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RACE, GENDER, AND HIGH SCHOOL EXPERIENCE--EXPLORING INTERSECTING
FACTORS INFLUENCING BLACK MALES' EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AND
COLLEGE ASPIRATION

by

EMMIE COCHRAN-JACKSON

Under the Direction of Dr. Heying Jenny Zhan

ABSTRACT

The underrepresentation of Black males in college and university campuses has continued to raise alarming questions for parents, teachers, and policy makers. In this study I utilized Intersectionality theory to examine Black males' experiences in high schools in order to gain an understanding of the factors that impact their educational attainment and subsequent development of college aspiration. Based on 30 qualitative interviews with 10th, 11th, and 12th graders and 30 interviews with their parents, this study examined familial and social contexts in relations to Black male students' educational attainment. Four key findings revealed that, 1) young Black men had to deal with gender-specific racial discrimination on a daily basis by counteracting the prevalent negative images against Black males in mainstream American society, 2) peer pressure exerted positive influence in middle to high SES neighborhoods and schools; but showed negative impact on their educational attainment and college aspiration in

low SES neighborhoods and substandard schools, 3) female headed households in particular did not necessarily have negative effects on Black male students' educational attainment, and 4) private schools appeared to have better climates than public schools in inspiring Black males to higher levels of academic achievement and college aspiration. Policy recommendations were proposed to stimulate Black male students' greater interest in college attendance and educational achievement.

INDEX WORDS: Black male high school students, Educational attainment, Family, SES, College aspiration

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EMMIE COCHRAN-JACKSON

A Dissertation in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the College of Arts and Sciences

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2014

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2014

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DEDICATION

This body of work is dedicated to the loving memory of my mother, Mrs. Emmie Jones Cochran, and to Mrs. Claudette Simon, two very extraordinarily wonderful women.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Being the mother of a large, young energetic, and happy Black male, my engagement with this topic dates back as far as 2002, when my son Stephen began attending pre-K in a small, elementary school, located in a suburban, White community in northeast Atlanta. Our family lived in an established Black middle class neighborhood, but the academic performance of the local school was dismal, according to the Georgia State Report Card. After a failed attempt at enrolling Stephen in the pre-K program of The Children’s School, a diverse private school located in mid-town Atlanta, we ended up moving to a White suburban neighborhood in one of the “best” school districts of DeKalb County Schools.

From 2002 – 2009, I observed many inconsistencies in teacher interest, involvement, encouragement, and engagement for Stephen, and other Black boys in general. I saw how the stay at home moms used their political power to rally for better grades and favoritism from the teachers and administrators for their children. Those mothers were mostly White, upper-middle class, and better able to spend inordinate amounts of time at the school volunteering in classrooms and after-school organizations.

A frustrated and retiring principal once told me that he thought that the parents were far too engaged in the academic and social affairs of their sons and daughters. He intimated that sometimes things went a little too far with mothers talking to teachers about their children’s grades, and trying to change them. While Stephen attended Pine Peak Elementary, I watched parents as they wielded their influence with the principals and teachers, and made sure that certain students benefitted from their parental influence. Most of the Black parents worked full time jobs although there were a few such as myself, who worked part time and volunteered as

much as possible in an attempt to advocate for my child. However, Black parents never quite had the same social capital with the teachers and administrators to create advantage for our children, or to fully help them navigate through the political system that was inherently ingrained in DeKalb County Schools.

Over the years, as I volunteered in organizations and classrooms, I witnessed several Black male students being ignored, scapegoated, singled out and blamed for troubled situations with various teachers and administrators at Fernleaf, Pine Peak, and Lanier Middle Schools. One example was when my son at age nine got into serious trouble for blowing the wrapper from a straw across the table in the lunchroom. The school counselor called me in for a conference away from work. I could hardly believe that she was serious. This was only one illustration of how Black male students were frequently villainized, and often singled out for an incidence that White males were given passes for, in keeping with the trope of “boys will be boys.”

There were few if any parental advocates for Black male students. In thinking about what my son and other young Black men had gone through, I questioned the effect of these micro-political aggressions on Black males in particular. In reflecting back over Stephen’ experiences at the elementary, middle and high school levels, the small numbers of Black males who graduated from high school made sense. Those who managed to attend and graduate from college were astounding.

I was a well-educated parent with a master’s degree in education that eventually put my career aside and worked part time to be available for my son when I witnessed the many questionable situations that he was subjected to. I don’t regret the experiences we have had in both public and private school environments because it fueled this investigation and research. What I have witnessed over the past twelve years gave me the motivation to return to graduate

school to conduct Ph.D. level research on Black males and more importantly the education systems that instruct them. Attending graduate classes for the past nine years, I sat in graduate level classrooms in a University that graduates the highest number of Blacks in the nation, yet had very few Black males in attendance. When I began to teach at the undergraduate level, my classes had some Black males enrolled, but were overwhelmingly filled with females from a wide variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds.

From my perspective much is needed to help Black parents understand the danger that some Black males are in, with regard to student-teacher, and student-administrator relationships and how those factors discourage Black males from developing college aspiration. Ferguson (1994) describes these relationships in detail and others also argue about the presence of a public school to prison pipeline (Raible and Irizarry, 2010; Smith 2009) that derail Black males from educational environments and place them squarely in the correctional system.

It is because of those observations that I sought to do this research. I hope that my findings will inform Black parents to somehow strengthen their resolve to help our Black sons. I pray that this work will deepen their commitment, and communication with Black males about learning in general and their specific and collective experiences in school settings. My wish is that Black parents will work together to fight harder for them, and to communicate by asking more questions about the experiences of their sons, grandsons, and nephews, and more importantly about their dreams, desires and feelings. I also hope that this research will motivate teachers and administrators to confront the grave issues of mistrust, unfair treatment, and gender and racial prejudices that occur, explicitly or implicitly, within the walls of education environments. I hope that I might ignite some interest from political arenas on the county, city, state and federal levels to examine the challenges facing Black males in educational settings, and

mandate proactive solutions. And finally, I hope that grassroots organizations will work together to provide support and legal sanctions to aide Black males and their parents in getting a college education, and helping them to create economic sustainability.

An age-old African proverb says it takes a village to raise a child. From my perspective this is true. It is just so unfortunate that many young Black males are village-less. And among those who can make a political and economic difference, not enough seem to care. To help Black males find aspiration for higher education, we may need to build this village of Black parents, politicians, public and private school teachers and administrators, who can and will work together to nurture, encourage, and inspire the many fragile and youthful spirits in growth and learning.

Chapter 1 introduces the problem of Black males' low college graduation rates. The relevant literature is reviewed in Chapter 2 to reveal prior studies that address and inform this social problem. In Chapter 3, I introduce the research methodology. Chapters 4, and 5 present the findings based on interviews with thirty young Black male high school students. Chapter 6 discusses the findings from the analysis of the parent and student transcripts, and Chapter 7 discusses the major findings and conclusions.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

American college and university enrollment numbers and predictions are dismal for Black males (Kleinfeld 2009a). According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (U.S. Department of Education 2010) in 2009, 1,601,368 Baccalaureate degrees were conferred, with males receiving 685,382 or 43%. Of all conferred bachelor's degrees, Black males received only 53,473, or 7.8%, to White males' 503,356, or 73.4%. Females received 915,986 undergraduate degrees, or 57%, with White females receiving 641,256 or 70%, and Black females 103,142, or

11.3%. In each category, Black males trailed considerably behind in the number of Bachelor's degrees conferred in 2009, creating problems for the Black community and society at large. One reason for this gap is because females, who are considered as far more focused on career advancement, are choosing careers that require college education (Blackhurst and Auger 2008). As the gender gap in college graduation rates widens for Black males, it threatens to further exacerbate their social and economic inequality (Cross 2000; Slater 1994; Smith and Fleming 2006).

Black males who fail to obtain a college education face a multitude of problems that are both economic and social; they lead all other racial and gender groups in incarceration rates, unemployment rates, and those who live in urban impoverished communities (Alexander 2010; Wilson 1999). Receiving a college education promotes economic development and reduces social inequality (Chen and DesJardins 2010); it enhances the possibility of upward mobility, leads to an increase in income, the likelihood that one will vote, and a decreased likelihood to become involved in the criminal justice system (Kleinfeld 2009a). Accordingly, huge numbers of uneducated Black males are subjected to vast reductions in career options that are related to their social mobility.

Black male absence from colleges and university classrooms is visible across national, federal, state and county levels. In elementary, middle-, and high schools, it is often reported that Black male students lead all others in academic underachievement, earning failing grades, and receiving excessive suspension and expulsions. They are frequently overrepresented in special education classes and high school dropout rates, failing to complete homework, and characterized by poor student-teacher relationships (Buchmann 2009; Griffin et al. 2010; Hughes and Bonner II 2006; Kleinfeld 2006; Kleinfeld 2009a; Uwah 2008). However, the sociology of

education research has yet to design a model to fully investigate this social problem. There are no models that seek to understand Black males in education settings, or the motivation that they have for learning. In reviewing the literature, and considering the gaping holes in the sociology of education discourse, it is evident that race and gender create unique obstacles for Black males across all levels of their school environments (Dance 2002; Ferguson 2000; Isom 2007). A closer examination is needed to understand the issues surrounding the complex intersections of race, gender and (socio economic status) SES to gain a greater understanding of Black male students and their underrepresentation at the college level.

Though the current sociology of education literature acknowledges the underachievement of all male students across international school levels, it falls short in addressing the potential causes in Black male students. Much of the literature summarily dismisses Black male academic underperformance as a collective cultural deficiency (Fordham and Ogbu 1986; Ogbu 1978; 1991), and blame is placed on Black males or their parents rather than focusing on the racialized and gendered barriers that they face (Martino et al. 2009; Roscigno 2000). Related to the gender issues that confront males in school settings, their identity is constructed and judged by physical strength, power and domination and not by an interest in learning. And while the literature does point to the feminization of education to explain White males' gendered rejection of learning (Kimmel 1987; MacLeod 1982; Strober and Lanford 1986), there is a huge gap in the literature that fails to juxtapose the Intersectionality of race, gender, family and SES, and learning for Black males. This study hopes to extend the sociology of education literature by increasing the understanding and awareness of the unique factors that impact the development of college aspiration for Black male high school students.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The initial purpose of this research was to investigate the relationship between masculinity and college aspiration among African American high school students. I intended to examine how masculinity was developed in family settings, how it varied by family SES, and how it influenced the development of college aspiration for Black male high school students. Specifically, I sought to investigate how masculinity informed the ideals, behaviors, classroom experiences and social interactions of Black male high school tenth and eleventh graders. At the outset, the goal was to address three specific research questions in semi-structured interviews.

In asking question one, “*What is considered masculine?*” I sought to uncover the conceptualization of masculinity and to explore the relevance of education in masculine ideals (for instance, is it considered important for boys to earn good grades, complete homework and work hard in school). Responses to the second research question were to increase the understanding of how masculine behaviors influenced college aspirations for Black male high school students; the following questions were to be asked: 1) “*What specific masculine behaviors do Black male tenth and eleventh school graders engage in?*” 2) “*How do those masculine behaviors influence college aspiration?*” The final question was to investigate how masculine ideals and behaviors varied by family contexts and how masculine ideals and behaviors developed according to family SES, family structure, and the values that Black parents held for education.

During the interview phase, it became quite apparent that there were other critical factors that influenced the development of college aspiration for Black male high school students. This necessitated that changes be made to allow the research findings to emerge. Strauss and Corbin (1998) discussed this and stated that qualitative researchers had to remain flexible throughout the

research process, because of the complexity of phenomena. When I began, I felt certain that masculinity comprised a large part of the influence on Black males' educational attainment and their interest in attending college. However, the conversations with both the students and their parents made me realize that several other factors were at work, which impacted the educational attainment of Black males. I implemented a change in the research paradigm in consideration of an analysis for those factors. What resulted was an exploratory study that, 1) analyzed Black male high school students' experiences, 2) examined the attitudes Black males held about learning, their value for doing well in school, and problems they had with teachers, 3) investigated public and private school environments to assess how they stimulated learning and enhanced or discouraged the development of college aspiration, and 4) studied the family contexts, such as family structure and resources, that influenced Black males' desires to attend college. Subsequently, the research questions that emerged out of the data were, a) *What is it like to be Black and male?* b) *How are Black males' perceptions related to educational attainment and college aspiration?*, and c) *What are the factors that influence Black male students' educational attainment and their development of college aspiration?*

In summary, this research sought to unpack several important factors that influenced and piqued the interest of Black males' higher learning. It opened a much-needed dialogue that allowed and encouraged them to freely describe their perspectives and discuss the variables that made them interested in going to college.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

There is a great deal of discussion about Black males in the mainstream sociological literature, but very few research studies directly question Black male high school students' about their educational experiences and school environments. To increase the understanding of how

public and private schools impact educational attainment and college aspiration, what is needed is a lens that focuses on the complexities of the overlapping categories of race, gender, SES, and family in educational settings. The social location of Black male high school students is comprised of a constellation of multiple social factors intersecting each other. These include the intersections of race, gender, SES, family contexts, and school environments. Unique circumstances and conditions are created for Black males, when teachers, students, and administrators stereotype and label them based on prevalent racialized and gendered images. Firsthand accounts of educational experiences are needed to reveal the covert and nuanced power that school environments have on learning and the long lasting effects they can produce in Black males' lives.

This study applied Intersectionality in the study of Black males. Intersectionality is frequently used to investigate the oppression of women and other minorities. It is seldom used to investigate the underrepresentation of Black males in the higher education environments, despite their marginalized social status. This body of work has the potential to enrich this theoretical framework by extending its application to race, gender, SES, and college aspiration in the case of Black male students. The hope is to stimulate discussion among parents, teachers, administrators, policymakers, and students, and to foster the development of policies, conditions and opportunities that are geared toward increasing the numbers of African American males in U.S. colleges and universities.

CHAPTER 2:

LITERATURE REVIEW

The path to college begins with educational attainment for all students. In review of the factors that influence Black male college underrepresentation, the sociology of education literature contends that gender, race and family SES heavily impact college enrollment numbers (Buchmann 2009; Freeman 1997; Harris and Harper 2008; Hughes and Bonner 2006; Jacob 2002; Nettles et al. 1986). Relative to gender, it has been noted that females are pursuing and attending college in greater numbers than males (Blackhurst and Auger 2008). Regarding race, Black male students are frequently characterized by significant academic and social challenges (Majors and Billson 1992; Moore 2008), which label them as “in-crises” (Hughes and Bonner 2006; Noguera 1997). Black female students, on the other hand, receive more familial support, encouragement, and college preparation by their parents (Smith and Fleming 2006). Others contend that there are several key factors that influence college attainment for African American male students, including psychological and structural processes, and negative social interactions (Carter 2002).

Before launching into the study, a comprehensive review of the relevant literature is important for understanding the research that has already been conducted in related fields. This literature review encompasses 4 bodies of literature: 1) sociology of education, 2) sociology of gender in relation to education, 3) sociology of family in relation to education, and 4) school environments in relation to education. As the goal of the study is to understand the factors that inspired or deterred Black male high school students to attend college, the literature review begins with a general examination of college aspiration models.

SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION

College and Educational Aspiration

To understand how college aspiration is developed, traditional student development and college choice models focus on the decision-making process students engage in regarding college selection (Freeman 1999; Stewart 2008). Lucas and Beresford (2009) state that the Wisconsin Social-Psychological Model of Status Attainment is a broad theory that explains educational aspiration, occupational expectations, and outcomes as by-products of parental socio-demographic characteristics. They contend that when parents, teachers, and peers collectively encourage children academically, their aspirations increase which cultivates educational attainment.

College aspiration is defined as the interest and desire to attend college (Nichols et al. 2010). It is influenced by family, race, gender, and socioeconomic status, and includes student attitudes, behaviors and expectations (Caldwell 2003; Hossler and Stage 1992; Stewart 2008). Many contend that college aspiration is developmental, that is, based on systematic, incremental and deliberate steps taken by students and their parents (Chapman 1981; Jackson 1982, Hossler and Gallagher 1987; Litten 1982). Jackson's (1982) model contends that the academic experiences that students engage in are strong predictors of college aspiration. Hossler and Gallagher (1987) conceptualized the process of college aspiration in a three-phase model. They contend that a student's ability to choose college, or predisposition to higher learning is developed over a student's academic trajectory, beginning in lower grades and continuing throughout high school (Hossler and Gallagher 1987).

Bateman and Hossler's (1996) research replicated the study of Hossler and Gallagher (1987). They administered surveys to 2,930 students drawn from 21 high schools in Indiana who

stated that they planned to pursue education past high school. The study sought to assess family income, parental levels of education, student academic ability, parental encouragement, and involvement in high school activities variables as positive influencers of post-secondary plans. Although, the schools were selected to ensure “the sample represented adequate numbers of students of color, all levels of SES and rural and urban schools,” there were 1,358 White females, and 1,348 White males, 121 Black females, and 103 Black males (1996: 4). The analysis revealed that parental expectations had the strongest correlation with student plans for college but the effect was stronger for White students than for Black students. Mothers’ educational level and students’ abilities had the next strongest significant impact for Black males.

Bateman and Hossler (1996) concluded that their model well explained development of college aspiration for White students but that the variables selected in their model did not show how college aspiration developed for African American males. The sampling was skewed and the number of White students was ten times that of the Blacks; in comparison to the number of White students, this study lacked the adequate number of Black students in order to be conclusive. A model is needed that succinctly addresses college aspiration for Black students. It is also important to increase the number of Black male students in mainstream studies in order to effectively investigate college aspiration for this population.

Understanding college aspiration for African American male students is much more complex than the student development or college choice models have been able to explain. Several models have tried to generalize the development of college aspiration, but have failed because of too small numbers of Black males used in the samples (Hossler and Gallagher 1987; Litten 1982). Traditional models fail to take both historical and contemporary systems of

oppression and marginalization into account that plague Black males' school settings. The specification of a more relevant model is needed as suggested by this study.

Gender and Education -- Boy Crises in Education

The boy crises literature addresses the underperformance of male students across racial, SES, and academic levels. An indicator of the boy crises is males' consistently low scores on school achievement tests, or more specifically below basic skill performance levels in reading and writing (Kleinfeld 2009b). As compared to girls, boys earn most of the barely passing and failing grades in school, complete less homework, and constitute the majority of the disciplinary and behavioral problems (Wiens 2006). Also, eighty percent of all children diagnosed with learning disabilities are boys, and many outnumber their female classmates on Ritalin or similar drugs used to help them stay focused in schools (Blackhurst and Auger 2008; Jacob 2002; Kleinfeld 2006). Kleinfeld (2009a) argues that although males are falling dangerously behind females, and notes that there is a growing lack of concern for this problem.

Reichert and Kuriloff (2004) delineate three perspectives in the dominant boy crises discourse: 1) the "poor boy" as the victim of schools wherein teachers promote feminist ideals and practices that privilege girls' interests over boys', 2) "failing schools/failing boys" view that holds contemporary education pedagogy as problematic for boys' learning, and, 3) an essentialist's view that "boys will be boys," which explains boys' inability to learn because of conflicts between outmoded pedagogy and males' biological dispositions. Each perspective will be discussed in greater detail.

In the first perspective, Reichert and Kuriloff (2004) connect boys' failing performance to social anxiety that is inherent in school environments for boys. Social anxiety comes about because of progress, praise and recognition of the achievements of girls, and the pressures boys

face in traditional school environments that perpetuate rigid male roles that involve “dress codes, gendered rituals, values and vortices of boys’ versus girls’ subjects, discipline systems and sports practices,” (2004: 545). The authors argue that when social anxiety is reduced, boys’ academic performance is enhanced because of a heightened sense of self.

Watts et al. (2005) extend the first perspective by suggesting that gender role conflicts contribute to the boy crises. These authors question the relationship between adolescent males’ academic, social and emotional problems and gender role conflicts created by restrictive, rigid, and sexist gender roles that are imposed on males. Gender role conflict, or sex role strain, is the psychological state that occurs when a person adopts and engages in established socialized gender roles that result in negative consequences for them or others around them (Garnets & Pleck 1979; O’Neil et al. 1986). O’Neil et al. (1986) contend that males experience gender role conflicts because of the fear of femininity, or being characterized as having feminine values, attitudes or behaviors, homophobia, and the restriction of their emotions. Learning, working hard, and striving for academic success are often judged as feminine characteristics, by certain students (Salamone 2005; Wiens 2006); it seems as though they may produce gender role conflicts for some high school students, since self-image is so important at this stage.

In the second perspective, Reichert and Kuriloff (2004) state that boys develop their self-concept in the “looking glass of gendered academic and social curricula of schools,” which they feel often is anxiety producing (2004: 544). They argue that the routines, practices and schools’ perspectives of males reproduce generations of stereotypical identities for boys, which puts pressure on them to behave in gender specific ways. Schools delineate specific male-appropriate practices of behavior and dress that establish and reinforce appropriate norms of socialization and curriculum for males (Reichert and Kuriloff 2004: 545). The authors state that schools

develop rigid practices that “inscribe socially acceptable patterns of masculinity into school relationships,” which restrict the development of boys and ties them to prescribed roles (Reichert and Kuriloff 2004: 545). This is an illustration of hidden agendas in schools; how they perpetuate gendered social roles for students and keep them tied to pre-set expectations and rigid social scripts. Boys become whom they think others perceive them to be, according to the authors. The authors conclude that if the school favors boys’ biography, class, ethnicity, or family they are able to meet the approval of the school and receive support and recognition.

Connell (1989) comments on the second perspective, and contends that schools and teachers are second most influential to parents and families in gender role socialization that may contribute to the boy crises. He posits that teachers encourage rigid social interactions for boys and describes schools as “masculinity-making devices,” (1989: 291), because they enforce stiffer gendered roles, and engage in institutional practices of gender such as segregating the sexes in elementary schools. He argues that students are forced to compete with each other for grades and tracks in secondary schools, which leads to a stratification of masculinities. Boys who earn good grades are well liked by their teachers, which may result in written letters of recommendation and increased access to higher education, but they may lose the support or respect of other students. Boys who fail classes and underachieve academically must find alternate sources of attention and power. For some, sporting abilities, physical aggression, and sexual conquests are used to gain peer respect in academic settings.

Recent research has revealed that public school disciplinary policies and procedures often feed a pipeline to prison. They contend that school discipline especially for African American males is becoming increasingly punitive and normalizes the expectation of incarceration (Fowler 2011; Raible 2010; Smith 2009). Although teachers and administrators punish boys for getting

into trouble, those who commit rebellious acts sometimes gain the respect of their classmates because non-compliant behaviors are often judged masculine, and place them at the top of an invisible hierarchy. Others agree that the gendered construction of masculine ideals and behaviors create problems that require males to shut down their emotions and idealize toughness (Pollack 1998). Gurian and Stevens (2005) postulate that emotions are related to boys' learning, and the way they feel also has an impact on their ability to take in and process information.

The third perspective of Reichert and Kuriloff (2004) contends that constricted generalizations of boys can minimize the importance of an implied contradiction between education and masculinity. The "boys will be boys" perspective assumes a narrowly focused posture of the nature of young White males and what is good for them, not realizing the harm that this inflicts on them and their perception of education (Gilbert and Gilbert 1998). As opposed to reading, getting good grades and learning, masculine behaviors are characterized by action and adventure and mass marketed to boys via video games, physical activities, and sports; some boys fail to embrace academics and learning because of a lack of widespread acceptance or appeal. They often feel conflicted with the messages they receive about acceptable "male-related" behavior and classroom rules that require them to be still, quiet and docile while listening to teachers who are most likely female (Gilbert and Gilbert 1998).

Related to both the second and third perspective, others agree that schools often fail boys by minimizing their educational needs and refusing to investigate significant differences in learning styles as compared to girls (Hoff Sommers 2000). This community of thought emphasizes the need for schools to re-examine the issues that impact males in their learning (Wiens 2006). The "boys will be boys" trope teaches boys to embrace rough and tumble behavior. When in school settings, the teaching modalities of public and private instruction

require boys to act passively, which often conflicts with the gender role socialization they receive, and also their physiological constitution (Gurian 2002; Gurian and Henley 2001). More research is needed to focus on gender differences in learning for males; schools will best serve the needs of boys through a closer examination of their brain structure and function, and a resulting curriculum that addresses such (Gurian and Stevens 2005; Kindlon and Thompson 2000). Boys are further disadvantaged in school settings because they mature later than their female counterparts (Gurian and Stevens 2005; Kindlon and Thompson 2000). When race is introduced in learning environments, and added to the conflicting messages given to males about proper behavior in schools it creates unique social interactions for Black males. This topic follows in the next section.

Race and Education

The boy crises literature presents compelling arguments that may explain the absence of Black males from college environments. Black males are more likely than others to be identified as learning disabled and placed into special education classes. They are criticized as underperforming when compared to other males in math and science courses, noted as missing from advanced placement classrooms, and also frequently below average grade level on standardized tests (Gurian & Stevens 2005). In problematizing the issue of education and gender for Black males, the sociology of education literature reveals that the issues confronting Black male high school students are much more complex and confounding than their classmates. Several micro political aggressions are discussed which may contribute to, or exacerbate the problems Black males face in education settings.

Stereotyping

Although race plays a significant role in education environments where Black males learn, it is rarely openly discussed. In school environments, race has a strong role in shaping teachers', administrators' and fellow students' relationships between Black, White and Hispanic staff and faculty members, and students, but it is rarely a topic discussed in class (Delpit 2006; Lewis 2006; Proweller 1999). This creates tense social interactions because of damaging stereotypes that are often constructed about African American male students (Delpit 2006). They inherit these stereotypes from those of older Black males, described as absentee, deadbeat, or irresponsible fathers (Essed 1991: 31). And although teachers, administrators and students, commonly hold these stereotypes, they are rarely examined, discussed, or challenged for the sake of students who are affected by them.

Moore III et al. (2008) contends that in academic environments, classrooms are plagued with biases and stereotypes about Black males that lead to various forms of discrimination. He asserts that because of complex relationships with counselors and teachers, Black students rarely receive substantive support (Moore III et al. 2008). Marable (1993) contends that Black males are unable to thwart the negative stereotypes held by gatekeepers. Conditions such as these lead to complex reactions from Black male students that may impact their development of college aspiration.

Dance (2002) interviewed 70 Black middle and junior high school males of African, Afro-Caribbean or Latino-Caribbean descent. They were between the ages of 12-16, and lived in urban and inner city neighborhoods in metropolitan Cambridge, Massachusetts. The two sample groups attended a supplemental after-school program for at-risk youths in the Cambridge and Boston public school systems. Dance's observations and interviews led to the conclusions that,

“African American [male] students are constantly confronted with stereotypes regarding their race [and gender] and respond in a number of ways; some are able to better cope with stereotypes better than others, while others resist the stereotypes,” (Dance 2002: 5).

Students who received empathy and genuine concern from their teachers, those adopted by surrogate fathers, who shadowed with and/or were mentored by male role models, were better able to cope with the conditions they faced in their schools and neighborhoods. She contends that although all may be characterized as at risk of failing in school, urban Black males who have academic aspirations and have no external support often devise and maintain survival strategies that are characterized as deviant because they are in opposition to the values of mainstream institutions (Dance 2002). One reaction to classroom biases and negative typecasting is stereotype threat.

Stereotype threat is defined as being at risk of conforming to a stereotype that exists regarding one’s group of origin (Steele 1995). When minority students are viewed through a lens of negative stereotypes, they fear engaging in some activity that will confirm the stereotype that others hold of their group of origin (Lewis 2006). Steele (1999) argues that stereotype threat restricts the academic success for African American students, because they are always conscious about their minority status and often cannot escape the negative stereotypes. Howard’s work (2003) reveals that when minority students are aware of negative stereotypes about their group membership, their performance is judged as inferior even if they work hard to combat them. He agrees that for African American males, negative stereotypes are constructed in early grades and follow them into middle-, and high school. The stereotypes may lead to further labeling by teachers and administrators, restricting their school success and deterring their ability to thrive academically.

Many Black male students are perceived negatively and often “pushed out of schools for engaging in behaviors that are considered anti-academic, i.e., strutting, rapping, woofing, playing the dozens, using slang, wearing hats or expressive clothes, and wearing pants with loosened belts,” (Majors and Billson 1992: 91). Foster (1974) states that Black males are often suspended for behaviors that are judged as negative, rude, arrogant, intimidating, sexually provocative, and threatening that are not conducive to learning. Foster concludes that teachers must be able to relate to their students, and must not be intimidated by them.

The perspectives that students, teachers, and administrators form about Black males are often shaped by external influences. In a study of fifth, sixth, and seventh grade African American children enrolled in a community based after school program located in an a lower/working class African American community, Isom (2007) investigated meaning making among Black elementary and middle school students, and what they thought of Black boys. She discovered that much of their perspectives came about as a result of external images they see in “pop culture, the news, advertisements, in their schools and communities,” (2007: 420). Masculinity as a characteristic was positively associated with Black male students, and was defined largely by the specific extracurricular activities they engaged in. Black fifth, sixth, and seventh graders had a tremendous amount of respect and admiration for their male classmates who excelled in basketball.

Isom’s (2007) study confirms that Black students also stereotype Black male students. Her research shows one example of how Black males are socially constructed through the words that Black fifth, sixth, and seventh graders used to describe them. Words including “sports,” “ghetto,” and “badness” were used by Black girls, and both Black girls and boys described other Black male students as “bad,” “dumb,” “fooling around,” “not paying attention,” “not doing

their school work,” and then as “blaming the teacher,” (2007: 419). Neither Black boys nor Black girls judged Black males as interested in academic matters. Further, Isom stated that the boys in the study concluded that social relationships with other students (both male and female) were “arenas for ‘the show’ of maleness,” (2007: 412). When asked what it meant to be a male, several of the responses given by male interviewees included “funny,” “sports,” “rough,” “like to fight a lot,” “strong,” and “think they cool,” (2007: 411). The common references to maleness in this study included physicality and sports.

Labeling

Black boys are often labeled early on by teachers and administrators who fail to realize the impact that stereotyping has on them (Ferguson 2000). Labels, which describe them as violent, underachieving, and as troublemaking often negatively influence the perceptions and interactions with future teachers or administrators. Some theorists argue that labeling occurs more frequently and more punitively for Black boys than for Whites (Davis 2001; Ferguson 2000; Lewis 2006). Ferguson (2000) recalls a conversation she had with a teacher who described a ten-year old boy as “shrouded in baggy pants and a hooded sweatshirt,” and stated, “That one has a jail-cell with his name on it,” (2000: 1). Negative labeling was also used to describe detention areas comprised mostly of minority students. Teachers and administrators called them “The Dungeon,” and “The Jailhouse,” (Ferguson 2000).

Lewis (2006) argues that African American males have negative reputations in most academic settings and are largely misunderstood because of variability in communication styles and cultural clashes. She noted how teachers responded to the interactions of children that were categorized as disruptive because of the race of the child. In her research, she noted that Black boys as a collective group had the reputation of being “notorious,” (2006: 74), were probably the

most “misunderstood,” (2006: 68), and that teachers were generally “fearful of African American boys,” (2006: 75). Black parents were concerned about the treatment of their children. They often struggled with the schools’ and teachers’ strong narratives that their children were to blame, and especially Black male students (2006: 75). This is problematic when considering Reichert and Kuriloff’s (2004) conception of male identity adoption. If the most popular and socially accepted roles are athletes and class disrupters, many boys will step into those roles to gain the acceptance of other students. Several questions arise, how do Black males feel about the labels that are often placed on them by teachers and administrators? How do they impact their learning? How do the labels affect their future interest in and access to college? This study attempts to shed some light on these questions from the perspectives of the Black male high school students.

The Social Contexts of Racism

Lewis (2006) states that race shapes both interactions and understandings, and has a significant impact on students’ schooling experiences. Through numerous accounts of unfair treatment of Black males and the excessive disciplinary measures given to African American compared to White boys in elementary school settings, Lewis’ research shows how race influences classroom patterns and how salient it is in the daily experiences of male students of color. Some argue that cultural clashes between teachers’ styles of instruction and students’ cultures create misunderstandings that perpetuate social inequality (Lareau and Horvat 1999; Lewis 2006). Ladson-Billings’ (1994) concurs and argues that communication conflicts between teachers and students usually create problems for Black students, who are judged as “disruptive,” as some communicate their needs through behavior.

Lewis' (2006) research concludes that in a school where Black students comprised less than 35% of the population, 90% of all students referred for disciplinary action were Black males (2006: 67). White males who exhibited similar disruptive behaviors received less punitive responses than African American males (Lewis 2006). When asked about the possible source of this, two teachers discussed cultural differences between students and teachers, and that teachers should take some time to better understand other cultures. They explained that the behaviors and tones of students' voices may not be intentionally disrespectful, but may be characteristic and reflective of their familial culture. As an example, a Spanish teacher explains that culturally, his people are loud. They express themselves with loud voices, which may disturb others, and contrary to what others may believe, are not meant to disrupt social settings. According to the teacher, this is one illustration of his family's cultural habitus. He stated that he has observed that in African American homes, there is a certain tone that is used that is comfortable for them (2006: 68). He suggests that teachers make home visits to understand their students better.

Teachers are not willing or prepared to deal with cultural differences that exist between their own cultural backgrounds, or those historically maintained by the schools in which they teach. In Lewis' (2006) interviews, another teacher states that the teaching staff was all White, that the total organization of school was authoritarian, and children were forced to "take orders" all day long. This teacher felt as though it was crucial for White teachers to "confront their own Whiteness, the limits of their understanding of others, their fears of being called racist, and the racist notions that inevitably pervade their understandings," in order to adequately serve minority children. (2006: 85). She also interviewed parents that recounted that, "Black males were the targets of negative attention at school," (2006: 59). Lewis' conclusions assert an incompatibility between the school curriculums, political processes of teachers and administrators and non-

White students. Hidden agendas often teach racist lessons regarding societal hierarchies that perpetuate inequality among Black males. She emphasizes the need for more research to examine the ways in which schools reproduce racial and gender categories in order to fully understand and deliver educational needs to African American children.

Dance's research (2002) reveals how many low-income, urban African American males hold on to dreams of doing well in school despite the rejection they receive, and then descend into academic failure. As they mature into their teen years, they succumb to the pressures of mounting rejection. Some fall prey to street life and assume identities of toughness, which Dance argues is not restricted to Blacks. Youths from other races and ethnicities are attracted to assuming masculine postures of toughness. African American males are particularly at risk of being attracted to this identity because of the harsh stereotyping that precedes them in schooling environments that potentially sentence them to failure before they are given an opportunity to succeed.

Also of concern are the collective effects of gendered racism through controlling images that are available to young Black males (Collins 1990; 2004; Harvey Wingfield 2011; Wiens 2006; Wingfield 2007). Essed (1991) defines gendered racism as specific oppression that is structured by racist and ethnic perceptions of gender roles. Images of Black males are portrayed in primetime television and screenplays as prisoners, aspiring gangsters, and misogynists, that increase fear based racism and stereotyping among Whites and other racial and ethnic groups who view them (Boyd-Franklin and Franklin 2000). Black males are rarely featured as teachers, professors, or intellectuals. Considering the vast amount of television hours that young Black children watch, it is important to question the impact that controlling images may have on the

desirability and relevance of college for young Black males (Prothrow-Stith and Toussaint 2000).

The literature on race and education clearly describes a unique variety of the boy crises for Black males and how it may develop in school environments as a result of several external influences. It links labeling and stereotyping to cultural clashes between teachers and student mismatches, but does not articulate the consequences it creates for Black males in regard to shortages in college enrollments. A much deeper investigation is needed to focus on the combined and interactional effects that race, gender, and SES create for Black males in education, and why the outcomes for Black boys often ambush them from college campuses. The boy crises literature does not discuss the challenges that Black male high school students face. Because Black males are collectively depicted as hyper-masculine and non-academic, conceptualizations such as these often bias the treatment they receive in school and society in general (Davis 2001; Lesko 2000; Moore III 2006).

Coping Strategies and Mechanisms

The sociology of education literature marginally discusses the impact of socially constructed images for Black males. A few theorists reveal how Black males frequently construct and activate coping mechanisms in response to the marginalized masculinity status they hold in school settings. These strategies include the previously discussed cool pose, which may contribute to the emotional restrictiveness of Black males (Majors and Billson 1992; O'Neil 1986), and reveals how some embrace street culture and illegal activities in order to survive the “racial, gendered, classed, regional, and educational oppression confronting them” (Apple 2002; Dance 2002; Martino et al. 2009: 14).

Majors and Billson (1992) elaborate on “cool masculinity” as a strategy that many Black males adopt. They state that because many Black males have lacked consistent access to the same means as Whites to fulfill their dreams and success, they use what is referred to as “cool pose” to maintain their unique identity. Cool pose is developed and adopted by Black males in relation to the social conditions that have marginalized and oppressed them. It is a complex persona that allows them to enhance their social competence, pride, dignity, self-esteem, and respect.

As an attitudinal marker and behavior, being cool “expresses bitterness, anger, and distrust toward the dominant society for many years of hostile mistreatment and discrimination; it is a creative strategy devised by African American male to counter the negative forces in their lives,” (Majors and Billson 1992: 105). It is described as a “ritual that is developed beginning in early adolescence that is comprised of an “array of masks, acts, and facades.”” It consists of scripts, physical posturing, impression management, and carefully crafted performances that deliver a single, critical message of pride, strength, and control. Many Black males work hard to manage the impression that they communicate to others by using the cool pose. The “performance aspect of the cool pose means that as a Black performer leaves his house in the morning, he is “on” and cannot ever completely relax; even when he is offstage, a Black male may feel that he is onstage,”” (Majors and Billson 1992: 4).

The cool pose “enhances the Black man’s pride and character and paves a pathway for expressiveness in sports, entertainment, and cultural activities including rapping and dance. It provides him with confidence, a sense of control, inner strength, balance, stability, and helps him deal with the closed doors and negatives images of himself that he must confront on a daily

basis. It may be one of the richest untapped areas for understanding Black male behavior today,” (Majors and Billson 1992: 9).

Isom (2007) agrees that the definition of Black males as aggressive, physical beings is an extension of the slavery characterization of them as only capable of exerting physical labor or as sexual and physical beings. Her work postulates the differences in the available images for Black males, as compared to Whites, including the pervasiveness of Black male athletes in the media. One such illustration is in the manner in which professional Black basketball players sell tennis shoes and other commercial products that dominate the airwaves. She criticizes them as offering powerful and convincing albeit very limited roles for African American males. Young Blacks, both male and female see these images and construct their meaning of [Black] maleness. These meanings are often internalized to define Black male identity. In her study of seventy-five youth attending an urban after school program, two of the reoccurring themes for young Black males were heightened emphasis on both *physicality* and *sports*.

In some instances, as a reaction to societal and classroom rejection, some Black males move themselves away from academic subjects and closer to activities that center on rebelliousness and violence (Dance 2002; Mancini 1981). The messages regarding what it means to be male, through imagery, labeling and stereotyping may have strongly negative effects on Black males' high school experiences, and their ability to develop college aspiration. It is important to note the potential impact they may have on Black male students in developing interest in attending college. A discussion of the potential effects is needed.

Acting cool, disinterested, and emotionally detached often leads Black males to distance themselves from the formal structures of school. For instance, some Black males perceive studying, going on field trips and relating positively to teachers as “uncool” (Majors and Billson

1992: 48). They often avoid these activities and opportunities and stifle their academic growth and educational enrichment. Peer pressure among students who also reject school related activities serves as a structure to reinforce what is cool and worthy of praise. Also, because of the “cultural insensitivity of White teachers, and curriculums based on White middle-class norms and expectations, most teachers lack the cultural insight, training and sensitivity and may misinterpret the cool pose as a negative source of pride that is disruptive for learning,” (Majors and Billson 1992: 12). Majors and Billson (1992) conclude that the cool pose may be detrimental to education for Black males. For those reasons it may often be negatively linked to academic achievement (Majors and Billson 1992: 13), and college aspiration for Black male students.

hooks (2004) states that patriarchy, mass media and class-biased education disseminate messages that Black males are more “body” than mind, and tells them that they lack intellect. She argues that through these messages, Black males are “groomed” for perpetual membership in lower socioeconomic class status. Apple (2002) extends the discussion and connects self-perception and identity development of young Black children to external sources and corroborates that low-income urban African American students formulate identity from the communities they live in and through media exposure. And according to Staples (1995), although least understood, the social construction of Black male identity as hypersexual studs, athletes, and repeat offending criminals dominates public consciousness. He too maintains that through social interactions on multiple levels, these roles are internalized by Black men and eventually adopted into their identity.

With a preponderance of seductive imagery drawing young Black males into a web of the potential professional athleticism and all that it entails, money, property, and prestige, the thought of developing an academic identity and interest in college may be far less attractive of a

proposition. Rosenberg and Turner's (1981) work revealed that family, school, economy, and the church shape a child's self concept. Other theorists extend this argument and postulate that the development of an (academic) identity is essential to academic success (Was et al. 2009). As previously discussed, rigid roles that are often embedded within the hidden agendas of schools, available images, and societal expectations may be linked to the preoccupation of Black male students' exhibitions of their physical rather than cerebral beings. Subsequently, opportunities for them to develop interest in academics and inquisitiveness for higher learning may potentially be impacted. Examining the unique intersection of race, gender and family is necessary to frame the discussion of Black males, high school experiences and how they combine to influence college aspiration.

SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION AND FAMILY

Family

According to Harrigan (1993), cognition and affect teaches us what we know, and what we feel about what we know. He states that families, along with schools, peer groups, and the media consistently both overtly and covertly reinforce our class positions in America and that children internalize these messages, which determine how they feel about themselves. Families begin the process of political socialization based on their beliefs of their class structure and pass them on to their children. Children of higher status born into families with greater access to money and educational resources are taught that they can succeed in school. Those born into lower status families with restricted access to jobs, money, and education are employed in low paying jobs, and lack the political power to effect permanent social and economic change in their lives.

Educational attainment is essential in the development of college aspiration. Educational attainment is precluded by an interest in academic subjects, and consists of making good grades, completing homework assignments, passing in school, and standardized examinations, and progressing through elementary, middle-, and high school. Although it is created by a combination of social factors, it is linked to family SES, and specifically income and parental education (Alexander, Entwisle, and Thompson 1987; Lareau 1989; Lareau 2002; Roscigno 2000). Davis-Kean (2005) argues that parents' educational levels influence student achievement and their interest in learning, and that parents' education levels foster specific beliefs and expectations that result in enhanced academic success for children. As the first and most important agent of socialization, the family heavily influences birth through the pre-teen years, and can increase the likelihood that a student will develop the required behaviors, attitudes and self-perception that will foster their desire to attend college (Harrigan 1993).

Of key importance in college aspiration, Nichols et al. (2010) reveal that in early education, students' perceptions regarding their parental involvement has a strong influence on their academic success. It would follow that, when students see their parents interacting at the school level with teachers and administrators, attending various events, including parent teacher conferences, and other school activities, their aspirations rise. Also, when parents discuss school matters with their children, academic success is enhanced. The effects of family on reinforcing behaviors and identities that foster college aspiration are crucial. Because children are greatly influenced by their families, receiving their support for education is crucial to create educational success that is linked to college aspiration (Alexander, Entwisle, and Thompson 1987; Lareau 1989; Lareau 2002; Roscigno 2000).

Joe and Davis (2009) argue that Black parents increase their children's school readiness by having and exhibiting strong values for school and learning. They found that specific parental behaviors, including reading books to their children, emphasizing excellence in mathematics achievement, discussing science topics, and discussing family, racial and ethnic heritage matters helped Black children succeed academically. They state that both working- and middle-class parents held higher expectations for their children's education than lower-class parents, and that parental expectations are directly related to student's academic success. They conclude that although minority parents hold higher academic expectations of their school-aged students as compared to parents of White children, that low-income African American parents generally hold lower expectations for the academic success of boys than for African American girls.

Hossler and Stage (1992) argue that parental support is a necessary component to the development of college aspiration. They contend that parental involvement can be categorized into setting aspirations, providing encouragement, and active support. They conclude that parental expectation has the strongest effect on students' educational aspirations, and that parents' education, the student's gender, high school GPA, and overall high school experiences contribute significantly to the student's aspirations.

Family is a central part of African American students' locus of control that strongly impacts their development of academic identity and educational aspirations (Flowers et al. 2003). And for African American males, involved parenting is related to the successful development of college aspiration (Kirk et al. 2011; O'Bryan et al. 2008; Smith and Fleming 2006). In building the required attitudes, behaviors and credentials, specific parenting behaviors that contribute to students' academic success include encouraging general academic success, reading, interacting with teachers, taking an interest in homework, creating home study areas, helping students to

develop effective study practices that foster learning, and giving verbal praise for academic excellence (Alexander et al. 1994; Griffin et al. 2010). In summary, it can be concluded that parental involvement in students' academic affairs (Dawkins et al. 2008; Flowers et al. 2003), parenting practices and styles (Davis-Kean 2005; Herndon and Hirt 2004; O'Bryan et al. 2008), and parental behaviors and expectations (Davis-Kean 2005; Flowers et al. 2008; Hossler and Stage 1992; Kirk et al. 2010), are all linked to educational success.

Another topic in the family and education literature questions how the family structure impacts the educational achievement of children. A preponderance of literature debates this topic, however a limited review of this literature follows.

Family Structure

Family structure and its effect on children's academic achievements is a widely debated subject in both the higher education and sociology of education literature. Relevant to this study, the ongoing debate questions the impact of single versus two-parent households on academic achievement. Family structure relates to the organization of a family, and more specifically, the members who live in the same household and the roles they play. Some theorists argue that the value of the traditional two-parent family model, with a heterosexual mother and heterosexual father is far better for the development of children. Mandara et al. (2005) critique the relevance of this model, because of its supposed "balancing effect" in the collective socialization of children by both mothers and fathers. They question the relevance of the model which claims, that, children raised in the traditional two-parent model excel academically when compared with other family types. This may hold some validity assuming that the presence of two parents would provide increased human and economic resources, more time to the child, and flexibility of scheduling to ensure that one or both parents may engage with teachers and administrators.

Hilton and Desrochers (2002) agree that the stress of role demands and rearing children single-handedly, coupled with fewer resources can present difficulties to both single parents and their children.

Fathers and Educational Aspiration

Earlier studies have linked males' educational aspirations to the occupational attainment their fathers', and attribute ascription as a theoretical explanation of status attainment for males (Carter 2002; Sewell et al. 1969). This may be different for some African American males, because of the increasing number of Black families that are single, and female headed (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). African American males who are more likely to grow up in homes headed by African American females, suffer economically because of the feminization of poverty. As an explanation to these social problems, African American males are subjected to extreme pressures and social constraints; institutionalized discrimination and lack of employment often relegates them to lower SES levels that limit their ability to meet the economic demands of family (McAdoo 1988; Royster 2003; Wilson 1999).

Collectively, Black males have limited access to higher education and receive less financial remuneration for their academic achievements (Smith and Fleming 2006), which may have a residual effect on their Black sons (Roscigno and Ainsworth Darnell 1999). Low socio-economic status negatively impacts Black males' abilities to be actively involved in the socialization and rearing of their children because of joblessness, motivation, skills and self-confidence, social supports, institutional practices and lack of resources (Johnson 2001; Mandara et al. 2005). Mandara et al. (2005) also contend that perhaps Black women have found ways to supplement the role of father. Banishing Black fatherhood, or downplaying the need of their presence and/or contributions may result in divisions in Black family life that can affect both

identity and academic issues for Black boys (Staples 1995). Black students who attend schools in urban, impoverished areas and live in single parent households are often at risk of being judged by their status and treated with negative bias by middle class teachers and administrators (Entwisle and Alexander 1993). This is particularly destructive to young students in early grades that are often optimistic, eager to learn and easily attached to their teachers (Entwisle and Alexander 1993).

Mothers and Educational Attainment

According to Davis-Keane (2005) mothers with higher levels of education held higher expectations for their children to achieve in reading and math. They asserted that mothers' level of education was also related to creating and maintaining study spaces that fostered the establishment and enforcement of study habits, reading to children, and providing the support and parental warmth to support learning. Herndon and Hirt (2004) also reveal that Black students perceive that their mothers were the most influential of all family members in encouraging their educational pursuits. Blackhurst and Auger (2008) found that female students receive more parental assistance in their educational and career pursuits than males. Single Black mothers are observed as encouraging their daughters to attend college more frequently than their sons (Blackhurst and Auger 2008; Smith and Fleming 2006). Smith and Fleming (2006) also found that mothers held higher academic expectations for daughters and encouraged them to attend four-year colleges more frequently than their sons. Black males with limited access to fathers and who live with mothers that are less interested in their sons attending college may not develop an interest in higher education. More investigation is needed in this area.

Family SES and Educational Aspiration

The sociology of education research discusses the critical impact of familial socioeconomic status (SES), or more specifically parental income and education, on the development of educational attainment and ultimately college aspiration (Alexander, Entwisle, and Thompson 1987; Coleman et al. 1966; Lareau 1989; Lareau 2002; Roscigno 2000; Rothstein 2004). Hossler and Gallagher (1987) state that SES is crucial because it provides parents the resources for stimulating school participation, and helps to prepare students for academic success (Upthegrove et al. 1999). They contend that SES has a cumulative effect on college enrollment that begins in preschool and continues throughout the formative years of education.

Family SES impacts both college access and choice through resources and opportunities that parents are able to provide that enhance their children's academic experiences and interests. Books, tutoring, summer vacations, and music lessons increase exposure and stimulate students' learning. Shonkoff (2011) argues that early environmental factors both at home and in academic settings create success or failure for children. Students with higher SES levels are more likely to attend college than those with low SES (Hossler and Gallagher 1987). Shonkoff (2011) further states that children with high SES experience positive learning experiences in their developmental years and complete more years of schooling than those who experience adverse living conditions such as poverty, abuse, parental mental illness, or substance abuse.

Low SES negatively impacts African American males and their parents through unequal distributions of wealth, institutionalized racism, and putting them at risk of poverty (Kozol 1991; Oliver and Shapiro 1990; 1997; Shapiro 2004; Wilson 1999). Some are frequently trapped in "intergenerational cycles of disadvantage," (Shonkoff 2011: 14) that are passed down to the next generation of children. More importantly, low-income parents are reported as having lower

expectations for educational success for Black boys (Joe and Davis 2009; Wood et al. 2007). They are also reported as constructing learning as a feminine endeavor as compared to middle, and upper-class families (Salomone 2003). This is critical because young Black males from lower SES backgrounds will face greater challenges in locating and connecting to college educated males that could stimulate their interest in higher learning (Salomone 2003). Academic advantage is created by SES (Lareau 1987; Lareau 1989; Lareau 2000), which is generally lacking in low SES or “at-risk” African American families.

SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT AND EDUCATION

Public Versus Private School Environments

The review of the literature revealed no studies that examined race and private school education. There was an abundance of mainstream research on school choice between public and private environments. Bukhari and Randall (2009) investigated the many reasons that parents remove their children from public school and place them in private environments. They show that studies that question parental preference for public and private school date back 40 years (Crawford and Freeman 1996; Daugherty 1991; Edwards and Richardson 1981; Erickson 1981; Gallup Poll 1969; Goldring and Bausch 1993; Johnson 1996; Hunter 1991; Lauder milk 1994; Peebles, Wilson, Wideman, and Crawford 1982; Schwartz 1986; 1996; Wolfe 2002). Bukhari and Randall (2009) revealed that parents use very specific criteria when making choices for public and private school environments for their children. More specifically, parents often choose to exit public schools for reasons related to quality of instruction related to academic rigor, quality of curriculum, quality and commitment of teachers, moral and religious values or other characteristics they considered as unappealing within the school environment, class size, minimal academic goals, unresponsiveness to parents, issues relating to the quality of preparation

for secondary schools/college, ethnic background of students, safety issues (both intellectual and physical), proximity of school, quality of school facilities and equipment, social/economic background of students, and extracurricular activities (Beavis, 2004; Johnson 1996; Schwartz, 1986).

Public schools were criticized because of the lack of discipline, overcrowding, nature of curriculum content, lack of religious values and problems relating to racial integration (Gallup Poll, 1969). Schwartz (1986) research featured 246 parents who took their children out of public schools and put them into private schools because they were disappointed in atmospheres that lacked disciplinary measures, engaged in preponderant adherence to the lowering of academic standards, and created and maintained environments that were highly rationalized, bureaucratic, and non-responsive to parental concerns. Some parents were also concerned with a lack of support and enforcement of civic and moral values.

The Brown v. Board of Education decision that was handed down by the Supreme Court mandated school desegregation in 1954. From the 1950s through the late 1980s, school desegregation was enforced even in the south. However, segregation has been on the rise for Black and Latinos since the 1990s (Orfield et al. 1997). School re-segregation threatens to produce long-term socio-economic effects for Blacks because school budgets are tied to residential taxes (Orfield et al. 1997). Residential segregation is spreading to suburban neighborhoods in large metropolitan cities (Orfield et al. 1997), where a large number of African Americans live. This has resulted in an increase in the number of Black males who are attending predominately Black public schools, located in lower SES neighborhoods that are frequently underfunded (Orfield et al. 1997).

Bukhari and Randall (2009) investigated the many differences between public and private school education. Private schools are criticized for many reasons including increasing segregation, especially in the south (Anderson and Resnick 1997; Clotfelter 1976; Clotfelter 2004). In the late 1960s in the south, all-White private schools flourished and allowed Whites to distance their children from Black students, while the rest of the United States sorted out the desegregation demands of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). White flight, or the massive exodus of White student withdrawal from public schools during 1960-2000 resulted in a 3 to 4 percent increase in their private school enrollment (Clotfelter 2004).

One of the advantages of private school education is related to governance. Because private schools are operated outside of national and state education charters, administrators and teachers are provided more educational freedom, and given great flexibility and input in creating and delivering curricular material. Other advantages include 1) smaller class sizes, 2) smaller student-to-teacher ratios, 3) higher academic standards that require students to take more college preparatory, math, science and foreign language classes, 4) safer environments without the presence of school or police officers, and 5) lower dropout rates (Anderson and Resnick 1997; Conway 1994; Finn and Voelkl 1993). Private school students have been noted as more likely to select college preparatory courses (Hanus and Cookson 1996), which lead to higher standardized test scores. Private and parochial school environments are also described as reducing achievement gaps for White and minority children, producing better cognitive outcomes as compared to public schools, better character and personality development (Boerema 2006; Coleman 1982).

Private schools are diverse and vary according to their missions. Boerema (2006) conducted a content-analysis study of private school missions and revealed that faith-based

schools focus on specific religious sects and reflect a goal of providing academic training centered in service to God, whereas secular schools promoted stronger academic training and college preparation. Despite the religious differences, private schools generally share more similarities that differentiate them from public schools relating to class sizes, curricular offerings, and school governance.

The goal of public schools is to promote equity by equalizing all students' chances of getting ahead (Boerema 2006; Coleman and Hoffer 1987). They were created to promote national economic growth and to educate the workforce (Boerema 2006; Foster 2004). Public schools promote learning for all students, and offer academic, general and vocational classes (Anderson and Resnick 1997). Some argue that the public school class offerings are unstructured and uncentered because they offer students a "smorgasbord of course and program offerings," (Boerema 2006: 182). They are observed as highly regimented, and punitive in administering student discipline (Skiba et al. 2008; NCES 1982), and some are also accused of creating "pipelines-to-prisons," for students (Hirschfield 2008). Public school districts are also noted as contributing to "schoolhouse to jailhouse," and "school to prison," pipelines (STPP) (Gonsoulin, Zablocki & Leone 2012; NAACP 2006).

An historical investigation revealed that, several legislations lead to the creation of zero-tolerance policies, including the Gun Free Schools Act of 1994 and the Title I of the Elementary & Secondary Education Act (ESEA), and No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Krezmien et al. 2010). In the midst of school shootings, Congress passed the Gun Free Schools Act of 1994 as a zero-tolerance policy for weapons that carried a one-year mandatory school suspension to punish students for bringing weapons to school. In addition to enforcing an immediate suspension,

schools were to also contact criminal juvenile justice systems to report students in violation of this act.

Title I ESEA created tremendous pressure for schools to raise their levels of academic achievement and focus on improving student behavior in order to meet annual yearly progress (AYP). Schools that failed to meet AYP faced negative sanctions from school boards and were required to allow student transfers into schools that passed. Administrators adopted zero-tolerance policies and interpreted them broadly, which led to an increase in suspensions (Hischfield 2008; Kupchik 2008). Zero-tolerance policies have been frequently used to address “minor adolescent behaviors” (NAACP 2006: p. 6), and by 1998, 98% of all public school districts adopted using them in all fifty states (Heaviside, Rowan, Williams & Farris 1998).

Public school administrators handled student violations during the 1990s, before the onset of in-school shootings (Krezmien et al. 2010). After that time, many public school districts hired school related officers (SROs, or in school policemen) to serve as disciplinarians (Snell, Bailey & Carona 2002). Many of them lacked clearly defined policies to appropriately address these infractions (Kim & Geronimo 2009). Many schools have altered student disciplinary procedures by delegating routinized punishment to hired personnel. In addition to SROs, some schools also installed metal detectors, and administered higher suspension rates to send strong messages to students and would be offenders of zero tolerance for misconduct (Schreck, Miller & Gibson 2003; Snell, Bailey & Carona 2002). In some schools, stronger measures did not work, and higher incidences of school disorder were reported (Snell, Bailey & Carona 2002; Meyer & Leone 2007).

Prior studies linked the use of zero-tolerance policies to the placement of mostly males from poor economic backgrounds, and many students with disabilities, into the juvenile justice

system for such school violations as excessive tardiness, bullying, threatening, using profanity, trespassing, assault and battery (or schoolyard fights) and using alcohol and tobacco (Hirschfield 2008; Kupchik 2008; NAACP 2006). Zero-tolerance policies were observed as rigid and highly bureaucratic; they did not take into account circumstance or contexts for which an incidence may have occurred (Gonsoulin, Zablocki and Leone 2012).

Zero-tolerance policies led to excessive school expulsions and also increased student delinquency rates (Advancement Project 2010; Children's Defense Fund 2007; Hirschfield 2008). Higher suspension rates led to higher dropout rates, increased disruptive school behaviors and decreased academic performance (Bowditch 1993; Raffaile-Mendoza as cited in Wald & Losen 2003; Skiba & Rausch 2006). African American males are linked to a disproportionate number of school suspensions and expulsions; they have a higher likelihood of becoming involved with the juvenile justice system (Fabello et al. 2011; Skiba et al. 2002). Zero-tolerance policies in schools have created massive problems for Black males, and derailed them from school attainment and college aspiration. Simply put, Black males are frequently demonized in public schools that refuse to objectively regard them as children. With this information at hand, some Black parents have begun to strategically choose environments that support and encourage learning. This study revealed parental strategies that fostered educational attainment in hopes that their sons would develop an interest in attending college.

STPPs are comprised of schools that have adopted zero-tolerance policies to create and maintain safer public schools in America (Gonsoulin, Zablocki & Leone 2012; Krezmien et al. 2010). Public schools are generally noted for administering excessive and disproportionate punishments to minority (Black and Brown) male students (Fabello et al. 2011; Skiba et al.

2002). Prior research has consistently shown that some public schools can be harmful to Black males.

Wolfe (2002) reported that parents chose private over public school environments because of reasons related to the quality of students' education, smaller environments, safety, parental involvement at the school, and because of receiving references and/or endorsements about the school from their friends or other family members. While Erickson (1981) asserted that parents who deliberately chose to remove their children from public schools and place them in private ones were more "sophisticated, thoughtful, and concerned about their children's learning than were the people who simply followed the normal pattern of public school patronage giving the matter little thought," (p 96).

Most of the research on private schools has been conducted with White parents. It may be assumed that in some instances the motivation of the parents was to remove their children from public schools with Black students in attendance. There were no studies that looked at race, gender, and private education, and related to this research, there were no studies that investigated why Black parents chose to put their Black sons in private schools. Certainly if Black parents are able to afford the costs of tuition and the related expenses of private education, then exiting public school would be more plausible if money is not an issue. Most Black families want to provide their children with the best education and extracurricular opportunities that will give them a better future. Parents with higher SES will have a higher value for education, and may be better suited to afford private school tuition. They will be more apt to provide their children with the social advantage of a better education, which will increase college aspiration.

The link between family SES and private school choices appears to be apparent. Yet little is known about the intersection of race and gender in private school settings. How do Black

males experience their private school lives? How do the intersections of being Black, and being male in a mostly middle class and predominantly White environment influence their educational experience? This study hopes to gain insight into the understanding of the Intersectionality of gender, race, and class in school environments.

THEORETICAL PARADIGM--INTERSECTIONALITY

The goal of this study is to understand various factors influencing Black male high school students in their educational attainment and college aspiration. The overarching theory that guides this research is Intersectionality theory. Intersectionality originated as the result of the lack of an adequate model to fully understand and analyze the lived experiences of the socially marginalized. Gender and race based research was criticized because of its inability to acknowledge “multiple subordinate locations,” compared to dominant ones (McCall 2005:1780). As an illustration, McCall (2005) stated that Black women have achieved equality with Black men because of the conditions of slavery and White supremacy that required them to work equally as hard. However, Black women were less protected and more vulnerable to sexual exploitation because their social status constituted that they were not worthy of receiving the same protection as White women. She stated that the complexity of the “potential for both multiple and conflicting experiences of subordination and power,” require a more in-depth analysis (McCall 2005:1780).

Plausibly, Intersectionality theory presents the complexity of the confluences of race, gender, and socioeconomic status that impact college aspiration for males. As a theoretical framework, it examines race, gender and socioeconomic status aggregately, to understand how each mutually constructs the other (Hill Collins 1998). While studies using Intersectionality in examining Black women and their experiences have been prolific; there is a dearth of literature

seeking to understand Black men, particularly Black young men. In the realm of gender, White men have been the dominant, the oppressor, and the decision maker. Yet, in African American communities, Black women are known to be more successful, better educated, and playing a more central role as a parent than Black men in the family. Why are Black men less successful and less educated? The purpose of this study is to make a genuine effort to understand the social context of Black young men before they launch their life journey in their pursuit of a higher education, a job, or an adult life in general. Findings of this study, hopefully, will contribute to the application of Intersectionality in a better understanding of Black young men in their complicated social locations with compounded subjugations of gender, race, and social class.

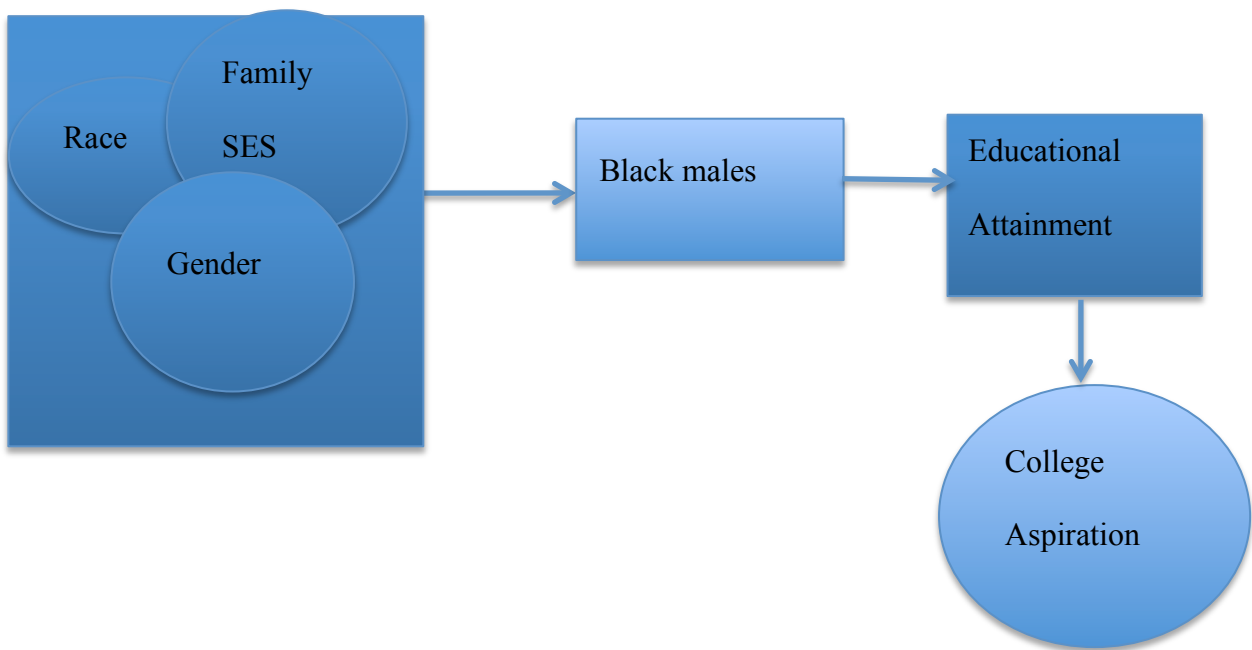


Figure 1. Theoretical Paradigm: Intersectionality and Educational Attainment for Black Male High School Students

Figure 1 presents the theoretical paradigm of this study. With the insight of this theoretical model, this study highlighted the confluences of race, gender, and SES in relation to high school experiences, educational attainment and the development of college aspiration for Black male high school students. Questions were raised to examine the individual factors, and intersections of race and gender, and race and class in high school environments that may influence educational attainment and developing college aspiration among Black teenage male students. Because Intersectionality is built upon the greater understandings of gender, race, and social inequalities, three sub-theories deserve separate discussion. Each of these theories provided insights for a greater understanding of the joint effect of this confluence. These sub-theories are: Social construction of gender, critical race theory, and social inequality theory. Below, I will briefly discuss each theory.

A review of race, gender and social inequality theories follow to gain an understanding of the factors that comprise and create the conditions of the social location of the group of participants. In this research, the social construction of gender, critical race, social inequality, and Intersectionality theories will undergird the theoretical framework for examining the familial, school, and social factors that impact Black males. Collectively they adequately inform and explain the combined effects of race, gender, and socioeconomic status on educational attainments and the development of college aspiration for Black males. Descriptions of these theories follow in the next few pages.

Social Construction of Gender

Although there are differences in sex and gender, it is important to understand the relationship between the two. It is commonly agreed that sex refers to the biological and physiological characteristics of an individual while gender refers to the social and cultural

aspects of individuals in Western culture. Gender is constructed in specific racial, cultural and class-based social interactions (Connell 1995; Sanders 2011; West & Zimmerman 1987). It is “accomplished,” through routine activities that are “methodical and recurring,” (West & Zimmerman 1987: 126). Gender is highly important in the social structure (Connell 1995), and is one of the most important societal distinctions (West & Zimmerman 1987), second to race.

Doing gender is the enactment of “socio-political activities that cast certain pursuits as masculine or feminine,” (West & Zimmerman 1987: 126). Gender is achieved and recognized through role enactments and “situated conduct,” (West & Zimmerman 1987: 126). Males engage in specific activities that they perceive define and reinforce their sense of being and belonging. Their forms of engagement vary according to their collective social location. Males select and organize their daily activities to display their gender (West and Zimmerman 1987), depending on what they have learned through social interactions. Gender re-enactment is intentional and males carefully contemplate specific behaviors they wish, or feel compelled to exhibit in order to show the strength of their gender affiliation. There are various influencers that determine gender affiliation for Black males, which include socio-economic class, parents, peers and the media.

This study applied social construction of gender in the examination of the Black high school aged males. The theoretical insights allowed the study to understand the extent that Black male images are socially constructed in a racialized social context, enacted by Black males under certain social environments in different types of families and schools.

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theorists argue that race and racism must be critically examined in order to capture and conceptualize the experience of non-Whites. Race is also socially constructed and is dialectically linked to other systems of exclusion, marginalization, abuse and repression

(Goldberg and Essed 2002: 3), and inexorably linked to political dominance that is sustained through hegemony (Omi and Winant 2002). Gender and race combine to create unique circumstances for Black males. An understanding of the impact of race is needed to inform the theoretical framework for this study.

Omi and Winant (2002) examined the ways in what race is formed. Their concept of hegemony attempts to explain how race is stratified through the ability of the dominant class to create ideology that becomes known as “a popular system of ideas and practices” disseminated in systems of education, the media, religion, folk wisdom that they construct as “common sense,” (2002:130). Their analysis lends credence to social positioning that Black males hold in society, and why collectively their ascent to higher levels of status is restricted, even in education systems that purport to serve all students, (NCES 2012) while developing a develop a “democratic and egalitarian society,” (Howard 2003: 6).

Critical race theory is insightful in explaining the academic experiences of Black males, through the unique and overwhelming complexities of racism. DuBois described it as the state of “double consciousness,” wherein Blacks constantly lived in the shadows of domination by Whites, while forging an existence in their own communities that were tied to a national economy (DuBois 1969). Essed (2002) examined how racism is institutionalized and transformed into power that is dispatched in many American systems, through thoughts, policies, and procedures that contribute to the development and perpetuation of Whites dominating Blacks. Her research revealed how macro level systems are created and sustained through the micro level social interactions of everyday living.

In a racial climate where color blindness is upheld as a positive political and racial perspective, the research of critical race theorists overwhelmingly revealed the complexities of

racism, and how deeply embedded White dominance is tied to and tightly control opportunity and access, income and wealth, privilege and power (Goldberg and Essed 2002), which largely begins in educational systems. Critical race theory is particularly insightful for this study because it helps to explain the unique social location of Black males in its discourse by continually addressing the long-standing discrimination that this group has endured in American history.

Social Inequality Theory

Socioeconomic status (SES) is one of the most important factors determining success or failure and the life chances an individual will have access to. It impacts educational opportunity and access, and negotiates whether or not students develop college aspiration. Low socioeconomic status (SES) negatively affects the educational experiences of African American males by putting them at risk of poverty, institutionalized racism, and unequal distributions of wealth (Kozol 1992; Oliver and Shapiro 1990; Oliver and Shapiro 1995; Wilson 1999). SES provides parents the resources for stimulating school participation, and primes students for academic success (Upthegrove et al. 1999). Academic advantage is created by SES (Lareau 1987; Lareau 1989; Lareau 2000), which is generally lacking in “at-risk” African American families.

Shonkoff (2011) argued that early environmental factors both at home and in academic settings create success or failure for children. He stated that children with high SES experience positive learning experiences in their developmental years and complete more years of schooling than those who experience adverse living conditions such as poverty, abuse, parental mental illness, or substance abuse. Children from low SES environments are trapped in “intergenerational cycles of disadvantage,” (Shonkoff 2011: 14) and pass them on to their progeny. He emphasized the crucial importance of healthy, stable parental and non-parental

relationships, home environments, and appropriate nutrition on children's learning ability and accomplishments.

The investment theory states that children raised in households with high socioeconomic status succeed more than those raised in economically challenged ones (Mayer 1998). Lareau (2003) revealed that children in high-income families were exposed to more cultural and social activities and also had access to greater academic resources such as tutoring for general academics and standardized tests as compared to children whose families had lower incomes. Using socioeconomic status as a predictor of college aspiration would most likely reflect that children from families with higher status will perform well academically, and attend college, as compared to those with lower status. In light of the fact that the majority of African American children are born to single-family, female headed households, this is problematic because of the feminization of poverty; more single-, female-headed households are below the poverty level.

Statistics from the 2009 Census revealed that 21.7% of African American families live below the poverty level. Low SES explains only a portion of low college enrollment for Black males, leaving questions regarding the factors that impact college aspiration for African American males with middle-, and upper class SES. If 21.7% of Black families live below the poverty level, then why are Black males from other SES levels not represented in college and university environments? What factors do they face in school experiences that prevent them from attending college? This study utilizes the Social Inequality theory to uncover some of the key factors, such as family resources and family structure that may influence Black male high school students in their educational attainment and development of college aspiration.

Intersectionality Theory

To understand the location of Black male high school students and their development of college aspiration, Intersectionality appears to be the best fit as an overarching theory for the study. Garcia Coll et al. (1996) viewed Intersectionality as a more efficient, comprehensive model for assessing how minority children are affected in their growth and development with the effects of social class, culture, ethnicity, and race. This study may add to the theoretical application of Intersectionality in the study of Black young men in their educational attainment and college aspiration.

CHAPTER 3:
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
RESEARCH DESIGN

The purpose of this research is to examine Black males' experiences in high school in order to gain an understanding of the factors that impact their educational attainment and subsequent development of college aspiration. I sought to learn how educational attainment and subsequent college aspiration develop based on high school Black male students' reported experiences related to race, gender, family and school environments. The goal of research is to increase the understanding of how the educational experiences of Black males shape their development of college aspiration or lack thereof. The nature of this study is exploratory given the fact that very little is known about the Intersectionality of race and gender in educational experiences and college aspiration for Black males.

Exploratory research methods are often used to become familiar with unknown phenomenon and to lay the groundwork for future research in a given area (Kerlinger and Lee 2000; Singleton and Straits 2005). They are used to unpack social problems that are not clearly defined. The sociological discourse has a lot to say about Black males but rarely includes the voices of Black male high school students and the topic of college aspiration. Exploratory research methods will aid in the generation of new information relating to gender, race, educational attainment, and the development of college aspiration for Black males.

To better understand the intersection and role of race, gender, and education, I decided to use qualitative research methods to conduct in-person and over-the-telephone, semi-structured, open-ended interviews with Black males and members of their family. Quantitative studies often fall short in capturing the nuances of social life (Kerlinger and Lee 2000). The purpose of

qualitative research is to gather data, ask specific social questions, and present an analysis to explain certain phenomena (Lofland and Lofland 1995). Qualitative methods allow a researcher to witness the lives of others and become an instrument to help explain and interpret their social conditions (Lofland and Lofland 1995).

The study participants were all identified through the use of non-probability sampling techniques. Non-probability is contrary to random systematic sampling, which guarantees that every member of a population has a chance in being selected for participation. Non-probability sampling allows the researcher to use convenience samples in selection based on systematically employed criteria (Henry 1990), especially when the researcher is familiar with the population and phenomena being observed (Kerlinger and Lee 2000). As the mother of a rising Black male, eleventh grader, I have witnessed the challenges that are common to Black males relating to education, learning, race, gender, ideals, roles, behaviors and activities. To investigate this, I set the criteria for selecting Black males as my subjects by using purposive sampling. High school students were the targets since this is the age that the likelihood of attending college intensifies.

Purposive sampling is a form of non-probability sampling, which operates by including groups specified by the researcher (Kerlinger and Lee 2000). The sample is collected through convenience and snowball strategies. Convenience samples allow a researcher to select cases based on the availability of subjects (Henry 1990). I also used snowball sampling as some of the participants referred their friends or classmates. The goals of this study, being exploratory in nature, were to discover why and how Black males experienced education in high schools and how these experiences related to their development of interest in going to college. This study method will hopefully yield deeper understandings of the subject matter, and therefore help generate future research questions for larger representative samples.

This study comprised a total of sixty interviews, including thirty Black males in the tenth, eleventh and twelfth grades, and one of their parents. Thirty of the interviews conducted with biological mothers and fathers, and/or stepparents of the students. While there was no scientific formula involved in selecting the number of Black males for interviews, I made an effort to include a variation of study subjects from different grades (9th, 10th, and 11th), different social class (middle class, working class, and lower class), different family structures (single family household and two parent household), and different schools (private and public) in the selection of thirty interview participants. This thus allowed some variability in a few core independent variables. The findings from this qualitative study are not meant to be generalized to the total population of Black male high school students in metropolitan Atlanta; interpretation of these data should be done with caution.

The inequality, family sociology, and college admissions discourse all argue about the importance of family in shaping the lives of children (Alexander, Entwisle, and Thompson 1987; Caldwell 2003; David-Keane 2005; Hossler and Stage 1992; Lareau 1989; Lareau 2002; Roscigno 2000; Stewart 2008). This became evident based on the abundance of literature that tied student educational attainment to both family value for education and SES levels. I felt that interviewing parents was necessary to examine the impact of parenting and family structure on college aspiration. Family contexts, educational attainment, and college aspiration were investigated by conducting open-ended interviews with one family member of each student totaling thirty parents.

SAMPLE RECRUITMENT PROCESS

Recruitment began in mid-June of 2012. I was highly optimistic about conducting all of the interviews in DeKalb County, after having researched its demographic characteristics.

DeKalb was an ideal choice because of the wide variance in the SES of students and families living in, and attending school there. I contacted the Research and Evaluation Department of DeKalb County Schools (DCSS) and was told that they would not review research proposals until the following August. I decided to write the proposal to submit to DCSS in the fall. To my dismay, the guidelines were removed from the web site and after I made numerous phone calls and received no response, I decided to change my plans.

I revised my strategy to solicit participation from as many agencies and organizations that served the Black community in metropolitan Atlanta as possible. I revised the research proposal previously submitted to Georgia State University's Institutional Review Board Office and requested permission from them to make changes to my recruitment process. When I received permission to proceed, I used the online White pages to contact several Black churches in South DeKalb, and in the surrounding North DeKalb corridor near where I lived. My plan was to continue to recruit from the DeKalb County area because of the diverse SES of its residents. I selected organizations that were located in both segregated areas of low and working class Black residents, and also those that were in integrated, middle class areas, according to the Census records. I also used the Internet to locate contact information for children and parental organizations including the Boys and Girls Clubs, local YMCAs, and community recreation centers, asking permission to post recruitment flyers and to actively recruit participants.

Although I received some cooperation, the overall response was considerably low. During the days and weeks that followed, I was mystified that very few of the organizations had shown any interest in the study, or even in the lack of Black males attending college as revealed in the abstract provided. When I made physical contact, I questioned if their lack of interest was because of my social location; I am a non-traditional, fifty plus year old, Black woman whose

appearance often projects middle class status; at the time I lived in a predominantly White, upper middle class neighborhood in North DeKalb. I telephoned a Black church located in South DeKalb and was invited by the minister in charge to come in to discuss my research project. He explained that the church had granted permission to one other female graduate student. When I arrived, after several minutes the minister asked me specifically where I lived. He engaged me in a lengthy discussion about political issues impacting the Black community and asked my political views. After about one hour, he referred me to an assistant pastor. I called the number I was given and left messages on his voice mail on several different occasions, but he never returned any of my calls. I contacted the minister in charge and was told that the associate pastor was probably busy and that I should continue to call him. After leaving several additional messages, I abandoned further attempts to recruit from this church. Initially, it seemed as though they did not care for my topic, my approach to the research, or for young Black males in general. After critical self-reflection regarding my recruitment experiences, I believe that the minister's inquiry regarding my residence shed a light on my challenges and was more of a barrier than I realized initially.

I decided to disclose my status as a graduate of two historically Black colleges, in hopes of proving that I was genuinely concerned and connected to this issue and not to further exploit the Black community. This strategy made no difference, and did not yield any new respondents through the organizations that I approached single-handedly. In order to generate some interest in my study and to at that point generate either a snowball or convenience sample, I relied on my social capital. I reached out to fellow graduate students, and a local chapter of a social organization that I was a member of, Jack and Jill of America. I placed bi-weekly announcements on a list serve and through a connection I had from a fellow graduate student, I

continuously disseminated to parents who worked for the Centers for Disease Control. Recruitment flyers were placed on my Facebook page, in one church, and few organizations that agreed to post them. (The one church that agreed to post a flyer was in my neighborhood. I knew the pastor from the neighborhood elementary school that my son attended several years back. I reminded the pastor that we had met at Oak Grove Elementary School and told him about the study. He showed some interest and told me about his son who was recently accepted into a HBCU in North Carolina. He agreed to post my flyer in his church.) Although many phone calls were made, none of the churches or community centers or agencies that served parents and children allowed me permission to actively recruit at their facilities, but few agreed to post flyers and to inform parents about the study. With exception, the Boys and Girls Club suggested that I volunteer to give community service, but would not agree to assist in the recruitment of participants. By the end of July I began to generate some interest and was able to conduct the first interview of a rising eleventh grader and his biological mother.

Recruitment continued to progress very slowly. In the fall of 2012, I finally received news that DeKalb County would not accept any research proposals from graduate students until further notice. I was informed that they had no idea when this would be lifted, but suggested that I keep my eyes on the DCSS web site for future changes to this policy. I decided to submit a request to the Atlanta Public Schools (APS) Office of Research and Evaluation. After revising the proposal and resubmitting it back through Georgia State's IRB Office, I did just that and was informed that it would take several weeks to give a response. In the meanwhile, I continued to receive phone calls and emails from interested mothers who worked at CDC. I also began teaching at Atlanta Technical College (ATC) and at Georgia State University (GSU) in the fall. I discussed my research and solicited participants through the Introduction to Sociology classes I

taught and received several responses from interested participants at ATC. Atlanta Technical College is located in a low-working class predominantly Black neighborhood in Southwest Atlanta. Georgia State is a research institution nestled in downtown Atlanta.

Additionally, my son began attending a private Presbyterian high school located in a suburban, upper-middle class White community in Sandy Springs. After receiving permission from the Head of School, I recruited several Black males and conducted interviews with four students. See Appendix F for a list of the recruitment sites. Although I was disappointed that I was not able to conduct random probability sampling through DCSS as I planned, I was pleased with the diversity of the non-probability sample. I eventually received permission to recruit from APS before the third week of November. By that time I had almost successfully generated a sample of twenty-eight participants. I decided not to recruit from the public school system, but to continue on the path that I started, since I was very close to meeting the goal of 30 participants. All 30 interviews were completed before the middle of December.

Even though this study is not a representative sample, I made an effort to include some variations of a few core variables in the study, such as family structure, SES, students' age, and grade as these variables were shown to have significant impact on students' college aspiration from earlier research.

SAMPLE DESCRIPTION

There were 13 married (two-parent biological), 13 single-family female/headed, two divorced (one divorced biological sharing joint custody with his ex-wife, and one divorced mother with full custody), and two blended (one father/stepmother, and one mother/stepfather) family types. A total of 26 biological mothers, one stepmother, and three biological fathers were

interviewed. See Table 3.1. below which describes the family structure of the participants in this study.

Table 3.1. Family Types

FAMILY TYPE	NUMBER
Married 2 Biological Parents	13
Single Family/Female Headed	13
Divorced Father/Joint Custody	1
Divorced/Female Headed	1
Married/Stepfather	1
Married/Stepmother	1

FAMILY STRUCTURE

Table 3.2 is a distribution of family structure and students' grade levels.

Among the group of nine 12th graders, there were five students from 2-biological parent, and 4 single-female headed households. Of the eleven 11th grade respondents, six were from 2-biological parent, 3 single-female headed, and 2 mother/step-father households. In the 10th grade group, there were 7 single-female headed, 1 divorced/joint custody, 1 stepmother/father, and 1 biological parent households. (two biological, mother and stepfather, father and stepmother, single parent/mother-headed, mother/father – joint custody. See Table 3.2.). A total of twenty-six biological mothers, one stepmother, and three biological fathers were interviewed.

Table 3.2 Cross tabulation of family structure and students' grade levels

	2 Biological	Single	Divorce d/Step-Parents	Total
12th Grade	5	4	-	9
11th Grade	6	3	2	11
10th Grade	1	7	2	10

SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

To investigate the role of socio-economic status, the participants were selected from diverse social classes. There were (16) middle-, and (6) working-, and (7) lower class households including those who lived in segregated neighborhoods. Only one participant refused to answer the question regarding household income. Seven (7) families had incomes under \$19,999, six (6) families had earnings in the \$20,000-49,000 income bracket, and (16) families earned above \$50,000.

Table 3.2. shows that families with incomes under \$19,999 were categorized as low-income, those in the \$20,000-49,000 income bracket were defined as working-class, and families earning above \$50,000 were categorized as middle-class.

SES traditionally includes education and occupational prestige, this study also takes into account both education and occupation through cross-referencing the filter and qualitative data. The majority of parents in the middle class group had completed college and/or professional

degrees, or worked in mid-level management positions. In the 12th grade group (n=9), five students had middle-class status, and three were from lower class backgrounds. Only one family refused to divulge household income information. Among the 11th grade students (n=11), there were 7 were from middle-class, 2 working-, and two lower-class background households. And in the 10th graders (n=10), 4 were from middle-class, 4 working class, and 2 lower class backgrounds. See Table 3.3. for a profile of the student participants’ household income.

Table 3.3. Income

Annual Combined Household Income	# of Families
\$ Under 19,999 (Lower Class)	7
\$ 20,000 – 49,999 (Working Class)	6
\$ Above 50,000 (Middle Class)	16
REFUSED	1

THE STUDENT PARTICIPANTS

The participants were enrolled in public and private high schools in the metropolitan Atlanta area. Their ages ranged between 15 and 18, and the mean age was 16 years old. There were 29 students in the 10th, 11th, and 12th grades, and the mean grade level was the 11th. There was one student who was 15 years old, in the 9th grade, but was taking 10th grade classes. Table 3.4. is a detailed summary of the age and grade distribution of the student participants.

Table 3.4. Age and Grade Distribution of Participants

Age	N	Grade Level	N
15	8	9/10	1
16	11	10 th	9
17	10	11 th	11
18	1	12 th	9

AGE

The average age of the twelfth graders was 17 years. The mean 11th grade age was 16 years of age. Of the 10th graders, the average age was 15. See Tables 3.4, 3.5, and 3.6 for a detailed description of the students' ethnicity, age, grade level, school status, family structure and SES.

ETHNICITY

The parents revealed their sons' ethnic status during the initial screenings. For the purposes of this research, each of the student participants was designated as "Black." Regarding ethnicity, among the twelfth graders, there were 5 African American, 3 African, and 1 Jamaican. Out of eleven juniors, there were 9 African American, 1 African and 1 Jamaican. There were 9 African Americans and 1 Jamaican in the 10th grade group.

SCHOOL STATUS: PUBLIC OR PRIVATE

The educational inequality literature describes some school environments as unsupportive of Black males (Davis; Ferguson 2000; Lewis 2006). Some discuss the school to prison pipeline and claim that racial bias in schools set up Black males for incarceration due in part to labeling and other micro-political aggressions that are thrust upon them (Kim et al. 2010; Roque and Pasternoster 2011; Welch and Payne 2010). Public and private schools both may engage in racial

profiling of Black males, and because of overcrowding and limited resources, Black males attending public schools may be less inspired to develop college aspiration, without considerable parental support.

To take into account potential differences between private and public schools in their educational processes and effects I included students from 20 schools: 14 public and 6 private, located in DeKalb, Fulton, Gwinnett, and Henry Counties, Atlanta City Public Schools, and in the Cities of College Park and Roswell, Georgia. They represented a vast array of public and private schools in the metropolitan Atlanta area. In the 12th grade group, there were 7 public, and 2 private school students. Of the 11th graders, there were 6 public and 5 students attending private schools. And among the 10th graders, 7 students attended public, and 3 were enrolled in private schools. Table 3.5. describes each school, according to public/private status and the county in which it is located. For purposes of confidentiality, pseudonyms were used for all public and private schools involved in the study, but county names are kept real to maintain the authenticity of the study. Since each county has many public and private schools, using real county names were unlikely to unveil the real identity of the participating schools. Tables 3.6., 3.7., and 3.8. depict the students and their school status. More is revealed in the student findings chapter. Again, pseudonyms were used for each of the student in the study to protect the confidentiality of participants.

DATA COLLECTION AND MANAGEMENT

In-depth interviews were conducted with each student and one member of their family using semi-structured, open-ended interview guides based on the formerly stated research questions.

Table 3.5. High Schools Attended

HS Name	County	Public	Private	Grade Level
Mountain Aire	DeKalb	X		12, 11
Champion Intl. Charter	DeKalb	X		11
Creekwood	DeKalb	X		10
Chatmon School	Roswell		X	11
Dennison	Atlanta	X		12
Enson Hills	Gwinnett	X		10
Gambrell Academy	Atlanta		X	12, 11
Kingswold	Gwinnett		X	10
Laurel Fields	DeKalb	X		10
Marion Estates Presbyterian	DeKalb		X	12, 11, 10
New St. Stevens	Henry	X		12
Crestline	Clayton	X		11
Crestwood	Fulton	X		12
Hampden	DeKalb	X		11, 10
Paul St. Holyoke	DeKalb		X	11
Jefferson Hall	DeKalb	X		12
Thompson	Atlanta	X		10
Dalrymple	DeKalb	X		11
Taunton	DeKalb	X		12, 10
Wilson Straits	College Pk.		X	10

Table 3.6. Characteristics of 10th Grade Participants

Names	Grade	Age	SES	Ethnicity	School	Family Structure
Jarvis	10	15	WC	African American	Private - White	single mother
Gus	10	16	MC	African American	Public - Mixed	stepmother/father
DeJuan	10	17	LC	African American	Public - Black	single mother
Isaiah	10	15	LC	African American	Public - Black	single mother
Justin ^a	9/10	15	MC	African American	Public - Black	single mother
Roger	10	15	WC	African American	Public - Black	parents divorced/joint custody
Jeremy	10	15	MC	African American	Private - White	single mother
Jaleel	10	15	WC	African American	Public - Mixed	single mother
Charles	10	16	WC	Jamaican	Private - White	single mother
Adam	10	15	MC	African American	Public - White	2 biological parents

^aJustin had unique grade status as a ninth grader taken tenth grade classes.

Student and parent interviews lasted between thirty minutes to one and one half hour each. Screeners were used to place participants in the needed grade categories (See Appendix A). The student interview guide (see Appendix B) consisted of questions that examined male Black high school students' awareness and conceptualizations of gender and race (what it meant to be Black and male), and its fit in school settings, social environments (familial and school environments) and their impact on college aspiration. Family type was a screened category in order to include diverse family groups in this study. Parents disclosed family information prior to conducting interviews with the students (see Appendix C).

Table 3.7. Characteristics of 11th Grade Participants

Names	Grade	Age	SES	Ethnicity	School	Family Structure
^a Michael	11	16	MC	African American	Public – Mixed	single mother
Frank	11	16	MC	African American	Public – Black	2 biological parents
Johnathan	11	16	LC	African American	Public – Black	single mother
Jimmy	11	17	WC	Jamaican	Public – Black	mother/stepfather
Joshua	11	16	LC	African American	Public – Black	2 biological parents
Gerard	11	16	MC	African American	Public – Black	2 biological parents
Hilton	11	16	MC	African American	Private – White	2 biological parents
John M.	11	15	MC	African American	Private – White	2 biological parents
Bruce	11	17	MC	African American	Private – White	single mother
Coby	11	17	MC	African American	Private – White	mother/stepfather
Rodney	11	16	WC	African American	Private – White	2 biological parents

^aMichael had a unique family structure. His father lived with his mother at the time of the interview, but his mother stated that they were not a couple.

Consent forms were signed by all parents to confirm their participation and also to grant written permission for interviewing their sons. A separate form was obtained from all students between the ages of 15-17, to acknowledge their understanding of the purpose of the study, and also their permission to use the data in this study. Participants were give a \$20.00 gift card in appreciation for their time. Interviews were audiotaped and the verbatim data obtained from in-depth interviews were entered into word processing software, which yielded 670 typed pages of 12-point font. Grounded Theory Methods (GTM) was used to guide the analysis of the data. All data and material generated in this study was locked in a safe off-campus location by the student researcher. Pseudonyms and case numbers were used to protect the identity and anonymity of all participants.

Table 3.8. Characteristics of 12th Grade Participants

Names	Grade	Age	SES	Ethnicity	School	Family Structure
Austin	12	17	MC	Jamaican	Public – Black	2 biological parents
Joe Brown	12	16	MC	African American	Public – White	2 biological parents
Mike	12	17	LC	African American	Public – Mixed	single mother
Willie	12	18	LC	African American	Public – Black	single mother
Nathan	12	17	LC	African American	Public – Black	single mother
Malik R	12	17	MC	African	Public – Black	divorced mother
Carl	12	17	MC	African American	Public – White	2 biological parents
Ryan	12	17	MC	African	Private - White	2 biological parents
Alex	12	16	REF	African	Private - White	2 biological parents

DATA ANALYSIS – GROUNDED THEORY METHODS

Glaser and Strauss (2006) developed Grounded Theory Analysis (GTM) as an innovative research method that would enable the development of theory. Before its advent, theorists were limited to testing extant theory and had no way of constructing new theory. GTM is a qualitative research technique that allows a researcher to derive theory through an ongoing process of constant comparison of text. It allows researchers to produce rich descriptions, analyze fact-finding accounts and narratives that “yield understanding,” (Corbin and Strauss 1990: 3), and generate theory from the perspective of the research participants. The purpose of using GTM is to explore a principal story, in this case, the Intersectionality of gender and race, family and school environment in relation to educational attainment and college aspiration was the principal

story. This study was likely to develop a better understanding of its subjects, however the research presented here would serve to generate additional research questions for future studies of Black male high school students' educational experiences and their relations to college aspiration.

By analyzing the responses from high school boys and their parents, GTM allowed me to extend the inequality of education literature broadly through an examination of the Intersectionality of gender, race, and education, in the context of family, SES, and school environments, to understand the effects on the development of college aspiration. With the data obtained from this study, I hope to contribute to continued improvements in the educational and social conditions of Black males in order to increase their enrollment and college graduation rates.

A review of the literature revealed prior studies that investigated the factors that potentially shaped and impacted ideals and behaviors for males' educational identity and performance. GTM was a good fit for this study and a viable analyses technique in efficiently examining the many pages of text generated by student and parent interviews. Glaser (2001) argued that Grounded GTM is a research methodology in its own right and very compatible with Intersectionality theory, as the theory is intertwined within the qualitative data of the study.

I used a circular process to analyze the data; the data were reviewed, concepts emerged, themes were created, and then the review process started all over again. Concepts that emerge from the data require the researcher to return to the data in search of clues to the concepts, which reveal closely related circumstances, shared meanings and behaviors that then comprise the basic nature of grounded theory (Jacelon and O'Dell 2005). The researcher repeats the review and inquiry-based process until theoretical saturation occurs; at this point, the researcher believes that

all concepts and themes have generated and created from the data. For the researcher, the iterative process means that all themes have been exhausted and no more themes arise from the data.

In this study, I collected and analyzed from in-depth interviews of Black parents, and male high-school students. I conducted data analysis through utilizing the most widely accepted phases of GTM open, axial and selective coding (LaRossa 2005). In the open coding phase, data analysis proceeded with opening the data, which is essentially breaking the data into small parts, examining them, comparing for similarities and differences, and asking questions about what is emerging from the data (Strauss and Corbin 1998). This happened by reading each interview transcript line-by-line, and developing concepts, defined as labels or symbols that are associated by indicators or referents (LaRossa 2005). Categories or variables were formulated from the concepts, which allowed for dimensionalization or a close examination of the properties of each category (LaRossa 2005).

I read each of the student transcripts twice (n=60), line-by-line and wrote notes in the margins relating to ideas that emerged. The core concept/variable of this study is college aspiration, other concepts/variables that emerged included educational attainment. In the category of race and gender, many themes emerged, including enduring discrimination, being hyper aware and hyper vigilant, “cool pose”, enduring hardships, peer pressure, benefits of education, problems with teachers, extracurricular activities, and school climates. See Table 3.9 for a description of some of the student concepts/variables and themes.

I utilized the concept-indicator model, which is predicated on constant comparisons between words, texts, phrases or sentences that define or underlie concepts. The presence of two or more indicators substantiated the creation of a variable or a concept. Some concepts had

several meanings according to each student, and similarities and differences became apparent upon comparison. Figure 3.1 illustrates the concept of race and gender, and six indicators reveal the commonalities and stark differences.

I continued with open coding and began to create categories, which according to Strauss (1987) is a conceptual element of the theory. Once the categories were created, I began to focus on the “properties,” inherent in each, which is described by Larossa (2005) as dimensionalization. Properties are finite descriptors of each category that define and give them meaning (Strauss and Corbin 1990). It was interesting to note the dimensionalization of the gender and race among the young men. Some were more aware than others, and could clearly express what they thought it mean to be Black and male. Others could define their social location, but had no feelings about their race or gender. Figures 3.2 and 3.3 show the properties and the dimensionalization of race and gender, and explore what it means to be Black and male.

During the next phase of axial coding, relationships among and between variables were explored. Strauss (1987) described this phase as an intense analysis of categories according to specific conditions, consequences, (p. 32) while Glaser (1978) described it as “theoretical coding,” by examining focal categories according to causes, contexts, contingencies, consequences, covariances, and conditions” (pp. 74, 76). In this phase the researcher asks questions about the phenomena that is being uncovered and begins to develop propositions or hypotheses regarding the data. I began axial coding with an analysis of race and gender and questioned Black males’ awareness by examining the conceptualizations of the students. In an effort to analyze the existence of awareness according to school types, I compared the texts of public and private school students, and looked at the similarities and differences between their responses.

Broader structural conditions were analyzed, as I questioned and compared racial and economic conditions. It was in the axial phase that I began to ask questions about the relationships between racial composition of the school environments, school types (public or private) and educational attainment.

I tried to determine if there was a relationship between them to understand how they impacted Black males' educational attainment and ability to develop college aspiration. I was interested in learning about the correlation between race and gender, SES, school environments, educational attainment and college aspiration: were lower-class students more or less cognizant of race and gender in all-Black public school environments when compared to working-, and middle-class high school students who attended private predominately White schools? Would the private students from middle-class backgrounds have more problems with enduring discrimination, having to be hyper aware and hyper vigilant, and enduring hardships? Would the school environments contribute positively to their educational attainment and allow them to develop stronger interests in attending college than the working-, or middle-class students? And if so, would the increased interest in educational matters vary by family structure and parental involvement? These were some of the questions that emerged and guided this phase of analysis. The results of this phase of analysis are discussed in the chapters that follow.

Table 3.9 Student Concepts

Race and Gender		
Concepts (Open Coding)	Categories (Axial Coding)	Variable Clusters (Selective Coding)
Conceptualizations about race and gender	Types of conceptualizations (related to race, related to gender, neutral)	Intensity of feelings about race and gender (strong, moderate, nonexistent)
Race and gender awareness	Types of awareness (present/subconscious/absent)	Intensity of awareness (acutely aware, moderate, nonexistent)
Enduring Discrimination		
Conceptualizations about enduring discrimination	Types of conceptualizations (related to race, related to race and/or gender, neutral)	Intensity of feelings about discrimination (strong, moderate, nonexistent)
Awareness of discrimination	Types of awareness (related to race and/or gender, related to SES)	Intensity of awareness (strong, moderate, nonexistent)
Being Hyper Aware and Hyper Vigilant		
Conceptualizations about having to be hyper aware, and/or hyper vigilant	Types of conceptualizations (related to discrimination related to race, or related to gender)	Intensity of feelings about having to be hyper aware and/or hyper vigilant (strong, moderate, nonexistent)
Awareness of having to be hyper aware, and/or hyper vigilant	Types of awareness about having to be hyper aware, and/or hyper vigilant (based on social interactions, based on implied actions)	Intensity of awareness of having to be hyper aware, and/or hyper vigilant (strong, moderate, nonexistent)
Cool Pose		
Conceptualizations about cool pose	Types of conceptualizations about cool pose (based on peer pressure, based on racial discrimination)	Intensity of feelings about cool pose (strong, moderate, nonexistent)
Awareness of cool pose	Types of awareness about cool pose (conscious, subconscious)	Intensity of awareness of cool pose (strong, moderate, nonexistent)
Enduring Hardships		
Conceptualizations about enduring hardships	Types of conceptualizations about enduring hardships (based on racial discrimination, based on gender or physical violence with other males, based on SES (school and neighborhood conditions))	Intensity of feelings about enduring hardships (strong, moderate, nonexistent)
Awareness of enduring hardships	Types of awareness about enduring hardships (based on race or gender)	Intensity of awareness of enduring hardships
Peer Pressure		
Conceptualizations about peer pressure	Types of conceptualizations about peer pressure	Intensity of feelings about peer pressure (strong, moderate, nonexistent)
Awareness of peer pressure	Types of awareness about peer pressure	Intensity of awareness of peer pressure (strong, moderate, nonexistent)