Man Made:

The (Re)Construction of Black Male Identity in Single-Sex Schooling

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ABSTRACT

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My dissertation examines how a single-sex school for boys of color in New York City (re)defines masculinity through organizational policies, practices, and messaging. I further study how black boys, sixth graders in particular, participate in and make sense of the school’s concept of masculinity. Lastly, I explore how boys’ define and understand masculinity and conceive of their identity and agency. I framed this dissertation within an expanded version of W.H. Sewell’s (1979) framework of structure and agency, amending the framework to include concepts of negotiation and identity. My study employs an interpretive, multi-modal qualitative design and integrates the following modes of inquiry: ethnography, in-depth interviews with teachers and students, and photo elicitation narratives with students.

My findings provide pedagogical and policy suggestions for enacting a model of single-sex schooling for black boys. I find that (the enactment of) school structures and boys’ understandings of school practices are conditioned by outside perceptions of black boys. I also find that although school, cultural, and disciplinary practices may be well intentioned, these practices may inadvertently reproduce the very structures that they attempt to circumvent by unintentionally reinforcing entrenched stereotypes about black boys. I further find that boys’ understandings of masculinity are not fully reflected in school practices, nor are they legible
expressions of masculinity to school staff. The contributions of this dissertation enrich the conversation with prior theory about how organizational or school practices can affect change with students, what helps black boys learn best, and how black boys can possess masculinity that is as varied as it is complex. Lastly, my work extends and elaborates upon current theoretical understandings of the development of adolescent masculinity.
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To all of my 6th grade boys who taught me so much and inspired me to learn more.
CHAPTER ONE: Introduction and Project Framing

Once upon a time black male “cool” was defined by the ways in which black men confronted hardships of life without allowing their spirits to be ravaged. They took the pain of it and used it alchemically to turn the pain into gold. That burning process required high heat. Black male cool was defined by the ability to withstand the heat and remain centered. It was defined by black male willingness to confront reality, to face the truth, and bear it not by adopting a false pose of cool while feeding on fantasy; not by black male denial or by assuming a “poor me” victim identity. It was defined by individual black males daring to self-define rather than be defined by others. (hooks, 2003, p. 147)

Introduction

In nearly every measure of quality of life—health, housing, education, employment, and crime, among others—black males stand out for how they continue to be shut out and mired by durable disadvantage (Noguera, 2012; Ferguson, 2001; Carter, 2007). The deleterious conditions of black men begin when these men are boys navigating the educational system. Nationally, black boys are disproportionately more likely to be suspended, expelled, or drop out of school when compared with any other subgroup (Ferguson, 2001). They are also less likely to graduate from college (Harper & Wood, 2015; James, 2010; Howard, 2013). Additionally, black men are highly overrepresented in our prison system (Alexander, 2012; Carter, 2007). All of these trends are now accepted as fact. What remains unknown, however, is what pedagogical strategies are most effective in educating these “at-risk” boys. Amid a great many initiatives that have been implemented across the country, single-sex schooling is one strategy that has been heralded as the panacea for best educating low-income black boys (Noguera, 2012). This model requires that to “save” these boys, we must educate them together, yet apart from the rest of society. To save these boys, we must segregate them.
The “black male crisis” is now broadly considered an issue of civil rights: “not only does [the crisis] impact individual black men...it also hurts their families and communities. It’s not just a problem for the black community, it is a problem for everyone in this nation” (Morial, 2007, p. 13). The gap between white students and black students begins early and widens over time. Fryer and Levitt (2004) explain that black children “lose substantial ground in academic achievement relative to whites” as early as the first four years of school (p. 447). Hanushek (2010) describes how the impact of having lower educated and lower status fathers, when compared to white boys, puts black students at an early disadvantage. Class aside, black males lag behind white peers with respect to GPA and standardized test scores (Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Warren, 2016). Roach (2004) also reports that the average black 12th grader’s proficiency matches that of the average white 8th grader. Given these persistent and sobering disparities between black and white boys, it is clear that better interventions are needed to ameliorate this gap.

Black boys also significantly lag behind black girls when compared to their academic trajectories. Academically, black boys are underperforming in reading and writing with respect to their female peers. While black girls have been outperforming their black male peers, “white males are not expected to fall behind their female peers [throughout high school]” (Royster, 2007, p. 156). Further, more than 50% of black male students drop out of high school yearly across the nation (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2010). Black boys make up a disproportionately large percentage of students that are classified with a learning disability, mentally retarded, or are placed into special education programs (Noguera, 2012). Black boys are also underrepresented in honors and advanced placement classes (Oakes, 1983). Furthermore, black boys are more likely to be grade repeaters when
compared to their female peers (DiPrete, 2012; Jackson, 2010). With respect to schooling difficulties and outcomes, it is clear that black boys are in need of better interventions.

The schooling experiences and outcomes of black boys endure throughout the life course, as black men experience disadvantages in many aspects of social life. To begin, poverty greatly affects the trajectory of black students. Specifically, one-third of all black children are raised in a poor household (Noguera, 2009, p. 21). Living in concentrated poverty “traps” young black men in a “horrible cycle including discrimination, unemployment, crime, prison and early death” (Anderson, 2008, p. 3). Black boys endure these hardships as black men; even controlling for education and occupation, labor market discrimination contributes to black men having lower-paying jobs than their white counterparts (Anderson 2008; Hanushek 2010). In metropolitan areas, black males are also the most likely demographic to be unemployed (Massey & Denton, 1993). All in all, black males are the only U.S. demographic with a declining life expectancy (Stevenson, 2004; Spivan, Prothrow-Stith & Hausman, 1988).

Single-sex education has grown dramatically in popularity since the authorization of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001). No Child Left Behind (NCLB) positioned resolving the black/white achievement gap as a national priority. This prioritization led to a search for “innovative strategies, programs and school models” that could potentially improve the academic outcomes of students of color navigating poverty. In 2011, prominent figures such as New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg and George Soros began redirecting nearly five-hundred million dollars of public funds toward a group of initiatives pledged to directly address the academic underachievement of low-income Latino and black males (Noguera, 2012). In 2014, President Barack Obama announced “My Brother's Keeper” as a
national initiative to close the opportunity gap young that young, minority low-income boys face. This initiative asked for government, businesses, nonprofits, local education agencies, and other able individuals to “do their part” to ensure young people, especially young men of color, have the skills they need to succeed (Klein, 2012c).

In this time, single-sex schools—school settings in which male and female students attend school only with other students who share their same sex—quickly became heralded as one potential remedy to improve life chances and academic outcomes for young people of color in low-income communities (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). These schools could ostensibly provide more targeted instruction and enhanced social and emotional opportunities specifically designed for the school population of black boys.

Single-sex schools for males of color tend to share a common philosophy around positively “redefining” student masculinity to counter negative messaging about manhood that boys could encounter from the media, their families, or their community (Fergus & Noguera, 2010; Stevenson, Slaughter-Defoe, Arrington, & Johnson, 2012). These schools counter students’ “oppositional” masculinities by investing boys in a new, school-defined masculinity that champions academic success (Fergus & Noguera, 2010). These conceptions create school-wide organizational norms and practices that have implications for school culture, instruction, and student socialization. Students could potentially be more likely to find increased solidarity with their peers and within their schools given the specific and defined population (Howard, 2010; Noguera, 2009).

Fergus and Noguera (2010) provide one comprehensive empirical assessment of single-sex schools, all of which primarily serve low-income boys of color. The authors report findings from The Black and Latino Male Schools Intervention Study (BLMSIS)
suggest practitioners in single-sex schools for boys share similar perspectives on the relevant strategies boys of color need to feel socially and academically supported. These findings derive from interviews conducted with seventy-five practitioners within a sample of seven single-sex schools. In these interviews, respondents emphasized school and instructional strategies need to “address the cultural and structural damage or inequities” that have, thus far, foreclosed boys of color from achieving at higher levels (Fergus & Noguera, 2010, p. 6). To raise achievement, practitioners discussed three prevailing social/emotional strategies they employed to address the needs of boys of color:

1. **Changing Boys’ Ideas of Masculinity:** Educators argue that boys of color, in particular, confront negative images and narratives in popular media and in their everyday lives. These images are so damaging that schools believe they need to adapt and nurture a new “masculine identity” which counters stereotypical ‘street’ images some argue keep [boys of color] from being successful (Fergus & Noguera, 2010, p. 14). Schools, effectively, “conceive themselves as mechanisms through which young men of color develop an alternative masculinity” (p. 15). The approach these schools and their educators take assumes masculinity is a key lever holding these students back from achieving, but also, that masculinity can be transformed within and by an institution.

2. **Incorporating an Academic Identity:** Practitioners believe the views of masculinity boys face in their day-to-day lives within their communities are laden with negativity. Further, practitioners suggest that these views position academic success as “an affront to their racial/ethnic identity” (p. 6). Within this sample, schools attempt to create a new masculine identity that counters anti-intellectualism by establishing an in-school “brotherhood” to help students sustain their “emerging” academic identities. The purpose of this school collective identity, they argue, is to “establish a safe space through which students may be themselves, even if those selves are not accepted outside the school doors” (p. 19). All in all, practitioners believe creating a new identity will help boys be resilient in the face of external, contradictory pressures.

3. **Developing Future and Leadership:** Rather than be drawn to and influenced by the negativity of “street culture,” schools seek to enlist students in taking accountability for themselves and their lives. Further, schools aim for students to use what they learn to “give back” to their communities and go out into the world to enact change for social good (p.
20). These schools and educators believe this work begins with the identity work mentioned above which assists students in dealing with structural racism, external pressures (of the family, community, society), and any negative perceptions of education. Once students take on the new school-supported masculinity and identity, they will be on the path of turning into transformative leaders.

While these social/emotional strategies may very well be well-positioned to address the needs of black boys, it is possible that (re)defining masculinity in these schools could problematize black masculinity or the families and communities these students hail from as something to be “fixed.” To adopt or accommodate the type of “alternative” masculinity these schools require, students may need to make uncomfortable compromises with regard to the masculinities they have developed in other interactions outside of the school. This may be easier said than done. Single-sex schools may run the risk of distancing students from their senses of identity not directly tied to the school, and further could potentially alienate students from communities and families who could guide and support them. By shepherdng young men of color into all-boys institutions and treating these students as a “homogenous” group, single-sex schools may risk flattening or ignoring differences with respect to learning styles, disability status, and sexuality. Conversely, these schools appear to have found methods they say “work” for a troubled population, in that these methods appear to keep these boys in school longer and create a more academically oriented male identity (Fergus & Noguera, 2010). While these practices are particularly compelling, it is hard to know by what processes students respond to these practices and how schools adjust their instructional practices to account for the various needs of black boys.

**Project Rationale**

In this dissertation, I explore how single-sex schools (re)define masculinity through organizational policies, practices, and messaging. I further study how students do and do
not adopt the school’s (re)definition of masculinity as well as how students’ conceptions of masculinity vary according to their experiences with masculinity outside of the school. My study adds to the still emerging knowledge base of how, practically, single-sex schools reconceptualize and inculcate students with new “non-oppositional” ideas of black masculinity (Noguera, 2009; Nelson, 2013). I explore the many effects these practices can have for students’ in-school experiences and self-concepts. I question the ease with which students would take on organizational norms without resistance. Simply, students may not take on organizational (re)definitions of black masculinity without some type of negotiation or reconciliation with their pre-existing notions of what it means to be a man. Students are not merely passive actors who do not have agency to resist or transform organizational norms or cultures.

Through my work I aim to understand the many ways boys negotiate their identities with the institutional logics around their learning and development. In particular, some students may find tension or dissonance with this adjustment, as they attempt to reconcile in-school and out-of-school identities. Investigating these moments of tension or conflict uncovered the diversity of responses students had in navigating the school context. Lastly, I examine how students in these schools understand their identities. I explore identity as a situated, contextualized process, subject to student agency and redefinition. As a result, this study also contributes to the growing literature on black boys’ experiences and identity formation within institutions.

At present, there is not much research guidance as to what organizational and instructional “best practices”—in terms of identity work—work best in single-sex schools (Fergus & Noguera, 2010). Thus, there is a very clear gap between educational practice and
pedagogy in single-sex schools and the knowledge and research from which educators can
draw to inform their approaches. There is therefore, an urgent call for research that
explores how the identities of black boys are *constructed* within single-sex schools and how
these identities, in turn, affect attitudes and dispositions toward schooling. It is my hope
that privileging the narratives of these students leads to improved policies, practices, and
conditions that will help boys of color thrive in school and in later stages of life.

**Research Questions**

With respect to the above discussion, this dissertation addresses the following research
questions:

1. Through what structural and academic conditions and practices does a single-sex
school—that serves an all-male and predominantly black student population—
(re)define and (re)construct notions of masculinity for young men?
2. What are black boys’ perceptions of the school’s concept of masculinity? To what
degree do black boys’ understandings of masculinity align with the school’s concept
of masculinity? To what degree, if at all, are these at odds?
3. How do black boys participate in and make sense of the school’s conception of
masculinity? How do the school’s practices affect individual students’ self-
perceptions and understandings of their identity and agency?

**Review of the Literature**

To frame my work, I consider three main areas of literature. First, I review the vast
literature on how black boys experience schooling in the United States. In particular, I
review several pieces that position schooling as structurally unkind to the experiences of
black boys (Carter, 2005; Delpit, 1995; Hill-Collins, 2000; McCready, 2010). Further, many
scholars discuss the many ways black boys are seen and mislabeled as “defiant” or
oppositional to learning in schools (Ferguson, 2001; Harris, 2011; Noguera, 2009; Oakes,
1985; Tyson, 2003). This section samples from the robust literature on these topics, in
specifically highlighting studies by authors who develop theories from empirical studies—
largely qualitative—in their work with students of color. Along with this, I explore some of
the literature on stereotyping as it pertains to black boys both in and out of school. I connect this literature to some of the current understandings of perceived and performed black masculinity.

Next, I describe a brief history of single-sex schooling in the United States. I trace the history and popularity of single-sex schooling as a way of understanding how these schools have developed into the potentially ameliorative policy mechanisms they are today for young people of color.

Finally, I review literature on gender presentation and performance, specifically as it pertains to black boys and masculinity. I situate this literature within the greater context of considering a diversity of gender and masculinity. I then present my rationale for this dissertation by presenting why it is necessary to first dig deeper into how schools practically (re)define masculinity organizationally and how boys, with a diversity and range of masculinity experiences, respond to these (re)definitions. A dissertation of this nature adds to the still emerging knowledge base of which school practices black boys identify as productive and consistent with their authentic selves.

Black Boys and Schooling

Black boys are in trouble. Academically, these boys lag behind their black female peers as well as their white male peers, among others (Fergus & Noguera, 2010; Ferguson, 2001; Howard, 2010). If these boys do not drop out from high school, they are unlikely to be college ready or even matriculate to college (Howard, 2010; Noguera, 2009). While in school, black boys face numerous difficulties, beginning with experiencing learning in institutions that may not be inclusive to their identities and learning styles (Carter, 2005). Black boys have been reported to disinvest from schooling when they feel schooling is antithetical to their identities or when they find teachers who do not support them (Harris,
Additionally, these boys also have to counter negative stereotypes throughout their schooling that make it difficult for them to achieve (Gunn, 2009; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). As a response to these conditions, the single-sex schooling model has gained popularity for boys. This traction can be attributed to the common conception that teachers are able to cater to and support boys’ unique interests and learning styles. This targeted instruction could be especially important given that for low-income boys of color, their racial and gender identities are shaped by and through poverty. In this section, I detail first how schools are non-neutral institutions that may devalue black boys’ experiences and identities. Next, I review literature on the myriad stereotypes that boys encounter in schooling with which they must contend. Lastly, I provide a preliminary discussion of black masculinity and connect this to the rise of single-sex schools for boys of color.

Schools as Non-Neutral Institutions

Some scholars argue that school structures and practices are inherently raced and classed (Howard, 2010; Lesko, 1999; Omi & Winant, 1994). Schools primarily serve the interests of white, middle-class students and as a result, place status, power, and knowledge within dominant, white cultural norms and values. As a result, school practices are seldom “neutral” and therefore can cause learning dilemmas for minority students. These learning dilemmas occur when students appraise themselves as not of the dominant power groups or culture in a school (Carter, 2005; Fordham, 1996; Ogbu & Fordham, 1986; Perry, 2003). Schools are built upon, and reflect, a racial and class hierarchy of power. This hierarchy extends into school culture, curriculum, and other school-based practices such that black boys’ knowledge is devalued and delegitimized.

One instrument that serves to inculcate students with the relative importance of different types of knowledge is the curriculum through which select cultural practices of
the dominant white-middle class are inscribed and deemed legitimate (Apple, 2002; Carter, 2005). In this process, the cultural practices and knowledge of minority students are relegated to a lesser status as they do not match the practices upheld by the institution (Carter, 2005). Lacking a pluralism of perspective, schools can then be said to preserve the racially hierarchized norms of our society as tacit, commonly held values without providing black children with an outlet through which to see themselves reflected within the school.

For black students in schools, their cultural competencies and identities are at odds with their abilities to achieve in a contentious context that may not explicitly acknowledge or value their identities. Within the school, it is messaged to black students that for them to achieve, they must displace their cultural identities, the very essence of who they are. For many black students adopting the achievement ideology of the school represents a threat to their non-dominant, black cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984). Adopting the narratives or culture of the school presents a danger to black students because black cultural capital largely “signifies in-group allegiance and preserves a sense of belonging” and identity (Carter, 2005, p. 52). Therefore, black boys must contend with a contentious environment in which they will either be deemed non-successful, or non-compliant, or potentially experience alienation with their culture and identity.

When black students do not comply with school practices or culture, they are deemed as “non-compliant,” or as “troublemakers.” To cope with feeling at odds with the norms and values of the school, black boys may want to signal their cultural status and identity. Black students adhere to certain ways of speaking, ways of dressing, and values which “protect boundaries around their racial identity” under fire by the school system (Carter, 2005, p. 54). Carter’s empirical work in particular highlights how black students
can be viewed as “non-compliant” when they refuse to subscribe to the school’s exclusive achievement ideology. This non-compliance is a consequence of the way in which the school is structured: to embrace behaviors or values in line with their racial or cultural identities, black students must opt out of schooling practices that operationalize achievement as a “white phenomenon.” While the school may deem this “non-compliance” as a reflection of not wanting to achieve, these students choose not to comply, and in doing so, they challenge and critique cultural practices “tacitly understood to be the codes of intelligence, success, knowledge and good cultural conduct” (Carter, 2005, p. 36).

Black students want to achieve like any other student, but they “slip through the cracks because they comport themselves differently and do not view cultural assimilation as a prerequisite for achievement” (Carter, 2005, p. 3). For the black student, the choice to comply or not comply hinders them in some way because the “mission of the school cannot equal that of the kids” (Anderson, 1999, p. 97). The choice for many students to accept the ideology of the school is difficult because “to accept the school is to give up the value of the street for ‘some other thing’...that hasn’t been sufficiently explained to them” (Anderson, 1999, p. 97). For a black child, complying is to give in to the dominant codes of the school so they can achieve, whereas choosing not to comply and uphold the street codes accepts they will not achieve in the school context.

Black males are “doubly displaced” when they do not comply. A great deal of empirical research documents the punitive experiences of students of color when they resist school culture and norms. Students of color are more likely to have their non-compliance with school norms deemed as “willfully being bad” and indicative of a “vicious, insubordinate masculine nature that as a threat to order must be controlled” (Ferguson,
2001, p. 86). The way black males are read by the school essentially criminalizes them; shaping and altering their identities as black boys. In this way, black boys sense they are excluded from the school as the norms and values of the “mainstream” culture are far-removed from their black culture and values. In this way, negative stereotypes tied to race, class, and gender can bind black boys in low-income schools to biased policies and practices that affect them adversely (Davis & Jordan, 1995). Interviews with marginalized students of color have revealed that students feel that their teachers fail to see them as unique individuals who are deserving of respect, but rather see them as falling into a stereotype such as “black,” “dangerous,” or “underachieving” (Anderson, 2008, p. 139). African-American boys who “act out” in class are typically less likely to receive academic help, which further locks them out of academic opportunities (Gunn, 2009).

Single-sex schools can serve as a respite for black boys to have a space that is not mired by these stereotypes and further, can provide supports and attention to identity construction (Noguera, 2003). It is possible that in such an environment, boys could be less likely to feel “out of place” given that there are more individuals with whom they could potentially identify. It could be less likely that these students would slip through the cracks at an institution uniquely designed to serve their community, with particular attention to socio-emotional needs.

Countering Stereotypes

For black boys, their race and gender are evocative of stereotypes and judgments in a mainstream society that positions them squarely within a deficit narrative (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). This deficit narrative depicts black youth in media (political platforms, news coverage, popular culture) as “dangerous, unintelligent, and inherently problematic” (Baldridge, 2012). These depictions become an unenviable burden that
weighs upon black youth in all of their dealings with society and can contribute to their decreased life chances (Cose, 2002; Davis & Jordan, 1994; Ferguson, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Tyson, 2003). Mainstream society equates black youth with low academic achievement, and with gang-riddled communities, drug use, and incarceration (Dance, 2002). Black masculinity scholarship associates black boys who exhibit “hypermasculinity” with pervasive racial marginalization, unmitigated violence, and urban poverty (Anderson, 2008; Duneier, 1994; Ewing & Grady, 2005). School-based interventions, therefore, must incorporate efforts to disrupt, counter, and transform black male stereotypes and hypermasculine identities (Noguera, 2008). Single-sex schools take this on by attempting to dismantle non-productive understandings of masculinity that are reactive to negative forces in boys’ environments. These schools attempt to do this by (re)defining masculinity to be academically oriented, and further, by providing an environment where black students are taken from the margins to the forefront.

Hyperaggression, anti-intellectualism and hypersexuality are central to the public image of black males and, for mainstream society, evoke fear, suspicion, and low expectations of black boys—often said to contribute to a self-fulfilling prophecy for black males and their life outcomes. Some research suggests that black boys can be complicit in their own failure, more likely to adopt “oppositional” identities in schools, or refrain from challenging themselves academically (Ogbu, 1987). Ogbu (1978) argues that black students perform poorly in school due to a cultural aversion that is “oppositional” to the schooling process. This research contends that although academic investment is valued, pursuing academic interests is perceived as less important to black boys given that their peers may accuse them of “acting white” or “acting gay” (Harris, 2011; Ogbu, 1986; Water, 1996).
A great deal of work has successfully challenged the deficit narrative of oppositional culture which suggests black students underperform in school because of a lack of will or desire to perform well. To begin, despite achieving less in school, black students actually have a “more favorable academic orientation” when compared to their white counterparts (Harris, 2011, p. 184). The “acting white” hypothesis currently does not hold much clout among theorists, as it has been widely observed that black students do not racialize achievement as merely being a “white thing” (Carter, 2005; Harris, 2011; Tyson, 2011). Harris (2011) underscores the importance of shifting the rhetoric of the racial achievement gap from scapegoating culture toward a focus on the school structures that cause the achievement gap to form and continue to widen. Harris (2011) argues for a shift away from oppositional culture theory, i.e., the assigning of the inequalities in education opportunities to a “cultural aversion” to learning. This reframing of culture gives traction to the idea that many behaviors exhibited by black students are actually being mislabeled as oppositional, as they are merely reactions of frustration to an academic skills deficit. Instead, the inclusion of “acting white” in the black student rhetoric exposes “the tensions between symbolic and cultural boundaries within the school…the cultural markers used by educators to mark intelligence and categorize students” (Carter, 2005, p. 52). In other words, students’ use of “acting white” acknowledges that succeeding in the school—academically, behaviorally, or otherwise—requires an acceptance of dominant cultural values that are different from their own. The acting white slur allows black students to acknowledge their awareness of the “institutionalized link between whiteness and achievement” to condemn and reject its validity (Tyson, 2011, p. 73). Students’ resistance
should be seen as more than behavioral resistance, but instead as non-acceptance of schools norms and culture that may not fully include or acknowledge them.

Taking the use of the “acting white” pejorative as one example, black boys are not merely passive to the pervasive stereotypes about them that plague American culture. Instead, black boys confront, resist, and adapt to stereotypes that seek to limit their futures. For example, Dance (2002) describes how black boys modified street culture to cope with “educational oppressions,” which Dance describes as stereotypes that map onto intersecting race, class, gender, and geographic identities. Although single-sex schools may identify new productive strategies that can assist boys, it is not a given that boys will take these strategies on without resistance. Boys have agency, and can reject the school norms or practices if they find them to be disingenuous or not fitting with their authentic selves.

Further, single-sex schools may counter any negative messaging students encounter in their out-of-school time. Given the expressed purpose of creating single-sex schools, these schools can position themselves as respites from these stereotypes. In serving primarily all young men of color from similar socioeconomic backgrounds, there may be less of a likelihood that students appraise the school linking “whiteness” to achievement, but rather, they can see the school as an affirmation of achievement specifically for students who look like them.

[Black] Masculinity
For black boys in lower-income environments, masculinity exists as a facet of their identity to make sense of the conditions of the neighborhood and the realities of poverty. When developed while living in lower-income communities, black masculinity can reflect a deep sense of alienation from mainstream society and any associated institutions with which young black males contend (Anderson, 2008; Cose, 2002; Ferguson, 2001; Howard,
Essentially, black young men inherit a particularly “vulnerable childhood that anticipates adulthood” in a drastically different way: in their communities, these children are already men (Ferguson, 2001, p. 96).

The lack of trust in police accountability in inner-city communities, for example, gives rise to self-preservation practices and a nuanced concept of manhood in taking care of oneself, others, and the neighborhood itself. For boys to make meaning of the confusion they feel about their neighborhood conditions in relation to more affluent communities, black male youth begin to develop a “code of the street” to bolster confidence to withstand fear and create solidarity (Duneier, 1992). Generally, black men in the community exemplify “real” manhood only by upholding this code through a “certain physicality and ruthlessness” without which, a man is “diminished as a person” (Anderson, 1999, p. 91). Duneier (1992) cautions, however, that this form of masculinity is, in actuality, very different from how black males are frequently stereotyped in mass media.

Black masculinity itself can be said to be “forged out of resistance against white institutional practices” to reaffirm cultural and racial belonging (Anderson, 2008, p. 73). Masculinity, then, is an active process by which boys or men can come to assert their identities in opposition to a dominant or hegemonic idea of what it means to be male, or what it means to be white, in the case of black boys. In this way, whiteness serves as a foil against which black boys and men can develop, and affirm, their own senses of cultural and racial identity such that rather than rejecting what they are not (i.e. white), they actively affirm their black male identity.

Schools can be one way in which black boys can gain a reprieve from any potential pressures they may feel in their communities. Single-sex schools can be one school model
that “challenge[s] conceptions of masculinity in peer culture, fostering or inhibiting boys’ development of anti-school attitudes and behavior” (Legewie & DiPrete, 2012, p. 1). Single-sex schools work to “suppress the construction of masculinity as oppositional [to learning] and instead facilitate boys’ commitment [to school] by promoting academic competition as an aspect of masculine identity” (Legewie & DiPrete, 2012, p. 2). The notion of reconceptualizing masculinity as a tool to invest and motivate male students in schooling is echoed and extended within the literature on educating black male youth (Anderson, 2008, Carter, 2005; Ferguson, 2009; Noguera, 2009). In this way, schools reconfigure what exactly a black man should and can be as aligned to the school’s organizational norms and standards.

Single-sex schools fundamentally reconceptualize masculinity to invest students in academic gains. This approach inherently problematizes black masculinity itself. What is it about the ways in which black males see themselves that must be reconceptualized in order for them to be “successful” in school? Ferguson (2001) writes about the many popular representations of black men, most of which “alternate between a ‘bad’ black man who is crime-prone and a ‘good’ black man who distances himself from blackness and associates with white norms” (p. 94). Single-sex schools may work to reframe black masculinity as an embracing of academic codes that position black males differently than the many popularized ways that they are stigmatized, i.e. as “criminals or as an endangered species” (Anderson, 2008).

The Rise of Single-Sex Schools for Low-Income Black Boys

Single-sex schools are one potential intervention to address the concern of black boys’ persistent academic underachievement. This is a recent legal and cultural shift for American schooling. Given this flexibility following the “No Child Left Behind” Act and the
2006 amendments, the number of single-sex public schools and single-sex classes within co-educational schools are proliferating throughout the country (National Association for Single-Sex Public Education, 2016). According to the National Association for Single-Sex Public Education (2016), “single-sex schools have grown exponentially” since the enactment of No Child Left Behind (p. 4). In 1999, only four public schools in the US offered single-sex education. This number grew to 11 schools offering single-sex education by 2002, and by 2006, 223 schools nationwide were operating single-sex educational environments. In the 2011-2012 academic school year, this number had doubled to 506 public schools in the United States offering single-sex classrooms or other educational environments. About 390 of these 506 schools are traditional co-educational public schools which offer single-sex classrooms, but the remainder are operational single-sex public schools. (National Association of Single-Sex Public Education, 2016).

This number grows despite the limited and inconclusive research on the benefits of gender separation in schools. Much of this increase can be attributed to the growing interest and prioritization of the black/white achievement gap since the enactment of NCLB. No Child Left Behind nationally prioritized a search for “innovative strategies, programs and school models” that would improve the academic trajectories of low-income and/or minority students. Single-sex schools became one such innovative strategy designed with targeted intention to answer the call to “save” and serve young men of color. Single-sex schools serving boys of color in particular have been embraced in parts of the United States as a remedy for improving the concerning academic and social trajectories of black boys and black men.
Since the early 20th century, single-sex schools in the United States have been predominantly white, private, or parochial catholic institutions (Salomone, 2003). But unlike the prestigious elite all-male academies educating the upper-class white elite, current single-sex public schools are more ethnically and racially diverse; the vast majority serve high-poverty and at-risk student populations (Noguera, 2009). Policymakers, educators and academics concerned with the “black male crisis” have since embraced single-sex schools for boys of color as a new innovative model that could disrupt the pattern of these boys experiencing disadvantaged life outcomes. Despite this support, there continues to be a lack of empirical evidence that single-sex education is “effective” and the current collection of data on single-sex education is both divergent, inconclusive, and in many ways incomplete.

Below I trace the development and popularity of single-sex schools over time in the United States. I describe some of the cultural shifts surrounding the equity of single-sex schools along with the legal history of their permissibility.

**History and Popularity of Single-Sex Schools in the United States**

Single-sex schools are on the rise in the United States, reversing decades of national education policy prohibiting segregation by sex or gender (Klein, 2012a; Nelson, 2013; Sadker & Sadker, 2012). When the United States was founded, only boys received a formal education; therefore, all schools were “single-sex” schools by nature (Bracey, 2006; Nelson, 2013). Girls were informally educated at home, if they received any education at all (Sadker & Sadker, 2012). By the early 1800s, cultural norms around formal schooling for girls began to shift, as girls began to attend school for the first time. In the first schools in which girls were permitted, teachers provided instruction in female-only classes before and after the standard school day for boys (Nelson, 2013; Sadker & Sadker, 2012). By the early
1900s, some communities started educating girls and boys in co-educational settings. Aside from economic reasons, cultural norms suggested that girls may exert a moderating influence on boys’ behavior in class (Bracey, 2006; Jackson, 2010). As a result, co-educational settings became the standard in public education, although many private schools still continued in the tradition of single-sex education.

No laws explicitly prohibited single-sex public schools or single-gender classes until the passage of Title IX legislation in 1972. Under Title IX, discrimination based on gender was outlawed in nearly all aspects of school, including: athletics, career counseling, financial aid, and admissions practices among others. Similarly, under Title IX, single-sex classes or extracurricular activities were limited primarily to physical education and sex education classes. Schools that violated Title IX were subject to loss of federal funds (Klein, 2012a; Sadker & Sadker, 1994). At this time, for a district to legally open schools that were one sex exclusively, that district needed to demonstrate a “compelling reason” for the school’s creation (e.g., that the school served as a “remedy” for past discrimination) (Mael, 1998; Sadker & Sadker, 1994). Title IX gave further legitimacy toward the cultural American norm of co-education as a means of ensuring educational equality—a trend that lasted for nearly three decades.

Before the close of the 20th century, however, policymakers and education professionals started to question whether co-educational schools were indeed the bastions of equity as previously thought. Many argued that teachers’ and peers’ sexist attitudes interfered with educational opportunities for female students in co-ed schools (Haag, 2002; Jackson, 2010; Lee & Marks, 1994). Further, critics argued that boys received greater attention from educators, especially in the hard sciences (i.e., science, technology and
math). Many of these attitudes reflected cultural attitudes that boys and girls simply learn differently and are predisposed to learn specific subjects better when compared to students of the opposite gender (Gurian, 2001; Sax, 2007). As a result, cultural attitudes began to support single-sex models to ensure boys and girls would both be provided opportunities for academic success to achieve at greater levels.

The late 1980s and the 1990s saw a number of efforts to establish both single-sex classes and single-sex schools as one potential remedy to the plight of low-income and minority students. This turn came about in response to growing evidence that the current status quo of schooling was doing little to nothing to “stop the downward spiral that increasingly has caught so many [low-income minority students] in its grip” (Salomone, 2003, p. 3). Ostensibly, policymakers argued that single-sex environments allowed educators to cater more effectively to the academic and social needs of low-income minority students. For students in low-income or minority populations, these schools were thought of as “not a matter of exclusion from an elite institution, but of inclusion and empowerment” to refocus energies away from negative pressures prevalent in low-income communities (Bell, 1996, p. 3).

Throughout the 1990s, there were many more efforts to found public single-sex schools nationwide. These efforts, however, were not without legal opposition in the courts. In 1991, efforts in Detroit to open all-male public schools for African-American boys were stymied by opposition groups who claimed these schools would be in violation of Title IX (Klein, 2012a; US Department of Education, 2008). Similarly, a few years later in 1993 and 1994 respectively, efforts to create single-sex classes in New Jersey and California faced legal challenges by way of vocal opposition groups that claimed single-sex
environments not only violated Title IX requirements, but could potentially result in better educational opportunities for one sex at the expense of the other (Bracey, 2006; COSEBOC, 2010).

As a result, many federal legislators attempted to bring about laws that would entirely circumvent the strict provisions in Title IX (Klein, 2012a). By creating new laws that were essentially workarounds to Title IX, public school districts could then legally establish both single-sex classes and single-sex schools. Although these efforts continued throughout the 1990s, it was not until 2001’s reauthorization of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) that real change occurred. The 2001 reauthorization, otherwise known as the “No Child Left Behind Act” (NCLB), allowed public school districts to establish single-sex schools as well as single-sex classrooms within co-educational schools. Without dismantling Title IX, NCLB circumvented the Title IX provisions entirely, while still legally providing for the creation of single-sex schooling options for districts and their students.

The Local Innovative Education Programs section of the No Child Left Behind Act states that funds can be used for same-sex schools and classrooms only in cases when these programs are “consistent with applicable law.” A few years later, in 2006, the United States Department of Education passed new regulations that provided educators with more flexibility to use all of their allocated federal funding for single-sex schooling from grades K-12. This was a change to the previous policies wherein educators were only allowed to use funding if “the purpose of the single-sex approach [was] achievement oriented with clear educational objectives” and continued to be “consistent with applicable law” such as Title IX and the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment.
Under these regulations, schools are required to justify each single-sex class or activity and demonstrate that the single-sex composition is “substantially related” to achieving one of two objectives: 1) to improve educational achievement of the class or activity’s students (through an established policy to provide diverse educational opportunities), or 2) to meet particular identified educational needs of students (need demonstrated by deficient educational attainment). At the time, districts needed to also provide a substantially commensurate or equal co-education option. Further, student participation in single-sex options needed to be completely voluntary and reliance on sex stereotypes in assignment was prohibited (Office for Civil Rights, Department of Education, 2006). These regulations allowed co-educational public schools to offer single-sex classrooms as long as the schools:

1. Provide a rationale (i.e. the addressed inequity) for offering each single-sex class;

2. Provide a co-educational class in the same subject at a “geographically accessible” location, which could be—but does not need to be—at the same school-site as the single-sex class and

3. Conduct “necessity reviews” every two years to determine whether each single-gender class is still needed as a remedy for the original inequity.

Along with clarifying the legal status of single-sex education, the 2006 amendments fundamentally incentivized school districts to establish single-sex education schools rather than single-sex classrooms within co-educational schools. While the regulations required districts choosing to operate single-sex schools to offer commensurate courses, services, or facilities within the district at another school, that school did not need to be a single-sex school for the opposite sex, but could instead be a co-educational school. These regulations provide greater flexibility to form single-sex public schools, including charter schools,
which are exempt from all three of the above requirements. Sex segregation in public schools is now allowable as long as the segregation is “voluntary, students are provided a substantially equal co-educational option, and the segregation substantially furthers an important governmental objective” (Brown, 2011). The 2006 regulations exempted single-sex schools from being required to provide adequate rationales for segregating students by sex and from conducting periodic reviews of the “necessity” of the segregation. All in all, single-sex schools are not under the same level of scrutiny as single-sex classrooms.

**Single-Sex Schools as Respite from Traditional Schools**

In 1935, Du Bois explicitly raised the question: “Does the Negro need separate schools?” In beginning his answer to this question, Du Bois explicated the many ways mainstream institutions uphold white middle-class values that may prevent black students from ever knowing the “history of the Negro race” (Du Bois, 1935, p. 333). Du Bois argued that in these schools, black students might not be welcomed or even treated as human beings. He further suggested that schooling for black young people needs to take into account “history, group experiences and memories, a distinct entity, whose spirit and reactions demand a certain type of education for its development” (Du Bois, 1935, p. 333). Du Bois provides a reminder—unfortunately still relevant—that “all things being equal—though they seldom are—mixed schools provide a broader experience” for black boys.

Although several mainstream institutions are designed to reflect culturally neutral or “colorblind” values, many scholars argue that schools continue to reflect the interests of those groups that are culturally dominant in our society (Collins, 2006; Howard, 2010; Lesko, 1999; Omi & Winant, 1994; Price, 2000). Students who are black and low-income are silenced by mainstream educational institutions. This literature argues that institutions condition low-income black students to see their failings as individual, rather
than institutional, and are often taught by teachers who may encourage submission, rather than engagement (Fine, 1991, Martino & Berill, 2003, Price, 2000). The constraining and troubling effects of the school on black identity are particularly insidious for poor black boys. For these students, the combined impact of incompatible school norms, poverty, and racial isolation further complicate the cycle of teaching and learning. When schools fail to appreciate the unique identities of black male students, it connotes a lack of respect (Anderson, 1999; Dance, 2002; Ferguson, 2001).

Several socio-cultural dimensions of schooling are ignored if and when a school maligns the out-of-school experiences and identities that students hold. Schools may further obscure the concern of how black males cope with reconciling school culture with their already existing identities (Anderson, 2008). Resulting from this tension, black boys may disinvest from schooling as they find transitioning to accepting school-based values and norms as a formidable challenge to maintaining their identities. Schooling, in a sense, becomes antithetical to preserving a student’s manhood along with his identity. School culture and practices additionally push students to decide between achieving through a school culture that potentially devalues and breaches their moral code, and following their ethos of masculinity and identity concepts, which could prevent them from participating in the school experience. (Mac an Ghalil, 1994; Price, 2000).

Black boys learn early on in their schooling that they are viewed as different or incongruous with the goals of the school. As this stigma mixes with other messages from peers, black males may find further solidarity with their peers in feeling different or out of place, resulting in their disinvestment from school (Mac an Ghalil, 1994; Tyson, 2011). Tyson (2011) notes the critical importance of peer influence for males of color in schooling.
as students are “influenced to a greater degree by their peers on matters related to school achievement” (p. 149). To cope with the oppositional nature of the schooling institution towards their identities, black boys can use masculinity as a type of “survival mentality” to achieve success in spite of the school’s attempts to marginalize them (Anderson, 2008, p. 16). In response to a marginalizing school culture, black boys can present themselves as tough or “hard” and able to engage in “defensive” strategies to counter the disrespect they perceive from the school (p. 16). In a sense, boys find ways to appear older, tougher, or more mature than their age would suggest so that they are formidable against threats to their masculinity, or their identity. In all, black boys inherit a particularly “vulnerable childhood that anticipates adulthood” in a drastically different way—in their communities and in their schools, these children are already seen as men (Ferguson, 2001, p. 96). As a result of seeing themselves as adults, black boys do not necessarily appraise opportunity in the long-term, but predominantly see what will yield shorter-term gains. The prioritization on short-term gratification makes investing in schooling difficult; boys may not find the value in long-term investments toward their futures since they may seek more immediate opportunity and fulfillment.

While part of the draw for pursuing single-sex schools is a more rigorous and tailored academic program, single-sex schools appeal for a wide variety of reasons. As Rosemary Salomone (2003) describes in her seminal review of single-sex scholarship and outcomes, “there is something else happening in these schools that goes to the heart of their single-sex mission—a special something that their supporters maintain is impossible to replicate in a co-educational setting” (p. 8). One facet of that “special something” is the idea that single-sex schools can more easily provide a supportive environment for the
forging of positive academically-oriented identities for young men of color amid a world that may see them as “less than” (Du Bois, 1935; Howard, 2010). By design, single-sex schools commit to educating black boys as well as nurturing their socio-emotional and identity development.

Benefits of Single-Sex Schools

In the face of persistent inequality, single-sex schools are attempting to challenge the status quo by creating an environment that uplifts the identities of black boys from the margins to front and center—as dominant, as valuable, and as a majority within the unique space. Lesko (1999) writes that adolescence is inherently racialized as it supports the “rightness” of white middle-class perspectives as the indicator of what is appropriate in terms of knowledge, language, and behavior. Given the norm, single-sex schools can provide an alternative to traditional schools that serve as an “outpost of the traditions of the [dominant] wider society” at the expense of black minority culture (Anderson, 1999, p. 93).

In these single-sex schools, Salomone (2003) found that students supported each other’s academic competence. This finding challenges the common cultural and academic perception that peer pressure among black males discourages their academic achievement (p. 222). Further, black boys in these single-sex schools report that, in addition to their peers, their teachers are supportive of “who they are” with respect to their identity and their ideas (Riordan, 2002). Riordan further found in his study of low-income racial minority boys in single-sex environments that students’ perceptions of their intellectual and social competence was much higher than their peers in co-educational settings.

Further, by creating schools uniquely designed to focus on a racial, class, and gender identity that would otherwise be marginalized in the wider school system, single-sex
schools may be more nurturing and supportive, such that black boys "would be more likely to perceive schools as a source of support and opportunity rather than an inhospitable place that one should seek to escape and actively avoid" (Noguera, 2003, p. 455). In this way, single-sex schools, through their support of black male identities, can potentially produce favorable outcomes contingent upon meanings constructed around black boys’ intersecting race, class, and gender identities (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Smalls, White, Chavous & Sellers, 2007).

Proponents of single-sex schools argue that these schools help to transcend negative "stereotypes [and] reputations, and allow for students to more individually define their identities within school, rather than in antagonism to it" (Nelson, 2013, p. 278). Further, Nelson (2013) found that black male students in a single-sex school developed strong self-perceptions and also were able to express “personal acknowledgments” of their intellectual abilities. Affirmations of their intelligence were also “heavily influenced and reinforced by multiple school-based practices” (p. 272). Many of these single-sex school-based practices are said to provide more opportunities for positive personal relationships forged on shared experiences and interests within a “culture of brotherhood” (Nelson, 2013; Fergus & Noguera, 2010). Many single-sex schools also attempt to showcase and connect students to more black male role models who have attained academic or professional success, and who can articulate how they have not compromised themselves or their identities. Harper (2006) suggests that seeing role models like this in students’ social worlds or in popular culture could prevent students from becoming afraid of deviating from potentially harmful “hypermascarine” cultural norms.
Overall, single-sex schools have entered the educational landscape as one unique solution for addressing the many academic, social, and emotional levers that can best aid low-income black males. By creating schools that, by design, serve students that presumably share similar struggles (across race, class, and gender), it is possible that these students will feel less negative stereotyping (Fergus & Noguera, 2010; Nelson, 2013). Seeing others that look like them in the school may create a “brotherhood” that can insulate them from non-academic attitudes and provide a safe space to be their authentic selves (Harper, 2009; Salomone, 2003). Further, single-sex schools may provide more supportive environments for black boys, and might reorient boys’ perceptions of school toward seeing school as a place of opportunity and support, rather than as unhelpful and unwelcoming.

**Masculinity as an Enacted, Not Reified Category**

Single-sex schools are certainly a promising development when considering the educational opportunities available to low-income black boys. As I detailed earlier, single-sex schools that are considered successful have been found to have very specific models and notions of “masculinity” (Fergus & Noguera, 2010; Nelson, 2013; Salomone, 2003). In reframing masculinity, however, single-sex schools rely on the assumption that masculinity can potentially be shaped or changed by practices and values of the school and that masculinity can be enacted by students and embraced over time. It is important to consider through what practices single-sex schools are able to transform the identities and masculinities of students to be more positively academically oriented. On one hand, it is possible these practices are successful for an array of students with varying types of masculinity. If so, it is useful to think about how these organizational practices can be extended to other educational contexts. On the other hand, it is important to consider how these organizational practices may negatively interact with students’ existing conceptions
of self, race, gender, and masculinity. It is possible students who do not “buy in” to the school model may disinvest from schooling, and in doing so, will continue to be mired by disadvantage.

Theory may support this practice, as Goffman (1979) writes that gender is itself not a reified category. Instead, gender reflects a “presentation of self” such that there is “no gender identity...only a schedule for the portrayal of gender” (p. 8). Masculinity, then, can be viewed as a constitutive social practice of displaying, appraising, and potentially adapting these presentations of self. Masculinity consists of a variety of practices, discourses, and postures enacted or mobilized by boys (Pascoe, 2007). Within a school, masculinity is created and constructed and inheres in the relations between a multiplicity of bodies, spaces, and objects (Pascoe, 2007).

In addition to considering gender as a presentation of self, Judith Butler (1990) presents gender within the context of performativity. Butler's (1990) performativity theory of gender provides a critique of how gender is typically understood as something people “are” rather than something people “possess.” She argues that rather than thinking of gender as a static trait, we should think of gender as a performance, or as something people do not something people are. These performances are a part of an individual’s everyday life. Individuals are constantly “doing” gender. This insight is based upon the idea that there is enormous variation in the ways people perform, experience, and live within gender. Butler argues we should be better attuned to the performances of gender itself, not to strict binaries or biological differences informing or generating gender on their own.

Presentation of gender is then a social process enacted with the understanding that this presentation will be understood through the eyes and audience of others. Gender
performance is contingent upon reception. In other words, performances are only meaningful when they are legible, or understandable, to others. Performances require audiences. Goffman (1973) thinks about the social world as a set of roles that individuals occupy and perform. He regards these roles as relatively fixed, and further, that performances within roles makes the social world legible to individuals. He argues that this legibility comes from roles providing a schematic of the set of activities one should be doing, or a certain script an individual should follow in order to perform aptly within a given role. Goffman (1973) argues that this endows others with the capacity to know how to interact with each other. Further, individuals who experience confusion within their roles with respect to the “script” can lead to uncomfortable situations in which individuals do not know how to act or how to perceive or appraise action.

Audiences can reaffirm or deny the legibility of performances, essentially providing near simultaneous feedback on an individual’s performance (Garfinkel, 1967). This feedback leads to an action or adjustment by an actor. The process of “passing” here has two dimensions: 1) passing to oneself, and 2) passing to others. It’s not just the performance, but the perception or “reading” of that performance also has major implications. As a result, many scholars view the performativity of gender as a social struggle (Butler, 1990; Goffman, 1973; Klein, Spears, & Reicher, 2007; McCready, 2010; Meadow, 2011). Those performances that are unintelligible or illegible will not be read as legitimate gender performances, and in not being recognized, will be read as requiring some type of social intervention. Individuals struggle to make their performances of gender (or sexuality) legible and legitimate to others. In this view, gender is reimagined and transformed through performances. Gender, therefore, is in a constant state of revision:
being imagined and reimagined (Butler, 1990; 2005). These performances are made possible through structures, which create a limiting set of conditions on the available set of performances individuals can enact. Structures roughly limit the conditions under which gender performances are “legible” or understood as legitimate within the environment (Goffman, 1973). Individuals, through their own agency, can enact those performances, yet reconstitute and potentially transform the structures themselves.

**Diversity of Masculinity**

Masculinity is performative. It is “set to a musical score; a dirge orchestrated by culture and social design. It is an audience-based construction of movement; choreography of talking the talk and walking the walk. It is a performance of the self for others” (Anderson, 2008, p. 76). Individuals have an ability to both “learn and to read depictions of masculinity and a willingness to adhere to a schedule” for presentation of these depictions (Goffman, 1979, p. 8). These depictions do not necessarily reflect one “type” of masculinity, but instead may be evocative of a variety of understandings and presentations of masculinity.

Willer (2013) suggests that along with considering the performance of masculinity, one must also consider the reading, interpretation and subsequent experience of that interpretation through the actor. He further argues that when masculinity is “under threat,” individuals often respond with masculine overcompensation. In this way, masculinity becomes a kind of structure that modes of action produce, that when one is threatened about their “proper” performance of masculinity, the actions one engages in might overcompensate or hyper-perform relative to the standard (Willer, 2013).

Connell’s (1995) model of “multiple masculinities” posits that there are a variety of masculinities that men enact and embody, depending on their relative positioning within a
hierarchically organized social space, with contested positions of relative power. In a school, for example, different “types” of masculinity can be advanced or rejected. Connell’s (1995) typology includes:

- *Hegemonic masculinity:* gender practices that support and reify the “norm” at the top of the hierarchy;

- *Complicit masculinity:* gender practices that benefit from hegemonic masculinity, but does not in and of themselves enact hegemonic masculinity norms;

- *Subordinated masculinity:* gender practices that are oppressed by the operating definitions of hegemonic masculinity. Practices that are oppressed are often those that are practices of homosexual or trans* individuals or those that may not otherwise fit the heteronormative or hegemonic standard; and

- *Marginalized masculinity:* gender practices that could be positioned powerfully with regard to gender norms, but may be marginalized in terms of other factors like class or race.

Racialized performances of self are another way to think about performativity. Thinking about a performance of race (e.g., of whiteness, blackness, etc.) allows us to think about the structured set of schemas or norms available for performance relative to racial identities. In this way, we can understand how people perform, reaffirm, resist, or deny these structures, and how that affects the reconstruction or edification of racial hierarchies. Students in a single-sex school, for example, may be judged on their “authenticity” with regard to what constitutes appropriate performance of blackness, or of masculinity, even if students are in conflict with parts of their individual identities. Students may reform their presentations or performances of self with regard to the acceptable set of performances within a broader environment in which one is embedded, like the school. Although a student has a choice, part of the expression of a “self” is constituted not only by self-identity but through what others expect of that student as an appropriate performance of self
(Khan, 2009). Rather than a static category, identity traits (i.e. gender, race, sexuality) can all be thought of as performed—as something individuals do rather than something that they are.

Many scholars now consider gender as a spectrum, rather than a binary (Butler, 2005; McCready, 2010). Our society does not clearly separate male/female as concretely as it once did (Meadow, 2011). In the black community, single-sex schools are entering this complex milieu with a fairly binary “all boys” school, which creates complications in considering a broad spectrum of experiences. Judith Butler (1990) refers to this process as validating the “logic of biology” as fact—reifying gender categories, emphasizing visible differences between genders at the expense of potentially smoothing out of differences within gender groups. By shepherding young men of color into institutions segregated by gender—and in many ways race and class as well—this may minimize differences, rather than bring them to the forefront. It is therefore important to investigate how, if at all, schools work to acknowledge the broad diversity of experience within this relatively seemingly homogenous student population.

**Studying Re(Construction) of [Black] Masculinity in Single-Sex Settings**

Single-sex schools have been heralded as one answer to easing the educational plight of low-income black boys. By design, these schools can provide more supportive environments for students with respect to their academic and their socio-emotional needs (James & Lewis, 2009; Nelson, 2013). Single-sex school practices and their practitioners describe the importance of transforming a student’s masculinity to become positively academically oriented (Fergus & Noguera, 2010; Salomone, 2003). It is possible, however, that through reconstituting “masculinity” for their students, single-sex schools may
inadvertently perpetuate an understanding of black males and their masculinity as something monolithic, or without dimension (Howard, 2010). Further, this logic assumes boys inherently want to be masculine, and that there is one organizationally upheld “type” of masculinity to which boys can subscribe. Further, through these school logics, students’ identities may be shaped in particular ways that the school may or may not intend. It is therefore important to study single-sex schools and the organizational practices they use to define and describe masculinity for students, and how students respond to these definitions.

Many authors suggest that the greater variation among the qualities and characteristics cultivated by schools is known to encourage authentic “presentations of self,” which, for marginalized students, are great aids in reversing poor social and academic outcomes (Way & Chu, 2004). Even so, although some single-sex school models argue that they acknowledge “the complexity and dynamic nature of black male identity,” it is unclear for which students this holds (Royster, 2007, p. 77). For instance, some boys may find that their masculinities are upheld by the school, but others may find alienation if they do not see themselves or their identities reflected in the understandings of the school.

It is therefore important to study how single-sex schools reconceptualize masculinity and the extent to which these reconceptualizations allow for diversity in presentation of self and masculinity. This reconstitution of masculinity by schools could be potentially reductionist as it minimizes gender differences in an entire population of students (Butler, 2005; McCready, 2010). Within a single-sex school—particularly one wherein race and class background are more or less constant among students—it is important to consider the various dimensions of hegemonic, complicit, and subordinated
masculinity *within* the larger category of an already marginalized masculinity (Bird, 1996; Connell, 1995). Allowing for more diverse conceptions of masculinity allows for an understanding of masculinity as a fluid and dynamic process, rather than a static, reified category (Howard, 2010; McCready, 2010). In the current literature, there is no space for considering diverse masculinities, i.e., the multiple ways in which students may negotiate their masculine identities with that of the school.

Within the socio-cultural landscape of the school, organizational norms and authorities might privilege the social identities and cultural practices of some boys while others become targets of discrimination (McCready, 2010; Pascoe, 2009). While single-sex schools may answer the clarion call to “save” black boys, it is important to interrogate how schools are inculcating and comparing their students to an organizational standard of masculinity. For example, McCready (2010) finds that individuals who contest traditional heteronormative notions of masculinity tend to experience negative consequences. It is therefore important to question how traditional or organizational ideals of [black] masculinity in single-sex schools could potentially contribute to the myriad issues with which many young black males already contend.

Given that there can be multiple iterations of gender, masculinity can also be produced, reproduced, or maintained as well. One-dimensional ideas of masculinity, therefore, are incomplete; theory about masculinities should consider multiple modes of masculine performances. This notion ties into intersectionality theory as well: gendered masculinity is not consistent across all people, but instead is inflected with experiences, positions of race, class, sexuality, and so on. These multiple modes of masculinity intersect
as well with interconnected traits like race, class, and sexual orientation (Choo & Ferree, 2011; Crenshaw, 1991; Martino & Berill, 2003; Shields 2008).

The narrow portrayal of masculinity in the literature on single-sex schooling appears naïve when considering the variety of experiences that students bring to the classroom and the many ways that individuals negotiate those experiences with respect to the school. There is some room to grow with regard to the scholarship on boys’ identity development within schooling, and this gap in the literature is even more prevalent with respect to black boys from lower-income communities (Imms, 2000). According to Way and Chu (2004), the vast majority of scholarship on boys from marginalized backgrounds attempts to “problematize or pathologize” their development. For example, literature on black boys in low-income areas views boys with a harsher lens with respect to risk-taking behaviors and violent or deviant behavior (Ferguson, 2001; Howard, 2010; Noguera, 2003). Howard (2013) also calls for an unpacking of identity that accounts for diversity in masculinity with regard to identity “tied to race, class, gender, sexual orientation, school subject matter and age” (p. 78). It is urgent to update the current array of empirical work on adolescent boys’ development from varying racial, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

To avoid “decontextualizing” the experiences of black boys from low-income communities, it is necessary to better explore how race, class, and gender identity is constructed by and within structural, cultural, and relational dimensions in single-sex schools for boys of color (Howard, 2010; Nelson, 2013). Improved scholarship that connects how black boys construct their identities within and through these intervention school models can help with designing better school and policy options that will better
support black boys’ academic, social, and emotional growth. A closer look at these processes will help design better alternatives and increase understanding for how to shape black students’ attitudes and behaviors with respect to, not in tandem with, the structural and cultural forces that inform their in-school experiences and their identity construction.

Lastly, although statistics situate the struggles of black male childhood in stark terms, they fail to tell us much about how black boys experience and develop resilience during their childhood. Placing importance on how students process their lives in school and negotiate the many demands on their identity is critically important to building up literature that delves into the “black man’s inner strength—his resolve, his pride, and his sincerity” (Duneier, 1992, p. 42). In studying black boys and positioning their experiences at the forefront, we prioritize their narratives and their experiences in determining how to best make sense of this new policy in an ever-changing landscape.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have presented the rationale for researching how black boys come to understand, negotiate, and experience masculinity in single-sex schools. I have examined the history and development of single-sex education as an ameliorative school model for black boys, given the “black male crisis” in America. I described many of the current challenges facing black male youth, including stereotypes and attending schools with norms that are both raced and classed. I additionally examined the history and current context of single-sex education as it pertains to black boys as well as the case for diverse concepts of black masculinity. In the next chapter, I outline the conceptual framework I use to study how single-sex schools (re)define masculinity, how black boys negotiate these conceptions, and how these boys develop and conceive of their identities and agency.
CHAPTER TWO: Conceptual Framework

Introduction
In this chapter, I present my conceptual framework for studying black boys’ understandings of masculinity in single-sex schools. Gendering and identity processes are enacted at multiple levels: institutional, interactional, and individual. To explore and theorize these patterns, this chapter integrates the structure-agency debate, critical race theory, and social psychology. Using these theories, I rework some of the insights of the structure-agency debate by presenting an iteration of the debate that allows for power and space for considering how structures create situations for individual students that are inherently raced and classed. I use the sociology of culture as a way to examine how individuals in groups interact with structures and a racialized history. I integrate literature from social psychology that allows for a more nuanced understanding of cognitive identity formation processes to build on the concept of agency. Next, I extend this model to understand the particular case of single-sex schools and how they might structure identity formation experiences for black male students that are not simply transmitted, but potentially embraced, challenged, or questioned by students in the school. I conclude by suggesting organizational practices are malleable and subject to dynamism or revision by social actors.

Rationale Revisited
As discussed in Chapter 1, Fergus and Noguera’s (2010) seminal study of single-sex schools found that practitioners believe that addressing the myriad social/emotional and academic needs facing boys of color must be integral to school organization and design. Central to engaging students in academic work, these schools emphasized the need to “undo structural or cultural damage” that could be preventing boys of color from closing
the achievement gap. The authors found that schools addressed these structural and cultural issues first, by problematizing the conceptions boys hold of what it means to be a man. Through this approach, schools may inadvertently problematize conceptions that students hold of themselves and their communities, and suggest that students are taught negative ideas of manhood by the media, and even by their families or community. The practitioners in Fergus and Noguera’s (2010) study suggest that forging an academic identity is critical to student success, even though they caution that these identities could be “at odds” with the identities students have developed within their communities or through their families.

Schools’ characterization of communities, families, and the culture of black boys can unintentionally pathologize boys’ achievement as a “symptom” of a cultural problem. Therefore, schools position the way to success as through adopting school-centered identities. It is therefore important to consider what organizational practices schools engage in with respect to altering or transforming the concepts of masculinity that boys bring into the school. This organizational approach could have organization-wide effects that can flatten, or ignore, differences between students by assuming their masculinities are similar and similarly problematic. By positioning students’ former identities as responsible for their academic deficits, schools “coerce” students to adopt the logics and the academic identity of the school and distance themselves from identities that may be salient for them in other contexts outside of school. The ease of this approach should not be taken for granted because boys may find it difficult to reconcile competing visions of their identities, and this problematization of “who they are” as individuals may effectively turn them off to education on the whole.
Further, students are not merely passive social actors, but are capable of resisting school practices and logics (Carter, 2005; Ferguson, 2001). Students may have different degrees of internalizing the messages of the school, so it is critical to understand the variety and type of these responses as well as how schools respond to students who do not successfully align themselves with the school’s vision.

Taken together, it is my hope that by integrating the structure/agency debate with some key Bourdieuian concepts, critical race theory, and conceptions of identity from within the social psychology literature, I can explore how social structures, embodied by individuals, shape identity formation and social action, which in turn leads to further changes to, or of maintenance of, social structures within the school.

**Overview of the Structure Agency Debate**

Scholars have long debated the relationship between structure and agency: the extent to which structure can be said to mitigate or control human agency or behavior. Structures can be considered to be a system of relations that constrain or enable individuals’ thoughts and actions (Giddens, 1979; Sewell, 1992).

On one side of the debate, **Structuralists** find that structures are deterministic and constitutive of social action. These theorists also posit that the reproduction of structures occurs independently of a social actor’s actions or behaviors (Giddens, 1979; Hays, 1994). Structuralists argue that structure is able to determine the “strivings and motivated transactions [human agency] that constitute the experienced surface of social life” (Sewell, 1992, p. 2). In this perspective, structure is heavily deterministic, taking for granted the conditions required to reproduce a pattern of social relations, even when actors are either unaware of these social patterns and do not even desire the reproduction of these social relations (Sewell, 1992). Within the context of black boys and their academic and
nonacademic trajectories, structuralists would argue that inequality profoundly inheres in the educational and social experiences of black youth. For black boys, structures construct the context in which boys operate, or a “field of meaning” which constitutes “specific ‘truths,’ common sense, and logics” (HoSang, 2006, p. 5). Understanding the “field of meaning” within a single-sex school is necessary to better understand how students’ experience and perceive school masculinity.

On the other side of the debate are resistance theorists who contend that this understanding of structure erroneously positions social actors as passive recipients of their environment, unable to resist or transform structures (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Carnoy, 1994; Giroux, 1992; Sewell, 1992). Resistance theorists, although they recognize the deterministic aspects of structure, argue that dominant ideology can be resisted, as individuals can make meaning of, challenge, or resist structures (Dance, 2002; Ginwright, 2009; Ward, 2000). In education research, resistance theorists argue that although there are substantive social forces that act in confluence to make schools unequal and highly politicized places for already marginalized youth, students are not simply passive or complacent to the effects of structure. Current conceptions of children and youth portray them as “oversocialized, passive, [or] without critical awareness or active agency” (Lesko, 1999, p. 183). These theorists believe it is a crucial mistake to neglect the role that students and teachers can play in a school context as agents of change given that individuals not only resist but also have the potential to transform or alter social structures. Many resistance theorists, therefore, believe in the theoretical importance of human agency and action (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985).
Many ethnographies have investigated how individuals can resist the imposition of social structures in schools by way of resisting dominant cultures or ideologies. These studies demonstrate many ways the “mechanisms” of social and cultural reproduction are not fixed—but are subject to opposition and therefore transformation (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985; Willis, 1981). Many resistance scholars, however, have argued that both traditional and radical views of schooling have been caught in a “theoretical straitjacket” that neglects individual agency at the expense of the importance of structural barriers, or vice versa (Giroux, 1997). Further, Aronowitz and Giroux (1985) have argued that reproduction theorists have overemphasized the concept of dominance and have relatedly failed to provide an understanding into how teachers, students, and other agents “come together within specific historical and social contexts to both make and reproduce the conditions of their existence” (p. 70). Many scholars now argue that it is incorrect to view structure and agency as dichotomous concepts (Bourdieu, 1977; Emirbayer & Mische, 2010; Giddens, 1979; Sewell, 1992).

Giddens is one theorist who tries to resolve the structure-agency conflict. Giddens (1984) defines structure as: rules and resources, recursively implicated in the reproduction of social systems. Structure exists only as memory traces, the organic basis of human knowledgeability and as instantiated in action” (p. 377). He argues that structures can influence social action, but individuals are able to interpret these structures to “resist, capitulate or try to transform” them (Giddens, 1984, p. 19). Therefore, as predetermined social forces, structures not only constrain, but also enable social action. Structure is therefore a process rather than a steady state. Giddens (1984) argues that there is a
“duality” to structure as structures are “both the medium and the outcome of the practices that constitute social systems” (p. 27).

Therefore, although structures shape the actions of individuals, people's actions both constitute and can reproduce structure. The relationship between structure and human agency is doubly hermeneutic given that cultures and social institutions constitute an individual’s thoughts, and these very institutions are reproduced by the (structurally constrained and conditioned) actions of individuals. Giddens also posits that these individuals can also “improvise” in ways that could transform or reconfigure structures—the same structures that constituted their actions (Giddens, 1979; Sewell, 1992). This was a large contribution to the debate given that this duality of structures questions the deterministic nature of structure.

**Sewell Model of Structure and Agency**

William H. Sewell (1992) reformulates Anthony Giddens’ notion of the duality of structure along with Bourdieu’s habitus in developing his own theory of structure. Sewell's theory restores agency to social actors and better accounts for change within the concept of structure.

Sewell finds that current theories of structure still are too deterministic because they remove human agency. Sewell also finds that these theories do not successfully explain change in structure over time—these theories explain change more by exogenous versus endogenous things that happen within the structure to create change. Lastly, Sewell finds that the use of structure by social scientists contradicts itself—he believes that rather than structure informing culture, culture informs structure, and social reproduction is not a guarantee.
Sewell argues that because actors are knowledgeable, it is this knowledge of the “rules” of social life that make people capable of action. Sewell argues that “what people know” can be thought of as culture. Therefore, Sewell argues that “rules” in the Giddens sense should be thought of as including the many varieties of cultural schema (Sewell, 1992, p. 7). Sewell proposes changing the “rules and resources” that Giddens describes to “schemas and resources,” respectively (p. 8). Sewell defines resources as publicly fixed codifications of rules that are actual, rather than virtual; he describes schemas as informal and not always conscious metaphors or assumptions from which people can draw (Sewell, 1992). Sewell argues that the “schemas that make up structures are generalizable procedures applied in the enactment/reproduction of social life” for they can be transposed or extended to new situations (Giddens, 1984, p. 3).

Although structure and individual forces can facilitate choices and agency, neither in its own right, can be a sole determinant of behavioral outcomes (MacLeod, 1987; Willis, 1977). A framework that acknowledges how structures and agency work in conversation with each other is far more accurate to describe the iterative and ongoing relationship between the two. For example, Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) argue that:

A total science of society must jettison both the mechanical structuralism which puts agents “on vacation” and the teleological individualism which recognizes people only in the truncated form of an oversocialized “cultural dope”...objectivism and subjectivism, mechanicalism and finalism, structural necessity and individual agency are false antinomies. (p. 10)

As such, a Sewellian framework better frames both the organizational and structuring effects of the felt impacts of a single-sex school on individual students while also allowing for an understanding of how black boys are able to reify, resist, or revise these structures through their own agency. Furthermore, this framework also allows for variety in
understanding masculinity as masculinities because this framework can be more inclusive of varying expressions of masculinity, rather than simply dominant norms of black masculinity.

Augmenting Giddens’ notion of structure, Sewell then defines structure as schemas and resources, not as constitutively equal elements in structure, but instead as “media and outcomes of the operation of structure” (Giddens, 1984, p. 191). Sewell (1992) agrees that structures have a dual character composed dually of schemas—which are virtual—and of resources—which are actual.

Schemas then are the effects of resources, just as resources are the effects of schemas. Resources are instantiations or embodiments of schemas, they therefore inculcate and justify the schemas as well. Resources, we might say, are read like texts to recover the cultural schemas they instantiate. (Sewell, 1992, p. 13)

Schemas must be “validated” by the accumulation of resources to support their enactment. Schemas that are not regenerated by resources are eventually jettisoned, as are resources that do not have the cultural schemas to support their use. Schemas and resources, therefore, “constitute structures only when they mutually imply and sustain each other over time” (Sewell, 1992, p. 13). In this way, structures can be said to have a dual character, consisting of schemas and resources, which mutually sustain each other. Actors access these through time and space to generate power, through their agency.

**Structure, Agency, and Habitus**

Bourdieu is one theorist who discusses the mutual reproduction of schemas and resources in forming temporally durable structures, or “habitus” (Sewell, 1992, Bourdieu, 1977). Bourdieu (1977) defines habitus as a set of “durable transposable dispositions” of an individual or a group of individuals (p. 72). These dispositions are shaped by the context
in which an individual operates. This context can be thought of as a “field” or a “set of objective historical relations between positions anchored in certain forms of power or capital” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 16). As the field contains broad social structures or otherwise contextual factors that exist outside of the individual, the field can shape an individual’s habitus, which as an embodied phenomenon, influences how individuals behave, think, and act. As such, habitus can be described as an individual’s embodied and internalized experiences or history within the social world. Habitus can be thought of as an internalization of an individual’s external realities. Therefore, an individual’s responses to the social world are “second nature,” habitual, or normalized (Bourdieu, 1980; 1986).

Habitus is one concept that can unpack how structural forces guide social action. In what follows, I link Bourdieu to Sewell, as I argue that Sewell’s (1992) theory responds to and improves upon both Bourdieu’s concept of habitus as well as Giddens’ (1984) theory of structure and agency. Specifically, Bourdieu describes that there is a mutually sustaining relationship between virtual “mental structures” (i.e., schemas) and actual objects within the “world of objects” (i.e., resources) (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 14). Sewell (1992) argues that habitus is a concept that can describe how the mutually reinforcing nature of schemas and resources endows individuals with knowledge and dispositions, and therefore, the capacity to act (p. 15). Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) describe the importance of habitus in predicting action: the authors describe habitus as a “structuring mechanism” that consists of a set of “lasting and transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions” and allows for action (p. 18). The concept of habitus, therefore, can address how students’ dispositions toward facets of their social world are formed within and in part by their
relationship to differential sets of knowledge, schemas, and the codes that they understand and use as a function of their position and vantage point in society. For my work within a single-sex school, habitus can be used as a tool to understand how structures shape, constrain, and enable students’ agency in school.

**Accounting for Power and Change**

Although powerful as an explanatory concept, Sewell argues that within Bourdieu’s (1977) concept of habitus, schemas and resources are inherently mutually sustaining because the enactment of schemas generates resources that condition the schemas. Therefore, schemas and resources reproduce each other without interruption or change.

Structuralist theories of structure and agency engender stasis, which Sewell argues is not realistic as transformations in structure occur. Sewell (1992) calls habitus “agent-proof” because the concept denies the possibility of agents to engage in action that does not otherwise reproduce the structure (p. 15). Bourdieu (1977) describes habitus as an “acquired system of generative schemes objectively adjusted to the particular conditions in which it is constituted, [such that] the habitus engenders all the thoughts, all the perceptions and all the actions consistent with those conditions and no others “ (p. 95) In other words, Bourdieu’s concept of habitus, a totalized concept, faces the issue of both structural and social determinism.

Sewell argues for a habitus that is a conceptualization of multiple structures that are available to individuals that condition agency. Change cannot be accounted for in structure unless there is a “far more multiple, contingent, and fractured conception of society—and of structure” (Sewell, 1992, p. 16). Given this, Sewell poses a multiplicity of structure that allows for knowledgeable social actors that both have knowledge of and access to a “heterogeneous array of resources” as well as “a wide range of different and even
incompatible schemas” (p. 16). In this sense, schemas are transposable in that they can be applied to a broad range of cases both known and not known outside of the context in which the schemas are acquired or learned.

The combined knowledge of schemas and a control of resources provide agency, and therefore, the ability for actors to act creatively. Individuals are then able to pick and choose which schemas or resources they will enact, and considering that individuals are not embedded in any one context, they will choose strategically among the schemas to which they have access. Sewell (1992) then defines agency as “the capacity to transpose and extend schemas to new contexts,” which is inherent in the knowledge of cultural schemas itself (p. 17). Agency is therefore inherent, but it differs based on social position. A capacity for “agency is as much a given for humans as the capacity for respiration” (Sewell, 1992, p. 20). Sewell’s notion of habitus expands upon Bourdieus original formulation of the concept, as it allows for change, and is not as socially deterministic as Bourdieus original concept. For Sewell, agency is constitutive of structure, and structure constitutive of agency.

Agents must have the capacity to exert control or choice over the social relations in which they are embedded, as well as the ability to transform those social relations. Agents are empowered to act with and against others by structures. This is because agents possess knowledge of the schemas that inform social life and therefore have access to resources. As a result, agency arises from the knowledge of these schemas (i.e., the ability to transpose or apply these schemas to new contexts) (Sewell, 1992, p. 20).

Agency, then, arises from a social actor’s ability “to control resources, [and] the capacity to reinterpret or mobilize and array resources in terms of schemas other than
those that constituted the array” (p. 20). Although actors are able to exercise control over resources, structures (sets of mutually sustaining schemas and resources that empower and constrain social action) are still likely—though not guaranteed—to be reproduced by that action. “Structures are at risk, at least to some extent, in all of the social encounters they shape—because structures are multiple and intersecting, because schemas are transposable and because resources are polysemic and accumulate unpredictably” (Sewell, 1992, p. 19). Since the relationship between resources and cultural schemas is central to Sewell’s concept of structure, this provides a more dynamic concept of structure that allows for understanding social change as “generated by the enactment of structures in social life” (p. 19). If we consider structures as social products that constitute the world through social relations, then “one can, within limits, transform the world by transforming its representation” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Social structures can be reconstituted but also through individual awareness and action. See Figure 1 for a graphic representation of Sewell’s (1992) model of the relationship between structure and agency.
Structure and Agency in Single-Sex Schools: An Extension of the Sewell Model

Through a Sewellian framework, I attempt to understand how boys come to know themselves in response to dominant structures and cultural norms of a single-sex school. Sewell argues that structures are dually comprised of mutually sustaining cultural schemas and resources. Further, that agency of individuals within the social world is empowered by the knowledge of structures and schemas. Given that structure has an impact only to the degree which individuals are able to act upon it, it is informative to study how single-sex schools are interrupting the reproductive pattern of effects that contribute to the “black boy crisis” and further how boys are negotiating their experiences in the school. This
approach helps to understand if that pedagogical work is truly taking hold or is indeed being resisted or transformed by students within the school.

This study illuminates how single-sex schools employ practices to (re)define masculinity and how students may respond to this redefinition. First, I consider how schools act in systematic ways to promote the school or organizational view of masculinity at the expense of the student's original masculinity. In elaborating upon Sewell’s (1992) model of structure and agency, I term school structures as “organizational practices” in the following model (Figure 2). These organizational practices consist of schemas and resources that may take the shape of norms, standards, beliefs, or ways of knowing that define for students what a “successful” black boy looks like within the organization. These practices prescribe an organizational culture that boys can choose whether or not to embody. Structures have effects on students, on the whole. For example, students may experience discomfort at having to conform to or reject certain student school norms.

Choosing whether or not to fall in line with school ideals reflects instances of “negotiation” that students encounter in their schooling. I argue that rather than thinking how structure informs agency directly, it is important to think about the negotiation or decision-making that students engage in before acting. In attempting the reconciliation between their existing selves and the versions of their “selves” promoted by the school, students may experience dissonance or tension in attempting to reconcile the two. I argue that these moments of negotiation involve instances in which students’ “selves” (or their “habitus”) fracture to navigate this unique school setting. Students, through their “agency” may engage in a diversity of responses in order to cope with this reconciliation. For example, students may reify school-centered notions of masculinity, resist these practices
entirely, or revise their understandings in a way that is both authentic to themselves as well as to the school. I also argue that structural practices, through negotiation, also inform a student’s “identity.” This identity in turn informs what actions a student may or may not take, and those actions also constitute the self. All in all, I return to Sewell’s notion of agency in informing how structures (organizational practices) are reproduced in the environment and how individual student actions can in fact transform school-level organizational practices.

This approach unpacks how structural and cultural processes influence black boys’ identity and agency within this very distinct and nearly homogenous school population. Some Critical Race Theory scholarship suggests that the interactions between structures and interpersonal negotiations can lead to increased stratification. For example, Gunn (2009) found that black male high school students who did not conform to the behavioral expectations of the school were less likely to receive academic help. In this way, structural conditions can reinforce poor student behavior, which continues to forestall them from partaking in opportunities that can help to improve their work. Understanding these boys’ experiences navigating a complex school model and specific mission with respect to masculinity informs and refines policies that currently support the operation of successful programs, classrooms, and schools. Without attempts to understand both the benefits and challenges to boys’ perceived capacities for agency and their self-described identities, low-income adolescent black boys may otherwise continue to be mired by interventions that do not focus on how, as individuals, they perceive and interact with schooling.
Organizational Practices as Structure

Single-sex schools that are considered “successful” for youth of color are those schools that intentionally reconceptualize or redefine masculinity (Fergus & Howard, 2013; Noguera, 2010). These schools prioritize “changing boys’ notions of masculinity, helping forge an academic identity that is connected to their social identities, and an explicit and sustained focus on developing and enhancing core basic academic skills” (Howard, 2013, p. 71). Through the school’s norms and standards, schools define what a “successful” black boy looks like within the organization, and as such, can use masculinity as a standard to which boys should subscribe (Anderson, 2008; Carter, 2005; Ferguson, 2001; Legewie & DiPrete, 2012; Noguera, 2009). Through these schools, boys learn a particular culture of
the school that they should orient themselves toward. This culture contains “learned norms, values, beliefs, behaviors and ways of knowing” that boys must navigate or master to function or thrive in the school environment (Howard, 2010, p. 52).

Tyack and Hansot (1992) encourage scholars to “think institutionally” about gender and schooling. They argue that through school organization, institutions create “gender regimes,” or an established order of gender relations. These gender regimes could be intended to produce a particular pattern of masculinity (or gender) in response to the student population (Acker, 2006). In this school context, it is useful to think of a regime in terms of gender presentation (masculinity) as well as race.

At its very basic level, a school’s redefinition of masculinity takes form throughout the institution and may in turn, shape students’ self-perceptions. McDonough’s (1998) concept of organizational habitus (a rebranding of Bourdieu’s “habitus”) captures the ways organizations act in systematic ways to use practices, policies, and symbols to enhance or diminish the outcomes of individuals within the institution. In this case, organizational habitus can describe how single-sex schools may promote an organizational view of “masculinity” as necessary for students to adopt to be successful.

Organizational habitus is conditioned both by social origins as well as subsequent experiences, and while durable, is transposable over time. Positions within an organization are homologous and mutually constitutive because they all share the habitus of the organization—“a system of dispositions or forms of know-how and competence with emotional, cognitive, and bodily dimensions”—that help to generate practice (Emirbayer & Johnson 2008, p. 27). This habitus provides a sense of what actions are possible, and impossible, for different individuals positioned within an organization. For administrators
and teachers within a single-sex school, habitus may operate largely below the level of consciousness and provide members of an organization with a framework for accomplishing practice that is “appropriate” and aligned to the school’s vision. Organizational habitus provides a more comprehensive understanding of the meaning- and sense-making processes that individuals engage in as well as how these practices can affect the lives of those participating within them (McDonough, 1998).

As the habitus espoused by the organization is positioned as the standard with which to attain cultural capital, schools will not frequently take into account that students can possess various forms of cultural capital and that these forms can be relevant in different contexts (Carter, 2005; Ferguson, 2001). The capital that is valued in the school setting, however, may not be what is valuable in the home, and vice versa. Rather, the school seeks to diminish the habitus of the home to be able to generate a school habitus and along with it, a form of capital in line with the institutional norms of the school.

Further, in single-sex schools, students are socialized through an organizational curriculum (i.e., culture, practices) that represents “a form of tacit requirements, as real principles of selection or exclusion without ever being formally stated” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 102). Further, the curriculum is likely to reflect institutional logics and norms, which impose views, standards, and cultural forms—cultural capital—as superior and advantageous to adopt. Berger and Luckmann (1967) argue that reality is continuously maintained through language or conversation. Language becomes the medium through which people make connections between their lived realities and available explanatory frameworks (p. 52). Overall, it is through language that reality is socially constructed. Schools, in many ways, make real or “legitimate” particular forms of knowing, and in this
way can define what is real in a way that is more or less as “objective truth” (Berger & Luckmann, 1967).

**Enhancing and Constraining Social Action**

Single-sex schools that boast strong visions of rebranding masculinity as a means to invest students are hailed as “successful schools,” despite a lack of research as to whether or not practices within these schools could have deleterious effects. The approaches that schools engage in to convert students’ current masculinities into that of the school may flatten or ignore differences with respect to the student population, and may not be as neutral a process as schools may intend.

Although single-sex schools are designed to make the minority the empowered majority, it is conceivable that if boys do not see themselves fitting into the norm of the school, they may too feel marginalized or not of the dominant power group. Carter (2005) argues that when school environments do not acknowledge or address these potential “learning dilemmas” that students can experience as a result of power dynamics, it can complicate and severely limit their learning. Less dominant groups in school do not regularly find themselves considered “knowers” but instead “caught up in the ‘symbolic drift’ of school knowledge” (Esland, 1971, p. 111). Boys that are a part of the less dominant groups in school may be constrained in their actions to resist especially as boys of the dominant groups are seen and heralded as successful by school officials and through school practices.

Below, I consider how the school context may act to enhance or constrain boys’ actions, or agency. The approaches that single-sex schools take to redefine masculinity, presuppose that schools can create a concept of masculinity as one particular type that
students will want to orient themselves toward. Students can hold cultural values that might be inconsistent with their material interests; these values can become reoriented to those of their material interests. Gramsci (1992) thinks of this as elite domination, or hegemony, and Bourdieu (1984) thinks of this process as symbolic violence.

Hegemony

If males within the environment do begin to subscribe to this concept of masculinity, it may be explained through the concept of hegemony. With a dominant ideal of masculinity, Gramsci (1992) would suggest that the interests of the more dominated within the environment are subsumed by the interests of the dominant. The “dominant” find ways to make the dominated share their interests, which produces outcomes in favor of those in power. Those that are non-dominant follow the interests of the dominant as a means of structurally aligning themselves with dominant ideals and short-term interests of survival within the organization. In this way, the interests and actions of those boys that fit into the “dominant” ideas of masculinity may be enhanced, as they are emboldened and supported by organizational practices and culture. The actions of boys that are non-dominant are constrained through hegemony, as they may be compelled to follow the interests and actions of those boys that fit into the dominant culture and narrative. As significant others (in this case, administrators and teachers) have the capacity to define meaning in the world, and this capacity allows power that exerts itself through constituting dominant frames of references; ways of thought and manners of speech that constitute the dominant ways of being and acting in the social world.

Connell (2013) provides a helpful analysis of hegemonic masculinity within organizations that can deconstruct what constituent components of masculinity are being
given importance within a single-sex school. As Connell (2013) suggests, it should be recognized that “hegemonic masculinity does not necessarily translate into a satisfying experience of life” (p. 852). As successful schools are hailed as those that reconceptualize what it means to be “masculine,” it is valuable to consider which aspects of masculinity are privileged and which aspects dismissed within organizations. Similarly, a parallel question would be, what aspects of race are privileged and which are diminished?

Connell (2013) describes that hegemonic masculinity need not be dominant simply because it is “common” in the daily lives of boys and men. Rather, “hegemony works in part through the production of exemplars of masculinity—symbols that have authority despite the fact that most men and boys do not fully live up to them” (p. 846). Bernstein (1996) explains that “school metaphorically holds up a mirror in which an image is reflected” (p. xxi). This image can be singular and one must ask themselves “what other images were excluded from that dominant image of value?” (Bernstein, 1996, p. xxi). In this manner, school practices convey broader social relations of power, knowledge, and of value. Within the school context, these exemplars might take the form of role models, authority figures within the school, or even students that the school acknowledges are “living up” to the organizational ideas of “masculine” and “successful.”

**Symbolic Violence**

Bourdieu explores the formation of self-knowledge in an embodied level through the lens of social relations. The process by which students come to convert their family habitus into cultural capital in school requires force, which Bourdieu conceptualizes as a moment of symbolic violence. In order for class habitus to become embodied cultural capital, there must be a concurrent process of devaluing the habitus of other classes while valorizing the habitus of the dominant class. Symbolic violence operates through the
damaging effects of the wielding of words, symbols or practices through the school’s “significant others” acting as symbolic enforcers of the cultural hegemony of the school. These authorities deem certain behaviors and actions appropriate or inappropriate with respect to the school’s cultural norms (Bourdieu, 1984).

Some boys may already come into the school with a habitus that is compatible with the dominant class, and thus requires less force to convert into school cultural capital. For boys for whom this is the case, they may be less likely to find difficulty in assimilating to the school culture, and in fact, may find belonging. For those boys that possess habitus that are more incongruent with the cultural capital of the school, this process may require some force that either boys may resist, or may accept, by rejecting their original family habitus. In this exchange, the student will be asked to make renunciations and sacrifices in exchange for testimonies of recognition and admiration from teachers or other “significant others” (Bourdieu, 1984). As authority is inscribed in the school, there is an implied agreement with the students: when students follow the rules and accept the “significant others” as authorities, the students will be provided with recognition and respect. Bourdieu further explains that children obey because obedience is something habitual or inscribed in the body (Bourdieu, 1984).

As such, students become socialized to learn whose knowledge is legitimate, what is recognized, and what is valued. As the organizational habitus becomes valued and legitimated through school culture, its symbolic currency accrues at the expense and devaluation of the habitus students bring into the school. The school provides a dominant set of gendered and raced symbols that are operative in the environment and subject students to an experience of symbolic violence. The social identity of black students may be
“defined and asserted through difference” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 172). For black students, this distinction represents the denigration of their habitus in the favor of what is dominant: school cultural norms that purport a new masculinity in order to be successful. As a result, social boundaries are effectively reproduced in the school context through the devaluing of the cultural habitus of the black community and family.

**Student Negotiation of Organizational Practices**

Schools have long been considered sites of cultural conflict (Bourdieu, 1977; Carter, 2005; Carter, 2012; Ferguson, 2001; Lareau, 2003). Carter (2005) describes schools as “cultural places that transmit evaluative messages about whose ways of life are noteworthy and whose are not” (p. xxvi). Schools participate in the process of creating and reifying cultural status through practices that can symbolically position students amongst and against each other. These “social group attributes” can be reflected, challenged, or reified through school culture (Carter, 2007; Fordham, 1996). Sociocultural theorists argue that students learn and “make meaning of new information, convey understanding and interpret their surroundings” (Howard, 2010). Additionally, cultural meanings and norms in school are interpreted and internalized by students “hierarchically,” in that these issues become central to issues of conflict and success for students of color or otherwise “marginalized” students (Carter, 2005; Fordham, 1996). Schools, therefore, play a part in the structuring of adolescent identities given that through school cultures, schools can create and reify institutional gender orders, external relations of power and other social hierarchies (Connell, 1996; Pascoe, 2007).

Some students may outwardly reject school norms that they regard as closed, unfair, or inconsistent with their lived experiences or identities. As Gabriele Lakomski (1984)
writes, some children reject the ideology of the school as if to say: “I know what your game is; I will not play it, but rather play my own” (p. 157). Students can exert agency to resist dominant culture that is validated in schools. Like many other resistance theorists, Lakomski argues that even though students have this agency, they may ultimately end up further marginalized than before, contributing to the reproduction of oppressive structures.

Carter (2005) notes that the cultural identities of youth of color are not deviant and do not represent a fixed singular narrative by nature, but are instead part of the negotiation for status based upon conformity or nonconformity to mainstream cultural norms, images, and rules in school. Though Carter acknowledges that accruing dominant cultural capital is important for student mobility in dominant settings, school officials often ignore that students can, and should, possess different kinds of cultural capital (Carter, 2005). Practices within single-sex schools occur through the prism of cultural processes that can reproduce the social group status that students experience outside of school, or create an entirely new hierarchy based on other desirable characteristics. Culture in school, therefore, plays a role in the reproduction of dominant social relations (Bourdieu, 1977). A sociological framework of how culture operates in school contextualizes practices, actions, and behaviors of students and teachers in broader social forces, and recognizes that these practices can work to reify social group status outside of school.

Many critical race theorists have focused on how underrepresented students have navigated complex environments or institutions (e.g., schools). These scholars have found that students rely on resilience, strong peer relationships, and deploying both dominant and non-dominant cultural capital in order to navigate challenging situations (Carter, 2005;
Tyson, 2011; Young, 2004). Students will respond differently to the organizational norms of the school depending on how consistent their habitus is with that of the organizational norms and expectations of the school. One’s habitus develops from one’s embodied cultural capital, including the dispositions that have been cultivated as a function of the subtle messages that have been communicated by social forces in one’s environment (Bourdieu, 1984; Carter, 2005; Lareau, 2003; Young, 2004). Some students may not find that the habitus that they draw upon outside of school is consistent with what is required by the school. This may be common for students in low-income single-sex schools given that historically, communities have played a large role in curating social, emotional and economic needs in conjunction with students’ academic needs (Weaver, 1972).

Even though these single-sex schools may appear homogenous—in the sense that they educate a population of mostly low-income, black males—there will still be dominant and non-dominant groups and statuses that form within the school culture. This situation presents a valuable opportunity to examine how youth from non-dominant status groups navigate a school’s cultural world along with what other forms of cultural capital students deploy (Carter, 2005). If students do not feel a part of the “dominant” culture, or feel deviant even within what is implicitly designed to be a more supportive school environment, students can “question the relevance of their relationship to the larger social, political, and economic context in which they live” (Finn & Checkoway, 1998, p. 72). This dismissal of alternative forms of capital (i.e., students’ “othered” cultural competencies) can cause tension or dissention for students in schools that can affect their level of attachment to the school culture as well as their academic engagement (Carter, 2005). In my study of
masculinity within a single-sex school, I am interested in the degree to which students’
diverse cultural capital, or masculinities, are recognized and developed within the school.

Successful single-sex school models are said to acknowledge the full complexity and
dynamic nature of black male identity so that students feel not only invested in school, but
also supported and motivated to achieve. While these approaches are deemed “successful,”
it is unclear for which students, by what process, and with what costs. While single-sex
schools may have a new approach to educating black boys, it should not be assumed that
every student readily adopts the “code” of the school with ease. Instead, the process by
which boys transition their individual frames of masculinity toward adopting that of the
school may, in fact, be riddled with conflict.

**Hysteresis**

Habitus is dynamic, therefore it is always undergoing constant adjustment as an
individual encounters new experiences, structures, or fields. As an individual enters in and
out of different fields and occupies different social positions, habitus too continues to
change and adapt (Lee & Kramer, 2012). Bourdieu (2000) argues that this adjustment of
habitus to the objective conditions of a field should not be considered a universal rule.
Instead, habitus has “critical moments when it misfires or is out of phase” (Bourdieu, 2000,
p. 162). These moments can happen when a field undergoes a “major transformation” that
dramatically alters its rules or norms—in this case, when a student enters a single-sex
school with clear norms around behavior and work ethic. Habitus has the tendency to
reproduce itself, and Bourdieu argues, perpetuate the structures that worked to produce it.
As such, individuals may have difficulty reconciling their habitus with the adoption of
practices that are aligned with the new rules of their field.
Bourdieu labels this mismatch between field and habitus as hysteresis. In a case where a mismatch occurs, an individual’s habitus becomes dysfunctional: efforts students make to advance in the field instead “plunge them deeper into failure” (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 161). The concept of hysteresis is useful because it draws attention to the disjuncture between new opportunities associated with field change and individuals within the field whose habitus renders them at least temporarily unable to recognize the (potential) value of new positions within the field. Importantly, hysteresis allows for a link between the objective structures of schooling with the subjectivity inherent in individual response.

When students experience hysteresis, they will make attempts to negotiate this mismatch. When faced with a new field, Bourdieu (2005) argues that a great benefit of one’s habitus is the ability to improvise: the habitus can “selectively perceive and transform the objective structure...while at the same time, being transformed in its makeup by the pressure of the objective structure” (p. 47). Students might also rebuff this change, rejecting choices that will require a confrontation between those dispositions formed earlier in socialization and those demanded by the school. The phenomenon of black boys negotiating their outer world (e.g., home demands, schools, peer pressures) with their inner world (e.g., desires, passions and authenticity) is one that has been a focus of contemporary literature (Gilligan, 1996; Young, 2004).

Although schools’ practices could provide new opportunities for students, these field conditions may actually pose challenges for students. To be successful by school standards, students must align themselves with the organizational codes and practices of the school. This alignment may create a rupture between taken-for-granted assumptions of students’ identities are in relation to race, gender, class, and sexuality, and expectations of
the new school regime. For students that experience a rupture, this creates frustration as students may find it difficult to learn new practices and symbols that are aligned with their new social conditions or field (Wacquant, 2005).

Hysteresis provides a lens with which to understand the many frustrations or internal struggles that students may experience while attending a single-sex school. Hysteresis highlights the mismatch between a student’s existing habitus (i.e., the dispositions they hold with regard to their identities as students vis-à-vis race, gender, sexuality, etc.) and what is required of them as students in a uniquely homogenous context. Struggles that arise may form around particular junctures, and so understanding how students resolve or fail to resolve mismatches can provide insight into how single-sex schools should adapt to minimize potential disruptions for students.

**Fractured Habitus and Double-Consciousness**

Hysteresis between habitus and field, Bourdieu argues, produces a distressing fragmented self, or a *habitus clivé* (“cleft” or fractured habitus). Roda (2013) describes this as a mismatch between an individual’s “sense of place” and “sense of placement” (p. 46). When experiencing hysteresis, one’s habitus (the set of one’s dispositions, lifestyles, and the learned experiences that are acquired through the everyday social milieu of one’s life) is not consistent across different contexts. In this way, an individual’s cultural repertoires can be said to be comprised of inconsistent representations, schemas, and ideas among which an individual may toggle between in response to any changes in context (Swidler, 1986). Since these dispositions are disjointed, or split, the self *fragments* because navigating these tensions creates substantial difficulties for the individual. In this context, a student may have trouble reconciling being dominant in some fields but not in others. This
hysteresis creates a tension: the sets of dispositions, inconsistent for the multiple contexts a student may operate within, fight one another.

Some individuals might experience institutions that are fairly consistent across their entire lives. Individuals experience a series of interactions through institutions, but if an individual meets an institution that is a new “type,” the set of dispositions that an individual has developed thus far within previous institutions may not serve him in the same way that has in the past (e.g., transitioning from co-educational schools to a single-sex school). The set of resources students have, that they embody, does not perfectly match the institution. This does not mean the individual cannot develop a new set of dispositions, but students can experience a difference or a fracture that requires negotiation. These moments of negotiation cut against the ease that students feel in an environment (Khan, 2009). In these moments, students experience symbolic violence because the overall symbolic systems reward certain ways of being. In this way, individual interests are subsumed underneath an institutional expectation or a set of logics that are difficult to fulfill individually due to either previous experiences or because of external demands that might be cognitively difficult to pursue.

Bourdieu (1999) writes that the “product of such a contradictory injunction is doomed to be ambivalent about himself...to produce a habitus divided against itself, and doomed to a kind of double perception of self, to successive allegiances and multiple identities” (p. 511). Bourdieu's concept of fractured habitus is similar to the way in which Du Bois (1903) describes the experience of a black individual in society. Bourdieu examines the process by which concrete individuals come to know themselves and are subjected through the eyes of “significant others” whereas Du Bois (1903) specifically
considers how black individuals experience their identities subjectively through the eyes of others to gain self-knowledge. Du Bois (1903) writes:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (p. 5)

The double-consciousness that Du Bois describes speaks to the way that students may experience habitus within a setting. Given that the approaches that these schools take valorize the school’s conception of masculinity at the expense of other influences, students may not be able to fully reconcile the many sets of dispositions they have acquired in and out of school. Rather than taking for granted a “unitary” habitus, fractured habitus offers a new way to understand the dynamism in human action while still considering how this action draws upon practical dispositions. Fractured habitus is particularly useful for research in this context because it accounts for the multiple identities, experiences, practices and social relations that adolescents may experience during the schooling process. Fractured habitus, or habitus clivé, is similar to the concept of “transitional identity” (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005; Lee & Kramer, 2012; Roda, 2013). Transitional identity describes the conflicts an individual can experience between various parts of their identity and how they feel they should behave. These conflicts, like fractured habitus, emerge from conflicts or tensions within the self. When an individual experiences these disjunctures, the self carries out these disjunctures with “tensions and ambivalence” (Conde, 2011).

Fractured habitus is a useful concept for this analysis because habitus has often been criticized as an overly deterministic concept (Apple, 2002; Aronowitz & Giroux, 1983;
Ginwright, 2009; Greene, 1986). Students are not simply complicit or passive, allowing structural forces to bear down on their lives. Rather, students are able to enact agency in a variety of ways. Fractured habitus, within this larger Sewellian framework, helps to acknowledge that while structural conditions are severe for black boys in single-sex schools, these boys still hold agency that makes them able to navigate, challenge, and transform these conditions.

**Agency and Identity**

Single-sex schools can therefore be thought of as structuring the experiences of boys. Given this, schools constrain and enable an array of actions on the part of boys, and those actions and the ways that boys do and do not engage with the school environment contributes to boys’ growing identities. Necessarily important to this study is a nuanced understanding of identity, along with how individual boys, as agents, interpret, make sense of, and affect the structuring character of their environments. In concert with sociological theory, the literature from social psychology can support here in explaining how cultures, structures, agency, and identity work together. The social psychology literature better accounts for change in structures through individual variation in response to structure. The structure-agency debate proves a fruitful place for scholars of social psychology and sociology to meet.

Social psychological theory and sociological theory find a lot of common ground in this debate. To begin, both disciplines find that cultures and selves (or identities) are doubly hermeneutic in that they constitute each other, cyclically. Both help rescue what gets “lost in the language of structure—the efficacy of human action—or ‘agency’” in also stipulating how individual agents can shape and alter structures (Sewell, 1992, p. 2).
DiMaggio and Markus (2010) argue that sociology emphasizes culture as domain-specific and contingent and (social) psychology emphasizes the dynamism of cultures and selves (identities) and how this dynamism can productively deflect the reproduction of structures through action. Selves are dynamic in the sense that they are able to adapt to various cultural contexts, and are indeed able to create change in the cultures that shape their actions as well.

**Agency**

A theory of culture helps to further discuss how individuals’ actions and identities are shaped by their context. Individuals cannot be considered apart from their social contexts and social contexts cannot be understood apart from the individuals that exist within those contexts (DiMaggio & Markus, 2010, p. 348). Rather than a stable set of norms, culture can be thought of as implicit and explicit pattern of representations, actions, and artifacts enacted through networks of social interaction (Atran, Medin, & Ross, 2005; Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Kashima, 2000). Culture is a symbolic mechanism that facilitates, maintains, resists, or even transforms social relations inside and outside of school (Bernstein, 1996; Bourdieu, 1977). An individual’s experience is socioculturally patterned, and as a result, a person's selfhood or identity reflects that person's engagement with the social world that instigates this patterning. DiMaggio and Markus (2010) argue that the self, or identity, is a “continually developing sense of awareness and agency that guides action and takes shape as the individual” (p. 349). Further, that “selves and identities” are “schemas” of past behaviors as well as patterns for current and future behavior” (p. 349). They argue that identity is situated and therefore, reflects context (DiMaggio and Markus, 2010, p. 349).
Ann Swidler (1986) offers a framework of culture as action, as a symbolic production based on a “tool-kit” of strategies to organize oneself toward valued ends. According to Swidler’s (1986) framework, in order for youth to realize their values, they deploy a certain style, a set of skills, habits, preferences, or wants. For Swidler, these actions are the symbolic components of culture, a tool kit that organizes action to realize a set of goals. Interestingly, Swidler argues that the tool-kits shaped by one’s culture and which organizes lines of action are “more durable than the ends they seek” because oftentimes individuals intuitively adjust their ends based on the available tools they have, or find different ends to which they believe their tools are well-suited (Swidler, 1986). In this way, individual choice and the capacity to act (agency) can be said to be constrained by available opportunities, values, beliefs, and norms within a school.

Agency, then, is temporally embedded and context-specific. Emirbayer and Mische (1998) explain that agency is “informed by the past (in its “iterational” or habitual aspect), oriented toward the future (as a “projective” capacity to imagine alternative possibilities), and [situated in] the present (as a “practical-evaluative” capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects within the contingences of the moment)” (p. 962). The authors argue that as individuals move within and among contexts, individuals can toggle between temporal orientations that are created within and by these contexts, and in this way, individuals are capable of changing their relationship to structure (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 963). Social actors can display varying degrees of “maneuverability, inventiveness and reflective choices” in response to how structure constrains and enables action (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 963). This conception of agency as responsive and varying connects with the concept of fractured habitus—the temporal aspects of agency and the
transposability of schemas in structures. Like fractured habitus, agency too is dynamic and “composed of variable and changing orientations within the flow of time” (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 964). Structures are therefore both sustained by and altered through human action. Mead (1934) terms this capacity “reflective intelligence” and described it as the ability of individuals to shape their own responsiveness to situations.

Similar to how action can be constrained by available opportunities, many scholars argue that adolescents construct their identities with special consideration to how they understand what is possible for them and their lives (Dimitriadis & Weis, 2001). For adolescents, the ability to understand what is possible is both conditioned and obscured by the deep structural barriers that constrain their lives. At such a developing age, adolescents begin to internalize inequalities in a way that not only shapes their understandings of possibilities for action, but also how they see themselves (Bourdieu, 1985; Young, 2004). As such, identity and agency are in many ways inextricably bound.

The literature that currently exists on black males details the structural and cultural conditions that black young men must negotiate so that they can achieve, but does not pay greater attention to the individual characteristics of young men. This literature characterizes boys as passive recipients of structural pressures and therefore does not allow for an understanding of how boys deploy agency within their schools and are active participants in constructing their identities (Nelson, 2013). This vein of research would characterize boys in a single-sex school as doomed to subscribe to dominant norms of masculinity irrelevant of their own wants, needs, or desires (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Carnoy & Levin, 1985). It is unrealistic to suggest that black males are merely passive recipients of the conditions that beset them. Instead what is necessary is to consider the actions that
black males take that either lead to them becoming “complicit in their own failure” or rebels to societal expectations in their own right (Noguera, 2009, p. 22). Although the obstacles that black males face are dire, it is dangerous to victimize them—doing so is to rob them of their active agency to fight these conditions. Further, although black males from high-poverty neighborhoods may share similar economic or social experiences, they are still individual beings and as such have varied ways of responding to multiple affronts to their livelihood. Prescribing “fixed meanings or controlled identities” for any racial group effectively disregards the multiplicities of individual identities and approaches towards dealing with cultural and structural obstacles (Carter, 2005, p. 53).

Identity Formation
For this dissertation, I frame identity using insights from the disciplines of sociology and psychology. I find that this combined approach allows for an understanding that considers both the social categories that contribute to form identity socially, along with the meanings that individuals associate to those categories. With regard to identity, the sociological approach stresses the structural aspects of this identity and considers identity performances as motivational in reproduction or maintenance of the social order. In sociological theory, schools are primary sites for identity formation and development for young people. The school as an institution that reflects the broader realities of society also exists as a forum for the construction and reproduction of race, class, and gender inequalities as well as a site of social change for individuals to challenge said inequalities. (Acker, 2006; Tyack & Hansot, 1990). Identity can be thought of as a temporary and unstable effect of difference. As Hall (1991a) writes: “identity is a structured representation which only achieves its positive through the narrow eye of the negative (p. 21). In this way, identity must pass through the “eye of the needle of the other before it can
construct itself” (Hall, 1991a, p. 21). This notion of identity formation speaks to Du Bois’ (1903) concept of “double consciousness” in that boys may identify themselves in terms of what they are not.

Psychological models tend to emphasize the ways individuals “actively negotiate among competing categories and groups in order to achieve psychological satisfaction” (Thoits & Virshup, 1997, p. 6). Identities are both produced and adopted through various practices of representation. According to Deaux and Burke (2010), both disciplines argue that “when an identity is activated, the characteristics of that identity are manifest to others and help define the self to the self and to others” (p. 317). In identity theory on the whole, identity characteristics create meanings of what it fundamentally means to be oneself, in relation to a shared culture. Deaux and Burke (2010) argue that these characteristics can be actively defended by individuals as self-verification, which can add to feelings of self-worth and authenticity, or if not defended, they can be supplanted by new characteristics that challenge the original traits (p. 317).

Hall (1992b) further suggests that identity is situated within a “distributed map of the social terrain” (p. 16). Understanding how difference works in this complex social milieu, in which students are more or less homogenous with respect to race, class, and sex is important to understanding how identity or difference is produced through distributive relations. In this way, identities can be thought of as contradictory and situational. Hall (1992b) explains that individuals are “involved in a series of political games around fractured or decentered identities...[s]ince black signifies a range of experiences, the act of representation becomes not just about decentering the subject but actually exploring the kaleidoscopic conditions of blackness” (Bailey & Hall, 1992c, p. 21). Carter (2005) argues
“even those who share an identity—perhaps an ethnic identity—show variation in beliefs, behaviors, practices, and attitudes precisely because of all the other identities that may influence us” (p. 112). Here, differences, as much as identity, are effects of power and other “social and cultural practices and processes” (Said, 1979).

In all, given that identity can have multiple expressions, performance is a key concept central to both disciplines. Audience is integral to an understanding of identity, as an audience can support or diminish any particular performances of identity. Klein et al. (2007) suggest that identity performance has two goals: identity consolidation—which confirms the “worth” of an identity—and identity mobilization—which motivates collective action on behalf of a social group to which one identifies. Identity is an important consideration in this school context, especially given gender performance. This is because when one’s presentation of self is strategically motivated, there are consequences for behavior given dominant norms and salient identities within an organizational context (Klein et al., 2007; Reicher et al., 1995). In a single-sex school, it is important to understand how students act in line with institutional norms, and how school culture shapes actions and identities. It is valuable to have this perspective because students may act in gendered ways that regulate their behavior in line with the valued gender identity within the institution (Witt & Wood, 2010; Wood, et al., 1997).

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have presented a conceptual framework for exploring the process of (race and gender) identity formation for black males in single sex public schools. The construction of adolescent identity is a multifaceted and iterative process – one that involves many actors and environments. The literature on single-sex schools and the
pedagogical and organizational approaches that they take simplifies this process as static, and simplifies students as mere passive recipients of new identity concepts. Instead, this process needs to be treated as one that is dynamic, given that it can be influenced by students’ past experiences (their habitus) and the multiple ways they can respond or resist to institutional logics of masculinity and prescribed identity. Schools engage in practices that are inherently raced and classed, which requires an understanding of power to fully delineate the many ways in which students may be subject to institutional pressures. Understanding identity in this way allows for an understanding of how school structures and their respective ideologies can enhance or diminish outcomes for students. In the next chapter, I present my methodological design for studying organizationally defined masculinity, resulting student identity concepts and how this process may vary for different students.
CHAPTER THREE: Research Design and Methodology

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss my research design and methodology for studying how a single-sex school that serves primarily low-income, black boys frames “masculinity” for their students, the process by which these boys respond, reify, or resist these institutional definitions, and students’ notions of agency and identity. To understand the entirety of the single-sex schooling experience for black males, I pursued a case study approach for this dissertation, which allowed me to deeply understand the organizational practices of the school, and the teachers who enact these practices, as well as how students negotiate and act with or against these practices. Given the nature of my study, my work necessarily employs a critical race methodology (Howard, 2010; Solórzano & Yosso, 2009).

Critical race methodology offers the framework to conduct and present research that is grounded within the lived experiences, knowledge, and voices of people of color. As I detail below, my dissertation is an interpretive, qualitative dissertation that integrates many modes of inquiry including: ethnography, in-depth interviews, and photo elicitation narratives. I foreground the experiences of black boys by soliciting their voices prominently in this dissertation. By doing so, it is my hope that their voices provide theoretical and practical contributions to the academic canon. These contributions enrich the conversation with prior theory about how organizational or school practices can affect change with students, what helps black boys learn best, and how black boys can possess masculinity that is as varied as it is complex.

Research Methods

For this dissertation I use an interpretive, multi-modal qualitative research design. The methods I use include: ethnographic observations, in-depth interviews, and student
photo narrative projects. Using these methods in concert with each other allows me to explore the many dimensions along which single-sex schools (re)define masculinity through organizational practices or policies along with how students respond to those (re)definitions. The success of these organizational practices relies upon boys choosing to transition their identities and the assumption that this is a process that boys can easily undertake. As the reproduction of structure may depend a great deal on the agentic behavior of students, my research methods help to understand structure and agency as doubly constitutive and in an iterative conversation (Giddens, 1984; Sewell, 1992).

Qualitative research situates “the observer in the world,” and in doing so, renders “the world visible” (Creswell, 2007, p. 36). A qualitative research design for this dissertation aided in making visible how and through what practices schools (re)define masculinity as well as how students come to understand themselves in relation to the school and otherwise with regard to masculinity and identity. Further, I aimed to learn about boys’ experiences and perspectives, which necessitates a qualitative approach. I employed a multi-level approach—the school/macro level (e.g., observation and interviews with teachers, document analysis) and student/micro level (e.g., ethnography, interviews, and photo narrative projects). This design positions student identity and school structure in ongoing dialogue.

Additionally, qualitative research uncovers socio-cultural norms, practices, and beliefs (Merriam, 2002). With the guide of a critical race methodology, this study also privileged the narratives of the boys within these schools. Critical race methodology (CRM) positions race and racism as intersectional with other forms of subordination along lines of difference (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Additionally, CRM challenges dominant ideologies
through a commitment to social justice and a foregrounding of participants’ experiential knowledge, lived experiences, and perspectives (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Framing my work through critical race methodology also allows for a focus on counter-storytelling through interviews and student-identity projects (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Counter-storytelling highlights and humanizes the struggles and experiences that are faced by individuals that are typically not highlighted in academia. Researching from the margins allows for an expansion of what information, and whose experiences, are valuable to understanding any particular social issue, allowing for a richer, deeper, and more nuanced array of research from which to draw and make meaning.

In my dissertation, these methods foreground how students construct their own rich accounts of how they understand organizational practices, masculinity development, and themselves with respect to agency and identity. Overall, this methodology gives voice to the ways that a single-sex school structures boys’ schooling experiences while, at the same time, examining how boys’ behaviors and attitudes can transform school practices as well, as I discussed in Chapter 2.

**Case Study Approach**

To pursue my research questions, I chose a case study approach of one public single-sex school that serves primarily low-income black males (more on site selection to follow). I treated one single-sex school as a case to consider how a school organizationally defines, frames, and messages masculinity for its students. As Merriam (2009) describes, case study research “offers a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomenon” (p. 41). Given the unique context of a single-sex public school for black boys, a case study approach allowed for a narrow focus on the ways a school developed concepts of masculinity and
added greater understanding of how school structures and practices condition the lives of black boys in schools and impact their educational, social, and emotional trajectories.

Further, a case study approach allowed me to explore boys’ understandings of school practices and learn about their identities without removing them from their school context. Case studies consider the relationship between a phenomenon and the context, rather than both in isolation—since the relationship is often difficult to distinguish otherwise (Yin, 2009). I primarily used an ethnographic approach to this case study, as it provided the most robust way to understand the lived experiences of the boys in this study, and to get a full sense of the organizational culture and practices of the school in a meaningful and substantive manner. Conducting ethnography also allowed me to build relationships with participants, which allowed me to learn and process boys’ counternarratives over time. As I have detailed above, and will further expand upon to follow, I also conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with students and teachers, and conducted photo narrative projects with students.

**Research Setting and Site**

Many cities offer public single-sex schools for low-income boys across the country. As of 2014, the nation has 95 single-sex public schools according to the National Association for Single Sex Public Education and more than 445 public coeducational schools also offer single-sex classroom environments. New York City provides an excellent and the most relevant context for this work given that it is a city with one of the longest histories in providing single-sex public education (Nelson, 2013; Noguera, 2012; Oeur, 2017).
For this study, I selected one public single-sex school within the five boroughs of New York City, henceforth referred to as Sankofa Boys’ Collegiate\(^1\). Sankofa is representative of other single-sex public schools in New York City as it serves almost entirely students of color, a majority of whom are students who are navigating poverty (see Table 1). Sankofa, like most other single-sex schools detailed in earlier chapters, includes in its mission statement and promotional materials a vision of transforming masculinity through various school practices and culture.

**Sankofa Boys’ Collegiate**

Sankofa Boys’ Collegiate is a public school serving grades 6-12 in New York City. The school is co-located, as is common in New York City, with two other schools. As such, Sankofa shares certain facilities and space including the gymnasium, cafeteria, and school support staff (e.g., school social worker, nurse, etc.). At the time of the study (2016-2017), the school served grades 6-9, and continues to grow by one grade each year until it reaches capacity at 12th grade in the 2020-2021 school year. At the time of study, each grade served between 50-76 students; 67 students were in the sixth grade. Boys at Sankofa are offered some special programs including basketball, drama, video game club, an entrepreneurship class, and an extended day program run by an outside community organization. Boys wear uniforms in each grade including slacks, a button-down shirt, and a tie (detailed in further chapters).

The school is headed by Principal Taylor, who has been the principal of the school since its founding. The majority of the staff are people of color, with a fair representation of both male and female staff. The majority of the male staff, however, are in administrative or

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\(^1\) This, as all other names in this dissertation, is a pseudonym to protect the identities of the individuals involved in this study.
dean positions. Each middle school grade has one teacher per subject area, who teaches three sections of their class. For example, Ms. Cozner, the science teacher, teaches all sixth grade boys in classes of approximately 22 each. Each grade has an assigned special educator that “pushes in” for an inclusion class (i.e., a class that integrates special needs students with non-special needs students). The school creates its own in-house curriculum for math, humanities, and social studies, and as such, the teachers are largely in charge of developing and executing curricula and individual lesson plans.

In terms of race, the school serves three black students for every one Hispanic student (see Table 1). The school also serves a majority of students who are navigating poverty, as operationalized by the population of students receiving free or reduced price lunch (RFPL). Sankofa also has a sizeable special needs population, representing about a quarter of the students at the school.

**School Admissions**

All students entering middle school in the New York City Department of Education (NYC DOE) enter an application process. In the fall of fifth grade in their elementary schools, students receive a Middle School Application packet, which lists every middle school program to which they can apply. Students are eligible to apply to attend middle schools in the district where the family is zoned, and when different, the district where the child currently attends elementary school, as well as citywide programs that are open to the students. When middle schools screen applicants, they have access to the following information from the student’s 4th grade year: Final Course Grades, attendance and punctuality records, and the applicants’ state test scores from the Mathematics and English Language Arts (ELA) exam. Families that are looking to have their son apply to Sankofa must:
- Inform 5th grade guidance counselors of their intent to apply to Sankofa;
- Attend an open house or an information session during the student’s 5th grade year; and
- Submit a formal application through the guidance counselor.

Applications for entry to the 6th grade class are then made through guidance counselors at a student’s elementary school in the spring of their 5th grade year. The NYC DOE assures that most students are matched to one of the programs that they rank. Sankofa cannot otherwise admit students on its own, and must follow the protocol of the NYC DOE.

Priority admissions are given to residents that live in the county and only for those that attend at least one of the following: (1) an information session or (2) open house. Students who are in charter, parochial, or other private schools in the city have to follow the same process, but can do so through the admissions systems of the DOE. Lastly, the New York City Department of Education does not have admissions priorities for siblings, or in other words, it is not a guarantee that younger siblings will be matched to the same school that their older sibling attends. Students who are English Language Learners (ELLs), students with disabilities, and those in temporary housing all participate in the same process.

**Table 1: Sankofa Collegiate Demographic Data in School Year (2016-2017)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free/Reduced Price Lunch</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language Learners (ELLs)</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Participant Sampling and Characteristics**
To explicate this case, I worked with teachers, school leaders, administrators and several sixth grade boys (n=34), for whom the rituals, routines, and practices would be most explicit since they were the school’s entering class. I began through systematic, naturalistic, and participatory school observations of the 6th grade. Overall, I observed students four to five days a week throughout the academic year. I was also heavily engaged in August and September, attending students’ summer orientations and any other 6th grade specific events to welcome them and fold them into the school. I spent the year observing classrooms, meeting students, and noting which students would be of particular interest for interviews (i.e., choosing students who performed varying “types” of masculinity). I also interviewed select teachers who I believed, though observation, to be of particular importance with regard to school culture.

I used purposeful sampling to select school staff to participate in this study (see Table 2). As my work centered on the sixth grade, I observed classes taught by sixth grade teachers and had regular conversations with these teachers. I also interviewed one or two focal teachers from each grade to paint a picture of the staff experience at the school, along with key administrators and school staff who interacted with the sixth grade (i.e., the school social worker, the principal, and support service staff).

Table 2: Staff Participant Characteristics (n=18)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff Name</th>
<th>Role at School</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Taylor</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Hamilton</td>
<td>Administrator; 9th grade Humanities Teacher</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Carr</td>
<td>School Social Worker</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Anderson</td>
<td>Parent Coordinator, Leader of Frederick Douglass House</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Franklin</td>
<td>Athletic Director, Leader of John Lewis/Jackie Robinson Houses</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dean Stockton</td>
<td>Behavioral Dean, Leader of James Baldwin</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>House</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dean Vasquez</td>
<td>Behavioral Dean (High School)</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Puerto Rican</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dean Crandell</td>
<td>Behavioral Dean (Middle School)</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Cozner</td>
<td>6th Grade Science Teacher, Leader of James Baldwin House</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Renaud</td>
<td>6th Grade Humanities Teacher, Leader of John Lewis/Jackie Robinson Houses</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Puerto Rican</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Lopez</td>
<td>6th Grade Math Teacher, Leader of Frederick Douglass House</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Dominican</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Martinez</td>
<td>6th Grade Paraprofessional/Special Needs support</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Puerto Rican</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Reynolds</td>
<td>6th Grade Special Educator, Leader of John Lewis/Jackie Robinson Houses</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Mitchell</td>
<td>7th Grade Science Teacher</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Adil</td>
<td>9th Grade Humanities Teacher</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Samuels</td>
<td>8th Grade Paraprofessional/Special Needs Support</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Kendall</td>
<td>8th Grade Science Teacher</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Ferrera</td>
<td>English as a New Language (ENL) Teacher</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Puerto Rican</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students at Sankofa attend grades 6-12 and were ideal for this study given that students in the entering class (6th grade) were slightly older, and therefore, better able than younger elementary aged children to articulate key experiences relating to identity. Moreover, messaging about school values and ideals was most explicit for these students who are first becoming a part of the school community. Adolescent children are also better able to reflect on their identities, school organizational practices, and masculinity when compared to younger children.

I bounded my sample for this study by both purposeful and theoretical selection (Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 2009). I focused my observations on the sixth grade given that studying the entering 6th grade class better elucidated the explicit messaging on part of the school’s teachers and leaders around (re)defining masculinity. I engaged in theoretical sampling (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to select boys from within the 6th grade for interviews and identity projects. I guided my focal case selection by
considering how I could maximize what could be learned from these boys about their conceptions of masculinity, identity development, and agency within this single-sex school (Stake, 1995; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

I recruited 34 sixth grade students for individual in-depth interviews and photo narrative projects—approximately 13 students from each of the school’s advisory groups, or “houses” (see Table 3). These 34 students represented about half of the students in the sixth grade. Including this many students within this larger school case study helped to unpack the individual process of negotiating masculinity and the identity-work and perceived agency that accompany it. Within my sample, 30 students identified as black. Throughout this dissertation, I considered any boy to be “black” who self-identified as black (including boys who identified as African-American and those who identified as black as well as bi- or multi-racial). Four boys in my sample did not identify as black, but still participated in this study. I highlight these boys’ racial/ethnic background when these boys are referenced in my findings.

Students were selected that represented a particular aspect of masculinity formation or identity. These aspects were determined in vivo as I worked with students throughout the school year. As I detail in later chapters, boys were given ties in a formal ceremony in the school, and over time some were given “gold” ties if they made the academic honor roll and others had their ties taken away completely if they interacted often with the school’s punitive system. I sampled from each of these categories as well as from the “average” students who retained their given ties. These boys mapped onto various aspects of perceived or enacted masculinity: boys who enacted “hypermasculine” ideas of masculinity, those who were quiet or shy, those boys that were academic achievers, and
others who had less heteronormative, or effeminate, displays of masculinity. I then compared across cases given that these diverse experiences could illuminate various aspects of how boys learn and assert masculinity. I also strived to make these boys representative of the larger sample by paying attention to various traits (e.g., GPAs, behavior, socioeconomic status as determined by parent occupation) as well as their masculine personas. These cases were selected to fulfill analytical generalizability (Yu, 2009). As such, variation in these cases provided foundation for the emergence of common patterns across these disparate cases (Wells, 2009).

The inclusion of these focal student cases ensured that student stories were at the forefront. Although social science research is typically termed “objective,” critical race theorists posit that without being cognizant of the experience of marginalized groups, research can distort or silence the epistemologies and experiences of people of color (Tate, 1997; Yosso & Solórzano, 2005). In this way, research can further edify deficit-orientations around people of color or other marginalized groups. The inclusion of focal cases in this dissertation, therefore, introduces the subjective experiences of students and guard against misrepresentation.

Table 3: Student Participant Characteristics (n=34)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sankofa House/Advisory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R1</td>
<td>Miguel Guzmán</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>James Baldwin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R2</td>
<td>Chris Vidal*</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>James Baldwin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R3</td>
<td>Bryant Goodman</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>James Baldwin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R4</td>
<td>Mason Wright</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>James Baldwin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R5</td>
<td>Brandon Mitchell</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>James Baldwin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R6</td>
<td>Grant Wilson</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>James Baldwin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R7</td>
<td>Tevon Baxter</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>James Baldwin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R8</td>
<td>Khaleel Dunn</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>James Baldwin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R9</td>
<td>Victor Fields</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>James Baldwin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Student Participant Characteristics (n=34)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Class</th>
<th>House</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R10</td>
<td>Isaiah Negasi</td>
<td>African-American, US Virgin Islands</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>James Baldwin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R11</td>
<td>Peter Cardenal*</td>
<td>Latino, Nicaraguan</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>James Baldwin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R12</td>
<td>Emari Sumpter</td>
<td>African</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>James Baldwin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R13</td>
<td>Quandell Bryant</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>James Baldwin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R14</td>
<td>Donovan Varick</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>James Baldwin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R15</td>
<td>Max Wright</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Jackie Robinson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R16</td>
<td>Jakeem Richards</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>John Lewis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R17</td>
<td>Joel Davis</td>
<td>Irish, Cherokee Indian, African-American</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Jackie Robinson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R18</td>
<td>Maurice Bolton</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>John Lewis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R19</td>
<td>Charles Barnett</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>John Lewis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R20</td>
<td>Danté Hill</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>13</td>
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<td>R21</td>
<td>Ryan Nelson</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>John Lewis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R22</td>
<td>Kayshawn Vega</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Jackie Robinson</td>
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<tr>
<td>R23</td>
<td>Chaquille Warner</td>
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<tr>
<td>R24</td>
<td>Edris Hayes</td>
<td>Black</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>R25</td>
<td>Isaiah Edwards</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Frederick Douglass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R26</td>
<td>David Sánchez</td>
<td>Honduran and Black</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Frederick Douglass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R27</td>
<td>Dymani Charles</td>
<td>Latino – Puerto Rican and Black</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Frederick Douglass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R28</td>
<td>Eric Chua*</td>
<td>Dominican</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Frederick Douglass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R29</td>
<td>Justin Miller</td>
<td>African and Native American</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Frederick Douglass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R30</td>
<td>Ellis Almonte*</td>
<td>Dominican</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Frederick Douglass</td>
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<tr>
<td>R31</td>
<td>Tyrese Stuart</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Frederick Douglass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R32</td>
<td>Calvin Dennison</td>
<td>Spanish and Black</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Frederick Douglass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R33</td>
<td>Hakeem Davis</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Frederick Douglass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R34</td>
<td>Jamal Andrews</td>
<td>Afro-Latino</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Frederick Douglass</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Race/Ethnicity in this table is students’ self-identification during interviews. The exact language that they used to identify their race/ethnicity is what is listed here. An asterisk (*) denotes students who are not black (n=4) but still participated in this study. For the 2016-2017 school year, the John Lewis and Jackie Robinson Houses operated as one combined house, which reflects the grouping of them together in my sampling here.

**Data Collection**

My approach to data collection employed a variety of qualitative methods.

Following in the traditions of qualitative research, I gathered multiple types of data to “build redundancy” or “triangulate” (Creswell, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). These multiple data sources built multiple perspectives into the research design, which better allowed for themes to emerge beyond theory. Triangulating data
sources and methods stressed both reliability and validity, as it countered shortcomings of any one method used on its own (Cho & Trend, 2006; Denzin, 1989). The qualitative methods that I used in this study included: critical ethnographic observation, document analysis of organizational literature, individual in-depth interviews, and student photo narrative projects. By triangulating these methods, I was able to confirm and cross-check “the accuracy of data obtained from one source with data collected from other [and] different sources” (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999, p. 131). In particular, I found it valuable to interview students one-on-one as this was the only time to ensure that they had individual space to voice their opinions and perspectives without any risk of peer interference. Additionally, as I discuss later in the Discussion chapter, I found that photo narratives were particularly revealing as boys were able to anchor their opinions and understandings of very abstract concepts, furthering conversation. The photos themselves were striking—I gained a viewpoint into boys’ lives outside of school that I would not have otherwise been able to gain access. This cross-checking was a priority in my study because it was important that as a researcher, I painted a realistic and accurate portrayal of the students from whose experiences this study draws upon.

Overall, I spent 1,000+ hours at Sankofa Collegiate during the 2016-2017 school year by observing 4-5 school days a week. This extended contact, qualitative study enabled me to observe: how masculine ideologies are developed by schools through habits and practices, how these practices may become routinized or transformed over time, and how masculinity rhetoric comes to reflect and constitute deeper social realities for students in terms of their own identities and perceived agency. The design of this study also allowed me to observe and use “stress” moments or critical incidents (moments of tension or
conflict) as points of conversation in interviews. Examples of critical incidents that would warrant further following up on via interview included particular fights that boys witnessed in school and news stories about black boys.

Qualitative research inherently produces a great deal of data for analysis. To keep my data organized and ready for analysis, it was of utmost importance to carefully consider my processes for data storage. To begin, I maintained an ongoing spreadsheet that kept track of different students (under pseudonym) and any pertinent observations with regard to masculinity or identity throughout data collection. This chart was a “living document” as it was updated continuously with new observations and insights about these different students. This spreadsheet kept me organized and also provided a schematic from which to draw from for my smaller in-depth sample, which ensured my sample’s representativeness. To stay organized, I typed up all of my fieldnotes within 24 hours after being in the field. I transcribed my interviews within two weeks after conducting them. I also created a separate folder for my daily analytical memos. Lastly, I created a data storage system on my computer that was password protected, which organized observations, interview and focus group transcripts, and analytical memos per focal case.

Below, I discuss in detail each of the key data collection methods that I used in this dissertation.

Organizational Literature and Physical Space

Sankofa, the single-sex school in this study, provided implicit as well as explicit messaging around what the school envisions its young men to look like with regard to masculinity, character, and academic success. As mentioned earlier, in order to create mission-driven single-sex public schools, these schools must explain how structure, context, and programming are designed to fit the unique needs of their student population.
It was therefore important to collect and review organizational literature (e.g., brochures, promotional admission materials, newsletters, annual reports, and mission statements). These materials unpacked how the school presents itself to and for young black boys and their families. Further, collecting this literature provided context around the school’s articulated and public framing of masculinity for its students, teachers, parents, and the broader community.

I was also interested in how the school visually defined and situated masculinity. This visual messaging took the form of literature posted around the school, posters, bulletin-boards, and flyers, to name a few. I included these materials and photos in my analysis and coded them in two rounds, along with the rest of my materials (see later in this chapter for more on data analysis). A physical assessment further elucidated how the school paints the space to be male—i.e., the posters, the visible mantras, school cultural pillars or mission statements can present visible representations of what the institution viewed as “successful” or “masculine.” To this end, LeCompte and Schensul (1999) recommend the drawing and redrawing of spatial maps to be able to describe the physical nature of a field site.

Berger and Luckmann (1967) explain how individually held beliefs maintain institutional structure, but are informed and reinforced through interpersonal interactions. In this way, language, or discourse, is the primary medium through which social construction of school culture takes place. Gee (2010) makes a distinction between Discourse (“big D” Discourse) and discourse (“little d” discourse). For Gee, Discourse refers to language in combination with other social practices or displays of social behavior (e.g., values, ways of thinking, culture-specific communities). On the other hand, Gee describes
discourse ("little d") as language-in-use. For both of these types, Gee considers language as situated and contextualized. Language is never neutral. As such, it was important to consider and document strategic use of language both by administrators, teachers and school-leaders as well as by students as political acts (Carter, 2005; Gee, 2010; Meadow, 2011; Pascoe, 2007). Studying language was critical to understand how the culture was constructed as well as how that school structure constructs or influences students as well (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Pascoe, 2007). This studying took place by reading and analyzing school communication, language used in school assemblies, or the particular phrases I observed used by teachers or students.

**Ethnography**

This dissertation draws upon ethnography as the primary means of situating myself as a researcher within the social world of my participants. Shank (2002) describes this method as a systematic and planned empirical inquiry into meanings and orientations participants have which are grounded in their “world of experience.” Ethnography is particularly relevant for this study as it offers a means to gain a full understanding of how the school frames masculinity and about how students negotiate these notions. As such, ethnography allowed me to “study individuals, communities, and phenomena in their own natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 3).

In other words, grounded in an interpretive and naturalistic approach, ethnography allows for a researcher to understand how others make sense of their experiences, rather than imputing boys’ motives, orientations, or beliefs (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). This research orientation allowed me to enter participants’ “conceptual world” and understand how they construct meaning from their experiences (Geertz, 1973).
To better accomplish this orientation, I take a critical ethnographic approach in this dissertation (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). This methodological approach prioritizes understanding participants in their historical, cultural, and social realities (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000; Madison, 2005). Critical ethnography spotlights the insights and knowledge of the entire context in which participants operate by being deliberate about being present in the space (Anderson, 1989; Dimitriadis, 2001). This methodological approach uncovered a full understanding of how black boys understand their masculinity, how their masculinity relates to school structures, and how their masculinity relates to their daily experiences outside of school. This epistemological frame was imperative for the study given that the study is about black masculinity and how black males are shaped by the realities of the school. This frame also addressed concerns of positionality (discussed later in this chapter), by acknowledging the complex realities of my participants and their realities to which I am an outsider.

This methodological orientation allowed for “thick description,” or a deeper description of participants’ cultural practices and life experiences within their own conceptual world (Geertz, 1973). In this way, ethnographies “recreate for the reader the shared beliefs, practices, artifacts, folk knowledge, and behaviors of a group of people” (Merriam, 2002, p. 9). Ethnographic description is interpretive and, as such, views participants as people, “rather than objects” (Geertz, 1973, p. 9). In this space, I pursued descriptive and reflective note-taking on informal and formal interactions (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). My fieldnotes (see Appendix A for observation protocol template) were structured for observations, or “pure” accounts, and delineated between these and impressions or comments (Adler & Adler, 1994). These notes were
either handwritten or typed depending on the circumstances, elaborated upon, and completed within 24 hours, which fostered fresh and immediate impressions (Luker, 2008).

My observations assisted me in constructing an understanding of the school as an organization. As single-sex schools must compile and create logics to support their formation, there were relatively formal routines, rituals, and practices that the school engaged in that structured organizational practices and culture. Observing rituals (e.g., “scholarship pledges,” morning meetings, mantras, or chants) was helpful to understand transparent messaging in the school of what is “dominant” and what is “normal” (Pascoe, 2007). These practices often work to cement what is acceptable and what is not in terms of belonging (Messner, 2002; Pascoe, 2007). Organizational routines may further reflect shared and well-established understandings that provide the grounding for instructional leaders and administrators to perform common work that is tied to specific standards and ideals, although it may take additional effort by teachers to transform and alter these practices (Feldman & Rafaeli, 2002).

Routines and practices undertaken by administrators and teachers presented opportunities to observe how masculinity was framed, how structures and practices attempted to shape student action and attitude, and whether or not they were effective for generating subsequent changes in identification and action for students. Through this approach, I aimed to observe patterns and rhetoric that espoused the traditional dominant norms of the schools in action, interaction, and thought. Further, Jerolmack and Khan (2014) write that when considering behaviors, ethnography may provide the most superior method as it accounts for the inconsistency between the “expressed attitudes” of
individuals and their actual behaviors: essentially walking the line between understanding what individuals say and what they do (p. 3).

In observing talk amongst and between teachers, between teachers and students, and amongst and between students, I noted the structures and content of discursive interactions and how they serve to either reinforce or challenge the existing and upheld logics of masculinity and success. I was able to understand how the school and the teachers or administrators within the school, do things with words, practices, and symbols to better understand messaging. In observations of students, the study of conversations and informal discourse teased apart how students used discursive strategies or “vocabularies of motive” to describe navigating the school environment (Mills, 1940).

As discussed earlier, I observed and shadowed the 6th grade, the entering class of the school. I shadowed these students four to five times per week for whole school days through their core academic subjects, electives, or extracurriculars, schoolwide or grade-wide assemblies, and informal meeting times such as lunch and sports practices. I also paid particular attention to the time that students spent within their houses (advisory groups), which were the groups with which boys attended classes and other activities throughout the school day. In these groups, the school provided boys the space to build a “brotherhood” and work on issues relating to character education as well as personal or socio-emotional needs. Within the classroom, I observed student interactions amongst and between one another as well as students’ interactions with teachers, and broadly, behaviors and attitudes of students (Ferguson, 2009). Within these observations, I took notes on individual or group-level behavior and attitudes, formal and informal conversations between teachers, teachers and students, or between students. I typically
took fieldnotes on my computer while in classrooms and used a notebook at times when a computer would have been inconvenient or would otherwise stand out (e.g. in basketball practices or in teacher meetings during which laptops were not permitted). Throughout all of these observations, it was important to see how teachers positioned students within the institution, how students saw themselves and one another, and how students were observed to be responding to school policies. This approach allowed me to see what values were uplifted and what values were marginalized.

Through focal case studies, observations allowed for comparison between students’ identity-work across grades.

**Interviews**

I conducted semi-structured individual interviews with students, teachers, and school administrators to learn how these actors understand and respond to the school’s (re)definitions of masculinity. In-depth interviews allowed for rich and detailed data on personal processes, which are otherwise hard to attain through observation alone (Merriam, 2009; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). It is not possible to observe an individual’s feelings, thoughts, intentions, or behaviors that have already taken place (Patton, 2002). Further, interviews allow the researcher to learn, through questioning and conversation, how
participants organize their world. Interviews uncover the meanings that individuals attach to components of their worlds. In all, interviewing essentially allows a researcher to enter into another person’s perspective (Patton, 2002).

For student interviews, my aim was to understand how boys “make sense” of the culture of their single-sex school and how its setting, mission, and practices shaped their conceptions of their agency, identities, and future aspirations (Weick, 2004). My questions for students (see Appendix C) prompted reflection of various components of their identities, including: race/ethnic identity, class, masculinity, and how they perceived their status with peers within the school. In-depth interviewing encouraged candid discussions about race and other salient characteristics (Shapiro, 2003). I believe that a safe interview space also encouraged less restrictive discussions on the intersections between race, gender, class, and sexuality.

I interviewed each student participant once using my interview protocol, and the interviews ranged from 55 to 90 minutes, depending on how vocal the interviewee was. I conducted these interviews during the last three months of the school year, after state exams, to ensure that I would not interfere with any critical school-based activities and to develop relationships with students over the beginning of the school year. Interviews occurred at school during non-class time including: before or after-school, during lunch, and during Friday free time. I typically used a free 6th grade classroom to conduct these interviews. Boys were generally very excited to have interview time; they talked about it as something special they were doing and as something to which they looked forward. As a result, I did not have a difficulty completing these interviews during the school year. I also conducted semi-structured interviews with teachers and school leaders to elicit their
understandings of the school culture as well as their perceptions of how students respond to the institutional messaging of the school (see Appendix B). I conducted these interviews during the same time of the year (the last few months of the school year) as the sixth graders’ interviews. I interviewed each adult that interacted with the sixth grade (see Table 2). These individuals included the sixth grade students’ three main classroom teachers, paraprofessionals, and other staff members such as the social worker, athletic director, and parent coordinator. I also interviewed one or two focal teachers from each grade to paint a picture of the staff experience at the school. I conducted these interviews in classrooms during the school-day, typically during the teacher’s prep or free period. These interviews lasted between 60 to 90 minutes, again depending on the interviewee. Teachers and school leaders elucidated the tacit understandings of whose knowledge and capital is valued in the school and which students are thought to be role models for others. Through interviews, I gained an understanding of what a quintessential “successful” young man in this school would look like with respect to masculinity. By interviewing both teachers and students, I was able to understand how all actors in the school perceive institutional messaging, including how students respond and react to these messages.

I constructed interview protocols to guide my conversations with respondents. The questions and structure of these protocols were flexible enough to allow for changes or shifts during the interview including: the questions that were asked, phrasing of questions, or the order of the questions themselves (Merriam, 2009). These open-ended, semi-structured interviews elicited deep and reflective responses from participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006). After conducting these interviews, I personally transcribed these
conversations “fully, accurately, and verbatim” to ensure that my research positioned students’ experiences with their own voices and in their own words (Rubin & Rubin, 2013).

**Student Photo Narrative Projects**

Students that I selected for in-depth interviews also created photo narratives about their experiences and identities (see Appendices C and D, respectively). Photos are both user- and kid-friendly, and were useful in exploring questions that might be more abstract (Becker, 2010; Clark-Ibanez, 2004; Dennis, Gaulocher, Carpiano & Brown, 2008; Sampson & Gifford, 2009). For younger participants especially, photo elicitation provided more concrete responses about abstract concepts. Many studies have found that photo elicitation yields more data from teen informants when compared to other methods (Dennis, Gaulocher, Carpiano & Brown, 2008; Samuels, 2004). Given that this dissertation studied identity, it was particularly useful to find multiple scaffolds for students to explore identity in ways that were more indirect or seemed less initially intrusive or awkward. As Dennis et al. (2008) find, photos can aid in participants communicating their interpretation of past experiences in comparison to direct questioning.

Guided by a protocol (Appendix D), students were asked to take multiple photographs that represented different parts of their identity both in and out of school. As a process matter, this became a project I needed to tightly manage as some boys would lose their photo protocols, or their cameras entirely. Boys were excited about the novelty in using a disposable camera as well. I did not have difficulty in asking the boys to do this project, but more difficulties arose in the logistics of having boys complete the project in a timely manner and return all materials. In having the power to take pictures, students had the opportunity to frame and define their own realities with little researcher influence (Clark-Ibanez, 2004; Samuels, 2004). Photographs can also reduce misunderstandings
because interview conversations are grounded by photos taken by the participant who has undoubtedly more understanding about its meaning (Harper, 2002). I found this to be true in my work as well. Boys were extremely talkative about their images, and were excited to share about what their image was about, and why they captured that image. It positioned me as the researcher in even more of a learning stance, which I find also mitigated any potential power dynamics. After taking these photos, students were asked to walk me through their collection of photos and explain what led them to photograph their final images. Since students took their own photos and then explained their choices, I gained insight into what guided their internal thought processes, and further elements of their lives that may not otherwise be captured in the images alone. Boys shared personal stories that otherwise would not have been discernible by looking at the image alone. Instead, their photos served as an anchoring image for boys to refer back to feelings and experiences that had happened in the past, and outside of school. In addition to anchoring the conversation, Harper (2002) argues that photos hone in on a particular part of the brain that is primed to induce feelings and memories.

In line with “counterstorytelling,” photo narratives ensured that student identities, voices, and experiences were not lost and that researcher subjectivity was minimized (Yosso, 2005). Counter-storytelling emerges from the traditions and intentions of critical race theory. Counter-storytelling is a “method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 26). Students’ photo projects operated as counter-narratives that challenged deeply entrenched and accepted understandings of people and communities. In using counter storytelling, I was able to better highlight the actual social realities of the often-marginalized group of black boys in
this study. In its simplest form, spotlighting the opinions and experiences of others that are not of the traditionally dominant culture is in and of itself a new or counter-narrative (Williams, 2004). This method also countered some concerns about positionality (discussed later in this chapter). These photos provided a safe space between me as the researcher and participants that eased conversations and traversed cultural boundaries when they were not shared (Clark-Ibanez, 2004; Harper, 2002).

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis includes the processes of “data reduction, data display, conclusion drawing and verification” (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 42). In qualitative research, these processes of data analysis can be pursued while still collecting data (Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Maxwell, 2005). For my dissertation, I engaged in ongoing, analysis in a number of ways. When writing up ethnographic field notes, I took note of any adjustments that needed to be made to my observational strategy or my note-taking protocol. I wrote ongoing analytic memos about my observations and my interviews. These memos served as an additional method to inform changes to my practices or to my protocols. Additionally, I personally transcribed my interviews and read through my interview transcripts on an ongoing basis, and wrote ongoing memos on each student in my study.

Through an initial read-through, I identified themes in my data and did some memoing on different themes that I was sourcing from my data. I then returned to the literature to better inform my ongoing analysis (Luker, 2008). Engaging in data analysis as an iterative process helped me develop my final frames of analysis for this project. As such, I approached this dissertation through a “logic of discovery” method rather than a “logic of verification” (Luker, 2008). While these frames “emerged” from the data, they were not wholly inductive, as frames were also informed by my theoretical framework. Specifically,
my theoretical framework pointed to analytical frames that were particularly relevant for my study. For example, I was interested in how different types of masculinities that students could espouse as well as how the school responded to or directed different “types” of masculinities. These frames were continuously revised and refined as I collected data and moved into a final round of analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

I conducted two formal rounds of data analysis in this dissertation. The first round of data analysis, coding, began with my initial frames of analysis after the formal school year. As the first step of my data reduction, coding was used to condense and summarize my data into salient categories (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Saldana, 2009). After some manual coding, I used NVivo to aid me in reading through and coding (for a second time) all of my field notes, interview transcripts, photo narrative projects, and artifacts (i.e. photographs, curriculum, etc.). I then used these codes to conduct a deductive analysis within a master data matrix of my thematic findings. This approach allowed for both within- and across-case analyses of the students’ experiences (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Specifically, I created individual case studies of each student participating in the study, and looked for themes between students as to how they experienced the school’s practices.

Within-case analyses aided in identifying emerging themes within each coded category. Using these emerging themes, I revisited the data in an inductive analysis. This allowed me to modify my initial codes as well as create new “emergent” codes (Miles & Huberman, 1984). While coding, I also looked for relationships between different coded categories and clustered them into larger analytic categories. I then looked across these clusters to find emergent patterns and themes that led to larger theoretical concepts (Maxwell, 2005). I then created a master matrix of my thematic findings. All in all, these
processes of iterative coding and analysis encouraged a recursive process of deductive and inductive analyses within this project.

Lastly, qualitative studies tend to gather a large amount of data, so it was particularly necessary to carefully select which data to use. This selection is an integral part of the analytic process (Rudestam & Newton, 2014). It was therefore important to identify data that were extraneous to the analytical aims of this dissertation (Neumann, 2006; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Maxwell, 1992). Doing so further guarded against threats to the data’s internal validity. As I analyzed and prepared to report data, I paid particular attention to “disconfirming data” to ensure that my data covered all cases. I also took note of the “cultural stories” that my participants shared and what specifically (e.g., logics, experiences, justifications) they drew upon to evidence their stories (Luker, 2008). Since I was interested in these boys’ identities along with organizational messaging and language, I prioritized foregrounding original language in my analysis and reporting.

**Ethics**

I considered many ethical issues while conducting this dissertation given the sensitive nature of student participants and of the topic. Ensuring confidentiality, then, was a primary concern. To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were given to each participant and any other identifying information was masked. These pseudonyms were used in all displays of data for confidentiality. Additionally, all of the data stored on my computer were password protected. This protected records that could be otherwise used to link identifying information to my observational records or interview transcripts. For instructional staff, I explained that their comments would not be shared with administrators, their colleagues, students’ parents or guardians, or students themselves. I
provided students with assurances that I would not report what they said to parents, teachers, administrators, or other students. I also provided students with examples of exceptions of admissions that I would be mandated to report (e.g., safety concerns). Further, I explained to respondents that when I ultimately shared findings, nothing that they said would be attached to their name and that their identities would be masked in my reporting.

Another ethical priority was addressing potential power imbalances that can occur between study participants and the researcher. As Marshall and Rossman (2011) write, “research fundamentally involves issues of power” (p. 112). These issues are inherent to conducting research, but they can be mediated with care and consideration. Given the current educational accountability context, teachers may be suspicious when being observed or questioned about their work. I did not want teachers to feel as if there were “high stakes” attached to their participation in this study or that participation could affect their employment status in any way, positive or negative. In recruiting teachers for the study, I had one-on-one conversations to discuss Informed Consent and any questions that they might have about what my role would be in the school. I made clear that there was no expectation by me, or by administrative staff, that they would participate. These conversations went well, as I had no teachers or other school staff abstain from participating in this study.

Students are also subject to the effects of potential power imbalances. Students may have seen me as similar to a teacher in terms of authority and could therefore position me as someone to whom they must be deferent. It was therefore important that I cultivated relationships with students so that they did not feel as though they had to give me the
“right answers” or that their participation was mandatory or related to academic standing. When I introduced myself to the boys, I told them that I had been a teacher at a different school, but I was here to learn about them and their experiences. I shared that I would not be grading them, and I would not be one of their teachers. Overall, it was paramount that I ensured that participants did not feel coerced or pressured into participation by being very clear about the purposes (risks and benefits) of the study and asking for and obtaining clear consent before pursuing any lines of inquiry. I ensured open lines of communication with parents had they any concerns throughout the school year. As I constructed meaning from and with my participants, it was vital that this information was not obtained in a way that could cast doubt on its veracity. Lastly, I prioritized reciprocity in this dissertation. Rather than merely “taking” information, I found opportunities to “give back” to my research participants and the school site. As Walker (1999) describes reciprocity, it is more than refraining from “doing the community no harm,” but in attempting to “do the community some good.” To accomplish the latter, I engaged in what Feldman (2003) referred to as “commitment acts.” These commitment acts embody the researcher’s humility and gratitude for the participation of others. Examples of these acts I engaged in for teachers included: making copies, chaperoning fieldtrips, going on coffee runs, taking students to the nurse, or working with a small group of students during class. For students, I provided tokens of reciprocity during interviews, such as buying them small snacks and provided help with homework.

Reciprocity and sharing findings also has its risks. Given the sample size, even sharing anonymous responses with administrators could lead them to connect students and teachers with their comments. Sharing findings, therefore, was done in aggregate and
in a way that masked individual identity of respondents. I did not share which sixth
graders were participating in this study with administrators. Sharing findings did not occur
until the end of this project, given that I wanted to refrain from impacting the school’s
practices while I was still conducting the study. At the end of the school year, I met with the
Principal to discuss some of my early conjectures, and we set up other times to chat over
the following school year. I also informally checked in with teachers over the next school
year. Lastly, I performed member checks with students to see if my interpretation of their
comments rang true for them.

I was reflective in this process, given that it was critical to constantly evaluate and
negotiate the precarious balance of maintaining reciprocity and refraining from influencing
the behaviors of my participants. In doing the community good in broader terms, it is my
hope that this study can inform practitioners and policymakers and be useful to parents
and students when considering the single-sex school as a schooling option for young boys
of color.

**Positionality**

As a part of the qualitative research tradition, interviews and ethnographic
observations require that the researcher be the primary instrument of both data collection
and analysis (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995). All information that was collected and analyzed
was mediated through me, the researcher. As the researcher, it was crucially important for
me to be aware of and reflect upon my positionality while conducting this project.

To begin, it was vital for me to consider the key dimensions on which I was an
insider and those on which I was an outsider to my research setting as well as my
participants. As a woman who is not black and has not grown up in New York City, I was
ostensibly an outsider to having experienced many facets of black male students’
racial/ethnic and gendered identities. I therefore considered my demographic traits in whether I would be able to gain access to parts of the school environment or physical space that would be valuable to study, but restrictive (e.g., physical education locker rooms, bathroom breaks, weight rooms). Aside from this, ethnographers are always, to some degree, outsiders to their participants’ realities. Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (2011) refer to this as “ethnographic marginality.” Given my marginality, interviews and access to students were beneficial where my access was limited.

Feldman et al. (2003) note that although shared identity with participants can gain trust, shared identity can also decrease the need for explanations as participants can assume shared knowledge. Further, researchers who share identity traits with their participants may result in making incorrect inferences in assuming that one understands what participants speak about shared traits or experiences. In this way, more access does not necessarily guarantee more information. As an outsider, in this sense, I was able to ask questions that an insider might not. I would regularly ask students questions, and I never received any type of push back that would suggest I should already know the answer. In my role, I prompted participants to explain their thinking, which they may have understood or anticipated given our differences.

Although there were some defining traits that made me an outsider to this world, there were other traits that positioned me as an insider. I am a former teacher who taught in a single-sex public school for boys in New York City, and as such, I may have had some insights that assisted in my data collection and analysis. Becker (1996) argues that a researcher’s relevant past experiences can serve as comparative examples that can provide opportunities for questions and generative insights. Further, my position as an insider
aided my ability to provide reciprocity and gain trust from school leaders, teachers, and students given that I have previously worked in a similar school environment. Teachers regularly thought of me as another teacher, with a similar background and understanding, rather than as a researcher. As an insider, however, I also had a previous archetype of what single-sex schools that serve predominantly black boys “should” or “could” look like.

Overall, it was important to be aware of my positionality—as both an insider and outsider—and how this positionality conditioned the lens through which I collected and interpreted data.

Reflecting upon my positionality was an ongoing process that began in data collection and continued into analysis. Again, given that the researcher is the primary instrument of gathering and analyzing data, “the preeminent skill for conducting qualitative research is reflexivity” (Luttrell, 2009, p. 4). This reflexivity was ongoing, because as Erikson (1986) notes, data is not simply what is collected during observations or interviews; instead, data is constituted during analysis, influenced by the schema and cultural lens that the researcher brings to the data. As I collected and analyzed my data, I wrote daily reflexive memos that helped me be deliberate about reflecting on my potential biases and frames of interpretation. I wanted to ensure that I was basing my analysis on my data and not on any prior experience in a similar school setting or working with a similar population of students. These memos also led me to consider how my identity impacted the data that I collected, which also illuminated changes I should make in my work (Erikson, 1986). For example, through memoing, I would often make strategic decisions about where to spend my time the next day, given the gaps in my current understandings. In this way, reflexivity was an ingrained and referential part of my work.
One challenge of my positionality, was being an adult who was “in-between” official roles. In particular, not being a teacher, but of course still being an adult, presented challenges at times. For example, I found myself stepping in if there were safety concerns (e.g., fighting) in a classroom because it otherwise would have felt unethical for me to watch students hurt each other. At other times, I did not report students’ misbehaviors to teachers or administrators both to not betray student trust and also because I was not a teacher.

**Conclusion**

As described above, my dissertation uses a multi-modal qualitative case study approach which allowed me to learn more about the entire process of how masculinity is framed for boys through organizational practices and culture and how boys reify, resist, and respond to these definitions. I used various qualitative methods in this study including: ethnographic observations, in-depth interviews, and photo elicitation projects with students. My study was positioned to elaborate upon the existing research base, and as such, was positioned to gather rich, deep data with a relatively small number of participants, all belonging to one single-sex school context. As such, my findings that follow are not generalizable to a well-defined population beyond the school in this study.

In the next four chapters, I discuss my findings from my dissertation research. My first findings chapter, Chapter 4, returns to and refines my original conceptual framework as a result of my fieldwork. In this chapter, I present a revised framework guided by how perceptions condition and ground the process of structure and agency for black boys in this school, using data to substantiate how this occurs at each level of the process. This revised framework is in itself a finding of this study, and further sets up the remaining findings chapters. In Chapter 5, I discuss the organizational practices tied to how boys’ displays of
masculinity are “seen” by others, and how this results in regulation of black boys’ bodies in the space and increased punishment. I additionally describe the various ways boys resist the organizational culture, and the consequences that the boys experience as a result of their actions. Chapter 6 unpacks the concept of brotherhood, which was positioned by boys as integral to developing masculinity. I also explore how boys’ understandings and expressions of brotherhood were perceived negatively by school staff. My last findings chapter, Chapter 7, discusses boys’ concepts of manhood and masculinity, and describes the ways in which their understandings of masculinity contend and conflict with that of the school’s. Lastly, I conclude this dissertation by offering implications and future directions for this research.
CHAPTER FOUR: Confronting Double-Consciousness: Coming of Age and Coming to Terms with Masculinity and Whiteness

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


“and as the rest of the world watches, we still try to learn how to see ourselves”

– Mychal Denzel Smith, *Invisible Man, Got the Whole World Watching: A Young Black Man’s Education*

“‘Get used to me, I am not getting used to anyone’ I shouted my laughter to the stars”

– Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967)

**Introduction**

In this chapter, I apply W. E. B. Du Bois’ concept of double-consciousness to how boys experience schooling at Sankofa Collegiate. There have been many readings of double-consciousness over the years, but for this dissertation I am using the reading of double-consciousness as an understanding of one’s self through the white gaze—trying to reconcile two competing versions of perception into one “self-conscious manhood” (Du Bois, 1903). This concept of double-consciousness, or understanding oneself through the perception of that self by others, was a prevalent theme during my time at Sankofa Collegiate. The boys intimated at feelings of being watched, judged, and perceived in a negative light by outside society, in particular by white individuals whom they did not know. In their words with the students, adults also highlighted the concern of the boys being looked at in the wrong way, and expressed being tasked with countering a deficit orientation of the boys in the “real world.” Both adults and students described the need for
boys to overcome a fixed reputation that inheres in the perception of outside gatekeepers—that were white, different, and powerful.

With respect to my first research question, I find that Sankofa’s structural practices—including the uniform policy, disciplinary system, and other rituals of self-presentation in voice and in space—were conditioned by adults’ notions and worries about how the boys could potentially be negatively perceived in the “outside” world by others, most specifically, by white individuals. The language and the rationale that adults used to describe these practices contained notions of care and protection. These practices were precautionary measures to protect boys from being read or perceived by others as the “dangerous, or violent” black boys stereotype.

Similarly, I find that boys had their own perceptions of how they themselves were being seen by others. Every boy in my sample articulated that they believed white people saw them in a demeaning, or deficit-oriented way, although some boys articulated feeling this weight more heavily than others. These findings are integral to understanding boys’ individual concepts of identity and agency (as framed in my third research question). Boys also differed in how they understood the intentions behind the school’s practices. Some boys rationalized these practices as the adults in the school being protective or that the practices were meant to keep them safe given the way they are seen in the outside world. The boys that made these allowances for the practices, and for the adults that enacted these practices, fared better in school and were rarely entangled with the school’s disciplinary system. The boys that did not articulate this notion—that school practices were there for their protection in the outside world—were students that regularly faced punishment. These boys regularly rejected the school’s practices and described them as meaningless or “extra”—i.e., that the
school was trying to control them. This finding lays groundwork for my second research question, as it provides an initial answer to how boys perceive of the school culture with respect to masculinity.

In what follows, I investigate how the white gaze impacts the boys’ experiences at Sankofa. As a result of my fieldwork, I return to the conceptual framework that I presented in Chapter Two, and examine how double-consciousness can be thought as operating at multiple, overlapping levels within a school's organizational setting.

**Double-Consciousness and the White Gaze**

W. E. B. Du Bois first introduced his concept of double consciousness in *Souls of Black Folk* (1903). The term is first included in the essay entitled “Strivings,” in which Du Bois describes how African-Americans are

born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, – a world which yields to him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. (Du Bois, 1897, p. 10)

Although the veil conceals, it allows those behind it a “second-sight”: the ability to see oneself through the eyes of white Americans. Du Bois writes about how white Americans distinguish themselves from black folks such that white Americans constitute “the other world.” This “second sight,” then, offers access to the perceptions of whites that may otherwise not be available or accessible to blacks.

African-Americans are occluded, however, by the veil that Du Bois describes. This veil prohibits the ability to be fully seen by others, or even by themselves. Du Bois (1903) describes this sense of alienation from oneself as “being an outcast and stranger in mine own house” (pp. 10–11). Second sight affords African-Americans the ability to see clearly the nature and realities of the dominant white majority, such that racial exclusion is positioned in stark comparison to the ideal democratic principles of the United States. Du Bois writes
how this creates the likelihood for a false self-consciousness, as the self-consciousness is conditioned by and constituted through “second sight,” which includes the racist and prejudiced worldviews whites hold of blacks. This relational dichotomy positions African-Americans as knowledgeable about the “majority,” dominant, white culture, while simultaneously forbidden from entry.

Du Bois’ sense of the other differs from other sociological conceptions of otherness (e.g., Mead’s 1934 concept of “significant others”), in that the relationship between the minority and the majority in this case is conditioned by power, and creates an “enduring hyphenation” or “twoness.” In “Strivings,” Du Bois describes clairvoyance as one outcome of second sight. In being veiled from true knowing by others, and as a function of the veil, African-Americans, in their ability to witness the true character of the other, can gain a “clear idea of what America really is,” this reality unseen by the white majority (p. 416). The consequence of this second sight, conditioned at least in part by racism by the majority as well as the partial invisibility of the “minority,” is a sense of “twoness” that positions African-Americans squarely as “other.” This alienation from oneself, however, initiates double-consciousness, which Du Bois describes as follows:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, —an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (Du Bois, 1903, p. 10)

Attaining a "self-conscious manhood" requires one to “merge his double self into a better and truer self” in which neither of the previous selves are lost or abandoned (p. 10). Conditioned by a sense of “otherness,” the power imbalance inherent in the relationship of the African-American self to others creates what Du Bois terms a “moral hesitancy that is fatal to self-
confidence” (Du Bois, 1903, p. 127). In this case, the “moral hesitancy” that Du Bois describes emerges from the refusal (or ignorance) of others to acknowledge the humanity of the African-American self. These negative (mis)perceptions create a sense of alienation with one's self, and are difficult for African-Americans to shed. This difficulty creates dilemmas with regard to self-recognition. As Du Bois describes it, these misperceptions create “all sorts of ways we are hemmed in” (p. 127). As a result, the possibilities of knowing the self are restricted and conditioned by outside perceptions.

Du Bois argues that self-recognition necessarily involves the interconnected recognition of one’s cultural identity along with the cultural identities of others that belong to one’s community (Gilroy, 1993). Identity and self-recognition are therefore socio-culturally embedded and context-specific as well as socially mediated (Meer, 2018, Owens-Moore, 2015). The true power in transforming the status quo of things is to move from the double-consciousness that one is ascribed to an agentic consciousness, in which one is able to construct one’s own identity so that it is a self that is wholly self-recognized and embraced.

Double-consciousness is not a static condition, however. Many scholars argue that there is an emancipatory possibility in Du Bois’ description of resolving the conflict of the “twoness” (Gooding-Williams, 2009, Reed, 1997). For Du Bois, the merging of the two split selves can occur only if and when white prejudice of blacks has been eradicated from popular culture. This eradication requires a rehabilitation of the “other world’s” perspective of black individuals, and also from the ways in which black individuals’ second-sight. This double-recognition of equality of blacks, by whites as well as by blacks through their second-sight, can help to overcome double-consciousness.
Conceptual Framework Revisited

In Chapter Two, I presented my original conceptual framework for this dissertation. In what follows, I revise that conceptual framework given the vast importance outside perceptions appeared to have at Sankofa in defining and enacting organizational structures, the process by which boys negotiated these structures, the actions boys took to reify, resist, or revise these structures, and lastly how boys understood themselves and their identities. The tension that Du Bois first articulates in 1903, was still very much present at Sankofa Collegiate, and is relevant to considering how black boys may understand themselves both at Sankofa Collegiate as well as in contemporary society.

To begin, I consider how this framework operates in and is conditioned by larger social perceptions of black boys, and I explore how the concept of double-consciousness operates at multiple levels. After reviewing my initial conceptual framework, and making a case for the inclusion of outside perceptions, I then present examples from my fieldwork that highlighted these instances of double-consciousness at various levels of my framework (at the level of “structures,” the level of the “individual,” and the interaction between the “structures” and the “individual”).

Review and Revision of the Model: The Role of Perception

In brief, my conceptual framework (Figure 1) augments and expands Sewell’s (1979) framework for structure and agency. For this study, I conceptualize “structure” in Sewell’s original model as structural practices. These structural practices consist of schemas and resources that can take the shape of norms, standards, ways of knowing, or beliefs that condition the culture of the school. Further, these practices prescribe an organizational culture that boys can choose to reify, revise, or reject.
Rather than positioning structure as directly informing agency, I introduce the concept of **negotiation**, or decision-making, into this relationship. I argue that students negotiate the reconciliation between their existing selves and the versions of their “selves” promoted or accepted by the school. In doing so, students may experience dissonance or tension in attempting to reconcile the two contextually different “selves.” I argue that these moments of negotiation involve instances in which students’ “selves” (or their “habitus”) fractures to navigate the uniquely homosocial environment of Sankofa Collegiate.

Through their **agency**, students may engage in a diversity of responses for the reconciliation of selves. For example, students may reify school-centered notions of masculinity, resist these practices entirely, or revise their understandings of masculinity in such a way that it is both authentic to themselves as well as embraced by the school.

Lastly, my framework argues that structural practices, through negotiation, also inform the construction of an individual’s **identity**. One’s identity informs what, and what types of, actions a student may or may not take. Those actions additionally constitute the self. In sum, I return to Sewell’s (1979) notion of agency in informing how structures (schemas and resources) are reproduced in the environment or how individual student actions can in fact transform school-level organizational practices.
In this chapter, I expand my original conceptual framework to include how racialized and gendered (mis)perceptions of black boys condition and inform this framework (*Figure 4*). The cycle of structure and agency does not exist in a vacuum, but instead are permeated by outside perceptions. I argue it is incomplete to consider the cycle of structural practices and the negotiation and identity practices that inform a student’s agency without appreciating the context in which this framework operates. This framework includes the perceptions that ground and condition each of these pieces of the framework. This chapter demonstrates how double-consciousness operates at multiple, overlapping levels in this framework. As such, this chapter provides a foundation and answer to all three of my research questions. Double-consciousness undergirds and conditions structural practices, boys’ interpretations of these practices, and boys’ concepts of masculinity outside of schooling.
In what follows, I describe how the concern about the misperceptions of black boys by “outside” individuals (namely, white individuals) informed what structural practices were created, and how these practices were enacted by institutional agents (i.e., the principal and teachers). This chapter section answers my first research question as it explicate the rationale through which structural practices are enacted by adults in the school. In particular, I highlight how double-consciousness operates at the structural level and conditions the ways in which adults enact practices.

Black boys at Sankofa attend school in what is a largely racially and socioeconomically homosocial environment. In this environment, they encounter highly prescriptive organizational routines, rituals, and practices that promote boys becoming a particular type of man. In encountering these notions, I argue that these moments spur a negotiation in which students’ “selves” (or their “habitus”) fractures in order to navigate this uniquely homosocial environment. As a result, students may experience dissonance or tension in attempting to reconcile the two contextually different “selves.” This dissonance or tension involved in this negotiation parallels the very same tension Du Bois writes about with respect to merging the selves under double-consciousness. Outside perceptions also guide the negotiation that occurs, the actions that boys take, and their identity concepts, as well as the interrelation between these three elements.

Double-consciousness has traditionally been taken to describe the individual experience of a black person in society—an experience of feeling as if one’s identity is split, or divided. This experience of “looking at one’s self through the eyes of others” is embodied within the division of the self, which makes it difficult to consider a black identity as unified, or stable (Du Bois, 1903). As such, this self is fractured. Du Bois (1903) writes that double-
consciousness makes it difficult for black Americans to reconcile both being black and being American in a society governed by white perceptions and archetypes or stereotypes that are reproduced by those in power.

One example in *The Souls of Black Folk*, which highlights this tension well, is the experience of the black artisan. The artisan is torn between producing goods that he feels reflect his artistic point of view and his lived experience versus producing goods that appeal to a variety of people—goods that are marketable to people to whom he is different. The artisan is tasked with a choice: creating art that expresses and reflects himself, but is not accepted by broader society and therefore less marketable, or creating work that is less self-referential, but has greater universal appeal, and may therefore bring him greater success, though albeit at the cost of reflecting his true self through his art.

Similar to the artisan, boys at Sankofa Collegiate may also find themselves in a similarly tough spot as they negotiate whether or not they will embrace the culture of Sankofa, which is aligned to position them to be perceived as less of a threat by society. For boys at Sankofa, they are caught between: 1) identifying and acting in a way that feels true to themselves, though maybe not firmly accepted by society, and therefore Sankofa, or 2) acting and identifying in a way that is more palatable to white outsiders and in line with Sankofa's school culture, though potentially less likely to feel genuine or authentic to oneself.
I first examine how boys experience double-consciousness at an individual level. Double-consciousness is a part of students’ experiences as black boys in the world, operating at an individual level, which I am referring to in this framework as *individual double-consciousness*. This is the traditional use and understanding of the term. Students experience their own levels of double-consciousness—processing how they are perceived by others, specifically through the white gaze and attempting to reconcile that with their own selfhood. The boys’ experience with and reaction to outside perceptions conditions how they experience the structures of the school as well as how they negotiate those structures with their own selfhood.

Throughout my time at Sankofa, boys frequently described instances in which they experienced racism from white individuals in their everyday lives. These instances of how
others see them appeared to condition how boys described their own understandings of
temselves. Boys typically framed their identities and characteristics in terms of what they
are “not”—as opposed to what they are—the “not” being defined by outside, white others.
These descriptions would be reactionary, or in opposition to a misperception or assessment
by a white individual. As I detail below, these outside perceptions condition how boys think
about their identities, masculinities, and agency.

Reputation and Stereotypes
All black boys in my sample described in interviews or off-handedly throughout my
fieldwork that they believed white people consistently held negative perceptions of them,
simply because they were black boys. For example, Joel Davis articulated in his interview
that he and his family were being negatively and incorrectly perceived by others. Joel is a
fairly quiet and attentive young boy. He’s one of the younger students in sixth grade, and
cries when he is upset or frustrated by the actions of his peers. Joel is multiracial—his father
is black with Native American ancestry and his mother is white. Joel described what he
believed the negative view that white people have of black people as follows: “Some white
people will say, like they’ll say ‘every black person is a criminal’ and that’s not true because
my dad was not a criminal. And my behavior is good.”

Joel’s case demonstrates how boys experience and make sense of white perception as
full of vast generalizations about black people. Joel identified these generalizations as untrue
for him and his family, though he still found these stereotypes deeply upsetting. Like his
peers, Joel filtered his explanation through what other (white) people think of people who
look like him before providing himself and his father as a counter-example to what he
perceives as a dominant narrative. This filtering, or two-step sensemaking, is illustrative of
double-consciousness experienced at an individual level; one must make sense of who they are through what they are not.

Danté Hill is in the same class as Joel. In humanities class one day, students were discussing racial prejudice with Ms. Renaud. Danté is a jovial and sensitive student, as he is quick to feel hurt or angry when teased. He is one of the bigger students in the grade, both in terms of size and in height. In class, he described a time recently in which he was walking with another friend in the park and he crossed paths with a white woman and her young son. Danté recalled how he overheard the woman tell her son, “you need to watch out for black boys. They are rough.” In describing the event, Danté was shaking his head and in a booming voice said, “white people be like that though, even though we’re not all the same. They don’t know me.”

Although he was able to shrug it off, Danté’s experience of racism stuck with him. Even at later points in the year, he would return to this example and use it to describe how he was not “what people thought.” Danté described himself in terms of what he is not, “I’m not rough like people think, I’m nice! My mom says I’m like a teddy bear.” Danté, like the vast majority of his peers, exhibited a sense of double-consciousness by referring to themselves and their identities within the context of disproving common misperceptions people had of them.

**Shared Identity**

Throughout the year, in multiple instances, boys expressed the notion that they were being watched and judged by others. These instances reflect the traditional concept of double-consciousness: being aware of how other (i.e. white) people are looking at them. The boys at Sankofa additionally remarked that they needed to actively counter misperceptions of their identity held by outside others.
Boys referred to the way that they were “seen” by others as ostensibly negative, and as something they would need to overcome. One day, Mr. Franklin was leading the morning meeting for one of the grade’s three advisory groups. He was reading a report to the students about their behavior the day before with a substitute teacher. The report included cursing, running out of the room, throwing things at the teacher and at each other, and fighting in the classroom. As he finished reading this report, he told the students, “there’s nothing that we don’t know here.” He asked the students, “What does that make you think?”

In response, Jakeem Richards shook his head and looked down, and said with a frustrated tone in his voice, “We are at Sankofa Collegiate, not Dodo Collegiate. We look like hoodlums; people are looking at us the wrong way.” Interestingly, Jakeem is one of the students who threw an item directly at the substitute teacher. Jakeem is a jovial boy, and quite social. He can usually be found holding court with his close friends at school. He finds himself in trouble frequently, as he does not always listen to rules or requests by his teachers (e.g., to put a toy away) and often finds it difficult to disengage from peers that tease him. At times, his verbal fights escalate to physical ones. Afterwards, he can discuss calmly what he could have done better in the situation, though he remains frustrated.

In his comment, Jakeem referenced many different facets of being perceived by others. To begin, he first clarified that the students are attending Sankofa Collegiate, seemingly a school with some prestige, and their behavior is not smart, or does not match the prestige of their school. Secondly, Jakeem likened himself and his classmates to “hoodlums,” with particular regard to how he and his classmates look, or appear to others. Lastly, he mentioned that there is a right way and a “wrong” way to be looked at, and for Jakeem, their behavior indicated that people would look at them the “wrong” way. Here, although the
misbehavior represents some, though not all, of the group, they all will be looked at the wrong way.

This notion reflects how Du Bois positioned one’s identity as interconnected with the identities of others that reflect shared characteristics and belonging to one’s community. Jakeem doesn’t make clear exactly what the consequences are of being looked at the “wrong” way, but he is deeply attuned to how he is perceived by others. This perception, however, did not guide him to make a different choice while the substitute teacher was present, but upon reflection and in concert with the other boys’ behavior in the room, that perception is now more firmly entrenched.

In the same conversation, Maurice Bolton also described how the group is seen as less-than by an anonymous “they.” Maurice is a student who alternates between being very quiet or even withdrawn to argumentative with his teachers, but only those that are male. Being somewhat shy, Maurice observes his peers a good deal and is a thoughtful young person. He would regularly have insights on the material he was reading in class and would offer keen observations in class discussions. In the context of this conversation, Maurice said off-handedly to another student, “people don’t think we Sankofa. We’re boys of color—they already think less of us.”

Maurice’s comment reflects that the boys are all seen as a unit, as a part of the population at Sankofa, but their behavior is causing other outsiders to doubt that they are a part of this school. Their image, and the quality of their image, is in doubt given their behavior. He additionally identifies himself as well as the other boys of the room in acknowledging that they are all boys of color, but goes further on to say that an anonymous or omnipresent “they” already think less of them.
An interesting distinction that both Jakeem and Maurice highlight is that Sankofa offers a certain bit of prestige *above* the traditional perception of a black boy. A black boy at Sankofa, versus a black boy not at Sankofa, should be perceived a bit better than what is to be expected. Maurice highlights this well, in describing a “they” that already think less of them, but that the Sankofa name is supposed to afford them a bit of privilege. Here additionally, Maurice and Jakeem connect their behaviors to how they are perceived, or the image that they maintain. In particular, the behaviors that they enact can be viewed as potentially altering how they are perceived by others, so they could be perceived in a deficit-oriented manner. As young as ten, sixth grade boys are aware of this negative perception, and that behaviors can further entrench this negativity, but other than this, it is not clear what the consequences are for these negative perceptions, or what is in the boys’ control to manage.

**Control and Consequence**

Throughout my fieldwork, the boys in my study regularly a lack of control or power over their lives, and in particular, over how racism affected how they were perceived by others. Boys described the tension of having to counter false narratives about who they were without having people who looked like them in power to support this process of providing counter-narratives.

On another day in Ms. Renaud’s humanities class, the boys were continuing a lesson about racial injustice through the teaching of Melba Patillo-Beals’ autobiographical novel, *Warriors Don’t Cry*. The novel chronicles Melba’s, and the other members of the Little Rock Nine’s, attempts to integrate Little Rock Central High School. Ms. Renaud and the boys were reading a passage from *Warriors Don’t Cry* in which Melba was treated poorly by one of her teachers. Ms. Renaud had the following discussion with her students:
Ms. Renaud: Who decides what differences on appearance matter?

Zackary Hollis: I think individual people decide.

Charles Barnett: You’re the only one who gets to decide in here.

Ms. Renaud: Who is in charge?

[Multiple Voices]: The KKK, the Police, white people.

Maurice Bolton: The People who make our laws –

Danté Hill: Cops kill black people, and now with Donald Trump there will be more stuff and people that thinks we’re bad and we’re in more trouble because he’s racist and he’s in charge. We have to be more careful.

Maurice: Yeah, nothing we can do about that.

In this exchange, the students express that people who look like them may not have a lot of control or power in the world. Many voices in the room call out that white people are in charge, and even a hate group can determine whose appearances are valuable, and whose are not. At one moment, Zackary Hollis, who is the first student to answer Ms. Renaud’s question, explains that this power rests with individual people. Charles Barnett, is quick to interrupt and tell Zackary that it’s he who gets to decide in that classroom. Zackary is biracial (white and black) and is very light-skinned in comparison to his classmates. Charles, a darker skinned black boy, in many previous instances along with other classmates, including Maurice and Danté above, have referred to Zackary as white and a “suck-up,” and as someone who thinks he is better than his classmates. Through this comment, Charles signifies to Zackary that his position is relatively better off than all of the others. That he “passes,” and as such, would be the only individual in the room to have control over a particular situation.
For Charles and the others, they mention institutions or much larger figures that are removed from their everyday lives—such as the police, the KKK, as well as Donald Trump—as determining how their appearances are perceived. Here, the lack of control over this perception is tied to the boys’ fears. As Danté explains, “there will be more stuff and people that thinks we’re bad...we’re in more trouble.” Here, Danté connects his lack of control, and the sheer number of individuals who may think of him and those who look like him negatively, before then advising his group of classmates to “be more careful.”

This study took place during a presidential election year, and a fairly tumultuous one at that. The campaign, and subsequent election of Donald Trump led to a lot of deep conversations and aired worries from students about what implications his presidency might have for them and those that look like them. In the day following the election, teachers held circles for students to discuss their feelings and their worries. Like any other students, Charles Barnett discussed the disappointment he felt with the outcome of the election. As Charles said,

I feel this is like a rainy day. Because, this is the time for us to get together and show them that we’re not those types of people that Donald Trump and white people think we are. That’s not what we do, or what we came from. I’m sad because I don’t know if any one will ever think differently about us, and we aren’t in charge anymore [referencing Obama’s presidency]. We’re not safe anymore.

Charles’ worry reflects the lack of control he, and others who look like him, have over the false perceptions that other white people may have. He wants to counter the idea that they don’t represent “those types of people.” Further, he worries that these perceptions will lead to actions that will create unsafe conditions for boys. Interestingly, Charles connects the moment when Obama was in office as a time where there was more control over these
negative perceptions, and that they were safe. It’s possible that if black boys were to see more representation of black individuals in power, they may feel less disempowered or defeatist about the possibility of countering negative narratives about people who look like them.

Maurice Bolton echoed this understanding. In his class conversation about the election, Maurice shared that “knowing that Trump’s racist, white, or a different skin color than us, he could do anything to us. He could kick black people out of America and just keep white people, but I hope that doesn’t happen. This impacts all of us.” In particular, Trump’s election appeared to kick into high gear many boys’ worries about how white individuals would perceive them, and potentially act against them. Maurice’s comment elucidates first, how many of his peers described being seen negatively, or “less-than,” and the pressures they articulated of having to prove others wrong. This pressure amounts to an unenviable burden on the boys, conditioning their fears and worries about how safe they may be as a result of these misperceptions.

**Structurally Reflexive Double-Consciousness**

Double-consciousness has typically been considered at the individual-level, as described above. Over my time at Sankofa Collegiate, however, the idea of perception and how the boys were seen was ever-present: not just through the boys’ experiences, but through the actions of the staff and the organizational practices, or structures, that staff enacted.

Structures do not exist apart from those that create and enact them (Sewell, 1979). Whether intentionally or not, double-consciousness can feed into structures and reinforce particular ideas of perception through practice. I found that double-consciousness, though not explicitly described as such, was present in the staff’s formation and enactment of
school practices and culture. I term this double-consciousness that inheres in structures as *structurally reflexive double-consciousness*. This level of double-consciousness is not limited to the boys’ experiences of structural practices that may embody this white gaze, but instead casts focus on the further complexity of the story: namely, how the teachers themselves process and position perception *vis-à-vis* double-consciousness into the school’s structural practices. As the vast majority of teachers (all but one) in this study are people of color, these individuals likely have had their own dealings with double-consciousness. As such, these individuals likely have had to experience and process that double-consciousness, and consider what about those experiences may be useful to impart through their work with students. Below, I examine several instances in which double-consciousness came to operate as an explicit or implicit latent rationale for the existence and enactment of school practices.

Beginning with the creation of some of these practices requires an introduction to Sankofa Collegiate’s school principal, Mr. Kenyatta Taylor. Principal Taylor has been the principal at Sankofa since its inception, and as such, is largely the visionary behind the school’s culture and practices. Mr. Taylor is an exceptionally friendly and genial black man. He is typically clad in a full suit and tie, and greets students with a handshake and a small greeting as they come in every morning at the entrance of the school. Principal Taylor seems to always have a smile on his face as he walks through the hallways and interfaces with the students or staff. He typically refers to students as “my brother” or “brother” as he passes them, reminding them to tuck in a shirt or bring in a permission slip.

Throughout the year, Principal Taylor doesn’t explicitly refer to the “mission” of the school. One of the few times he does so, however, occurs at the New Family Orientation for
incoming 6th graders. This year’s orientation took place on an unseasonably warm day in the Spring. Many families file into the school campus’ shared auditorium space and fill the rows. It’s scorching in the auditorium, and before he begins, Principal Taylor takes out a small towel to dab at the sweat from his forehead. As he greets the families, he begins with a description of the mission of the school:

Good morning! [Attendees reply “good morning”] Nice to see some familiar faces, some new faces, and nice to be seen in general. What we hope to do in these next few minutes is to really go through the big picture. Why Sankofa? What are our expectations for your young men? Why we do the work we do.

Let’s start with why Sankofa. We were established in [year] in [different area of the state], by a man named Mr. Campbell, He was part of [a group working to advance black men and black issues]. And there was a report by the Schott Foundation that said, at the time, 76 percent of inmates are black men. Seventy-six percent of all [city] inmates are black men. All of the prison population in this city. That was a crazy statistic! We need to build schools in these areas, and here we are.

In the above quote, Principal Taylor situates the creation of the school, and the work that is done inside of it, within the larger mission of preventing boys from entering prison. In positioning Sankofa as a salve for this potential reality, Principal Taylor discusses some of the many policies and practices that the school uses to teach the boys self-discipline and encourage their academic growth. I detail some of these practices below, and consider how double-consciousness operates at a structural level. These practices are formed and enacted by school staff who do so with a non-neutral perception of the white gaze with respect to their students.

**Let Them Know We Are Different**

At Sankofa, the school has many practices that are set to fulfill the mission of charting boys on a path toward success and away from jail. For the school’s behavioral
deans, Dean Crandell and Dean Vasquez, being able to do that requires the boys fulfilling a particular image and enacting a certain code of conduct.

The intersection of these image and comportment concerns are communicated at a high-level by Dean Crandell prior to the 6th grade’s first field trip early in the academic year. Dean Crandell is the middle-school dean: a stern, no-nonsense middle-aged black man. This year is his first at Sankofa. Before this year he taught in co-educational classrooms. When I asked him why he took this job at Sankofa, he mentioned that he was often put in charge of discipline, and so he thought he might as well get paid for it as well. He said that after having to discipline young girls, boys were so much easier.

Before the boys departed, Dean Crandell advised, “When we are out in public, we are modeling for the community where we come from...we want people to know we are a good school and a good community.” Dean Crandell’s advice to the students reflects that there is a larger perception that the students have to counter when they are outside the school building; that there is both some pressure and some necessity to demonstrate that the school, and the students of that school who are boys of color, belong to a “good community” which may not be the default assumption.

The suitability of boys’ image is largely determined by their required school uniform. The uniform consists of a button-down shirt, a tie with the Sankofa emblem on it, and gray slacks. The boys are additionally required to wear a belt and dress shoes with their uniforms. Boys enter the punitive system at Sankofa if they are not in full uniform. As they enter the school, the deans check off each item of their uniform as present or absent. For every item that is missing, the boys receive a demerit, which spurs detention. The boys are also not allowed “out of the building” (i.e., on school trips, recess, and Friday
after school game time) if they are not in full uniform. These boys are placed on what Sankofa calls the “No Fly List,” meaning they cannot leave the building on school-sanctioned trips or activities during the school day.

Scrutiny of black bodies in public spaces is not a new phenomenon. Through uniforms, dressing black boys up can strike the impression that the boys are safe and non-threatening, both in school as well as in society at large (Ferguson, 2000; Oeur, 2017). Packaging boys in “suitable” dress allows them to be considered passable, which may conceivably allow the boys some measure of safety, and also distinguished from “other” black boys that may not be dressing the part as much. In his study of a single-sex charter school for boys, Freeden Oeur describes how uniforms afforded the boys a sense of respectability and positioned other non-uniformed boys as “disreputable” (Oeur, 2017, p. 1073).

Boys’ behavior is also heavily scrutinized. Detailed further in Chapter 5, boys have a strict code of conduct, and when it is breached, boys enter what the school refers to as “The Ladder of Referral.” The ladder lists several consequences for behavioral infractions, including removal from class, in school-suspension (“ISS”), and parent-school mediation, among others. Boys that are on the ISS list are also quite literally “grounded”; boys in ISS are added to the above-mentioned “No Fly List.” In one particular instance, Principal Taylor and Dean Crandell prepare the boys for an upcoming field trip. Principal Taylor warns the students, “we are allowing the vast majority to represent us out of this building. If you violate that trust, you won’t be going out of the building again.” In this example, Principal Taylor explains how the stakes of this are high, if students do not do well
representing the school outside of the building, they will not be able to leave the building again, as they will risk sullying the image of the school, and of its students.

The stakes of representation here highlight the risk on the part of the school for students being poorly perceived. Here, the actions or image of one boy reflects onto the others; as such, white worry and the risk of perception condition the school’s practices of who is allowed to be a “representative” of the school, and to quite literally be “seen.” This practice highlights how school staff place a premium on the image that boys send out into the world about their character, so that boys must be sure they are not advancing any negative narratives by sending out students who may not represent the rest of the student body, or the race/ethnicity for that matter, in a positive light.

**Be Defensible**

When boys’ actions inside school do not match up to the ideals that staff have for them, the staff regularly reminds students about negative images that others outside of that building hold for them. Staff frame boys’ actions as a disappointment for confirming these misperceptions, and urge the boys to think about the ramifications of their actions on wider perceptions about them, and about people who look like them.

Dean Vasquez, for example, frequently addressed the boys during their Town Hall meeting, the morning meeting for the middle school. Dean Vasquez is the school’s high-school dean, but given that during the year of the study the high school only consists of the 9th grade, he works a good deal with the middle school as well. Dean Vasquez, a middle-aged Latinx man, is usually seen smiling and in a jovial mood when he walks throughout the hallways, though when he is managing student behavior he has a disapproving, and dissatisfied expression on his face.
At one Town Hall, Dean Vasquez explains an encounter he had at a Wal-Mart outside the city limits with a white, female shopper with whom he started talking. This woman asked about what he did for a living, and upon learning that he lived a long drive from the school, asked him why he commuted so far to teach boys of color. Disappointed in their recent behavior, he explained that “people” look at students in a pre-determined way that is deficit-based. He adds that when he reflected about that comment, and thought that their behavior matched the perception, he felt disappointed that he couldn’t “defend” the students against this perception, and further, prove the woman wrong.

He continues, with a more frustrated tone of voice, “Think about this: you have people who are looking at you and saying to themselves that you are not worthy because of behavior. That you’re not worthy because of your lack of effort. And I couldn’t defend you.” The sixth grade boys are listening, while many of the older 8th and 7th graders are laughing together or listening to the story. The 6th graders are a bit different: many of them shrug at Dean Rivera’s story, others are listening, some others are tracking him with their eyes and not visibly reacting. Isaiah Negasi catches me after and says “it’s just sad that he couldn’t defend us, you know.” Tevon Baxter runs up after him and says to me with a shrug, throwing up his hands, “I mean, what are we supposed to do? We can’t change people.”

This example highlights a central tension between school staff and the students at Sankofa. Boys typically describe a lack of control around the way they are perceived by society, and as such, describe changing the minds of others as an exercise in futility. The staff, however, in attempting to rehabilitate any negative perceptions that exist in the outside world, need to operate under the assumption that there is some control over this image. When the staff is confronted with confirmatory evidence of these negative
perceptions, however, this typically sparks anger and disappointment and a stern talk about how the boys need to do better to overcome these deficit-oriented opinions about them.

**We Don’t Have the Luxury**

Representation is a high-stakes matter. Adults at Sankofa regularly correct behavior by reminding students that there is no room for failure, or mistakes. The rationale for this lack of wiggle-room is rationalized through the fact that the boys are academically behind as well as up against a negative reputation in society that they must counter with their actions. The staff at the school that most promote this line of thought are those that are males of color themselves. These men describe that the boys simply do not have the luxury of making mistakes like their white counterparts in other part of the city. In terms of reputation, the athletics coach and an Advisory leader Mr. Franklin, told the boys:

> Those [affluent neighborhood] kids might be skipping to school, probably a private school at that. The DOE doesn’t have the best rep, but we don’t need to push that reputation. This is why we have Sankofa Collegiate...We have no luxury to have fights where our academics are at.

Mr. Franklin is a black man, and as the athletics coach, is someone that the boys often amble toward in the hallways and with whom boys tend to strike up conversations. Mr. Franklin’s demeanor with the boys is a bit more casual, and he speaks to the boys a bit more like a peer than as an adult. For example, if a student is misbehaving rather than “managing” him as a typical teacher might, Mr. Franklin will “roast” the student as a peer would—making them feel momentarily embarrassed, but in good fun, so that the student will listen and do what is asked of them.

In this anecdote, Mr. Franklin juxtaposes the boys’ experiences to those of their white counterparts in a more affluent part of the city to rationalize that the boys simply do
not have the “luxury” to fight or otherwise misbehave because of the lack of quality in their academics. He positions the boys as relatively better off, when compared to other boys of color, because they attend Sankofa Collegiate. As he describes it, Sankofa Collegiate dispels some of the poor reputation that boys of color already have, so they should not act in a way that would lessen that comparative advantage.

In all, double-consciousness operates at multiple overlapping levels affecting the entirety of how students experience schooling. Not only is double-consciousness present at the student level, but it also affects the adults (i.e., teachers) that are responsible for creating and/or carrying out the structural practices of the school. Mr. Franklin’s comments, similar to those made by the rest of Sankofa’s staff, demonstrate how school staff enact implicit and explicit logics of how they believed their students would be perceived by “others” in the outside world. Male staff in particular believed that boys who did not consider their behaviors and image as existing within a larger continuum of reputation and stereotype would not be successful in school, or later in life. Males regularly brought up these themes in conversations with the students—citing that their behaviors would not be reflected well in the “real world.” Female staff in this study, regardless of their racial background, expressed this belief in their interviews, but rarely articulated this belief to boys directly. I did not probe female teachers about this belief directly, and why this did not take shape in their regular conversations with students, but this might be something useful to understand in future studies.

In creating and carrying out these practices, staff reflect their understandings of what students may need to be successful given their own understandings of self through double-consciousness. I term this double-consciousness, which works its way through
structures and the agents that enact those structures, *structurally reflexive double-consciousness* as represented below (Figure 5).

**Figure 5: Structurally Reflexive Double-Consciousness and Individual Double-Consciousness**

I did not witness school staff wrestling with the tension between what they themselves had experienced with regard to double-consciousness and the ways in which these experiences had manifested in the structures that the boys experienced at Sankofa. Although school staff would frequently mention the negative perceptions with which boys must contend, regularly absent from these discussions was an articulation of fairness, equity, or institutional racism. School staff placed great urgency on the need to counter negative narratives in society, but these discussions were rarely contextualized in larger inequities of the *why* behind these practices.
**Chiasmic Consciousness**

Framing double-consciousness as operating at a structural and individual level contextualizes the nature in which structure and agency are in conversation with one another. I expand current understandings of double-consciousness as operating beyond the individual, or beyond *individual double-consciousness*. The framework I have thus far presented offers an opportunity to elucidate how structures exist in conjunction with those that enact them. In the context of Sankofa, I term how double-consciousness operates at a structural level *structurally reflexive double-consciousness*, because the structures reflect the double-consciousness of those individuals enacting the structures and double-consciousness inheres in the structures themselves.

This narrative is incomplete if we consider double-consciousness at a structural level and double-consciousness at an individual level in isolation. Rather, I argue that it is necessary to understand to what extent students are knowledgeable, or conscious, of *structurally reflexive double-consciousness*. An improved understanding of this knowledge will assist in teasing out why, and which, students succeed and others fall behind at Sankofa. In particular, students’ cognizance and ability to understand intentionality behind structures relies in part on the degree to which they are *individually double-consciousness*. In line with my earlier framework (see Figures 4 and 5), I contend that boys participate in a *negotiation* in which they process structures in line with their own set of world-beliefs, and understandings, *(identity)* which conditions their *agency*.

In what follows, I present several instances from my fieldwork that do not fully fit into existing models because of a need to have some way of framing the mechanics of this negotiation. In putting together the structural and individual concepts of double-consciousness, it is necessary to provide language or concepts to think about how this
intersection manifests. I offer a new concept to better understand this intersection: **chiasmic consciousness.** The word chiasmic comes from anatomy, to describe the nature of a crossing or overlap of nerves at the base of the brain. In cell biology, chiasmic refers to how an overlap of paired chromatids fuse and exchange genetic material. I extend this term to double-consciousness to better think about how the intersection, or overlapping, of *structurally reflexive double consciousness* and *individual double-consciousness* map onto one another reflecting one’s identity and are negotiated by students to inform action (or agency). This negotiation is framed within the larger context of navigating these negative perceptions or racism.

Many students were conscious of the intentionality and presence of double-consciousness in structures, or in other words, were able to perceive rationale behind school cultural practices or norms. Students who recognized this may, for example, subscribe to the rationale or importance of dressing a certain way. I observed that students who have this recognition are able to “buy-in” to the school culture, and those that failed to find a rationale of double-consciousness in these practices found themselves more often on a punitive track at Sankofa Collegiate, seldom labeled as a “good” kid or “successful.” In what follows, I present several instances of boys’ chiasmic consciousness and the ways in which their acceptance or rejection of school rationale conditioned their ability to succeed at Sankofa. Throughout, I raise questions as to how school practices could be made more transparent for students, and how structures might be more accommodating for differing levels of accommodation to the school’s structural practices.

**Image**

All but one of the students in my study spoke about the uniform policy as being an essential part of the mission of the school. Boys described the uniform as being necessary
to change their image, or how they looked to other people, whether it was the police, their families, or generally white individuals in society. All of these boys described the potential use of the uniform for safety, or as a way to distinguish themselves as better or less dangerous than other black boys. The vast majority of boys reflected chiasmic consciousness about the potential intentionality behind the use of uniforms, though differed on whether they found the practice a necessity.

Brandon Mitchell is one of the eight students in my sample who found value in wearing a uniform, and was able to consider the perspective of the adults in the building who enacted this structure, or rule. As Brandon described,

They want us to have uniforms here because they know you can’t walk around... in baggy jeans because past the precinct and [name of neighborhood], Sankofa wants us to show that we’re actually going to school and we’re not like other kids, they want us to look good and not get stopped by the cops.

Brandon was one of the honor roll students at Sankofa: a top academic performer and rarely found himself in trouble with the Deans. Brandon highlights why the uniform may be important not for in-school times, but for his time out of school. He ascribes a positive intentionality to needing uniforms at Sankofa, that it sets him apart from “other kids,” so that they will not be as likely to be stopped by the cops or otherwise be in trouble. Brandon’s comment also highlights again the relative advantage that members of the Sankofa community afford attending Sankofa over another school; being a part of this group provides a leg up on what might otherwise be a long climb. Brandon Mitchell interprets the uniform requirement as this idea that they aren’t like “other” black kids, the idea that they are not lumped in with the “bad” kids, but instead that the image of the uniform separates them and sets them apart so they won’t be profiled or stopped by the
cops. Brandon recognizes this as part of the school’s mission—to make sure that they are seen in a better way.

The vast majority of students articulated that this rationale was not necessary or important. Isaiah Edwards, for example, describes the potential rationale for a uniform policy, states that he does not feel that the policy should apply in particular to him, and questions why the policy needs to be so strict. He tells me during an interview, “What I find frustrating at Sankofa is that I can’t wear my sweater if I want to...I wear it every day out of here, and no one looks at me the wrong way. It’s like I can’t be myself [at school].” Similarly to his peers, Isaiah recognizes there is a need to look the “right way” outside of school, but expresses frustration that he is not allowed to wear his sweater at school. He questions this policy because he does not think there is anything problematic about the way he is “seen” while wearing his sweatshirt. He therefore does not see his image or appearance as something that needs to be fixed.

Brandon and Isaiah provide an instructive comparison for thinking about how chiasmic consciousness and the acceptance of school practices led to different school experiences. Like Brandon, Isaiah was one of the top performers in his academic classes. Isaiah, however, regularly experienced difficulty following the rules. Very quick to anger, he would sometimes curse or storm out of class when something upset him. Through his own experience, Isaiah found nothing wrong with how he was perceived by others. He mentions never being looked at the “wrong way” in his sweater, and thus, the rationale for not being able to wear his sweater in school did not seem fair or reasonable. Even when boys ascribe a proactive and protective intentionality to school practices, if their experiences outside of school counter Sankofa’s logic, boys face disciplinary action for straying from the school’s
rules. Isaiah, for example, accrued multiple demerits for not adhering to the uniform policy (punitive system discussed further in Chapter 5).

Despite possessing chiasmic consciousness about the potential necessity of these practices, boys rail against the uniform application of these policies without individual assessment. Specifically, boys question if the uniform is the only way to appear “acceptable” by society. For those boys that augment their uniforms with sweatshirts or hats, and still articulate that they are not seen as a problem, they express frustrations that there is little room to express themselves, or express or make visible certain parts of their identity. Taking Isaiah as one example of these boys, he finds this white worry misplaced, as he has not experienced the negative perceptions based on his dress that the school, he believes, is attempting to guard against.

Behavior

A common theme that I heard from students, when describing the discipline of the school, was that the behavior policies at the school were meant to change them. The boys differed on whether or not they welcomed this change, however. Whether boys trusted school staff, and the school itself, to do this work was filtered through their chiasmic consciousness, and whether or not they “bought in” to the practices. When discussing the extent to which boys found these disciplinary practices valuable, boys’ acceptance depended largely upon whether they felt that falling into these practices would indeed protect them in the “real world.” For example, Bryant Goodman expresses this idea that the school is almost a training ground for how to act in the “real world”—to teach them to be “on our stuff” and to know how to act. Bryant believes his teachers are preparing him with skills such as code-switching, or being able to respond appropriately to ensure safety
and success in the future. In his own words, Bryant describes the teachers’ actions as follows:

They want to teach us how to be out there.... the world is not like a game. They’re getting us ready for that to prepare us for that, to be on our stuff, and know how to respond properly so they’re teaching us so we know what to do when we’re out there.

Bryant found the discipline valuable at the school largely because he found that it would be useful in the future. When boys felt that what they were being taught had future relevance, they regularly framed disciplinary practices as preparatory and purposeful. Other boys acknowledged that the school’s practices were meant to make them successful in the “outside” world, but still rejected them because it would mean being inauthentic to themselves. Maurice Bolton, for example, described being a man at Sankofa as “just learning to act differently. They want to change how you act, so we’re different than now.” When I asked Maurice to elaborate upon whether or not he thought this would be a good change or a bad change, he said “I don’t know what they want us to change into, just that we have to be different.” Boys who did not possess chiasmic consciousness could not articulate the rationale behind these practices, and simply found the practices and the adults that enacted them as wanting them to change, simply because they weren’t “good enough” the way they currently were.

Charles Barnett expressed a similar sentiment during his interview. Different than Maurice, however, Charles described how Sankofa’s approach was meant to prepare them for the “real world.” Although Charles possessed this chiasmic consciousness, or knowledge of the intentionality behind disciplinary practices, he rejected them all the same. When I asked Charles how he would describe the mission of Sankofa, we had the following exchange:
CB: They want us to act like good students. Like who is doing good—like [names of students who are well-behaved and quiet].

PN: Tell me more about that, why do you think you need to be like [names of students]?

CB: That’s what they think it takes I guess.

PN: Are those kids you want to be like at all?

CB: No! I want to be myself, I don’t want to be a follower. The way I act though I wouldn’t be a good kid here. Because I sometimes like to do my own thing, but we have to blend in with each other.

PN: Do you feel like you can’t do your own thing here?

CB: (laughs) No, definitely not!

Like the vast majority of the boys in my sample at Sankofa, Charles’ quote demonstrates a belief that Sankofa’s goals were to change boys to be more palatable both for the school and for society. The boys that were less accepting of the school culture found that they were not willing to make this sacrifice to be considered a “good” kid either inside or outside the school.

**Countering Stereotypes**

Boys expressed fairly similar notions in describing the mission of the school. All students in my sample expressed that Sankofa was in place to get them to college and improve their chances in life. Some boys framed this “getting ahead” in terms of needing to counter popular deficit-narratives in society of black boys’ capabilities. All but two boys in my sample described the mission of the school, and by extension many of the school’s practices, as rehabilitative to the reputation of black boys. One of these boys, Emari Sumpter, describes the mission as follows:
The mission of [Sankofa] is... this school is open for kids of color—like us people because these white people out here think that [boys of color] can’t succeed and will just be like other criminals, they said that’s why they opened up the school, so [boys of color] can have a better chance...to improve what other people say.

Emari Sumpter understood the mission of the school in terms of reputation—the idea that white people think that boys of color cannot succeed and will just be like “other criminals.” Emari’s comment rings similar to a handful of other boys who also described changing their reputation from being seen as “thugs,” “criminals,” or simply “bad.” Emari highlights the notion that the mission is positioned as countering a label of “criminality” that is ascribed to the boys, and that in doing so, it will improve the boys’ outcomes as well as how they are perceived by others. He positioned the school as there to improve this reputation, to teach the students how to be stewards of this new reputation and to be counterexamples to what white people think or know to be true.

Chaquille Warner reflected on the mission of Sankofa and found that although it seemed as though Sankofa staff wanted to drastically change who he was as a person; this is not what happened for him during his time at the school:

CW: I thought that I would be a completely changed person, that the normal me that you see before you would not be the me anymore. I’d be...more down to business rather than the normal me, not super down to business.

PN: So that didn’t happen?

CW: (laughs) No.

PN: Why did you think that they were going to change you?

CW: My first impression—the first day of Summer Bridge. Was super professional. It looked and sounded professional in every way. They had Dean Crandell come and give us a speech like—I don’t remember what he said, but he said he doesn’t expect failure or something like that and he gave a speech. And then he left (laughs).
PN: So did you want this change to happen?

CW: It would have been ok, but it’s like not really real, you know? Mostly just fixing the way we look rather than changing what we know, who we are.

This conversation with Chaquille reflects how the school might have wanted to change how he acted or presented himself, but he describes how this did not feel like a genuine change to him. Chaquille highlighted that the changes that the school wished to make with them were more superficial, rather than substantive; that the changes were not real. Many of his peers also highlighted this notion that they were being changed on the “outside” but not on the inside. Even when boys ascribe a rationale or purpose to school practices, boys experience these practices to be shallow. It’s possible that if the school were to provide a more articulate description of why these practices were in place, and how the boys themselves were not in need of being “fixed,” boys might more readily find meaning or purpose in these practices.

In total, double-consciousness that operates at a structural level, structurally reflexive double-consciousness, pushes down upon students and students’ individual double-consciousness pushes up as students negotiate their understandings of these structural practices. Some students discern ways in which double-consciousness about the students (structurally reflexive double-consciousness) operates through structures, and decide whether to reify, resist or revise these structures. I call this intersection and the double-consciousness that students experience of these practices: chiasmic double-consciousness (Figure 6).
Chiasmic consciousness refers to boys’ cognizance of how structures, and the adults enacting these structures, are reflective of adults’ commitment to care and protect their students given an unpredictable, or otherwise racist “outside” world. Boys possess chiasmic consciousness if they articulate that school organizational structures are in place to protect them from being misperceived in an unjust, and white-dominant society.

Chiasmic Consciousness is a necessary, not sufficient, condition for doing well at Sankofa Collegiate. Boys that succeed at Sankofa are those boys that articulate the belief that adults enforce these structures out of care or love. The boys that rationalize these practices as being for their own protection, given how they are perceived in society, seldom interact with the punitive system at Sankofa. These boys represented approximately one-third of the boys in my study. What’s more is that these boys are typically the “exemplar” students for
other boys to look up to, or emulate. I found that these boys seemed genuine of their appreciation and understanding of these practices, or in other words, were not simply “playing the game” to get ahead. As stated above, boys found value and meaning behind these practices ranging from being necessary for survival to being necessary for success.

Other boys possessed this awareness, or chiasmic consciousness, but either did not believe it was being enacted by adults who cared for them, or did not think this attenuation to whiteness was necessary for their success. In all, these boys found that abiding by these structures would require certain renunciations or sacrifices so that they would “make it” in school, as well as in society, and were not willing to make such sacrifices. These boys do not do well at Sankofa Collegiate; school staff refer to these boys as troublemakers. Further, staff cite the boys’ criticism and lack of assimilation to the school culture or practices as impeding their success at the school, and by extension, their success outside of school, which I explore further in Chapter 5.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I argue that double-consciousness can be enacted on multiple levels: by institutional agents and through structural practices, on an individual level, and through the ways in which boys can be conscious of how double-consciousness influences the enactment of school structures that they experience.

I find that boys learn how adults understand black boys’ place in society through structural practices, which mirror and reflect those understandings. Students who pick up on these understandings reflect a *chiasmic consciousness*—a consciousness that recognizes how perceptions inhere in structures—and can make choices about whether to conform or dismiss the culture and practices of the school. These understandings are negotiated by students—to accept, reject, or adapt in some way. Those that have *chiasmic consciousness*, but find the
practices and culture of the school alienating to their own identities, do not fare as well in school outcomes, and are placed in punitive tracks.

The findings from this chapter shed light on how teachers and schools should spend considerable time reflecting on how their projected perceptions of students' life chances in society may inform the creation, maintenance, or reproduction of school structures that boys may find alienating in school—structures that single-sex schools purportedly seek to disrupt. At the moment, the boys in this study are between eleven and fourteen years old, and some find a rhetoric of care and protection as operative within structural practices, but it is not clear if and how long these understandings will last. The findings from this chapter provide a foundational answer to all three of my research questions as it undergirds how structures are created and enacted as well as how boys see themselves, and may potentially appraise school practices.

The theme of how perceptions, and racism, influence the internal practices of the school will be revisited in the following chapter, in which I examine the school’s practices around character development and discipline. In the next chapter, I will investigate how the fears of negative perception play into how boys are punished through the disciplinary system at Sankofa.
CHAPTER FIVE: Chutes, Not Ladders: The Control and Confinement of Boys of Color through School Discipline

Introduction

In this chapter, I explore how Sankofa Collegiate intentionally and unintentionally (re)defines masculinity through organizational rules and rituals. This chapter answers my first research question, as it provides a description of the structural practices and culture through which Sankofa positions masculinity for its student population. In particular, I examine the enactment of Sankofa’s school mission, which argues that boys become men through developing three interrelated skills: self-regulation, self-awareness and self-reflection. Despite this three-pronged approach to masculinity, I find that school disciplinary practices dominate boys’ experiences at Sankofa, which narrows the school’s masculinity work to self-regulation. Self-regulation takes the form of bodily control, both in terms of comportment as well as in movement. Although it may not be the intention of Sankofa, boys in the sixth grade learn that manhood is mostly about self-regulation.

I additionally examine how school disciplinary practices interact with school and individual understandings of masculinity at the student-level, which responds to my second research question. I interrogate how different, or deviant, displays of masculinity are met with school disciplinary practices including negative labeling, punishment, and isolation. Lastly, I unpack how students participate in schooling and make meaning of these practices with respect to their personal masculinity concepts. In all, I argue that school practices may obscure the benefits of boyhood and inadvertently reproduce elements of the racial inequities in society that single-sex schools seek to disrupt.

Background: The Converging of the Justice and School Systems

Over the last three decades, boundaries between the justice system and the school system have converged. Many scholars refer to this convergence between these systems as
the school-to-prison pipeline (Alexander, 2012; Wald & Losen, 2003). For black males, this pipeline operates through the targeting, tracking, and criminalization of behaviors through disciplinary or surveillance mechanisms in schools. Within the pipeline, students can be: improperly placed in special education programs, behaviorally tracked through surveillance and other means, suspended both in and out of school, or denied grade promotion. As a result, black boys have less time in the classroom, which can lead to increased rates of drop-out, feelings of alienation from school, and entry into the criminal justice system (U.S. Department of Justice, 2003; Nolan, 2011).

**The “Tough on Crime” Political Turn**

Emerging after the Civil Rights movement, the late 1960s and the early 1970s began a new era of being “tough on crime.” This era, emboldened through racially charged political rhetoric, led to a substantial increase in the amount of drug arrests, mandatory minimums for prison sentences, and more punitive sentencing and incarceration for juveniles, who were disproportionately low-income and boys of color (Alexander, 2012; Aizer & Doyle, 2015; Losen et al., 2014).

Mass incarceration is not colorblind, or racially neutral (Alexander, 2012). Many researchers note that this unfavorable treatment of people of color and/or low-income individuals operates through sentencing policies, systemic and racial bias in the courts and through policing, as well as larger structural trends and disadvantages these groups face (Garland, 2001; Skiba et al., 2014). Indeed, black males have greater than a 32% chance of being imprisoned during their lifetime, whereas the probability of incarceration for their white counterparts is less than 6% (The Sentencing Project, 2017).

These trends have not exempted juveniles. As a facet of the “tough on crime” turn in the 1970s, several states across the nation became more punitive with regard to justice
administration for young people (Alexander, 2012; National Research Council, 2013). In the 1980s, there was a swell of violent crime that continued to rise until the start of the 1990s (Skiba et al., 2014). The rise in teen gun violence created great public concern for how to best rehabilitate black boys who were commonly associated with the sale of crack-cocaine (Cook & Laub, 1998; Feld, 1999). In 1991, the U.S. Sentencing Commission made public the racial disparities that resulted from mandatory minimums, but treatment toward juveniles remained steadfast with rhetoric such as “if you do the adult crime, you do the adult time.” Public concern over these boys took the form of fear and labeling—referring to black boys as “superpredators,” or “hardened, remorseless juveniles...[who] pack guns instead of lunches” (Dilulio, 1995). This public perception shepherded in changes to several state policies with regard to the arrest, prosecution and incarceration of juveniles, many of whom were boys of color (Alexander, 2012; National Research Council, 2013). By the end of the decade, America’s juvenile incarceration was the highest worldwide, topping the next closest country nearly five times over (Aizer & Doyle, 2015).

The Schoolhouse as a Remedy for the Jailhouse

The rhetoric of the 1990s, which positioned black boys as having a particular propensity for crime, led to changes in juvenile justice administration as well as changes in school disciplinary measures (Nolan, 2011). In restructuring school discipline, many schools began to implement the ideas of safety through surveillance: installing cameras in and around school buildings, hiring school security officers, and incorporating metal detectors into students’ morning routines—disproportionately in schools that are under-resourced, overcrowded, and highly segregated in low-income areas predominantly serving students of color (ACLU, 2017).
Schools in primarily low-income, or high-poverty neighborhoods have adopted and embraced the same culture and procedures present in prisons: surveillance, guards, barred windows, property and body searches, and a uniform dress code (Nolan, 2011; Wacquant, 2001). In all, this carceral apparatus in schools extends the popular, yet misguided, fears about black boys and their nature: opting instead to control and punish them in yet another context (Allen, 2017; Costelloe, Chiricos, & Gertz 2009).

These changes have created a culture of control and containment of misbehavior—precedents of crime—in schools. More than ever before, schools address student misbehaviors more punitively than they once did, mirroring the larger justice system by focusing more on detention and isolation rather than rehabilitation and restoration. In the United States, black students represent 18% of the total student population, but reflect 39% of school expulsions and 42% of school referrals to law enforcement (Losen et al., 2014). Black students, males in particular, are 3.5 times more likely to be suspended or expelled from school than their peers (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

These stark trends of the criminalization of black males cannot be attributed to higher incidences of student misbehavior for black students, or difficulties associated with being a low-income student (Carter et al., 2014; Skiba, Shure, & Williams, 2012). Relative to their peers, black students are more likely to have their non-compliance with school norms deemed as “willfully being bad” and indicative of a “vicious, insubordinate masculine nature that as a threat to order must be controlled” (Ferguson, 2001, p. 86). The way that black males are read by the school essentially criminalizes them, shaping and altering their identities as black boys. Negative stereotypes tied to race, class and gender can relegate black boys in low-income schools to biased policies and practices that affect them
adversely (Davis & Jordan, 1995). Interviews with marginalized students of color have revealed that students feel that their teachers fail to see them as unique individuals that are deserving of respect, but rather see them as falling into a stereotype such as “black,” “dangerous,” or “underachieving” (Anderson, 2008, p. 139). African-American boys who “act out” in class are typically less likely to receive academic help, which further locks them out of academic opportunities (Allen, 2017; Gunn, 2009; Oeur, 2016).

On the whole, black students are disciplined through detention or suspensions at a much higher rate than their white peers for the same behaviors, such as “disrespect, excessive noise, threats and loitering” (Winn & Behizadeh, 2011, p. 153). Black boys are affected by this culture of criminalization early on in their schooling; as Ferguson (2010) writes, teachers can label boys as criminals as early as fourth and fifth grade. This culture of criminalization funnels boys into what is now commonly understood as the School-to-Prison Pipeline (Nolan, 2011; Oeur, 2016; Thompson, 2010; Wald & Losen, 2003). This pipeline encourages exclusionary discipline techniques such as detention, suspensions, and other punishments that track or label students. These practices forestall students from feeling safe, welcomed, and wanted in school.

As discussed in Chapter 1, to combat these problems, some school districts have established single-sex schools for boys of color. The majority of single-sex public schools are located in large urban cities, such as Philadelphia, Chicago, Los Angeles and New York City. Single-sex environments tend to overwhelmingly serve lower-income African-American and Latinx students (Klein, Lee, McKinsey, & Archer, 2014). Proponents of this model argue it is essential to create a space for black males to engage in academic interventions, develop socio-emotional literacy, and partake in mentorship programs with
older black males. Single-sex schools are situated as a place where boys of color “would be more likely to perceive schools as a source of help and opportunity rather than an inhospitable place that one should seek to escape [from] and actively avoid” (Noguera, 2003, p. 455).

**Manhood: Self-Regulation, Self-Awareness, and Self-Reflection**

Black boys experience a heavy criminalizing gaze during their out-of-school time that has diffused into their in-school experiences (Garland, 2001; Rios, 2011). Single-sex schools that primarily serve black boys can serve as a respite for boys to have a space that is not mired by these stereotypes, that serves as an intervention with attention to academics, discipline, and positive identity construction for black boys (Noguera, 2003; Oeur, 2016). It is possible that in such an environment, boys could be less likely to feel “out of place” given that there are more individuals with whom they could potentially identify. Relatedly, boys may be less likely to face stereotypes or misperceptions about their identity in a school that is a “level playing field” with respect to race and gender. Given the unique focus, it could be less likely that these students would slip through the cracks.

Sankofa Boys’ Collegiate is led by its founding principal, Kenyatta Taylor. Principal Taylor is a black man, in his mid 30’s. In conversation with me, Principal Taylor described the manhood he and his staff aim to develop in the boys in what he termed “three buckets”: self-regulation, self-awareness, and self-reflection. Principal Taylor explained the school’s mission is to develop these three skills and mindsets in the boys, as he said with a laugh, “you can be a thirty year old boy if you lack these three things.”

Principal Taylor described the first aspect of manhood as *self-regulation*, which he explained as the ability to “control or regulate yourself, regulate your emotions.” He explained this as thinking about “who is in charge? the body or the mind?” Indeed, every
day throughout the school year, before he would dismiss boys from their Town Hall meetings in the morning. Principal Taylor would say to the boys as if to “center” them, “we are in control of our bodies and of our minds.”

The second piece of manhood he described was self-awareness. To be self-aware requires being “aware of your actions and its impact on the people around you as well as the impact of other people’s actions on you.” Principal Taylor mentioned that this piece can be difficult for boys, as it can involve assessing when it’s “time to say goodbye to that friend—to know when energy you’re allowing in your space is compromising you and your growth.” As he further explained,

I can’t tell you the amount of times that I’ve asked a child, “are you aware?” and it throws them off: are you aware that when you said that it had this impact on the educator in the space? Was that your intention? Were you intending to be cruel? Usually the kid’s like, “no I was just upset.” Okay, so now we need to go back to self-regulation. So I made you aware, now you need to go back to regulation.

Although self-awareness is the next facet of manhood, one never moves beyond self-regulation completely. For the staff at Sankofa, self-regulation surfaced as a constant and necessary refrain upon which manhood rests for boys.

The last element of manhood and masculinity that Principal Taylor expected in boys was self-reflection. He told me this one is key: “at the end of the day, we connect masculinity to what a guy can do.” This “doing” connects to how men take care of their families, how they manage relationships, and how men save money and develop financial sense. For example, in order for men to take care of their families, Principal Taylor said it could only be effectively done if a man has achieved a level of self-regulation, self-awareness and self-reflection.
The Rules: “We Are in Control of Our Bodies and Our Minds”

Of the three components of masculinity, self-regulation was by far the most prioritized component over my year at Sankofa. Self-regulation is typically written about in the social-emotional learning landscape as a child’s ability to monitor and manage their emotions, thoughts, and behaviors (McClelland, et al., 2010; McCluskey, 2018). This management is believed to help students tune out distractions in class, support healthy interactions with peers and adults, and better deal with conflict (McCluskey, 2018). Students with positive self-regulation skills may also perform better academically, behaviorally, and socially (Payne & Welch, 2018). Those that fail to self-regulate, however, may encounter punishment in schools more frequently (McClellan, et.al, 2015).

Self-regulation took on a different meaning at Sankofa Collegiate. The boys were constantly told to self-regulate their appearance, behavior, and movements. Self-regulation rarely referred to students’ abilities to control their emotions or their thoughts. Self-regulation manifested in disciplinary practices that corrected breaches in the uniform policy as well as how boys moved and took up space within the school. Importantly, these “rules” were not articulated in the school’s disciplinary system (see Figure 5 later in this chapter), but were the most often corrected and scrutinized by the behavioral Deans and the Principal.

This focus on self-regulation appeared to be rooted in and rationalized through a rhetoric of safety and protection. Teaching the boys how to self-regulate was the most high-leverage preparation for being seen in the outside world by others. The Principal and the behavioral Deans typically referred to the notion that boys were being watched when they were outside of school as well, and that their actions when outside of school would always come back to the staff. This focus on self-regulation also implied that the staff believed that
the boys needed to be taught how to control or regulate themselves, that this was a missing skill.

At Sankofa, boys were told that their image mattered, and that the way they looked was incredibly important to being a successful man. What was not made explicit, however, was for whose consumption was this image important and what exactly the image was that boys should aim to convey. Boys were told to self-regulate their movements, be mindful of the space they took up, and to be intentional about how they moved from one place to another. I argue that the disciplinary practices focusing on these visible indicators of acting and looking correct were representative of a larger concern of boys being seen as presentable, suitable, and non-threatening to others in an outside environment. As such, at Sankofa, self-regulation was presented as the most critical element of masculinity, as it could guarantee one’s safety and protection so that the teaching of other components could be possible.

**Image**

To begin their days, boys attended a Town Hall and were expected to stand, facing the Dean, with their hands at their sides, their uniform pristine (i.e. tie tied, shirt tucked in, belt in place). Staff describe this presentation of self as “self-regulation.” As Dean Crandell described to the boys, “I’m looking around to see where is the self-control. Who is moving, or swaying hands? Are your hands where they are supposed to be? If they are not, it doesn’t express or communicate self-control.” The staff member that was leading the Town Hall regularly thanked the boys that did this well. On occasion, Dean Crandell provided a blanket gratitude in saying, “I want to thank every single individual that self-regulated their bodies and put their books away.”
Before boys were dismissed from the Town Hall, they were required to recite the Middle School Pledge. The boys were to then recite the pledge in unison, and if boys were not saying the words or were saying the incorrect words, the Deans might call them out for not doing so. On one occasion, Dean Vasquez and Dean Crandell repeated select words of the pledge along with the students. At other times as the boys recited the pledge, they corrected the students’ comportment; Mr. Crandell looked at Danté Hill and told him, “hands out of pockets!,” Mr. Vasquez told Jakeem Richards to stop swaying, and Tevon Baxter was told to stop talking and to fix his tie.

In Town Hall, Dean Crandell told 6th graders, “I’m going to ask [these students] to model transition from the floor. It’s silent. Notice that [they] are self-regulating their uniform. If a shirt is untucked, he is retucking it.” Boys were to look a particular way as they went throughout the school. For example, boys were reminded to “self-regulate” themselves as they walk in their lines and attend their classes. On one particular day before dismissing the boys, Principal Taylor announced, “We are looking for precision in lines. Self-regulation. Your correct uniforms.” In this was a control of both bodily movement as well as presentation of self through visual cues. The staff told them that this presentation of self was very indicative of their quality of character: how they saw themselves and how they wished to be seen by others. The image, according to Principal Taylor, was about “being present in the space where we are. The way we sit, the way we stand, conveys an image about how you present yourself. That image is important, young men.”

These practices surrounding image communicated that being a black male is a highly visible enterprise—subject to scrutiny by those members of the immediate
community (i.e. Sankofa), and by others that are not of the community, or who may not otherwise provide students the benefit of the doubt. This image and space carried beyond the school building, as boys were reminded that they were always being watched, and that they were accountable to such informal surveillance, or observation. On one particular occasion, Principal Taylor provided students one additional reminder before they began the day:

Everyone should know this, but you’d be surprised, but I always have people speaking to the great things you do in the building, but there are also people who speak to me about the misbehaving they see you do outside of the building: on the train, on the bus, walking down [local street]. People are watching you. Integrity is what you do when no one else is watching. When you are moving from the gym to your classes, I shouldn’t hear you. Let’s be mindful of our movements.

Being mindful of movements was a common refrain heard at Sankofa. At another Town Hall, Principal Taylor told the 6th graders that he wanted to echo some announcements that Dean Crandell provided to the students. “Be mindful of your bigger actions and the words that come out of your mouth. Not only here but outside. Your words come back. Be mindful of your movements.” For boys at Sankofa, integrity and masculinity were positioned in relation to surveillance: boys were told that their actions when no one is watching communicated their integrity, but there was always an element of accountability or documentation of these movements.

**Space and Place**

At Sankofa there was a large focus on how the boys “transitioned” or moved from place to place within the school. The sixth grade was especially inculcated with this type of taught transition. When boys entered the hallway in which their classes were held, they were to form single-file lines. The lines were to be as exact as putting one foot on a black line, and the other foot on the gray space between that line and the wall. As the boys lined
up, a Dean or the Principal would ask them to “rotate”: the houses then walked in a loop until the correct class was lined up in front of the correct classroom.

The boys did this transition every time they moved outside of the classroom: between classes, walking to lunch, coming back from lunch, and when they were dismissed from school. As they carried themselves, they were required to also comport their bodies appropriately. Before the boys left the Town Hall in the gym, they were reminded about how they must carry themselves. On one occasion, Dean Vasquez phrased this reminder as: “Your stuff is where? In front of you? Not next to you. Your book bag? It’s taking up too much space.” The emphasis on these transitions suggested there is a proper way for boys to use and navigate space, and that proper movement requires boys to take up as little space as possible. This training for how to move within spaces might reflect larger notions about how black boys should function in other, outside spaces—taking up as little room as possible. It is possible that this messaging also highlights that it would be potentially advantageous for boys to take up as little space as possible, making it less likely that they are highly visible or in danger of the wrong kind of attention.

As the boys moved to their classes, they were told which aspects of their transitioning or their comportment need fixing. Dean Crandell shouted to the students that they should, “look like you have somewhere to be.” He told students to move with “urgency.” In telling one house to adjust their manner of movement, he corrected, “Urgency! Show us! It’s the process of you looking like you have somewhere to get to. You have somewhere to go. Stay with your line, and you walk with urgency.” There were many times throughout the course of the year in Town Hall when Principal Taylor admonished students’ movement in the school. During one of those times, he dismissed the rest of the
middle school (7th and 8th grade) and told the 6th graders that he wanted “to talk about the line transitions.” He told students that perhaps he “made an error in giving [them] too much room.” This language invoked the idea that boys were given space to use, but if they breached that space, or the regulations of that space, they would have that space or room taken away from them. Principal Taylor continued, “I made an error in giving you too much room. I apologize. Now, I am pulling back. Your educators are pulling back. We are reinstating those restrictions. Our pledges not strong in classes? We do it again. Transitions — are they tight? We’ll do it Again. If we need walking drills to walk in silence, we will do that all day today.”

This guidance had a layer of protection and surveillance to it, as Principal Taylor reminded students that their actions had larger consequences, how they moved or acted in public was tracked, or documented, and would ultimately be known. Space was a luxury in this context, and could only be given to those individuals who could take up space responsibly. Students were instructed not to loiter, and if they were in a liminal space, they were instructed to move from “here to there” with urgency. If they did not, there were consequences. On one day, Principal Taylor warned the students about the possibilities of doing a “sweep,” which he described as follows:

There is something we call a “sweep.” Anyone in the hallway will get detention, if you don’t get to the room you are supposed to be at with urgency. Our hallway is not your playground. We don’t move you off the floor because we don’t love you, we move you because you need to get to where you need to be.

The rationale behind these practices was framed within protection and love. Boys were encouraged to move with purpose. This language put a tax on loitering, as if not moving with urgency could create an emergency situation. In many ways, the consideration of how
much space was taken mirrored how the school referred to the boys’ time outside of the school: being outside and potentially being seen as a target, given that they are black boys. These practices also invoked the notion that if boys were not controlling themselves (or their bodies) that their bodies were susceptible to control by others.

**Punishments: “Control Your Body or It Will Be Controlled for You”**

If boys failed to control their bodies, i.e. failed to self-regulate, they entered the disciplinary system at Sankofa, or the “Ladder of Referral” (Figure 7).

In explaining this ladder to students and their families, Principal Taylor described the approach to discipline in the following way:

There are consequences for Level 1 offenses (e.g., disruptive talking, refusal to sit), then conversations for Level 2 offenses (e.g., disrespectful language to a teacher), and [meetings with] the Dean or Detention for Level 3 severe clause (e.g., fighting, using the “n” word).

Although the ladder was presented as a disciplinary system with a set of tiered rungs for levels for misbehaviors depending on severity, students found that regardless of the breach in behavior, they encountered multiple forms of punishment. The ladder of referral functioned more like a chute down which students fell as they navigated the school. The reason for this rapid fall was that students received demerits for small infractions, or what the Deans and Principal refer to as “punishable offenses” not reflected on the ladder, that added up in such a way that they could earn multiple detentions in a matter of minutes. Punishable offenses included: lateness, an incomplete uniform (e.g., lack of a tie, proper shirt, belt, slacks, or shoes), and being outside of approved spaces (e.g. in a stairwell rather than a hallway). Many of these offenses were not even listed on the Ladder of Referral. On a given day, if students were missing multiple items of their uniforms, they received one detention per item missing.
All sixth grade students in my sample expressed frustration with the dress code. As Emari Sumpter described it: "if you're more than a minute late and you forgot your tie,
there’s really no point in going [to school] because you’ll have two detentions and they’ll just keep adding up.” Charles Barnett described the rules as very unforgiving. On one day Charles was given a detention the moment he walked through the door because he forgot his tie. He looked over to me and said, “what's the point of trying today? Just because you make a mistake one time you get detention. Forgetting your tie could happen to anyone!” Charles’ reflection on the Sankofa’s lack of tolerance for making mistakes might mirror the larger societal pressures black boys have from making one mistake. The stakes are high in terms of boys’ representation; such that one mistake could quite literally be a life-or death matter.

Only a couple of students in my sample were more understanding of the school’s policies. These students were of course those that rarely found themselves receiving demerits, or being punished. As Isaiah Negasi described,

I think they put down some good consequences even though I might not agree with those consequences. They're good for us...let's say I'm a man, right? And I have a job, right? I can't be late to that job and then I'll be fired. And they treat us like that, we're late to school they'll give us a detention. And our parents will call and say to not give us a detention, but our parents will not always be there to save us from stuff.

Although Isaiah did not always agree with the consequences he might receive, he was able to find rationale in why these consequences took place. Isaiah described the school’s practices as more or less a necessary, although frustrating, preparation for the future, and for manhood. He also described how these practices were mirroring what might happen for him later in adulthood, when he will no longer have his parents to be able to “save” him from consequences of his actions. Isaiah’s ability to find rationale in these practices was grounded in his ability to visualize his future, and make connections between what actions he pursued today and the future man he would become. Not all boys were able to make
these connections to future, and those boys that did not regularly had difficulty finding meaning or compliance with the rules.

Ellis Almonte, a Dominican student, also expressed that the school rules were a necessary part of growing up. He found the practices fair, although they presented him with a steep learning curve.

EA: For being late? I wasn't used to it in the beginning, I used to always come to school five minutes late. Sometimes one minute late, but I learned that it don’t matter I have to be here on the dot.

PN: What do you think about that rule—do you think it’s fair, do you like it or not like it?

EA: I think it’s fair because like when we have a job and we have to get there at a certain time, I get what they’re doing for us.

Here, both Isaiah and Ellis were able to connect the school’s rules with what the future might entail as a man, including expectations for holding a job. They both described the school’s practices as a sort-of training ground for being ready to take on such responsibilities in their future, or when they became men. Both boys in this case were able to articulate expectations they had for the future, and were able to picture themselves as men living their lives with jobs, something that not all boys in my sample articulated. This ability to picture their future grown, male selves allowed these boys to be more understanding and amenable to Sankofa’s practices.

Scholars also received detentions for not taking the rituals and practices of the school “seriously.” These detentions were typically doled out during the morning Town Hall meeting or in hallways. For example, as students were reciting the pledge one morning, Dean Crandell spotted two students that he described as “not doing the pledge with conviction, as if it were a joke.” He chastened students by reminding them that “the
work we do in here in and out of class should have meaning and purpose in your life; it should drive how you look and appear to yourself and others. It will determine not only the next few school years, but the rest of your life.”

As such, enforcing boys’ self-regulation of their image and their bodies constituted the main draw of the Deans’ work with students. Chaquille Warner, a sixth grade student who was chronically absent during the year, described the Deans as “sentinels”: people who “are supposed to guide you to do what you have to do to make it out, but also when you do something wrong, they’d be the first people to be there. I’d always seen them like that, more like guards rather than actual guides to help.” Chaquille’s comment highlights how his initial perceptions of the deans’ role in the school was that they would be helpful and guide him along the correct path, but instead his experience of the Deans eventually was that they were there to punish, rather than mentor. Chaquille’s experience also cast into doubt whether or not these men would help him “make it out,” which seemed to suggest that he found the Deans less helpful than he originally thought they would be toward supporting his current or future success.

The Deans saw their work as helpful, however. In speaking with students in the hallway, Dean Vasquez told them, “everything we are asking you to do is to make you a greater person, into developing you into the man you want to become.” Dean Crandell added, “some of the demerits and the attitudes we are looking at will not get you far in life. These things are to make you a better person. If you’re struggling, if you can’t fall in line with what we are asking you to do at Sankofa. You’re starting to make it uncomfortable for everyone else.” This notion reflected the idea that individual success can impact the success of the collective, of the whole community—further tying these boys together. At the end of
this speech, the boys stood straighter, taller, and were facing forward. As the sixth graders did so he added, “Now, I’m looking at these wonderful bodies so in control. I’m looking at this group, that this could be a solid group.”

In terms of masculinity, the Deans appeared to convey that learning to control oneself was a necessary skill for becoming the men that students would want to be in the future, though that ideal was far from made explicit. The Deans’ comments also referenced that boys who were receiving demerits were not yet on their way to becoming men of character, and that for all boys, there was room to grow to become better men. This rhetoric of betterment offered a certain deficit-orientation to how boys might currently see themselves; rather than finding value in who they already were, boys were receiving messaging that they were instead lacking in some respects. The Deans’ actions evoke notions of structurally reflexive double-consciousness (introduced earlier in Chapter 4). The Deans, in their effort to prevent these boys from being seen in the ways that white people see them, also come to see the boys in the ways that white people see them—effectively reproducing the structures that they may aim to dismantle.

The Daily Reading of the Detention List

Each day, the Deans totaled up student demerits; any student with three demerits had to attend detention that day. The average list of sixth graders read about 21 names long, representing approximately one-third of the sixth grade class. In conversation with the Deans, they described the list as usually comprising the same names each day, students who Dean Vasquez explains “just can’t get it together.” The Deans kept a meticulous log of their detention lists over the year; writing down each student’s name along with their “punishable offenses.” The vast majority of these punishable offenses were lateness and a lack of the required uniform, either partially or in full.
As Tevon Baxter described, “Yeah! I’m always in detention, you know that. It’s always for stupid things. Not being in line, tying my sneakers, not wearing my tie, not wearing my belt. I figure I’ll always be in there for something.” Tevon’s comment suggests that his perception of unfairness, or even just inevitability, of ending up in detention every day had made him generally expect to be punished. Being labeled as one of the “repeat offenders” was a sticky label; he did not necessarily find a reason or a means to be able to escape this perception. Justin Miller echoed a similar sentiment, “we get detention for the smallest thing, forgetting a belt, the shoes, wearing sneakers—they just keep adding up. Always.” Like Charles and Tevon earlier, Justin also found that making small mistakes can have large consequences, and for Justin, these consequences were largely unavoidable.

Deans created a master list of all students in the school who had detention, and after doing so, they made the rounds to all of the classes during the final class period of the day to announce whose names were on the list. Dean Vasquez typically read the detention list for the students, though on some occasions Dean Crandell read it. The language stayed remarkably the same each day that the list was read; the Dean would walk into the classroom, stand at the door with a clipboard, rarely excuse the interruption and say, “The following people have detention” and then would follow with the reading of the boys’ last names. After closing with a thank you, the Dean would exit the classroom.

This announcement typically came mid-way through the last period of the day, such that after the announcement was made students still had 45 minutes or more of class time left before the end of the day. As the year went on, this announcement crept up earlier and earlier in the school day. Teachers regularly expressed their frustration with this process, and found that the reading of the detention list during class regularly created behavioral
and emotional issues for students. On one particular day the detention list was read twenty minutes into Ms. Renaud's ninety-minute class session. After this announcement, the rest of the time became thrown off: students were shouting, fighting, cursing, and were mostly out of their seats, which was not typical of Ms. Renaud's classes. She looked at me, and said, "This happens every time. This is the reason they go crazy. They were fine! But then they realized, what's the point?"

Two of the three sixth grade teachers complained to the Deans about how the timing of this announcement affected their lessons and their classroom culture, but their complaints did not lead to change. The Deans responded to their frustrations, by citing a logistical issue about their schedules; namely, that their schedules were unpredictable as they might have to break up a fight, or deal with a "crisis," such that they had to take advantage of whenever they might have a free minute to read the detention lists to the classes. In this conversation, Dean Vasquez simply shrugged and said "it's those repeat offenders, they are not surprised anyway."

There were consequences for skipping detention, or missing your name on the detention list. Dean Crandell gave these reminders every so often; on the Thursday before the school's Spring Break, he told the boys, "Listen up, if you don't show up for detention, start your vacation early on Friday—don't even bother coming to school, do us a favor. You cut out, you're not going to the Boys' Club on Friday." In this example, Dean Crandell told the boys if they did not come to detention, they would not be able to participate in an extracurricular trip during the afternoon the following day, and to not even bother coming to school. The next day, nearly half of the boys did not attend school; Ms. Cozner and I discussed this and she tells me:
Yes, since they started telling the boys what punishments they would have for the day after, and literally told them ‘don’t come to school’ we have no one here to teach. I guess it’s smart from their perspective, because now they [the Deans] don’t have to babysit those kids.

The idea of the deans as “babysitting” the boys was not far from the reality. When boys headed to detention in the Auditorium, the main rule was that they were not to talk, and must sit until the time was called. In asking boys to describe detention, the boys who had experienced detention described it as more or less a holding cell. When I asked what detention was like, Jakeem Richards explained, “you just sit and wait until you get out.” As he described, “you have to sit there in silence for a long, long time. There’s so many things you can’t do otherwise they’ll just add to the time you have to be in detention.” Boys went on to list the many rules and punishments that they could potentially incur during detention. As student Emari Sumpter, summarized:

You walk into detention, you sit down, or sometimes go up to the table [where the Dean sits]. If you have a merit slip and it’s signed, they’ll take off, depending on—if you have two merits from each teacher, they’ll take off two detentions and they’ll let you go home, and if you have three, they’ll take off three, but if you don’t have a merit ticket, they make you sit down, three seats apart, and you have to sit there quietly. They say you can read a book, but if you fall asleep you have to stand up. So most people just sit there, and you can play on your phone and they don’t notice. If you talk, there are three more detentions added to the number you have. If you get out of your seat without permission, you have three more detentions. We can’t go to the bathroom, can’t get water during detention, because they think we’re going to sneak out or something. So it’s basically waiting out the time.

Boys, and their “deviant” masculinities, were not rehabilitated while they were in detention. Rather, being in detention was similar to being in a holding cell—such that these boys were removed from the “good boys.” This sent a message that boys, as long as they were away from potentially contaminating the rest of the students, were not necessarily worthy of extra attention or time, but must simply do the time until they were
permitted to try again the next day, an endeavor that many boys found led to the same result. Just as society writ large isolates and incapacitates criminals—many of whom are black men and boys—through mass incarceration, the Deans replicate and reproduce these methods with the students, instead of providing opportunities for rehabilitation. The enactment of these practices again mirrors and reproduces the effects of the white gaze onto these boys.

**Repeat Offenders: Removed from the General Population**

Deans described removing students who chronically misbehaved as removing them from the “general population.” Chronic misbehaviors that warranted being removed from class included repeated: cursing, interrupting class (i.e. calling out), getting out of one’s seat, and fighting. The removal typically took the form of one of two punishments: in-school suspension (ISS) and the “No-Fly List.” Between themselves, the Deans referred to the boys who participate in these punishments as “repeat offenders.” Again, the terminology of “repeat offenders” mirrors the language that the carceral system uses in referring to inmates, and further, ascribes labels to these boys that are difficult to shake.

Suspecting the worst, the Deans would patrol the hallways and peer through small windows in classroom doors to monitor the students they worked with the most. Boys were removed on the sheer suspicion that they might “act up.” Jakeem Richards, one of the “repeat offenders,” described this relationship with Dean Crandell as follows: “Yesterday, I think that Dean Crandell just thought that I was going to do something bad, or not act in the correct manner or way. He took me out of the classroom and brought me down to the detention.” This demonstrates the way in which labeling worked inside of the school building to stereotype boys who might not be able to behave, and would likely need to be punished. Masculinities here were seen as largely impermeable or static—such that a boy’s
masculinity and his past actions were largely determinative of future actions. Jakeem found a silver lining in this situation, in telling me “Dean Crandell was nice about it though. He told me I could just fall asleep and sit there and do nothing until time is up.”

A popular refrain for the Deans and for Principal Taylor when he saw a class that was misbehaving was to say, “I need the few brothers messing up—I need them pulled.” This notion again references how boys who were not abiding by the school rules were not allowed the privilege of even being perceived as part of the larger group. The larger idea that was being “messed up” by these boys was that black boys can indeed, and should, be seen as in-control, self-possessed young people.

On one occasion, Principal Taylor responded to the 6th grade teachers’ concerns about a student who repeatedly cursed in class by describing the issue as: “really just thinking about, how do I make sure this tornado spins without damaging the equipment?” Boys were threatened with removal from their peers if they couldn’t abide by the rules. As Dean Crandell described, “when most of you are in line, and there are just the few of you that need to be pulled, you stand out.” This notion reflects the idea that the institution could have been trying to collectively camouflage the boys: through their image and their behavior, or in other words, through self-regulation. If boys were all acting in the same manner, then not one would “stand out” for bad behavior. This collective camouflaging operated through the standardization of image and behavior as non-threatening and suitable for presentation in the outside world. The boys that threatened this suitability, were not allowed to represent the community in the same way. The punishing of these boys messaged that black masculinity itself needs to be highly regulated, though encompassing of all individuals. If boys are able to blend in with each other, they
cannot be identified, separated, or singled out. Essentially, this behavioral program provided a possibility for strength in numbers.

The boys that risked the success of this collective camouflage would not be included in what was considered the “general population,” or the group. The use of the term “general population” mimics the terminology that Correction Officers use when referring to where and with whom inmates can be housed. In an effort to prevent tarnishing how all black boys are seen, the Deans reproduced this carceral frame within the school: relegating those who might jeopardize the group into isolation. Boys who were not acting in accordance with the standard would risk exposure to the group. The Deans and the Principal would describe removing students as “putting them on notice that you may not exist in the space.” Quite literally, this messaging informed students that bad behavior could not be tolerated among the other peers, and if bad behavior occurred, that the person himself will not be able to even exist within that group. This process of isolation mirrors larger trends with regard to the United States’ carceral apparatus: like solitary confinement, or generally, the carceral system has become concerned more with incapacitation—preventing individuals from harming the populace by merely placing individuals in jail for an extended period of time—rather than rehabilitation, deterrence, or even punishment.

Concern with the “bad boys” contaminating the behavior of the boys that are abiding by the disciplinary code affected how all boys navigated the space. The “bad boys” were often positioned to the sides of all spaces they inhabited: the edges of the cafeteria at lunch time, the sides of the gym during Town Hall, or removed to a separate detention room away from their peers in classes. To enter a room and see a boy in one of these spaces was to
immediately know that they were in trouble. In some ways, the behavior of these boys was seen as potentially contagious, and to prevent the spread, these boys were quarantined.

The first line of defense for Deans during the school day to keep repeat offenders out of the general population was the ISS room. The ISS room sat in a separate hallway, away from where the sixth grade classes were. The ISS room was a small room with two large teacher desks, a small window, and room for about six student desks. Often, the room overflowed with more than six students, so extra chairs were brought in. One of the two main deans, Dean Crandell and Dean Vasquez, and occasionally Assistant Dean Stockton would monitor the room. Dean Stockton was a bit younger, and certainly more casual with the boys, as his main interaction with them discipline-wise was to monitor them in this room, but not give out the consequences. The rest of his role included serving as an Advisory Leader for one advisory group and occasionally helping to supervise a weekly gym period.

The boys who were commonly in these quarantined spaces described the place in one of two ways: a place where they felt uncomfortable and on edge or as a place they felt calm and at peace. The difference between the two opinions of ISS rested upon whether the boys themselves were a bit more extraverted and social, or more reserved and quiet. The more reserved boys described the ISS room as a place that was highly stressful. For their photo narratives, many boys took a picture of the ISS room as a place they did not feel comfortable, or as a place they did not belong (See Appendix D for full protocol). Danté Hill described his picture of the ISS room (see Figure 8) as “it’s torture, you just look up at the ceiling and no one says anything to you. You have to do what the people say in there and no
one wants to hear you. It’s not a good feeling.” Tyrese Stuart, a much quieter boy who mostly kept to himself, described ISS as follows:

TS: The point of ISS is to make you sit and look at a wall until you break.

PN: Until you break? What do you mean by that?

TS: You’ll, um, you have to figure out what you did wrong if you don’t already know, and then you break. They break you. You tell them what you did wrong and you break. That’s what they want. But, I get antsy in ISS because I have a hard time going to sleep.

**Figure 8: Danté Hill’s photo of the ISS Room**

Although the quieter boys described ISS as a pretty miserable place to be, they also explained that they had the ability to go to sleep or to rest. As Tyrese mentioned, he felt antsy in ISS because he didn’t fall asleep well. Indeed, students were encouraged to sleep in this room, rather than completing assignments or doing work. Danté explained, “Oh yeah,
we can sleep or do whatever. They just let us be quiet, sometimes talk very softly. If Dean Crandell is in there, sometimes he lets us just rock out, go to sleep or do nothing.”

Other boys, the more extraverted boys, found the ISS room to be fun or a welcome place to be. One of these boys, Tevon Baxter, described ISS as follows: “It’s fun, it’s cool in there, you can just sleep. No work.” Another student, Charles Barnett, also described ISS as fun, because “most of my friends are in there...we can sleep, talk and that’s it. The reason I end up in there is because I don’t have my shoes or my tie, and they end up pulling me out, but it’s fun when I’m in there because you can just relax.” Indeed, these boys also referred to ISS as a place where they could achieve a sense of calm. Justin Miller for example described ISS as “it’s quiet and calm, and it’s not like class you know, so it’s actually quiet and you can just relax.” Over time, for some inmates, being in prison can be viewed as more comfortable to them than their freedom, because it becomes what their routine, and what they know. Being removed from the demands of life, or school in this case can, for some, bring a peace of mind.

The second type of longer-term punishment at Sankofa was being added to the “No-Fly List.” As part of an induction into the school, students earned ties for their uniforms in a prestigious ceremony (detailed further in other chapters). Earning their ties signified becoming a “young man” within the school community. As such, the tie came with privileges such as: recess, fieldtrips, and generally being able to leave the building. Ties signified that students were a part of the school community, but students did not automatically keep their ties; the ties could be taken away for behavioral issues, such as fighting, talking back to adults, chronic lateness, cursing, and so on. When certain 6th grade
students were identified as “pulling” the others down, these boys had their ties taken away. Dean Crandell explained the rationale to them in the following way:

You had an opportunity to earn your tie, we allowed you that moment to be embraced with your family, guests that were here that understand what the [school] model is about. You earned that tie, but you haven’t lived up to that expectation. So we took your tie. To earn your tie back, you’re going to have to atone in front of the entire cohort…to explain why you think you should earn their tie back, because wearing that tie comes with a big privilege and a big responsibility, and you have not lived up to that expectation.

When students had their ties taken away, they were placed on the “No-Fly List,” described by Dean Vasquez as “when you have no privileges—you do not attend trips, festivities, parties, or things of that nature. You do not represent us out of the building.” Students could have their ties taken away for chronic misbehaviors or a very extreme singular misbehavior (for example cursing out a teacher). In a Town Hall early in the year, Dean Vasquez asked students “how do you lose your tie?” When no student answered, he continued, “when you do something disrespectful to a teacher or a student in this building or when you make a fool of yourself in public.”

The decision to take a student’s tie away and place him on the No-Fly List was a decision typically made by the head Deans, though teachers regularly threatened students with having their tie taken away for misbehaviors in class. When boys had their ties taken away, they were easily read by the school as a “bad student” or a “troublemaker.”

Teachers or students that otherwise did not know a No-Fly List student would automatically be able to categorize that student as someone who was deviant, or willfully bad. Although the tie could be seen as a rehabilitative, restorative and meaningful symbol of community for boys, the removal of the tie connoted that boys were not currently members of the community. This shared visual practice became instead a form of
“sequestration and surveillance,” such that the cultural significance of the tie was used instead to separate out and label students who did not belong (Lustick, 2017).

This had a larger gendered and classed perception because the boys that did not have a tie may not have been perceived as “higher-status,” or even as representative of a potential professional. Relative to Principal Taylor’s conception of masculinity, masculinity was connected to “what a guy can do.” And in a sense, removing the tie provided less of a guarantee that this boy would be capable of doing the same great things as his counterparts in school.

Throughout the year, as many as 18 students were a part of the No-Fly List, and the average time it took to for students to receive their ties back was a little over seven weeks. Some boys never received their ties back after they were taken. Once the ties were taken, however, they were very difficult to get back. To begin the process of getting one’s tie back, a student had to receive signatures from all of their educators and the Dean saying that they were ready to “atone” in front of their grade. Principal Taylor described atonement to students as a process that deans and educators figure out together; what was the harm done to the school community? Atonement is the process of making right what is wrong, not equal to saying “sorry.” You may not be sorry, maybe you meant to do that, but it’s about the harm to the community.

Although this process was communicated to students, I only observed two atonements during my time at Sankofa. The reason for this could be due to the fact that over the year, rather than atonements, the Deans typically decided when it was time to return ties to students based on deans’ own assessments of “readiness” to re-enter the school community. In what follows, I describe one of the two atonements that I observed.
When Ryan Nelson had his tie taken away for fighting after school, he was placed on the No-Fly List. After nearly ten weeks without his tie, he was presented with the opportunity to atone. In this instance, teachers were not afforded the opportunity to sign off on his progress, but the Dean simply informed teachers that Ryan could be eligible for atonement. Dean Crandell asked him to write a letter of apology to his class, which he read aloud to them. After he finished reading, his peers then voted as to whether he seems ready to have his tie back, or re-enter the community. An excerpt of the students’ discussion is presented below:

Charles Barnett: it takes mistakes to be made and teachers to help so we’re able to get better, and he’s trying.

Joel Davis: I think he should get his tie back because everybody deserves a second chance and he probably didn’t know what he was doing.

Zackary Hollis: Charles said everybody make mistakes, and Joel said something similar. I’ve known Nelson since like 1st grade or something, and he’s done this twice or something. So I think he should get his tie back because I seen him at our old school and I’ve seen him here and I know he can turn it around. He can turn it around and we’ve all seen that he can do it.

Ms. Renaud: Okay, everyone who wanted a chance to speak has spoken, and the majority of people say he should get his tie back, I’ll let Dean Crandell know.

The ritual of atonement has a focus on the collective, rather than the individual. Atonement meant repairing any breach in the space that was put forth by an individual, and about holding the community above all else. So rather than a responsibility to one’s self, the tie signified that students were connected to the other black boys in their class, carrying the weight of representing and reflecting their peers well. When considering image, this distinguishes those young men of color with a tie and those without; the lack of a tie
serving as an indicator that this student was not a good visual representation of what a young man of color “should” be.

At Sankofa, atonement initially presented itself as a restorative practice that could surface breaches in school norms or school community, and provide opportunities for the community to rebuild and recommit to their co-created culture. While atonements could indeed be quite powerful, I found that this practice was limited by the larger school culture in which it was embedded, which was highly punitive and authoritarian.

To begin, the ultimate decision to give a student his tie back did not solely rest with the students. The Dean made the final decision, such that the opinion of the collective was still managed and mediated by the adults. The elevation of this decision to school staff may have reflected the high-stakes nature of acting as a representative of the community, and of black boyhood. As Dean Vasquez explained to students before they headed outside for a trip: “when we are out in public, we are modeling for the community where we come from...we want people to know we are a good school and a good community.” Dean Vasquez’s comment highlights that boys may not readily present the image of coming from a “good community,” and instead must be cognizant of this as they are in public. Further, through their visual presence, the boys have the unenviable burden of countering stereotypes about their race and about their community. Students who could risk further entrenching negative stereotypes about black boys were not even permitted the chance; they were quite literally “grounded”: placed on the No-Fly List and prohibited from leaving the building.

Proponents of restorative school practices argue that the success of these practices is largely dependent on creating a shift in school philosophy (Cremin, 2010; Elliot, 2011;
Morrison (2011), such that the school culture itself is “characterized by a shift away from being a rule-based institution to a relationship-based institution, or from being an institution whose purpose is social control to being an institution that nurtures social engagement” (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012, p. 145). Supporting a shift from an authoritarian school culture to one that is more relational and restorative requires schools to reimagine discipline, such that it is not the breaking or following of rules, but relationally contextualized: such that one’s behavior is framed in larger relation to the effect on other members of the school community. For this approach to be successful, it is necessary for students to consider themselves a part of a community, a theme I discuss further in Chapter 6.

**Conclusion**

This chapter explores how Sankofa Boys’ Collegiate intentionally and unintentionally (re)defines masculinity through rules and rituals. The school’s mission posits that boys become men through developing three skills: self-regulation, self-awareness, and self-reflection. At Sankofa, these skills are viewed as integral to transforming boys’ masculinity such that boys are self-possessed young men who can successfully navigate their worlds. Despite this three-pronged approach to masculinity, school disciplinary practices dominate boys’ experiences at Sankofa, narrowing this approach to masculinity to self-regulation. This focus takes the form of bodily control and rehabilitating boys’ image as more suitable and less threatening to outside world.

School disciplinary practices are enacted within a rationale of protection—these practices are meant to ensure boys’ safety and success in a contentious world with respect to black boys’ masculinities. School staff worry about what happens when boys leave the school; as Principal Taylor put it, “when they leave, they are tested and the stakes are high.”
As a result, boys are corrected and punished when they fail to self-regulate, and as a result enter the school’s ladder of referral. School staff describe self-regulation as integral to out-of-school success, but these practices may inadvertently reproduce negative labeling and control of black bodies. These school practices reproduce the punitive, authoritarian, police-heavy, mass incarceration system within the school building. In the school’s, and Deans’, efforts to prepare these boys for the real world and the way they will be seen in that world, the Deans inadvertently see and label boys who enforce these negative perceptions—effectively, treating the boys the way they fear that others could treat them.

School disciplinary practices are well-intentioned, but run the risk of reinforcing entrenched stereotypes about black boys. Through these practices, the “bad boys” are labeled, sequestered from their peers, and forbidden from participating as a full member of the school community. Alternatively, these practices do bring more mindfulness to boys’ actions, image, and how much space they inhabit, which could speak to recent cultural attitudes surrounding toxic masculinity and the Me Too movement. While this could be one potential rationale for the value of these policies, as this study focused exclusively on boys of color, it is difficult to understand to what extent, if at all, similar discussions and practices take place in schools with majority white male populations.

Sankofa Collegiate, like other schools that educate black boys, might consider shifting its philosophical approach to discipline to being more “relationship-oriented,” rather than rule-driven. This could include implementing more restorative justice practices to better support black boys. Restorative discipline can shift school culture from sequestration and labeling to “reconciliation and reintegration” (Payne & Welch, 2018, p. 233). Restorative practices have been shown to be associated with a reduction in school
suspension rates, but these decreases have typically been for white students rather than students of color who are more likely to experience restorative discipline and more likely to be suspended in comparison to their white counterparts (Lustick, 2017). No particular practice alone is a silver bullet to interrupting systemic inequality within schools, but at the very least a concerted effort to examine and understand the trends of what types of students, and which expressions of masculinity, are regularly and disproportionately interpreted as defiant, or labeled as counter to the school’s mission, is a start.

In all, Sankofa’s mission prioritizes ensuring boys’ appearances, both in actions and in image, are uniform and suitable for wider public consumption. This “one size fits all” approach obscures their various diverse masculinities and makes it difficult for boys to find their own voices and expressions in a school that is virtually homogenous with respect to race, class, and gender. Boys are penalized for deviations from school rules with respect to their behavior and their image, deviations that typically represent aspects of their masculine identities. These punishments lead boys into punitive tracks that are very difficult to escape. To disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline, schools must work toward school cultural practices that affirm, rather than deny, the benefits of boyhood.
CHAPTER SIX: The Bonds of Brotherhood and the Tempering of Trust

“Brotherhood is a two-way connection...I think of it like a bicycle wheel with the spokes—it’s a connection to a common understanding.”

– Principal Taylor

“Now I run the game got the whole world talkin', King Kunta
Everybody wanna cut the legs off him, Kunta
Black man taking no losses”

- “King Kunta,” Kendrick Lamar

A Walk into Brotherhood: Summer Bridge

I begin this chapter with an excerpt from my fieldnotes that highlights boys’ first interactions with Sankofa, during an orientation program called “Summer Bridge.”

Sitting in the swelteringly hot cafeteria, boys dressed in their “Friday” uniforms: polo shirts and pants, I fanned myself a little as I got my lay of the land. I came to the school in August for the Sankofa’s Summer Bridge program: an orientation to the culture of the school in which boys learned about their school pledge, the icons that are the black leaders of each mentorship House, behavioral practices, and the school’s mission on the whole.

After a quick “welcome” from Principal Taylor, the 6th graders were told to make their way outside. They walked out of the building, and took a left out of the building’s heavy metal doors. They lined up in single-file and were each handed black blindfolds. Principal Taylor then told them to put their blindfolds on. No one did this right away, most looked at each other bewildered. The teachers urged them, “put them on.” The principal then said that they were not going to move on until every single person had their blindfold on. One by one, the students put their blindfolds on.

Principal Taylor then continued, “None of you are able to see what’s in front of you, but together you will know the way. You will need to use each other to find your way back into the school. We now ask you to put your right hand on the brother in front of you.” Less tentatively, the boys then put their right hand on the shoulder of the young man in front of them, and they were walked into the “threshold of the new adventure,” as Ms. Hamilton described it. Ms. Hamilton was one of the founding teachers of the school, at that time teaching upper grades and moving into an administrative position the next year. She told me, it’s “this idea of the hero’s journey: you’re leaving the old to go out into a new adventure,” she continued with a smile “a call to adventure.”
The adults asked the boys to walk back into the school building. As the boys walked back in, all of the teachers were positioned on the sides of the boys’ lines shouting words of advice and encouragement, such as: “don’t let go of your brother’s shoulder,” “You do it together,” “let him know if you have to step up or step down as we’re coming up the steps.” I heard: “be your brother’s ears, be your brother’s eyes, be your brother’s mouth.” Mr. Mitchell, a 7th grade teacher, later told me, “this really embodies what brotherhood is — this being your brother’s eyes, and ears, really being there for them. Ms. Hamilton added with a laugh, “it’s really about, you know, making them uncomfortable very quickly and depending on someone you don’t know to get you from A to B.”

I followed the boys with the teachers as they walked up two flights of stairs to the gym on the second floor, one of the shared spaces of the three co-located schools of the building. There was a screen and an LCD projector set up on one wall to the left of the entrance. Boys sat down on the wooden planks of the gym floor and were greeted by a clip from the movie Roots. They watched as Kunta Kinte was taken from the village with the others, with bags over their heads, hands on the shoulders of those in front of them. Some boys around the room began pointing and saying, “we just did that!” and “that was us!” while others were simply watching without a sound. The students were asked about the walk that they just did, and how it connected to Kunta Kinte’s walk. One of the questions asked students how their experience was a “rite of passage.” Many student comments referred back to the journey that Kunta and the other young men experienced in the movie. In processing student answers for the group, Ms. Hamilton concluded, “yes, it’s a process of resilience and taking chances.” The teachers explained that that was a journey the young men took together because they took chances on each other and on themselves to get to where they needed to go. Another 7th grade teacher tells them that they were resilient.

Their sixth grade teachers then advised them, “it’s important to ask yourself some questions: who are your allies here? Who are the people that you seek out? Who are your mentors? You are all starting a new adventure today, congratulations gentlemen.”

Introduction
This chapter opens in the same way that the student experience at Sankofa began: with a walk into brotherhood. In the previous chapter, I presented how various expressions of boys’ masculinity were perceived and variably disciplined by school officials. Boys’ conceptions of masculinity itself were embedded largely within the notion of brotherhood, which they described as more accessible to them given their age. Indeed, boys and adults’
descriptions of manhood typically included mentions of brotherhood as well. In particular, boys tethered descriptions of brotherhood to the idea of personal growth in one’s masculinity. Therefore, in order to fully understand masculinity at Sankofa, it became necessary to further unpack how boys understood brotherhood and how brotherhood was “taught” at Sankofa. In this chapter, I describe the process through which boys build, test, and confirm trust with their brothers. The trust that brothers have is far more paramount to the levels of trust that boys report in other, less close peer relationships such as friendships.

I begin with presenting how the trust that boys develop with brothers differs from the trust boys have with friends. Boys saw a brother as someone who was an inextricable part of them—a brother was someone who would be self-sacrificial and who was with them no matter where they went. Boys termed a brother as someone who was fiercely loyal and could never conceivably betray them. Students explained the bonds with brothers as unbreakable and forged through hardship. I argue that relationships between brothers undergo a process of tempering, in which the relationship is made more resilient and stronger through hardship, or forged through fire. I term the trust that is developed between brothers tempered trust as these stronger bonds are harder to break, and therefore serve as a veil of protection for both of the boys if and when they encounter adversarial situations.

The boys’ concepts of brotherhood were limited to their peers who were their close friends, rather than a far-reaching brotherhood extended to all boys with whom they came in contact. Boys developed brotherhood through a process of finding, keeping, and testing trust. For many of these boys, this trust was first found or developed during a traumatic or
frightening situation. Keeping this trust required boys not to “switch up” or snitch. Boys viewed tests of loyalty as indicative of whether or not someone could be considered a “real” brother. Lastly, boys tested trust by seeing whether or not other boys would be there to proverbially catch them when they fall. Boys who talked about peers they considered brothers talked about instances where that brother fulfilled each stage of trust.

Additionally, I discuss how boys develop brotherhood through play. In particular, boys play-fought (pretended or mocked fights) to bond with each other. This type of play was not permitted at Sankofa. For adults, the similarities between play-fighting and real-fighting were too close for comfort; at times, it was unknown to adults whether or not two individuals were real-fighting or play-fighting. Only brothers engaged in play-fighting, however, so boys were typically aware of whether fights were real or play. Since boys were not permitted to play-fight in school, they were not able to express brotherhood regularly in this way within Sankofa’s walls. In this way, boys’ concepts of brotherhood and masculinity are at odds with Sankofa’s understanding of how brotherhood and manhood are expressed, and as such, boys’ expressions of these concepts are misread by school staff.

Lastly, I present data that reveals that the vast majority of boys reported that they did not consider their Sankofa classmates to be their brothers. This last section responds to my second research question, as it explores how boys’ concepts of brotherhood are not legible by the school as “correct” performances of brotherhood, or by extension, of masculinity. By design, Sankofa Collegiate had many structures in place to create and foster brotherhood among the boys. With respect to my first research question, some of these structures included: boys participating in small advisory groups, or “Houses,” membership and identification with their House, as well as school uniforms that signified
their connection to one another. Lastly, I respond to my third research question in this chapter, by discussing how boys participate and make meaning out of these school practice designed to foster brotherhood. In particular, boys reported that they did not consider members of their House as closer to them than any other boy outside of their House. Additionally, while brotherhood is thought of as lifting all boys up together, I argue that brotherhood has bidirectionality: boys can be lifted together but they can also fall together. I found that with Sankofa’s organizational practices, it was much more common to watch boys “fall” or be brought down together, rather to rise or to be lifted up together. So rather than succeeding together, it was more common to see a “one falls, we all fall” sentiment.

A Background on Brotherhood
Brotherhood has been written about as a positive aspect of single-sex schooling for black males. Brotherhood refers to a community of boys or men who are joined through common characteristics or traits, experiences, backgrounds or traditions, and shared identities (Franklin, 2004; Harris, 2014; Nelson, 2013; Oeur, 2017). Brotherhood stands apart from friendship as brotherhood hinges upon these shared elements. Through this communal brotherhood, young men can join in interactions and experiences that are, ostensibly, more relevant and meaningful to all parties given the shared experiences and traits of those boys involved in the relationship. Brotherhood allows for a relational safety net for boys; through mutual determination and support, boys will be able to push and support each other toward advancing academically, financially, and socially.

Choosing the “right” members of one’s brotherhood has been described as a crucial task. The right brothers will support upward mobility, but choosing the wrong brothers could potentially forestall boys from securing the right opportunities. Brotherhood is conditioned by respectability politics, such that social advancement is largely dependent on
choosing the right individuals in one’s inner circle of brothers, making positive choices, and continuing to monitor one’s own character as well as the character of one’s brothers (Harris, 2014). Deciding who is in a brotherhood also requires a consideration of who is kept out of this relationship. This requires that boys must make boundaries to keep out those brothers that can either weigh them down, or put them into jeopardy.

Brotherhood is integral to developing one’s own masculine self-concept or identity. Identity is formed relationally—such that one’s iterations of identity are developed through the “looking glass self” of authentic relationships (Cooley, 2009). Identity can be thought of as an ongoing, recursive process that integrates life experiences conditioned by structural and cultural forces, and across social contexts such that identity is an ever-evolving construct, such that self-understanding is constantly under revision (Nakkula & Toshalis, 2010; Sadowski, 2008). Of the many relationships that boys participate in, peer relationships may be some of the most foundational. The sharing of one’s voice is relational, such that boys’ choice of language and the comfort level differs depending on with whom they are speaking (Gilligan, 2003; Nelson, 2013). Especially with their peers, and specifically with those whom they refer to as brothers, black boys’ brotherhood is strengthened by shared experiences of adversity (Dancy, 2012). Brotherhood, as a bond between black men or boys, indicates a special sort of closeness, vulnerability, and affirmation predicated upon sharing experiences and common traits.

Brotherhood is often written about as a positive aspect of cultivating a strong understanding of masculinity among young boys. In terms of single-sex black male schools, Freeden Oeur (2017) writes that single-sex schools share a “core objective...[to] develop a respectable brotherhood: an exceptional class of young black men with disciplined minds
and bodies, destined for college and middle-class security” (p. 1076). In particular, the first wave of black male academies prioritized developing relationships with adult male role models, whereas the second wave of single-sex black male schools focused more on building peer solidarity among their students (Oeur, 2017; Warren, 2016). This peer solidarity was referred to as creating a “brotherhood,” to support and “promote positive student outcomes” and positive concepts of masculinity (Fergus et al., 2014, p. 129).

**Brotherhood and the Process of Trust**

Boys develop brotherhood through building trust with each other. I found that boys’ experiences of developing brotherhood occurred in stages of increasing levels of trust with a peer, or friend. Boys cited brotherhood as necessary to becoming men. Boys positioned masculinity in this way as a collaborative endeavor: boys did not become men alone. Instead, boys became men through learning about manhood, and growing together, with their brothers. In all of boys’ stories about who they considered brothers, boys recounted experiences when they learned a friend could be considered something more: a brother.

The label of “brother” was conferred onto a peer only when a boy learned or found out that this peer could be trusted. This was the first stage of the trust process in brotherhood: finding trust. Boys recounted stories in which they were taken by surprise when they learned that peers whom they did not know well could be trusted as brothers. Boys also discussed times they had found that friends they had had for years demonstrated trust far into their friendships, such that they proved their potential of becoming a brother, rather than just a friend. This process of finding trust was the first stage in the process of boys qualifying someone else as a brother.

The next stage in the trust process for brotherhood was that of keeping trust and ensuring that a brother would not snitch, or switch up. This stage was about demonstrating
loyalty—both that they would not reveal what was told to them by their brothers (snitch), or play both sides of an argument, such that they were not wholly loyal (switch up). Once boys passed this stage, they were seen as mostly trustworthy, but not a full-fledged brother yet.

The final stage in developing brotherhood trust is that of proxy trust. In this trust, the boys saw their brother as someone who was an inextricable part of them—someone who would be self-sacrificial, someone who would be with them no matter where they go, someone who was fiercely loyal, and would never betray them. In this stage, this level of trust demonstrated that the brother would quite literally take a bullet for their brother. That they saw themselves in their brother, and that their brother saw themselves in them: reciprocal trust.

Overall, this trust that boys develop that they attribute to brothers, I argue is tempered trust. Relationships with these boys undergo the process of tempering, in which they are made more resilient and stronger through hardship. As discussed later in Chapter 7, boys viewed enduring a hardship or trauma as one of the stages one must endure to become a man. Relationships with brothers were conditioned by a hardship as well. These relationships were tempered, and therefore created stronger bonds that were harder to break. Brotherhood therefore served as a veil of protection for both boys who participated in the bond. Brotherhood helped boys prepare for manhood, and also would continue on into manhood such that boys would have allies as they age.

Tempered trust relates in stark contrast to what I term annealed trust, the type of trust present in friendships between boys, in which bonds did not undergo a process of tempering, and therefore the relationship—and by extension the boys in the relationship—
were not as formidable against threats. Manhood is high stakes, and as such, boys’ relationships with their peers cannot rest on faulty fonts of trust. Boys did not value annealed trust as it would not help on their journey to becoming men. When threats to these types of friendships occurred, the fractures that formed were too great. Boys therefore leaned on their brothers more than their friends because of the experience and process of tempering the trust and bonds between them.

**Finding Trust**

Boys distinguished brotherhood from friendship in many ways. One of the main ways boys described someone as a brother rather than only a friend was through the level of trust that they shared with that brother. Jakeem Richards described brotherhood as being “close to somebody and knowing you can trust them.” I asked Jakeem if he had anyone in his life he would consider a brother given the way he described it. He spoke about a friend that he had had since elementary school: “Little Brother, that’s what I call him. We’re close, I know I can trust him. There have been lots of times—he’s proven I can trust him—we’re close and I can talk to him about real, real, real personal stuff, you know? Like things I can tell nobody else.”

When I asked Maurice Bolton the difference between a brother and a friend, he told me that “you trust a brother more than a friend.” To probe further, I asked Maurice, “How do you know you can trust someone like that?” to which he replied, “you find out you can, that’s how you know. Something has to happen, and you find out.” Like Maurice, many students recalled moments that they had learned someone was a brother rather than only a friend, a time where a friend had demonstrated that they could be trusted, or that they were reliable, and therefore became a brother.
Tevon Baxter was one student that was able to find a brother at Sankofa. He singled out another member of his House, DuSean, who he considered as a brother after a particular incident in school Town Hall. He told me that ever since that day, he felt close to DuSean because DuSean could be trusted and would defend Tevon if he needed it. When I asked how Tevon realized that DuSean would have his back or defend him, he told me:

TB: Cause there was one day in what’s it called? Town Hall. I was about to get jumped...

PN: Wait, in the gym? In Town Hall you were about to get jumped?

TB: Yeah, and DuSean was near me and we both got up and we both smacked the two boys and ran [mimics getting up and running].

PN: So you just happened to be in that place at the same time?

TB: Yeah.

PN: Were you close before that?

TB: No—we knew each other, but weren’t close like that. We talked sometimes.

PN: So would you describe him as a brother or as a friend, if you had to choose?

TB: Yeah! Brother, of course!

Boys had to witness or experience this level of trust to know that they could trust others at the school. Boys had long-standing relationships with individuals who they termed “brothers”; many of these relationships had lasted for their entire schooling experience thus far. To compete with the extent and tenure of these friendships, it took a significant incident for a student at Sankofa to qualify as a brother to another. Ellis Almonte, a Dominican student, described that he considered many of his classmates brothers. When I asked him how they were like brothers, he responded that he “studied” his classmates:
PN: How do you feel like you're brothers?

EA: ‘Cause we know each other now—I study them.

PN: What do you mean ‘study them’?

EA: When I say study. I say, I mean as we get to know each other, I see who I can trust. I see how they act with each other, so I figure them out. I get to know more about another person.

Ellis’s example highlights that it takes some time to even know if you can trust another person. It might require a significant amount of observation or experience to know whether or not someone is trustworthy, and as a result, finding and calling someone a brother can take some time. The barrier to entry for brotherhood is high—it is difficult to become a brother, but once making it through the various stages of proving trustworthiness, the relationship becomes an impenetrable bond.

**Keeping Trust: No Snitching, No Switching Up**

Snitching is a breach of brotherhood. Snitching, or betraying someone’s confidence, is a demonstration that someone cannot be trusted, and that when tested, they will not have a brother’s back. When a person gets snitched on, they typically also face a consequence—in school, that consequence can be getting a detention, or in other situations it could be more a threat of physical violence.

Whether or not someone is a snitch determines if conversations can even be had around the person. After a fight broke out that I witnessed (detailed later in this Chapter), the students decided they could continue to discuss their plan of action because of my behavior in the previous incident. Danté Hill was bleeding from something; he said he got into a fight. Charles Barnett and Ryan Nelson began telling me about who was going to plan to fight with who— they didn’t go into specifics, but Barnett said about me “we can talk to
her, she didn’t snitch that one time. She’s cool.” Nelson and Hill nodded, presumably remembering the last time.

The next day, Charles Barnett came in upset and when I ask him what’s wrong, he told me: “Joel Brinson is telling my business for no reason, yeah I went out of the room without permission, and now I have detention because he snitched on me.” Refusing to snitch was upholding that you would proverbially keep your nose out of other people’s business. Implied here, was that talking about someone else’s business would lead to consequences for the person who was being talked about.

Further included in snitching was the unofficial code that boys would not snitch on each other to teachers. Doing this implied that the boys could not handle their own problems with each other, and of course invoked a consequence for the aggressor in the situation. For example, one day in Ms. Renaud’s class Maurice Bolton noticed that Jakeem Richards had a bottle of baby powder he had been trying to throw on others in the class. Bolton began telling me “shhh, don’t tell anyone.” In this example, even though Jakeem and Maurice never had an explicit conversation about snitching (to my knowledge), Maurice appears to know the consequences of sharing this information. As a result, he can only share this information with other individuals in the room who will not snitch. In this particular example, I am included in this group of who can be trusted, as I have demonstrated that I do not report behavioral issues to their teachers or to the Behavioral Deans. Further, even though Maurice does not even particularly like Jakeem, he knows the consequences for telling this information would lead to him not being trusted by his own friends, and therefore he maintains his silence.
In another instance, Ellis Almonte broke this code of snitching by finally approaching Mr. Lopez, the sixth grade math teacher, about how he had been picked on by a few students during the course of class. Notably, Ellis waited nearly 75 minutes, endured teasing for a very long time before he finally told a teacher. The cost of snitching was one that needed to be weighed, because it had consequences for the one who snitches as well as for the one who was snitched on. Eventually, Ellis walked over to Mr. Lopez and told him that Donovan Varick and Tarif Hayes were bothering him. Those two then began to shout out that it wasn’t them, but that it was someone else. At this, Eric Chua (a Dominican student) chimed in that it was definitely those two kids, and then Donovan Varick stood up and shouted “This snitching needs to stop, come on! You know that!”

The teachers were aware of this dilemma of snitching and found ways to work around it. On one occasion, Mr. Lopez recounted to the Sixth Grade team that during his last period, a pencil was thrown at him as he was teaching and his back was turned. He said to his class, “I know there are witnesses” but no one volunteered any information; he told the team “no one wanted to be a snitch.” To overcome the obstacle of snitching, Mr. Lopez put a post-it on everyone’s desk and said okay no one will know if you said something if you write it down, and if you write it you’re not really saying it. He collected the post-its, and from the handwriting was able to tell that those who did tell the truth were: Mason Wright, Emari Sumpter, and Isaiah Negasi. For the most part, these were the “good” kids.

After school that day, Emari Sumpter asked me if I heard what happened in Mr. Lopez’s room. I told him that I heard that someone threw something at Mr. Lopez, but no
one would say who it was. Emari Sumpter then told me, “Yeah it’s snitching. In the hood we say you’re a rat. In Sankofa Collegiate, if you snitch you get beat up.”

**Trustfall: They Are Always There To Catch Me**

Many boys felt that they needed to know someone for a long time before they could consider them a brother. David Sanchez did not consider anyone from Sankofa as a brother. Rather, he described his friends from outside of school as his brothers “because I’ve known them for a long time.” When I asked David what makes someone more like a brother than like a friend, he told me the following:

> DS: Like a friend? A friend of mine would be, would be listening to my story I tell him, right? But a brother? A brother would be in the story I’m telling. Like, my brothers? They’re not my ‘real’ brothers, but we’ve been through so much things, it’s not even funny.

> PN: So Brotherhood, would you say –

> DS: Brotherhood is—they’re not your real brother, but they are going to be there when you need them. They’re the type of people to be in every story you tell.

*Figure 9: David Sánchez’ photo of brotherhood (the park where he and his “brother” play after school)*
In the moment, I was struck by this distinction and found it to be particularly insightful. David Sanchez spoke about brotherhood as being something that one engages with over time; to be a brother you have to be in the moment with your brother, you cannot be a bystander or an after-the-fact friend. Brotherhood is being right next to you as you head into battle, being an inextricable part of your story rather than simply listening to your story. A brother could be considered one in the same as yourself, which requires a trust that I term proxy trust. In this situation, a brother is an indelible part of all of one’s dealings with society, such that separating the brother from the narrative renders it incomplete.

Other boys described their brotherhood with David in a similar way. Dymani Charles described David Sanchez as like a big brother to him. When I asked Dymani to tell me more about why he considered David a big brother, he said, “He helps me with everything, like we always talk about things. I talk to him most of the time because he really helps me out.” I also asked Dymani about what made David more of a brother than a friend and he replied as follows:

He’s like a really close friend; he helps me with more things than a friend could do. Like, if I had detention, or if I was about to get killed, he would be like ‘No, it was me’ and he would get killed.

This description of brotherhood is powerful, of quite literally taking the place of someone else. One necessary aspect of being able to take the place of someone else, to look out and protect them, requires that this brother is always present such that they are ready at any time to be protective, or to be there for their brother. Charles Barnett echoed this sentiment when I asked him why he couldn’t consider anyone else as much of a brother as his own brother.

PN: You said he backs you up—is there a time he backed you up recently?
CB: Yeah there’s a kid in the school—named [Name]. He goes to school, he bothers me in the park and he kicked me and then my brother stopped eating his food, came up, and beat him up.

PN: So you told your brother about it and then he came to the park to take care of it?

CB: No—my brother saw it himself. He was there, because he is always there with me. He took care of it when it happened.

Charles described how his brother was always there, such that Charles did not need to ask for help, but his brother was simply always ready to spring into action to protect him. This ability to sense trouble, and to be able to react at a moment’s notice, without even needing to ask for help is a key benefit of brotherhood. Brandon Mitchell described that this bond of brotherhood extended even when that reciprocity became impossible, even through death. Brandon’s biological brother died a few years back. His photo for brotherhood was a photo of him and his brother when Brandon was about six. When I asked Brandon about brotherhood, he described it as “say that something goes wrong with your brother or something, you try to keep his legacy going because you can.”

As such, brotherhood is a powerful bond that connects two or more boys together through the most challenging of circumstances. In all, boys connected the trust developed in brotherhood as ensuring that they would be able to make it to manhood. Specifically, boys credited trusting relationships as being what would allow them the protection and the care to be able to counter threats as they grew up. Boys described brotherhood as this mutual care-taking, a strength in numbers to be able to ensure their abilities to lead full lives as men.

My Brother’s Keeper:
“That’s My Son” and Other Expressions of Brotherhood
In the middle of Ms. Renaud’s class, Justin Mitchell threw something and it hit Tissshun Harrison in the face. Tissshun became immediately upset, crying and yelling as he stood up and started throwing things in frustration. He took Ms. Martinez's, the paraprofessional’s, notebook, which just seemed opportunely located on a desk nearby, and threw it across the room. Ms. Martinez admonished him for this, “Absolutely not, you pick that up.” Tisshun didn’t, and instead, charged out of the room. Ms. Martinez looked angry, and Ms. Renaud looked at me, and I say “I can go check on Mr. Harrison.” She thanked me.

By the time I got into the hallway, Tisshun had also thrown his backpack down the hall. He was walking back and forth, but was receptive when I started talking to him. I asked him to show me his face, and I saw that there did not seem to be any visible mark after being hit. He breathed deep and I tried to calm him down.

Other students began to appear in the hallway, presumably on trips to the Dean or the bathroom. The students saw Tisshun and, seeing he is upset, started checking on him. One student asked, “What happened?” Danté Hill, now also in the hallway and also a member of Ms. Renaud’s class, said “Mitchell threw something at him.” The first student volunteered, “Yo you want me to get my son, Malaki Brown on it?” to which Danté responded, “yeah Mitchell took over from me, I used to be the bully of the school.” I was surprised by this comment, because from what I had observed, Danté was a pretty sweet kid; registering my surprise, the first student laughed and said, “Well yeah, just look at him, that’s why [referring to his size]. Yeah, Mr. Brown is my son, I can get him to get Mitchell.”

At this point, Maurice Bolton, another student from the same classroom, was in the hallway. He looked directly at Tisshun and asked, “you ok?” Tisshun nodded. Maurice registered this and moved along to wherever he was going. I took Tisshun back inside the classroom, and Ryan Nelson walked up to him, put a hand on Tisshun’s shoulder, looked him in the eye, and asked, “You good?” Harrison nodded. Then Charles Barnett came up to him and said, “It’s okay. You won. He ran like a little girl.” When I ask, why exactly Tisshun “won,” Barnett said, “He ran, he doesn’t know how to fight.”

When boys announced “that’s my son,” this language allowed boys to claim which peers they did and did not consider brothers. “That’s my son” is the essence of the idea of “my brother’s keeper” as it reflects the symbolic ownership and responsibility of taking care of a peer, specifically a brother. The brotherhood that boys espoused, and how they articulated the responsibility to and relationship with their brothers, may be represented
differently than the school might otherwise have envisioned. This possession—the choice
to associate with someone else—was through the cliques that the teachers argued could be
a hindrance toward brotherhood. However, although it was not an expansive brotherhood
of many, these bonds appeared to be a strong, selective brotherhood. Boys claimed this
possession, this responsibility over each other, in a few ways: through looking out or
protecting their brothers (those that they would call “son”) and by demonstrating their
loyalty by not “switching up,” or playing both sides. Additionally, some boys explicitly
developed and demonstrated their brotherhood through notions of care and caretaking.
Lastly, I highlight some of the nuances that boys who had biological brothers experienced
in attempting to describe friendships that resembled brotherhood.

Protection and Looking Out

The vast majority of my sample echoed this sentiment of protecting another person,
or looking out for them, especially when the other person was being picked on, bullied, or
threatened. During his interview, Jamal Andrews told me that he slapped Malaki Brown,
who some considered to be the 6th grade bully. Jamal smiled as he told me “Yeah, he got
slapped! I stood up for Jayden. I slapped Malaki, and yeah, then I got in trouble. Again!
That’s when I came back up and Malaki denied it, but Troy slapped him too, to stand up for
Jayden.” In this example, Jamal, who described Jayden as one of his “Sankofa brothers,”
found it important to stand up for his brother when he was being threatened. In this sense,
a threat to one brother is like a threat to the other, such that it cannot be ignored. It is a
visceral feeling that initiates a necessary response.

In another instance, Justin Miller was becoming annoyed with Jamal Andrews in
class, because according to Justin, Jamal was talking. Justin threatened to leave the
classroom and made a menacing gesture toward Jamal. Jamal said, “he [Justin] is always
complaining for no reason.” Edris Hayes, sitting next to Jamal, who he described as his “brother,” turned to face Jamal and said, “you think I’m going to let him hit you?” Jamal nodded as if to signal understanding, and they shook hands. In this instance, Jamal’s frustration about Justin was registered not only by Jamal, but by Edris such that he was ready and willing to intercede on Jamal’s behalf if and when necessary. Later on in the same day, Justin Miller was looking for another student because this student had “messed with Calvin.” Although Calvin was not hurt in the exchange, Justin found that the threat of a negative incident to his brother constituted a need to “look out” and show an offender that the brother had protection or backup.

Another time, Dymani Charles was arguing with Donovan Varick about a pencil—arguing about whose pencil it was. Dymani began to get upset, raising his voice and screaming, “You know this is my pencil!” Isaiah Edwards stepped in between Charles and Varick, put his hands on Charles, and sat him back down in his chair. This was more of a guide, rather than a push. Isaiah Edwards said to Dymani Charles, “I promise you I’ll smack him, just chill.” In this instance, it seemed as though a brother was able to look out for another, especially given that tensions were higher with the brother who was immediately affected by the incident. Isaiah told Dymani to “chill,” and quite literally moved him out of the potential fight, and communicated to him that he would provide retribution to Donovan Varick.

Incidents with boys who were not brothers were a quick confirmatory test to see how strong their bonds were with boys who they did consider brothers. Boys sometimes put themselves in particular situations in which they were at odds with boys that were not in their circles, such that they require protection or looking out, and in doing so, they were
able to test the bonds of their brotherhoods with their friends. As will be discussed further in Chapter 7, boys viewed being able to care or “look out” for family and others as the second stage of manhood. This protection was one that was practiced through the bonds of brotherhood. Tests of Brotherhood uncovered and determined who was trustworthy, willing to stick up for them, and put themselves on the line to defend that brotherhood.

**Having My Back, Getting Theirs**

For his photo of brotherhood, Ellis Almonte took a photo of his best friend. When I asked him why his best friend represented brotherhood to him, he explained:

> My best friend? He’s like a brother to me (claps his hands together). We know each other’s families, and we knew each other since first grade. To help a brother is to always have their back, like if anything happens they're always there to help you.

Ellis’s description highlights a major theme that came up with boys describing others they considered brothers: knowing them for a long time, so much so that they know your family. The brothers that boys described seemed that they would be present in every aspect of a young boy’s life: sports, family time, school, after school, signifying that brothers are “always there to help you.” For the boys in my sample, when they knew that boys would always be there, they would know that those brothers would have their back.

Jamal Andrews took a picture of a sign he found in his community that said “working as one” for the photo prompt on brotherhood. When I asked him why he chose to take that photo to represent brotherhood, he told me the photo represented brotherhood because “brothers should be there for you no matter what, brothers have your back. They’re always with me no matter where, no matter who, no matter what, no matter how—wherever I go. They will always have my back; they’ll stand up for me.” In this example, Jamal highlighted how the expectation for brothers is higher than that of friendship—that
brothers will be present during most experiences, and that this presence ensures that they can be trusted, and that they will have your back.

Donovan Varick described brotherhood similarly as, “like having your brother’s back or being your brother’s keeper.” He described this feeling as giving him comfort, that he felt like he could be himself more around others he would consider brothers. As Donovan described, “We’re all brothers—we hang out every single day. We—we’re just like, it’s like a different kind of feeling. Like, it’s like I feel comfortable, I feel more comfortable around them than anyone else.” Boys highlighted the need to feel that someone had their back, and that this knowing helped them feel safe, or comfortable as Donovan described this feeling.

Boys regularly described the increased comfort they felt with brothers, as opposed to friends. This comfort was reflected in the idea of safety: both in feeling safe to share intimate or personal worries and the feeling safe physically with the presence of a brother. Again, this feeling of safety extended to the levels of manhood that boys described—that when family was not around, boys had to take care of each other until they became “man enough” or old enough to do so themselves. Chaquille Warner was another student that described this phenomenon. He described the notion of “being able to fall back on someone.” Joel Brinson also described brotherhood similarly, as “having your brother’s back—sticking up for them.” In describing having other students’ back, many boys evoked notions of loyalty and not betraying confidence or an allegiance to that friend. Danté Hill described brotherhood as “being loyal to people, not ratting on them, and if they did something to you—tell them chill, chill out. And if somebody is fighting, or messing with that person, be a bigger person and tell that person to stop.”
Demonstrating Care

Victor Fields described the difference between a brother and a friend through a classmate, Chris Ramos, who also attended Sankofa, with whom he also went to elementary school. Chris had recently experienced a seizure during one of the school's Town Halls. During the seizure many students stood by, but Victor rushed to his side. Throughout the week, Victor visited Chris at home as he was recovering and brought him cards from his classmates. He told me,

I think of [Chris] Ramos more as a brother than a friend. Chris? He'll like, he'll do way more stuff than someone [else]. Like say if the same thing happened to me that happened to Ramos in Town Hall [the seizure]? I think a friend would just stand there and feel bad, and probably wouldn't care. But Ramos would do what I did, I think. I know.

In this example, Victor was able to explain the difference in a particular emergency instance of what a brother would do and how that compared to the actions of a friend. Victor also recognized that his relationship with Chris was built on reciprocal trust and care, as he emphasized that he knows that if the situation were reversed, Chris would come through for him in the same way. The other sixth graders witnessed this incident, and many of them underscored this as an example of brotherhood that they witnessed at Sankofa. Emari Sumpter, for example, described brotherhood as “helping when another person is going through a tough time or something...like when [Chris] Ramos had his seizure and [Victor] Fields was there with him, trying to help.”

Implicit in this idea of brotherhood was one of care, but only two boys—ones that were not heteronormatively “masculine”—actually used the word “care” in their descriptions of what brotherhood is. For example, Isaiah Negasi described brotherhood in terms of caring: “I think brotherhood means you're taking care of your brothers every day. If they're feeling down, you make sure that they are okay and you make sure that they are
up to the utmost standard.” Although this type of caretaking was not very present in my data, it is possible that it is implicit in the way that boys talk about protecting each other and looking out for them. This notion is one of care: of taking care of threats, of taking care of their integrity, and by sticking up for them.

**No One Comes Close to My Brother**

Several students who had biological brothers found it difficult to express that any friendships of theirs resembled brotherhood. This could be because these boys valued their relationships with their biological brother to a high degree, such that calling anything else brotherhood would impinge upon the strength of the relationship with their biological brother. Alternatively, this could also be that boys did not seek out “brother” type relationships with friends as regularly, because their biological brothers already satisfied this need.

Justin Miller, for example, said that he felt that “someone like a brother would be closer than your friend, but I don’t know what that would be like because I have my own brother and that’s the only brother I need.” Ryan Nelson expressed a similar sentiment; while he acknowledged that there were others that fit the description of brotherhood, he would not go so far as to actually call them “brothers,” because of his biological brother.

PN: What would someone have to do to show you that they would treat you like a brother?

RN: They’d have to look out, if I got in trouble basically. Look out for me and stuff.

PN: Okay, and you said these guys look out for you, but you said they’re more like friends not brothers, how come?

RN: Because I knew them for a long time, and they look out for me a lot and stuff and we always do fun things, but yeah, because of my actual brother. I already have a brother.
For boys that had a brother at home, some had very high standards for the type of brotherhood they would expect from someone with whom they were not related. Eric Chua (a Dominican student), for example, described brotherhood the following way:

Brotherhood is connecting with other men. Like, connecting with your friends in the type of way that makes you like brothers. You trust each other more and then you get full trust, and you can trust them to have your back and not betray you.

When asked if there was anyone at Sankofa he thought of like that, Eric Chua took a long pause and tentatively said, “Maybe Kayshawn Vega?” I told him he didn’t have to pick anyone if he did not consider anyone a brother at school, and he replied “Okay, cool, because no one comes close to my actual brother at home.”

When I asked Charles Barnett “what makes someone more like a brother than a friend?” he told me that a brother would “understand” him more because they would have more in common. Charles continued, “a brother understands—we like each other, we have things in common but they understand me. Like Tyshawn [his biological brother] understands, he likes to fight too. Only when he has to defend himself. Just like me.” When I asked Charles to give me an example of how someone who was more like a brother would act he said, “They’ll tell me to fight! If somebody keeps on touching me they’ll tell me to stick up for myself, or they’ll fight them—that’s what we do.”

Charles was quick to correct me when I referred to his description as “what a brother would do.”

CB: Uh uh (shaking head no), never. My brother is different than them—he’s the only one who is a real brother.

PN: So what would your brother do differently than these friends that are like brothers, but not your actual brother?
CB: They wouldn’t ask to borrow money; they would only defend me if only I defended them. Like my older brother defends me every day no matter what—even as a grown man. My brother? He’s like a super hero to me. He helps me when I need help, he backs me up when I need back up, and that’s it. If I don’t have money or anything and he has money, he’ll give me half of his money. And I’d do the same for him, but we don’t keep track like that.

Charles’ description reflects a certain unspoken understanding between him and his biological brother—that they both would defend and take care of each other. Charles typified the relationships with these boys as distinct from that with his brother, as more transactional than unconditional. If his brother protected him from something, Charles did not expect a quid pro quo, nor would his brother’s protection need to be invoked in return for a previous favor from Charles. Rather, for Charles, brothers simply look out for each other without expecting anything in return. He distinguishes this from friends, who could be considered brothers, as there would need to be some sort of demonstration of care or protection on Charles’ part to be able to earn that reciprocal or mutual faith in a shared bond. Danté Hill also echoed this lack of immediate reciprocal caring with someone you think of as a brother. As Danté distinguished, “a friend is like—you don’t invite them to your House, a brother you’ll invite them, be nice to them, buy them things. They won’t pay you back necessarily, you don’t expect it but you’re good with each other.”

Quite simply, the boys that already had brotherhood in place through their biological brothers were less likely to mention seeking this type of brotherhood out with their peers, and similarly did not often describe their peers as “brothers.” In this scenario, older brothers provide the role of men, or care-taking described in the second level of masculinity detailed further in Chapter 7. The care-taking involved in these relationships of biological brotherhood led these boys to not seek out that reciprocal care with their friends.
Tempered Trust and Annealed Trust

Overall, the trust that boys developed with peers they deemed brothers differed from the trust boys had with friends. Boys saw a brother as someone who was an inextricable part of them—a brother was someone who would be self-sacrificial and who was with them no matter where they went. Boys termed a brother as someone who was fiercely loyal and could never conceivably betray them. They explained the bonds with brothers as unbreakable and forged through hardship. I argue that relationships between brothers undergo a process of tempering, in which the relationship is made more resilient and stronger through hardship, or forged through fire. I term the trust that is developed between brothers tempered trust because these stronger bonds are harder to break, and therefore serve as a veil of protection for both boys if and when they encounter adversarial situations.

Tempered trust relates in stark contrast to what I term annealed trust: the type of trust present in friendships between boys, in which bonds do not undergo a process of tempering. I extend the characterizations of tempered and annealed trust from the science of glass-making. Annealed glass refers to standard glass which, when broken, tends to break into multiple, non-uniform, jagged shards. When annealed glass is broken, the pieces are virtually impossible to secure back together as the pieces are disparate in size and shape. Tempered glass is much tougher, and more resilient than annealed glass. Annealed glass is made through thermal treatment and a slow cooling process, whereas tempered glass is manufactured through a process of extreme heating and rapid cooling, such that it results in glass that is much more fortified than annealed glass. Tempered glass, if and when it breaks, will split into small pebble-like pieces, that are much safer to the touch than shards from annealed glass.
Without this trial by fire, or tempering, the relationship, and by extension the boys who participate in the relationship, are not as formidable against threats or future traumas. When threats occur to these friendships, the fractures that occur are too great for the relationship to withstand. Boys therefore lean on their brothers more than their friends because of the experience and process of forming the tempered trust between them. Through tempering, boys can determine that brothers are capable of protecting them against threats and ensuring that the boys who belong to the brotherhood can mutually assure the other is safe during their boyhood, and into future manhood. Manhood, as described earlier, begins with a traumatic, or difficult incident, through which boys will need to be able to have allies or support structures to be able to endure. In keeping brothers who are identified through a process of tempering, boys can determine that these other boys will protect and care for them, just as they protect and care for the other boys, as they move through boyhood into adulthood, or manhood.

When boys develop relationships with their brothers through tempered trust, they are able to be their “full selves,” potentially allowing them further opportunities to both honor what makes each individual unique, and what characteristics are shared between the brotherhood. Tempered trust as it operates through brotherhood can allow boys a space to be vulnerable and a structure through which they can evade pervasive norms of hypermasculinity, linked to adverse social and academic outcomes for black boys (Cunningham & Meunier, 1999; Stevenson, 2004).

**The Bidirectionality of Brotherhood: One Falls, We All Fall**

Over my time at Sankofa, it became clear that brotherhood was not simply about advancing, but it was bidirectional: brotherhood could also negatively affect the boys. The way that boys expressed brotherhood was not always seen as congruous with the mission
of the school, and as such, boys’ notions and expressions of brotherhood were appraised as deficit-based or detracting from the brotherhood adults had hoped to create among and between the boys at Sankofa.

At Sankofa, I found that boys were often guilty by association, and often this guilt stemmed from them belonging to an ostensible brotherhood. For example, if a boy got into a fight and the rest of the students in that boy’s House did nothing to stop it, they too would be held accountable for the fight occurring. Through the actions of the educators enforcing various policies over the school year, it became apparent that the ways that the boys were seen had ramifications for the entire group. This “one falls, we all fall” attitude connects back to the stakes of perception and representation detailed earlier in Chapter 4. If one boy is seen as misbehaving, that misbehavior reflects poorly on the rest of the brotherhood. If a boy is seen without a proper uniform, that reflects poorly on the rest. Although brotherhood ties the boys together to bond them, brotherhood can also tie them down. Additionally, many of the ways that boys described expressing brotherhood were not seen as positive aspects of affirming brotherhood at Sankofa, but rather, detractors from the sense of brotherhood that Sankofa was attempting to create. Below, I present a few examples of how boys’ expressions of brotherhood were misperceived.

**Play-fighting as a Misunderstood Expression of Boys’ Brotherhood**

At Sankofa, I found that boys developed brotherhood through play. Boys play-fought (through mock fighting) to bond with one another, but the school quashed this form of play. Play-fighting was one way that brothers prepared for the “real world;” their brotherhood prepared them, in a “safe” space, to fight other potential threats from people who were not in their clique or their crew. Many boys expressed knowing how to fight as a skill they needed to have to feel safe outside of school. All but two students in my sample discussed
getting jumped as something they think about when they are outside. Some of the boys practiced not flinching with their brothers: Tevon Baxter often had his brothers try to get him to flinch, so he could practice being tough in the event of a real confrontation. Below, I present an excerpt from my fieldnotes that details an extensive play-fight that I happened to walk in on:

As I’m walking down the stairs and toward the exit, there is a huge commotion near the 1st floor bathroom. It looks like an all-out brawl, students are grabbing at each other’s’ shirts and ties, it looks like a whirlwind of [their uniform colors]. Students are mostly laughing or smiling, so I’m a little confused at first. I see Ryan Nelson, Tevon Baxter, Charles Barnett, Daniel Carter and some 7th graders. Baxter is laughing and smiling as he yells a loud yell and runs across the hallway shoving as many people as he can. Students are shoving each other, pushing them down to the ground or against walls. The fight starts breaking up, I see that Barnett is laughing as the 6th grade students start running toward the cafeteria for their after school program.

I head to the cafeteria with them, and sit near Charles Barnett. Barnett is viewing a video on his phone of Carter and Nelson fighting in what appears to be the 1st floor bathroom. He’s watching the video under the cafeteria table, sitting with the two of them. Carter looks visibly disheveled as he looks onto the video, he’s smiling, sweating and out of breath. He tells me he chipped his tooth and starts laughing and shows me some other spots that are bloody. His eyes look a little strained, but he’s smiling and laughing.

Barnett looks at me and says, “you’re cool, right? Shhhh. Don’t tell anyone, ok?” Danté Hill walks by and tells me that Ryan Nelson and Daniel Carter were playing this game they like to play called “30 seconds to die.” Danté tells me not to tell anyone about it and he says, “don’t worry it’s not really DYING, no one is going to die! It’s just a game! Basically, you have to fight for thirty seconds going all out and then you see who wins at the end. It’s play-fighting, basically.” Maurice Bolton continues to explain this play-fighting to me, “It’s just play-fighting, sometimes when two people have a problem, they just fight for a bit and it’s fine. It’s not real, it’s just, you know, a fight. Ryan Nelson and Daniel Carter are just playing, it’s fun, and then we’ll usually watch the video and see how it went down.” Barnett is still watching the video and starts scrobbing back and forth and says, “this is when it happened!” It’s Nelson punching Daniel Carter across the face. Danté Hill says, “yeah, that’s when it happened, he has to check that out!” Hill, Nelson, Carter, and Barnett replay this part over and over together, watching the punch together. There’s lots of nodding and smiling from everyone.
Charles Barnett, one of the students in the above description, told me the day after the above play-fighting incident that what I observed was typical:

CB: We always fight after school, for fun

PN: Where do you fight?

CB: Outside, or in the bathrooms, and we’ll fight and after that we’ll talk about the fight, so it’s just fun for us. Or if there’s beef, everything will be resolved. There’s no beef after that.

Barnett, along with the great majority of my sample, described play-fighting as just regular bonding between friends—a way to pass the time and the spend time with each other. As Victor Fields, who is standing with his best friend Chris Ramos, tells me, “Play-fighting? It’s just fun to play, it’s all your real friends—you know your real friends are always going to be fighting outside after school with you. That’s how you know they are your real friends.”

Real friends, or brothers, play-fight with one another. There’s a level of trust to play-fighting, such that it would not be possible or even desirable to fight with someone who was not your brother.

Boys typically did not take kindly to being touched by another boy, unless it was someone that they would consider a brother. If someone else touched them, this would be considered a “violation” and grounds for physical contact or fighting. Between brothers, however, touching is allowed: from pats on the shoulder, to handshakes, to occasional hugs to hype-man (encourage) a friend, touching was not seen as a violation but as indicative of the strength of their relationships. Play-fighting and the touching that occurred as a result of it was therefore permissible between brothers.

To adults, play-fighting appeared far too close to real fighting. Adults had difficulty knowing whether or not two individuals were actually fighting or play-fighting. The boys,
however, were aware of who would “play” with whom, and whether two boys were actually fighting by a single glance. This was because only brothers played: boys did not engage the same way with those they considered as merely friends. At school, the boys were punished for play-fighting. The school, therefore, inadvertently adultified this exercise of boys’ play: the boys were seen as more dangerous, and as men. This adultification resulted in an environment in which boys were not seen as boys, but were perceived as larger, older, or more dangerous than they actually were. Ultimately, the school’s conception of brotherhood was somewhat rigid, as it did not allow for other non-school accepted perceptions or enactments of brotherhood.

To begin, when the students play-fought, it often looked like real fighting, and it was not clear except to the students involved if it was a play-fight or not—it depends on their relationship to one another. On one day, I spotted Jakeem Richards and Danté Hill in the Deans’ office. Later on, after they were dismissed, I asked Danté what happened to land him in the office. He told me, “They thought we were getting into a fight—me and Richards, after I dunked on him. But I didn’t even try and fight him, we were just playing. And we were laughing too! But yeah we got in trouble.”

Another reason that educators mentioned that play-fighting should be prohibited was that play-fights could sometime escalate into real-fights. When a play-fight became too rough between brothers, the boys shook this off by saying that their brother “plays too much.” Sometimes boys did “real”-fight with boys they consider to be their brothers. Danté Hill and Ryan Nelson were close friends, and they both described each other as brothers. On one particular occasion at the end of the day, Ryan nearly got into a physical altercation with Danté. Ryan said that Danté punched him in the chest, and was “getting in
his face.” Ryan got angry and Danté didn’t remove himself from the situation. Ryan then did what I observed many other boys do in this situation—got into a fight with a brother—he told Mr. Hill, “I’m not playing with you!” to elucidate that this was not play-fighting, this will be a real fight, and someone could get hurt.

Play-fighting incidents constituted a great deal of boys’ interactions with the disciplinarians of the school: the Deans. Although sometimes play-fighting could also lead to real fighting, the boys described that this was the way they bonded with their friends, and could know that they were “real friends.” Of course, the school rules could not forbid this play-fighting from taking place outside of school, but most of the students in my sample did not spend time with each other outside after school because they all traveled from many different neighborhoods. By cutting short the opportunity to play-fight because of the specter of fighting, the school messaged to the boys that their ways of forming bonds with each other was not the right or appropriate way to act with one another. The Deans and the teachers also told students they were not allowed to touch each other because play-fights can sometimes lead to real-fighting. Although safety is always a concern of any school building, dismissing play as a valid form of peer relationship-building effectively kills play and the idea that boys can play without dangerous consequences. This move in many ways unintentionally adultifies children’s behavior and strains the bonds of brotherhood.

The Dangers in Bystanding: Being Pulled Down by Your Brothers

Brotherhood was not always a good thing at Sankofa Collegiate. I argue that Brotherhood can be considered bidirectional as it has positive and negative consequences for the boys. Brotherhood’s bidirectionality at Sankofa can be seen in the ways that boys could rise together, but they could also fall together. The men in the community,
responsible for discipline, often implied this duality and that they had to fight to overcome the tendency to pull each other down, and shift toward pulling each other up instead.

Dean Vasquez, the former middle school dean and the current high school dean, described brotherhood in the following way:

It’s looking after your fellow man... however you do that. The idea is not to be a crab in the barrel—if you're not being a crab in the barrel, instead of dragging them down, you're pulling them up. So brotherhood to me, is helping your fellow man.

In this conception, there is an implication that boys are not helping, but instead they are actively “hurting” brotherhood—pulling other brothers down from success. This was a common theme over the year: that if a few students were creating a problem, then everyone would be subject to a consequence. One particular example illustrates this well. Students were expected to line up quietly against the wall in front of their next class and “transition” quietly. During this transition, boys were not allowed to speak, their backpacks had to be off to their right sides held by their right hand, and even their feet had to be positioned properly—one on a guided black line and another on the gray tile floor. On one particular day, the 6th graders were not transitioning well, and Ms. Cozner was managing the class in the hallway:

We will give out transition demerits. If we have to practice how to stand in lines, we will. Who is still talking? Point him out, otherwise it's the whole House. It won't be funny when it's you who created the issue for your whole House and everyone will be mad at you.

Ms. Cozner then said she would see them afterschool to practice transitions. Principal Taylor happened to be out in the hallway during this transition, which wasn’t typical. He did not interrupt as Ms. Cozner was managing the children, but after she finished he spoke to the boys: “The young men that are outside in the hallway waiting to enter? The few
brothers messing this up, I need them pulled.’’ Students who were breaching this idea of brotherhood would get “pulled” for discipline in many ways when they were outed either by themselves or by their peers (For more on school discipline see Chapter 5). Students were also in trouble if they were bystanders to situations. Throughout the year, students would periodically get in trouble for yelling, screaming, and banging on walls as they transitioned their ways back from lunch to the classrooms. Boys would traditionally be asked who created the noises, but only a select few would reveal who the misbehaviors were from. Most others, however, were bystanders—not creating noise, but also not telling others to stop misbehaving. In admonishing the behavior of the boys during transition, Dean Crandell said the following:

Each and every one of you are not being accountable for your actions, and there are some of you that are saying, “well I didn’t do anything,” that’s the whole point. Like just not doing anything, not helping, is guilty by inaction.

In this context, boys were not allowed to be bystanders: to simply witness misbehaviors, but were told they were just as “guilty” for not stopping these infractions. In this way, boys were faced with complicated choices that often went against the code brotherhood—of looking out and not snitching on their brothers. For other boys, doing anything other than bystanding conflicted with their personalities—especially those that were often afraid to speak—whether it was for retaliation of their peers, or simply that they were shy and often wanted to simply get through the school day. In all, the school’s idea of brotherhood—helping the school hold boys accountable by stopping misbehavior or reporting it—is in direct contradiction of the boys’ notions of brotherhood.

In another incident, a fight broke out in Ms. Renaud’s class, and Principal Taylor came to the classroom to speak to the students at the end of the day:
Y’all just watched it happen—watching you tear each other apart. Then I hear that you’re taking out phones and recording. Disgusting. Y’all into that for some reason. It’s not funny. It’s embarrassing. You’re better than that. [I am] charging those followers in this House, clumped together, those that are following? Some of you we’re disengaging. Not going to be a problem or fight against. Just sit there and laugh. Just going to hype man. And watch.

Here, Principal Taylor made a distinction that those that were watching fighting were tacitly endorsing a dissolution of brotherhood, or a display of animosity between brothers. Principal Taylor emphasizes that fighting, or encouraging those to fight is counter-intuitive to Sankofa’s conception of brotherhood. This aspect of Sankofa’s brotherhood is in direct contradiction to the boys’ understanding of the role of play-fighting between brothers. These students were referred to as followers, anathema to one of the core values of the school: leadership. In this way, being a bystander was conflated with being a “troublemaker” and actively following negative behaviors in the space. As Mr. Reynolds, a special educator who worked with the sixth grade explained, “If you see a sinking boat, would you want to drown with it? Don’t drown with them.”

The followers were also given a consequence along with those that were involved in the fight. In this way the School saw the students that were not actively contributing to the physical welfare of their brothers as contributing to the downfall. The boys however, in witnessing, could also be making an active and agentic choice in asserting their brotherhood. Although it looks as though boys were straining the bonds of brotherhood, boys saw this act of not stepping in or witnessing as maintaining and asserting brotherhood with their friends and acknowledging an act of a fight as a typical ritual in negotiating brotherhood. With regard to physical fighting, boys needed to constantly navigate the tensions, and likely punishments around, fighting with their brothers.
Although boys found their play-fighting to be innocent and other boys were encouraged to watch, the school saw this as supporting brothers tearing each other apart.

**Houses: A Group of Boys, Not Brothers**

During their Summer Bridge program, students were sorted into Houses. The sorting was done more or less randomly, as students were simply assigned a House at arrival. The Houses were each named after a prominent man of color who was successful in his field (e.g., Jackie Robinson in baseball and humanitarianism). Each House contained about 15-20 students, splitting the 65 or so in the grade.

At a New Family Orientation for the school, Principal Taylor described the function of the Houses in the following way,

All right, so each House is responsible for one another [within the House]. The Houses compete—there will be an accumulation of points that rise and fall each day—at the end of each week tallies are made by the Deans by recommendations from each of our staff members. Whoever wins will go on the House trip at the end of the year, which could be Six Flags, for example. It’s an incentive program to keep them on the right track.

In this way, the Houses acted as a microcosm of brotherhood at-large—a way to recognize and reward those students that could enact brotherhood, and even draw competition from this challenge of performing brotherhood well. The big end-of-year reward for the House Winner was a trip to Six Flags. A couple of students in the Baldwin House describe this incentive toward brotherhood:

Edris Hayes: We all can have brotherhood, we all can work together as brothers and as one.

Jamal Andrews: Yeah, we have to work together to go to Six Flags.

Jamal’s response highlights that as a House, they are tied to one another—such that one’s success is another’s success, and one’s failure will impact the others. He described that they must work together, but in describing this working together Jamal did not mention
any deeper bonds other than working together to achieve the goal of an amusement park trip. When asked whether or not students felt close to their House brothers, students overwhelmingly told me that they did not, unless they were previously friends prior to joining Sankofa:

PN: Do you feel close to your House brothers? If someone was getting picked on do you think you would stand up for them?

Khaleel Dunn: I don’t feel close, but yes it’s important to stand up for them because we’re going to have to help each other out one day, so we might as well start now.

Khaleel’s comment shows that although he did not feel close to his peers that were in his House, he still would stick up for them like he would for any other peer. In a sense, then, his House did not provide him with any closer relationships or trust than he would otherwise have without the House structure.

Another student from a different House, Tevon Baxter, said he did feel “a little bit” close to his House brothers because he “they always have my back but I don’t have theirs.” Interestingly, Tevon found that his Housemates looked out for him in a way that he did not reciprocate, which led to him feeling some type of closeness with them. Despite this closeness, he did not feel compelled to look out for them in the same way.

Other students felt that Sankofa wanted its students to feel brotherhood because of their racial and gender similarities:

PN: What do you think Sankofa thinks brotherhood is?

Emari Sumpter: That we’re all similar because we’re all African-American—and that means we’re brothers. They’ll always say if you need help you can ask your brother for help.

PN: Do you feel like you would do that—ask another student here for help?

ES: Um, not really…(shrugs) maybe?
Emari, like many other students in my sample, described what he had in common with his Housemates as limited to race and gender. He did not seem to find that this was sufficient for him to develop close bonds with them, or that this meant that he would view them as brothers. For most of the students in this sample, and at Sankofa on the whole, this was not their first time attending a school with a school population that consisted of others representing the same racial or ethnic background. The unique element of Sankofa to them is that now they were also attending a school without girl classmates. Even with this further commonality, boys did not find that this offered them an opportunity to develop close bonds with these boys just because of their shared grouping in the House. It’s possible, however, that if these groupings were more intentional to consider shared interests beyond shared characteristics, that boys could develop closer or meaningful friendships and support with one another.

**Visual Language of Brotherhood**

The idea of brotherhood was present in the space—the idea that if one falls, you all fall. The success of one was built on the success of the other, as was failure. In many ways, using the tie as one uniform piece across all students worked to tie the students together through a visual language. On one day, a student pointed out that another’s tie wasn’t tied properly and went to help him tie it correctly. Seeing this, Mr. Franklin, the leader of the Lewis House said: “This is good, because you guys are learning to take care of each other.” Here, it’s also notable that taking care of the visual representation of manhood, or doing right in the space, is what brotherhood is about: nurturing the presentation and assisting others in expressing their proper manhood. The school intended this to be something that
students remember to use to “take care of each other.” In the first example, the tie became one way to show caring for another brother.

Just as brotherhood can be something to applaud, it can also be something to visually notice is not present. Dean Crandell stopped a Town Hall meeting when he noticed there were two students play-fighting in the back of the room. He removed those students, with the support of Dean Vasquez, and then announced to the room that this type of behavior was unacceptable, and the rest of the boys in grades 6-8, present in the gym’s Town Hall, should be upset. He said,

I’d think “you go to my school and represent my school, and if there’s something that doesn’t convey the same image that I convey? I know I’m here with my tie, but you don’t convey what I convey? I would not be happy.”

Here, the concept that looking similarly—wearing the emblem of the school signifying you are a “particular” type of man, came with particular expectations of how one acts: the actions of one boy affected and reflected the character or potential actions of another boy within the brotherhood. Dean Crandell in another Town Hall described this saying the following:

As I’m walking the hallways, uniform says a lot about who you are through presentation of yourself as an individual. We want to make sure that you are presenting your best self and not getting House deductions for this. Not letting other people down.

The uniform had a bigger symbolism than just the individual wearer because of the stakes of not presenting oneself properly. If one person had a uniform infraction, the consequence was administered both to that individual and to the group members within their House. For example, if a student was not wearing a tie, that student would have to attend detention but they would also cost their House five points. The bigger symbolism
here is that if a boy wasn’t presenting himself well, he affected the well-being of his brothers and the brotherhood itself.

There were also many instances throughout the year in which other students were punished or “pulled down” by the poor behavior of their peers. In one instance, Mr. Anderson, the Frederick Douglass House leader, had every member of his House remove their ties because they were no longer “embodying” the tie. Mr. Anderson labeled each tie with the student’s name as he took it. As he took each student’s tie, he remarked out loud “If I do it for one, I do it for all.” The students were all standing in what was now their incomplete uniform as Mr. Anderson was writing names on ties at the front of the room. Students like Ellis Almonte (a Dominican student) and Jamal Andrews, gold tie students, were standing quietly, and appeared resigned. In punishing these students as well, by taking their visible indicator that they were a part of the community, the “good kids” were being metaphorically pulled down by the actions of other students, which mirrored some themes from perception of black boys at large, in terms of stereotypes and fears. This is a microcosm of the greater society: No matter the degree of a misbehavior, others will use that behavior to be indicative of all others that look like that boy—the brotherhood as a whole.

For his photo of brotherhood, Donovan Varick took a photo of his school tie. When I asked why this photo represented brotherhood to him, our exchange went as follows:

DV: Well, the tie? Because we all wear it. So we’re all the same, we’re supposed to be like brothers.

PN: So, you said “supposed to be like brothers” just now. Would you say you feel like you consider your classmates brothers then?

DV: (Shrugs) Not really.
PN: Okay, you said earlier that brotherhood was “having someone’s back,” if let’s say you saw one of your classmates getting picked on by someone from a different school, what do you think you would do?

DV: That actually happened already. I just—it didn’t really happen to none of my friends, so I didn’t look into it. I didn’t pay attention to the situation, I didn’t want to get involved.

PN: Are there particular people you would want to get involved for or want to have their back? Or not so much?

DV: Yeah, but not so many people to put myself out there, to get involved like that. Just the ones who are really like brothers.

Donovan was able to identify that the ties could signify brotherhood as they unite all boys under a shared symbol, but that he did not consider his peers brothers. Donovan questioned this all-encompassing idea of brotherhood, and explained that experiencing and practicing brotherhood requires a vulnerability or a sacrifice of oneself to “put myself out there” or to “get involved.” In this way, brotherhood is a very high-stakes act for boys, as they do not always want to put themselves out there for just anyone, but only for those with whom they really feel close.

**Conclusion**

Brotherhood is bidirectional as it binds boys together in both positive and negative ways. Brotherhood is built on trust and is developed through various stages. First, boys find that a peer can be trusted, then boys test the loyalty of this trust, and lastly, boys confirm the bonds of brotherhood through repeated interactions in which boys demonstrate that they will show up for them in particularly traumatic situations. The bonds of brotherhood support the process of becoming a man and coming into manhood, detailed further in the next chapter. Brotherhood is built on trust, and it is different than the trust that operates in friendships. I term the trust that operates in brotherhood as tempered trust, as the trust undergoes a process of tempering, or trial by fire or trauma, to
provide a foundation for brotherhood. The tempering of trust mirrors the hardship that boys find that they must endure to become men. Testing boys, and their trust, in this way assures that they will be positive companions along the road to manhood. This tempered trust differs in stark contrast to the annealed trust in friendships, which does not undergo this process of tempering,

Trust is difficult to develop and is fostered through shared trauma in which boys can witness and gauge another’s trustworthiness or capacity for brotherhood. Students in this study did not find that they developed close brotherhood bonds through the structures in place at Sankofa, but rather developed brotherhood through their trusting bonds determined by happenstance; witnessing and experiencing repeated incidences of boys being able to be there for one another. Teachers and students alike remark that they do not “know” a vast majority of their peers, though boys may find more opportunities to trust one another when taken “out of their element.” Both through their original Summer Bridge “walk into brotherhood” and their camping trip, boys were able to find ways to support one another in ways that they may not otherwise have needed to or have sought out.

Boys also conceive of and act out brotherhood in ways that are not acknowledged by Sankofa. Boys’ displays of brotherhood are adultified, as play-fighting is viewed as a dangerous activity, rather than an expression of the bonds of brotherhood and a preparation for the manhood to come. An alternative approach to developing brotherhood among the entire grade would be to consider the viable brotherhoods that boys develop independently of Sankofa. Through these brotherhoods, Sankofa could better support boys’ positive masculine concepts and work toward academic, social, and professional trajectories. In the next chapter, I discuss in further detail the conceptions of masculinity
and manhood that boys hold and how these conceptions play into their experiences at Sankofa.
CHAPTER SEVEN: Leveling Up: Playing the Game of Masculinity

“Play the game, but play it your own way—part of the time at least. Play the game, but raise the ante, my boy. Learn how it operates, learn how you operate—I wish I had time to tell you only a fragment.”

- Ralph Ellison, Invisible Man (1952, p. 8)

Introduction

This final findings chapter explores how sixth grade black boys at Sankofa Collegiate define and describe masculinity. In Chapter 4, I have described how boys rationalize and value school practices to varying degrees depending on how much they feel the white gaze, and how valuable they find preparing or acclimating to that gaze. In Chapter 5, I examined how boys’ varying displays of masculinity are met with disciplinary practices. In Chapter 6, I described how notions of masculinity are inextricably tied to boys’ notions of brotherhood, which boys consider an early enactment of an ongoing protection to carry into later manhood.

In this chapter, I examine how boys assert, redefine, and contest school conceptions of masculinity. I argue that boys describe manhood as discrete stages through which one must advance. Boys viewed manhood as passing through multiple, discrete stages, or levels, rather than one fluid, continuous journey. A few boys termed this movement in stages upward toward manhood as “leveling up”—a term taken from videogame culture to mean one has succeeded in a level can advance forward with the game.

Boys identified three levels of manhood: enduring struggle, taking care and looking out for others, and acquiring calm and maturity. I discuss each of these stages in the sections that follow. In addition to describing how boys’ understood manhood, I compare these understandings to how they contend with boys’ understandings of Sankofa’s version of masculinity. In particular, boys’ perceptions of whether or not school practices further
masculinity determined the degree to which they found the school and its demands to “level up” in masculinity as grinding tasks, or obstacles, concurrent with, but not integral to, becoming a man. I term the boys who find these practices as indeed helpful to furthering their own masculinity as Grinders, because they go with the grind of the school. The boys that find that the practices are obstacles, or unrelated to their eventual goals of masculinity, are often punished for not abiding by school rules (also discussed earlier in Chapter 5). I term these boys Minders as they do not assimilate easily into the school cultural landscape.

This chapter concludes with suggestions for how schools can do away with “the grind.” Specifically, I suggest increased attention to organizational practices that incorporate and affirm boys’ experiences with respect to, not in tandem with, the structural and cultural forces that inform their identities in and out of school.

**Leveling Up**

I asked boys about their conceptions of masculinity through a few avenues: through in-depth interviewing as well as through their photo narratives, which I used as a point of elicitation in their interviews. Boys captured photos of symbols or people that represented manhood to them. In their verbal descriptions, boys described manhood as occurring in successive stages. Rather than a continuous journey, boys found these to be discrete stages. A few boys described this movement in stages toward manhood as “leveling up”—a video and computer gaming term for when a player has beat the challenges from a level, or stage, of a game and is able to move forward in the game and its successive challenges. One of these boys, Mason Wright, described masculinity as follows:

PN: What was the picture you took of for masculinity?

MW: My dog. Just kidding, my computer!
PN: Your computer? Tell me about that. Why does your computer represent masculinity to you?

MW: It’s ‘cause it’s smart! No, I mean...(pauses and holds up his hand as if to suggest an idea) it’s leveling up!

PN: Leveling up? What does—

MW: Leveling up, like in a computer game. When you finish one level, you get to move to the next one. And then the next one – so you just keep leveling up!

PN: And tell me why that, why leveling up, represents masculinity to you?

MW: It’s the same thing as manhood, we grow up and learn different things, how to be a man, but we don’t do it all at once. We do it step by step ‘til we get there.

I extend this metaphor of “leveling up” to frame how boys’ conceptions of manhood spanned three different stages, or levels. The first level of becoming a man is enduring struggle. Boys described struggles that they had been through as explanations for why they consider themselves men, and other boys who had yet to personally encounter a struggle listed and presented the known struggles of other men in their lives as a formative journey through which those men became men. The second level that boys described was about taking care of or looking out for others, specifically family members. This conception deviated slightly from how boys termed “looking out” within the context of brotherhood. To be a man requires that you look out and care for your family, rather than your brothers. The last level of manhood is that of acquiring calm and maturity. Many boys described their current lives as lacking in a sense of calm, and that their relationships with peers were conditioned on fighting and a lack of verbal resolutions. Boys described that men would have a sense of calm in their lives, knowing when and when not to engage in certain provocations. In what follows, I describe each level in detail through the boys’ words.
Level One: Becoming a Man Through Hardship

The vast majority of the thirty-four students in my sample connected this idea of acquiring manhood to an outside incident that caused them to grow up from boys into men. The few boys that did not mention that they had already become a man through a traumatic event indicated that they were still waiting for such a big moment or test to happen for them. When asked what indicates when someone has become a man, many boys presented examples of how they leveled up in masculinity when they endured a traumatic or difficult event. Boys described specific incidents in time or flashpoints that caused them to be forever and instantly changed. In boys’ descriptions, these events functioned as critical moments during which boys transitioned from boyhood into manhood.

Brandon Mitchell is one student who experienced one of these incidents, or as he described it, “a big moment where it happened.” Brandon is a fairly reserved student, he does not frequently engage his peers, and rarely participates in class. He works with his head down at times, though he has a small circle of friends that attend Sankofa, most of whom attended elementary school with him. Brandon described manhood through one experience, describing manhood as something that “happened for me when my brother was shot and was killed at [a convenience store].” Brandon looked down briefly, and continued to reminisce about his brother, telling me that it was his brother who “taught me how to shoot a basketball when I was little, when I was a boy.” Brandon demarcated a time when he was a boy learning to play basketball with his older brother from life after his brother was killed, explaining that he had become a man when he was faced with coping with the loss of his brother. Brandon further described manhood as “kinda when your voice gets deeper or you get facial hair for some people, but it’s really only when you can get pain a little bit better.” For Brandon, and other boys who had incurred similar such
traumas, physical indicators of manhood fell second to experiencing hardship; no matter the age, once you have experienced one of these life-altering events, boys found that you entered manhood, and boyhood disappeared.

David Sánchez also understood becoming a man as an outcome of struggle. David described manhood as “getting away from something or going through something...it’s about surviving.” For David and others, surviving something meant that they were then deemed a man on the other side of that event. Boys ranged in their descriptions of the “something” they were getting away from or going through: boys mentioned custody battles, steady shelter, abuse, violence, crime, and poverty—specifically, not having enough food to eat. Joel Davis was another student who described masculinity as achieved by and through hardship. Joel indicated, that he had yet to experience that struggle firsthand, though he anticipated that masculinity was a test of being able to “deal with struggles.” As he explained: “you’ll have a struggle and when you’re a man, you’ll deal with it and that shows you’re a man, or you won’t, and someone else will have to deal with it for you so you’re not a man yet.” Boys described encountering, and conquering a struggle, displaying agency, or in essence being able to “deal with” a situation as what would display that one were man enough to take care of himself. If one was not able to do so, that would indicate that it was still necessary to have someone else taking care of him, and thus, he would not yet be a man.

Grant Wilson, a math-loving, principal’s honor roll student who mostly kept to his tight circle of friends, was another student who still saw himself as a boy, and did not yet identify as a man. For his photo of manhood, Grant brought in a photo he took of his developing arm hair (see Figure 10).
Grant described his photo as follows: “I mean for me; it's looking like a man. When you get older, you're going to have that hair, and that’s what manhood looks like on the outside, but what it really is is being brave. I haven’t gone through that yet though. So I couldn’t take a picture of it.” Grant provides the distinction between what a man looks like, and what a man is—interestingly, he takes a photo of his own arm, but he doesn’t yet feel like a man because he has yet to be “brave” through a difficult experience.

In other cases in which boys had yet to undergo a struggle, boys described manhood in terms of struggles that their male relatives had encountered. Dymani Charles described manhood as follows:

PN: How would you describe manhood in your own words?

DC: Like when you grow up and you become a man and you start changing, like the way you look.

PN: Okay, so a change in your physical appearance. Can you tell me about the photo you took for manhood?
DC: A photo of my uncle; he represents manhood because he’s grown up and he was in jail for 17 years for no reason and he got out.

PN: Why does that represent manhood to you?

DC: Because he went through that and now he’s grown, he’s a man because of it.

Like Grant, Dymani’s explanation of manhood began with the physical features that define a man. But upon further probing, and through the picture that he decided to take for this prompt, Dymani’s explanation moved toward struggle being a defining characteristic of being a man, specifically that of his uncle serving time in prison. For boys that have yet to experience this struggle, they were quick to first draw upon physical attributes, but when asked to explain manhood, they moved into discussing more than just physical characteristics tied to manhood.

Another student, Donovan Varick, explained that he too was still waiting for that “big moment” to happen to him and said he wasn’t a “man in that way” quite yet. Donovan is a chatty and clever boy and is always asking questions. He often finds himself in the school’s punitive tracks and he has a big circle of friends at Sankofa. When asked to describe what manhood is to him, Donovan spoke about his father who he said became a man “when he was 13 when his father died.” Donovan’s expression then changed as he leaned forward, continuing, “how is that fair? That’s being a black man though, you have to stand tall on all ten [toes]” he told me as he puffed out his chest. Donovan highlighted how he perceived life’s unfairness in that life often requires black boys to grow up into men, potentially sooner than other boys from different ethnic backgrounds. Although no individuals are immune to deaths in the family, Donovan appears to highlight an innate
unfairness in being black, such that it is a regular occurrence that one would need to “stand tall, on all ten” as a black man.

**Level Two: Taking Care and Looking Out**

After becoming a man through struggle, boys described that being a man required being able to take care of and protect others. Boys described this care in terms of providing physical, financial, and/or emotional support for members of their families. Boys also framed this caretaking in terms of protection, or “looking out” for family members, including physically protecting them from harm as well as looking out for their best interests. Several boys qualified this ability to take care of others by stipulating that first, a man must prove he can take care of himself to be a man. The boys that explicitly stated that this was a prerequisite of caretaking for others comprised a vast majority of my sample.

In describing manhood, Edris Hayes brought in an older photo of a fish he had that since died. When I asked him to explain how and why this photo of a fish represented manhood to him, he told me, “because you gotta learn to take care of something as man.” He told me, “I can't relate to that yet, since I’m still a kid and nothing that bad has happened to me yet, but it’s the closest so far to what that would be.” Edris’ photo brings to mind the previous level of manhood—enduring hardship to enter into manhood—before taking on the responsibility to care for others. He mentioned that “he can’t relate to that yet, since he’s still a kid,” implying that he did not yet consider himself a man. Further, Edris explained that as a man you have to learn to “take care of something,” or potentially other people.

Boys discussed care through the frame of protection. Specifically, boys cited the ability to gain control over difficult events in their lives as for a prerequisite to providing this protection for others in their lives. Boys also described the benefit of this control as
being able to shield their loved ones from experiencing pain or harm. As such, many boys described manhood as having the ability to protect others. Miguel Guzman, for example, took a photo of a bird of prey for his image of manhood. As Miguel described, “it’s an eagle or a falcon or something like that. It represents manhood because they are very strong, very protective animals that protect others—men are able to do that.” Boys described manhood as full of possibility, of being able to do what they yet could not, namely, taking care of and protecting others. Boys found optimism in the potential of their manhood to be able to find more control in their circumstances—to be able to protect others, and to be able to take care of themselves.

No student in my sample indicated that they felt they were at this stage just yet. Boys typically cited other members of their family that take care of them as examples of manhood. As Donovan Varick succinctly put it, “manhood is like, taking care of your family.” Chaquille Warner described the caretaking in manhood in also terms of caring for family: “when you’re a man, you’re able to look out for your family, and those you’re closest to.”

Looking out, in the context of manhood, was typically framed as being able to protect or care for your family. This contrasts with the idea of “looking out” in brotherhood, discussed in Chapter 6, which requires taking care of and demonstrating loyalty to your brothers. Kayshawn Vega mentioned this notion of family caretaking:

KV: What is manhood to me? It’s important to be in a family.

PN: Okay, so when you grow up, and you’re a man, what would be important for you?

KV: It would be important to work...and to take care of my children if I ever have any.
Kayshawn mentioned the importance of taking care of oneself through securing employment, as well as the necessity of having a job to be able to take care of any future children. His comments, like others, show that boys feel that manhood requires caretaking of family members, and by extension, pursuing any opportunities that would secure or further that caretaking. Jamal Andrews, in citing someone he looked up to or admired, discussed his uncle. As he shared, “I look up to him because he’s like...he’s a man: he takes care of his family and he started paying rent when he was only 18.” For Jamal, his uncle’s ability to pay rent beginning at eighteen, demonstrated his manhood and the foundation from which he could begin to take care of his family.

Boys described the protection of men and other caring adults in terms of being able to “look out” for children, or other family members. For example, as Justin Miller explained, “My dad looks out for me, that’s what manhood is—he makes sure we can stay kids as long as we can. He says stop trying to be a grown up. [My parents] protect us, they look out for us...they make sure we can do better than they did.” Justin’s explanation elevates the notion that manhood, if done well, can let kids be kids for longer.

Emari Sumpter identified his dad as the person in his life who fulfilled this role. As he explained: “My dad is the man of the house, he knows I’m a boy too, and he knows everything that can happen, and looks out until I can look out for myself.” In Emari’s explanation, manhood is protecting, or “looking out” for someone until they are old enough to do so on their own. In this explanation is a recognition of boyhood as Emari says “he knows I’m a boy,” which seems like it would otherwise be an obvious point, but highlights the lack of being able to completely care for oneself.
Others boys highlighted how their parents know they are still boys, or not yet men, but are providing boys opportunities to demonstrate manhood. Although he didn’t yet identify as a “man,” Ryan Nelson explained that his parents have him go pick up his brother because they know “I can protect him, and [this is] proving I can do it one day.” Here, Ryan notes that he is not yet a fully-fledged man, but is in training to do so by beginning this process of looking out for his little brother.

Students’ conceptions of manhood were not confined by gender. Chaquille Warner’s photo, for example, was a photo of his mother because “she is the one who takes care of us until we can.” Chaquille, like several boys in my sample, did not have that “man” figure in their lives, so they cited their mothers or other female relatives as the ones who took on that care-taking role. Maurice Bolton was another boy who cited his mother as who represents manhood to him. As Maurice described, “I look up to her. She takes care of me. I’d want to be like her when I’m older, She's hardworking.” Maurice’s conception of manhood is not tied to men exhibiting these traits, but rather he sees manhood in his mother because she is the one who fills that role in his life.

Khaleel Dunn also mentioned his mother, in addition to his father as emblematic of manhood. As he explained, “my mom is really tough and really nice at the same time. She’s been through a lot and she’s walked through them okay, and whatever she puts her mind to, she does it. She takes care of me.” Of note, is that Khaleel also lived with his father, and he went on to describe his father as “really caring for me, my mom, and my little brother.” So while women can take on the role of “manhood” it was unlikely that they would be the only ones to be referred to if there were other men in the boys’ lives that also took on a caretaking role.
Level Three: Acquiring Maturity and Calm

The last level that boys described in achieving manhood was acquiring maturity and calm. Boys described *hoping* they would find calmness, as opposed to being certain that they would achieve it. In many of their descriptions of a place they felt safe, boys picked places that they had control over their environments, and places that they described as “calm” or “quiet.” In terms of attaining calm individually, or in having a sense of maturity, boys explained that this maturity would come when they eventually learned what types of things were worth getting upset or angry about, and what was not worth their energy.

Isaiah Edwards described this level of manhood through a photo (*see Figure 11*) he took of the LA-based hip-hop group, NWA. He connected with NWA’s music as well as the group members’ lives as depicted in the movie *Straight Outta Compton*. He told me that NWA represented manhood to him because,

NWA [represents] growing up, being black, and it’s all they had to go through like in [the movie] *Straight Outta Compton*... [it] had a lot to do with racism, and that growing up and being black. And the Rodney King incident? He was just [riding] his bike and they beat him up so bad for no reason. I like NWA because they talk about that kind of stuff—it’s like learning about how the world is, but also knowing how and when to fight things. That’s the manhood.

Isaiah indicated an appreciation for the reality, or the truth-telling, he found in NWA’s music. He describes connecting to it, because the music talks about what it’s like “growing up” and “being black.” He connected this to manhood, as an ability to discern how to best pick your battles given all of the difficulties and context of growing up as a black boy.
Emari Sumpter also described this maturity in manhood as developing this sense of appraisal or discernment. Emari explained that, “We all know what it means to be a man...you hope that the world changes, and that your perspective [changes] as you get older—it’s like, learning that not everything is about fighting or something...it’s about changing your perspective.” Emari’s explanation also hints at the perception of unfairness and the reconciliation of that unfairness with potentially changing one’s perspective and deciding when to fight, and when to abstain.

For boys at Sankofa, maturity reflected the possibility of becoming able to appraise situations for whether or not the situation justifies becoming angry or upset. As Emari further explained, manhood is “the idea that you won’t get mad about every little thing...you have more knowledge, you’ll know if someone is trying to get to you, if they are playing around, or they don’t care at all about you.” Emari’s comments highlight the maturity or sense of calm that might be gained with age, with particular regard to being able to better appraise the intentions of others. Being a man comes with this increased knowledge, which, as Emari described, provides more insight into these intentions and may
then prevent the need to act, or to fight. Growing into manhood is about growing into, and becoming comfortable with, a sense of calm.

Boys also noted their own steps toward attaining this sense of calm as steps toward eventually becoming a man. As Jakeem Richards reflected, “Sankofa helped...my demeanor is different than last year [at my old school], I'm not as bad or disrespectful. It’s kind of weird to explain, but it’s the steps to growing up and being the type of man I want to be. Calmer and more respectful.” Throughout the year, Jakeem was working with the school social worker, Ms. Carr, on not being as quick to anger, and to talk himself down from anger by counting down from ten. Jakeem mentioned how he aims to be calmer as a man, and that his year reflected positive movement toward that goal.

Other students took photos of or mentioned older relatives, such as grandfathers, for their symbols of manhood. Victor Fields described his grandfather as being “someone I look up to...that calm person a man should be, talking respectfully and not getting angry too quick.” Boys discussed admiring older male relatives who espoused calmness in their daily interactions, but typically did not indicate calmness was a part of their own, current daily lives. On the contrary, boys described their lives as chaotic, and indicated that they were not as in control of their lives as they wished. Ellis Almonte, a Dominican student, described his grandfather as a man he looked up to, and would want to be like in the future. Ellis described his grandfather’s advice for him—to be a “gentlemen of respect”—which he used to describe what manhood was to him. Although Ellis was able to cite this grounding principle to manhood, he still mentioned it was difficult to consistently be a gentleman of respect given the actions of his peers. “It’s not that easy,” he told me, “to stay respectful and
calm, but I try.” Ellis highlighted the difficulty of attaining this calm in interactions with his peers, but that calmness is a desire and a goal of his.

Jamal Andrews thought of manhood as his grandfather “having a calm talk with other men, or his friends.” He described his grandfather as someone whom he admired, especially for his relaxed and fun-loving personality. Jamal’s description of his grandfather highlights the eagerness to have a sense of calm not just in one’s own dealings with society, but also with peers. This suggests that the ideal of calm in manhood is widespread in many, if not all, of the various arenas in which men operate and participate.

Ryan Nelson also provided a picture of two older gentlemen talking as his photo of how he understood manhood. As he described it, “my picture is of men talking; they might have a talk about something rather than fighting about it.” In his picture of manhood, Ryan provided an alternative to the current method of solving problems with peers: fighting or getting physical. Manhood provides that alternative—to be able to be calm, and talk through issues, rather than fight about them.

Victor Fields highlighted this transition from boyhood to manhood—or from chaos to calm—in his photo of manhood. He described manhood as follows within our exchange from his interview:

VF: I think it’s [manhood is] when you start showing that you are a man, or you’re about to become a man.

PN: Okay, so what does a man act like or say to show they are a man?

VF: He’ll like calm down more and talk respectful.

PN: Okay, and what was the photo you took for Manhood? Can you tell me about it?

VF: I’ll say I forgot his name because I just call him my uncle, but he’s not my actual uncle. He knows my dad really well so I know him well, ... when he was
younger he used to be bad to his family and now he's more respectful and he stopped disrespecting his family. So he's calmer now and better to people.

Victor's family friend is a symbol to him about what it is to grow up and grow out of bad habits. The outcome of this growth into manhood is becoming calmer and possessing a more respectful attitude in dealings with others, whether they are family, friends, or any others.

Lastly, boys described that men would regularly take responsibility for their actions and for their lives. Khaleel Dunn described his dad as his example of manhood. He first began his description of his dad fulfilling manhood by stating,

[My dad] looks like it, but I don’t understand how he looks like [manhood]. I guess he has a beard, that’s how. It’s looking older, but also showing that you’re older. Like you can have jokes sometimes, but you can’t always joke around because things come to be really important and that’s it. So it's not joking around all the time when you're a man; taking responsibility for serious stuff.

Khaleel’s description evokes that there is maturity, and seriousness to becoming older such that you cannot joke as often as things may become more important in manhood. As a man, you must be the one to take responsibility for “serious stuff,” and therefore need to possess maturity to be able to do so.

Charles Barnett described taking responsibility as not only taking responsibility for your actions, but also being able to admit when you make a mistake, or when you are wrong. Charles took a photo of Dean Vasquez, the high school dean, for his photo on manhood. Our conversation about this image is presented below:

CB: Manhood? I don’t know, acting like a man! Taking responsibility if you do something wrong, just taking responsibility for your actions.

PN: What is your picture for that?
CB: Dean Vasquez. The principal does too though.

PN: How do they act like men?

CB: Because they make mistakes and they know that they do, and they wouldn’t just do like Dean Crandell, that even when he’s wrong he pretends he’s right.

PN: Have you seen them do that? Take responsibility? Can you think of an example?

CB: Mm-hmm... This one time Dean Vasquez gave me a detention, and then he said ‘matter of fact, you shouldn’t have a detention today’ so I didn’t have it. He said he had it in wrong, so I didn’t have detention. He didn’t just lie and give me detention anyway.

Charles often found himself in detention, or in the school’s punitive tracks (i.e., in school suspension). Despite his regular presence in these environments and his ongoing dealings with the school Deans, he still found manhood in Dean Vasquez, who was one of the deans that set these punishments. Charles’ example of Dean Vasquez highlights how manhood is appreciating and admitting openly when you have made a mistake, rather than just going ahead with a decision because you are afraid, or unwilling, to admit that a mistake was made. In this moment, Charles mentioned he “respected” Dean Vasquez for what he did because he “didn’t just lie” instead of admitting he was wrong.

**Grinding Tasks**

In all, these three levels of masculinity—making it through hardship, taking care and looking out, and acquiring maturity and calm—provide one way of understanding how boys at Sankofa process and conceive of manhood. In what follows, I consider how these conceptions of manhood fit into and interact with the organizational notions of masculinity at play at Sankofa Collegiate.
I apply these boys’ perspectives to framing how they negotiate and interact with the school practices and culture. In Chapter 5, I describe the organizational notions of masculinity with which boys contend. These aspects of masculinity—self-regulation, self-awareness, and self-reflection—manifest through the school’s many rites and rituals. These practices include the mandatory school uniforms, standing and delivering the school pledge, maintaining particular bodily comportment within spaces in the school, and being called “Mr.” rather than by first name, to recall a few of these practices.

I frame this discussion of boys’ negotiation of organizational notions of masculinity within an analogy taken from video gaming, as inspired by informal conversations with the boys. In a videogame, a gamer encounters certain tasks or challenges that are repetitive, time-consuming, or “grinding” but are necessary to complete before advancing to the next level. These challenges are referred to as grinding tasks, which are required, though not directly related to the aim of the game. Boys viewed the school and its demands as grinding tasks, or obstacles that must be conquered, concurrent with, but not integral to, becoming a man. An example of such a task includes being able to stand and deliver the Sankofa school pledge or wear (and keep) the school tie—both symbols of being a part of the Sankofa community, or brotherhood.

A grinding task is part of the total “game,” but not something that in and of itself boys believe will help them become men. Depending on the student’s attitude toward these rituals and practices, these tasks can be seen as a waste of time or as something that is an enjoyable requirement. I term those that find these tasks an enjoyable part of the Sankofa experience “Grinders” as they go with the grind, so to speak. I term those who do not find joy or meaning out of these rituals, the “Minders,”—because they “mind the grind,”
(i.e., the grind bothers them)—as they find the rituals to be obstacles toward the point of the game: schooling.

**The Grinders: Go with the Grind**

The boys that find meaning, or even joy, in the rules and rituals, or “grinding tasks,” of Sankofa I refer to here as “Grinders.” The Grinders at Sankofa were boys who were on the honor roll, rarely if ever got in trouble, and expressed excitement and joy coming to school. These boys expressed that they found meaning in the grind through one or more of three major beliefs: the belief that Sankofa wants success for them, that Sankofa cares about them, and that Sankofa wants them to be safe. In what follows, I detail each articulated theme by providing examples from interview and ethnographic data.

*Sankofa Wants Me to Be Successful*

Grinders appreciated the school’s rules, rituals, and culture because they articulated that their time at Sankofa would lead to their future success. The boys that trusted Sankofa to lead them to better outcomes did not question these rules or rituals as the Minders did, but rather understood these rituals as simply a part of the process.

One grinder, Eric Chua, explained his appreciation of the uniform because it was something that would “prepare me to be a man.” As he explained, “they want us to be proper businessmen. They don’t want us to be all like ‘yasss whassup?’ and casual.” Eric’s description highlights how Sankofa seeks to transform boys’ image from the outside-in through uniform, and for Eric, this meant also transforming his casual nature to be more in line with what the uniform communicates: proper, and business-like behavior. For Eric, this businessmen ethos resonated as a symbol of manhood for him. Eric took a photo of a pair of Jordan sneakers an 8th grader had been wearing to school that he’d had his eye on
(see Figure 12). He explained in his interview, that for him, manhood was about having the money to be able to “buy the best shoes and not worry” about the cost. He mentioned that he also wanted to be a businessman because it would achieve the lifestyle he wanted and he liked Sankofa because through its practices, Sankofa was preparing him to do just that.

**Figure 12: Eric Chua’s Photo of Manhood**

Other Grinders found rationale in the disciplinary policy at Sankofa. The Grinders rarely, if at all, encountered the disciplinary system at Sankofa because they rarely stepped out of line. For example, Khaleel Dunn explained that the “uniform, and walking in lines, and the speaking respectfully, it’s all for a reason...they’re hard on us just so we can learn discipline from that for jobs and the future.” Khaleel, like the other Grinders, was able to find rationale in these practices because he made sense of them as fitting into a larger picture or vision of his future life. Khaleel described how when he grew up, he would like to have a “professional job where he wore a suit every day,” and therefore, “speaking respectfully” would be integral to his success in a future professional role. As stated earlier
in this chapter, this understanding of Sankofa’s practices as preparing boys for the future fit in well with the second level of manhood: to look out and take care of others. Many Grinders connected this care-taking to being able to financially provide for their families. In contrast to the Minders, the Grinders could cite a reason behind the value of these practices in connection with their future dreams or aspirations, a connection that Minders did not articulate.

Isaiah Negasi was one grinder who expressed more than one belief as to why he found the practices and culture at Sankofa in line with his future aspirations of manhood. Isaiah connected attending Sankofa with promoting and preparing him for future success, as well as being cared for by the adults at Sankofa. As Isaiah described,

*This school really believes that if you come here, you’ll come out with a changed life; you’ll be a man of color who cares and wants to do something about maybe even problems in our world, maybe fight for what’s important. That’s what I want to do and Sankofa wants me to do that, too.*

Isaiah’s comment reflects that he both felt cared about at Sankofa, and that he believed that Sankofa wanted him to be successful. Isaiah connected with this mission of pursuing a moral imperative in his life, and as such, found that Sankofa had faith that he could do just that.

*Sankofa Cares About Me*

Other boys like Isaiah who found joy in school practices described a possible rationale behind the practices, even when that rationale had not been made explicit to them. This may be because the boys that do not resist the school and its culture expressed that they felt cared about by adults in the school. Isaiah Negasi, likened Sankofa to a fraternity, explaining, “they care about people, they help people out...” For Isaiah, trusting in Sankofa was directly related to the relationships that he made with his educators, and
feeling that they cared about him and wanted him to succeed. For Isaiah, this care was reciprocated; he regularly wanted to eat lunch with and would bake and bring in baked goods for his teachers because as he told me, “I want them to know that they’re the best!” Articulating this reciprocated care was critical to his perception of Sankofa and of its culture, as he found it to be congruous with his future prospects of manhood and success.

Miguel Guzman echoed this sentiment, saying “all the stuff…the ties, the pledge, all the stuff we do here is ‘cause Sankofa thinks manhood is…they want us to represent men well, taking responsibility and encouraging each other, and that’s what they try to show us, like caring about us.” In his comments, Miguel referenced learning about the manhood at the school framed within a context of care. In particular, he listed every individual that interacted with the sixth grade as caring about him. For example, he described his science teacher Ms. Cozner as “really fun and entertaining…she gives me the hope that I can do something great because of what I’m doing now.” Miguel’s relationship to and perception of the adults at Sankofa framed the rules and rituals of the school within a context of care and support for his current and future goals.

Ms. Renaud, the humanities teacher, was one teacher that was repeatedly referred to by the Grinders as caring. Jamal Andrews and Edris Hayes, both Principal honor roll students, described her as the “nicest teacher in the world.” Edris added that “she helps me out, she makes me feel like she cares, so Sankofa’s aight [all right].” Of note: if boys found that Sankofa cared for them, they only cited female teachers who did this carework, rather than any of the males they interacted with on a daily basis. In connection with the previous theme—that boys found that Sankofa wanted them to be successful—Grinders associated this belief as operating through the adults’ care for them to do well. Again, Grinders linked
their daily interactions at Sankofa with how these actions might play into their future endeavors—a connection that Minders did not make explicit.

Quandel Bryant is a student who is quiet most of the time; rarely talking back or resisting against the school’s practices. Quandel explained his perception of the school and his teachers as follows: “they want me to be like a man that doesn’t want to give up...and they don’t want us to like, get into anything bad. Like going to jail for something that you and your friends did. They’re looking out.” Interestingly, Quandel described the teachers as “looking out” for him, in a way that brothers do for each other, or family does for family. In this way, Quandel described how Sankofa may have had his best interests at heart through their actions, and as such, rarely found himself questioning the rules or regulations of the school. The few times he did find his way in detention were because of negative peer interactions, not behavioral infractions with the dress code, lateness, or for disrespectful attitude toward his teachers.

*Sankofa Wants Me to Be Safe*

Some boys find these tasks, although beyond the immediate tasks of the school, as ones that will keep them safe; essentially the idea that Sankofa is not a grind, it’s for my own safety. In creating rules and practices that are read by boys as keeping them safe, boys expressed that they felt cared about by the school. Edris Hayes mentioned that the school is trying to “teach us, not just like school stuff but to be smart about what we do out there.” Edris described a difference between “in school” and “out there,” wherein Sankofa positions itself as a safe training ground preparing students on how to exist and act in the outside world.

Other boys that appreciated Sankofa in terms of the safety piece echoed this idea of an “in here,” within the school bounds, and an “out there” for which they needed to be
prepared. Brandon Mitchell, a very quiet student who I described earlier in this chapter as having experienced the loss of his brother, articulated an understanding of the uniform policy in terms of safety:

They want us to have uniforms here because they know you can’t walk around... in baggy jeans because past the precinct in the [neighborhood]. Sankofa wants us to show that we’re actually going to school and we’re not like other kids, they want us to look good and not get stopped by the cops.

Brandon's assessment of the uniform policy comports with his ideas of manhood, as he too deemed the “outside world” unsafe, especially given his personal history.

Bryant Goodman also echoed this sentiment of an “in here” and “out there.” He also found that the school was teaching the boys about how to change their behavior so that they will be in less danger. As Bryant said, “they want to teach us how to be out there...the world is not like a game. They're getting us ready for that to prepare us for that, to be on our stuff, and know how to respond properly in case you know? They’re teaching us so we know what to do when we’re out there.” For both of these boys, to be successful men in the real world, they first needed to be safe, which they found Sankofa prioritized as well in their approach.

**The Minders: Minding the Grind**

In contrast to the Grinders, other boys’ descriptions of Sankofa’s practices surrounding masculinity ranged from neutral to discouraging, to even alienating. I refer to these boys as the “Minders,” for they seemed to “mind the grind” in that the grind bothered them in one or more ways. In their descriptions, Minders explained that the school’s approach to manhood was something they “just need to get through.” Notably, boys did not describe the adults or the school’s rituals or practices as teaching them how to advance through the levels of becoming a man, but more or less as biding time until they simply
became men on their own. Tevon Baxter characterized the school’s approach to character building as “pointless” and a “way to just keep us busy at school but not help us grow up.” In this way, Minders saw these practices as artificial obstacles, rather than integral to growing up and becoming men.

_Sankofa Does Not Get Struggle_

A popular theme among the Minders was that they found the tasks asked of them by the school to feel artificial and not meaningful. The boys who held this critique were those who had cited they had gone through a struggle indicative of entering manhood (cited as “level 1” of manhood, earlier in this chapter). These Minders remarked that the school did not feel like it was in touch with their realities. In terms of their resistance to these rituals, Minders mocked the gravitas of the school’s mission during interviews. Isaiah Edwards, for example, put on a nasally voice and told me “Sankofa wants us to be smart, prestigious scholars” as he went on to detail the many aspects of the school he did not like because they felt “fake.” Boys who had experienced very real tragedies found it difficult to find meaning in Sankofa’s practices that teach manhood, potentially because they already saw themselves as having endured trauma, such that these practices seemed kiddish or irrelevant. Isaiah compared Sankofa to the hip-hop group NWA and said of NWA “see this is real, this is what we go through. Sankofa? (shakes his head no) it’s not the same.” Isaiah, and many other Minders who had experienced struggle, found difficulty with Sankofa’s school culture for this incompatibility with their out-of-school lives.

Joel Davis told me that Sankofa differed from his idea of manhood and how to prepare him to be a man: “I just think that Sankofa doesn’t worry about the struggles and stuff boys go through, it’s mostly just wear the tie... We’re not supposed to look sloppy, we just have to look the right way.” Joel’s comments highlight how the messaging of the tie
may have come across to some of the students, as many expressed similar feelings about the uniform. Joel articulated that Sankofa cared more about the superficial, or surface-level goings-on for boys, rather than what’s deeper, or the more substantive struggles that students experienced. For Joel, and other boys who have experienced trauma, this focus on the superficial struck him as disingenuous or irrelevant, as Sankofa’s focus was on “looking the right way” rather than preparing the boys substantively to become men capable of handling any future traumas.

As detailed in Chapter 4, earning a tie at Sankofa involves a large ceremony in which boys are told they have officially entered a community of manhood. With the tie, boys are allowed privileges such as attending recess and being permitted to go on field trips—essentially, they are permitted to leave the building and be seen by the outside community. Tevon Baxter described manhood at Sankofa as “it’s just getting the tie; we get privileges as long as we look right.” Tevon’s statements highlight the importance of the tie to Sankofa: Minders find that achieving the tie, and looking put-together, is of importance, albeit superficial importance, to the staff at Sankofa. Boys call out this artificiality by rejecting the tie and the symbolism that it carries. Some boys who described the tie as being a waste of time, did not buy into the notion that Sankofa was preparing them for a future career. The boys that did not find positive valence, utility, or chiasmic consciousness (as discussed in Chapter 4) in “looking the right way,” rejected the tie as a false symbol of manhood. As such, these boys sought out other visual indicators of manhood such as augmenting their looks with sneakers that could demonstrate status, expensive hoodies, or football accessories such as gloves that could signal other aspects of masculinity or identity.
Those that described the school as a negative or hostile place positioned school rituals as a waste of time, preventing them from moving forward. These students were often those that engaged most with the school’s disciplinary system: encountering frequent conversations with the school deans, serving multiple detentions, or even in-school suspensions. For Ryan Nelson, although he believed each of his teachers wanted the best for him, felt that the school was not helping him to improve: “I don’t really feel like [the school] is doing anything really. They said that, and they keep saying that to my mom: that they’ll help us become ‘young men of character,’ but when I came here it wasn’t like that—it’s not like that at all.” Ryan was one among many of the Minders who explained that their earlier impressions of Sankofa did not match the support they received on character development and academics.

*Sankofa Teachers Don’t Care About Me*

The vast majority of the Minders clashed with the school staff, in particular with the school’s male deans. David Sánchez described his strained relationship with the deans as follows:

[Dean Vasquez is] literally about every poster or sign that’s here. Oh, ‘be accountable for your actions!’ ‘oh it’s your fault.’ He is always trying to blame it on me. And Dean Vasquez is the main reason I don’t want to be here! He’s not understandable. He doesn’t understand nothing, I mean Dean Crandell understands, but he always has a reason to not care.

David’s description of his relationship with the deans highlights how he did not see himself as being “understood” or cared about by these individuals. David further identified his relationship with Dean Vasquez as the primary driver behind his lack of interest in attending Sankofa. Charles Barnett also articulated a difficulty with the deans based on a lack of care, or wanting to listen to the boys. As Charles explained,
they just don’t care, they only care about the rules...it’s basically summer right now, and we come out of the school building burning up [gesturing to wearing his full long-sleeve and long pants uniform]. They won’t ever change this stuff and we’ll still get in trouble even though it makes no sense.

Charles comment reflects how he found some of the school rules and practices to be out of line with reality, or what he found to be reason. Charles not only found himself at odds with the deans, but he also did not feel cared about by the teachers. During our interview, we had the below exchange in which Charles told me that he does not feel close to any of the teachers, but does feel close to me. We talk about this below:

PN: You mentioned you don’t feel close to the teachers here. Why do you think that is?

CB: They’d have to be nice for me to like them. They’d have to be nice and understandable for me to like them—like you. Like you understand me.

PN: You would talk to me if you had a problem?

CB: Yeah! (throws up his hands as if to say of course)

PN: Okay, so tell me what about me makes you feel like you can talk to me if you had a problem.

CB: You understand—you talk to me, ask questions. Like with [male staff member] you said leave it alone, it’s not that important and you made sure I didn’t get too upset or that he didn’t bother me. No other teachers do that, not even Ms. Cozner. I thought she would be one of the nicest teachers here [during] Summer Bridge, but she turned out to be one of the worst teachers here. When I found out she started yelling a lot, that’s when I stopped liking her.

In positioning me as an adult at Sankofa who espouses caring behavior, Charles seemed to suggest he would like advocacy from the teachers, such that they would “look out” for him, and help him better understand how to respond to situations, or gain that maturity that comes with growing into manhood. Many of the boys that minded relationships with male educators, specifically those in disciplinary roles, did not have
male figures at home with whom they regularly interacted. In particular, these boys came from female-headed households who often remarked that these men did not care for them in the way that many of their female teachers did.

Despite Charles’ relationship with Ms. Cozner, other Minders described their relationships with Ms. Cozner as one silver lining of attending Sankofa. Emari Sumpter described her as “funny, she plays around sometimes and she understands us the most out of all of our teachers...she like, she talks to us and doesn’t scream a lot. She talks in a calm manner—she shows she understands us.” Emari’s comments reflect that he felt seen and understood by Ms. Cozner. Indeed, when Emari would have difficulty with rules with the Deans, Ms. Cozner would typically try to calm him down. Danté Hill had a similar perspective about Ms. Cozner, finding that she “likes to help people, she wants us to help each other too.” Danté went on to detail the many ways he felt supported academically by Ms. Cozner during class, though he mentioned over all that he does not get the help he needs at Sankofa.

Having adults who care about you appears to be a necessary, though not sufficient, condition for being able to go with the grind at Sankofa. My conversation with Justin Miller elucidated how important this need would be for students who otherwise did not find that they belonged or excelled at Sankofa. After asking him what an ideal teacher would do, he said it would be a teacher who could “make me feel better about things if I feel sad or something; they would talk to me.” Justin’s articulation of what a teacher would do if they care reflects how other Minders described feeling as though they were not being understood, or even further, that adults did not even try to understand them.
Sankofa Wants Me to Change

Minders also expressed that the school was trying to change them into something else—something different, and disingenuous to who they are. As Maurice Bolton described the mission of the school, he said, “They just want you to act different. Don’t be you. You just have to be different here.” Importantly, Maurice did not change his behavior or act differently so that he could do well at the school. Rather he appeared either withdrawn in class or actively resisting rules, including arguing with adults.

Several of the boys who were frequently punished echoed Maurice’s attitude toward Sankofa, which suggests that these boys did not feel as if they belonged at the school, and were not willing to compromise parts of their identity to be seen as an ideal student at Sankofa. Donovan Varick also expressed his feelings that the school wanted to change him, and described that this difference-making started from the outside in:

they think that manhood is being successful, aware in like your wardrobe and the way you look outside, being good. They wear suits and shoes and stuff. So they want us to do that so we’ll start to change and be different.

Donovan’s understanding of the school’s uniform policy, and ultimate mission, was that once boys look different, they might start acting differently, and therefore be changed. Boys mentioned liking who they are, and not wanting to change—or rather, not seeing the need to change. Likely unintentionally, these boys received messaging that there was something about them that needed fixing or changing to be seen as a successful man by Sankofa standards.

Although most of these boys seemed to acknowledge that Sankofa had good intentions for them as students, they seemed to find difficulty following the success scripts of the school with respect to masculinity. Many expressed that they felt the school did not think they were yet “good enough,” which was a phrase that came up in many interviews
with students. Justin Miller described this further, saying, “we’re not good enough yet, they want us to be better when we grow up.” Justin’s comment reflects somewhat of a deficit-orientation around how the boys, particularly the Minders, perceived the school staff’s assessment of them—as lacking, and not yet “good enough.”

This type of messaging could potentially motivate students to change their behaviors or dispositions, but for the Minders, this seemed to alienate them further from the organizational culture and messaging of Sankofa Collegiate. Charles Barnett, for example, described the school culture as a place where you had to be like the “good quiet kids or you can't be here... I want to be myself; I don’t want to be a follower. The way I act though, I wouldn't be good here because sometimes I like to do my own thing.” Through my observations, and through Charles's own account, he did not compromise his personality or change his actions to “fit in” with the school culture, but rather appeared to see himself outside of the lines of belonging at Sankofa.

**Leveling Up and Down in School**

Boys described manhood in concrete stages, or levels, that they considered a part of the trajectory of becoming a man. This notion of *leveling* is one way to consider how boys understand their status with respect to manhood and masculinity. The main way that boys understood their status within Sankofa’s culture was through whether or not they kept the ties that they had been given during their Tie Ceremony. Boys took great pride in their ties, seeing them as a symbol of the conferral of and entry into manhood. Those boys that had their ties taken away for behavioral infractions, typically described the experience as humiliating, and after the incident, would best be categorized as Minders who did not express faith in the school or its mission.
Leveling Up at Sankofa

Boys first understood “leveling up” through the school’s Tie Ceremony, in which boys were formally inducted into the school community by receiving school ties to wear daily with their uniform. At the ceremony a month into the school year, the school principal highlighted the tie as “a visual reminder of the men we strive to grow you into here at Sankofa Collegiate.” At the time, the boys treated the ceremony and the ties with reverence as this was a ceremony that they had known about since Summer Bridge, or at the latest, their first day of school.

During and following the ceremony, boys wrote written reflections that highlighted the experience of earning their tie as a big moment in which they “leveled up.” Minders and Grinders alike expressed that the ritual had conferred upon them official status in the community. The vast majority of my sample, all but one student, connected receiving the tie to signify that they had now become men.

To begin with the Grinders’ reflections, Dominican student Eric Chua wrote, “my tie means to me that I have earned the right to be a part of the Sankofa community.” Earning the right to be a part of the community confers the privilege too, to be considered part of the Sankofa brotherhood, including the educators and the other boys in older grades who also wear ties. As Isaiah Negasi reflected, “the tie represents to the [Sankofa] community entry into manhood...a token to life into a man and that means your [sic] more responsible, mature and confident.” As messaged to them, Isaiah found the tie to be a big moment in which he began the transition into manhood, and as he defined it, to become more responsible and self-possessed. Miguel Guzmán also saw the tie as a way of reaching a new stage in their lives—that with the tie, they were now “entering manhood.” For these boys, receiving the tie felt like a moment where they received the key to unlock the many
privileges at Sankofa, without which they would be stuck on their current elementary school level. Jamal Andrews also shared that it was not until he received his tie that he “felt like a real person and a real man and a Sankofa scholar.” Jamal, like others, made a demarcation of authenticity—claiming that the tie meant you were a “real” man, as opposed to an imitator, or even a boy.

Despite not buying into the school culture later in the year, Minders also expressed at the time of the Tie Ceremony that the tie was a symbol of a new stage in their lives, moving toward manhood. One of these students, Danté Hill, was visibly moved to tears during the ceremony. A picture was taken of him having his tie tied by a community member, tears streaming down his face. Danté later wrote in a reflection, “I will never forget the moment I became a true man at Sankofa.” When Ms. Cozner showed him the picture that she caught of this moment, she asked him what he felt at that moment and Danté responded “I was just really proud of myself.” Other Minders also connected a sense of legitimacy to their manhood with the tie. Donovan Varick, for example, described the tie as representing “becoming a true man and a true Sankofa...My tie is a very special thing to me. I was hyped when Mr. Mitchell put it around my neck; I feel like I leveled my rank.” As the tie represented a “true” symbol of manhood, many boys felt that with this ceremony, they had now officially entered manhood. As such, having the tie taken away from them could be taken as a serious blow to their confidence and sense of self.

**Leveling Down: Demotion**

About a week after receiving their ties at the Tie Ceremony, students were told that if they were not upholding the values of the tie and what it represents, the tie would be taken away from them (see Chapter 5). These students are known colloquially as the “bad” kids—they are often in detention or other punishment, and are visually and immediately
recognizable as not “making it” as a man in Sankofa, as they do not have the tie on. In this way, the tie serves as a visual indicator of who is considered a “man” and part of the community, and who is not.

All students who I classify as the “Minders” had their ties taken away at least once during the school year. When losing their ties, the Minders expressed feeling like they were “violated” or knocked down a level. One of these Minders, Donovan Varick, described the tie policy by comparing it to segregation: “It’s segregation—like not having a tie! You don’t get the same privileges as everyone else.” Donovan was not the only minder to compare losing the tie to a loss of status at the school. Ryan Nelson, for example, described a sense of alienation with both the school and the teachers after his tie was taken away. As he remarked to his class, “this is how the teachers want to see me, with no tie.” Here, Ryan expressed the idea that the school and its teachers did not want him to succeed, and that the teachers did not want to see him as a “man” within the school community.

The students that have had their ties taken away resist conforming to the norms of the school. For many of these students, the barrier may be so high to regain their ties, that no-tie Minders may have reinterpreted manhood to mean “being known” rather than compromising. These young men of color reject the school ritual, the tie, and with it school conceptions of manhood.

**Conclusion**

It is important to question how schools reconceptualize masculinity and the extent to which these reconceptualizations allow for diversity in presentation of self and masculinity. Within a single-sex school, wherein race and class background is more or less constant among students, it is important to consider the various dimensions of hegemonic, complicit and subordinated masculinity within the larger category of an already
marginalized masculinity (Connell, 1995). Allowing for more diverse conceptions of masculinity allows for an understanding of masculinity as a fluid and dynamic process, rather than a static, reified category (Howard, 2010; McCready, 2010).

The boys in this study described manhood as consisting of various stages, or levels. Although boys began the year believing they could grow into men by “leveling up” in the school through its “grinding tasks” (i.e., rituals and practices), most boys began to express doubts of the applicability of what they were experiencing in school to their lives outside of school. The boys that were often disciplined for not comporting themselves properly with regard Sankofa expectations were not afforded the benefits of manhood. Although these boys critiqued these practices, they may in fact internalize the various ways in which their actions, and by extension, their masculinities, are misread and misinterpreted by the institution (Dance, 2002). During such formative years, it is possible that Minders may become increasingly disinvested, if not alienated, from schooling.

The Grinders illuminate how certain black masculinities may find traditional school practices more compatible with their mindsets and personalities, and may also find it easier to trust in school. The black masculinities espoused by the Grinders, may be acknowledged, encouraged or even championed by Sankofa in a way that the masculinities of Minders—diverse, different, or deviant—are seen or encouraged. Despite this lack of encouragement, many Minders continue to resist and contest the dominant cultural scripts in the school with respect to masculinity (Ferguson, 2001; Imms, 2000; MacLeod, 1987).

In all, I argue that in order for schools to be responsive to the needs and identities of black boys, they must commit to finding ways to do away with “the grind.” The third level of masculinity that boys identified—attaining maturity, or calm—was not present in either
the *Minders'* or the *Grinders'* explanations of school practices. School practices could center more on restorative justice or meditation practices to help boys work on further developing boys’ emotional intelligence, sense of patience and calm, and providing restorative avenues for boys to process trauma or hardship. Increased attention to the relevance and resonance of these practices with boys could shape students’ attitudes and behaviors with respect to, not in tandem with, the structural and cultural forces that inform their in-school experiences and their identity construction.
CHAPTER EIGHT: Discussion and Conclusion

Introduction
My dissertation investigates how boys participate in and make sense of masculinity in a single-sex public school through a twin focus studying: 1) the institutional conditions and practices through which boys learn about the school’s notions of masculinity and 2) boys’ perspectives, experiences, and unique identities. Single-sex schools for boys of color often seek to transform, or reconceptualize, masculinity for boys to become positively academically oriented as well as grounded in community, leadership, and future aspirations.

This dissertation was animated by my interest in better understanding how single-sex schools reconceptualize masculinity and the extent to which these reconceptualizations allow for diversity in boys’ presentation of self and masculinity. The findings from my dissertation add to the existing research and theory on single-sex schooling and adolescent masculinity. In particular, many studies on single-sex schooling examine the institutional structures and practices or student perceptions and experiences, though not both in concert with one another. This dissertation adds to the literature by doing both: bringing together a study of structures and students’ schooling experiences. My findings, therefore, can inform both practice and policy. To begin, this dissertation provides a closer look into how students who attend single-sex schools experience organizational school practices and culture, and further, how these boys articulate these experiences in their own words. This dissertation explores how the identities of black boys are constructed within single-sex schools and how these experiences, in turn, can shape boys’ attitudes and dispositions toward schooling. As such, my findings also provide pedagogical and policy suggestions for enacting a model of single-sex schooling for black boys. Lastly, my work extends and
elaborates upon current theoretical understandings of the development of adolescent masculinity.

In all, my research privileges the narratives of students and contextualizes these narratives within the larger socio-cultural landscape of the school that they attend. In this final chapter, I summarize my findings from the previous chapters, discuss implications of my dissertation, and provide suggestions for future research around single-sex schooling and masculinity. It is my hope that my dissertation will lead to improved policies, practices, and conditions that will help boys of color thrive in school and in later stages of life.

**Research Aims**

This study was framed by three high-level research questions. My first question asked: through what structural and academic conditions and practices does a single-sex school, serving all-male and predominantly black boys—(re)define and (re)construct notions of masculinity for young men? To frame how schools act in systematic ways to promote the school or organizational view of masculinity, I elaborate upon Sewell’s (1992) model of structure and agency (see Figure 2). I term school structures as organizational practices, which consist of schemas and resources that can take the shape of norms, standards, beliefs, or ways of knowing that define and condition organizational culture. These structures, or practices, do not exist apart from those that create and enact them (Sewell, 1979). As a result, organizational culture can create for students the norm or standard of what a “successful” black boy looks like within the school.

Through my second research question, I aimed to understand black boys’ perceptions of the school’s concepts of masculinity, and to what degree, if at all, concepts and messaging about masculinity at the school-level were at odds with boys’ individual
understandings of masculinity and identity. Here, I sought to understand how boys defined masculinity and manhood for themselves, and how, if at all, these definitions mapped onto those definitions of the school. This question connects to the concept of negotiation which I introduced into my elaboration of Sewell’s (1992) framework. Sociocultural theorists argue that students learn and “make meaning of new information, convey understanding and interpret their surroundings” (Howard, 2010, p. 31). In this question, I tried to capture boys’ sensemaking of school practices—how they rationalized or found frustration in those practices. I argue that each student responds differently to the organizational norms of the school as a function of how consistent his individual habitus is with that of the norms and expectations of the school. One’s habitus develops from embodied cultural capital, including the dispositions that have been cultivated through the subtle messages that have been communicated by social forces in one’s environment (Bourdieu, 1984; Carter, 2005; Lareau, 2003; Young, 2004). The phenomenon of black boys negotiating their outer world (home demands, schools, peer pressures) with their inner world (desires, passions and authenticity) is one that has been a focus of contemporary literature (Gilligan, 1996; Young, 2004).

My third and final question asked how black boys participate in and make sense of the school’s conception of masculinity, as conditioned through organizational routines, rules, and rituals. I further aimed to answer how these practices contend with boys’ self-perceptions and understandings of their own masculinity, identity, and agency. Through this question, I examined the ways in which boys resisted, reified, and responded to school organizational practices. Further, I aimed to understand boys’ concepts of identity and how, if at all, the school’s practices played into how they saw themselves. This research
question aligns well with the last two pieces of my elaboration of Sewell’s framework: 

*identity* and *agency*. DiMaggio and Markus (2010) argue that the self, or identity, is a “continually developing sense of awareness and agency that guides action and takes shape as the individual” (p. 349). Further, that “selves and identities” are “schemas” of past behaviors as well as patterns for current and future behavior” (p. 349). They argue that identity is situated and therefore, reflects context (DiMaggio & Markus, 2010, p. 349). Agency is also contextually conditioned. I consider agency as dynamic and “composed of variable and changing orientations within the flow of time” (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 964). Structures are therefore both sustained by and altered through human action.

**Findings**

In my first findings chapter, Chapter 4, I investigated how the white gaze impacts the boys’ experiences at Sankofa. As I conducted my fieldwork, I realized that the white gaze and boys’ notions of perception (how they were perceived by others) was one key way that the boys were making sense of their identities and agency as well as the structures and practices of the school. This chapter spanned across my three research questions as I found that the ways in which boys could be negatively perceived (e.g., as troublemakers) conditioned both organizational structures (through the adults that enacted them), boys’ understandings of, or potential belief in, the school’s organizational practices, as well as the degree to which boys accepted or rejected the school’s practices. In this chapter, I returned to my conceptual framework that I first presented in Chapter 2 and examined how W. E. B. Du Bois’ (1903) concept of double-consciousness could be thought of as operating at multiple, overlapping levels within a school setting. I presented examples of double-
consciousness at the individual student-level, which reflected the common understanding of the concept.

Also in this chapter, I argued that double-consciousness inheres in organizational practices vis-à-vis the adults that enact those structures. I termed this level of double-consciousness, *structurally reflexive double-consciousness*. I further argued in this chapter that boys learn how adults understand black boys’ place in society through structural practices, which mirror and reflect those understandings. Students who notice these understandings reflect a *chiasmic consciousness*—a consciousness that recognizes how perceptions inhere in structures—and can make choices about whether to conform or dismiss the culture and practices of the school. These understandings are negotiated by students—to accept, reject, or adapt in some way. I further found that those who have *chiasmic consciousness*, but find the practices and culture of the school alienating to their own identities, do not fare as well in school outcomes, and are placed in punitive tracks.

I continued to examine this theme of how perceptions and fears of racism influence the internal practices of the school in Chapter 5. In this chapter, I explored how Sankofa Boys’ Collegiate intentionally and unintentionally (re)defines masculinity through rules and rituals. Chapter 5 centered on answering my first research question as it unpacked the school’s articulated and enacted concepts of masculinity through school practices. I examined the expectations for boys in the school, and the consequences for boys when they did not meet those expectations. I also highlighted how boys differed in their understandings of the value of these practices. In particular, the school’s mission posits that boys become men through developing three skills: self-regulation, self-awareness, and self-reflection. One of these skills, self-regulation, dominated boys’ experiences at Sankofa.
Self-regulation manifested through the school’s disciplinary practices which narrowed the school’s approach to masculinity to heavily regulating boys’ images and bodies. School disciplinary practices were enacted within a rationale of protection—these practices were meant to ensure boys’ safety and success in a contentious world with respect to black boys’ masculinities. School staff described self-regulation as integral to out-of-school success, but these practices may have inadvertently reproduced negative labeling and control of black male bodies.

As I talked with teachers and with students, it became clear that no discussion of masculinity would be complete without fully unpacking and understanding brotherhood, which I discussed in detail in Chapter 6. In particular, boys’ conceptions of masculinity were bound with the concept of brotherhood, which boys described as both a formative process toward manhood as well as a constitutive element of manhood. Boys distinguished their relationships with brothers from those with their friends. Brothers, unlike friends, went through a process of finding, keeping, and testing trust. These relationships underwent a process of tempering, in which the relationship was made more resilient and stronger through hardship, or forged through fire. As follows, I termed the trust that is developed between brothers tempered trust as these stronger bonds were harder to break, and therefore served as a veil of protection for both boys if and when they encountered adversarial situations. Boys valued these relationships as they would prepare them for manhood and protect them so they could eventually reach manhood.

I further discussed in Chapter 6 how brotherhood is often written about as a positive aspect of cultivating a strong understanding of masculinity among young boys (Fergus et al., 2014; Nelson, 2013; Oeur, 2017). At Sankofa, however, brotherhood was
bidirectional: boys could be lifted up together, but they could also be punished together. Sankofa evaluated many of the ways that boys expressed brotherhood with one another (e.g., play-fighting) as aggressive, adult, and as punishable offenses. Chapter 6 helped to answer to my second research question, as it described boys’ understandings of brotherhood in relation to masculinity and how boys’ expressions of brotherhood are regularly misinterpreted and punished at Sankofa. Additionally, Sankofa’s concept of brotherhood and masculinity stood in opposition to the ways that boys expressed solidarity with their brothers. Sankofa’s understanding of who “counts” as a brother was very much at odds with how boys founded, tested, and kept trust with brothers over time. Further, brotherhood also operated with negative connotations at Sankofa, as misbehaviors of one student often pull down the group.

In my final findings chapter, Chapter 7, I explored how sixth grade boys at Sankofa Collegiate define and describe masculinity. This chapter responded to my third research question, because it compared boys’ understandings of masculinity with how they found masculinity messaged to them in the school. In particular, boys described manhood as discrete stages, or levels, through which one must advance, rather than one continuous, smooth journey. A few of the boys described this process as “leveling up,” a term I extend to consider the three stages of manhood that boys illuminated: enduring struggle, taking care and looking out for others, and acquiring calm and maturity.

Some boys found alignment between their understanding of a leveled development of masculinity and Sankofa’s rules and rituals to move upward in manhood, while others did not, and found the practices as either tangential to, or discordant with, their desire to level or man up. This section of Chapter 7 also answered my second research question
because it described the alignment between boys’ understandings of masculinity and school notions, and what typified boys’ alignment with or rejection of school norms and culture. I termed the organizational and cultural practices of the school with regard to masculinity as *grinding tasks*, or obstacles that boys either found value in with regard to becoming men, or that they found that these practices did not further their own masculinity. I termed the boys that found these practices beneficial as *grinders*, because they go with the grind of the school. Those that *minded the grind*, or were not bought into these practices, I referred to as *minders*, because they were regularly punished for not abiding by the rules or easily assimilating with the culture of the school.

**Larger Themes and Implications for Single-Sex Schooling**

Single-sex schools have been heralded as one answer to easing the educational dilemmas of black boys navigating poverty. These schools may provide supportive environments for students with targeted interventions regarding to their academic, personal, and socio-emotional needs (James & Lewis, 2009; Nelson, 2013; Oeur, 2017). As discussed in Chapter 1, several single-sex school practices aim to transform, or reshape student concepts of masculinity so that boys become positively academically oriented as well as future-focused, in order for boys to be more successful in school (Fergus & Noguera, 2010; Salomone, 2003). I argue that this logic can be deficit-oriented, as it assumes that these aspects are lacking in boys’ conceptions of masculinity, and further, assumes one singular “type” of masculinity to which boys can conform. Lastly, this logic implies that boys *inherently* want to be masculine, which may not be the case for all boys.

**The Boys and Sankofa Differ on What Constitutes Masculinity**

Boys’ conceptions of masculinity did not cleanly map onto the school’s three-pronged approach to masculinity (self-regulation, self-awareness, and self-reflection).
Rather, boys described manhood in terms of discrete stages through which one must pass to attain manhood. Boys aligned on these successive stages as enduring trauma, taking care of others, and lastly, attaining a sense of calm. While my analysis grouped boys’ responses into these three categories, individual boys of course provided different examples of what would typify reaching or passing through each of these stages. Boys did not see these stages of masculinity reflected in the culture of the school, but the school’s approach to masculinity in the sixth grade relied heavily on policing image and bodily control—implying that self-regulation in this respect was the most important organizational lever for demonstrating masculinity.

Given that boys did find some common ground on what they termed masculinity, it would be wise for schools to consider how these understandings could be funneled into or help form organizational codes, norms, and practices on masculinity and character development. For example, boys described being able to take care of others as an integral stage in manhood. Therefore, it would be useful for schools to make explicit connections between what boys are learning in school, and how it could potentially build up to a potential career or trade that would allow boys to fulfill a tenet of manhood: caretaking and providing for others. Another example could be offering electives to students in service of this level of manhood; these classes could include financial planning, cooking, and pursuing professional internships or trades.

Overall, boys who were able to conceive of and visualize themselves in the future, fared better at Sankofa in terms of the rules and regulations. It’s possible that boys may be more amenable to broadening, or even entertaining, other conceptions of masculinity if they are able to conceive and articulate some aspects of their future. In my study, these
boys were the *grinders* who were regularly able to associate the rationale behind some of Sankofa's school practices with skills they would need later in life, and in particular, in careers. Many of the boys that had difficulty articulating these future aspirations for themselves had already passed through the first stage of manhood, encountering and moving through trauma. It is possible, then, that the *minders* esteemed that their likelihood of attaining complete manhood and a possible future were not as certain as the boys who had yet to experience trauma. As a result, it would be beneficial for these boys who have experienced trauma—those who have reached the first level of manhood—to talk through and process trauma so that they may be more likely to be forward-thinking about their futures.

**Social Perceptions and the White Gaze**

The findings from my dissertation situate school practices within a larger context of social perceptions and the white gaze. To begin, I revised my earlier conceptual framework to allow for perceptions to be characterized as both a conditioning and mediating effect on the process of structure and agency. I hope that this framework might be beneficial for other school-based researchers who work with young people to be able to situate and make space for a conversation that includes both organizational practices as well as students’ negotiation and interpretation of those practices. To begin, school practices reflect several notions, and realities, of how black boys may be seen and appraised in and by wider, and whiter, society. Adults’ (i.e., teachers’, administrators’, deans’) perspectives inhere in these school practices, as these adults enact organizational practices with students. Teachers evoked language of protection and care in admonishing students for not following the rules and cultural practices of Sankofa. This appeared to be largely guided by a worry that the boys would be “seen” the incorrect way by [wider] society.
The risks and dangers for black boys in society are felt and very real. It is possible, however, that this worry may inadvertently be shaping how schools respond to students who do not follow, or actively resist, organizational rules, norms, or practices. As detailed in this dissertation, those boys that do not collectively camouflage themselves endanger the safety of the entire group. These stakes are indeed very high for young black boys in society. In all, this study can hold up a mirror to these practices, so that school professionals can spend time reflecting on how, if at all, their projected perceptions and worries about students’ lives and identities may inform and condition school structures that boys may find disaffecting.

**Individualization and Relationship-Building**

The perspectives that boys held of Sankofa Collegiate, along with their varied and deep understandings of what they understood masculinity and manhood to be, have implications for how single-sex schools might consider forming or framing some of their organizational culture or practices. For example, it would be valuable for schools to consider a student-centered and grounded approach to understanding how already operant mental models of masculinity that students hold can mesh with organizational practices. Invested school adults might consider incorporating some of the deep, individualized work of relationship-building with students, that in my work, took the form of research interviews and photo narratives, but in school-centered work could take the form of one-on-one mentorship, or peer mentorship between younger boys (i.e., 6th graders) with older boys at Sankofa. Relationship-building, I found, was a key component to learning through these methods what boys found important to them, and how they conceived of or conceptualized manhood and their futures.
Boys regularly remarked during or after their interviews that they had fun during these conversations, and that they enjoyed the time because they were able to talk about themselves. Some mentioned that opportunities to do so were rare, and others asked when they could have another interview or conversation. Schools should consider preserving a concerted space for boys to do identity work both with adult support, and with a small community of others within their schools. In relation to the earlier conversation on perception, schools might also consider structuring and holding brave conversations about race, stereotypes, and perceptions such that the intentionality behind the school structures, and the boys’ understanding about these structures’ relevance is made transparent, and is co-constructed. This might create better alignment between boys’ attitudes and dispositions toward organizational culture and schooling on the whole.

Relatedly, it would be valuable to create spaces for boys to name and process their concepts of masculinity along with their experiences of trauma. Nearly all boys in my sample referred to manhood as beginning through trauma. With regard to brotherhood, boys found their most trusting relationships through a traumatic or dangerous event. Although boys found value in this trauma because it allowed them the opportunity to grow and gain friendships, they still may need a designated space to work through these experiences. Providing such a space could allow more opportunity for boys’ understandings of masculinity and out-of-school experiences to both be validated and become more legible to the staff so that expressions of brotherhood and manhood that do not align with the school’s operating definitions of manhood and brotherhood would not be misread as willfully defiant, and thereby punished.
**Single-Sex Shoaling**

Although school cultural and disciplinary practices may be well intentioned, these practices may inadvertently reproduce the very structures that they attempt to circumvent by unintentionally reinforcing entrenched stereotypes about black boys. As detailed in earlier chapters, boys were coded as being aggressive when they play-fought, even though for boys, play-fighting served as an outlet to express brotherhood. Another example of these well-intentioned practices was the use of the uniform; which could be seen as sanitizing and protecting the image of black boys so they are not seen as a threat in the outside world. Although practices like these may ostensibly be created for the safety and well-being of the boys, they may also run the risk of edifying deficit-narratives that the image and behavior of these boys is something to be controlled, or fixed.

To extend a metaphor from biology, “schooling” is used to refer to fish of a similar size and species that evolved over time to organize in a tightly synchronized group to: swim efficiently, protect themselves from and confuse predators, and increase the ability to find food and survive. Fish in schools can sense their environment with great accuracy, consider themselves in relation to other members of the school, and can respond quickly to changes in their environment. For black boys at Sankofa, schooling took the form of bodily control, an urgency of movement, and a focus on boys moving together as one unit to improve how they are seen by the threats of the outside world. As mentioned earlier, the perception of how black boys are seen in the outside world was very much felt and inscribed into the daily rituals and ethos of the school, such that boys were seen as one brotherhood, or unit, such that they rose together or fell together.

Extending this metaphor to our understandings of schools as educational institutions, it is necessary to do away with the “schooling” of black males through
disciplinary or other school cultural practices. I argue that the focus on the whole, the “school,” could potentially obscure diverse masculinities, and make it difficult for boys to find their own voices and expressions in a school that is already virtually homogenous with respect to race, class, and gender.

Instead, school cultural practices should consider and center diverse masculinities through “shoaling”. Biologically, “shoaling” differs from schooling as fish in shoals relate to each other in a looser way, retaining their independence but still maintaining awareness of and social identity with their fellow group members. Unlike schools, shoaling groups can include a wide variety of fishes of many sizes and species. As applied to single-sex schooling, shoaling could support boys’ learning by critiquing and eventually overcoming external perceptions including “reputation” or stereotypes as they embrace the power, possibility, and range of raced and gendered expressions that they represent.

To support this work, schools of all types might consider context-specific consequences in place of zero-tolerance or subtractive disciplinary policies (Lustick, 2017; Payne & Welch, 2018). As detailed in my findings, boys were regularly punished for stepping out of the “school,” including: breaches in the uniform code or occupying space incorrectly (lateness, or incorrect body positioning). More often than any other “punishable offense,” boys were typically in disciplinary tracks because of failures to comport themselves in line with their peers. To counter this, one school practice could include a cross-disciplinary and cross-grade school team designated to examine data on types of students that are typically referred to disciplinary services; this could shed more light on the disproportionate impact of disciplinary polices on particular students, and why particular expressions of black masculinity can be regularly misinterpreted as defiant or
counter-productive to the school's mission. In all, schools must work toward highlighting and embracing the benefits of boyhood in a world that adultifies black boys much too soon.

**Implications for Future Research**

My dissertation research pursued a qualitative approach that allowed me the latitude to study organizational practices and culture as well as individual student perceptions and experiences of masculinity in single-sex schooling. I framed this dissertation within an expanded version of W.H. Sewell’s (1979) framework of structure and agency, amending the framework to include concepts of negotiation and identity. Through ethnography, photo narratives, document analysis, and in-depth semi-structured interviews with staff and with students, I was well-positioned to document and understand: the structural and academic conditions and practices through which boys learned about masculinity at Sankofa, how boys perceived and negotiated these practices, and lastly, how boys made sense of school concepts of masculinity, how they themselves defined masculinity, and how these concepts interrelated with perceptions of identity and agency.

My study highlights the usefulness of studying both organizational culture as well as individual student experiences and identity-work, not just a singular focus on one or the other. This study fills a gap in the literature around the conversation between institutional messaging and the ways that these messages are received, research from which educators can draw to inform their approaches. This approach provides an exploration that contextualizes how the identities of black boys are constructed within one single-sex school within the organizational culture of that school. I further explored how boys’ interpretations and sensemaking of these organizational practices impacted boys’ attitudes and dispositions toward schooling. The use of this research design allowed for a more
holistic understanding of masculinity and identity as an ongoing, contextually-mediated process, rather than as a static, reified category.

The inclusion of photo narratives into my research design allowed me to privilege the voices of boys in my study, and further, allowed them to voice their stories with their own images and words. Photos were an integral part of this research; I learned so much more from students through their photos than I would have if I had used interviews alone. The photographs allowed me a window into boys’ outside-of-school lives that would have otherwise been difficult to visualize or gain access. I found that the images that boys decided to capture allowed for much richer conversation than interview questions alone (Dennis, Gaulocher, Carpiano & Brown, 2008). Further, I found that this method allowed for counterstorytelling, as boys were able to frame their own realities and narratives with little researcher influence of subjectivity (Clark-Ibanez, 2004; Samuels, 2004; Yosso, 2005). Photo work might be especially valuable in further research—not only on this topic—when working with adolescents from historically marginalized communities, so that their stories are valued and validated.

Further research could also examine various other lines of difference that I was intellectually interested in and personally passionate about exploring, but did not have the scope to do so in this study. In particular, Sankofa Collegiate enrolled three black students for every one Latinx student, though I did not prominently feature Latinx boys who did not also fall into the black diaspora in this study. Latinx boys are also an integral facet of the single-sex schooling process. In particular, in this study, Latinx boys were attending a school intentionally designed for black boys, and this may have provided some potential for tension in finding a sense of belonging at Sankofa. Additionally, further research would
benefit from studying boys who self-identity as part of the LGBTQ+ community. At the time of this study, no boys in my sample identified as part of this community, but this could also be a feature of the younger age-group with whom I chose to work. Potentially, there might be more opportunities to do this work with self-identified members of the LGBTQ+ community in later adolescence when more of this identity development has the potential to take place (McCready, 2010). Although none of the boys in sixth grade, to my knowledge, identified as LGBTQ+, some boys in older grades at Sankofa had identified as gay, so it’s possible timing this study with boys who are older might be advantageous to studying and learning from this population of boys.

Along these lines, while this study was well-positioned to uncover boys’ initial readings and interpretation of organizational concepts of masculinity, it is of course possible that these conceptions and notions will shift as boys grow older. While research of any sort provides a snapshot of a moment in time—in this case the 2016-2017 sixth grade school year—identities, opinions, and perspectives change with time. Further research could consider a longitudinal design in which boys could be interviewed at different time points during their educational career. This would allow researchers to learn more about how masculinity and identity concepts could develop over time and how, if at all, attending a single-sex school may have a mediating effect on these aspects. In all, it is my hope that further research on single-sex schooling as a policy mechanism for boys of color considers boys’ perspectives and lived experiences as paramount to informing practitioners and policymakers and conditioning change.
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### Appendix A: Observation Protocol Template

**Overview:**

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<tr>
<td>House/Class + Teacher (if instruction):</td>
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**Running Record of Observation:**

Note Comments with “XXXComment”

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Appendix B: Administrator/Educator Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol
(For Instructional Staff)

Researcher: Pavithra Nagarajan

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Notes (special requests on identifiability, other):
To Do:
[Give interviewee copy of consent form]
[Request signature on consent form]

Introductory Script:
Thank you for joining me today for this interview. The purpose of this study is to develop an understanding of the particular organizational practices that single-sex schools—that primarily serve low-income black males—use around reconceptualizing masculinity and identity. Additionally, this study seeks to understand students’ experiences in navigating those organizational practices.

Our interview today will last approximately 60 minutes. During this interview, I will ask you about your teaching career, your time at this school, and some of your reflections on school practices and student experiences here.

As a reminder, I will treat this interview and any documents collected from you with the strictest confidentiality. For example, I will refer to you by a pseudonym and not include any identifiable information in transcripts or any final reports. I will be the only one with access to recordings and transcripts. You may refuse to answer any question I ask. You also can ask me to turn off the tape recorder at any time. You are also free to have things you say be treated as “off the record.”

Do you have any questions or concerns before we start? [Discuss questions/concerns]

Teacher Interview Schedule

I. Background
I’d like to start by getting some background information about you and your work.

1. How many years have you worked at this school?
   a. So that would mean that you started working here in [YEAR], is that correct?

   b. What exactly is your position at the school? How would you describe the things that fall under your work here?
c. So you have been teaching here for [YEARS]. Have you taught at other schools aside from this one?

i. [If Yes]: Where else did you teach?

1. What did you teach?

2. How long did you teach there?

ii. Have you taught anywhere else?

[NOTE: Respondent may have taught at MULTIPLE schools.]

2. Can you recall how you first came to work at this school?

   a. How did you first hear about the school? [PROBE IF NECESSARY: Through colleagues? Through supervisors?]

   b. When you were introduced to the school, do you remember what this person said to you?

   c. What led you to accept a position here?

II. Experience working at the school

3. I’d now like to ask you a little bit more about your experiences working here.

   a. What do you really enjoy about teaching here?
b. What’s challenging about working here?

4. Could you describe a teacher who teaches in this school that you think is particularly great with the boys? You don’t have to use names if you feel uncomfortable.
   a. How would you describe his/her relationship with the students?
   b. What does this teacher do or say that makes them a really good educator/resource for the boys?

5. In your experience working with the boys, are there particular things that you would say that work really well with the boys?

**FOLLOW UP:** Are there particular things that you think don’t “work” well with the boys? (For example, way of speaking, teaching techniques, etcetera)

III. School Culture
Now that you’ve told me a little bit about what it’s like to work here, I would like to ask you some questions about school culture.

6. How would you describe the school culture at [Sankofa]?

**PROBE:** If you were to explain it to a friend who wanted to work here as a teacher, what would you say?
7. Tell me a little bit about the mission of this school. (ALT: What would you say the mission of the school is?)

a. Does this mission statement [REPEAT their answer] resonate with you?

b. How, if at all, would you say the school puts this mission into action? (FOLLOW UP: Are there particular rituals, practices, or other messages that you think communicate the mission well?)

c. Would you say that [Sankofa] is on their way to fulfilling this mission or do you feel like there is more room to grow?

8. What are some particularly strong aspects of your school culture?

9. If you could make any three changes to the school what do you think it would be? (ALT: If you could make any three changes to the school, what would your dream list be?)

IV. Manhood/Masculinity/Brotherhood
Thank you for telling me about your experiences so far, Now, I’d like to ask you a few questions that center around manhood and brotherhood.

10. So, at this school, you’re trying to form these boys into young men. How do you do that?
**PROBE if necessary:** What structures are in place to help you do this?

What, if anything, do you think is still missing?

11. I've asked the students this question, but I'd like to ask you as well. What is "manhood" in your own words?

   a. Given the specific school population here, mostly boys of color, would you say that their manhood is different in any way from the "average" boy who is not of color?

   b. How do you think the boys think of "manhood"? How do you make sense of those ideas of manhood or masculinity?

12. How would you describe "brotherhood" in your own words?

   a. Have you seen the students exhibit "Brotherhood"? Can you tell me about an example that comes to mind?
b. In your experience, what best helps students develop this sense of Brotherhood with their peers?

V. Student Culture
Now, we'll chat a bit about how students experience schooling here.

13. Overall, what do you think the image is of the “ideal student” that the school is trying to convey?

a. Would you say your description, which was [READ THEIR DESCRIPTION BACK TO THEM] is any different from a typical co-educational public school? Why or why not?

14. Let's talk about some students. Think of a boy; don’t tell me his name, who has really flourished at this school. What was he like when he came here? How would you describe him now?

15. Now I'd like you to think of a boy, again don't tell me his name, who has really struggled at this school. Can you describe his struggles? What in particular do you think would help him do better here or elsewhere?
16. Overall, what students do you think [Sankofa] benefits? Does the model work really well for some students and not for others? Which students does it not work well for? If so, what could be done to bring the other kids into the fold?

17. What are some things you are particularly proud of when you think of the students at [Sankofa]?

18. What are three big issues that you still feel like need to be developed or addressed with the students here? How would you go about addressing those?

IV. Closing
We’ve about reached the end of our interview ...

19. What are you looking forward to next year?

20. Do you have any other comments you would like to add in addition to what we’ve talked about today?

THANK YOU for your time!
Appendix C: Student Interview Protocol
Researcher: Pavithra Nagarajan

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Notes (special requests on identifiability, other):

To Do:
[Give interviewee copy of \textit{ascent} form]
[Request signature on consent form]

Introductory Script:
Thank you for joining me today for this interview! The purpose of my research is to develop an understanding of students’ experiences in single-sex schools. Our interview today will last approximately 60 minutes. During this interview, I will ask you to reflect on your experiences in and out of school and on the photos you took with your camera.
As a reminder, I will treat this interview and any documents collected from you with the strictest confidentiality. For example, I will refer to you by a pseudonym (a fake name) and not include any identifiable information in transcripts or any final reports. I will be the only one with access to recordings and transcripts. You may refuse to answer any question I ask. You also can ask me to turn off the tape recorder at any time. You are also free to have things you say be treated as “off the record” which means I won’t write those things down.

Do you have any questions or concerns before we start? [Discuss questions/concerns]

I. Basics/Background:
First, I’d like to ask some general questions about you. Could you tell me how old you are?

What would you say is your racial/ethnic background?

Who do you live with at home?

What Neighborhood or community do you live in?

Where were your parents born?

II. Family
Great, now we’ll talk a little bit more about your family. One of the photos you took for this project was to take a photo of your family (C). Can you tell me who is in your photo and why you chose to take this picture?

Do you have any siblings? Can you tell me about them?
FOLLOW UP: Are you the youngest, oldest, or middle child?

Are there any other family members that we didn't talk about just now that you feel are really important to you?

IF YES: Can you tell me about them?

III. **Outside of School/Community/Belonging**

What neighborhood do you live in?

IF NEEDED: How would you describe where you live to someone who wasn’t familiar with the area?

Could you describe this photo you took of your community *(D)*?

Here’s the photo you took for the place you spend most of your time out of school *(S)*. Can you tell me about this place?

PROBE: Why do you spend a lot of time there?

PROBE: Do you like spending time there?

When I asked you to take a picture of your favorite place, you took this photo. What is this a picture of? Can you tell me why it is your favorite place? *(E)*
You took a couple of photos of where you feel like you belong or feel comfortable (Q), and where you don’t feel like you belong or feel comfortable (R). Can you tell me about why you chose to take these photos?

IV. School/Mission/Institution
How did your family first hear about [Sankofa]?

FOLLOW UP: Where did you want to go to middle school at the time?

How did you ultimately make the decision to attend [Sankofa]?

What were your impressions of [Sankofa] when you first got here? Can you remember what you thought on your first day of school?

FOLLOW UP: Have these impressions changed over the year?

How is this school similar to the school you attended for elementary school? How is it different?

If you were to describe [Sankofa Collegiate] to a friend who was thinking about coming here, how would you describe it?
Is there anything you would say is unique or special about [Sankofa]?

Is there anything special or unique that you’ve experienced at [Sankofa] that you don’t think you’d get at another school?

Is there anything that you think would be improved if you went to a different school?

In your own words, what do you think the mission of [Sankofa] is?

Follow up: What do you think [Sankofa] expects for its students – what kind of students do you think they want you to be?

FOLLOW UP: Are there things that you think your Principal or Deans do to try and make this happen?

Are there things your teachers do to make this happen?

Now I’d like you to think about what the “ideal” 6th grade student at [Sankofa] would look like. By “ideal”, I mean someone that the principals and the teachers would look to as a young man embodying CLEAR or fulfilling the mission that you mentioned earlier (Remind them of mission).

What types of things would this “ideal” student be? What would they do, say, or act like?
What do you think of this? Do you like the school’s idea of an ideal student? Why or why not?

These are the photos you took for “something that’s challenging” (I) and “something you don’t understand” (H) at school. Can you tell me about why you took these?

You took this photo of something in school you wish you could change (G). What would like to change?

Are there any other things you find frustrating at [Sankofa Collegiate]? Why do you think these are frustrating?

This is somewhere in the school that makes you feel happy (J). Tell me about it.

Are there any other things you like at [Sankofa Collegiate]? Can you tell me about them?

V. Teachers/Deans
Now we’re going to talk a little bit about the relationship you have with your teachers.

Are there any teachers or adults in the school building you feel you have a particularly strong relationship with?

IF YES: Is there anything that teacher does or says that helped you form a close bond with them?
FOLLOW UP: Can you tell me about a memorable time with that teacher? A time you had fun, or they helped you out with something?

IF NO: Why do you think you don’t feel close to the teachers here? Is there something they could do that they could do better or differently?

FOLLOW UP: Is there a teacher you can think of in the past that you were close to? What did they do that helped you develop a close relationship?

Were there any teachers that you were close to at the beginning of the year but aren’t any more? Or teachers that you really liked that you don’t any more, or vice versa?

Can you tell me about your relationship with the Deans? Are you close with them? Do you like them? What do you think their purpose is in the school?

What are things that a student typically gets in trouble for at [Sankofa]?

What do you think of those rules?

Can you tell me about your relationship with your advisory leader, Mr. _________? How would you describe the purpose of advisory?
Are there any teachers, or adults in the building, that you don’t really get along with? What do they do that makes you frustrated or upset?

VI. Individual Identity/Future
Now we’re going to talk a little bit more about your own identity. So we’ll talk about those photos and I’ll ask you some more questions.

This is the photo you took of something that is important to you (N). Can you tell me about your photo?

For one of the photos, I asked you to take a photo of something that represents where you come from (K) – can you tell me about the picture you took here?

I also asked you to take a photo of something you really like (F). Can you tell me what you took a photo of?

PROBE: Why did you decide to take a photo of ________ for “something you really like?”
You took this photo to “represent who you are” (O). Tell me how this photo represents who you are.

In general, how would you describe yourself? (ALT: What are three traits that describe you?)

How do you think other boys at [Sankofa] would describe you?

FOLLOW UP: How would another student who knows you well describe you? Someone who doesn't know you well?

In what ways do you think you're similar to other boys in the 6th grade here? What ways are you different?

How do you feel about these similarities and differences? Do you feel okay with being similar in these ways or different in these ways?

In what ways, if at all, has [Sankofa] shaped who you are?

VII. Peers
Now, how would you describe a “typical” student at [Sankofa] Academy? What I mean by typical, is how most students act, what most students do or say.
In what ways are you a “typical” student? What ways are you not a typical student at [Sankofa]?

Is there anything that happens when someone is not a “typical” student at [Sankofa]?

Here’s the photo you took for the question “Take a photo of a friend (or friends)” (A). Can you tell me about them?

Who are your closest friends at [Sankofa]? How did you meet them – did you know them prior to coming for [Sankofa]?

Do you hang out outside of school? How often would you say you spend time together?

How would you describe these friendships?

FOLLOW UP: Can you think of some good aspects of your friendships? Or something beneficial that you take away from them?

What are some not-so-good parts, or things that challenge you in these friendships?

Tell me about a time you recently hung out with these friends. What did you do?

Are there others you hung out with and had fun with recently? Can you tell me about that time?
Would you say bullying is a problem at [Sankofa]? Why or Why not?

I've heard a lot of insults between boys at [Sankofa] here and there – for example, calling each other “girls”, “pussies”, “soft” or “not tough”, “gay”, “fag”?

Can you tell me about each of these in turn? What would be the worst thing to be called? How would you feel if someone called you one of these names?

Have you been called any of these names by other boys’ here? Can you tell me about one such time?

Why do you think boys say these things to each other? Is there anything specific about [Sankofa] that you think makes this happen?

Can you tell me a little bit about lunchtime and recess at [Sankofa]? Who do you typically sit with, what do you during lunch aside from eat?

Can you tell me about a memorable time you had at lunch and recess recently?

VIII. Manhood/Brotherhood/Role Models
Now we’re going to talk a little bit about the idea of brotherhood and manhood and growing up.
For the question “take a photo of someone you admire or look up to” (B) you took this photo. Can you tell me who this person is and why you chose to photograph them?

Here’s the photo you took for representing “Brotherhood” (M). Can you tell me why you chose to take this photo? What would you say “Brotherhood” means to you?

Here you took a photo of something that represents “Manhood” (L). Can you tell me about this photo? Why does this represent manhood to you?

In your own words, what do you think manhood is?

What do you think [Sankofa] thinks manhood is? In other words, what kind of men do you think they want you to be when you grow up?

In what ways do you think your idea of manhood fits in with [Sankofa]’s idea?

Why do you think [Sankofa] made the House Model?

Do you feel like you get that (their above answer) out of your experience with the house model?
Do you like being a member of your house? Why or why not?

Do you feel close to your House brothers? Why or Why Not?

Lastly, Here’s the photo you took for the item of “future” (P). Can you tell me how this photograph speaks to your future?

IX. Closing
What, if anything, did you learn about yourself while doing this project?

Is there anything else in general or from your photos that you think we should talk about today? Something we missed in our conversation?

Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you!
Appendix D: Photo Project Protocol

Name______________________________

Photography Story Projects

You have been selected to participate in a project that wants to better understand how young students think about their lives and their schools. One way to understand this better is to ask you to create visual representations of your lives.

Using the cameras that you have been given, you will take pictures for each of the items listed below. Please make sure the photos you take are for the items listed below. Once you have taken those, you can use any remaining photos to take pictures of your family, friends, community, interests, or anything else that is interesting and important to you. Remember, that if you are taking a picture of a person you should ask their permission first. If they don’t give you permission, you cannot take a picture of them. All of the photos you take will be used just for us to have a conversation, and I won’t use any of your photos in any publications.

I will come around to your Advisory periods and collect the cameras on Monday. If you do not return the cameras you will not be able to see your photos. The following week, I will come to school with your developed photos. I will return the photos to you to keep!

Before you leave with the camera, I will take a photo of you on the camera (Photo #1). Then, you’ll take a couple of practice shots to make sure you know how to use the camera (Photos #2 and #3). Each time you take a picture, the photo count will go up by one. So when you leave, it will show “4”. This means you are on the 4th picture, and have taken 3 so far. You’re on your own! Have fun and keep track of what number photo goes with each item below.

Use the Photo Log to keep track of the photos you take. Underneath the “Picture #” column, look at the camera and write the number that appears BEFORE you took the picture. Under Topic, write the letter of the topic that corresponds with the photo you took.

Steps to using your camera:

1. Press the button on the top right side of your camera.
2. After you have taken your photo, turn the wheel as far as it will go, towards the right.
3. Repeat step two after each photo you take.
4. The number of photos you have left will be displayed on the top of the camera.
5. Once you have taken 27 photos, your camera roll will be complete.
6. Turn the wheel all the way to the 0 when you have finished taking all 27 photos

Take a Photo of:
A. Take a photo of a friend (or friends)
B. Take a photo of someone you admire (look up to)
C. Take a photo of your family
D. Take a photo of your community
E. Take a photo of your favorite place
F. Take a photo of something you really like
G. Take a photo of something in your school that you wish you could change
H. Take a photo of something in your school that you don’t understand
I. Take a photo of something in your school that is challenging for you
J. Take a photo of something in your school that makes you feel happy
K. Take a photo of something that represents where you come from.
L. Take a photo of something that represents “Manhood”
M. Take a photo of something that represents “Brotherhood”
N. Take a photo of something that is important to you.
O. Take a photo of something that represents who you are.
P. Take a photo of something that represents your future.
Q. Take a photo of a place where you feel comfortable or that you belong.
R. Take a photo of a place where you don’t feel comfortable or that you belong.
S. Take a photo of the place you spend most of your time outside of school.

**Picture Log**

For each photo you take, write down which topic from the direction sheet it corresponds to and a short description of the picture.

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<th>Topic Letter:</th>
<th>Short description of your photo</th>
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