the entire class on my behalf if any were interested in taking part, after which a few

additional students followed up with me directly. Eventually, however, I became more purposive in my sampling of students, more so than the adults and alumni because some of the young students were less than comfortable discussing the gender-and sexuality-related aspects of diversity and maleness. Like students, alumni represented a cross-selection of professions, sexual orientation, and schooling experiences post-Pebbles.

Brian is a 23-year-old alumnus of the Pebbles School and a recent college graduate. After graduating from college, Brian began working in the field of education. He is the older of two siblings. He was raised in a single-parent household. Brian also attended the Pebbles School for four years when the facility was previously housed in a shared building space with a co-ed school.

David is a 21-year-old alumnus of the Pebbles School. He is a former gang member. Currently, he is a working professional. He is also a single father who did not enroll in college immediately after high school. David was raised in a single-parent household. David attended the Pebbles School for 4 years.

Jay is a 21-year-old alumnus of the Pebbles School. He is currently a full-time college student. Jay is President of the Black Student Union at his college. In his spare time he gives motivational speeches to middle school students. Jay was raised in a dual-parent household. Like Brian, Jay attended the Pebbles School for 4 years when it was previously housed in a shared building with a co-ed school.

Dion is a 20-year-old alumnus of the Pebbles School. He is the only self-identified gay male interviewed in my study. He is currently a full-time college student involved in a number of extracurricular activities. He was raised in a single-parent (mother) household. Dion attended the Pebbles School for four years.

Eddy is a 20-year-old nontraditional-age high school student. He is an applicant for admission to a local community college's accelerated General Education Development (GED) combined with an associate's degree program. Eddy began high school in West Africa and repeated the 10th grade a few times at the Pebbles School. From an academic standpoint, Eddy is a D-average student. He was raised in a dual-parent household.

Lex is a 19-year-old nontraditional-age student. He is college-bound and has been accepted by several colleges. He is from Jamaica but presently resides in the United States. From an academic standpoint, Lex is a student with a C average. He attended the Pebbles School for five years. He was raised in a single-parent (mother) household.

Max is a 19-year-old nontraditional-age student. He struggled to pass a statewide regents exam needed to receive his high school diploma. The result was that he had to repeat a grade. Presently, Max is slated to graduate and has been accepted by several colleges. From an academic standpoint, Max is a student with a C average who has already accrued nine college credits from courses taken at a community college. Max is from a single-parent (mother) household. He attended the Pebbles School for 5 years.

Franky is an 18-year-old high school senior. Franky is a self-described athlete. Franky has attended the Pebbles School for four years. He is a student with a C+ average. Franky admits to being lazy with regard to completing his schoolwork on time. Franky often intentionally sways class discussions to suit his personal needs, due to academic boredom. He is from a single-parent (mother) household.

Kevin celebrated his 18th birthday on the day of this interview. He is a high school senior and has been accepted to several junior colleges. Kevin spends a lot of idle time in the library

instead of attending class. From an academic standpoint, Kevin is a student with a C average. Kevin attended the Pebbles School for 4 years. He was raised in a dual-parent household.

Henry is a 17-year-old student. Henry comes from a two-parent household. He plays basketball and football. Henry transferred to the Pebbles School in the 11th grade and has an A-average. Henry has been accepted for admission by several universities and is a student leader. He attended the Pebbles School for 2 years. Henry was raised in a dual-parent household.

Samuel is a 17-year-old high school student. He has a twin brother and mentioned to me that he is multitalented: an avid music lover who plays the bass guitar. Samuel is on the Pebbles School basketball team and has a B- average. His grandmother is raising him. Samuel attended the Pebbles School for 4 years.

Kyle is a 17-year-old high school student. He is an honors student and has aspirations to attend the prestigious Ivy League Brown University. He states that his dark skin and large size evokes a mixture of emotions from strangers. He attended the Pebbles School for 3 years. He was raised in a single-parent (mother) household.

In addition to participant characteristics, I provided the data analysis on how I interpreted each interviews.

Data Analysis

In my research study, I developed codes after reviewing each transcript and wrote small words that summarized each section of my transcripts consisting of data collected from interview transcripts, field notes from participant observations, journals, and group meetings. My codes consisted of developing a word or short phrases for a portion my interviews. This coding also took place in two cycles. Saldana (2008) noted that the portion of data coded during first cycle

coding processes ranged in magnitude from a single word to a full sentence that took place after I collected all my transcripts. In second cycle coding processes, I extracted the coded portion of data “like longer passages of text, and reconfigure(ed) the codes themselves” (Saldana, 2008, p. 3).

I applied the codes to my data during both cycles. I did not begin the data analysis process until after I had finished conducting all of the interviews in order to prevent the premature identification of themes. I analyzed the data from my field study, which I had gathered from the participants in order to understand how contemporary Black males have come to perceive, understand, and think about gender, identity, and masculinity. Before beginning my data analysis, I organized all of my data in a cohesive manner that was easy to understand and evaluate. I then isolated significant experiences within each participant’s story so as to generate some of the themes mentioned above. I considered an event to be significant based on the level of detail provided by the participant and/or whether the participant said that the event was important. I then analyzed other themes that emerged and kept in mind the literature on sociocultural theory, identity theory, and critical literacy which related to perceptions, gender, and awareness.

I examined each boy’s responses, answers, and experiences and aligned them with themes and categories that emerged during the study. These themes then developed into codes. In addition to coding, I attempted to “pre-code” by circling, highlighting, bolding, and underlining significant quotes that struck me as being salient. In qualitative inquiry, a code refers to a word or short phrase (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) that has been symbolically assigned as a summative for a portion of a language exchange. I sought to capture how each young man constructed the personal meaning he placed on his social and academic life. I then analyzed the data broadly

while focusing attention on some initial concepts derived from my one-on-one interviews, such as the terms “heteronormativity,” “academic achievement,” “gender identity,” and “perceptions.” I was guided by these concepts, and attempted to explore each participant’s definitions of self, their interactions with teachers, and the ways in which they battled racism and developed cultural pride.

Ralph Ellison’s theory of invisibility encapsulates the interviewees as both redefining themselves and yearning for complete recognition from peers, family, and teachers. These young males have complicated gender and diverse masculine identities. They challenge stereotypes about their male gender identities while hearing conflicting messages about masculinity from peers, parents, and male teacher role models. Media messages also privilege stereotypical images of masculinity and render those males who do not personify such traits as invisible.

As many of these Black males define themselves, they also represent what Ellison articulates as the conscious Black male who not only understands just how complex his gender is but also is acutely aware of the racist world that regularly only views him as threatening and violent. Additionally, my own experience with visibility and invisibility, and my readings of Ellison’s work, made me especially attentive to what I didn’t hear from the participants (non-verbal cues), to how I might potentially have mis-positioned an interviewee who wanted to be known differently, to how that person may have also experienced multiple sources of masculinity socializations, or how he may have wanted to asserted his own version of masculinity.

The Progressive Black Masculinity framework was also helpful as a theoretical apparatus for this study. This mode of inquiry was one way I recognized different types of schooling and the personal experiences of Black masculinity as expressed by respondents, leading to a better

contextualizing of these males lives, their gender identities, and the importance of such context on adolescents.

Pattern Coding

I hired a transcriptionist to provide me with interview transcripts. I compared them to the original audio recordings for accuracy and filled in any missing information that had not been provided by the transcriptionist. I grouped all of my interview transcripts according to themes and the frequency of key words that had been mentioned by the participants (e.g., in my study, some initial themes related to pride, brotherhood, academic confidence; see Chapter Five). I then focused on the frequency of the responses the participants provided in order to isolate additional codes that had developed.

Isolating pattern coding within my data involved processing how group observations, field notes, and individual interviews generated themes. I coded by reading in a paragraph-by-paragraph manner each transcript provided to me by the transcriptionist, and immediately realized that some of the participants' responses shared similar information. These similarities related to each person's sense of collective sense of brotherhood as Black males at the school. I also coded some of these participants' pride in their masculinity.

I also examined how pattern coding helped delineate some of the sub-patterns and themes mentioned above that had emerged. For example, one participant discussed the importance of academic success and being a role model for other Black males, and all of these notions were concepts he had learned from teachers and administrators at the high school. His response was an example of role modeling behavior, because being a positive role model is an element of maleness, as described in Chapter Two, and is valued in community spaces such as schools and

professional networks. The students also expressed a desire to become high-achieving African Americans who reflected assertiveness and self-pride in their educational achievements.

I used another level of pattern coding to delineate emerging patterns, themes, and constructs. In order to carry out all three levels of pattern coding, I also entered much of the data from my transcriptions and initial themes that had been generated as a result of my literature review into the NVivo10 data analysis software package. My objective in doing this was to compare the frequency of words by analyzing the number of times they appeared in NVivo10 child node. I then looked for whatever new words developed had not previously appeared in my initial literature review of themes. The NVivo10 data analysis software essentially helped me to organize my individual interviews and group interviews. The software program did not identify themes. I did that during the process of focus coding, which helped me isolate pattern coding. I conducted the coding process and analysis after I had collected all of my data. These themes are shared in detail in Chapters Four, Five and Six. I also developed several strategies for safeguarding the data and ensuring its trustworthiness. These techniques are described in detail below.

Trustworthiness

Data are trustworthy when they were “worth paying attention to” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). Bloomberg (2009) identified four components of trustworthiness in qualitative methods: “credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability” (pp. 77-78). Credibility measures whether the research findings represent a plausible conceptual interpretation of the data drawn from what the participants think, feel, and do. Transferability refers to the fit or match between the research context and other contexts, as judged by the researcher. Dependability measures

whether one can track the process and procedures used to collect data. Conformability measures how well the data supports the inquiry's findings (Bloomberg, 2009, p. 78). In my study, I defined trustworthiness using the following three strategies:

1. **Triangulation.** Corbin and Strauss (2008) stated that triangulation “is the desire to obtain various types of data on the same question/problem” (p. 27). In my study, triangulation included meeting with participants (students and alumni), administrators, and staff at the Pebbles School. During each interaction and communication exchange, I attempted to compare information received related to the history of the school, the mission and creed of the middle high school, the dress code, messages about manhood, and so forth, with each interaction in order to find areas of agreement between different groups of people. Specifically, triangulation entailed me sharing at least one of the interview transcripts for review with one alumnus for its accuracy of what was written from our interview. I thus used a variety of data collections (interviews, observations, field notes, and group meetings) to understand and make claims about how young Black males come to understand and define their masculinity.
2. **Conversational checking.** The group meetings conducted during this study helped me conversational check information received from individual participants. During this meeting, I then summarized some additional findings (such as “heteronormativity,” “academic achievement,” and “gender identity”) derived from my one-one-meetings with students, and concepts such as “brotherhood” and “pride” emerged. I chose to perform conversational checking during the interview stage, specifically during the last several weeks I was in the field. This was conducted at this point because I had conducted several interviews by that point in time and knew it could be difficult to stay connected with the participants after I had left the site. I also observed how the respondents interacted with each other in a group setting and with their peers. In the group meetings, the participants had opportunities to challenge and/or offer new perspectives.
3. **Researcher bias.** I acknowledged and took into account my own inherent biases as it related to Black males during this study. I also understood just how my positionality as a Black male might have indirectly influenced the data collected for this dissertation. And I recognize that I am not a high school student, not affiliated with the Pebbles School, and technically, was an outsider. Ralph Ellison’s work on invisibility reminds me of how hard it is to appear and do research in the way that I wanted to, knowing the complexity of social context and my own personal struggles with invisibility and visibility are being researched. As one response to this, I maintained a consistent presence at the Pebbles school, interacted with the students on a weekly basis, and even developed a sense of rapport to the extent that one student mentioned to me that I had helped inspire him to go to college. I saw all of these experiences as being vital experiences, which reinforced my emic inquiry approach.

Godina and McCoy (2000) wrote, “A completely etic approach risks blinding oneself to potentially new and groundbreaking concepts. At the same time, since all researchers come with

previous ideas, perspectives, and commitments it may be impossible to be purely emic” (p. 1). Taking an emic approach helped me (a) put aside prior theories, assumptions, and biases and allows the participants and data to “speak” to me, and (b) allow themes, patterns, and concepts to emerge organically.⁴⁸

Limitations

This study has one limitation. One point of concern was the generational difference in experiences regarding masculinity between the participants and this researcher who is old enough to be the father of a contemporary high school student. Although I was unable to relate to all of the problems that the respondents experienced regarding their masculinity issues or challenges, there were nevertheless similarities in our respective quests for validation and recognition as Black males particularly during adolescence.

I triangulated data, used conversational checking to confirm the initial findings, and shared some interview transcripts with some of the study participants. As a Black male, my status and background experiences also shaped how I viewed the study participants, which was as individuals with unique skills and abilities, coupled with a general subjectivity to the Black masculinity.

This study is important given that research is limited in the area of Black masculinity constructions. My background experiences as a Black male has also shaped my interest in Black Masculinity Studies, as did the types of personal connections made with many of the young men in this study. Further, when discussing masculinity studies with friends and acquaintances, I am asked two particular questions: “What about Black girls?” and “Don’t Black girls experience just as much complex issues related to their identities as Black males?” My response has been that

⁴⁸ Researchers typically use this approach in grounded theory, but it proved useful in my study.

Black males and females, as well as other racial groups, have unique histories. No single ethnic group's past or present reality as a racially marginalized or historically oppressed group should be regarded as being more important than, or worse than, another's.

Conclusion

This methodology allowed me to shed light on the participants' thought processes and ideas concerning the topic of Black masculinity, and what it meant to them to be a young Black male attending an all-male school. This analysis was used to elucidate the kinds of masculinity the staff privileged in an all-male school, and understand some of the emotional and social challenges these boys faced as Black males.

I also examined the extent to which the attitudes, beliefs, and values of the young men manifested in the behaviors and strategies they believed they needed to succeed in school while maintaining their identities. Their responses helped me to understand some of the previous theories that arose during my literature review section of this dissertation.

My time spent in the field included two interconnected activities that comprised a six-month research project: (a) first-hand participation observations, and (b) the production of a written account of what I observed. I developed a theoretical understanding of what "field writing" entailed, while "interpreting other people's [e.g., the Pebbles students'] behavior, language, and thoughts" (Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, 2007, p. 2).

The fieldwork experience also provided me with an opportunity to "come across persons who agree[d] to be interviewed but [had] little to say once the interview [began]" (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, p. 28). I wanted to avoid such encounters, so I purposefully engaged in a "get to know you" and "meet and greet" approach with all of my potential participants during their

lunch periods at Pebbles. I wanted the boys to get to know me, and I wanted to get to know them. In addition, because I was a consistent presence at the Pebbles School, I did not have a difficult time establishing rapport with these boys. By the time the interviews came around, they felt sufficiently comfortable to talk with me, but some of the respondents still hesitated to speak openly about their experiences.

This research process helped me obtain a better appreciation of the customs, daily practices, and lifestyles adopted by groups of male students at the Pebbles School. While in the field, I adopted several qualitative inquiry approaches and applied various “senses”—such as taste and smell—to learning about, and holistically observing, the school and its students while in the field. The methods I adopted in the field, such as field observations, interviews and focus group meetings helped me ascertain what Black males thought about masculinity studies and how they communicated with each other. Although it is difficult to say that specific meanings were present in every aspect of the fieldsite, when choosing and constructing themes to focus on, some initial patterns and word choices did emerge from within the data.

These patterns ultimately determined how I chose to group words together and the order in which the data is generally presented herein. I also discovered that there were limitations to what I was able to observe. I would say that this relates to how to understand people. There were factors that defined their behavior, and certain elements were either missing or could not be seen within the confines of the space under observation. [The participants may have chosen to not disclose certain things to this researcher.] In conclusion, I enjoyed being in the field and believe it was an ideal way to apply theory to practice, specifically qualitative methods, and to seek answers to my broad research questions. In addition, this experience helped me deconstruct and

better understand qualitative inquiry, entry/access, and thick descriptions, coupled with the importance of applying various “senses” to the space observed.

Chapter Four

Achieving Respectable Black Masculinity or Experiencing Masculinity as a Problem

In this chapter I present the profiles of my interview sample through a theme of achieving respectability and as a perceived problem that arose with both adult alumni and current students. Specifically, the interviewees discussed topics around masculinity to suggest that they cope with the pressure of fulfilling societal expectations and/or unchallenged guy codes.⁴⁹ Respondents expressed specific problems associated with masculinity based on other's perceptions or expectations of them or their concerns with masculinity. The participants' data include some nuances that define them and their respective gender identities. Respondents are simultaneously aware of their responsibilities as individuals (based on family expectations) and as marginalized males.

The dominant cultural representation of masculinity constructions as discussed by Ralph Ellison has given us the image of the isolated male figure struggling with the rest of the world to assert himself into a society that does not fully recognize and affirm his status as a Black man. Likewise, my study yielded an equally complex understanding of Black masculinity as the dominant cultural representation, oftentimes as individuals who were struggling to find or define their unique identities in a world as young adults.

In what follows, I describe the socialization of relational masculinity between some of my participants. I also discuss how masculinity developed in relationships (negatively and positively) between participants. I then explore how interviewees viewed this relational responsibility as connecting Black masculinity to advocacy for marginalized people.

⁴⁹ This is a collection of stereotypical rules of maleness, found in the urban dictionary.

Relational Masculinity Negotiations

Not all of relationality is positive. All of the males I interviewed, irrespective of age, could recount instances of social, institutional, and peer-related stress. Some of these stressors were the result of attending an all-male school, while others came from self-imposed expectations; and all of the interviewees displayed negotiation in communications between friends and family. This routinely impeded their peer-to-peer relationships, how they viewed themselves in relationship to other males, and how others viewed them. While the particularities of gender identity differed among interviewees, all had experienced similar relational challenges to their masculinity. For example, peers from outside of their school initially questioned the majority of the participants about their sexual orientations because they attended an all-male school. This information is important to share because these males said that this type of questioning was routine and impacted how they understood or problematized their personal constructions of male identity.

Over half of the participants expressed that they had experienced some form of gender socialization as Black males stemming from parents; peers and through observations of certain male staff members at the Pebbles School (e.g., regarding how they were expected to speak). As regards the latter, the findings revealed that the type of socialization about gender expectations they experienced took the form of conflicting expectations in the messages these young males mentioned having received from others concerning types of behavior. These regulations also determined gender norms and expectations. These men consequently developed strategies (e.g., charting their own identities as males through role modeling behavior, and acting responsibly by taking care of younger siblings) for conforming to, and/or challenging, these expectations.

For many males, their homes presented several points of discussion regarding masculinity. Parental messages were relational in messages imparted to their sons regarding the expectations that the oldest males in the families take on a part time job to help with family expenses. The gender identities of these young men also took the form of having to act as responsible adults charged with adult responsibilities while they were still young non-adult men.

One response came from a current student, and the other response came from an alumnus. Part of how the respondents understood relational Black masculinity can be seen in how they represent their unique masculine expressions through attire. For example, types of (expensive) clothing (or the appearance of such) symbolize a quest to be seen—to be making one's self visible as discussed by Ralph Ellison; to be respected; to be elevated in status based on personal attire. This finding is illustrated in the following example:

We are always talking about it [masculinity] in class because I'm in the AP literature class. That theme comes up a lot and in literature and I'm like why? Then I had to realize because it's in humans themselves and for me for my family from the adults they say they want you to act a certain way because they've seen the world and they know what the world holds and its like umm, ok I have to [be] respectful. I have to act a certain way. I have to be responsible. I have to button my shirt up, fix my tie, and be presentable [when I am at school]. But when you go out with your peers sagging your pants in front of teachers and family members, adult members are not cool. It's like code switching. You have to know how to change it up. You have to know when it's appropriate to wear certain clothes, to [act out] behavior a certain way and what's not acceptable. Like I know when to switch it up and to also relax. (Kyle, Pebbles School junior)

Expectations regarding style of dress are particularly noteworthy in relation to this discussion of masculinity constructions. Kyle's response represents refutation of masculinity expectations of gender norms as dictated in society, but instead denotes careful negotiation with respect to dress. What is interesting about this finding as it relates to Kyle's response is his ability to not only discern that specific types of urban wear are not condoned within his family or through his exchanges, but also the importance of his linkages of code switching to style and dress. This

suggests that he has mastered the ability to traverse different spaces and the stigmas attached to Black males who wear specific types of clothing.

While discussing the pressures to be respectable and masculine with an alumnus, he pointed out three interrelated factors: stress related to Black masculinity, pressures in the Black and wider communities to act responsibly as a man, and how styles of dress shaped his sense of self while growing up:

In my family and just from friends in general . . . that is where a lot of pressure comes from just trying to not only live up to that [expectation] but to educate people about me. To let people understand that these stigmas that are attached to us [Black males] are only socially accepted because we are making that way. . . . Trying to make sure that I'm not disgracing who we are as a people and my parents. I was raised a certain way. . . . I was expected to dress a certain way. I was to always look presentable in public. As a Black man [growing up] there are certain things you didn't do [like dressing inappropriately or misbehaving] or say [like swearing or speaking disrespectfully] because of family expectations. And then as a son. . . . The only son of my mother. It's just like the only son of my mother and my father. . . . A lot of pressure [in expectations] makes me comfortable but when I am comfortable with the situation I'm never really going to grow so being uncomfortable really helps me like keep moving and progressing in life. (Jay, alumnus)

Jay's responses illustrate a few key points about the different scales of relationality. He understands how family pressure works, and how economic issues impact his self-expression. At the same time, his latter point about discomfort is an affirmation of the role others press upon him developmentally like his mom and dad. The responsibility to set his own path is not solely dictated by others' expectations. Jay's response manifests as examples of peer-to-peer and adult pressures across generations to adopt, resist, or conform to different constructions of masculinity. These constructions are varied in how they are adopted, but also promote the showcasing of different Black male narratives. Examples below represent specific narratives shared by my participants on achieving respectable Black masculinity and experiencing

problems with or one's masculinity as a problem. These represent additional relational masculinity examples.

Achieving Masculinity or Experiencing Masculinity as a Problem⁵⁰

I previously examined how respondents discussed key structures of masculinity. They point to the relational qualities found in ideas about respectability as dictated by peers and family (including some self-imposed expectations to such respectability). Within this chapter, I look at how size and skin tone, being responsible, and role modeling positive behavior, is some components of both themes.

Given the differing educational outcomes of Black girls and Black boys, a continuing problem of blackness is both race-and gender-related, and the young men in my study understand the specificity within negative responses to Black masculinity very well and see the connection to their educational aspirations. W.E.B. Du Bois's also discussed the problems of blackness in 1903 when he posed the question: "How does it feel to be a problem?" and the "Negro Problem" of the twentieth century. This question captured the racial sentiment of African Americans who vied for complete acceptance in a world with civil unrest brought on by Jim Crow segregation, the legally sanctioned racial exclusion until the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* (1954) decision declared "separate but equal" unconstitutional, and the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

The "Negro Problem" that W.E.B. Du Bois witnessed a century ago is equally complicated today. Although it's illegal to discriminate by race, unfortunately there is still extreme racial xenophobia—overt and silent in nature. Peers and adults repeatedly stereotype

⁵⁰ Within this chapter, I reference multiple examples from W.E.B Du Bois's work on invisibility and his discussion on the "Negro Problem" to discuss the Black male's race and gender complications.

Black males, and these males are regularly mislabeled in schools as special needs and victims of crime. This reality complicates today's problems facing Black males, and represents the realities of these groups, inside and outside schools.

This study extends W.E.B. Du Bois's "Negro Problem" and double consciousness discussions as challenges to Black masculinity that are posed as newer strands of maleness, equally complex and salient as race and gender through its links to sexualities. These multiple perspectives define some individual respectability, sexuality, gang affiliation, and academic struggles. By not exploring all nuances of masculinities, we continue to silence the experiences and gender-unique identities of those males who regularly seek to set their own identity paths and respective masculinities that are not dictated by others based on unwritten rules of masculinity. Du Bois also talked about a further world gliding into a wider humanity, where more different kinds of people were beginning to be accepted. But, as Du Bois wrote cautiously, "[W]ith the Negroes of Africa we come to a full stop. . . . This feeling, widespread and deep-seated, is, in America, the vastest of the Negro problems" (p. 1). As such, I then pose the same questions as Amy Hiller (2007) with respect to the perceived African American problem, but slightly expanded:

Isn't what Ralph Ellison wrote about, when discussing being invisible and the Black race, being denied the right to dream and hope and expect goodness from the world? Isn't this what [educator] Jonathan Kozol laments, that we are slowly killing our children in homeless shelters and decrepit schools? (p. 5)

Over half of the participants in my study said that they had experienced the problem of masculine gender socialization as being relational to three sources: parents (e.g., messages about the responsibilities of manhood and not being a wussy); peers (e.g., through unwritten manhood codes of the street and questions about their sexual orientation); and observations of some male staff members at the Pebbles School (e.g., regarding how they were expected to speak). They

experienced conflicting expectations in messages in the forms of gender norms and expectations. They developed personal strategies (e.g., personal fronts, charting their own identities as males through role-modeling behavior, and being responsible by taking care of younger siblings) for conforming to and/or challenging these expectations.

The following responses comprise the subtheme of achieving respectable masculinity as a specific masculine identification some of these adults and students' epitomized and/or articulated during shared interviews with me.

Achieving respectable masculinity. Alumnus Brian spoke about his family's expectations of him as a Black male. He mentioned also how he had often confronted familial pressures that dictated codes of manhood, and how such expectations impacted his view of himself, and the challenges he faced in dealing with those expectations. Brian also shared that he grew up in "a rough [family] situation." Brian admits challenging the adult male teachers and people in authority as a high school student "because of my absent father [in my family]. . . . I didn't know how to interact with them."

During our interview conversation, Brian also stated that he was an individual who is determined to set his own career path and redefine and choose his own identity as an adult male, and he believes that working in education will make him a more responsible and respectable man. He defines himself as being a respectable Black man because of his quest for personal betterment and his gender-identity is partially informed by family expectations and partially self-directed. Both reinforce his quest to serve as a positive role model for Black males, including his younger siblings. In short, Brian disclosed that messages about gender identity and maleness were conveyed to him through a network of people, including family, peers and staff members at the Pebbles School.

Our interviews provided me with an opportunity to learn from Brian and vice versa. I was more than just a researcher. I was also a person who had undergone similar experiences while dealing with my gender while growing up. I was someone he said that he could potentially identify with, given our gender dispositions and similar interests in education. Brian provided a personal narrative concerning how Black masculinity was reinforced by the familial and sociocultural demands he faced and adopted. What follows is Brian's response to my research question, "What does it mean to be a Black man and boy?"

I don't really see being Black male as different from being a White male but a lot of people see it that way. . . . I mean I feel like sometimes people hold being a Black male, to a certain standard as opposed to someone who is a Caucasian. We're look upon as we have to be the strong one, we have to be the man of the house, we have to be the breadwinner, we have to be the provider—that is how, I feel we're being portrayed.

From the above response, Brian provided reflections of his familial pressures to perform a specific trait of masculinity reinforced through the message he internalized growing up. Brian also shared with me how not having a father figure in his life impacted his relationship with other peers, especially some of the adult male teachers at the Pebbles School. His response was, "I didn't know this at the time that I was resisting adult male authority." Overall, Brian's response provided a personal narrative on Black masculinity reinforced by the familial and sociocultural demands he faces and adopts.

Like Brian, alumnus Jay represents respectable Black masculinity through his self-described quest for betterment and role modeling positive behavior. Jay spoke at length about his strong drive to "bridge the [educational, financial, opportunity] achievement gaps for [B]lack males." He lives his life in a confident manner and has a strong, positive Black male presence (or ethnic identity pride). He stated, "I love the beauty of my blackness, of my Africanness [sic]."

He also mentioned that being a Black man involves searching with the expectation of helping others.

Jay does not mask his resentment towards those who regularly direct distasteful looks at Black men in public spaces. He articulates, “I just can’t stand the looks that people who aren’t Black give to Black men.” Jay contends, “I [also] understand there is a history to it and why people would get nervous and act a certain way [when they see a Black man], but that’s just one harsher case because it’s still like animalistic. . . . We are looked at as predators.” Jay argued these looks are disrespectful, and help explain the discomfort some Black men experience, which can lead to self-hatred due to the indignation expressed by others.

Jay also attempts to lead his life by example to others. He sets his own path in life and hopes that others will model themselves after him. He represents respectable Black masculinity because he sees himself as a role model and mentor to others. He regularly advises underclassmen in college—particularly Black male students—regarding the importance of academic success. He suggests that his dedication to academic work stems from his time at the Pebbles School. In short, Jay discloses his personal quest to be a “pebble in the pond that ripples the inequalities experienced by Black males.” Jay suggests that he is a trailblazer who defines his own identity and pays homage to his Black ancestry and his connection to the continent of Africa.

Jay is keenly aware that not all types of masculinity are viewed in the same manner, and that some forms of masculinity are dominant. When asked to explain, Jay stated that there are multiple guy-codes that dictate that everything that is feminine is wrong, and that everything that is feminine makes a man less masculine: “particularly, I guess the more feminine side of homosexual males rather than the ones who are down low.” Jay spoke about an example from

the Pebbles School: “[W]e acknowledge him [our classmate] for what it [he] was, but at the same time he was still teased and ridiculed horribly, but him being ridiculed in a way, was amongst us guys [with the Pebbles school, not outside in public].”

As the researcher of this study, I interpreted this statement to mean that only insiders, not outsiders, could ridicule other classmates at the Pebbles School. Jay affirmed this theory and shared that outside of school, if that student was being teased or ridiculed by others who were not students at the Pebbles school, his class peers came to the rescue due to their shared brotherhood bond. I liken Jay’s response to an example of an older brother who routinely picks on his younger brother in and outside the home, only to be at his back if someone else who is not a family member picks on that younger brother. Jay’s response also reminds me of the theory of “Circling the Wagons” where someone outside a membership group makes a critical statement (let’s say through the use of the word “gay”), about someone inside a particular group “known as the wagon,” other members of the insider group may run to defense of that person. Not only that, other members may pull together to also defend.

Jay’s observation concerning a family member picking on another family member silences the feelings and personal experiences of the one young man in question who was (perceived or openly) gay. This relational family bond Jay spoke of meant experiencing teasing by dominant males directed against males perceived to be weaker by peers. What follows is Jay’s response to my research question, “What does it mean to be a Black man and boy?”

I think its pride. . . . To be Black is to be powerful. It’s to be intelligent. The genesis—the beginning of all time. It’s something that’s near and dear to us. Being Black is at least in my eyes knowing and seeing all things that the textbooks didn’t tell you. It’s about the constant search to get the knowledge that people purposefully try to omit from the classroom and from everyday life. Being a Black man is about that search, but it’s also about helping other marginalized men and women. Particularly the Black men or women at least from my end to join that search with you because I feel that there is a strong

connection between history that you know and understand to be true and who you are as a person. Umm, being a Black boy truly is everything to me.

From the above response, Jay shared his pride as a Black male; equally important, he offered that United States history purposely omitted the accomplishments of Black males [and females], and a solution to this quandary is not only the charge of Black males and women to build an alliance with each other but also as a society to collectively help rewrite a more accurate, all-inclusive history of Black males. Yet, when discussing diversity of Black males and acceptance within the Black communities, Jay shares that he is keenly aware that not all masculinities are viewed the same and that some forms of masculinity are ridiculed. He admits that this experience was the case for some openly gay students at the Pebbles School.

When asked to explain what those experiences were, Jay stated that there are multiple guy-codes that dictate everything feminine is wrong and lessens a man: “particularly for I guess the more feminine side of homosexual males rather than the ones who are down low.” For example, Jay goes on to give an example at the Pebbles School: “[W]e acknowledge him [our classmate] for what it was, but at the same time he was still teased and ridiculed horribly, but him being ridiculed in a way, had to be amongst us.” Outside of school, if said student was being teased or ridiculed by others who were not students at the same school, his class peers came to the rescue because of their shared brotherhood bond. I liken Jay’s response to an example of an older brother who routinely picks on his younger brother in and outside the home, only to have his back if someone else who is not a family member picks on the younger brother.

Current student Lex’s shared narrative is similar to the narratives of some alumni with respects to achieving respectable masculinity. He states that he regularly confronts false impressions that he is a criminal, a thug, or someone that other people should fear. Lex contends that the images of Black males, whether true or false, reflect that his life may be predestined for

struggle (financial, emotional, etc.) and that he must get through such struggles. In order to succeed in life, the Black male in particular must overcome barriers. Lex and about half of his Pebble School peers expressed the notion that they are predestined to struggle.

Below is Lex's response to my ancillary research question, "What does it mean to be a Black man and boy?"

Alright, so to be a Black male, it reminds me of a struggle. Because, you know, slavery and all that. It brings, brings you through it and like, being a Black nowadays, you know, they say, "You, you've been through a lot so you basically have to live up to a lot," you know what I'm saying? Because nothing comes easy, so usually when you, you're in a car driving, they say, you know, your mom, "Be careful. You're, you're Black and cops like to pull over Black males." So basically to me it's like, it's more of a, more like a struggle to be a Black male. If you hear he's rich, he's a millionaire, and he's also a Black male, you're like, "He's been through a lot. He's struggled."

The above response indicates that Lex was presented with a dilemma: he could either accept, or challenge, the impressions, assumptions and expectations about Black males that are held by others. Lex is on guard about his personal front as a Black male in public. This defense is a harsh reminder of the perils of the constant surveillance of Black males.

Lex's responses to my questions provided a uniquely different story than most of his peers concerning Black masculinity. He specifically epitomizes the sort of person who has traversed two distinct cultures, and is a young Black male trying to set his own course in life. Lex also represents respectable masculinity given his goals in life, meaning his quest to challenge negatives assumptions about himself, and setting his own course in life. This journey has involved the daunting recurring task of redefining the images other people have of him.

Like Lex, Henry was interviewed and shares his thoughts on achieving respectable masculinity. He spoke about being disadvantaged as a Black male: "I'll say that I really started at a disadvantage because of the color of my skin." Henry also spoke about challenging overt stereotypes about young Black males, notably, "Black people are [seen as] violent, rude,

uneducated and stuff like that. I like to go against those stereotypes, it just puts me ahead.” This approach led Henry to rally against false impressions through his positive example.

Henry is also quick to note, “leading by example isn’t always easy,” given the perceived social pressure to emulate older males who might not be positive role models. For example, growing up, Henry sought to adopt a tough guy image from “older Black males who felt the need to put up this [personal] front” to impress younger males. Equally important, Henry offered the response below to my research question, “What does it mean to be a Black man and boy?”

I’ll say that I really started at a disadvantage because of the color of my skin even though I didn’t choose to be in this color of skin. However, there are a lot of opportunities that opened up as well because these days colleges and jobs they give us chances. They’re actually giving us a chance but it’s up to us to take it. If you’re being lackadaisical about it, you’re not going anywhere in life, but the opportunities are there. All the discrimination and racism is all mental things. It’s all in your head but if you push past that, you can excel.

My conversation with Henry provided a narrative of a young Black male who describes himself as being very “mature for his age” as well as often being seen as too “serious.” He sees himself as a committed and determined individual, and states that he wants to become a dentist, which further confirms his ambition.

Our conversation is not one-sided. Henry asked me questions about the challenges I experienced as a Black man. He asked additional questions about my background, why I chose to attend graduate school, and my post-graduate school goals. Overall, Henry’s narrative serves as an example of the social and cultural pressures of Black masculinity, as reflected in the examples of some older Black males that he mentioned.

Student Samuel also discusses some of his thoughts about achieving respectable masculinity, but also points to some problems and challenges with masculinity as a Black male. Samuel spoke at length about his positive affirmation of many of the educational, financial and

professional advances within the Black communities. He is proud to be Black, but harkens back to what he believes life was like before the institutionalization of slavery. He had some thoughts about the idea that there was a better sense of Black community and unity in the past than in the present day: “I think bein’ Black, it’s kind of a positive in a way because it’s the history of Africans before slavery.”

Below is Samuel’s response to my ancillary question, “What does it mean to be a Black man and boy?” This response articulates some of his concerns with how masculinity is defined.

Um, even though they [people of different races] don’t know us, they just perceive us a certain way because how we dress or just because we’re Black, or the way we carry ourselves. [And] Like, uh, [it comes from] all, all sorts of places. It comes from, you know, like the crime and, and the neighborhoods we come from . . . our environment. Basically in the media. Sometimes the media portrays people of color in a bad way and, Like other people they kind of, we kind of, you know, base their opinions off what they see in the media, so. . . .

Our conversation, including Samuel’s narrative, also serves as an example that speaks to the complexities of gender and identity. His response detailed some of the dilemmas associated with being Black and why role-modeling behavior is important. And notes the dilemmas relate to, but are not limited to, false messages and images transmitted through the media about Black males. These messages impact Samuel’s own impressions of his race, but are not the sole channel of information. Samuel’s narrative adds to the literature on Black Masculinity, specifically meaning impressions related to perceptions.

Student Kyle was also interviewed in my study. He shares his thoughts of achieving respectable masculinity which like his peers meant succeeding academically in school, and being responsible, but also, like Samuel, shares concerns as it relates to masculinity as a dark skin Black male,

My little cousin, he’s light skin and when I think about it, umm, I once said wow he has it really easy. Like he doesn’t look white, but he looks like he could blend into society

better. It's like he has it so easy [because of his lighter skin] and then for me, it different. I always have a scar on my face like it's just my personality I'm always thinking things so I'm like, I don't have anything to smile. I have—there's always a time and place for everything so I'm like . . . it's just people's perception of you. That's why I get mad sometimes like when I see kids that act the fool. I'm like you don't know how easy you have this like . . . like even though I wasn't there like for Civil Rights or whatever—like you still see the shadows of that people still perceive you to be whatever because the color of your skin.

The light-dark skin social complexities faced by some Black males are reflected in this narrative.

The narrative provides a context for what Kyle thinks of himself and may explain why others may fear him due to his dark skin and large body size. For example, Kyle recounts an unsettling experience with a White female stranger riding with him on a train he was on. They were the only two people on the train that night. Instead of reacting in anger or disbelief, his recourse was original and ingenious,

I've' come across people who think that I am inferior to them [because I am a Black male] and then when you open your mouth, they think otherwise. . . . Like I was on the train once, and so was a White older lady. I was wearing my hoodie—I looked like an average kid and, I wasn't wearing my uniform. You could kind of sense that she was kind of staring at me—I just chuckled a little bit and then [as a response] I pulled out a book on Hamlet.

This quote reflects that Kyle is a young man who routinely challenges assumptions and false impressions about himself using creative responses. Kyle is also deeply aware that his presence may lead people around him to perceive his large body size and gender identity as a Black male in a negative manner. He displays both double consciousness through his ability to problematize his presence as a large stereotyped Black male. He understands what it may mean to others. His narrative also represents the partial invisibility he experiences as a Black male, as he is grouped with all Black males as a threatening presence, and not fully recognized for his personal uniqueness, creativity and intelligence. However, he is never discouraged, because he believes

that his path is predestined and his use of knowledge instead of brute strength in emotionally tough situations is commendable.

Below is Kyle's response to my research question, "What does it mean to be a Black man and boy?"

[W]ell I think being in an all-Black and -Latino school we always talk about that from our summer break. [In the beginning] we was talking about this subject, but personally, I didn't know what that was—what it was to be—because everyone from middle school, I was around people of my own color, my own race but similar background, so I didn't know exactly what that meant. What it was to be a Black kid or a Black young man so then going here, they drill it into us so much that you're more aware. You're more aware of the obstacles that you are faced with.

Kyle is a young Black boy who understands the psychological complexities that his presence evokes in others on the unconscious and conscious levels. Kyle understands how uninformed personal opinions can skew impressions about young Black boys. These dilemmas serve to arm him emotionally when he is in public places or interacts with people who do not know him. Kyle has a passion to succeed in life. He is a role model. Kyle also represents salient issues as a Black male that involve gender, phenotype and body size.

Student Max rounds out the interviewees who spoke about achieving respectable masculinity though his challenges of other's false impressions of him. He is acutely aware of how his gender, race, body size, and personal front influence how others think of him. He acknowledged that these impressions are not always accurate (echoing similar stories told by other Pebbles students) and can help explain how Black men are often depicted in society. Other people may fear him because of his large size: "They are stereotypical [ideas which] are based on isolated incidents and should not define me."

Max identified strength and stability as being essential components of being a Black male: "What does it means to me to be a Black man?"

What it means to me to be a Black man is to be stronger, more of a stabilizing influence. Because my mother showed me that you don't need a woman to be stable. You can be yourself and be stable. So that's basically what being a Black man showed me. It also shows that in this, in this community of Black, Black males, being put down each and every day through—if you would say healthcare—there's not a lot going around for . . . the minority, the Black community. And that's basically what it shows me, that I have to succeed to get where I want to go. And what do you think it means to be a Black boy? It means that I have to put myself out there as, as a, as, like, I'm a hard worker. So I can show the, the males or the Caucasian males or the Black males that are successful that I can be successful, too.

Max's response detailed some of his social, familial and economic pressures. The message that I took away from our meeting, and from social theory literature, is that one person can have membership in multiple social groups such as race and gender. Multiple social identities can overlap or not overlap.⁵¹

Issues of race, gender, body size, and related factors intersect to shape Max's perceptions of his gender as a male. Max articulates that many of the expectations other people placed on him as a young Black male vary from one individual to the next, and also vary from one network of people to another network (similar to the case of Jay). Max does not shy away from having a strong work ethic and represents respectable masculinity, because he regularly seeks out professional opportunities to grow and learn.

Next, I provide additional examples from alumni and students who shared a diverse array of comments centering on this chapter's second subtheme of experiencing problems of masculinity and/or seeing one's masculinity as a problem. Within the second subtheme of "perceived problems," the following respondents spoke about challenging restrictive, traditional definitions of masculinity, cultural or academics stressors as Black males, and social-cultural,

⁵¹ See Rydell, R. J., & Boucher, K. L. (2010). Capitalizing on multiple social identities to prevent stereotype threat: The moderating role of self-esteem. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 36(2), 239-250.

and economic struggles they faced. Like the first set of responses, the second subset of responses proved to be just as equally fruitful.

Experiencing one's own masculinity as a problem. Alumnus David articulated some problems he associated with masculinity constructions. David represented a young male who not only understood problems associated with masculinity but also willingly challenged these society-imposed expectations. David is also a former gang member who left gang life⁵² as a result of positive mentoring by adult male teachers he received while a student at the Pebbles School.

David is a single father who did not enroll in college immediately after high school: “Cause I took on certain responsibilities and I created certain situations [like having a baby while in high school].” David eventually enrolled in college, but dropped out due to limited financial resources. He regrets not going to the all-male, historically Black Morehouse College immediately after graduating from the Pebbles School.

David spoke at length about routinely challenging the misconceptions some people held about him as a young Black man who was not perceived as being smart. David articulates his concerns with the representations of masculinity through his avoidance at attempting to fit into the proverbial stereotypical box of being a Black male thug who dressed in baggy clothes and whose uninterested in improving his life. In fact, prior to meeting me, David deliberately chose to dress casual. His reasoning later became clear to me when he shared, “I purposefully chose not to dress up to meet you Mr. Laing. . . . I wanted you to see me as a regular person and know that I am smart, not [only] see how I was dressed.”

⁵² I draw on Stewart and Simons (2006)’s work *Structure and culture in African American adolescent violence: A partial test of the “code of the street”* thesis. The researcher of this dissertation is acutely aware of the difficulties many people face if they should attempt to leave gang life due to the often-violent retaliatory nature of the gang (see Anderson, 2000 which discusses “code of the street”).

David's resistance to "dressing up" (and following school protocol by wearing a tie to a face-to-face meeting with an adult while on school premises) was interpreted by the researcher of this dissertation as an illustration of a challenge to the status quo that involved avoiding looking a certain way and avoiding being defined by material possessions such as clothing style.

What follows is David's full response and elaboration to my research question, "What does it mean to be a Black man and boy?"

Age and maturity are not on the same level at all. I could show you grown ass [Black] men [who are not responsible] . . . me at 21 am a far more mature man and I can show you a 15-year-old boy that is more mature than most of the grown men. So age and maturity should not be in the same, in the same, in the same, in the same conversation cause it don't, it doesn't mean anything, the older . . . you be 18 you can buy some cigarettes and 21 you can buy some liquor. That's it—there's no difference . . . there's no difference, really.

From the above response, David shared his personal adversities growing up; equally important to mention is that he remains steadfast in his present view that there is no difference age-wise that separates boys from men. David is also representative of the sort of individual who purposely sought to challenge one-sided images of young Black males. He readily admits that his acceptance is tested when he meets someone who is perceived or defined as gay or bi-sexual. He admits that he is homophobic, but can respect "other people's sexual orientations" provided that they don't "bring that touchy, touchy towards me." In short, David disclosed that his specific school experiences, coupled with his experiences as a gang member (and his current paternal responsibilities), combined and shaped him into the man he has become.

Like David, alumnus Dion articulated some of this concerns and problems associated with masculinity expectations that have been traditionally defined in his view, as representative of the ideal heterosexual male. Dion self-identifies as a gay male and stated to me that he did not experience any teasing from his peers at the Pebbles School because he intentionally concealed

his sexual orientation. Dion did, however, make direct observations that fellow Pebbles students who were perceived as having gay self-identities were picked on, as a result used different communicational exchanges with peers in high school.

Despite his initial objections to attending an all-male school, Dion's mother enrolled him at the Pebbles School. When asked why he initially objected, he mentioned that he didn't think that he would have anything in common with his peers at a single-sex school. This was based partially on what he had observed of older students who lived in his neighborhood.

Dion's narrative provides a uniquely different perspective on masculinity than his peers. His story is emblematic of a student who had to hide his sexual orientation (or public front⁵³) at school. He initially chose not to disclose his sexual orientation at the school because he feared being ostracized and teased. Dion eventually came out to reveal himself as being gay to his classmates and teacher in his French class during his senior year at the Pebbles School during his final week of school classes. When asked whether coming out at that time intentional, he stated, "it just happened; wasn't planned." He also mentioned that he was relieved that he had told someone at the school.

Dion unhesitatingly stated that he would not choose to attend the Pebbles School again. His response was based on certain similarities in narratives that had been shared by some other alumni (e.g., getting along with other males; what he defined as "[being] ill at ease"). He said that he differed distinctively from the other students, based on his previous interactions with peers and some of the male teachers/ administrators,

⁵³ Erving Goffman's (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, provides descriptions and analysis of interactions between people. Goffman is also one of the earliest scholars to write about personal "front" describing "that part of the individual's performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance" (22). The front allows others to understand individuals based on observable and imputed character traits.

I wouldn't attend just because I feel like for some reason I never really like fitted in. There was a sense of brotherhood that I never really found myself or felt a part of and it's kind of hard for me to like try to embrace that try to be a part of that. I don't know if it's because of my personality. I've always been like that kind of person or if it's just because I just can't get along with guys in that type of way and stuff like that.

However, Dion acknowledged that if he had not attended the Pebbles School, he would not have enjoyed opportunities to obtain internships and scholarships. These opportunities helped him secure a full scholarship to college based on his strong academic performance, leadership and extracurricular activities. Dion also spoke about not feeling connected with many of the adult male teachers. Specifically, Dion found a greater sense of connection and comfort with female teachers. What follows is Dion's response to "What does it mean to be a Black man and boy?"

Um, a Black man in this society I think that it means, it's very hard. Not have many opportunities or resources as others. Also not being able to have a lot of privilege or a lot of opportunities. Like . . . I think that's it.

Dion's narrative discusses the acceptance and exclusion of masculinities and represents respectable masculinity due to his dual identity of being gay, which does not mesh with the ideal masculinity mode discussed in Chapter Two, and being Black. He initially defined his masculinity as the backdrop for others' expectations as a particular type of respectability. However, as an adult, Dion does not accept stereotypical assumptions about maleness nor his sexuality, which can be viewed as problems against expectations. He instead chooses to challenge them. My interview with Dion provided a space to talk with him about both gender and sexual orientation issues intertwined with his identity as a Black male. All three issues are equally important for understanding Black masculinity and connecting with this dissertation's conceptual framework.

Student Franky also shares some examples he associated as being problems with masculinity from both an academic and personal standpoint. During our interview, Franky's

mother patiently waited outside of our private meeting room where I interviewed him, but only after she initially requested a brief meeting with me to introduce herself and learn about my dissertation study. Franky articulated that, to him, being a Black man means: “I am destined to struggle. That’s kind of a fact.” He states, “Nobody ever wants to see a Black person become successful.” This personal awareness prepares Franky mentally and emotionally for this challenge.

Below is Franky’s full response to, and elaboration upon, my research question, “What does it mean to be a Black man and boy?”

Nobody ever wants to see a Black [male] become successful so I know I’m destined to struggle. But I’m ready to overcome the struggle because, I want to be, successful, but you can’t do that, in the regular way.

Franky’s response is partially bleak and partially solace. His response is bleak given that he has already concluded that he has to struggle. His response represents solace due to his positive outlook on life such that he expects to succeed in life despite obstacles. In one way, Franky’s understanding of Black masculinity provides insight into the process of developing gender identity. In another way, Franky is representative of a generation of youth attempting to define their presence and identities after having internalizing positive and negative messages that others may have about them.

Like fellow classmate Max, Franky believes that his large body size effects how others see him. He also purposely restricts certain types of attention-drawing public forms of loud behavior as a Black male. For example, he shares; “when I get mad, I [tend to] raise my voice, but don’t do so always,” due to his beliefs about how other people may respond. Franky is consciously aware of the impressions he makes on other people and has developed a coping mechanism for dealing with potentially uncomfortable situations. This coping mechanism

impacts how he may interact and/or communicate with people who may not look like him or “to put them at ease in my presence.” Franky’s responses to my questions helped clarify some ideas about Black masculinity. This is an individual perspective, but it can be valuable with regard to the trials and tribulations young Black males in general face today.

Student Eddy was also interviewed in my study. He shares a range of problems with masculinity that manifest as emotional and academic stressors as a Black male. Eddy and I spoke about pressures on “us Black kids” such as the injustices inflicted by police on Black people. He has been repeatedly stopped and questioned by the police: “I got stopped by the cops, oh, many times. They just stopped me out of nowhere and just asked me questions or, or search me [as] if I have somethin’ bad or anything.” Eddy is aware of how race and gender intersect and how the perceived negative impact of his race affects his daily experiences. Eddy feels bad that Black people—particularly males—perpetuate crimes and rationalizes why cops are on alert when they see a Black male. For example,

So, for the cops, every Black boy they see in the hood wearing a hoodie or something, they think you’re about that life, like in the gang life or somethin’. So we get stopped many times, even without doin’ nothin’ or just, even now, even just standing next to your building they say [that] is trespassing. You should go inside and everything. So that makes me feel really bad for our kind. ‘Cause we makin’ a bad name [for] ourselves.

The above response indicates why Eddy explains some of the socio-cultural pressures exerted against contemporary Black youth, himself included due to their masculinity as perceived problem. These pressures originate with friends, peers and family. Eddy believes that the Pebbles school environment provides a safe space where he can escape these pressures.

Below is Eddy’s response to my ancillary research question, “What does it mean to be a Black man and boy?”

Well, the life we live in right now, there’s too many pressures on us Black kids Cuz most of us are who people judge right now. Like doing bad stuff in the streets, getting locked

up in jail, killin' people, Gun violence, gangs, so basically, going to school is a good thing in our life cuz it takes me off the street. So if you're focusin' in school and go to school every day, you're not gonna be involved in that. But some people, they do both. I realize that. But for me, I'm not into that gang life 'cause it makes no sense to me and it's just gonna make your life harder and harder. 'Cuz you, like [for] example, you're not into it but you hang with a person that's into it. So imagine they do something bad and you're the good person but you're still hanging out with them, and the cops come. They gonna take all of you. You be in the wrong place at the wrong time. So you got to, for us young males, we gotta know how we move and just stay out of the street and focus on life. Have a bright future and know what to do in life. For older males, like you tryin', 20 and above?

Eddy's story reflects that he is a bi-cultural individual who embodies dual cultures as a West African immigrant and Black person living in the United States. Eddy offered a unique outlook on life as a young Black male. His responses to my questions provided another dimension for understanding Black masculinity. In his specific case, he previously lived in a majority-Black country and now lives in a racially diverse community in the United States. In the United States, he noted that images by the media, in particular, and messages about Black males, appear to be more negative than what he initially experienced as a child.

Kevin was the last student interviewed in my study. Like some of his classmates, he discussed some problems with masculinity coupled with academic and personal stressors. Kevin stated that he is scared about growing older "Cause throughout my lifetime, I've shown many different signs of irresponsibility. And I know I spoke highly [to you] of being responsible." Growing older represents maturity to Kevin. However, he admits not being ready to take on such responsibility. Kevin also identifies himself as not having always been seen by some of his peers as a responsible male due to his often-irresponsible behavior. This shared information represents one of his problems associated with masculinity, specifically, his self-identified failure to meet such a standard.

Prior to my interview, I personally observed Kevin on several occasions spend some of his idle time in the library instead of being in his classes. When asked by the resource librarian why he was not in class, he stated, “I have a pass” and did not have to attend class

During our meeting, Kevin’s initial display of confidence took a downward turn when he discussed some of his academic struggles. Kevin immediately discontinued maintaining eye contact with me and looked down at his hands. His voice softened and he sounded melancholy when he stated,

As far as writing, hmm-mm, can’t do it. I am kind of embarrassed. They [teachers] gave me a laptop [to help with my assignment] because of my [difficult-to-read] handwriting. It wasn’t legible. It was only legible to me.

Kevin further explained that he had regular conversations with teachers who questioned the quality of his work, particularly when he failed to turn in his assignments using the computer. During our interview, he readily admitted, “I want to do this [referring to improving academically] but then I’m always easily sidetracked by others and I can’t keep focused, and then when I do get focused, I get lazy.” Despite his self-identified academic struggle, Kevin is ready to graduate and start anew in college. He believes that college will assist him in improving his academics provided that he takes advantage and does not act as “a lazy Black boy.”

Below is Kevin’s response to my research question, “What does it mean to be a Black man and boy?”

To me, personally, to be a Black man, just, to me it has the same meaning as being a man in general. Showing to have responsibility, that you know how to manage . . . and take care of yourself and others around you. Uh, you know, not just in the family case. But it doesn’t always have to be family, just people around, learning how to take care of things. And that’s what I think being a man is. But in a Black, in a Black society, being a Black man just means “do you” [or define you]. . . . So what I mean by “do you” is prove them wrong. Do what you gotta do. Put yourself out there. Make yourself known. Prove that you can amount to something’.

Kevin provided his definitions of manhood in the response shown above. His response does not initially distinguish between being a Black man and being a man in general. He identifies “responsibility” as the key to what ultimately defines a man, regardless of his race. Eventually, a slight distinction emerged in his reference to inequalities between people of different racial, social, cultural and economic backgrounds. These factors explain Kevin’s drive to succeed. Kevin’s narrative also advances some of the present scholarship on Black Masculinity, specifically, Kevin’s response to the idea of being a family provider.

Concluding Summary

Collectively speaking, the narratives of all 12 participants’ (Brian, David, Jay, Dion, Eddy, Lex, Max, Franky, Kevin, Henry, Samuel and Kyle) are grouped together using the themes of intergenerational negotiations of masculinities and inter-peer and cultural understandings of masculinities. The narratives in this chapter helped this researcher elucidate what it means to be a contemporary Black male by asking an ancillary question related to this question.

Within each theme are the subthemes of masculinity and respectability and masculinity as perceived problems to illustrate how masculinity is relational to peers, adults, and family members. These responses represent similarities and dissimilarities found in discussions with these young males. There was no single universal experience found among these Black males— young and old—but their individual experiences were uncovered.

The wide variety of answers illustrates the differences among these males, meaning differences that are based on cultural experiences and upbringing. This researcher also found a multitude of developing attitudes among both younger and older Black males regarding gender and race and the effects on manhood.

The Black male identity construction introduced some contestable and conflicting definitions of maleness. This claim was reinforced by the messages received by the participants themselves. In many cases, they had social networks (families, peers, and schools) in many of their lives that directly or indirectly shaped their consciousness of themselves as Black males.

In each story shared by these individuals, I sought to capture the truth in an honest manner, and to represent their characteristic voices honorably through written thoughts and interpretations of the meaning of identity. These males also validated many of the struggles that some Black males face, as well as the societal and/or personal pressures they experienced with parents, peers and adult males inside and outside of school. The implications and discussions of these encounters appear in Chapters Five, Six and Seven.

Chapter Five

Masculinities Expressed Through and Constrained by Brotherhood

Black males feel particularly pressured to express a sense of brotherhood with other Black males while also distinguishing themselves from those who display effeminate mannerisms or act in an openly gay manner. Brotherhood stems from the homosociality and links Black male students as representative of masculinity at the same school. Brotherhood and homosociality also serve to bring Black males together, but heterosexism keeps some of them cautious about others. This caution impedes diverse brotherhood, leading to non-acceptance of diverse sexual orientations or identities or any other axes that have the potential to cause dissonance.

This chapter discusses how brotherhood can serve as a form of inclusion and exclusion between Black males who have diverse masculinities. I also show through a classroom volunteer experience how middle school boys sought to emulate me, and the interplay of brotherhood through a nonverbal exchange between one interviewee and me. Such exchanges between males represent brotherhood across generations irrespective of the lack of a familial relationship. Ralph Ellison writes about inclusivity and exclusivity of Brotherhood, notably that it may be at times futile. I extend Ellison's theory to all Black males who embody different identities. However, this quest for membership leaves the diverse Black man trying to assert himself for acceptance in a community that may not fully accept him if he's perceived as being different. Despite these challenges, Ellison ventures to say that the Black male should not abandon his conscience or his quest for acceptance to a brotherhood.

Brotherhood

Brotherhood, as also shared by a Pebbles student, represents both a shared gender identity and race membership. The students in my study also expressed that brotherhood means “having each other’s back in times of trouble.” In this study, eight male high school students reacted to the expectations of peers, parents, and some teachers. They developed different types of social selves to meet the different norms of masculinity, behavioral expectations, and imagined judgments of these three completely different audiences. They did so in reaction to verbal and nonverbal communications (e.g., facial expressions during interviews that expressed approval or disapproval), including verbal instructions from teachers to deepen their voices.

These young males also describe Black masculinity in several ways that include personal/interpersonal and community-based influences. Such factors explain their conception of brotherhood, sexuality, and heterosexism, but also homosociality, and are based on direct and indirect messages they received that often took the form of regimented gender norms. Interpretations of data also revealed that racial and gender status as Black males got explained as some self-imposed mental barriers, which is reflected in the following response:

I’ll say that I really started at a disadvantage because of the color of my skin and because I am a male even though I didn’t choose them. However, there are a lot of opportunities that opened up as well because these days colleges and jobs they giving us chances. They’re actually giving us a chance but it’s up to us to take it. If you’re being lackadaisical about it, you’re not going anywhere in life, but the opportunities are there. All the discrimination and racism is all mental things. It’s all in your head but if you push past that, you can excel in today’s economy. (Henry, Pebbles School senior)

Henry defines the negatives associated with his masculinity as being a societally imposed “barrier.” Henry believes that taking advantage of professional opportunities not previously available to Black people and role modeling positive behaviors can lead to a recasting of his

presence as a masculine Black man, and that this has the potential to correct assumptions about who he is as a person.

My interviewees also shed light on how groups of similar students offered different definitions of masculinity that were contested between peers. Such dissonance could explain why there is some exclusivity in membership between males with respect to brotherhood. This interpretation is similar to the literature on Black masculinity examined in Chapter Two that offers contesting definitions of masculinity. In practice, these young males, despite a shared brotherhood between many students, discovered during a group meeting that they held different definitions of Black masculinity⁵⁴. Samuel's comment on masculinity challenged one of his peers who was interviewed separately (i.e., he was not in the group meeting).

I think that by showing emotion [that] kind of shows your strength because a lot of people feel that if a man or a Black man or any man for that matter, shows emotion, like if they're crying or if they let others know how they're feeling, it kinda makes them [look] weak. But I kinda, I disagree with that and what was said by someone [at the Pebbles School] because I think that showing emotion is how you become a better person. Because we all have, we all cry... So think, those people, who let others in are kinda, take on the risk of being called weak by some, just because of the mere fact that, they're showing emotion. . . . By showing no emotion that kind of makes you weaker because you don't wanna let anybody else in and see who you really are at times, putting this, like this wall. And, I don't think that's it's healthy mentally. (Samuel, Pebbles School junior)

Where there was a meeting of the minds between the students who were interviewed and those students who were not a part of the follow-up meeting concerns brotherhood and representations of masculinity.

The two examples shared below further discuss the concept of brotherhood at an all-male school:

⁵⁴ I started out by reminding the students about the purpose of the meeting and that I would share their responses with the other males present at the group meeting—while maintaining their anonymity—about what they feel it is like to be Black male; that masculinity to some meant being strong; how the Pebbles School as a community could be more accepting of all people regardless of sexual orientation; and what they would say if given the opportunity to shape policy makers concerning the education of Black males.

There is also a brotherhood bond in an all-boy school, there are more males that care. . . . And, the downfalls for going to an all-boy school. Basic—, I guess, being around all boys for so long. (Lex, Pebbles School senior)

Alright let's say there's somebody that goes through the school that I'm not too close with, however, I'm acquainted with this person, if I see him outside in any type of trouble, I'll go and protect this person cause there's a brotherhood.⁵⁵ (Max, Pebbles School senior)

These examples demonstrate how definitions of masculinity are viewed differently among peers with respect to theories of weaknesses and a shared bond or brotherhood, where various interpretations and challenges to masculinity constructions dictate how today's males defines masculinity and brotherhood.

Below is another example of how these students make sense of themselves through the role models provided by adult males with whom they come in contact, supplemented by one field note entry as an example of how different perceptions of masculinity may have been shaped by unconscious emulation of staff members at the Pebbles School.

One student noted that being around mostly Black male teachers “gives role models” who can relate to “us kids” as Black males. These students mentioned that by communicating with older males they find that some teachers have similar pasts, gender identity constructions, and life experiences or have faced challenges as males. Samuel articulates,

And, like, African American male teachers. And they kind of give us, like their experience and their stories, the mistakes and, and the choices they made and how we can, like as men of color, how we can, you know, shy away from, from those, like from those bad decisions to kind of become better people. (Samuel, Pebbles School junior)

Below is a field note from March 6, 2013. This note describes a form of masculinity where middle school Black male students I co-tutored emulated my behavior and instruction as a Black male adult teacher. This note also illustrates how the lure of emulation/idealization

⁵⁵ This story mirrors the example that alumnus Jay spoke about, where a sense of brotherhood linked the young men because they attended the same school.

between the brotherhood of younger and older Black males is salient, given how many of my interviewees repeatedly mentioned the importance of having positive, responsible Black role models at the school whom they could look up to and a shared gender identity.

Within the field note, the theme of brotherhood is expanded to include adult males such as myself, who were working at the school as volunteers. My presence as a role model was equivalent to Black male teachers and paraprofessional staff who worked with students at the school. The collective brotherhood between the students and me was our shared gender and race, despite not being blood relatives.

As this chapter points out, some Black males feel pressured to express a sense of brotherhood with other Black males and as such, emulation helps to cement that bond. As a participant-researcher, I also recognize that I embodied a double consciousness as both a male and outsider while tutoring. I was aware of the importance of my presence to these students as an older Black male and the reality that they also saw me as a successful Black male who was in graduate school, pursuing an advanced degree.

Research on Black masculinity reveals that in order for Black male students to emulate success, they first must necessarily be exposed to successful people and given the opportunities to learn how to become successful themselves (Lewis & Toldson, 2013, p. 201).⁵⁶

Today I assisted Mrs. Goodman [pseudonym used] in a weekly tutorial session with 12 sixth and seventh graders (Black and Latino males) who were identified by their teachers as needing additional study skills to prepare for an upcoming English Language Arts exam. This teaching opportunity was the first time I actually co-led the reading exercise, and to be honest, I was anxious.

The boys were quite energetic. Ms. Goodman spent the first 35 minutes trying to quiet the class, which consisted of what initially appeared to be uncooperative young boys. All of the students were dressed in the requisite school attire. These young males varied in appearance. Some were small in stature. Others were larger. The room where the tutoring session took place was a vacant classroom. This classroom was filled with

⁵⁶ Lewis, C. W., & Toldson, I. A. (2013). *Black Male Teachers: Diversifying the United States' Teacher Workforce* (Vol. 1, pp. xiii-xv). Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

chair-desk combination seating for individual pupils. In the front of the room was a smart board and chalkboard. The room was full of various smells, primarily the smell of sweat because it was quite hot outside and many of these young males had a free period before the tutoring session. The lead teacher was a Black female.

What was interesting was that Ms. Goodman, the teacher, asked each boy to initially read aloud and then asked the class to respond to a series of questions, identifying what they thought was correct. The majority of the boys yelled out answers they thought were correct in a disruptive manner, creating a classroom that was quite chaotic.

When it was my turn to lead the set of tutorial activities, instead of creating a space where these young students would yell out answers, I took a poll by asking these young men to raise their hands to state what they thought the correct answers were. I had some of the unruly boys read a paragraph aloud from the assignment and had them take the lead in the form of asking their classmates to state what the correct answers were. The reason I adopted this approach was because having served as a volunteer tutor for a middle school in Boston, Massachusetts, while in college, I understood the importance my positive presence would have on these males, and past experiences as a volunteer tutor served to validate this fact.

To my surprise, one of the Black boys whom I had asked to read aloud a paragraph emulated my behavior and instruction, which included asking the class to participate in a poll by raising their hands, instead of yelling out the answer, as a way of indicating which answers they thought were correct. This modeling of behavior was done almost exactly as I had initially instructed and is an example of masculinity. In fact, I asked another Black male student to read aloud another paragraph and the same sort of emulation in my behavior took place. These young men did not emulate the lead Black female teacher.

I also observed that the boys in the class were easily distracted. They showed off their sense of masculinity by doing sit-ups on the floor, lifting books or exercising in various ways to show they were “strong,” showed their bravado by kicking and hitting each other, and threw items into the trash can as a way of pretending to be basketball players. These characteristics, through displayed mannerisms, equally support the literature that links masculinity to competitive interest in sports.

Volunteering provided a space for me to observe that education is not conducted exclusively through speech but also through body language and other forms of tone of voice. Through this activity I witnessed how masculinity and brotherhood converged as these young males emulated me as an instructor, and also how such an exercise defines different types of

relationships between males. By physically acting out their emulation of me as the male teacher, they mirrored my displayed mannerisms, which called for an orderly, attentive classroom. These expectations, coupled with the understanding that messages received from teachers rewarded them for being successful males, meant that they needed to graduate from high school and college. I am not discrediting the role of Black female lead teachers through this experience.

However, this experience does remind me of Terrell Strayhorn's (2008)⁵⁷ study on Black males:

Black males face other unique challenges that may compromise their success in school. Black male youth are often described using disparaging terms such as dysfunctional, lazy, uneducable, or dangerous (Parham and McDavis, 1987; Gibbs, 1988; Majors and Billson, 1992; Mincy, 1994). These terms reinforce negative stereotypes (Bailey and Moore 2004) and perpetuate the "invisibility" of Black men (Ellison 1952). Often such stereotypes shape the perceptions and expectations of educators. (Strayhorn, 2008, p. 1)

The problem mentioned above is exacerbated because they internalize negative beliefs that, in turn, become "self-threatening" and work to compromise their success (Steele, 1997). This particular point was also discussed in Chapter Two as a form of coping and academic detachment. Some respondents stated that they choose to emulate members of their peer groups because of the types of social relationships they had with peers.

Armed with this knowledge and the messages the school imparts about academic success, in addition to my double consciousness, I was aware of the educational impediments as described by Strayhorn along the lines of needing to "provide a profile of individuals whose educational and social fate is in jeopardy." I did not want to act as a stereotypical male teacher who had any preconceived notions of these young males' academic abilities, masculine traits, or lack thereof. My presence was equally as important as the Black female lead teacher's.

A review of the interview transcripts also revealed a quest by the interviewees to seek academic achievement, irrespective of academic differences in performance among their

⁵⁷ For complete review, see Strayhorn, T. L. (2008). Teacher Expectations and Urban Black Males' Success in School: Implications for Academic Leaders. *Academic Leadership Journal*, 6(2), 29-34.

brotherhood of Pebbles students. Despite different types of academic performance among students, their sense of academic diligence was clear. Interview transcripts revealed that the school personnel stressed academic achievement throughout the band of brothers who attended the school. The importance of success in academics was also evident in some of the examples that participants shared concerning the expectations of family members. For example, Max stated,

It's more like I have to do better than what my family did. My home is pretty weird now because my sister just moved back with us. My sister's older. She is 28. She has an eight-year-old. Then she got pregnant again. She puts me down all the time [by what she says to Max]. I asked her [one day] "What's the reason for putting me down? Like, you do want me to get out of high school, right?" Uh, she says, "Yeah, but it don't seem like you're doing the effort." But you can't put me down. Like I'm not saying that I have low self-esteem, but it's not helping. I know what I have to do. I know what is expected of me.

This example illustrates one strand of masculinity, which is that family members talk about the importance of being a responsible man by doing well academically. Family members play a major role in exerting the pressure these young men confront as students. Family members challenged these young men in the hope that they would not adopt criminal personas (or emulate) similar negative behaviors as their peers who were not at the school), another strand of masculinity cited in the literature review that would limit their professional opportunities. Eddy's statement best reflects this:

My uncle, sometime he thinks that I still hang around with them (gang members). But I tell him that I don't. And, when I go there, I just say hi to them. So he be pressurin' me like even, he don't want me to, uh, to go there at all. But I be explainin' to him like it's not, I know what I want in life. Nobody could change, nobody could change me or nobody could make me decide what I wanna do. It's my decision. So I know it's, uh, he's right about not hangin' around with them.

This reflects a conscious effort on the part of family members to prevent some of my interviewees from being involved in activities that could be considered criminal and to develop

and maintain a positive social status. As depicted below, not all communication exchanges with students were verbal. Some were nonverbal and took place between the researcher and one participant. The example that follows reflects the last shared example of the inclusivity of brotherhood.

This shared example of the interplay of masculinity between one student and myself took place at the Pebbles School on April 22, 2013. This example also represents a gendered-cultural exchange in the form of a nod, an affirmation of respect between the brotherhood of Black males, and one way Black males publicly recognize each other's presence. This exchange is typically done between Black males even if they do not know each other and is a signal to their visibility (as also defined by Ralph Ellison's work) and each other, regardless of social status, sexual orientation, or disability.

Today, I sat in and observed Eddy in class. The class comprised 10 juniors and seniors. Similar to the case of Franky, I had obtained the teacher's approval to be in the space, and had Eddy sign a consent form. Unlike Franky, Eddy asked for me to let him know what day I would observe him, so my presence was expected.

I also engaged in brief conversations with two students at the start and end of the class because they wanted to chitchat. What was very interesting about the visit to Eddy's classroom was not characteristic of what took place during the entire class, but what actually took place between us during our initial eye contact as Black males as he walked into the space, at the start of the class.

When Eddy entered the room, we made initial eye contact and gave each other an affirming nod of our heads, which was almost simultaneously followed by a verbal "s'up." I interpreted a nod of the head coupled with a "s'up" as a nonverbal and verbal visible exchange defining boyhood/manhood in the context of casual communication between Black men (not by all, however), even if they were previously unacquainted. Some people consider a nod to be a sign of respect, which denotes compassion and understanding between Black males, and as a silent acknowledgment that our presence, particularly as Black males, is recognized in a positive manner. A nod captures a variety of sentiments in a single momentary act, often a few seconds, and might not be noticed by onlookers. Such a nod is filled with individual meaning for the two passers-by.

This cultural exchange between Eddy and myself was pondered upon at length before developing this field note, including a review of some theories relating to the origin of the nod that took

place in my own family. I eventually came to recognize that in my own family, and possibly in the case of Eddy's family as well, these cues were observed by older Black men in the immediate and extended family as forms of cultural masculinity practices enacted through encounters with other Black men with whom they were unacquainted (usually in spaces where Blacks are in the minority). I, too, adopted this cultural practice with other Black males in public spaces.

This exchange is an unwritten, nonverbal code that serves as another form of Black masculinity that was enacted between Eddy and myself. We were technically still strangers to each other, only having peripheral information about each other from our initial meeting, and were attempting to define our rapport, but we used a form of silent recognition that privileges our respective identities, gender, and race in a public space.

The first half of this chapter described some of the inclusivity practices (or intricacies) of brotherhood between students and others (peers, family, and within schools related to academics) and between students and myself, with respect to our masculinity. Unfortunately, brotherhood can also exclude diverse masculinities, particularly those that are not heterosexual, through heterosexism (defined also through the guise of unchallenged guy codes). This exclusion is demonstrated by teasing between peers, questioning of sexuality by peers outside of the school, and through the all-minority male school's norms driven by heterosexism.

Students mentioned that their high school fostered mostly traditional definitions and discussions of masculinity. They had teachers who understood the importance of the diversity, but some of them did not publicly affirm all forms of masculinity such as homosexuality. This identity marker is not regularly discussed publicly at school wide events. Avoidance on the part of some Pebbles School personnel of discussions of homosexuality defined homosociality at the school.

Students themselves also displayed examples of how discussions on heterosexuality over homosexuality took place. For example, Franky stated: “Who wants to attend an all-boys school, especially as a teenager?” I deduced that Franky’s response reflects the perspective that all males are intrinsically heterosexual and that attendance at an all-male school would not be the first choice of a straight young adult male. (What Franky did not know was that some of his peers had in fact deliberately chosen to attend the Pebbles School, as revealed by a review of interview transcriptions.) He also mentioned that he did not disapprove of persons who were gay and in fact liked everyone.

Franky’s actions and attitudes seemed quite the opposite of what was stated to me during our interview, as he exhibited a homophobic stance when I observed him in class. His statements that he was not homophobic and accepted all students, regardless of their sexuality, differed from his stance toward a classmate he perceived to be gay. His public attitude represents the negation of brotherhood and the singling out of persons who are perceived to be gay.

During my classroom observations, Franky would periodically get up and move from one classmate to the next. When asked by the teacher why he was moving around, Franky stated, “I don’t want to be next to [points to a student in the class]. He is gay . . . looking at me kinda funny.” Immediately some members in the class started laughing at what appeared to be a joke. The student in question remained silent, and no one challenged Franky’s insensitive remark.

I saw one student’s silence and the other students’ laughter as an example of how peers can affect and challenge masculinity inside this all-male school. Franky’s announcement questioning his classmate’s sexual orientation meant that either he was not as accepting as he had claimed or he was purposely attempting to disrupt the class as a self-described clown. Being a class clown involves acting out a social role to meet the behavioral expectations of an audience

of peers, and this potentially includes a lack of interest in the role of being a hard-working student. Franky does also appear to be the class homophobe. Unfortunately, no definitive conclusion was possible, but observing Franky in class provided me with an opportunity to view his interpersonal skills, participation—or lack thereof—while in class, and some of his interactions with peers. Franky’s presence and verbal exchanges in a public space appear to be hyper-masculine, a strand of masculinity discussed in Chapter Two.

A review of transcripts also indicates that students expressed annoyance about being repeatedly asked whether they are gay by non-Pebbles School peers whose brotherhood they sought. These young men described being tired of having to define their sexual orientation because they attend an all-male school. The posing of such questions by outsiders seemed to be based partially, if not entirely, on their restrictive definitions of masculinity. One respondent challenged questions about their sexuality directly:

I mean you don’t have to be gay to go to an all-male school. I am not gay. It’s that in most cases and no disrespect towards the females but sometimes they distracted males. They throw us off in academic situations. So instead of focusin’ on your class work, we’ll be sittin’ there focusin’ on girls. They’re sittin’ right in front of you when you have work that needs to get done. (Kevin, Pebbles School senior)

The above example links sexuality as a form of masculinity to gender considered in conjunction with the complexities of attendance and a shared brotherhood at an all-male school. The example illustrates some of the personal stressors that young males, who may be of the same racial or ethnic brotherhood as their peers, face in defining their own sexuality and how others influence or impart judgment on these perceptions.

No student identified himself as being gay, bisexual, or questioning in my interviews. However, the homosociality within the group and at the school resulted in mostly limited discussions about male-to-female relationships and in messages about masculinity in general.

Students also developed different types of social selves to meet the different norms of masculinity, behavioral expectations, and imagined judgments of three completely different audiences: parents, peers, and some teachers.

There were pressures from peers and some teachers who worked with these students to conform to unwritten “guy codes.” For example, it was stated to me that they were to “act” masculine and speak in a particular way (e.g., instructions from others to deepen their voice), not only through how they displayed actions and behavior but also through their character and responsibilities such as graduating from high school.

Concluding Summary

Below are summaries of main points shared by interviewees in regard to their understanding and definitions of masculinity.

Students routinely defaulted to referring to peer-group thinking about their masculinity construction because they spent a lot of time with peers. Those who embodied multiple identities expressed that they did not fit into the traditional definition of what is perceived to be masculine.

No student identified himself as being gay in my interviews. Half of these students stated that when their peers learned they attended an all-male school they repeatedly were asked if they were gay. Some of these students represented challenges to their peers’ present definitions of masculinity constructions; such divergent opinions represent examples of how theories of masculinity are contestable among similar peer groups. The students also articulated a sense of academic diligence, which pointed to their astute understanding of the value of working hard and being a responsible male in school and in life.

The nonverbal exchange between a student and me also serves as an unwritten, nonverbal code describing another form of Black masculinity.

Chapter Six

Identity Markers Through Sexualities and Between Self-Perception and the Projection of Others

I've argued in earlier chapters that attention to complex Black masculinities has a long history and showed how current students were uncomfortable discussing in-depth various sexual/gender minority-related issues. Like their student counterparts, alumni (Brian, David, Jay, and Dion) offered diverse and thoughtful understandings of pejorative assumptions of sexuality/gender issues. These narratives, shared in this chapter, comprise heterosexual and homosexual alumni navigation of Black masculinity constructions, and how they redefined or reshaped their masculinities (or sexualities). These responses also explain different gender constructs inside and outside the Pebbles Schools and are shared through two-prong themes of masculinity through self-perception/projection of others and conflicts between males about manhood and sexualities.

Discussions with alumni uncovered commonalities in their lived experiences and are intentionally shared to explain masculinity ideologies. Approaching the sample of alumni was important because these conversations added more dimensions to identity and manhood not previously found in the current students, particularly around minority sexuality. These conversations also exposed complications between males in their understanding of masculinity and the gap of minority sexuality as defined by Ellison to describe invisibility of Black males, specifically through the lack of discussions about diversity of masculinity as it relates to homosexuality and my interview with the one-self identified gay male alumnus.

Alumni mentioned how others viewed them and how such perceptions impacted their self-identities as males. Specifically, they shared how the expectations and impressions from others positively or negatively define their personal fronts; such responses also support literature

on gender to uncover that “masculine identities are ongoing” (Hammond & Mattis, 2005; Marbley, 2003; McClure, 2006).

Examples shared by alumni illustrate how these Black males are targets of surveillance and also how their gender, body size, and behaviors are monitored inside and outside the home. This policing is based on prevalent gender norms or stereotypes. Such surveillance also affects the self-perceptions of how these males view themselves as minority males. In short, alumni echo a version of the identity construction as defined by Ellison and Du Bois, accounts of masculinity, and conflict between males.

Self-Perceptions of Masculinity and Conflicts Between Males

The questioning of sexualities and their effects on Black males’ self-perception was uncovered through a review of interview transcripts. For example, two alumni mentioned that their masculinity was questioned by outsiders who were not affiliated with the Pebbles School, based partly, if not entirely, on those outsiders’ restrictive definitions of masculinity. Their responses to their peers serve as counter-narratives. Many of the adults challenged the questioning of their sexuality head-on by stating, “Not everyone who attends an all-male school is gay.”

Although there was mention that their peers initially teased them, it was told to me that over the years these same peers noticed “no difference” in how adult respondents interacted with their peers. The responses traversed many personal and peer-imposed issues ranging from the complexities of sexual orientation (straight-gay binary) to social pressures to conform to gender norms.

Self-perceptions of masculinity. Explaining the different nuances of masculinity across similar groups of males may complicate explaining the differences in male gender expectations and the self-perception of masculinity. One interviewee admitted to some hesitation when he was a student to associate with peers who were perceived as being homosexual or displayed less traditional masculinity traits, which in turn shaped his self-perception of others. One reason for this avoidance may have to do with a heterosexual male protecting himself from being wrongfully mislabeled as gay because of a platonic association with someone who may openly identify as (or is suspected of) being gay, bisexual, or questioning.

A review of interview transcripts revealed that David admittedly acknowledged being homophobic but also mentioned that he can respect other people's sexual orientations provided they do not "bring that touchy, touchy towards me." His comments are supported by a view of the literature on masculinity concerning hypermasculinity, which refers to a male who eschews and even rejects softhearted emotions, blocks attempts by women and other males to appeal to his emotions, and exhibits sensation-seeking behavior that reinforces his vigor and/or desire for thrills (Scharrer, 2001).

Beyond male sexual orientation differences, members of adolescent male groups demonstrated some conformity across responses in the various forms of antipathy to those who are unlike them, such as athletes bullying non-athletes (according to Gustave Le Bon).⁵⁸ Analysis of transcriptions indicated different perspectives regarding the role that peer influence plays in shaping the self-perceptions of Black masculinity.

⁵⁸ Gustave Le Bon was an early explorer of this phenomenon in his 1895 publication *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*.

For example, of the four adults, two of them internalized the perception that showing emotion was a sign of weakness,⁵⁹ negated the exterior toughness, or challenged the ideal male construct, which is one criterion of maleness. The following two examples reflect such a finding:

You have to be stoic by any means necessary. And I think that's a lot of the issues with male culture. There's no room for self-expression. There's no room for emotional expression and I think it hinders our development as human beings period. (David)

Okay. So in my household, being a Black male, you are supposed to represent and exude masculinity, being strong, not really showing emotions, then crying was for wussies, you know and things like that. [Eventually,] we were expected to take care of our family, and be responsible adults. (Jay)

These responses reveal two points related to the theme of self-perceptions of masculinity in particular: how parental messages or peer influences insisted on traditional types of masculinity (e.g., being a provider, taking care of one's family, or being stoic; showing no emotion) and how such messages are imprinted in the minds of the adult males, as revealed by these reflective narratives.

The responses from participants revealed that burdens of masculinity come with gender, irrespective of age. In this case, the burdens were articulated in direct messages imparted by those who shaped these male's formative years or by the peers with whom they associated.

A review of interview transcripts also revealed that some internalized pressures come with trying to live up to masculinity expectations through role modeling behavior. Despite its positive effects with respect to masculinity (or less potentially positive fronts such as an external toughness), there were undue self-imposed pressures on the part of some of the alumni as they regularly attempted to serve as examples for other males. For instance, Jay's response represents his self-described pressures of role modeling,

⁵⁹ Hills Collins (2010) also looks at the dilemmas and negatives of "weakness" when she examines the harm that Black men do to themselves when they seek to occupy images and spaces dictated to them by American hegemonic masculinity.

There is a definite expectation of—yes what’s in my family and just from friends in general. I oftentimes tell my girlfriend, I’m tired. I get tired of being the example of a role model. Sometimes I want to trip and bug out and act crazy, because it is a lot of pressure just trying to maintain the knowledge that I have.

Thus, modeling behavior can have both positive and negative effects with respect to masculinity constructions on the person in question and on his self-consciousness. For example, the positive impact is that others looked up to that person in a respectful way. The converse is that an expectation to be a role model can create an equally overwhelming and unwanted burden of always having to serve as an example for others.

There were additional pressures with respect to masculinity constructions that got fashioned as conflicts in shared responses between males. These conflicts serve as additional expectations that may influence how males talk about masculinity between males and how some of their impressions and expectations of maleness is defined.

Conflicts between males about gender identities. Ralph Ellison notes that the Black man’s identity is in conflict between self-perception and the projection of others. The four adult males interviewed in this study also posed conflicts in opinions when describing to me theories about masculinity constructions, particularly when it came to issues of homosexuality. I identify two areas where alumni responses serve to fill in these gaps previously not mentioned in interviews with students: age of participants and sexualities.

Responses also revealed some conflict regarding sexuality, notably that the questioning of sexuality by others (whether or not a particular person is heterosexual, gay, or bisexual) took the form of peers teasing others peers who were perceived as being gay inside and outside of the school. Conversely, the one openly gay male who was interviewed in my study observed much of the questioning of perceived gay male classmates’ sexuality within the school and through types of heteronormative conversations.

My interview with alumnus Dion, who mentioned to me that he came out as gay to his classmates later in his high school tenure, represents an example of the types of conflicts between males with different viewpoints on masculinity as heterosexual and homosexual males. Although Dion mentioned that his coming out just happened and was not planned, I suspect that his observations concerning how his peers at the Pebbles School personally mistreated males perceived as being gay had an impact on his feelings about his own sexuality and when he chose to come out to his peers.

Dion's narrative and comments about masculinity expand this study's previous discussions of W.E.B. Du Bois's double consciousness theory and masculinity when looking at double consciousness through the lens of intersectionality. He was acutely aware of how others viewed him because of his three identity markers: male gender, sexual orientation as a gay male, and African American race; all factors shaped his present understandings of masculinity. For instance, Dion stated,

Yes, I experienced pressures. This was because people characterize my personality as really feminine. I had different interest[s] than males my age. Like I was always told that I needed to be more Black and/or be more of a man than I was at the time.

Interviews transcripts revealed that Dion was constantly on his guard as an adolescent with respect to how he should act in school or in public. These challenges should not be thought of as isolated experiences or as being removed from the past circumstances of African American males. However, attitudes about gender, ignorance, and fear are discussed more openly today than in previous generations because society nowadays is generally more accepting of differences in lifestyle and sexual orientation. Despite changes in attitudes and in acceptances of males who have multiple identities, conflicts still exist between heterosexual and homosexual males in how they may interact with each other.

Dion's experience confirms that different types of masculinity that do not mesh with the traditional hegemonic or ideal strand of maleness (Ward, 2005; Skelton, Francis, & Smulyan, 2006) get challenged by males or are not included in conversations about masculinity. Dion articulates that more conversations about sexual orientation should take place in educational spaces and between diverse males when discussing masculinity. This last point is important for understanding masculinity. It is linked to the part of the overarching theme, which is related to "sexualities" (in this case perceived heterosexuality as a form of the ideal male trope). Heterosexuality, in this case, explains the direct expectations of maleness that can also be linked to Du Bois's double consciousness theory, helping to explain how males may or may not interact with each other due to differences in their sexual orientation.

Responses from alumni revealed that they embodied more reflective accounts of their past experiences when they were students at the Pebbles School (compared to the student interviewees) and within the larger society they existed in, perhaps because of more life experience of maturity. Specifically, all adult males mentioned that there are strict societal expectations about gender norms, and any deviation from the ideal masculinity criterion in expressed performance may lead to the potential questioning of one's sexual orientation.

For example, Jay commented, "True to guy-code (later identified in a follow-up interview) teasing of [some] boys took place [at the Pebbles School] if they seemed different." Within this study, "guy codes" are defined as unchallenged, stereotypical male norms and behaviors that define nonsexual relationships between males. Such codes are supportive in their non-acceptance of males who waiver from such constraints. Within the context of gender norms, guy codes serve as another example of conflict about maleness between males because such expectations are mostly generalizations. Jay further complicated his theories of masculinity and

guy codes through his examples to explain differences between males and females while discussing anatomical differences, when he remarked,

Often times when you look at a lot of studies researchers say that sex is between your legs and genderism [sic] is between your ears. So we make up a lot of what masculinity, being a man is.

Jay's responses reveal a couple of things: masculinity is based partially on guy codes but also that such expectations are challenged individually or socially. I conclude that unchallenged definitions of masculinity, particularly those based on guy codes between males, are problems that should be re-examined in a broader context. These definitions of masculinity should extend beyond sexual organs. This last example, also expressed by Brian, further delineated another expectation of masculinity contrived by guy codes:

Well, me personally, I'll say no [pressure] because I choose a good set of friends to hang out with, guys that have the same mentality, some same goals as I do, [and] that don't believe in things [such] as violence unless it is necessary. And I'm not the type of person to just to put up a [personal] front just to have that tough-guy image.

Finally, examples of guy codes resonated through alumni observations of teachers and students at the Pebbles School and challenged types of masculine behavior. For example, Dion recounted a past communication exchange where he observed one of his high school peers being requested to speak in a lower octave to the adult male teacher. This unwritten rule of masculinity serves as an example of how messages of masculinity were transmitted from adult males to young males, specifically with respect to manner of speech and how to communicate with traditional adult males who embody strict gender norms. Dion stated,

I remember one [person]—well, a lot of people thought that he was very feminine because of the way he spoke. His voice was not like very deep and stuff, he had like a very high-pitched voice and he got into an argument with one of the class deans and the last thing that the dean said to him was what do you think, 'You better not approach me until you deepen your voice' [e.g., put bass in your voice] or something like that and I was just like, wow, that's not ok.

All of the alumni responses or recollections that centered on masculinity resulted in two takeaways and questions on my part concerning how these males constructed their masculinities, talk about gender, and resolve conflicts in ideology about masculinity.

First, alumni said that they responded to potentially false assumptions made by their peers about sexual orientation, particularly if those assumptions were based solely on stereotypes. The question that arises is why they felt the need to justify one's assumed sexual orientation simply because they attended an all-male school. This line of questioning and the perceived need to defend oneself against heterosexual people in these educational spaces led to another question posed by me: Why is there any questioning from persons outside of the Pebbles School?

Second, if a male student eventually develops questions about his sexual orientation at any all-male school, would there be any social support? Is an all-male school a supportive environment for gay males? Unfortunately, the interviews did not provide a conclusive answer, but the responses from the one openly gay male in the study, an alumnus, asserted that the environment was not an accepting one regarding homosexuality. Messages about masculinity could impact whether and when a student might choose to disclose his sexual orientation to his peers.

The latter point was shared by Dion and Jay and reflects evidence of factors that directly and indirectly shape masculinity ideologies, the Black male body, and sexualities in their narrative accounts about gender norms. However, some gender norms perpetuated hegemonic or traditional expectations of maleness. Such gender norms, however, varied in definition and expectation, depending on the types of relationships and expectations that define types of interpeer relationship.

I traverse now to a broader conversation about masculinity and sexuality to round out this chapter followed by a summary of concluding points. Within the next section, alumni reveal that society has a dual fascination with, and fear of, Black males. This love-hate relationship added complexity to the issue of masculinity with respect to the type of masculine identity constructions that are conceptualized and the personal impression of some Black males.

Sexualities and Body Identity Marker Complications

Interview transcripts align with the literature on gender and masculinity as reflections of love-hate. For example, Ladson-Billings (2011) spoke about such love-hate when explaining societal fascination with Black males centering on the Black male body as the point of discussion. Specifically, she states that

The “love” aspect of the relationship is exhibited in the way mainstream America embraces a variety of cultural forms that are either designed or dominated by Black males [such as sports]. The “hate” aspect of this dichotomy [is how] many view African American males as problems that society must find ways to eradicate—regularly defining them as the root cause of most problems in schools and society. (pp. 8–9)

This dichotomous love-hate relationship often induces two equally strong sentiments—fear and the need to control Black male bodies. In addition to this theory defined by Ladson-Billings, Jay commented about the love-hate relationship among his peers.

It was a love-hate relationship with males in high school. It’s pretty much all things are peaceful until you start talking about different [sorts of] masculinity in neighborhoods and how people react and act certain ways, but from a Pebbles School standpoint, I’m cool with everyone.

A love-hate relationship existed between the interviewees and their former peers inside and outside of the Pebbles School. Love-hate links to the overarching theme of sexualities because it depends on the identities the men adopted. Love-hate dictates the types of acceptance or teasing

they experience with peers. For example, Jay noted that the “love” and “hate” aspects of guy codes were apparent only when different versions of masculinity were discussed.

It was noted that some peers at the Pebbles School displayed a brotherly supportive heterosexual masculine love bond. However, that bond was quickly challenged and resulted in dislike for any boy at the Pebbles School who adopted an observable trait of masculinity that peers found unacceptable or different than what was displayed by the majority of the males.

The informal group membership between males at the Pebbles School posed a unique problem for Dion. He had to mask his identity as a gay male most of the time he was in high school. He never felt the sense of brotherhood his classmates claimed to experience; primarily because he feared rejection should they find out that he was gay.

Upon further analysis, this “bond” appears to denote a shared membership mentality, which meant students defined themselves as heterosexual males (or sought to act out personal fronts that made others think they were heterosexual) or risked being teased by peers. No evidence of overt violence took place against those males who were thought to be gay, but scars related to psychological teasing can be damaging.

What are the additional burdens of masculinity? Analysis of transcriptions revealed the policing of Black male bodies. All of the male interviewees agreed that Black males are specifically feared based on gender and size markers. This denotes how the Black male body and sexualities are another form of public surveillance. Such policing involves other adults in positions of authority that contribute to potential stereotypes of masculinity through law enforcement because of Black males’ race, gender, body size, and even style (e.g., clothes).

This is an example of (in)visibility. On one hand the latter complements Ralph’s Ellison’s work. On the other hand, it describes how a racist society repeatedly victimizes Black males

through its surveillance. Black males often become visible targets of arrest, but this renders them partially invisible based solely on a perceived criminality or body marker because they are viewed as a collective problem.

Routine surveillance of Black male bodies, not in sexual terms but rather in terms of perceived criminal and deviant forms of masculinity, is a frequent occurrence. Such surveillance is defined in this dissertation as policing of Black male bodies⁶⁰ and explains how Black males are watched in public spaces and “stopped and frisked”⁶¹ because they may fit a particular stereotypical image. The literature on stopping and frisking serves as a tangible example of how Black males are routinely mislabeled. The unfortunate reality is that many of the adult males expressed the experience as policing.

Responses from participants yielded important discoveries concerning how some of the large-stature Black males are viewed as potential threats. The policing of Black male bodies reinforces the theory that these men are violent or thugs based on material possessions such as clothing. Policing is a challenge to many Black males because it is based on stereotypes about the types of masculinity they embody (e.g., violent or suspicious) or their body size (height and/or weight demarcations), is linked to physical descriptors such as phenotype, and is based on false assumptions. This unfortunate reality is damaging to Black males’ identity constructions, because it warps Black male experiences and masculine appearances and makes many Black males feel fearful and suspicious.

⁶⁰ This is a play on words from Miller (2010) who writes in *Progressive Black Masculinities* about the realities of “Incarcerated Masculinities.” Miller explains one consequence of the construction of Black men as “unwanted traffic” (as defined by Calmore (2010), also in *Progressive Black Masculinities*, is the heavy policing and imprisonment of Black males.

⁶¹ According to uslegal.com (2013): The controversial practice of “*stop and frisk*” occurs when police temporarily detain somebody (historically Black and Latino males) and pat down their outer clothing because a police officer believes that said person is armed and dangerous.”

The responses below facilitate the understanding of how masculinity constructions such as body size and traditional gender norms serve as layers of maleness. These opinions reflect the challenging encounters some participants faced as adolescents and adults. For example, the following response is an example of how body size in particular, coupled with gender, shapes stereotypes of some Black males and repositions them as threatening. Steven argued:

Oh, yes. That [surveillance in the form of policing in public spaces] happens all the time. I mean, I'm big. There never been anything small about me. It's just over size alone I get, I get looks aside.

Thus size, gender, and racial markers coexist in some Black males' minds, pose additional problems concerning masculinity construction, and explain some of the fears that others express about them. This point about surveillance explains why many Black males, irrespective of size, are regularly policed or perceived as being potential masculinity threats based on factors such as size, attire, and other descriptive information.

This interpretation is supported in the literature on Masculinity Studies. Researchers (Franklin, 2004; Frost, 2003; Taub, Blinde & Greer, 1999) state that physical appearance can be misleading and can pigeonhole individuals in ways that either do not truly represent them or that result in heightened policing of their bodies and/or false assumptions about them. Such surveillance explains but does not excuse why these males are often misidentified as being suspicious or as a problem to be dealt with by the law.

Concluding Summary

Below is a summary of main points as defined by interviewees, and some concluding discussion points, about their understandings and definitions of masculinity. Discussions with alumni also uncovered some commonalities in their lived experiences and with their families

regarding what it means to be masculine and heterosexual. Analysis from a review of transcripts also led to a more complicated hypothesis and analysis.

First, the questioning of sexualities and its effects on the self-perception of Black males was uncovered through a review of interview transcripts. Responses also revealed some conflict between sexuality, notably the questioning of sexual orientation by others and whether or not a particular person is heterosexual, gay, or bisexual.

Second, responses revealed that alumni embodied more reflective accounts of their past experiences when they were students at the Pebbles School (compared to the student interviewees) and within the larger society they existed in, perhaps because of life experience or maturity.

Third, a review of interview transcripts revealed internalized pressures from trying to live up to masculinity expectations through role modeling behavior and the pressures of guy codes.

Fourth, all interviewees agreed that Black males are feared (based largely on stereotypes). Black males thus often become visible targets of arrest, but they are also invisible because they are viewed as a collective problem.

The responses in this dissertation should not be viewed as representing any sort of monolithic experience that is universally applicable to all Black males. However, individual experiences have multiple dimensions, and it was not always easy for this researcher to discern a collective participant conclusion concerning what it meant to be a Black male, because interviewee responses varied.

By broadening the study to older adult males, I found differences in understandings of masculinities between males, but I also saw the importance of how masculine identity growth is shaped through different schooling experiences. In part, this chapter also showed that some of

the adult male teachers at the Pebbles School were limited in their expectations of masculinity to some students through their dialogue exchanges. This point, coupled with the brotherly supportive heterosexual love bond as shared between males, was quickly challenged by some alumni and peers, resulting in dislike for any other male with observable traits of masculinity found to be unacceptable or different from his peers.

Chapter Seven

Discussion and Recommendations

This chapter shares the summaries of main findings, offer recommendations to educators who work with Black male students, the contributions this study makes to the field of Black Masculinity Studies, the study's limitation, and a concluding summary.

This research points to a long history of scholarship that discusses the nuances of Black masculinity within the United States and contestability in definitions across scholars. Within this study, masculinity constructions are centered on the problems of visibility and invisibility as discussed by African American scholar Ralph Ellison and the negotiation of complex dilemmas from within blackness and within a white-dominant society as discussed by African American scholar W.E.B Du Bois. This research shows how pervasive the problem of invisibility and visibility is within America and shares narratives of 12 students and older Black males who negotiated various pressures to define their gender identities from parents, peers and teachers. Interviewees shared their conformity and creativity in masculinity constructions negotiations, their understandings of pressures to define their masculinity as marginalized Black males, and their attempts to oppose those pressures through the use of new conceptions and classic conceptions of Black masculinity to overcome gender, racial and sexual orientation barriers. This research also explained some of the exclusions or silencing of diverse types of males, particularly with respects to males who embody multiple identities such as sexuality orientation.

Discussion and Summary of Main Findings

To further tease out many of the study's findings, a discussion of the overall key study's findings considered in conjunction with the main research questions is presented. I then describe

an unexpected additional question about Black masculinity. There was a multitude of developing attitudes and beliefs among younger and older Black males regarding gender and race and the effects on manhood. These attitudes explained how discussions of masculinity between peers and myself took place.

My interviewees were simultaneously aware of their responsibilities as individuals and as marginalized males. They understood the importance of role-modeling positive masculine behavior and providing support to others. Yet, a review of interview transcripts revealed internalized pressures from trying to live up to masculinity expectations through role modeling behavior.

Interviewees worked against the dominant model of masculinity constructions and exhibited a form of masculinity as respectability that was relational to others' expectations and as responsible Black males. There were varying identity constructions among the study participants that got adopted in various settings.

Responses revealed that alumni embodied more reflective accounts of their past experiences when they were students at the Pebbles School (compared to the student interviewees) and within the larger society they existed in, perhaps because of life experience or maturity.

Students routinely defaulted to referring to peer-group thinking about their masculinity construction because they spent a lot of time with peers. Those who embodied multiple identities expressed that they did not fit into the traditional definition of what is perceived to be masculine.

The questioning of sexualities and its effects on the self-perception of Black males was uncovered through a review of interview transcripts. Notably, hegemonic strands of masculinity are privileged between males over all other masculinities, especially effeminate or gay

masculinities. Specifically, interviews with alumni revealed personal reasons for adopting or resisting unspoken codes of manhood that routinely go unchallenged by other males. Shared responses were based on personal reasons such as fear of being teased or putting up personal fronts. Responses also revealed some conflict between sexuality, notably the questioning of sexual orientation by others and whether or not a particular person is heterosexual, gay, or bisexual.

Inclusivity and exclusivity of masculinity constructions through a shared brotherhood as Pebbles students and alumni were ambiguous. For example, some alumni and students displayed a brotherly, supportive, heterosexual, masculine love bond of other Pebbles students. However, that bond was quickly challenged, resulting in some teasing for any person who adopted an observable trait of masculinity that peers found unacceptable compared to what was displayed by the majority of the males.

Statements disclosed to me about the school culture offered both advantages and disadvantages; in one situation some teachers expressed conflicting messages to my interviewees on how to “act” masculine and speak in a particular way (e.g., instructions to deepen their voices was overheard by at least one alumnus).

A review of interview transcripts revealed few public discussions at the Pebbles School or in classrooms on homosexuality as masculinity or other diverse masculinities that do not support traditional definitions of maleness, thus silencing the experiences of these groups of males.

All interviewees agreed that Black males are feared (based largely on stereotypes) and offered unique solutions to such fear, through displayed academic interest not bravado. For example two of the interviewees stated that fear of the Black male body was based partly on

stereotyped societal constructions (such as body size, gender, and the all-too-common criminology persona found in broadcast communications). Thus, Black males are often visible targets of routine arrest by law enforcement but also are invisible because they are viewed as a collective threatening problem.

As a result of the abovementioned findings derived from the interviews, one unexpected question resonated. This two-pronged question—“Does Black masculinity create a false sense of reality in the Black community for what it means to be a Black man, and, if so, how?”—was pondered after collecting data and reflections of interview transcripts where respondents talked about concepts of role modeling behavior, developing personal fronts, hiding their sexual orientation for fear of being teased and challenging stereotypes based on gender, body size, and mannerisms.

Recommendations

Although the Pebbles School’s mission and creed support the creation of a supportive climate where students are developing into positive adults, this study found diversity of masculinity that challenged the school’s traditional gender norms and some ideas about hegemonic Black masculinity in its school culture. This work shows that there is variation and thoughtfulness behind masculinities of young men, rather than a singular construct. Analysis of interview transcripts also revealed that no one stereotype or school style that these students and alumni adopted or resisted was universal across males. Their shared narratives help us to think about the values in diverse masculinities (beyond the heterosexual male singular construct), coupled with beliefs in practice through teaching, open forums at the school, and through adult and peer actions in the form of communication exchanges.

Below are several recommendations partially assembled by myself and partially assembled by the interviewees that can help Black Masculinity scholars and educators who work with Black males, potentially better work with, and better understand the nuances of young Black males inside and outside of educational spaces.

Recommendation One: Improve institutional practices. First, the Pebbles School and all schools should regularly provide examples of the diversity of Black masculinities represented in its curricula. Doing so explains how Black male and female teachers can apply W.E.B. Du Bois's double consciousness theory to how others view them as teachers. They will also have more inclusive, educational, and diverse examples of Black males who are not stereotypically defined as a threat in society. Consequently, these young Black male students will be able to also adopt a double consciousness to see their own diversity reflected.

My study revealed that some teachers and staff at the school introduce scholarship written by men in their respective classes, and the school is adorned with influential leaders through its residential day theme houses. However, what wasn't clear from these anecdotes was the diversity of such scholarship. It is important to use examples and course materials to which a wide range of students can relate. Equally important is the use of examples and course materials that expose students to ideas and values that may differ from their own personal ideas or self-defined masculinity, or that relate to their unique background experiences.

Research has shown that culturally relevant teaching⁶² is one approach to reaching all students through varied curricula that they can relate to more holistically, irrespective of unique identity markers. Having conversations that allow Black males to work through others'

⁶² Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings writes that teachers are required to display cultural competence or skill at teaching in a cross-cultural or multicultural setting, thus helping students relate to course content based on his or her cultural context.

stereotypical views about them as being threatening, provides these young men with cultural capital to confront these issues creatively.

Second, the Pebbles School and all schools could also encourage the regular practice of publicly discussing topics that affirm different masculinities in their institutional and pedagogical practices. For example, one alumnus recommended that such discussions should take place at required school or Parent Teacher Association meetings at Pebbles School. Expanding this recommendation to all single-gender schools that enroll Black males would require such discussions about the diversity of masculinities within schools to become public practice.

This expansion would lead to more inclusion of masculinity conversations that do not unintentionally privilege traditional thinking and definitions about maleness. As referenced previously, findings revealed very few public conversations about other diverse masculinities that are not completely representative of these groups of males. Through revamping of institutional initiatives and practices, new types of masculinity conversations can take place, and as equal validation of all males who may embody multiple identities.

Recommendation Two: Encourage more inclusivity in school practices. All single-gender schools should have or encourage through its instructional practices a gay⁶³-straight alliance organization or a similar umbrella organization. Such organization could have a campaign against name-calling or teasing of students who represent multiple identities such as being gay, bi-sexual or intersex. As shared previously, findings revealed few public discussions take place at in school/classrooms on homosexuality.

⁶³ Disclaimer: I personally did not know whether there were any openly gay teachers or administrators at the Pebbles School, because their narratives were not a part of this research. There was no recognized student-staff group of this nature at the time of my visit. According to: <http://www.gsanetwork.org/get-involved/start-gsa>, a gay-straight alliance is a student-run club, typically in a high school or middle school, which provides a safe place for students to meet, support each other, talk about issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, and work to end homophobia and transphobia. There are three typical functions of a GSA club: *Support, Social, and Activist*.

Such an organization could be student-staff run, recognizing both identity and academic diversity of students. Without the support of students and respected administrators/teachers, there will continue to isolated incidents of discrimination, harassment and teasing that go unnoticed thus silencing the experiences of these groups whose masculinity has been rendered partially invisible in the current school discussions. Concomitant with their respective missions, having such an organization that celebrates the diversity of its student bodies and serve to forestall inequalities or injustices as well as stereotypes of Black males, will lead to an environment more inclusive of such diversity.

By establishing this school supported organization, the Pebbles School and others will set themselves apart from peer schools, through such initiatives that encourage and support such masculine diversity, in positive ways.

One alumnus shared the following remarks about this idea.

I would love for something like that to happen at the Pebbles School, the Pebbles School does need something like that even if it makes a lot of people uncomfortable. But I feel like the Pebbles Schools kind of has to ease into that like a transition.

Another alumnus commented:

I do agree with you. I think that if there was like an openly gay staff member and a straight staff member that co-lead this group with students who are also gay and straight, I think that it might work. But I'm just thinking about my experience, something like that won't work unless like the teachers, staff member, is like really respected. In terms of like everybody loves that staff member and like, they were like, open to the idea of being this role model.

Recommendation Three: Incorporate the use of affinity groups. If not the present case, the Pebbles School and all schools could invite to campus different affinity groups to host workshops or campus activities on topics of masculinity throughout the academic year. Such groups can be charged with finding creative ways or making recommendations to the school to address many of the problems related to masculinity as shared by my interviewees. To recap,

some of these include peer and family pressures, the dual pressures of masculinity and respectability or masculine as a perceived problem, but also finding solutions to reduce some social-cultural stressors. These stressors get manifested through role modeling positive masculine behaviors.

Schools could consider partnering with different local colleges or universities to bring in student interns as part of their class requirements or invite professors who they may have personal associations with at no cost. Bringing in an outside group that is not affiliated directly with the school could help in the facilitation of these types of discussions and could slowly aide in creating a school culture that affirms all masculine diversity through its institutional, pedagogical, and curricula discussions.

Recommendation Four: Publicize diverse Black masculinities. The last change in institutional practices encourages all teachers and administrators to have in their office, without drawing attention to, a diversity of males represented in print and media. This research has shown that young Black males are bombarded by media images of limited masculinity representations of their diversity. Schools similar to the Pebbles School could help to counter such media restrictions by having equally visible, positive representations of males through their masculinity and professions in their office spaces for male students to see as alternative representative examples. As a society, we should be more inclusive of all groups, so we can minimize prejudice/stereotypes of Black males, as well as more overt forms of racism and ignorance.

Contributions to the Field of Black Masculinity Studies

There is little comprehensive data regarding the narratives of Black males themselves who are asked to speak about masculinity constructions from the perspective of attending all-male Black secondary schools. The narratives shared within this dissertation add to this gap in literature. The narratives also speak to the personal definitions the young men have of masculinity and of themselves; how they measure and compare themselves with the predominant constructions of masculinity through the messages they share; how these males self-define themselves; and how they understand and/or challenge the perceptions that others have of them. These factors speak to the various nuances in experiences of young Black males and add to the research on Black Masculinity Studies.

Concluding Summary

To study posits a two-pronged thesis on masculinity. One, young Black males at all male schools need to negotiate their identities. Two, the school environment may sometimes privilege hegemonic standards of masculinity over other masculinity constructions. Various negotiations and modes of resistance and/or adoption of masculinity identity constructions were recognized between the young men interviewed in this study. Thus, visibility of Black males can be achieved but there are social forces of racism and classism always operating to obscure the kinds of masculine visibilities and identities that young men are creating and inhabiting.

The experiences of many of these young men also ran counter to the often-cited issue of African American males whose masculinity is often defined as violent. These young men instead crafted their own definitions of masculinity, albeit their confidence in acceptance of identity was not initially evident when some of these men were situated at the Pebbles School.

These experiences compare to similar cases of other Black males who attend all male schools. This research indicated that masculinity constructions and experiences of Black males are not monolithic experiences and not generalizable to all Black males (young and old), but rather refer only to a small subset of males who attend all male schools. Nonetheless, the gender identity issue is paramount in the lives of young men, specifically, between males, their relationships with each other, family, adult male teachers, and the media combine to influence how young Black men view themselves and think of other males.

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Appendix A

Principal Endorsement Letter



University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Department of Educational Policy, Organization and Leadership

1310 South Sixth Street, Champaign, Illinois 61820

Phone: 217-333-2446 Fax: 217-244-7064

PRINCIPAL ENDORSEMENT LETTER TO PARENTS

Dear Pebbles School Parents,

We are seeking your help with the attached dissertation study being conducted at the Pebbles School by Tony Laing, PhD Candidate at the University of Illinois-Urbana, Champaign. In this study, your child will be asked specific questions about what he thinks about gender issues, the high school environment, the school climate, and how he communicates with others or interact with peers. Each meeting with your child will last between 30-60 minutes on Wednesdays (exact time TBA) and no more than 1 hour for a focus group meeting with all students who comprise the study.

In this study, Mr. Laing will also observe, audiotape, and interview 10-12 students, while taking notes during interviews or during classroom sessions (note in class field observations will not be audio taped). All notes/transcriptions will be coded to generate themes, ensuring accuracy and confidentiality of each student participant and the school. We ask that you please review the attached assent form and sign and return back to the Pebbles School (attention Tony Laing) within two days from date of receipt should you be willing to allow your child to participate in this dissertation study. Final results of the study will be made available to the staff at the Pebbles School.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation. Please feel free to contact Tony Laing directly with questions or comments via cell at 973.350.0722 or via email at laing2@illinois.edu.

Best Regards,

Principal Name

Appendix B

Research and Ancillary Questions



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RESEARCH/ ANCILLARY QUESTIONS

RQ1: How do Black youth define their masculinity?

Ancillary questions

1. Tell me about what it means to be a Black boy and Black man?
2. Tell me what you like and dislike in yourself as a Black male?
3. Have you experience stereotypes? Please tell me about this experience by giving examples
4. Do you think people are afraid of Black males? If not, what are your thoughts about this questioning?
5. Do you participate in sports? If so, which sports? What attracted you to this sport?

RQ2: How do Black males experience and understand masculinity in all-male schools?

Ancillary questions

1. Tell me why did you decide to attend an all-male school?
2. What role did your parent(s) play in your decision to attend all-male schools?
3. If you had the choice to attend an all-boys school again, would you? Why or why not?
4. Are there any negative of attending an all-boys school?
5. Are there any the benefits of attending an all-boys school?

RQ3: How do the perceptions of peers and adults impact their definition of masculinity?

Ancillary questions

1. If I was to ask your friends or family to describe you, what do you think they would say or how do you think they view you?
2. What do your friends who do not attend an all-male school think about your attending an all-boys school?
3. Tell me about what you think your teachers think about you in the classroom?

RQ4: What strands of masculinity do Black males adopt in and outside of school settings?

Ancillary questions

1. Do you feel pressure from peers and/or family to behave a certain way in school as a young Black male?
2. Is there pressure for you to act a certain way (e.g. are you expected to act tough, always be confident while in or outside of school?)
3. How important are academics to you? Do you do well academically in school?
4. How is your relationship with other Black males? Do you get along with other Black males? If so, why do you think so; if not, what are some reasons?

Appendix C

Recruitment Assent and Consent Forms



University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Department of Educational Policy, Organization and Leadership

1310 South Sixth Street, Champaign, Illinois 61820

Phone: 217-333-2446 Fax: 217-244-7064

RECRUITMENT ASSENT/CONSENT LETTERS

(Student Interview)

CONSENT LETTER (18 years of age)

You have been invited to participate in a research project that will ask questions related to gender identity and perceptions of gender. This project will be conducted by Tony Laing, a graduate student from the Department of Educational Policy Studies, at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, during school hours. Dr. Cris Mayo, of this department, will also be overseeing this research project. Tony Laing will ask you specific questions about what you think about gender issues, your school experiences, the school climate, and ask questions related to how you communicate with others or interact with peers. Depending on your experience, some of these questions may be upsetting like, “How do others view you because you attend an all-male school?”

In this project, Tony Laing will observe, audiotape, and interview student. These notes/transcriptions will be coded to ensure accuracy and confidentiality. Exceptions to the confidentiality rule will be made and reported to the appropriate authorities in the case of child abuse or other reportable serious violations to students. Additionally, meetings with students will take place on campus at the Pebbles School or at a designated location. While taking notes during interviews or during in classrooms sessions, Tony Laing’s observations will last one hour per class session, 60 minutes per individual interview, and one hour for 2-3 focus groups (depending on in-class times, these times can be adjusted). These recorded notes will also be from observations and will not involve engaging in conversations with students during class sessions, only during individual and group interviews. Note that there may be circumstances where students may be asked to leave the interview or not allowed to continue their participation in the study. No videotapes will be used during these sessions. No audiotapes will be used during observations. Your parents/guardians will not be interviewed.

One of the minor risks of this study lies with the school’s reputation, as potentially expressed through the narratives of students or faculty, leading to negative feelings by said individuals. For example, if the research study was to uncover that the school intentionally or

unintentionally regulate behavior or restricts opportunities for student self-expression of boys, this could potentially hinder each students' feeling about the school and the types of responses they give. There is also inherent confidentially risk involved with focus groups, as a result, the researcher will ask students to respect the privacy of the sessions and each other student, but can't absolutely guarantee that one or more students wont relate 'who said what' afterwards. Students will be reminded about this possibility prior to each meeting. At anytime you are asked a question that is upsetting or that you do not want to answer, you are welcome to say so and to stop the interview.

The decision to participate, decline, or withdraw from participation will have no effect on students' grades at the Pebble School, status at the Pebbles School, or future relations with faculty, staff, or students at the University of Illinois. All names, including the name of all persons involved, the school's name, and district name will also be changed. The results of this study will be used for a dissertation, and may also be used as a scholarly report, a journal article, a book, or a conference presentation.

Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You may view a copy of the research results, after this project is completed. If you have any questions about this research project, please contact Tony Laing by telephone at (973) 350-0722 or by e-mail at laing2@illinois.edu. You can also reach Dr. Cris Mayo via email at cmayo@illinois.edu.

Sincerely,
Tony Laing

I have read and understand the above information and voluntarily agree to participate in the research project described above. I have been given a copy of this form.

- yes no I agree to voluntarily be interviewed by Tony Laing in at least 2 interviews and at least 2 focus groups. These interviews will last for an hour.
- yes no I agree to have Tony Laing observe me while in my class or during in school extracurricular activities.
- yes no I agree to be audiotaped during interviews. I understand these audiotapes are for transcription purposes only.
- yes no I want to be contacted to review summaries of my participation in this study. I realize there is some risk involved in with a follow up conversation. Tony Laing will take all necessary steps to ensure my confidentiality. Tony Laing will not be responsible should the conversation be heard by a third-party unknowingly.



University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Department of Educational Policy, Organization and Leadership
1310 South Sixth Street, Champaign, Illinois 61820
Phone: 217-333-2446 Fax: 217-244-7064

(Parent Interview Approval)
CONSENT LETTER

Your child has been invited to participate in a research project that will ask questions related to gender identity and perceptions of gender. This project will be conducted by Tony Laing, a graduate student from the Department of Educational Policy Studies, at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, during school hours. Dr. Cris Mayo, of this department, will also be overseeing this research project. Tony Laing will ask your child specific questions about what he thinks about gender issues, the high school environment, the school climate, and also ask questions related to how he communicates with others or interacts with peers. Depending on your child's experience, some of these questions may be upsetting like, "How do others view them because they attend an all-male school?"

In this project, Tony Laing will observe, audiotape, and interview students, while taking notes for observational purposes during classroom sessions and during individual or focus groups (note that in class field observations will not be audio taped). These notes/transcriptions will be coded to ensure accuracy and confidentiality. Exceptions to the confidentiality rule will be made and reported to the appropriate authorities in the case of child abuse or other reportable serious violations to students. Observations will last one hour per student during in class session (depending on in-class times, these times can be adjusted), 60 minutes per individual interview and one hour per 2-3 focus group meetings. These recorded notes will be from observations and will not involve engaging in conversations with students during in class sessions, only during individual and group interviews. No videotapes will be used during these sessions.

The risks involved in participation in this study are a minor risk to the reputation of the Pebbles School, not to the students, administrators or teachers. For example, if the research study was to uncover that the school intentionally or unintentionally regulate behavior or restricts opportunities for student self-expression of boys, this could potentially hinder each students' feeling about the school and the types of responses they give. There is also inherent confidentiality risk involved with focus groups, as a result, the researcher will ask students to respect the privacy of the sessions and each other student, but can't absolutely guarantee that one or more group members wont relate 'who said what' afterwards. Students will be reminded about this possibility prior to each meeting. At anytime you are asked a question that is upsetting or that you do not want to answer, you are welcome to say so and to stop the interview.

The decision to also permit your child to participate in this study, decline, or withdraw from participation in this study will have no effect his status at the Pebbles School, or future relations with faculty, staff, or students at the University of Illinois. To minimize the possibility

of any serious damage caused by this research, all names, including the name of all persons involved, the school's name, and district name will be changed. The results of this study will be used for a dissertation, and may also be used as a scholarly report, a journal article, a book, or a conference presentation. Your child's participation in this study is completely voluntary. Your child will also be able view a copy of the research results after this project is completed.

If you have any questions about this research project, please contact Tony Laing by telephone at (973) 350-0722 or by e-mail at laing2@illinois.edu. You can also reach Dr. Cris Mayo via email at cmayo@illinois.edu.

Sincerely,

Tony Laing

I have read and understand the above information and voluntarily agree to have my child participate in the research project described above. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

yes no I agree to have my child be interviewed by Tony Laing in at least 2 interviews and at least 2 focus groups. These interviews will be one hour.

yes no I agree to have my child's conversation with Tony Laing audiotaped for the purposes of clarity

yes no I agree to have my child observed during classes and/or during
During in class scheduled school extracurricular activities

yes no I agree to have my child communicate via phone with Tony Laing for any follow up sessions that seek clarity on answers provided by my child related to this study.

yes no I agree to have my child contacted by Tony Laing at the conclusion of the study to share findings with my child.



University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Department of Educational Policy, Organization and Leadership

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(Student Interview)

ASSENT LETTER (under 18 years of age)

You have been invited to participate in a research project that will ask questions related to gender identity and perceptions of gender. This project will be conducted by Tony Laing, a graduate student from the Department of Educational Policy Studies, at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, during school hours. Dr. Cris Mayo, of this department, will also be overseeing this research project. Tony Laing will ask you specific questions about what you think about gender issues, your school experiences, the school climate, and ask questions related to how you communicate with others or interact with peers. Depending on your experience, some of these questions may be upsetting like, “How do others view you because you attend an all-male school?”

In this project, Tony Laing will observe, audiotape, and interview student. These notes/transcriptions will be coded to ensure accuracy and confidentiality. Exceptions to the confidentiality rule will be made and reported to the appropriate authorities in the case of child abuse or other reportable serious violations to students. Additionally, meetings with students will take place on campus at the Pebbles School or at a designated location. While taking notes during interviews or during in classrooms sessions, Tony Laing’s observations will last one hour per class session (depending on in-class times, these times can be adjusted), 60 minutes per individual interview, and one hour for 2-3 focus groups. These recorded notes will also be from observations and will not involve engaging in conversations with students during class sessions, only during individual and group interviews. Note that there may be circumstances where students may be asked to leave the interview or not allowed to continue their participation in the study. No videotapes will be used during these sessions. No audiotapes will be used during observations. Your parents/guardians will not be interviewed.

One of the minor risks of this study lies with the school’s reputation, as potentially expressed through the narratives of students or faculty, leading to negative feelings by said individuals. For example, if the research study was to uncover that the school intentionally or unintentionally regulate behavior or restricts opportunities for student self-expression of boys, this could potentially hinder each students’ feeling about the school and the types of responses they give. There is also inherent confidentiality risk involved with focus groups, as a result, the researcher will ask students to respect the privacy of the sessions and each other student, but can’t absolutely guarantee that one or more students won’t relate ‘who said what’ afterwards. Students will be reminded about this possibility prior to each meeting. At anytime you are asked

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Tony Laing

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