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# The Sons of Emmett Till: Addressing Black Male Masculinity in Urban High Schools in New Orleans

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THE SONS OF EMMETT TILL: ADDRESSING BLACK MALE  
MASCULINITY IN URBAN HIGH SCHOOLS IN NEW ORLEANS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The School of Education

by

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This dissertation is dedicated to Jerome H. Seaberry, Sr. and Junius Barnes, Sr. for showing me what masculinity and manhood are. They laid down their lives for others. One did so in his line of work. The other did so in his everyday actions.

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Be not weary in your well doing, for you shall reap if you faint not.

--Galatians 6:9

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation explores how Black boys in New Orleans' urban high schools develop, define, and do masculinity. Beginning with a narrative literature review, this study provides themes common among the six peer-reviewed articles that are specifically written on the subject of Black boys' masculinity in urban high schools in the United States. Analyzed using Critical Race Theory, the themes discussed in these six articles were used to formulate interview questions for 10 Black male students in New Orleans high schools. The empirical portion of this study found that Black boys in New Orleans urban high schools develop masculinity at birth, define it as person's character traits, and perform masculinity according to society's standards, enacting a cool pose (Majors & Billson, 1992). These findings lead the researcher to utilize Critical Race Theory in conversation with Feminist Standpoint Theory and Queer Theory to provide scholar-practitioners with the tools to re-evaluate the conversations that take place behind closed doors in relation to Black boys and their development, definition, and expression of masculinity.



## Introduction

Black boy -

Your body drifts through unwanted territories filled with dead  
Love, leaves, and light. None of them existed in this space.  
They were hoping that *you* don't exist in this space  
But you taught us differently  
You taught us that  
Black bodies still rise in death.

Though mangled...you taught us wholeness  
When your mother held that casket open for us to see *all* of you  
And how morbid (*read ironic*) must it be that  
You were held down by cotton gin  
I think it was the ancestors still sitting with you in death

You - wanting to be normal - to be a kid in a candy store  
Were made superman (of sorts)  
This superman was not America's favorite superhero  
And you did not wake up with a cape on your shoulders  
Though you did save the world

This superman was kryptonite in its purest form  
Then he became death and destruction  
He was nuclear code being launched  
And his only weapons were his lips  
How, when they whistled the whole world shook  
And no one ever allowed his lips to explain  
Instead, his lips drank the same waters that swallowed those ancestors

He never had physical children  
But the SONS OF EMMETT TILL still live on  
Let them speak for themselves

I pray they catch us listening.

This dissertation begins with a narrative literature review that addresses Black male masculinity studies in urban high schools across the United States. Of all the literature that address Black boys and masculinity, only six peer-reviewed journal articles are empirical research studies that specifically address masculinity in urban high schools. These articles were analyzed through a Critical Race Theory (CRT) lens that allowed me to categorize according to the tenets of CRT as well as the emerging themes from the literature.

These emerging themes along with the tenets of CRT were then used to create interview questions that examined what Brooms (2015), one of the six articles, poses as a future direction of their research. Therefore, chapter two of the dissertation is an empirical study in which I interviewed 10 Black male students in an urban New Orleans high school on what it means to *develop, define, and do* masculinity in the context of their high school.

Lastly, chapter three takes into account the CRT lens in which both the literature review and the empirical study were framed and moves the research forward by positioning this theory with two others, Queer Theory and Feminist Standpoint Theory. I placed these three theories in conversation with each other in an effort to fill a gap in the literature at the crux of where these three meet, working to create a standard for which educational stakeholders -- teachers, parents, administrators -- can conduct conversations surrounding Black male masculinity in high schools.

As stated in the above poem, Emmett Till was a 14-year-old Black boy whose words and actions were taken out of context and viewed through a lens of hegemonic masculinity, resulting in his death. If we redefine what masculinity means and invite Black boys to the table, we must let them speak in order to truly examine what it means to *develop, define, and do* masculinity.

## **Black Male or Black and Male: A Narrative Literature Review Addressing Black Male Masculinity in Urban High Schools in the United States**

Education in America's public schooling system has taught me that not only am I a Black male, but also that I must accept and adhere to the standards of what being Black and what being a male means, as defined by the dominance of white male leadership (Seaberry, 2016, p. 86).

The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (2013) wrote that over 45% of the United States' PK-12 student population was comprised of students of color; however, less than 20% of the teaching population was comprised of teachers of color. The U.S. Department of Education published that over 80% of United States public school teachers identified as white. Of those 80%, 77% identified as female (Howard & Navarro, 2016; Taie & Goldring, 2017; U.S. Department of Education 2015). Pair that with the fact that "teachers regularly assimilate young Black men toward "standard" norms for learning while inculcating them with "curricula" that esteem the social and cultural perspectives of the dominant group" (Warren, 2015) and we see the effects that bell hooks (2003) mentions in her reference to the imperialist, white-supremacist, capitalist, patriarchy permeating through school and societal systems such as healthcare, prison-systems, and legal affairs.

### **Research Question**

This narrative literature review seeks to address the question: What does the literature currently say about the Black males and masculinity in urban high schools in the United States?

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study will be conducted using Critical Race Theory (CRT) in an effort to examine the environment in which Black boys in urban high schools construct their masculinity.

## **Critical Race Theory**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is credited with beginning as an examination of legal studies, also known as critical legal studies in the 1970s (Cole, 2017; Kumasi, 2015; Matsuda, 2018). In their explanation of critical race theory, Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas (1995) stated that “there is no canonical set of doctrines or methodologies to which we all subscribe” (p. xiii). However, it is noted that critical race theorists agree that the fight for freedom began with critical views from American scholars “whose work challenges the ways in which race and racial power are constructed and represented in American legal culture, and more generally, in American society as a whole” (p. xiii). These American legal studies began examining the world as inherently racist. Specifically, Derrick Bell, widely known as the father of Critical Race Theory, set the foundation for such a theory in two essays where he condemns those who are forcing *Brown v. Board of Education* and the idea of integration upon Black communities without knowledge of what is truly needed in the community. He credits interest convergence, the idea that white people will only help other races if the outcome is of their interest for the majority of these societal issues. After the settling of his thoughts among other scholars, the theory began branching over to education and other arenas as the need for studying systems of power and privilege were strengthened in American society.

This civil rights discourse (see Bell, 1975; Bell, 1980; Delgado, 1984) paved the way for scholars to begin critically assessing systems within our justice system that seemingly were leaving Black people out of the narratives that most concerned them. These studies opened the doors for other scholars to create action plans, which led directly into legal action studies (see Matsuda, 1987), and finally emerged with counter-narratives (see Banks, 1990), in which the voices of the oppressed were amplified within the scholars’ works. More recently, Taylor,

Gillborn, and Ladson-Billings (2016) have taken hold of this theory to give educators a more thorough view of each tenet as well as its place in education, race/disability, affirmative action, and more.

In an effort to familiarize education scholars with the true history of CRT, Ladson-Billings (2013) makes it clear that simply discussing race and issues of race does not make any person a critical race theorist, just as discussing food dishes does not make one a chef. There are a set of hallmark identities that you must subscribe to that mark you as a critical race theorist. As defined by Delgado and Stefancic (2001), they are

- Belief that racism is normal or ordinary, not aberrant, in US society;
- Interest convergence or material determinism;
- Race as a social construction;
- Intersectionality and anti-essentialism;
- Voice or counter-narrative

For decades, these tenets have been used as the foundational resources to examine Black boys' view and perception of masculinity. In this study, I focus on the following tenets of CRT: endemic racism, systemic inequities, intersectionality, and counter-narrative. The definitions as they apply to this study are as follows:

**Endemic Racism (Racism as 'normal')**. The belief that racism does not happen in random, isolated acts. Rather, it is woven into the very threads of the United States society. CRT Scholars firmly believe that racism is the way society conducts business. It is a common experience that people of color endure daily (Ladson-Billings, 2013).

**Systemic inequities**. Systemic inequities refer to the idea presented by Ladson-Billings (2006) concept of the education debt, as cited by Bennet, Driver, and Trent (2017). This concept states that the "historic inequities hampered education opportunities for minoritized groups" (p. 3).

**Intersectionality.** “The complex, irreducible, varied, and variable effects which ensure when multiple axis of differentiation - economic, political, cultural, psychic, subjective, and experiential - intersect in historically significant contexts” (Brah & Phoenix, 2004, p. 76).

**Counter-Narrative.** Counter-storytelling and counter-narratives, used interchangeably, are significant parts of the principles of CRT (Vasquez & Altshuler, 2017; Leonardo & Boas, 2013; Yosso, 2006). This research methodology amplifies the voice of minoritized and marginalized individuals and situates their experiences as reality within the context of historical oppression in research (Vasquez & Altshuler, 2017).

## **Methods**

### **Data Collection**

**Selection of Articles.** The following criteria were used to select articles for this systematic review.

- Study content focused specifically on masculinity or masculinity as a tenet of identity work. Studies that focused on other types of identity were excluded.
- The study was conducted at a secondary school or a program associated with a secondary school in the United States.
- Participants included high school male students who identified as Black or African American. Studies where participants were middle school or primary school students, faculty and staff, collegiate-level, or other-gendered were excluded.
- Researchers reported findings from empirical research designs (i.e., qualitative, quantitative, survey, or mixed methods designs).
- The article was published in a peer-reviewed journal.

- Whole books, book chapters, dissertations, and theoretical manuscripts were excluded based on the lack of peer-review in such publications.

I completed an electronic search for peer-reviewed articles using the databases *PsycINFO* and *ERIC* (Education Resources Information Center). Using the Boolean indicators “or,” “and,” and “not,” the following terms were into databases: *masculinity, urban school, secondary education, high schools, inner-city schools, Blacks, African Americans, Black Americans*.

The initial searches yielded 14 results on *PsycINFO* and 43 results on *ERIC*. After one of each duplicate article was excluded and all abstracts read to ensure inclusion criteria, the final list included six articles for analysis.

**Data Analysis.** Following Bennet, Driver, & Trent (2017), I developed deductive codes based on “Delgado and Stefancic’s (2012) description of the tenets of CRT” (Bennet, et al., 2017, p. 7). These tenets included “endemic racism,” “systemic inequities/societal injustice,” “counternarratives,” and “intersectionality.” Initially, 18 codes were created based on empirical and theoretical knowledge in the articles. Some articles were coded based on the outcomes that the researchers sought. For example, “reimagining Black male images” applied to any article that actively sought to debunk the societal, and often stereotypical, image of the Black male. Theoretically, any article that indirectly discussed how Black boys define, develop, and do masculinity were coded accordingly. For example, any article that discussed the expression of masculinity both physically and/or emotionally was coded with “masculinity performance/identity regulations.” During round two and three of coding and reading each article, it became evident that these 18 codes were not extensive enough to cover all of the material presented in the articles. Therefore, I expanded the codes and began to create themes as they presented themselves within the codes. For example, “disciplinary procedures,”

“stereotypes,” and “institutional systems” are all codes that can be summarized as “systems that create and/or promote hegemonic masculinity.” The themes and codes that are associated with them are found in Table 1.

Table 1. Characteristics of Identified Studies.

Themes	Codes	%	n
Tenets of CRT			
	Endemic racism*	66	4
	Systemic inequities/societal injustice*	66	4
	Counter-narratives*	83	5
	Intersectionality	83	5
Systems that create/promote hegemonic masculinity			
	Disciplinary procedures	16	1
	Stereotypes	100	6
	Institutional Systems/Promotion of Systems	66	4
	Teacher perceptions	33	2
Influences on masculinity development			
	Goals of examining masculinity development	66	4
	Police Influence	33	2
	Black history influence	33	2
	Father’s involvement	33	2
	Teacher-student relationships	66	4
	Neighborhood influence	16	1
Reframing society’s definition(s) of masculinity			
	Goals of reframing dominant masculinity ideologies	83	5
	Reimagining Black male images	50	3
	Ability to resist hegemonic masculinity		
	Teacher resistance	66	4
	Student resistance	100	6
Opposition to reframing society’s definition(s) of masculinity			
	Difficulty to resist hegemonic masculinity		
	Teacher difficulty	50	3
	Student difficulty	83	5
Masculinity performance/Identity regulations			
	100	6	
Choosing to embrace hegemonic masculinity/accommodation			
	Teacher embrace	50	3
	Student embrace	50	3
Solutions to reframing society’s definition(s) of masculinity			
	Using friends and peers to combat masculinity performance issues	33	2
	Black male role models	66	4
	Increase ideational, relational, and/or material resources	16	1



Themes	Codes	%	n
	New disciplinary procedures that are anti-hegemonic	33	2

*Note:* Six total articles.

## **Findings**

### **Summary of Studies (Chronologically)**

Howard (2012) studied eight African American high school boys who attended Angel’s Academy, a predominately African American public charter school. He used interview sessions over a three-month period to explore the relationship between the students and the school administrators/personnel. Howard employed the use of narratives to elucidate said relationship and its effects on the everyday interactions of the students and personnel. He found that most of the students viewed their relationships with the adults as inconsistent, strained, and oftentimes not-reciprocal, although they all seemed to put their trust in one young, African American, male teacher, Mr. Harold. On a superficial level, Mr. Harold helped the boys to redefine characteristics of being a man, though it is still unclear how these relationships “inform their own presentation of self, in general, and masculinity in particular” (p. 384).

Nasir, McKinney De Royston, Given, and Bryant (2013) used qualitative methods to study the Manhood Development Program (MDP) in the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD). First, they defined the important of knowing the North American systems set up and perpetuated by dominant society, white, wealthy, Christian men. These are an Ideological State Apparatus (ISA includes schools and churches and “reproduce dominant class ideology” (p. 492) and a Repressive State Apparatus includes police and prison systems and “repress[es] working class power” (p. 492). Their study was an effort to examine “how an alternative space was

created in the school that *reinterpellated* or *rehailed* African American male students in an attempt to resist the working of the school as the ISA with its internal RSA” (p. 494).

Brooms (2015) used qualitative methods to follow 20 Black males from an urban, all-boys public charter school. He originally set out to explore their educational perceptions and experiences, but found the context in which they study of far greater importance. This study examined “the neighborhood effect” (p. 272) and how the student’s perceptions and experiences affect their self of self, including masculinity. He found that the students “engage in a cross-section of these scripts [cool masculinities, tough guise, and a search for respect] in order to protect the perception of their normative masculinity during out-of-school time” (p. 279).

Rogers and Way (2015) used qualitative methods to “examine identity development as a process of resistance and accommodation to racial and gender stereotypes among Black adolescent males” (p. 269). They acquired information from 183 Black males who were all enrolled as members of an incoming ninth-grade class. A subsample of 21 boys were interviewed over the course of the study. They found that Black boys in this school identified as resisters and accommodators in various aspects. The “Accommodators” reinforced both gender and racial stereotypes. The “Resisters” worked to resist both gender and racial stereotypes, believing that they “can shift how others view Black males” (p. 281). The “Exceptions” viewed themselves as exceptions to the stereotypes and, therefore, only resisted race and accommodated to gender stereotypes.

Givens, Nasir, Ross, and McKinney De Royston (2016) used qualitative methods to study the Manhood Development Program (MDP) as mentioned above. This article is a continuation of the Nasir, et al. (2013) study in the OUSD. In this particular version, they looked specifically at what resources were made available to students that allowed them to examine notions of Black

manhood. They drew their study upon the concept of *identity resources*, which include *material, relational, and ideational resources*, which refers to the physical environment, the relationship between others, and the ideas about who one is and what is valued, respectively. This concept “highlighted the agency of students to disavow stereotypical, dominant images of black men and to instead create new possibilities to construct for themselves what it meant to be black and male” (p. 180).

Laing (2017) used qualitative methods to elucidate how Black males at an “urban, all-male public combined middle and high school – constructed, perceived, and negotiated their masculine identities and perceptions of brotherhood” (p. 1). He employed interviews, focus groups, and classroom observations Black boys in school negotiate their masculine identities both inside and outside of the school. They challenge others definitions of masculinity and that their gender identity issues are relational to their peers, family members, and adult male teachers.

### **General Findings**

Of the six identified studies, four (Brooms, 2015; Givens, et al., 2016; Laing, 2017; Rogers & Way, 2016) had either direct or indirect goals of examining masculinity development within this population. Brooms (2015) sought to find the impact that the neighborhood had on Black male’s development as it relates to them existing within the context of the school and the neighborhood in which they live and thrive. Although not explicitly stated, Brooms proved that the neighborhood has a great effect on masculinity development in relation to masculinity performance and, as Majors and Billson (1993) would call it, “cool pose” in order to survive the many verbal and physical attacks related to the stereotypes of attending an all-boys school in “the hood” (p. 273). Givens, et al. (2016) stated that their research question was “What notions of black manhood were conveyed to the students in the Manhood Development classes and

through what processes were these notions made available to students” (p. 169)? Laing (2017) was most influential in examining masculinity development. In his literature review and discussion, he mentions that “what is means to be male or female is socially constructed – that is, individuals learn from individuals” (p. 5). He further adds, “this study exposed that gender identity issues are major issues in the lives of young men and are relational to their peers...family members..and older male teachers” (p. 26). Lastly, Rogers and Way (2016) broadened the conversation by making an important connection between identity development and Critical Race Theory. They stated “The purpose of this analysis was the examine the identity development of Black adolescent males within a framework of resistance and accommodation using an intersectionality lens” (p. 284). Not only did they seek to examine identity development, but they did so through an intersectional lens, ensuring that all parts of being Black and male are addressed.

All six research teams (100%) mentioned stereotypes about Black male students in their studies, which can be seen as a system that promotes hegemonic masculinity and will be discussed later. Two (33%) of the studies mentioned police influence on masculinity development (Givens, et al., 2016; Nasir, et al., 2013), two (33%) of the studies mentioned Black history influence (Givens, et al., 2016; Nasir, et al., 2013), and two (33%) of the studies mentioned father’s involvement as important to masculinity development (Givens, et al., 2016; Howard, 2012). Five of the studies (83%) had goals of reframing dominant masculinity ideologies, either directly stated or indirectly implied (Givens, et al., 2016; Howard, 2012; Laing, 2017; Nasir, et al., 2013; Rogers & Way, 2016) and, similarly, all six articles (100%) discussed how students have difficulty opposing society’s definitions of hegemonic masculinity.

## Tenets of CRT

Four (66%) of the studies positioned their research within the reality that society operates through power differences based on racialized, and oftentimes gendered, norms. This normalization of differences is known in CRT as endemic or systemic racism and is evident when looking at disciplinary systems (Nasir, et al., 2013), “resistance for survival” (Rogers and Way, 2016, p. 266), the pervasiveness of the troubled Black boy persona in public schools (Brooms, 2015), and the ignoring of institutional and structural racism when framing the problem as belonging to the child or his family (Givens, et al., 2016). These four as well as Howard (2012) also employed the use of counternarratives to negate and renegotiate the power differences displayed in society.

Five (83%) of the research teams spoke specifically to the use of intersectionality in delineating how Black males view and develop masculinity as well as how researchers, teachers, and society views them within that context (Brooms, 2015; Givens, et al., 2016; Laing, 2017; Nasir, et al., 2013; Rogers and Way, 2016). Brooms (2015) gave context to the use of intersectionality when he stated that

research on the lived experiences of Black males is important to consider as well since it demonstrates the need to nuance their experiences across the intersections of race, gender, and class (Anderson, 2008; Jenkins, 2006; Johnson & Leighton, 1995; Young, 2004) (p. 269).

To operationalize this meaning, Givens, et al. (2016) developed the concept of “identity constellations” (p. 170) in which they give meaning to the data derived in their study of the Manhood Development Program in the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD). “This concept attends to the ways that identities come in sets; that is, one aspect of one’s identity can have implications for other aspects” (p. 170). “It requires teaching them in a manner that

acknowledges their identities as black and male in a society that has always positioned them as a problem” (Givens, et al., 2016, p. 182). However, Laing (2017) made it evident that these identities do not always come as equal. He quoted Mutua (2006) as he said “Black men at the intersection of race and gender were subordinated by race and privileged by gender... We speculated that at times Black men were oppressed by gender in addition to race” (p. xviii).

Rogers and Way (2016) warned us about unifying labels in this manner when they said

identity union assumes unified identity labels as the unit of analysis, for example, “Black male.” However, such labels are also limiting as they reinforce an alternate fixed identity that then ignores other intersections, such as sexuality and social class (McCall, 2005; Phoenix, 2006)” (p. 268).

As evident in Nasir, et al. (2013), understanding intersectionality allows the teacher to view the acted roles of the students within his/her own historical context and “cultural and gendered language [to] allow him to *translate* the hidden logic of students’ actions as resistance to the dominant ideology” (p. 508).

### **Systems That Promote Hegemonic Masculinity**

This review aimed to collect and analyze previous work done by scholars to uncover and identify the ways in which high school Black male students develop, define, and do masculinity. However, the six studies found seemed to have better uncovered and discussed the systems that are promoting hegemonic masculinity, than they did actually delineating the the root of Black male masculinity.

**Disciplinary Procedures.** In the Nasir, et al. (2013) study of the Manhood Development Program, Brother P, the Black male teacher often times used push-ups as a form of punishment in the class. Claiming that the physical activity was to enforce brotherhood and togetherness, this

also is a perpetuating force of hegemonic masculinity. The use of a typically masculine form of exercise endorses the performance of masculinity associated with power and becoming stronger.

**Stereotypes.** All six teams of researchers (100%) discuss stereotypes of Black male students in their study. All address them as a form of perpetuating and promoting hegemonic masculinity and view men Black men through a lens that has been created by the media to prove unregulated, violent, and resistant nature of Black men (Howard, 2012; Laing, 2017). It is known that stereotypes have a long historical background in the lives of Black men, i.e.- *The Birth of a Nation* portraying them as “dangerous primitive brutes (Griffin, 1915) and slavery depicting Black men as “lacking in moral fiber or intelligence (Douglass, 1857)” (Givens, et al., 2015, p. 168). Using words to describe Black males like “harshly perceived” and “difficult or disruptive” (Nasir, et al., 2013, p. 490) is what leads many early studies to believe that Black males perceived “opposition to school negatively impacted their educational outcomes (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986)” (Brooms, 2015, p. 269). However, this is no surprise. The negative stereotypes that often pervade society “often begin in school” (Brooms, 2015, p. 270), whether physically in the school-building or in context of educational institutions. For example, Brooms’ (2015) study on the context that the neighborhood plays in development of young Black males and academic achievement showed that there are also neighborhood stereotypes surrounding what type of school Black males attend. For those attending an all-male school, there was a fear that “students with whom they shared a school might have thought they “were punks”...they thought that attending an all-male school might create perceptions about their sexuality and masculine constructs” (Brooms, 2015, p. 275). There have been many other studies (Kunjufu, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2011; Noguera, 2008; Steele & Aronson, 1995) that look at the effects of Black

boys being labeled as threats (Laing, 2017). These stereotypical views are what promote hegemonic masculinity within the school systems.

Supporting the claims made earlier, Rogers and Way (2015) stated Black males, for example, are routinely depicted as aggressive, hypersexual, and violent; they are gang members, criminals, or professional athletes. While this cultural image does not represent the vast majority of Black males, its dominance as a stereotype tangibly impacts how young Black males come to view themselves and make sense of their own identities (e.g., Davis, 2006; Ferguson, 2000; Nasir, 2011) (p. 264).

In their 2015 study, they also go on to question which stereotype is *easier* for a Black male to resist? “Are they more likely to resist stereotypes related to positions of subordination (Blackness) than dominance (maleness)” (Rogers and Way, 2015, p. 269)? This directly relates as evidence to the claim made by Rogers and Way in regards to intersectionality and unifying the labels of Black male, instead of Black and male.

### **Reframing Black Male Masculinity**

Despite the promotion of hegemonic masculinity in much of mainstream America, especially pervasive in educational contexts, five of the studies (83%) had goals to reframe society’s definition or view of Black male masculinity (Givens, et al., 2016; Howard, 2012; Laing, 2017; Nasir, 2013; Rogers and Way, 2016). Laing (2017) asserted that “researchers need to take responsibility for reframing discussions about diverse masculinities inside and outside school spaces” (p. 5) and that is just what these studies have done. Givens, et al. (2016) described a program in the OUSD that specifically works to “disrupt stereotypes and to create opportunities for expanded notions of black manhood in the context of a Manhood Development class in a public high school” (p. 169). One of the studies (Nasir, et al., 2013) even took a look into the teacher as a means of reframing Black male masculinity. Here, they saw that “Brother P” mainly taught “against the dominant racial ideology,” proving that not only race can be resisted,



but that he, a Black man, can be seen as teacher, leader, and a new Black male image to emulate. In a similar way, Rogers and Way (2016) found that those who resist the systems are doing so to “shift how others view Black males” (p. 281).

**Reimagining Black male Images.** Three of the articles (50%) spoke to realistic goals of reimagining the Black male image as seen in mainstream society today. Givens, et al. (2016) worked “to create opportunities for expanded notions of black manhood” (p. 169), Nasir, et al. (2013) worked to “examine how alternative space was created in the school that *re-interpellated* or *rehailed* African American male students...” (p. 494), and Rogers and Way (2016) used an “all-Black, all-male school designed to counteract mainstream cultural beliefs about Black men” (p. 285). There were teachers who found it necessary to provide positive male images for his students (Givens, et al., 2016), teachers who are hailed as the “hero teacher” that works against the schools as an ISA (Nasir, et al., 2013), and researchers who believed that recruitment of positive Black male teachers increases the amount of role models the Black male student have in the school system. This, in turn, provides a positive learning environment with positive disciplinary systems, alternate examples of career paths, and various “played differences of masculine performances” (Laing, 2017, p. 20).

**Ability To Resist Hegemonic Masculinity (Teacher and Students).** While only four of the six articles (66%) addressed the teachers ability to resist hegemonic masculinity (Givens, et al., 2016; Howard, 2012; Laing, 2017; Nasir, et al., 2013), all six articles discussed the student’s ability to resist hegemonic masculinity, proving that it is possible to work towards reframing Black male masculinity. It is important to remember that any form of resistance is also an offering of strategies to push against expectations (Laing, 2017). All of the authors have shown such strategies. For example, Brooms (2015) posited that the Black males in his study “didn’t let

the neighborhood win” (p. 276) by resisting stereotypes, remaining focused in school, and graduating/matriculating into college. Howard (2017) showed the bonds that can be formed between school administrators and Black male students. He said “By embracing such non-traditional masculine behaviors and characteristics, the boys may be resisting hyper-masculine behaviors exemplified in their relationship with other adult males in the school” (p. 384). With the push of their instructors, other students in other studies were able to resist hegemonic masculinity by physically holding babies, a task thought of them as feminine (Givens, et al., 2016), allowing themselves to experience life in new ways such as a productive member of the community and a reasonable problem-solver (Nasir, et al., 2013), and finally by choosing resistance over accommodation in both racial and gender terms (Rogers and Way, 2016).

### **Discussions, Implications, and Future Directions**

The purpose of this analysis is to examine how scholars have previously delineated high school Black male’s perceptions of masculinity in urban schools in the United States. My findings underscore that the process of examination of masculinity in high school-aged Black males has uncovered the influences of masculinity (fatherhood, police interactions, neighborhoods, etc.), the systems that promote hegemonic masculinity (disciplinary systems and stereotypes/perceptions), and how the Black male students and teachers are working to oppose/resist these systems. Moreover, this analysis also uncovered the struggle of being a *Black male* or being *Black and male*, the use of intersectional lenses when examining masculinity.

Hegemonic masculinity, is oppressive to Black males in that it can be seen as limiting to their ability to realize self. Erasing the ideas of hegemonic masculinity that permeate the hallways of urban high schools gives autonomy to high school males and affords them an opportunity to grow through self-actualization and self-identification without the constraints of

academic achievement on their backs. Specifically, Black male high school seniors who are on the cusp of graduating and being viewed as adults can challenge the harmful notions that society places on their masculinity in the form of hyper-sexuality, emotional isolation, and minimal liberation (another way to tell men what they should not be). Schools cannot afford to focus solely on academic achievement of students and ignore the intersectionalities that come along with them. There are students with religious, sexual, socioeconomic, and health concerns that require just as much attention as do their academic needs. Specifically, it is my goal to examine the perceptions and factors of masculinity that can pervade as pivotal to self-identity of urban Black male high school seniors in a Louisiana school district.

### **Implications for Masculinity Development**

Seeing that only a few researchers ( $n = 4$ , 66%) had realist goals of examining masculinity development (see Table 2) and only a few others found that fatherhood, Black history, and police presence had an influence in masculinity development, I contend that more work needs to be done in examining the root of masculinity development for each individual in the studies.

The tendency to address Black masculinity in high school males without first addressing their perceptions of hegemonic masculinity can hinder the true understanding of the above findings.

Young (2007) stated

Thus to comprehend what prompts my racial-cum-linguistic performance in one site depends upon an examination of my performance in the other. This juxtaposition of hood and school forms an analytic lens that Hoover also suggests is appropriate. "In order to properly interpret Black attitudes toward Black English," [Mary Rhodes Hoover] writes, "one has to consider schools in relation to settings outside them" (1978, 65-66) (p. 3).

Although Young directed his comments towards understanding Black English in the hood and the school context, this is applicable to masculinity in both the hood and school aspect.

Examining the influences of the neighborhood, fatherhood, Black history, and police presence

without examining the origins within the school provides insufficient amounts of data to truly understand Black males, intersectionality, and the performance of masculinity in urban high schools. In order to fully examine the development of Black male masculinity, as is needed in the field, the Black male subjects in the study should be keenly aware of the endemic racism, systemic inequities, and promotion of hegemonic practices that affect their everyday decisions.

### **Implications for Identity Development**

When discussing masculine performance, the cool pose/tough guise personas, it is important to situate their actions within the larger society's happenings. Furthermore, endemic racism and systemic inequities should be addressed and named in order to the subjects to grasp their position in society. These thoughts stem from The Cross Model of Psychological Nigrescence (Cross, 1978). If we are looking at the intersection of being Black and male, but the subject has not moved through the initial phase (The Encounter Phase), then it is possible that they will not fully understand how their intersectionality plays part in their masculinity development. This can cause the subject in the study to respond with answers that are accommodating to racial and gender stereotypes. Intersectionality is at the root of all of these studies and should also be taken into consideration. While it creates a vast amount of identities to examine, researchers must begin questioning subjects in regards to all identities so that they can have an accurate and whole picture of the development of Black masculinity. These identities include, but are not limited to race, gender, sex, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, parental involvement, parental occupation, so on and so forth.

Again, Young (2007) positioned this discussion in layman's terms. In a trip to the barbershop he has an existential realization that allowed him to express that he does not fit well into any one category of his existence. As he stated, "I'm not ghetto enough for the ghetto. Because I'm not a

white boy, I'm not white enough for white folks...I'm not completely accepted into the mainstream" (p. xvi). This realization caused a tremendous amount of psychological distress for him and can do the same for Black boys who are in similar predicaments in urban high schools. Those who have not defined what masculinity is to them or those who have defined it by hegemonic sentiments can begin to feel this pain.

The psychological pain that this liminal existence creates, the pain of negotiating multiple cultural and racial worlds, is far too great for many. I've been doing it for a long time and have been able to cope only by transforming my personal problem into an intellectual one. In some ways I'm chipping away at the burden. But far too many are not able to do this. And why should they have to (Young, 2007, p. xvi)?

Scholars who have begun the work of examining masculinity in high school Black males have a responsibility to elucidate the perceptions of high school Black males on masculinity, specifically in the context of secondary institutions, in an effort to understand masculinity and identity development in both the schools and the neighborhoods that surround them.

Brooms (2015) stated that now is the time to "investigate how Black males develop, define, and *do* masculinity" (p. 279). I am suggesting that we focus first on the definition of masculinity. Then we will be able to examine the development of that definition using the contexts that were shown in this analysis (influences, systems that promote hegemonic masculinity, and intersectionality). Once we examine those two areas, then we can take a full circle approach to the performance and *doing* of masculinity that so many scholars have already researched.

### **The Disconnect Between Collegiate and High School Studies**

There are notable studies that address masculinity and identity issues amongst Black men enrolled in community colleges as well as two- and four-year universities (Brooms, 2018;

Brooms, Clark, & Smith, 2017; Edwards & Jones, 2009; Harper, 2004; Harris, Palmer, & Struve, 2011; hooks, 2004; Jackson, 2012; Mincey, Alfonso, Hackney, & Luque, 2015; Pelzer, 2016; Strayhorn & Tillman-Kelly, 2013). These research studies have significantly moved the conversation about how Black men develop, define, and *do* masculinity; however, they have forgotten the transition and matriculation from high school to college in their studies, leaving high school Black males in a dark hole.

Similarly, there are seminal studies that add significant amounts of research about Black males in high school to the academy. As stated earlier, there are only six peer-reviewed journal article that specifically address Black male masculinity in urban high schools; however, there are tons of articles that address the Black male academic performance/achievement gap (Allen, 2015; Noguera, 2003; Strayhorn, 2014; Warren, 2016; Warren, Douglass, & Howard, 2016), racial and gender identity (Billson, 2018; Mahalik, Pierre, & Wan, 2006; Rogers, Scott, & Way, 2015), parental involvement (Allen & White-Smith, 2018; Curtis, Grinnell-Davis, & Alleyne-Green, 2017; Posey-Maddox, 2017), and other issues that affect Black males in secondary institutions such as discipline (Aull, 2012; Berlowitz, Fenning and Rose, 2007; Frye, & Jette, 2015; Heitzeg, 2009), the school to prison pipeline (Berlowitz, Frye, & Jette, 2015; Dancy, 2014; Fasching-Varner, Mitchell, Martin, & Bennet-Haron, 2014; Fasching-Varner & Seriki, 2012, Porter, 2015; Wald & Losen, 2003 ), reading and literacy levels (Haddix, 2009; Tatum, 2008; Tatum, 2003; Wood & Jocious, 2013; Young, 2007), and more. There are even significant studies that suggest that there is a conspiracy to destroy Black boys (Kunjufu, 1985).“Judith Kleinfeld, a psychology professor...suggests that black boys fail because they worry too much about blackness and masculinity and are insufficiently preoccupied with learning to read, write, and speak” (Young, 2007, p. 4).

The issue on the table is that these two categories are not intersecting in a way that gets to the crux of what we need to know. We as scholars have not defined masculinity in terms of a Black male enrolled in these urban high schools. Reaching this root can inform many other scholars who study identity development, academic achievement, parental involvement, etc. by giving them the space to understand a portion of the Black male population that enrolls and matriculates through community colleges and four-year universities. Maybe if we dive to the bottom of their definitions of masculinity and manhood, we can begin to focus on two processes that seem to hinder full academic achievement: (1) the process of understanding one's identity, a theoretical preoccupation with blackness and masculinity, which comes at the hindrance of learning to read, write, and speak; and (2), essentially a subset of the first process, working against what I will continue to call the burden of gender performance. The latter is a take on Young (2007) book *Your Average Nigga Performing Race Literacy and Masculinity*, where the author takes a look at "the burden of racial performance, the demand to prove what type of black person you are" (p. 37). Here, in my work, I want to alleviate the burden to prove what type of man you are *or are not*. At the intersection of all of previously published articles about Black males lies the answer to many solutions for many issues of academic achievement, the achievement gap, and more: *how do you define yourself as a man? How does this definition play part in your academics, familial involvement, and other relationships or situations?*

The next chapter of this dissertation will "investigate how Black males develop...masculinity" (Brooms, 2015, p. 279), while the last chapter will position Black male masculinity in conversation with Critical Race Theory and Queer Theory, hopefully creating a new model for examining masculinity in Black boys.

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## **“And Ain’t I A Man”: Defining Masculinity Through the Lens of New Orleans High Schoolers**

See me for who I am  
Allow my words to permeate cement walls  
Like piercing arrows  
Listen to the way my walk tells a story  
I have been wanting to define my own life  
Against society’s will  
Here I am  
Earrings dangling on both ears  
Voice the octave that I want it  
Clothes reminiscent of another era  
Walk as bold as I choose  
And ain’t I a man?

In 1851, Sojourner Truth delivered the speech “Ain’t I a Woman” at the Akron, Ohio Women’s Convention. In this speech, Truth fights for Black women’s rights to be equal to white women. Truth pleads to the convention audience that she, too, is a woman and should be treated as such (Truth & Kennedy, 1992). Pleading for cross-identities to be acknowledged, Truth used an anecdotal approach to provide evidence that men were overlooking the women in her community, when, in fact, it was the women who kept the community going. Her example of Christ being born to a woman may have touched the hearts of the listeners, but it was her tenacity and gall to confront a room full of white, patriarchal, supremacist men that may have caused a shift in providing equal rights to all.

Truth’s speech as a call for equal rights for Black women demonstrates how listening to a standpoint -- a certain position -- can positively impact the society or community in which the person, usually oppressed, belongs. This speech ultimately paved the way for Black women to eventually gain more rights and be seen as citizens in the eyes of the white men around them. Modern day society can take this same approach to addressing oppressed populations in our

communities. If oppressed people are given the opportunity to speak and address their concerns, then they may have a chance to begin the conversation that can ultimately change their plight.

For example, when looking at published peer-reviewed journal articles, Black boys in urban high schools<sup>1</sup> have never been given the chance to openly speak and state their standpoint on how they define masculinity. Similar to Truth in 1851, if they are given a platform to speak and make their case, then they, too, can begin the process to a conversation that addresses the placing of expectations on the young Black boys through American society's definition of Black male masculinity as hypermasculine, hypersexual, and emotionally isolating.

According to the Schott Foundation for Public Education (2015), the estimated national graduation rate of Black males during the 2012-2013 school year was 59%, while white males graduated at a rate of 80%. Louisiana, however, was listed among the lowest of the 50 states in Black male graduation rates. Louisiana's rate listed at a 53% graduation rate, a 16-point drop from the 69% graduation rate of white males in Louisiana, making it a "state of emergency" (Schott Foundation for Public Schools, 2015, p. 11). This data also showed that Louisiana had a suspension rate of 12.9% for Black males, while white males were suspended at a rate of 6.3%. The difference between Black and white male suspension rates creates a 6.6% Black/white gap (Schott Foundation for Public Schools, 2015). The danger of a single story toward creating a monolith (Adichie, 2009) aside, statistics such as these might prompt an examination of the root causes of racialized gaps in graduation and suspension rates. As Flenbaugh (2016) stated,

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<sup>1</sup> The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2018) defines a large city as "territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with population of 250,000 or more." New Orleans, Louisiana has a population of roughly 393,292 citizens (US Census Bureau, making it a large city (formerly referred to as an urban area by NCES). Therefore, all schools inside Orleans Parish are considered urban schools.

We must take a moment to critically reflect on the power that this particular narrative has on Black male adolescents and decide how helpful it is to create an alternative story of success for young Black men in high school (p. 65).

My experience within the Orleans Parish School system afforded me the opportunity to witness the conversations and observe the unspoken language that exists surrounding Black male masculinity. I have taken it upon myself to commit my work to investigating the myriad of expressions that are exhibited in Black male masculinity. This commitment is evident in my use of Critical Race Theory, and in the future, Queer Theory as a means to amplify the voices of those who may be marginalized by the existing hegemonic ideas of Black male masculinity.

Through individual interviews with 10 Black male high school students, this chapter captures the voices of Black male students as they navigate masculinity in educational spaces. This study provides critical insight into the benefits of engaging in conversation with Black males in regards to how they develop, define, and do masculinity, The research presented in this chapter addresses the ways that educational institutions create the space necessary for Black boys in urban high schools to explore and examine masculinity, despite existing as a microcosm of American society (cite). Finally, I show how Black boys passively resist hegemonic masculinity through their defining of masculinity as a character trait rather than a physical expression. The purpose of this research is to elucidate how Black boys in New Orleans' urban high schools develop, define, and do masculinity, according to Broome's (2015) recommendation on moving forward from his study on masculinity, schools, and the neighborhoods that they are situated in. The data transcribed and coded in this study point to just that. There are three major themes that emerge from this data: (1) developing masculinity, (2) defining masculinity, and (3) doing masculinity.



## Literature Review

Toward understanding perceptions of *Black* masculinity in high school males, I first examine its historical context within hegemonic masculinity. Children are taught to reify the notions of dominant, patriarchal views of masculinity during their formative years in early education, which can become problematic both in their adolescent years and in supporting the culture of a monolithic view of masculinity, also known as hegemonic masculinity (Bryan, 2018).

Understanding perceptions of *Black* masculinity in high school males warrants an examination of empirical studies that have addressed multiple facets of masculinity. Here, I have assessed and analyzed the six studies that specifically focus on Black male masculinity in urban high schools in the United States. Of these peer-reviewed journal articles, I have also examined their use of Critical Race Theory, specifically counter-narrative and intersectionality, and how they have expanded on the theory in their own ways.

Though there is a vast amount of literature focusing on Black boys and masculinity in high schools, this study focuses only on those that have been published in high quality, peer-reviewed journals within the last few years. After a vast search, ensuring that all inclusion criteria were met, there exist only six journal articles that directly relate to Black male masculinity in urban high schools across the United States. The scholars who published these articles have all conducted empirical research with Black males in urban high schools across the United States as their participants. Research on Black males and masculinity shows that there are a number of school-related programs, models, and personnel that directly engage with the students and influence, whether positive or negative, masculinity development.

## **Tenets of Critical Race Theory**

This study, as well as the full literature review that proceeds this study, are situated within within Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a theoretical framework. Specifically, I focus on endemic racism, systemic inequities, counternarrative, and intersectionality as four tenets of CRT in which we examine the literature and responses from participants. As research shows four of the six peer-reviewed journal articles were positioned in the same lens, examining society through the lens of endemic/systemic racism. Endemic racism can often appear as power differences based on racialized, and sometimes, gendered norms and has been shown to permeate through disciplinary systems (Nasir, Ross, Mckinney de Royston, Givens, & Bryant, 2013), student-centered methods that promote resistance as a means of survival (Rogers and Way, 2016), the widespread troubled Black boy persona (Brooms, 2015), and projecting educational institution's structural racism on the the Black male child and/or his family (Givens, Nasir, & Mckinny de Royston, 2016). These four mentioned articles also employed the use of counter-narrative as a means to exemplify the racism within the walls of some United States high schools.

This research also examined the high schools via their use of intersectionality as a means to understand and engage the students they work with. 83% (5 out of 6) of the articles showed used intersectionality to delineate how researchers, teachers, and society view Black males and their masculinity development (Brooms, 2015; Givens, et al., 2016; Laing, 2017; Nasir, et al., 2013; Rogers and Way, 2016). Givens, et. al (2016) expanded on the use of intersectionality with their coining of the phrase "identity constellations" (p. 170) in which they operationalize CRT in their all-male manhood development program to acknowledge and rehaul them as members of society in all of their identities. Finally, some researchers have stated that understanding

intersectionality at its core can allow the teacher, especially those who teach in the hood (Emdin, 2016), to view the expression and performance, also known as the acted roles, of the students within the student's own historical and cultural context. Viewing the students in such a historical and cultural context gives the teacher space to translate the student's logic as actions of resistance (Nasir, et al., 2013).

### **Systems that Promote Hegemonic Masculinity**

Previous research also shows that there are systems within United States high schools that promote hegemonic masculinity primarily through disciplinary procedures and the pervasiveness of stereotype threat in classrooms. Beyond discipline procedures and processes that have been proven to discipline Black boys at a higher rate than any other gender or race, Nasir (2013) exemplifies that there also schools and school systems that, in their efforts to produce manhood development programs, are reinforcing hegemonic masculinity. For example, one Oakland-based program in particular promotes society's definition of hypermasculinity when they assign pushups as a form of punishment. Assigning pushups reinforces the idea that men and masculinity are both associated with being physically strong. Strength as a tenet of masculinity is a stereotype, similar to lack of intellect and hypersexuality that has been perpetuated years, beginning in historical times (see *The Birth of A Nation*). Stereotypes such as these are widespread throughout urban high school administrators and teachers, causing the promotion and perpetuation of ideas of hegemonic masculinity. According to Brooms (2015), it is not only the hallways and classrooms that perpetuate these ideas, but the neighborhoods play a large role in stereotype threat. These various spaces of resistance or accommodation was the root cause for other researchers to examine when and where Black male students would resist racial and gender stereotypes (Rogers and Way, 2015).

## **Reframing Black Male Masculinity**

Many of the same researchers also set out to examine how educational institutions as well as individual students are attempting to, and some succeeding at, reframing Black male masculinity (Givens, et al., 2016; Howard, 2012; Laing, 2017; Nasir, 2013; Rogers and Way, 2016). Givens, et. al (2016) described programs that are specifically disrupting stereotype threat in schools and providing the space to expand the notion of Black manhood and masculinity in public high schools. Of these studies, some have studied how organizations and individuals realistically reimagine Black male images. There is evidence of providing positive Black male images and role models in the classrooms (Givens, et al., 2016), re-hailing Black male teachers as “heroes” (Nasir, et al., 2013), and recruiting Black male teachers to increase diversity and accessibility to someone who looks like majority of the students in urban high schools. Furthermore, five of the six articles examined how teachers and students are able to actively resist hegemonic masculinity in the context of the schools they are associated with. Students are able to resist neighborhood stereotypes (Brooms, 2015), bond with administrators and create non-traditional male-to-male relationships (Howard, 2017), learn to debunk gender roles such as holding babies (Givens, et al., 2016), embrace emotions to become problem-solvers (Nasir, et al., 2013), and choose resistance over accommodation in both racial and gender terms (Rogers and Way, 2016).

## **Theoretical Framework**

Forming in the 1970s and 1980s in an effort to address race and racism in Critical Legal Studies (CLS), Critical Race Theory (CRT) is considered a newer approach to attaining equitable societal institutions, policies, and practices. The search for equitable circumstances causes many CRT scholars to act and perform as activists in their work, differing CRT from CLS efforts,

ultimately bringing about social change (Decuir & Dixon, 2004). Derrick Bell, known as the father of CRT, laid the foundational principles for the predecessor, Critical Legal Studies, when he set the pace for an alternate view of law cases that emerged as inequitable and, in a sense, racist. This “alternative to dominant perspective [whiteness or majority]” (Chapman, Dixon, Gillborn, and Ladson-Billings, 2013, p. 1020) is what led critical legal studies to work to deconstruct the idea of liberalism and, eventually, began to tackle the idea that racism is not a single act of violence or hatred, but a permanent fixture of society. CRT scholars subscribe to the idea that racism is *endemic* and must be addressed not only as sole incidents, but also as ingrained into policies, procedures, and systems. Beyond Bell’s work, other scholars began to expound on the meaning of Critical Race Theory with the emergence of scholars such as Crenshaw, Delgado, Freeman, Harris, and Matsuda. Following those scholars, others such as Chapman, Dixon, Lynn, Stovall, and Yosso expanded its meaning in the field of education (Chapman, et al., 2013).

Since the emergence of CRT, educational theorists have since expounded on its meaning within educational spaces and the process of adopting such a methodology in research. It is understood amongst them that CRT does not have a specific doctrine that it follows and that discussing race does not make a researcher a critical race theorist. It is the understanding and adopting of the subversive nature of CRT that constitutes becoming a part of the movement. It is also choosing to subscribe to the following tenets:

- Counter-storytelling
- The permanence of racism
- Whiteness as property
- Interest Convergence
- The critique of liberalism (Decuir and Dixon, 2004)

Though these five tenets are widely used and are pervasive in educational studies, for this particular study, I focus on intersectionality and counter-narrative as a means to incorporate the efforts of the six studies mentioned in the literature review and to further understand and interpret the experiences of Black males in urban high schools in New Orleans.

### **Counter-Narrative/Counter-Storytelling**

Counter-storytelling, according to Delgado and Stefancic (2001), is an analysis tool utilized during the methodology phase of research in which the researcher “aims to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority” (p. 144). Its main purpose is to challenge all privileged discourses that arise in research, providing a voice for the marginalized groups, “exposing and critiquing normalized dialogues that perpetuate racial stereotypes” (Decuir & Dixon, 2004, p. 27), and contradicting the process of Othering that majority views create.

### **The Permanence of Racism**

Bell (1992) coined what is known as *racial realism*, the idea that racism is permanent, as in pervasive, throughout American society. He stated that accepting this idea as truth is when an individual realizes the role that racism plays in everyday American life on both a conscious and unconscious level and, subsequently, when society can begin to work against this dichotomy which allows the “privileging of Whites and subsequent Othering of people of color in all arenas, including education (Decuir & Dixon, 2004, p. 27). In education, the permanence of racism can be seen when examining the structural and institutional impact (Hiraldo, 2010).

### **Intersectionality**

Coined by Crenshaw (1989), intersectionality is a term that “denotes various ways in which race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women...” (Crenshaw,

1994, p. 1244). She reiterated that her focusing on these specific intersections called for other scholars to examine all forms of identity when studying the construction of the social world in which we live (Crenshaw, 1994). Brah and Phoenix (2004) have since elaborated and defined intersectionality as “the complex, irreducible, varied, and variable effects which ensure when multiple axis of differentiation - economic, political, cultural, psychic, subjective, and experiential - intersect in historically significant contexts” (p. 76).

### **Methodology**

As demonstrated in the literature review, of all the scholars who have conducted empirical studies on Black male masculinity in urban high schools, none have specifically addressed how the participants develop, define, and do masculinity. There exists a gap in the literature that this study seeks to fill. In particular, this paper focuses on amplifying the voices of 10 Black male high school students enrolled in urban high schools in New Orleans. The main research question is: How do Black males in New Orleans urban high schools define masculinity?

To answer this question, I assessed that it can best be answered using a single case study<sup>2</sup> with embedded units, meaning the study will encompass multiple schools and participants (embedded units) within the same Louisiana school district (single case). This study included individual interviews, in which the origin, definition, and use of masculinity within personal and academic settings was examined.

### **Participants**

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<sup>2</sup> This case study is utilized as a method and not a product. It functions as a systematic analysis whereby I reported only on what is substantive across the data set for all or a vast majority of the participants.

Participants in this study included 10 Black male high school students. I acknowledge that this sample size (n=10) may not constitute a generalizable number; however, I chose this specific sample size for the purpose of developing deep analytical and critical insights towards Black male masculinity. Utilizing CRT strategies, it is more salient, in this study, to focus on the voice as evidence and to “challenge a ‘numbers only’ approach to documenting inequity or discrimination that tends to certify discrimination from a quantitative rather than a qualitative perspective” (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005, p. 11).

The students in this study ranged from 14 to 18 years of age, and were, on average, 15.8 years old. Participants must have identified with the following: (1) Between the ages of 13-18; (2) Currently enrolled in a high school in Orleans Parish School District; (3) Identify as male; (4) identify as Black or African American; and must (5) have attended the same school for the entirety of their high school tenure. Participants in this study will be recruited using maximum variation sampling as a tool in purposive sampling (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016), as well as snowball sampling (Atkinson and Flint, 2001). Purposive sampling allowed me to gather information from individuals who are “willing to provide the information by virtue of knowledge or experience” (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016, p. 2). This will allow me to focus on participants who are in an urban school. Using maximum variation sampling as to gather information from various subgroups of students at the high schools (i.e. - athletes, gifted, low-achieving, etc.).



Table 2. Participants

	Student	Age	Classification
1	Duna	18	Junior
2	Jacoby	18	Senior
3	La'Trell	18	Junior
4	Patrick	14	Freshman
5	Bartholomew	15	Sophomore
6	Jackson	15	Sophomore
7	Deuce	14	Freshman
8	Jack	17	Junior
9	Derrick	14	Freshman
10	Elias	15	Freshman

### Data Collection

Participants were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire included information about the school they are enrolled in, their family makeup, mother and father educational attainments, and mother and father employment statuses.

Since I am using case study as method and not as product, as primarily done in qualitative research, my data is solely based on interviews, providing the space for deep analytical processing of the root issue(s) without utilizing other data sources (documents, archives, observations, etc.) to triangulate the data. Using only interviews has allowed me to isolate *voice* as the sole data source. Using voice as the sole data source allows me the opportunity to amplify what the participants are saying and not to discredit what they say and believe with their performance in public spaces or with their academic records showing a disconnect. In this study, voice is my primary concern.

Two sets of interviews served as the primary sources for data in this manuscript. I recruited participants using purposeful and convenience sampling at both sites. I primarily worked with the Dean of Students at one of the local high schools identify and recruit

participants. The second set of interviews were facilitated by a mentoring organization that matches high school males of color with professional mentors from around the city, providing them with mentoring tools and spaces in which their mentor/mentee relationship can flourish . The first set of interviews were conducted during the school day and took place in a vacated campus office, which allowed for privacy. The second set of interviews were conducted at the mentoring organization's headquarter office and took place in a company office after school hours, to allow for privacy.

The individual interviews followed a semi-structured format. After introducing myself and signing consent forms, I allowed the participants a moment to gather their thoughts with an open-ended question such as "When you think of masculinity, what comes to mind? Why?" This allowed the participant an opportunity to become comfortable with me and to allow them to lead the questions where they choose. It also allowed me an opportunity to hear, without leading them, what they think masculinity means on a foundational level, as well as what they associated with masculinity. The interview moved further along with more open-ended questions and ended with asking the participants if they had ever engaged in this type of conversation before, showing whether they had critically thought about masculinity before the interview or not. Using open-ended questions that can leave room for dialogue and emerging questions for the participants (DiCiccio-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006). Many of the participants wanted to continue the conversation after the interview was officially completed. The interview protocol consisted of roughly 18 questions, including questions about their view of masculinity, sources of this perception, whether the school foster this view or not, what are some policies at their respective school that may hinder or enhance your view of masculinity, how is your experience at the

school with respect to masculinity, do you feel that you must ‘perform’ masculinity, and more (See Appendix).

### **Data Analysis**

Using a multi-step content analysis, I began with In Vivo coding during the first round of coding to honor the participant’s voice (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). After transcribing the interviews, I began by reading each interview once. During this initial reading, I made notes and remarks similar to In Vivo coding. For example, while reading the first round of interviews, I would highlight and mark specific texts that stood out to me as salient in defining masculinity. After reading all interviews, I created an electronic document that consisted of two columns. Column one was for codes and themes. Column two was for in-text references. This began my second round of coding, in which I specifically pulled out in-text references from the transcripts and matched them with In Vivo codes as well as predetermined codes based on my literature review and analytic process. These predetermined codes included items such as “performance of masculinity,” “strength/toughness,” and “hegemonic masculinity.” The In Vivo codes included items such as “discipline,” “how you carry yourself,” “makes you more masculine,” and more.

In Round 3, these codes were categorized into themes. Codes such as “how you carry yourself,” “ makes you more masculine,” and “performance of masculinity” were all categorized into a theme based on “performance of masculinity,” which I related to *cool pose*, a thought coined by Majors and Billson (1992) on performing masculinity to fit in with society’s ideations. These themes were then categorized into three main categories according to the research question: developing masculinity, defining masculinity, and doing masculinity.

Lastly, data was identified according to the theoretical framework, Critical Race Theory. After combining the codes into themes and categorizing them, I analyzed the major themes and findings through a Critical Race Theory lens, utilizing themes of endemic racism, counter-storytelling, and intersectionality.

## **Findings**

### **Developing Masculinity**

Throughout the interviews and conversations about masculinity, the participants revealed information that, unbeknownst to them, showed how they view their development as men and showed specific examples of how the schools and school systems participated in their development process. In the conversations, they discussed that (a) masculinity is an innate characteristic, (b) role models helped them to develop ideas of masculinity, and (c) courses and coursework played a role in development as well.

### **Masculinity is an Innate Characteristic**

When asked what comes to mind when they hear the word ‘masculinity’, several of the students described masculinity as being an innate characteristic. Though it appeared in the data over five times, three of the students specifically mentioned that masculinity is something that cannot be taught to a young man. Jacoby described it as being “...something within a man...” Jackson went even further in his definition and mentioned that it is “what it takes...like what it is to be a man,” while Deuce dived a little further to say “Hmm, masculinity? I think of it, like...it showed me, like, how men grow up...they start as kids and they start to grow...”

As they discussed the natural development of masculinity, some of the participants focused more on how the school plays a role in development. They reflected on the daily happenings both inside and outside of the classroom and deduced that the school personnel has a

role in actively discussing masculinity with the students and giving them both negative and positive examples of what masculinity can be. These personnel also provide space inside of the classroom for coursework to examine masculinity, giving the students fictional and non-fictional examples that aid in the development of their own masculinity.

### **School Role Models in Masculinity Development**

As the students spoke of administrators and teachers, it was clear that some of them served as physical representations of masculinity for the Black males enrolled in the schools. In most cases, it was a portrayal of a positive image of a man that attracted the students to them. However, this did not hold true for every student all the time. As discussed earlier, the percentage of male teachers, especially Black male teachers, is extremely low. This leaves students like La'Trell, who did not have any male teachers to look up to during the peak development of his masculinity. He stated, "my 9th grade year, all my teachers were female. So...[I] barely see, you know, men around the school unless it was around football or something like that." The lack of presence of male teachers, except in sports, can cause the development of hegemonic, patriarchal, supremacist masculinity, known more widely as #ToxicMasculinity. However, he also stated that of all of the teachers he had in later years, one male teacher made him feel comfortable because he began "watching how [his] peers respected him and like how he respected them." Throughout all the responses, there was great affinity for those who pushed you to be in a better situation than you are now and for those who pushed you to be a better person overall. The students also had comments on what it takes to be a good role model, which included traits such as speaking up for students, being realistic about future endeavors, relating on a personal level, understanding where they come from, looking out for them past their education, and motivating them to succeed.

## **Coursework and its role in masculinity development**

Students also discussed the impact that specific classes and assignments had on their masculinity development. These comments emerged as poignant in the interviews as they pointed to specific spaces that allow freedom to develop and interpret others development however needed. Many of the students praised these spaces as places where they felt comfortable to create their own ideas of what masculinity means to them. These spaces ranged from Science and History classes to extra-curricular sport groups and Physical Education classes. Derrick mentions that there were science classes that taught you “how to take care of yourself.” He goes on to say, “You gotta know how to keep yourself clean. You gotta do that yourself. Nobody can do that for you,” implying that masculinity development includes learning proper hygiene and physical upkeep. Physical Education classes also assisted in the development of a masculine identity with gender-specific lessons of maintaining good hygiene and having respect for others, characteristics that the participants noted as being masculine. La'Trell gave testimony to this fact when he stated

Like on Wednesdays or certain days they would take the girls. The female coach..she would take the females out and talk to them about certain topics...and the males -- Coach D and Coach A would talk to us about things. So...yeah, they help us understand things more. And then try and help us make better choices when we are in situations

Patrick, who experienced something similar, said:

Every Wednesday, we got this, instead of like physical stuff, we get like a lesson based on life. It might not always be just about who you are. It could just be like...I think, last week, we talked about how to keep yourself healthy, especially when it comes to, uh, STDs and stuff like that.

Beyond Physical Education, students discussed how they developed ideas of masculinity in other courses such as English and History. In reference to learning about rulers of nations who have started wars for frivolous reasons, Jack said “When we learn about the past and how they

did stuff in the past - that make me want to do something different 'cause I don't wanna like, be on the same path as they was." Bartholomew, who also felt that his history class plays a role in his masculinity development, says,

Like they say history repeats itself. And like all throughout history, I'll see that men all try to like- tried all this stuff just to - just to like, um, overpower each other, but not knowing if they just worked together, it would've - it would've made things more easy and efficient because all they wanted, they all wanted the same thing, like to conquer places, and just like gain more power.

Understanding the student's stories and claims on how they develop masculinity -- being innate and further developing through role models and coursework within the school systems -- fills a previous gap in the literature that only addressed the systems in which the students are existing. According to CRT, this also expands and reiterates the purpose of counter-storytelling, which is to tell the stories that counteract the dominant ideology against them. Masculinity development in the context of an urban school system is an everyday act of the Black male student reifying the self and finding validation within the community that is created for the him. It is also an act of bravery on the school's part. Providing role models and coursework that actively seek to provide counter-stories, advice, and both positive and negative examples of masculinity gives the students a chance to develop their masculinity in a space that supports the CRT idea of counter-storytelling and contradicts the idea of whiteness as property, situating Blackness and male-ness as property. This, in itself, is subversive, although potentially subconscious.

### **Defining Masculinity**

The second theme found in the transcriptions is that the participants often defined what masculinity means to them. Though they gave a specific definition at the beginning of each interview, their words and actions throughout the interview spoke to the hidden definitions that

each of them holds closely to their heart. They spoke of many characteristics that they believe makes a person a man or masculine. Unlike society's examples of hegemonic masculinity and characteristics associated with it (strength/power, hypersexuality, emotional isolation, etc), they spoke mostly of maturity, responsibility, respect/manners and briefly mentioned other characteristics such as being true/honest with yourself, displaying leadership characteristics, and having a healthy work ethic.

### **Maturity and Responsibility As Part of Masculinity Definition**

The students put a lot of emphasis on taking care of things themselves. Whether they were taking care of family, schoolwork, or personal endeavors, they kept coming back to the fact that they take care of what needs to be done. They described this as maturity and responsibility. Many of them discussed how they are taking care of their families, performing the 'role' of 'man of the house,' finding jobs to take care of their financial needs, and more. These added responsibilities, they implied, suggest that they are growing, maturing, and learning to be a man. Each of those responsibilities allows them to learn and add characteristics of what being masculine means to their life. They also implied that masculinity correlates with maturity. As you mature, you become more of a man and release the childish thoughts and actions that you may have possessed. Bartholomew said that students have to "...like stop playing around because like in life not everything is like a joke."

They also used maturity and responsibility to describe their work ethic and ability to complete tasks as a trait of being masculine. Derrick makes this evident when he describes the need to complete his work. He understands that in high school, you are expected to be use your inner motivation and maturity to complete your tasks. He states that , "...if they teach us something, they ain't gonna really sit over us and try to make us do it." Duna also speaks to that



point when he says, “I participate in school, they don’t got to ask.” Deuce sums it up by saying, “[masculinity] is also, like, a responsibility...if you know you have something to do, you gotta keep it in your mind and do it, because responsibility is key in your life, period.”

### **Respect and Manners As a Part of Masculinity Definition**

Lastly, the students defined masculinity as being respectful and well mannered. This could serve as a testament to the way an individual is raised; however, in this case, we will focus on the individual making the choice to be respectful and well-mannered on a daily basis. Patrick stated well that “[masculinity] is like opening the door for women or holding the door open for people in general...if somebody drops something, just pick it up, just simple things like that.”

Later, when discussing extra-curricular activities, Patrick also praised the coaches for their approach to sportsmanship and masculinity. He appreciated their coaching style and the way they would keep students calm during a loss. It spoke to the debunking of hypermasculinity and the resisting of hegemonic masculinity. Deuce sits in a similar situation at his school. The coaches preach good sportsmanship as a tool of being masculine. Deuce says,

...you have to have good sportsmanship to grow your masculinity. Because if you don’t know good sportsmanship, you less of a man. Because you’re mad that you, that this happened. And now, now it’s affecting you -- how -- how you feel about this or that. No, it doesn’t work like that. You have to be a good sportsman so you can grow as a man. And grow more mature than the other, than your other teammates or than the other kids that you know.

Defining masculinity is a direct contradiction to society’s views of Black masculinity in a way that articulates and amplifies the Black male voice, contradicting the *othering* of people as can happen according to CRT’s idea of the permanence of racism. The ways in which the students defined masculinity also support CRT’s idea of counter-storytelling in which these students have told what they deem necessary to be ‘masculine,’ debunking the dominant

narrative about Black masculinity. This study has had a chance to examine how Black boys *define* masculinity, a feat that has not yet been completed in a peer-reviewed journal article.

### **Doing Masculinity**

The most salient part of the discussions came when students, both knowingly and unknowingly, discussed how they “do” masculinity, essentially the daily performance of masculinity. In the discussions, two sub themes emerged. They are (a) participant perceptions of performing masculinity and (b) the school’s role as a site in resisting hegemonic masculinity.

### **Participants Perceptions of Performing Masculinity**

Whether they were hustling on downtown streets for extra money or they watched school personnel hustle at their jobs (and outside jobs), many of the participants learned that hustling and working extremely hard at something is “how to become a man...like a man doing what he has to do. Get his job done. You know, his business.” according to Jackson.

Elias took his approach to “doing” masculinity as a direct opposition to societal gender roles. He discussed his contribution to the family can include wanting to take care of his little siblings more often than he currently does; however, he honed in on the idea that

I always clean up. I clean dishes and wipe the counters and the table and stove off. And sometimes I sweep...always bring school supplies and always get, be prepared for school in more, like, get my clothes washed and ironed. And not...so, like, when I go to school my clothes don’t be wrinkled. And I smell good. I do my hygiene.

Elias was not the only one to utilize domestic gender roles and family structure as a means of “doing” masculinity. Patrick contends that showing masculinity is

always taking care of your family and stuff like that and make sure their best interests are at heart...I feel like it really is how you take care of your family. If you can do it financially...emotionally, physically...that’s all.

But what perception does this give society? What happens when a Black boy disrupts the hegemonic system that contributes to society's definition of masculinity as hypermasculine, lover of women, and more? Although Patrick agrees that "people judge masculinity on if you act more of a male or a female" and La'Trell agrees that "people sometimes hide who they are so people won't judge them," this does not negate the fact that most of the participants in this study understand what La'Trell states as he thinks deeper into what doing masculinity truly is. He says

Masculinity, to me, is just like a person, a man, being himself. Like, he's taking care of his business and, you know, getting things done. Like if his lover's a female or a male, like, it doesn't matter as long as he's doing right by the person 'cause, you know, love is...love is forever but everyone deserves it.

Bartholomew and Jack said the same thing in response to this prompt. They agree that doing masculinity is all in "how you carry yourself." For example, when contemplating whether or not he wanted to serve as drum major for the high school band, Bartholomew had to assess his performance of masculinity to ensure that he would be accepted by his peers as worthy enough to serve in such a masculine role. He says,

I usually think being like drum major would be tough 'cause, you know, I have to be like, just all like -- actually be manly and stuff. Like other people think that's being manly, but it's not really all that. All you have to do is just give advice and just help others to, uh, go in the right direction.

He also spoke to the idea that he was trying to force himself into the stereotypical male role that others wanted him to portray. He described his attempt as

You know, trying to make like - trying to make my voice deeper. You know, it - I just stopped. It didn't really work. Yeah, like yelling at them instead of just like calmly giving someone, like, giving them advice, just trying to help them. Not really caring like what-what they thought.

## **Doing Masculinity in the Schools**

Although schools can be microcosms of society when it comes to masculinity, there are schools and administrators that actively and passively work to resist hegemonic masculinity in their actions, rules, and everyday doings. When asked about the school rules, students discussed a few ways in which the schools can be repressive. They mentioned the fear of stereotype threat from white female teachers, peers giving into stereotypes, and being labeled as homosexual if a student actively resists masculinity stereotypes.

In the opposite manner, however, students also mentioned how the schools can be sites of active resistance. I asked students specifically about rules or regulations that may impact the way they express their masculinity. Here, the dress code became a large part of the conversation as I inquired about the impact that wearing earrings, different hairstyles, and other expressions that society could deem as 'feminine.' Patrick, when explaining the school dress code, says, "They want you to be yourself. Like they, they express not changing for anybody. So I don't think there's too many restrictions on what you...like how you wear your earrings, how you wear your clothes." Elias agrees when he says, "We-we can wear anything we want, like, for free dress...we just...you don't have to, um, wear our open toed shoes, or high shorts," which can be interpreted for safety and modesty reasons. Bartholomew says, "I think everything is all fair 'cause like they don't really - they don't really put too much stuff on boys..."

The students descriptions of *doing* masculinity rearticulate the notions and ideas of intersectionality. As described in my previous article *Black male or Black and male...*, allowing Black boys the space to be both Black and male is an intersectional freedom that they should each experience. Even with the contradiction of a Black male "doing what he has to do" and

“they don’t really put too much stuff on boys,” is it evident and evidenced that Black male masculinity occurs at an intersection of race and gender and, if approached in that manner, schools can be active resisters of hegemonic masculinity.

### **Discussion**

The principal walked into the cafeteria to do a routine check. Every day, after the students entered through metal detectors and were stripped of all outside food, drinks, and contraband items, they entered the cafeteria as a holding place until the bell rang to signify the start of the school day. Today, in particular, the principal decided to do uniform checks. He noticed Marcus sitting with his friends, shiny new diamond earrings in his ear. The principal approaches Marcus and says, “What is this in your ear?,” knowing that the policy states that boys cannot wear earrings or nose rings.

Marcus replied, “My earrings.”

The principal says, “Well take them off unless you are gay. Is that what you are telling me?”

His friends looked in shock as the principal continued, “If you *are* gay, you can wear them and be a woman. If you are not gay, take them off and be a man.”

Marcus stood up and replied, “I am not gay and my earrings have nothing to do with my sexuality. What I choose to express myself with is none of your concern.”

The principal replied, “This is my school and my rules. What I say goes. Now you can accompany me to my office where we can discuss the consequences of you disregarding school policy and your manners.”

Marcus, walking away with his head down, quietly replies, “Why can I not just wear them in peace. I apologize for being disrespectful, but these earrings are not harming anyone. I

just choose to wear them as an expression of my style.” He puts his head in his hands, crying, and says “Why do people equate what I wear to being a man? It is not fair. I am a gentleman, kind-hearted, and a scholar, yet when people see earrings, a nose ring, or even if I continue growing my hair, they automatically assume that I am less than a man. When will this end?”

The principal, feeling sorrowful for how he addressed Marcus, says, “In this world, the way society has conditioned us all to believe that femininity and masculinity are equated to physical expression, it may not end anytime soon. However, the least we can do is work against it. Let’s talk.”

They both walk towards the principal’s office.

### **Developing Masculinity**

High schools and the types of personnel they hire often appear as microcosms of the community, and larger society, in which they reside (Haupt, 2010; Killian, Cardona, & Brottem, 2018). The racial and gender diversity are often one-sided with more white, female teachers in the spaces where mostly Black students are learning (Warren, 2015). Though these systems perpetuate the imperialist, white-supremacist, capitalist, patriarchy (hooks, 2004), the Black male students in this study were able to positively identify tools -- role models and coursework -- that provided them the space to further develop that innate notion of masculinity. Essentially, the participants are fighting daily against a system that was not designed for them, showing their ability to call out and resist endemic racism.

In this study, the participants mostly discussed that their masculinity was an innate characteristic that further developed in school buildings via role models and courses/coursework. These two points can seem to be a juxtaposition, but on a fundamental level can be explained via nature vs. nurture. The nature argument is that masculinity is innate, as shown in the study. The

nurturing of this innate characteristic happens through role models and coursework designed to allow students a view of the masculinity spectrum. According to the Center for Public Education (2011), students in the United States are required to attend between 175 and 180 days of school per year and/or between 900-1,000 hours of instructional time per year (Hull & Newport, 2011). Spending this much time in school, administrators and personnel can serve as positive role models for young Black boys (Cephas, 2012; Gale, 2007; Smith, 2015). For this reason, Black boys and urban high schools need more positive male role models as teachers and administrators that bring culturally relevant materials, are more emotionally stable, and are diverse in terms of socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and other identifying characteristics and/or intersections. There is research present and readily available about women, general teachers, and white people bringing cultural relevant topics into the classrooms of urban high schools (Adams, Rodriguez, & Zimmer, 2017; Emdin, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2009). However, the research on Black men in the classroom as role models using culturally relevant work to allow spaces of exploration is not expansive. Bringing in cultural relevance will aim to resist hegemonic practices in the classrooms and bringing in diverse men will increase the visibility of intersections such as sexual orientation, both working to subvert the permanence of racism.

This study also shows the need for culturally relevant coursework. As shown, Black male students responded well when they studied characters that looked and acted like them, whether Black, male, or both. Schools can learn to capitalize on this moment by incorporating African American history courses that have a curriculum that incorporates the study of Black men, giving the male students a counter-story to follow as an example of positive or negative growth. This subversive measure acts, as Critical Race Theorists would say, as subversive. As a CRT scholar,

I must also ask how do these multicultural classes challenge and change racism and structurally resist practices and policies (Decuir & Dixon, 2004). This is a critique of liberalism.

### **Defining Masculinity**

All of the terms given to this definition are counter-intuitive to what society says masculinity should be. Society's definition holds true to the patriarchal, white supremacist, heteronormative idea that men should be hyper masculine, hypersexual, unable to express their emotions, and provide for families as the dominant gender. This study has shown differently. Only two participants mentioned any words associated with the hegemonic view of masculinity. The others described masculinity using character traits such as honesty, respect, maturity, and more. By using character traits instead of physical traits, the students are actively resisting the permanence of racism and stereotypes associated with that. Essentially, their word choice is creating a counter-story to the dominant ideology of masculinity.

Contradictory to their words, many of the participants displayed some of the physical characteristics (hyper masculinity, deep voice, masculine expressing clothing) as I observed during interviews. This *cool pose* persona (Majors & Billson, 1992) could be a direct correlation with being in an all-male group waiting to be interviewed by an older Black male (me). I assume they were trying to "fit in" with the crowd and not be singled out as *other*. However, I left the interviews thinking why would they not mention any physical traits as masculine. From the transcripts, I gathered that this could be due to this group of students, and subsequently, many other student in their generation, are very tolerant of the differing physical expressions they see (whether they are due to sexual orientation or not). However, they are not so tolerant of character flaws. This opposition to character flaws also stands as opposition to the permanence of racism and, in this case, genderism and sexism as well.



## **Doing Masculinity**

The participants noting that, for them, masculinity often *looks like* ‘hustling,’ points to the idea of “cool pose,” coined by Majors and Billson (1993). Cool pose can be defined as an outward display or performance by African American men of all ages. It is characterized by trendy and baggy clothing (usually urban wear), an overall relaxed look, an informal presence, and a “pimp-style” (p. 93) strut. According to the participants, the idea of hustling is the physical expression of how a young Black boy can exhibit masculinity. This notion is in contradiction to the way the participants described how they developed masculinity (through the use of character traits) and is rooted in endemic racism. The idea that a Black man has to hustle stems from systemic racism and the painting of what a Black man should be by imperialist, white-supremacist, capitalist, patriarchy (hooks, 2004).

Does the school play a role in this patriarchal view of doing masculinity? Yes. The school acts as an Ideological State Apparatus (ISA (Nasir, et al., 2013), which works to reproduce dominant ideology. This type of setting can create resisters and accommodators. Resisters are those who choose to work against the dominant ideology and accommodators are those who choose to be complacent in the dominant ideology. For example, Bartholomew, in his description of becoming drum major, showed us that he tried to accommodate to the dominant ideology by deepening his voice, talking sternly, and more. However, he could not keep up that performance and chose to resist the dominant ideology by speaking softly, caring about his teammates, etc.

Elias demonstrated that he opposes traditional gender roles by washing dishes, cleaning his home, and taking care of children. Essentially, he has chosen to resist the gender norms and we are not sure whether or not he has resisted or accommodated to racial norms. Resisting the gender norms is an expansion of Rogers and Way’s (2016) study in which they found that their

participants resisted only racial norms and accommodated to gender norms. Elias conducted his acts of resistance subconsciously and on an individual level. The school, although a traditional ISA, chose to resist hegemonic masculinity and allow Black boys the freedom of expression within their school hallways. This freedom of expression has the potential to expose other students to intersections other than their own, a critique of liberalism that will allow other ISAs to operate as the school, and a chance to subversively overthrow the endemic racism that many schools policies and procedures are based on.

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## **A Theoretical Approach to Examining Conversations About Black Male Masculinity**

In a previous study on Black masculinity, I found ways in which Black male students in urban high schools in New Orleans, Louisiana *develop, define, and do* masculinity. Based on a recommendation by Brooms (2015), I expanded the study of Black masculinity to encompass qualitative methods that examine exactly how these Black boys develop, define, and do masculinity.

In this study, I interviewed 10 high school Black males that were (1) Between the ages of 13-18; (2) Currently enrolled in a high school in Orleans Parish School District; (3) Identified as male; (4) identified as Black or African American; and must (5) attended the same school for the entirety of their high school tenure. The findings presented information that lead to a greater understanding of the developmental process of Black masculinity in adolescent youth in New Orleans. The participants shared that masculinity is an innate characteristic and cannot be taught to a young man; however, they also recalled the fact that their teachers, administrators, and peers had a hand in the development of that innate characteristic, insinuating that the school sites, including school role models and the coursework written into curricula, play a role in developing and shaping what is already known to Black boys.

The findings also show that Black boys define masculinity in ways that differ from the societal view of masculinity being patriarchal, hegemonic, and capitalistic. In this study, the participants defined masculinity as character traits instead of as physical appearance, performance attributes, or even amounts of sexual encounters, etc. They defined masculinity as



being mature, responsible, having a dedicated work ethic in whatever field one chooses, as well as showing respect and having manners as a method to good sportsmanship in all areas of life.

Though the participants shared their own views of developing and defining masculinity that were opposite in nature to the societal views of developing and defining masculinity, some of their views of doing masculinity seemed to stem from societal expectations of performing to a certain stereotype, while some were in opposite stance to societal expectations. For example, some participants viewed doing masculinity as a sort-of hustling agenda, which they called “doing what he has to do,” and some participants viewed doing masculinity as a chance to debunk normalized gender roles and participate in activities that may have been deemed as feminine such as washing dishes, cleaning the home, and holding babies. In relation to school sites and the performance of masculinity, the participants mostly agreed that New Orleans urban high schools “don’t really put too much stuff on boys” as they create room in their rules and regulations for Black boys to be somewhat expressive with their clothing, jewelry, and mannerisms (within certain boundaries).

In this paper, I situate three theories - Critical Race Theory, Queer Theory, and Feminist Standpoint Theory - in context *and* conversation with each other as a method to take conversations about Black males and their expression of masculinity from behind closed doors to more open spaces, making sure to include the subjects in question. Utilizing these three theories is, in a sense, an effort to triangulate methods and epistemologies to pinpoint an exact physical or metaphorical space where these conversations can happen. The main research question addressed is how can we shift the conversations about Black male masculinity from our perspective to the perspectives of the Black boys we teach.

I approach this conversation in a similar way to the Appel and Davis (2011) approach to mass incarceration, using the lens of Black Feminist Thought. They define Black Feminist Thought (BFT) as

... emerged from the political and intellectual need for systems of thought that could comprehend and interrogate the massive state-sponsored violence against Black people enslaved in the New World, including what Angela Davis termed sexual terrorism. importantly , this terrorism was targeted not only at Black women, but also at Black men as sexual and gendered beings. Black feminism has proven particularly adept at theorizing how the state uses gender and sexuality instrumentally to manipulate, manage, and discipline targeted populations (Appell & Davis, 2011, p. 3-4).

Similarly, Collins (1989) defined Black feminism as “a process of self-conscious struggle that empowers women and men to actualize human visions of community” (p. 30).

According to Taylor (2013), Collins and other leading researchers in BFT have defined the collective themes as

- (a) African American women are able to empower themselves and repel negative stereotypes of African American womanhood through self-definition and self-valuation;
- (b) African American women do not allow themselves to be oppressed by race, class, or gender dominance;
- (c) African American women are able to merge their intelligence and political ambition;
- and (d) African American women have the skills necessary to resist daily discrimination (p. 1064).

I present this final article to education stakeholders - teachers, administrators, and parents - in urban high schools as a call to evaluate and change the way in which we discuss and address masculinity of Black boys in these respective schools. I do not present this as a manifesto or any absolute method due to the study’s population being small (n = 10). I do present this as a means to begin the discussion on how to address Black male masculinity in urban high schools more effectively. This is not a directive, but a hopeful direction in which we can shift educational practices.

## **Literature Review**

When looking at the literature that exists in relation to Black masculinity and Critical Race Theory, Queer Theory, and Feminist Standpoint Theory, one of the limits we have is that there is a very small amount of data that is deemed as scholarly data (peer-reviewed journal articles). When I initially searched for articles specific to this study, I completed an electronic search for peer-reviewed articles using the databases *PsycINFO* and *ERIC* (Education Resources Information Center). Using the Boolean indicators “or,” “and,” and “not,” the following terms were into databases: *critical race theory, queer theory, feminist standpoint theory; black males, African American males, high school, secondary education, urban education, inner city schools, masculinity, masculine, and manhood.*

I have expanded the literature review to focus on articles that utilize the theories in question. I have chosen the literature review articles if they utilize the theory as a theoretical framework or if they employ the tenets of the theory in their analyzing Black masculinity in urban high schools in the United States.

### **Critical Race Theory**

In a previous literature review on Black masculinity, I identified six articles that specifically addressed masculinity in urban high schools in the United States. Of those six articles, four (66%) of the studies positioned their research within the reality that society operates through power differences based on racialized, and oftentimes gendered, norms. This normalization of differences is known in CRT as endemic or systemic racism and is evident when looking at disciplinary systems (Nasir, et al., 2013), “resistance for survival” (Rogers and Way, 2016, p. 266), the pervasiveness of the troubled Black boy persona in public schools (Brooms, 2015), and the ignoring of institutional and structural racism when framing the

problem as belonging to the child or his family (Givens, et al., 2016). These four as well as Howard (2012) also employed the use of counternarratives to negate and renegotiate the power differences displayed in society.

Five (83%) of the research teams spoke specifically to the use of intersectionality in delineating how Black males view and develop masculinity as well as how researchers, teachers, and society views them within that context (Brooms, 2015; Givens, et al., 2016; Laing, 2017; Nasir, et al., 2013; Rogers and Way, 2016). Brooms (2015) gave context to the use of intersectionality when he stated that

research on the lived experiences of Black males is important to consider as well since it demonstrates the need to nuance their experiences across the intersections of race, gender, and class (Anderson, 2008; Jenkins, 2006; Johnson & Leighton, 1995; Young, 2004) (p. 269).

To operationalize this meaning, Givens, et al. (2016) developed the concept of “identity constellations” (p. 170) in which they give meaning to the data derived in their study of the Manhood Development Program in the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD). “This concept attends to the ways that identities come in sets; that is, one aspect of one’s identity can have implications for other aspects” (p. 170). “It requires teaching them in a manner that acknowledges their identities as black and male in a society that has always positioned them as a problem” (Givens, et al., 2016, p. 182). However, Laing (2017) made it evident that these identities do not always come as equal. He quoted Mutua (2006) as he said “Black men at the intersection of race and gender were subordinated by race and privileged by gender... We speculated that at times Black men were oppressed by gender in addition to race” (p. xviii). Rogers and Way (2016) warned us about unifying labels in this manner when they said

identity union assumes unified identity labels as the unit of analysis, for example, “Black Male.” However, such labels are also limiting as they reinforce an alternate fixed identity that then ignores other intersections, such as sexuality and social class (McCall, 2005; Phoenix, 2006)” (p. 268).

As evident in Nasir, et al. (2013), understanding intersectionality allows the teacher to view the acted roles of the students within his/her own historical context and “cultural and gendered language [to] allow him to *translate* the hidden logic of students’ actions as resistance to the dominant ideology” (p. 508).

### **Queer Theory**

Since the formation of Queer Theory, scholars have made their mark in critical studies and its application in the educational realm. Though many of the

**Heteronormativity.** Queer Theory works to debunk the idea that heterosexuality is the ‘normal’ (Lange and Moore, 2017) and that any categorization, especially under the pretense of sexuality, is false (Smith, 2003). Therefore, heteronormativity is a social construct that scholars have worked to delineated in areas such as family studies (Allen and Golojuch, 2018; Allen and Mendez, 2018; Matsumunyane & Hlalele, 2019; White, Martin, & Adamsons, 2018), media communication (Westerfelhaus & Lacroix, 2006; Vanlee, Dhaenens, & Van Bauwel, 2018), and even within the sociology of gender in relation to partner violence (Cannon, Moon, & Buttell, 2015; Sanger & Lynch, 2018).

Educational spaces are no different from the above mentioned areas in which heteronormativity exists and has become an “institutionalized norm and a superior and privileged standard” (Gunn, 2011, p. 280). prevalent throughout . Gansen (2017) conducted an ethnographic study in which she found that preschool teachers’ practices perpetuate gender and sexual socialization in the classroom. These practices ranged from encouraging boys and girls to

kiss without the girls' consent, ignoring bodily display from boys, reading traditional heteronormative fairy tales, and promoting crushes between boys and girls. This also included restricting ideas such as same-gender displays of affection, disciplining girls for bodily displays or commenting on boys bodies, and policing kisses, saving them only for family. This socialization occurring in early educational institutions is what causes heteronormativity to "become constructed, normalized, or disrupted in preschool classrooms" (Gansen, 2017, p. 267) and, I would beg to differ, all classrooms.

As mentioned as a finding in an empirical study on Black masculinity, coursework and available resources (textbooks, media, etc.) play a role in socialization of Black male students during masculinity development. Wilmot and Naidoo (2014) discuss the trends they see related to heteronormativity in South African textbooks. Their quantitative study on Life Orientation textbooks lead them to discover that there were very low numbers in relation to the coverage of sexualities and varying lifestyles available for students to read about. For example, in their study, Textbook A had only 1.8% of the textbook that referenced LGBT content, whereas it had 25.4% of textbook references to heterosexual content. This low content is attributed to the exclusion of LGBT identities and sexualities from the textbooks, making heterosexuality the 'norm.'

Finally, there are some educational institutions that actively resist the notion of heteronormativity or resist hegemonic practices in general (Blackburn & Miller, 2017; Burke & Greenfield, 2016; Cumming-Potvin & Martino, 2018). These institutions have spaces such as English language arts classrooms that challenge the societal norm by reading LGBT books, analyzing the characters and social situations, and addressing uncomfortability surrounding the topic (Burke & Greenfield, 2016).

**Performativity.** While there are studies that address performativity in relation to drag performances (Greenhill & Tye, 2014; Hobson, 2013), books that address the performance of imaginative freedom as related to Black masculinity (Royster, 2011), positioning of performativity in sports and other public sectors (Majors & Billson, 1992; Majors, 2017), and the seemingly bipolar nature of Black masculinity as a performance to ease white tension (Cooper, 2005), there lacks a subset of studies both empirical and theoretical that address performativity of Black masculinity in high school Black males. I seek to fill this gap in the literature by providing a new theoretical framework that provides space for performativity of Black males in masculinity to be examined.

### **Feminist Standpoint Theory**

In a similar manner, there is a gap in the literature that acknowledges the high school Black male as a valid standpoint in which to examine society's hegemonic masculine and heteronormative views through. This lack of acknowledging a standpoint, or perspective, also brings to light the idea that Black male viewpoints are sufficient and subversive enough to remove the Black male, who holds a privileged epistemology, from his oppressive state and acknowledge his viewpoint as superior to the dominant identities because he has had to understand both sides in order to strategically navigate society.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Critical Race Theory**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a catalyst movement by scholars who seek to subversively provide cathartic moments for the oppressed readers that they actively work to free from oppression. The examination of legal studies in the 1970s is credited as the beginning of this subversive moment (Cole, 2017; Kumasi, 2015; Matsuda, 2018) and has since become

widespread amongst education scholars (Taylor, Gillborn, and Ladson-Billings, 2016). Although CRT has been known to follow the mantra that “there is no canonical set of doctrines or methodologies to which we all subscribe” (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995, p. xiii), it is noted that there are specific tenets that all CRT scholars subscribe to. As defined by Hiraldo (2010), they are

- Counter-storytelling
- Racism as normal -- the permanence of racism
- Whiteness as property
- Interest convergence
- Critique of liberalism -- colorblindness

Although the study focused on the role of CRT in higher education, the explanation of the five tenets holds true for any CRT scholar.

**Tenet One: Counter-storytelling.** The use of this tenet provides people of color a voice to amplify their narratives with regards to the marginalized spaces they often exist in.

**Tenet Two. The Permanence of Racism.** This tenet asserts that racism is in control of the political climate, the social experiences, and the economic norms of society. CRT scholars believe that racism is inherent part of civilization, not a phenomenon and that it privileges white people.

**Tenet Three: Whiteness as Property.** This tenet originated from tenet two, the permanence of racism, where the notion of whiteness operates on levels of privilege such as the right of possession, the right to use and enjoyment, the right to disposition, and the right of exclusion (DeCuir & Dixson; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998).



**Tenet Four: Interest Convergence.** This tenet acknowledges White people as being the primary beneficiaries of civil rights legislation (Ladson-Billings, 1998; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; McCoy, 2006), exemplified in affirmative action and diversity initiatives, especially amongst larger institutions such as education, healthcare, justice systems, etc..

**Tenet Five: Critique of Liberalism.** This tenet comes from the notion of color-blindness, in which systems or individuals do not acknowledge racial differences based on ignorance, not equality. Scholars who employ these tenets must use them for social justice purposes and to aid in social change (Decuir & Dixon, 2004). Particularly, in this study, I focus on the use of counter-storytelling and intersectionality as they relate to Feminist Standpoint Theory and Queer Theory, respectively.

Critical Race Theory has been utilized to critique and subversively uproot systems across many disciplines. However, using boolean phrases in *PsycINFO* and *ERIC*, I was able to identify 10 peer-reviewed journal articles that utilize Critical Race Theory to specifically examine masculinity in various aspects. These articles are described below.

### **Queer Theory**

According to Abes and Kasch (2007), Queer theory (QT) “critically analyzes the meaning of identity, focusing on intersections of identities and resisting oppressive social constructions of sexual orientation and gender” (p. 620). With key theorists such as Foucault, Rubin, Sedgwick, and Butler, Queer Theory’s origins stem from numerous critical contexts including, but not limited to, feminism, gay and lesbian movements, and even post-structuralist theory. The amalgamation of these movements led to the belief that one specific ‘normal’ does not exist. Instead, there are multiple changing normals that people tend to shift into. Queer scholars propose to destabilize domineering social goals of ordinariness. In their efforts to

expand Queer Theory, they have presented a constructionist perspective which naturalizes all human experience, garnered wide consent to an indeterminacy which rejects any assertion of identity, encouraged experiencing various cultural settings, and promoted a historical and theoretical approach to the theory that thought and culture exist in relation to each other (Yep, 2014).

Lange and Moore (2017) describe Queer Theory as having three distinct concepts: heteronormativity, performativity, and liminality. Heteronormativity refers to the use of heterosexuality as the social norm in which “all expressions of identity are measured against” (p. 824). Performativity refers to the idea that gender is a performance marked by physical expressions “through a series of repeated acts (e.g., how one dresses, speaks) and effects (e.g., how others map gender onto one’s body)” (Lange & Moore, 2017, p. 824-825). Liminality refers to incorporating both the dominant idea of heterosexuality and the opposite idea of nonheterosexuality into an identity, rejecting the normalized binary (Abes & Kasch, 2007; Lange & Moore, 2017).

In a different and more elaborate manner, Smith (2003) describes the tenets of queer theory as

- all categories are falsifications, especially if they are binary and descriptive of sexuality;
- all assertions about reality are socially constructed;
- all human behavior can be read as textual signification;
- texts form discourses that are exercises in power/knowledge and which, properly analyzed, reveal relations of dominance within historically-situated systems of regulation;
- deconstruction of all categories of normality *and* deviance can best be accomplished by queer readings of performative texts ranging from literature (fictional, professional, popular) to other cultural expressions (geographic distribution, body piercing, sit-coms, sadomasochistic paraphernalia) (p. 346).

In this study, I focus on the Lange and Moore (2017) tenets of heteronormativity and performativity.

### **Feminist Standpoint Theory**

“Some things are best understood from the standpoints of those who are less powerful, less economically privileged, less entitled” (Tanesini, 2017, p. 1). Feminist Standpoint Theory (FST) dates back to the 1980s with a basis in Marxist perspective and relationships between masters and slaves. The power relations between those identified as powerful and those labeled as oppressed shape the epistemological approaches of FST. FST also has its connections with DuBois’ (2006) concept of ‘double consciousness’ in that the oppressed are privileged with the capability to understand the world from their own perspective *and* from the perspective of the dominant culture. Collins (2002) also argues that this “is an ability that is born out of necessity. The subordinated need to know how the privileged think in order to outwit them so as to deflect the worst consequences of oppression and discrimination” (Tanesini, 2017, p. 8). Essentially, Feminist Standpoint Theory is a critical theory that exposes power relations for emancipatory purposes (Tanesini, 2017). It is a “theory for justice” (Paradies, 2018, p. 120) that emphasizes “dialogue over debate” (Paradies, 2018, p. 121) in an effort to position the oppressed voices as more powerful.

Feminist Standpoint Theory centers itself on three tenets known as the situated knowledge thesis, the standpoint thesis, and the inversion thesis. The situated knowledge thesis states that individuals who share certain objective interests are more likely to share specific knowledge claims related to the groups that they share membership within. The standpoint thesis states that some standpoints are more privileged than others in that they are more thoroughly developed and contain more truths than another, providing a better understanding of the whole

situation. The inversion thesis claims that epistemologies that allow disadvantaged populations to remove themselves from oppressed situations are more epistemically superior because they are more truthful and less distorted in regards to the social world.

Critics such as Spelman (1988) and hooks (1982) argue that feminism is not a monolith. They claim that the experiences of women and feminists is not easily separable from each other and are not shared by all women. This claim has led Feminist Standpoint scholars to adapt pluralism about standpoints, acknowledging that “there is no single feminist standpoint, but a plurality of standpoints each related to a different social location” (Tanesini, 2017, p. 8). This plurality, a subset of intersectionality, is what links FST to Critical Race Theory in this study. Feminist Standpoint Theory is also linked to Queer Theory through its use of feminism as a basis in which it was founded.

### **Discussion**

Previously, Black male masculinity in high school Black males has been defined using theoretical frameworks that include Critical Race Theory (Allen, 2013), identity resources and identity constellations (Givens, Nasir, Ross, & McKinney de Royston, 2016), theories on discipline in schools (Nasir, Ross, McKinney de Royston, Given, & Bryant, 2013), positioning theory and student resistance (Allen, 2017), and many others. In this study, I am attempting to fill the gap in the literature (Figure 1) that should exist from the practitioner perspective of a scholar-practitioner.

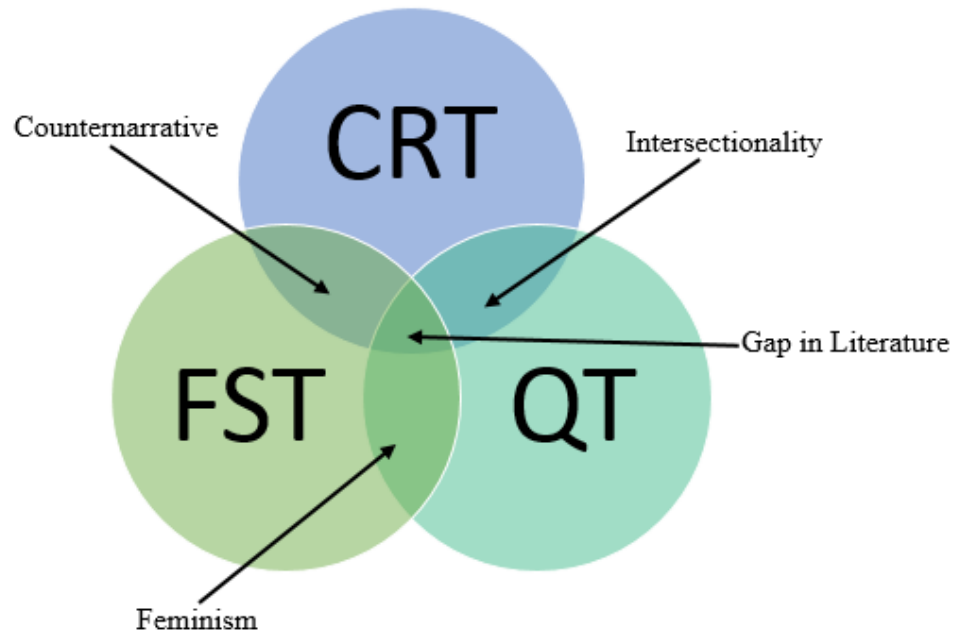


Figure 1. The gap in the literature. This figure illustrates the gap that exists when using Critical Race Theory, Feminist Standpoint Theory, and Queer Theory.

The scholar-practitioner’s work, in part, is to illuminate and interrogate injustices -- such as those created by hierarchies of participation and forms of social control. The scholar-practitioner interrogates social structures and cultural practices that contribute to injustice, bringing democratic practices to bear so as to mediate cultural dominance, political ideologies and asymmetries of power that work to reproduce cultures and social structures that foster injustices and inequities in educational settings (Jenlink, 2009, p. 4).

Although this framework is designed for practitioners, let us view this through a research lens.

Imagine that we approach conversations about Black male masculinity through a framework lens. We would first need to define and identify what ontology, epistemology, and methodology are being utilized as the framework for this work. The ontology is the truth -- “a specification of what exists” (Newby, 2014, p. 35). The epistemology is the knowledge -- the central values and/or theories that influence the development of knowledge (Hofer & Pintrich, 1997). The methodology is the how -- the section that allows readers to critically assess the validity of a

study or framework by providing the techniques used to collect, organize, and analyze data (Kallet, 2004).

For a better understanding of this study, I use these theoretical terms to define the framework presented in this paper. Here, Feminist Standpoint Theory (FST) becomes our ontology, Queer Theory (QT) becomes our epistemology and Critical Race Theory (CRT) becomes our methodology. Each has its own purpose as described below.

Feminist Standpoint Theory serves as the ontological approach as it asserts that some phenomena are best understood when viewed from the perspective of someone less powerful and less economically privileged (Tanesini, 2017). As standpoint thesis, a tenet of FST, explains, these standpoints are privileged in that they provide a view from both an oppressed person and that of the oppressor (Tanesini, 2017). This idea is similar to DuBois' ideas of the veil and double consciousness (DuBois, 2006), as well as to the performance of race (and gender) idea proposed by Young (2007). Using FST as the ontological assumptions also provides tangible standpoints/perspectives that we can see are evident in the findings of one of my previous studies. In said study, participants provided an anti-deficit styled perspective, or counter-narrative, to societal underpinnings of Black male masculinity, especially for high school Black males. They debunked the physicality of masculinity and focused mainly on character traits, commitment, and disrupting gender norms when discussing the development, definition, and doing of masculinity.

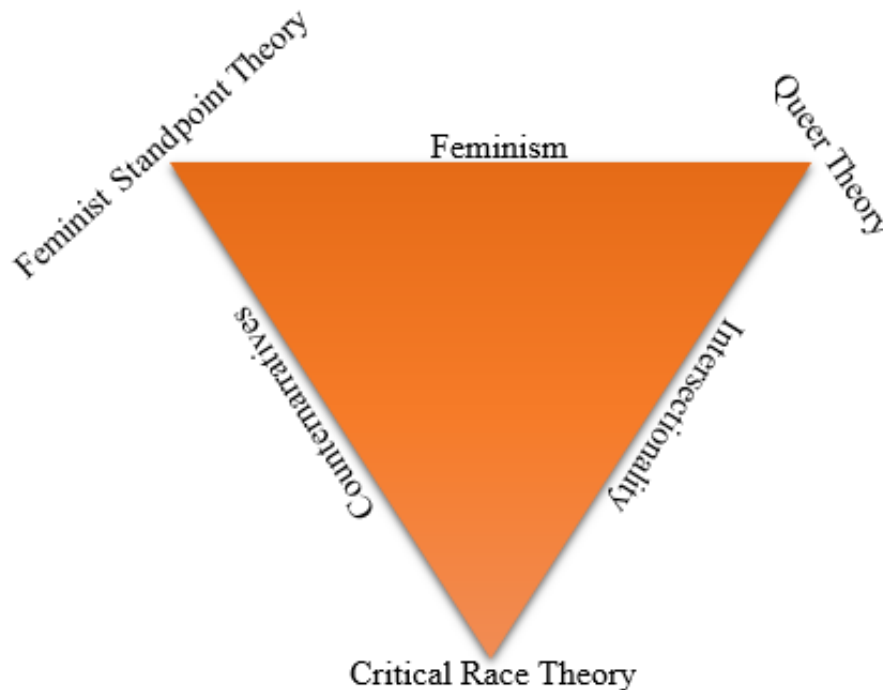
Queer Theory serves as the epistemological approach in that it provides the knowledge of how to address conversations surrounding Black male masculinity. Following FST, QT tells us that all categories are false, especially when viewing through a binary lens (Smith, 2003) -- Black male masculinity included. This must be our way of thinking as scholars and practitioners.

We must address (and assess) our positionality as professionals as each person's approach to research data, methodologies, and even a conversation can alter the way in which it is viewed (Dean, Furness, Verrier, Lennon, Bennett, & Spencer, 2018). Queer Theory as epistemology allows us to understand that we must approach these conversations with the assumptions that (1) heteronormativity is not acceptable and (2) performativity exists (Lange & Moore, 2017) and may manifest in manners such as a previously defined "cool pose" (Majors and Billson, 1992) or in specific ways as delineated in a previous study of mine. The literature review and the participants in my empirical study on Black masculinity in New Orleans high schools showed that heteronormativity and performativity are evident in the lives of high school Black males through the use of pushups as punishment and reinforcement of hegemonic masculinity, embracing the 'hustle' persona as a means to become a man, deepening your voice as a means to appear more masculine, and accepting all Black men as masculine despite what sex or gender they are romantically or sexually attracted to.

Finally, Critical Race Theory serves as the methodological approach in that it provides a subversive framework in which we can enact the tenets of FST and QT. CRT approaches issues from an activist perspective, bringing about social change and implementation of social justice ideas (Crenshaw, Gotanda, & Peller, 1995). analyzes the power relations within systems (cite), and especially views whiteness as property (Decuir & Dixon, 2004), which I contend that we add heterosexuality as property and hegemonic masculinity as property. For this framework, CRT provides counternarratives, also known as counter-storytelling as a method to analyze power within hegemonic systems. These counterstories allow textual demonstration of "various elements of CRT, including the permanence of racism, Whiteness as property, interest

convergence, and the critique of liberalism...” (Decuir & Dixon, 2004, p. 27), all of which I contend are parallel issues within masculinity studies.

Individually, the three theories are like instruments. They sound beautifully on their own, but in concert they add more harmonic sounds to create an orchestral experience. The model below (Figure 2) demonstrates how I relate each of the theories.



*Figure 2.* How to address conversations on Black male masculinity. This figure illustrates the process of addressing Black male masculinity. The inverted triangle shows how the ontology (Feminist Standpoint Theory) and the epistemology (Queer Theory) feed into the methodology (Critical Race Theory).

The triangle is upside down to represent subversive methods. CRT is on the lower point as it is the crux of working FST ontological assumptions with QT epistemologies.

CRT + QT ---> Intersectionality



CRT + FST ---> Counternarratives

FST + QT ---> Feminism

In conclusion, this article is designed to allow Black males the space to speak for themselves. I leave the reader with three steps to bettering our conversations surrounding Black male masculinity. The steps are as follows:

1. Invite Black boys to the conversation
2. Understand that they have multiple identities
3. Understand how power can influence the conversation

If we aim to incorporate these three steps into our thought process when conversing about Black male masculinity amongst other practitioners, we will continue our work in not excluding oppressed populations from conversations about their well-being.

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## Conclusion

It is with great understanding that this study is not 100% generalizable to all Black males. If I were to generalize the statements of the participants and the data found in both my literature review and theoretical analysis, I would be creating a “single story” as Adichie (2003) warns us against. Studying New Orleans high schools, however, has given me a specific lens in which we can view urban schools in the United States. The data in this dissertation provides context to the deficit narrative created by many scholars and assists in the creation of the anti-deficit narrative as Harper (2010) mentions in his framework proposed by analyzing STEM students.

The limitations of this study are what make it non-generalizable. For example, the sample size (n=10) is a relatively small sample size, although it is typically acceptable for qualitative studies. It is also recognized that this is self-reported data, which is subject to issues such as selective memory, exaggeration, and or attribution. Access to recorded data in the high schools was also limited and hindered the ability to triangulate data with school records, discipline records, and even literature on school policies and procedures.

Lastly, this dissertation opens the gateway for further research and implies recommendations for future studies. With the small amount of peer-reviewed literature available that examines Black male masculinity in urban high schools, I charge researchers and scholars to continue this work with more empirical and theoretical approaches to this examination in an effort to broaden the literature. The available studies all focused on Critical Race Theory or some related theory, as well as focused on heterosexual, middle class Black males, leaving the perspectives of those who identify as LGBT, low income, high income, and other intersectionalities out of the study. Finally, while this study was built upon Broome's (2015) call to

examine how students *develop, define, and do* masculinity, there is room in the presented literature and empirical study to examine how the school systems, not just individual schools, play a role in these processes. The school spaces, literature, and school districts play a role in how the schools affect development of masculinity in Black boys. How women *develop, define, and do* masculinity and/or femininity can also be studied. This study would serve as a great complement to the previously discussed studies and would further elucidate the lives and experiences of Black boys and girls in urban high schools in the United States.

## **Appendix A**

### **Survey Questions**

1. Participants will receive a demographic questionnaire to include the following questions:
  1. Please choose a nickname (also known as a pseudonym) for the researcher to use in place of your real name
  2. Age
  3. Race
  4. City of Birth
  5. Mom's level of education
  6. Father's level of education
  7. Mother's occupation
  8. Father's occupation
  9. How many people live in your household? Who?
  10. Total household income
  11. Current High School Name
  12. Current High School Classification
  13. Clubs/Organizations Involved In
  14. Have you read the student handbook?
  15. Are you aware of all of the policies and procedures as it relates to behavior and dress code?
  16. Do you agree with them all?
    1. If not, which ones and why?

### **Interview Questions**

Icebreaker:

1. When you think of masculinity, who comes to mind? Why?

Section One

1. How would you define what it means to be masculine?
2. Describe your masculinity.
  1. How does your description relate to your definition?
  2. How do you see yourself in relation to other men?
3. Do you have any role models for what it means to be a man?
  1. If yes, describe what they have taught you.
  2. If no, what attributes would you look for in a role model?
4. What other factors contribute to someone's perception of masculinity?
  1. Probing Questions:
    1. Does sexuality contribute?
    2. Does class contribute?
    3. Does race contribute?
    4. Does religion contribute?

5. Are there any other comments you want to make about your definition of masculinity and factors that contribute to it?

## Section Two

1. How does your experience in school shape your definition of masculinity?
  1. Probe Questions:
    1. How do the books you read shape it?
    2. How do the classes you take shape it?
      1. Phys. Ed.
      2. Sciences
      3. Math
      4. Reading
      5. Electives
      6. Extra-Curricular
        1. Sports
        2. Clubs/Organizations
        3. Student Government
  2. Are there any other factors in the school that helped to shape your definition of masculinity?

## Section Three

1. How do the school rules/policies affect your expression or performance of masculinity?
  1. How do teachers affect it?
  2. Administrators?
2. How is your masculinity supported or not support in your school?
3. Have you ever thought much about this topic before this interview? When? Why?
4. Have you learned anything about yourself as a result of our conversation? If so, what?



## Appendix B

*Black Male or Black and Male: Addressing Black Male Masculinity in Urban High Schools in New Orleans*

*Performance Site:* New Orleans Public Schools and New Orleans Public Libraries

*Investigators:* The following investigator is available for questions,

**Mr. Michael J. Seaberry**

School of Education, LSU

504-351-3889

and

**Dr. Kenneth Fasching-Varner**

School of Education, LSU

225-578-2918

Available M - F, 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

*Purpose of the Study:* The purpose of this research project is to investigate high school Black male's definition of masculinity.

*Inclusion Criteria:* Participants must identify with the following: (1) Between the ages of 13-18; (2) Currently enrolled in a high school in Orleans Parish School District; (3) identify as male; (4) identify as Black or African-American; and must (5) have attended the same school for the entirety of their tenure in high school.

*Exclusion Criteria:* Students who do not meet the classification requirements, who do not identify as Black or African American, or who do not identify as male.

*Description of the Study:* Participants will complete a demographic survey to identify their eligibility in the study as well as demographic identifiers such as socioeconomic status, religion, age, sexual identity, etc. The investigator will conduct semi-structured interviews in a neutral space, lasting no more than one hour, assign "nicknames" to each participant, and use investigative techniques to analyze school documents such as policies, procedures, and curriculum. All interviews will be audio recorded. The finalized interview notes that are used in the study will be available to the participants for review of validity. School documents such as student handbook, faculty handbook, and policies/procedures will be requested for analysis as well.

*Benefits:* Each participant will receive \$10 cash as compensation for their time. The study may identify various definitions of masculinity which will help educators cater to the needs of adolescent Black males. This study can benefit school policies, procedures, and/or curriculum, which will help decrease the effects of the school-to-prison pipeline, disciplinary actions against Black males, and the overall safety of Black males.

*Risks:* There are no known risks.

*Right to Refuse:* Participation is voluntary, and a child will become part of the study only if both child and parent agree to the child's participation. At any time, either the subject may withdraw from the study or the subject's parent may withdraw the subject from the study without penalty or loss of any benefit to which they might otherwise be entitled.

*Privacy:* The school records of participants in this study may be reviewed by investigators. Results of the study may be published, but no names or identifying information will be included for publication. Subject identity will remain confidential unless disclosure is required by law.

*Financial Information:* There is no cost for participation in the study.

*Signatures:* The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigator. For injury or illness, call your physician, or the Student Health Center if you are an LSU student. If I have questions about subjects' rights or other concerns, I can contact Dennis Landin, Chairman, Institutional Review Board, (225) 578 - 8692, irb@lsu.edu, www.lsu.edu/irb. I will allow my child to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the investigator's obligation to provide me with a signed copy of this consent form.

Parent's Signature : \_\_\_\_\_ Date : \_\_\_\_\_

The parent/guardian has indicated to me that he/she is unable to read. I certify that I have read this consent form to the parent/guardian and explained that by completing the signature line above he/she has given permission for the child to participate in the study.

Signature of Reader : \_\_\_\_\_ Date : \_\_\_\_\_

*This study has been approved by the LSU IRB Committee. IRB Exemption Number: E11164*

## Appendix C

### Minor Assent Form

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to be in a study to examine how high school Black males define masculinity. I will have to complete a questionnaire on paper and participate in a face-to-face interview with the researcher. I will be audio recorded. I can decide to stop being in the study at any time without getting in trouble.

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Witness\* \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\*(N.B. Witness must be present for the assent process, not just the signature by the minor.)

*This study has been approved by the LSU IRB Committee. IRB Exemption Number: E11164*

Please contact us if you have questions about this form.

Institutional Review Board  
Dr. Dennis Landin, Chair  
130 David Boyd Hall  
Baton Rouge, LA 70803  
P: 225.578.8692  
F: 225.578. 5983  
irb@lsu.edu | lsu.edu/irb

## Appendix D IRB Approval



### ACTION ON EXEMPTION APPROVAL REQUEST

**TO:** Michael Seaberry  
Education

**FROM:** Dennis Landin  
Chair, Institutional Review Board

**DATE:** August 30, 2018

**RE:** IRB# E11164

Institutional Review Board  
Dr. Dennis Landin, Chair  
130 David Boyd Hall  
Baton Rouge, LA 70803  
P: 225.578.8692  
F: 225.578.5983  
[irb@lsu.edu](mailto:irb@lsu.edu)  
[lsu.edu/research](http://lsu.edu/research)

**TITLE:** Black Male or Black and Male: Addressing Black Male Masculinity in Urban High Schools in the United States

**New Protocol/Modification/Continuation:** New Protocol

**Review Date:** 8/29/2018

**Approved**  **Disapproved**

**Approval Date:** 8/30/2018 **Approval Expiration Date:** 8/29/2021

**Exemption Category/Paragraph:** 1; 2b

**Signed Consent ~~Waived?~~:** No

**Re-review frequency:** (three years unless otherwise stated)

**LSU Proposal Number** (if applicable):

**By:** Dennis Landin, Chairman 

#### PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING –

Continuing approval is **CONDITIONAL** on:

1. Adherence to the approved protocol, familiarity with, and adherence to the ethical standards of the Belmont Report, and LSU's Assurance of Compliance with DHHS regulations for the protection of human subjects\*
2. Prior approval of a change in protocol, including revision of the consent documents or an increase in the number of subjects over that approved.
3. Obtaining renewed approval (or submittal of a termination report), prior to the approval expiration date, upon request by the IRB office (irrespective of when the project actually begins); notification of project termination.
4. Retention of documentation of informed consent and study records for at least 3 years after the study ends.
5. Continuing attention to the physical and psychological well-being and informed consent of the individual participants, including notification of new information that might affect consent.
6. A prompt report to the IRB of any adverse event affecting a participant potentially arising from the study.
7. Notification of the IRB of a serious compliance failure.
8. **SPECIAL NOTE:** When emailing more than one recipient, make sure you use bcc. Approvals will automatically be closed by the IRB on the expiration date unless the PI requests a continuation.

\* All investigators and support staff have access to copies of the Belmont Report, LSU's Assurance with DHHS, DHHS (45 CFR 46) and FDA regulations governing use of human subjects, and other relevant documents in print in this office or on our World Wide Web site at <http://www.lsu.edu/irb>

## Vita

Michael J. Seaberry is 2014 graduate of Xavier University of Louisiana. He currently serves as the Program Coordinator for Retention Services and Special Projects and is the Director for the S.T.A.R.T. Summer Bridge Program here at Philander Smith College in Little Rock, Arkansas. Michael plans to graduate in May 2019 with his PhD in Curriculum and Instruction at Louisiana State University. Since beginning his graduate education, Michael has published peer-reviewed journal articles in journals such as *Diverse: Issues In Education* and *The Journal of Critical Scholarship on Student Affairs and Higher Education*. He has also published numerous book chapters on the school to prison pipeline, the adverse effects of Brown Vs. Board of Education, and even a few motivational pieces for students investing their time into higher education.

Michael has self-published two books titled *The Mississippi Crying: A Collection of Poems, Stories of Healing* and *naked bird, don't feel no cold*, both of which are available on Amazon and in bookstores across the United States. These books are collections of poetry addressing mental health in the Black community and sexuality/mental health of young adults, respectively.

Michael's future plans are to launch a diversity and inclusion consulting company that focuses on making space for Southern Black men in corporate, educational, and religious institutions. He lives by the Henry Kissinger quote, "The task of a leader is to get his people from where they are to where they have not been" and his life mantra is to make Black kids feel like the sun -- like the world revolves around them.