“They Schools Ain’t Teachin’ Us”: Black Males, Resistance, and Education at Uhuru High School

BY

VERNON C. LINDSAY
B.A., University of Illinois at Chicago, 2005

DISSEPTION

Submitted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Policy Studies in the Graduate College of the University of Illinois at Chicago, 2013

Chicago, Illinois

Defense Committee:

David Stovall, Chair and Advisor
Pamela Quiroz
Steve Tozer
Victoria Chou
Marvin Lynn, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire
SUMMARY

Resistance behaviors among Black males often are viewed as negative, even when they are used to critique oppression and school conditions in an attempt at transformation. Resistance, critical race, youth development, and intersectionality theories offer insight to the experiences of Black males in K-12 schools. This study makes use of qualitative interviews, with a foundation in critical race theory, to illustrate how the resistance behaviors of Black males can be cultivated to provide transformation. It seeks to demonstrate how a youth-focused program, the Psi Guys, influenced the lives of Black males to have an impact on school policy and school culture. Specifically, this research is a one-year study of seven Black males who attended Uhuru High School in the urban setting of Torchton. The results of the study illustrate the importance of Black male voices in understanding race, policy schools, and transformative resistance.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family, friends, acquaintances, and comrades, who provided unconditional support when this work was faced with opposition.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to first recognize The Creator for guiding and providing me with the strength and discipline needed to achieve this goal.

Thank you, Gabriella, for choosing me as your husband and providing me with the gift of fatherhood. You have helped me in so many ways to make this dream a reality. I love you and look forward to a life filled with your love and compassion.

I would like to thank my dissertation committee: Dr. David Stovall, Chair; Dr. Pamela Anne Quiroz; Dr. Steve Tozer; Dr. Victoria Chou; and Dr. Marvin Lynn. Thank you, Dr. Stovall, for all of your guidance as an advisor, mentor, advocate, and friend. Thank you, Prof. Quiroz, for providing me with invaluable experiences as a graduate student and for your willingness to help me acquire the necessary skills as a researcher and scholar. Thank you, Prof. Tozer, for your assistance with clarifying my problem statement and pushing me to clearly define my research. Thank you, Prof. Chou, for listening to my concerns and helping to improve my methods and literature review. Thank you, Prof. Lynn, for asking that I take a closer look at critical race theory to strengthen my theoretical foundations. I want to thank all of you for your contributions to this dissertation.

I also want to thank my family: Mom, Dad, Camile, Melanie, Rachel, Erica, Brittany, Nowanna, Ramona, Ernest, and extended family for your encouragement and the support that you provided me throughout this pursuit of formal education. I want to say a special thank you to my father, who provided me with a positive example of Black manhood and timely financial gifts to ensure that this goal was achieved. I love you all.
Thank you, Diversifying Faculty in Higher Education–Illinois fellowship, for four years of financial assistance that covered many of my education expenses.

Finally, but not least, I want to say “thank you” to all of the students, administrators, teachers, counselors, and interns at my research site. This study would not have been possible without them.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Statement and Significance</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy Schools</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neoliberalism and Policy Schools</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uhuru High School</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study and Research Question</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Males and Education in the United States</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Pedagogy, Low Skill Acquisition, and Black Teachers</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formation of Adolescent Identity and Academic Achievement</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Resilience and Academic Achievement</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Greek Fraternities and Academic Achievement</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-centered Approaches to Increasing Academic Achievement</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Foundation</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resistance Theory</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Race Theory</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intersectionality Theory</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Youth Development Theory</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary and Implications</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>METHODOLOGY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FINDINGS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening to the Voices of Young Black Males</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James from Brunsgreen</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nathan from South Torchton</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating the Psi Guys to Engage in Resistance Behaviors</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Psi Guys’ Engaging in Transformative Resistance</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DISCUSSION</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for Policy and Practice</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE OF CONTENTS (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDICES</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VITA</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I. INTRODUCTION

As a graduate student at Torch University, I obtained a research assistantship to assist with an action ethnographic research study that examined the experiences of Black males (males of African descent, born and socialized in the African continent and those born or socialized throughout the African Diaspora) at Uhuru High School. During the fourth year of the study, I walked through the courtyard and then the glass doors of Uhuru High School, where, inside, I saw a sign that stated, “All students must pass through metal detectors.” This immediately called to mind my own resistance to high school culture and policy.

As a Black male who lived about 15 to 20 minutes from the city of Torchton, I attended a high school to which middle class Black parents sent their children to learn as well as to escape from the failing schools of the Torchton Public School system. The high school that I attended was also one of many schools that experienced White flight, as Black families moved into previously majority White neighborhoods and schools. I remember that my freshman English class contained what appeared to be the last White students in the entire school. In my sophomore year, 1998, the school report card indicated that 73.9% of the students were Black, while Whites composed 21.5% of the student body. In the year that I graduated, 2001, Blacks comprised 85.5% of the student population and Whites, 10.4%. As the student population shifted, so did school policies.

My resistance began with my not adhering to the school’s identification policy. This policy stated that students must wear school identification cards around their necks at all times on campus. Essentially, students were mandated to prove that they belonged inside the building. The school stated their purpose for this policy in terms of security,
uniformity, and preparing students for future employment. I saw it as a violation of my ability to freely express myself and as a marker that, when I arrived on campus, I became the school’s property. I resisted by placing my identification card in my pocket, and the consequence was suspension.

Because I refused to wear my identification card, I became part of the statistics that document Black male suspension rates in secondary schools. The school sent me the covert message that, when Black boys decide to engage in resistance to school policy and school culture, they are no longer fit for an education. While on suspension with other Black males, I was not given access to classroom instruction or the assignments provided to other students. During the in-school suspension, the supervisor told us to sit, look at the wall, and think about the choices that we made to get suspended. Clearly, my resistance was regarded as delinquency and addressed by punishment.

After I was allowed, once again, to be part of the general population of my high school, school policy required me to make an appointment with my school counselor. Specifically, the policy required students in their junior year of high school to meet with a school counselor to discuss plans after graduation. My family has always emphasized the importance of education, and, despite my acts of resistance to school culture and school policy, I understood that college was the preferred option after graduation. I went to see the counselor who was assigned to me, based upon my last name, and informed him of my desire to attend a four-year university. He looked at my record of detentions, suspensions, and average grades and quickly recommended that I seek admittance to a junior college. I recall his looking directly in my eyes and saying, “I don’t think that you are quite fit for a university at this time. You can apply, but I don’t believe you will get
admitted. You should explore the local junior college.” I knew that his comments were not only reflective of my academic and behavior records but also were related to my identity as a young Black male.

After my meeting with the counselor, I returned to history class and talked with friends about the suspension and my conversation with the school counselor. One of my friends recommended that I buy the album *Let’s Get Free* by Dead Prez (2000) because it provided a profound critique of society. I was familiar with Dead Prez, a Hip-Hop duo that includes Stic.man and M-1, due to their single *Hip-Hop*, in which they criticize the music industry’s abuse of artists and the Hip-Hop genre. It was not difficult to take my friend’s advice and to purchase the Dead Prez album that included the song *They Schools*. In *They Schools*, Dead Prez speaks to their experiences as Black males in a high school rampant with racism. As a young Black male in high school, I identified with the lyrics of the chorus. “They schools ain’t teachin’ us what we need to know to survive. They schools don’t educate, all they teach the people is lies.” At the time that I heard this album, I didn’t realize how many Black males attended “they schools,” where they are not adequately prepared to address the issues relevant to their lives.

**Problem Statement and Significance**

These high school memories were recalled after I interviewed an employee of a student support organization at the Torch University. She mentioned the difficulties that the school faced in attracting Black males to student support programs and services. The employee commented that she believed that the school does not support this population and, as a result, many Black males do not graduate.
Too often, there are reports of schools that fail to support Black males and the consequences, which range from poor academic performance to early deaths. “According to recent data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY97), over 30 percent of young Black men drop out of high school” (Jones, 2007, p. 75). Recently, in the city of Torchton, two Black males were placed on trial for the killing of another young Black male student. These young Black males attended high schools where race, racism, power, and the property rights of Whiteness influence educational outcomes (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Dixson, 2006; Harris, 1995).

The educational system plays a role in high school dropout rates and the limited number of Black males who pursue post-secondary degrees (Davis 2006; Freeman & Holton, 2009; Harper, 1996; Hunter & Davis 1994). Schools that Black males attend, and the type of education that they receive, affect identity development, socioeconomic status, and physical and mental health. Many of these schools do not prepare Black males to address the issues relevant to their lives; instead, they maintain and create environments for resistance to school policy and school culture.

The failure of many schools to prepare Black males also has implications beyond education (Noguera, 2008). A 2009 final report of the Illinois Taskforce on the Condition of African American Males (as cited in Freeman & Holton, 2009) noted significant differences between African American and other males in Illinois. According to the report, African American males in Illinois are less likely to complete high school and obtain a post-secondary education and more likely to be incarcerated or on parole, to have lower lifetime economic earnings, to have been part of the child welfare population,
to have a shorter life expectancy, and to have health problems such as HIV/AIDS, drug dependency, heart disease, obesity, and diabetes.

The conditions presented in the Illinois Taskforce report are related to a significant problem in education. Many adolescent Black males attend schools that often do not adequately prepare them to address issues that could affect their lives. In response to school inadequacies, Black males often engage in passive and active acts of resistance to school policy and school culture. Importantly, youth-development programs have the potential to engage Black males’ resistance behaviors to school culture and school policy into acts of transformative resistance.

**Policy Schools**

Policy schools are educational institutions that admit students based upon a set of standardized test scores, academic grades, and attendance policies. Many parents believe that policy schools can provide the skills necessary, not only for Black males, but also for all students to achieve academic success. Policy schools came into existence after the passing of an amendment to the 1976 Federal Emergency School Aid Act that authorized federal grants to support policy schools as a tool to implement desegregation (Raywid, 1985). In Torchton, where this study takes place, policy high schools attract educators with advanced degrees and high-performing students. Torchton is in a Midwestern city of the United States and is similar to urban school districts across the country in regard to policy school students’ performance on standardized tests. Torchton offers an alternative to neighborhood public schools that often are racially segregated and low performing. Student test results at policy schools in cities similar to Torchton indicate that these students tend to outperform students in traditional public schools (Eaton, 2010).
In cities such as Torchton that continue to struggle with segregated and underperforming schools, policy schools offer access to a college preparatory-based curriculum with a racially and ethnically integrated student body. Proponents of school choice and desegregation tend to favor policy schools (Morris & Goldring, 1999). They also attract students throughout the city and suburbs, thereby creating a diverse student body that performs well on standardized tests (Eaton, 2010).

Although policy schools offer some advantages over neighborhood schools, they do not benefit all students. There is an assumption, supported by research, that all children experience educational benefits in a school environment in which students are voluntarily desegregated. This assumption is noted in the amicus brief of Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No.1 and Crystal D. Meredith v. Jefferson County Board of Education, which was signed by 553 social scientists (Garces, 2012).

Morris and Goldring (1999) conducted a study of disciplinary trends in Cincinnati schools, the results of which challenged the belief that all students benefit from attending policy schools. They found that policy schools discipline Black students at rates equal to or greater than what is experienced by Black students in non-policy schools. The study also indicated that Black students in policy schools were disciplined more frequently than were White students enrolled at the same school. In addition to differences in disciplinary trends, as part of a Neoliberal agenda, policy schools have increased class differences in urban educational systems (Lipman, 2002).
Neoliberalism and Policy Schools

Neoliberalism is a philosophy and political stance that affects housing, transportation, economic, and education policy. The primary focus is on individual rights and competition in a global market, and several authors have made contributions to our understanding of this theory and how it affects schools. Harvey (2005) provided a definition of Neoliberalism that allows us to understand how Torchton policy schools cooperate to serve the interests of local and international investors. Hackworth (2007) noted that Neoliberalism is related to gentrification and housing policies, which often affect schools in cities such as Torchton. Anyon (2005) explained that transportation and housing policy, as a part of the Neoliberal agenda, affect poverty and education. Lipman (2002) noted that policy schools, in accordance with the Neoliberal agenda, influence gentrification policy and allow for the marginalization of students of color. Policy schools located in gentrified neighborhoods with strong ties to international investors serve as tools in the Neoliberal movement (Lipman, 2002). The contribution of each author is presented below.

Harvey (2005) defined Neoliberalism as a “theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedom skills with an institutional framework characterized by strong property rights, free markets, and free trade” (p. 2). This push for individualism via property rights and entrepreneurialism in a free market influences housing, economic, and education policy in Torchton. In particular, Neoliberal politics influence the location of and policies that govern Torchton policy schools. This is seen in the fact that policy schools often are found in gentrified neighborhoods that displace lower-income residents
and small businesses, in keeping with local and international investment interests. Neoliberalism devalues public interests in areas of employment and housing to maximize private profit.

Hackworth (2007) discussed the Neoliberal agenda via this urban gentrification policy. Hackworth stated, “The location, history, and demographics of a particular neighborhood are all important factors in how Neoliberalism gets localized through gentrification” (p. 123). In Torchton, desirable communities for gentrification are economically disinvested, located close to urban centers, and primarily occupied by people of color. Hackworth explored gentrification policy in New York, with special attention to Long Island City, Brooklyn Heights, and Clinton, and noted a shared defeat of public services for residents of color by state-facilitated gentrification. Governmental or state-facilitated gentrification involves “the reduction of public subsidies and regulation, the aggressive promotion of real estate development (particularly spaces of consumption), and the privatization of previous public services” (p. 16). In Torchton, these practices disproportionately affect communities of color who reside in areas that suffer from years of disinvestment.

Anyon (2005) investigated how transportation and housing policies influence education reform in urban communities. Anyon noted that, although transportation and housing policy are never coupled with educational reform, the dependency that lower income families have on public transportation and housing directly influences educational opportunities. Anyon stated, “Low-income households spend a much larger share of their income on transportation: Households earning between $12,000 and $23,000 spend 27 cents of every dollar they earn on transportation” (p. 86). In Torchton, lower-income
households’ transportation expenses are linked to the limited availability of jobs in urban communities of color and the related need to travel to suburban and downtown districts. Non-policy schools that depend largely on regional funds for support are penalized due to local businesses and residents’ needs to leave the community for employment. As such, transportation and housing policies under the guise of Neoliberal politics influence Torchton policy schools.

Lipman (2002) has argued that policy school reform in Chicago often serves local and international economic interests, in alignment with the Neoliberal agenda. She described how, in Chicago’s region 1 and 2 zones, policy schools attract students from neighborhoods with an average home value of $271,000. Lipman noted that the students’ homes are in the neighborhoods of former low-income and public-housing communities that have experienced gentrification at the gain of global financial investors. In this way, policy schools maintain racial and class divisions as they cooperate with business interests to relocate lower-income families to other neighborhoods of the city and suburbs. A similar trend for policy schools is occurring in Torchton, and Uhuru High School is reflective of this process.

**Uhuru High School**

Uhuru High School is a policy high school located in Torchton that is a result of the Neoliberal agenda. The school is named after the Swahili word for freedom, uhuru, and has adopted a motto of “Uhuru through Education.” Select Torchton communities are undergoing intense gentrification and displacing lower-income residents in an effort to be recognized as a global city. Uhuru High School is located in a gentrified neighborhood of the city. The school’s name has been changed four times since it
opened in February of 1918 as Torchton Military Academy; at that time, it specialized in preparing students for careers in the military. Over time, the school’s curriculum focus has changed to office administrative work and, currently, to students’ attending college. In keeping with these changes in focus, the school’s name changed from Torchton Military Academy to Torchton Business High School to Torchton Policy High School and, finally, to Uhuru High School.

Uhuru High School attracts students from around the city, due not only to its status as a policy school and its location within a recently gentrified neighborhood, but also because it prides itself as having a diverse student body. In 2011, Uhuru High School comprised relatively equal percentages of students that self-identified as White, Black, Latino, and Asian. These student percentages are different from those of other schools in Torchton, most of which are categorized as racially isolated. The percentages at Uhuru High School reflect attempts to maintain diversity as a marketing tool and to attract local and international investments.

According to the Uhuru High School marketing materials, the school currently specializes in educating students in a diverse environment to meet the challenges and demands of attending a four-year university. In 1980, the school became part of the Board of Education’s “Options within Education” program, created to provide students with a unique, integrated schooling opportunity. The neighborhood began to undergo gentrification in 1996, and the school underwent a transition from a public high school, with a largely working-class student population, to a policy high school, with a growing middle- and upper-class student body. In the process, gentrification and school reform policy, in alignment with Neoliberal politics, cooperated to serve the interests of local
and international investors. Private parties invested in higher-income housing that displaced many lower-income residents of the community that surrounded Uhuru High School.

In Torchton policy schools, where students are required to perform high on standardized tests to qualify for admissions, there are a limited number of Black male students who meet admissions requirements or who possess knowledge of the admissions process. Karp (2010) noted that policy high school principals have reported sending acceptance letters to remarkably fewer Black male than White male students. Gentrification and school reform policy have made it necessary to create initiatives that provide for an intensive search for Black male students for admittance. Uhuru High School aimed to maintain racial and socioeconomic balance among students via the recruitment of Black males from underserved communities and the implementation of the Black Male Achievement Initiative (BMAI). The school put together a steering committee of established individuals and gathered resources to develop a recruitment and support model that could potentially be duplicated among other policy schools in the Torchton school district.

Purpose of the Study and Research Question

This study stems from a larger, four-year research project that explores the structure and implementation of a diversity initiative and its impact on the study participants’ experiences at a policy school. Using data from Year 4 of the larger project, the current study uses qualitative interviews to investigate how a group of Black male students in a policy school actively and passively resist school policies and culture. School policy is defined in this study as the formal, enforced ordinances that determine
acceptable practices in school. For the purpose of this study, school culture is the underlying informal practices, beliefs, and acceptable forms of behavior that are agreed upon by students, teachers, faculty, and administration. This study further seeks to investigate the use of youth-development programs to engage in transformative resistance. For the purpose of this study, youth-development programs are any consistent set of activities developed by an organization or group of young people, with or without the support of schools or other institutions. They differ from extracurricular programs due to the lack of formal support that often accompany school-sanctioned athletic teams and student clubs.

This inquiry attempts to understand the relationships between Black males, school policy, school culture, youth-development programs, and transformative resistance. The research question for this study is twofold: “How do Black male students make meaning of resistance behavior in a policy school?” and “How can these behaviors be used to engage transformative resistance in members of a culturally-relevant youth-development program?” Underlying these questions are resistance, critical race, youth development, and intersectionality theories, which can be used to understand the multiple layers of meaning of Black males’ experiences in K-12 educational settings. As such, this research seeks to contribute to existing literature on Black males who attend policy high schools. It also aims to illustrate how resistance behavior cultivated via a youth-development program can provide opportunities for youth to positively affect schools and to improve their conditions.
II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In the interlude in *They Schools*, Dead Prez (2000) states, “Why haven’t you learned anything? The same people that control the school system control the prison system and the whole social system. Ever since slavery.” Dead Prez is making the claim that the education system is a tool used to maintain oppression. Throughout this song, the group discusses their school’s use of irrelevant curriculum, teachers that do not foster cultural solidarity, and the school’s overall ineffectiveness to prepare them to address issues relevant to their lives. I remember hearing the song for the first time and being amazed at how these Black males described their experiences within the education system. As someone who researches the experiences of Black males in schools, I understand how some Black males identify with the chorus of *They Schools*, where Dead Prez claims, “They schools ain’t teachin us what we need to know to survive. They schools don’t educate, all they teach the peoples is lies.”

The historical research that examines the experience of Black males indicates a strong connection between race, education, and efforts to maintain oppression. In Virginia, where many of the enslaved Africans arrived for the first time, education operated alongside racial hatred to justify slavery. An interpretation of the research presents the possibility that educational policy assisted the marginalization of Black males. Booker T. Washington and Frederick Douglass’s narratives demonstrate the struggle for enslaved Black males to obtain an education. Academic scholars Jawanza Kunjufu, Alford Young, and Haki R. Madhubuti provide insight into how the intersections between race, class, gender and education have assisted the marginalization of Black males.
An increased local and national focus on the plight of Black males emerged in the mid-1980s (Fultz & Brown, 2008; Garibaldi, 2007) and indicated the role of the intersections of race, racism, gender, and education. Terms used to describe Black males as an “endangered species,” “in crisis,” “a dying population,” “misdiagnosed,” and “at risk” stem from research that examines race, gender, poverty, and underachievement of Black males in schools (Bailey, 1983; Fultz & Brown, 2008; Gibbs, 1988; Leavy, 1983; Parham & McDavis, 1987; Porter, 1997, Strickland, 1989; Young, 2004). Since the mid-1980s, researchers have noted the overrepresentations of Black males in high school suspension, expulsion, and dropout rates. These findings illustrate a relationship between race, racism, gender, and the academic underachievement seen in young Black males.

Critical pedagogy, familial support, and academic resilience influence the academic underachievement of Black males in K-12 settings. Academic underachievement often is related to the failure of schools to implement critical pedagogy and employ teachers of color with whom Black males can feel connected (Foster, 1995; Giroux, 2001; Kincheloe, 2005; Lynn, 1999). The research demonstrates how Black males can potentially perform better in schools that utilize critical pedagogy and employ teachers of color. Academic underachievement of Black males also is perceived as connected to poor familial support and the development of certain gender and racial identities (Bryant, 2000; Davis, 2006; Mandara, 2006). Research suggests that Black males with limited familial support in schools, who are subject to certain external factors that influence racial identity and gender development during adolescence, tend to suffer from academic underachievement. Research also indicates a relationship between the academic struggles of Black males in K-12 settings and a lack of academic resilience or
the ability to succeed in school, despite the failures of peers (Gayles, 2005; Roderick, 2003). Black Greek fraternities that positively engage in racial identity and encourage community service often are highlighted as a means to address academic underachievement among Black males. The studies that attempt to offer insight into academic underachievement among Black males have both strengths and weaknesses, and most propose the need for educational polices that can potentially address the issues associated with Black males in K-12 education settings.

African-centered or Africentric youth programs often are recognized as a tool of educational polices to positively influence Black males in K-12 schools (Derge-Butler, 2009; Ginwright, 2004; Kafele, 2009; Kunjufu, 2005; Porter, 1997). Africentric youth programs make use of African-centered philosophies, rites of passages, and the seven principles of Kwanzaa, as developed by Maulana Karenga, to assist young Black males to develop toward adulthood. African-centered philosophies inherent to many Africentric programs include a collective societal outlook influenced by West African and Kemetic (Egyptian) historical and cultural components. Rites of passage include gender-based programs that emphasize an African-focused heterosexual transition to “manhood.” Africentric programs also make use of Karenga’s Nguzo Saba principles of Umoja (unity), Kujichagulia (self-determination), Ujima (collective work and responsibility), Ujamma (cooperative economics), Nia (purpose), Kuumba (creativity), and Imani (faith). Although Africentric programs offer participants many benefits, they have been criticized for a failure to address the multiple identities of program participants and the multiple layers of multicultural education (Banks, 1993; Ginwright, 2004; Singer, 1994; Sleeter, 1996).
Research illustrates the complexity of understanding academic underachievement and the experiences of Black males in K-12 educational settings, for which multiple theoretical frameworks can be brought to bear. These frameworks include resistance theory in education, critical race theory, intersectionality theory, and positive youth development theory. Resistance theory in education, as a critique of school conditions, helps to make meaning of the behaviors in which Black males engage in educational settings. The theory provides insight into the variations of resistance, which include reactionary, conformist, self-defeating, and transformative. Critical race theory provides insight into K-12 Black males’ educational experiences by taking into account the intersections between race, racism, power, and the property rights of Whiteness. Intersectionality theory concerns Black males’ relationship with race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and age. Positive youth development theory concerns how adult role models, parents, and extracurricular programs assist Black males’ transition to adulthood. Each theory has certain strengths and limitations in explaining the experiences of Black males in the K-12 context.

**Black Males and Education in the United States**

There is literature that suggests that the selection of Black males as a focus of education policy in the United States has origins in slavery (Anderson, 1988; Watkins, 2001). Watkins stated that education was a tool used in chattel slavery to instill and maintain oppression. Woodson (as cited in Fultz & Brown, 2008) noted that legislators placed firm restrictions on the education of enslaved Africans and provided the comments of an 1832 Congress representative:
We have as far as possible closed every avenue by which light may enter their minds. If we could extinguish the capacity to see the light, our work would be completed; they would then be on the level with the beasts of the field and would be safe. (p. 857)

This comment reveals a fear of all enslaved educated Africans and the necessity to implement oppressive educational policies. The congressman’s statement further reveals a perception of the relationship between education and the ability to reinforce Black inferiority. Gabriele Prosser and Nat Turner led slave revolts in the 1800s, indicating a possible relationship between the congressman’s comments in 1832 and conditions on plantations for enslaved Africans (Fultz & Brown, 2008). The forthcoming narratives of enslaved Black males confirm that, beginning in slavery, limiting Black males’ access to education has contributed to their marginalization in society.

Booker T. Washington (1995) documented his struggles as a Black male to gain access to an education. Washington discussed how he was allowed to carry the books of his master’s children but was prohibited to read. Post-emancipation from chattel slavery, he began to teach himself how to identify numbers as he worked alongside his stepfather in a salt factory. His mother, although illiterate, helped him learn to read. It was not until his community identified an educated person from Ohio who offered to teach others that he was provided an education. Many members of Washington’s community initially sought an education to be able to read the Bible. Washington and other Black males believed that education could enable them to change their conditions (Anderson, 1988; Jenkins, 2006; Washington, 1995).
Frederick Douglass (1997) also provided evidence of deliberate actions taken to prevent Black males from access to an education. Douglass learned how to read from his White mistress, Mrs. Auld, without the knowledge of her husband. When Mr. Auld discovered that his wife was teaching Douglass how to read, he strongly condemned her actions. Douglass noted Mr. Auld’s response:

If you give a nigger an inch, he will take an ell. A nigger should know nothing but to obey his master—to do as he is told to do. Learning would spoil the best nigger in the world. Now, said he, if you teach that nigger how to read, there would be no keeping him. It would forever make him unfit to be a slave. (p. 325)

Mr. Auld believed that Black males should be kept from an education because, otherwise, they would prove difficult to control. Douglass and other Black male leaders understood education and literacy as critical to liberation (Anderson, 1988). As noted by Perry, Steele, and Hillard (2003), Douglass eventually fled slavery and wrote three narratives that exposed the inhumanity of slavery and how education influenced his experiences. Douglass’s narrative provides insight into later efforts to ostracize and control Black males through education.

Race and racism are central to Kunjufu’s (2005) understanding of how Black males often are marginalized in society as a result of K-12 education experiences. Kunjufu stated that there is a White supremacist agenda that seeks to limit the development and success of Black boys through education. Welsing’s (as cited in Kunjufu, 2005) definition of white supremacy is “white power domination by the global white minority over the vast non-white global majority” (p. 4). According to Kunjufu, this definition of white supremacy is the basis for understanding how schools fail to
adequately prepare Black males to address issues relevant to their lives. Kunjufu claims that systemic racism prevents schools from embracing interactive learning environments, which have the potential to present alternative teaching methods for active learners among Black boys. He further noted that nearly 50% of Black boys drop out of school due to “irrelevant curriculum, low teacher expectations, lack of rewarding experiences in school, lack of positive adult reinforcement and lack of safety” (pp. 106-107).

Madhubuti’s (1990) work makes it clear that schools influence the social and economic mobility of Black men. He argues that the marginalization of Black men is related to the intersections between race, racism, gender, and education. Madhubuti claims that the sociohistorical construction of race assists misguided understandings of Black males, which are supported through systemic tools of oppression. In regard to the current state of Black males, he stated:

Many Black men and boys twelve years and older now realize that they are, indeed, marginal to this economy, and that as technology advances and job requirements become more technical, their chances of “good” employment are just about negligible. Black young men are quickly becoming an illiterate, non-verbal, directionless, unattached, non-responsive, uncreative, jobless problem. (p. 79)

Madhubuti noted that the lack of access to a quality education influences employment opportunities among Black males and, further, has lasting effects in the Black community. He believes that the lack of access to a quality education is behind violent crimes, health issues, and high incarceration rates among Black males.
Young (2004) offers insight into how lower-income Black males experience school. He explored how 26 Black males from Chicago experience race, employment, and conditions in lower-income communities. His findings indicate that lower-income Black males face social and education related challenges due to their race and lower socioeconomic status. As one of his study participants, Dennis, explained:

I believed in school, but you know, sometimes, you know, when you don’t have exactly things to wear or, you know, you feel embarrassed . . . so sometimes I would diss school cause I didn’t have nothing to wear, you know what I’m saying. And it was hard, you have to go to school and you look like a bum. (p. 81)

Young acknowledged that this Black male and others decided not to attend school based on their lower-income status and fears of rejection by teachers, peers, and administrators. This decision, of course, had a negative impact on their academic achievement.

The attention to academic underachievement among Black males reached its peak in the mid-1980s, with research that documented the low academic performance and high rates of encounters with school discipline policy among Black males. Garibaldi (1986) conducted a study of Black males in New Orleans to explore academic performance and discipline. He found that Black males accounted for 65% of total suspensions, 80% of all expulsions, 58% of non-promotions, and 45% of school dropouts. Countless studies conducted throughout the 1980s and 1990s had similar findings. Leake and Leake (as cited in Davis & Jordan, 1994), who studied Black males in a Midwestern city, found that only 2% of Black males possessed a cumulative grade point average of 3.0 on a 4.0 scale.

The historical literature that examines education among Black males clearly demonstrates a link between race, racism, gender, and education and how education was
used as a tool to maintain oppression. As Jenkins (2006) noted, a large percentage of the early Africans enslaved in the Americas were Black males, and education policy ensured that they did not have access to formal education. Washington (1995) and Douglass (1997) attested to these realities in their narratives. Kunjufu (2005) and Madhubuti (1990) illustrated how racialized oppression is the force behind schools that do not improve academic achievement among Black males.

Despite the strengths of the historical research on Black males and education, it also possesses some limitations. Many of the limitations are caused by researchers who did not seek to adequately understand the experiences of Black males. Other limitations include the inability to draw direct links between codified laws, race, racism, and the education of Black males. Laws that forbid education among people of African descent were not specific to Black men. Black women and Black children also were prohibited from receiving an education. Nevertheless, Kunjufu (2005) and Madhubuti (1990) present persuasive arguments; they use white supremacy theory, individual observations, and personal experiences instead of relying on empirical studies to illustrate a relationship between schools and the marginalization of Black males.

**Critical Pedagogy, Low Skill Acquisition, and Black Teachers**

Schools that do not make use of critical pedagogy often provide a disservice to all students, including Black males. Critical pedagogy involves the systemic use of educators and researchers to teach students to question the social and political landscapes of schools and society (Kincholeoe, 2005). It developed from the works of scholars (Friere, 2007; Giroux, 2001; Kincholeoe, 2005; McLaren & Kincholeoe, 2007) who established the need for school culture, school policy, and curriculum and teaching to
engage youth in learning how to criticize structural inequalities and in developing appropriate remedies (Andrade-Duncan & Morrell, 2008; Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2003). The refusal of schools to employ critical pedagogy is related to the academic underachievement of Black males in high school.

Academic underachievement among K-12 Black males often is attributed to several factors, including the refusal of schools to embrace critical pedagogy. In They Schools, Dead Prez (2000) asserts, “Cuz see the schools ain’t teachin’ us nothin’. They ain’t teachin’ us nothin’ but how to be slaves and hard workers.” Dead Prez is speaking to the experiences of Black males in the education system, their high school’s inability to implement critical pedagogy, and teacher’s ineffective methods to have a positive impact on their learning. The use of critical pedagogy can assist Black males to learn, despite the existence of less-supportive environments.

Research also indicates that Black males account for high rates of academic underachievement due to low skill acquisition and the lack of Black teachers in elementary schools. Roderick (2003) noted the academic struggles that Black males experience in their transition to high school. She stated that Black male high school students avoid schooling due to low skill acquisition in elementary grades. Low skill acquisition among Black males in K-12 settings also has been attributed to the limited number of Black educators in urban schools. Irving and Hudley (2008) noted that Black males perform higher on aptitude tests administered by a Black examiner. This is an example of how the opportunity to identify with teachers affects learning (Irving & Hudley, 2008; Terrell, Terrell, & Taylor, 1981) Limited skill acquisition coupled with the
lack of teachers of color can have a negative impact on the academic success of Black males in high schools.

Black teachers who connect with Black male students have the potential to improve academic performance. Milner (2007) emphasized that caring teachers are critical to the success of Black males in educational settings. Black teachers can serve as caring teachers that offer a pedagogy that incorporates “cultural solidarity, affiliation or kinship, and connectedness” (Lynn, 1999, p. 607). Black educators who offer pedagogy of cultural solidarity, affiliation, kinship, and connectedness can influence academic achievement among Black males. In addition to the lack of critical pedagogy, low skill acquisition, and the limited number of Black teachers, academic underachievement also has been related to how gender and racial identity develop.

**Formation of Adolescent Identity and Academic Achievement**

Racial identity and notions of masculinity influence academic achievement among Black males. Dead Prez (2000) states, “I tried to pay attention, but they classes wasn’t interestin’. They seemed to only glorify the Europeans. Claimin’ Africans were only three fifth’s a human being.” Schools that do not teach the great contributions of African society hinder the identity development of students of African descent.

Masculinity is the social and cultural construction of what it means to be a man, which includes the performance of mutually accepted behaviors of dress style, disposition, and attitude by society (Brod & Kaufman, 1994; Davis, 2006; Noguera, 2001). Ferguson (2000) noted that the criminalization of young Black males is related to the performance of Black masculinity that impedes academic achievement in public schools. She noted that two societal representations of masculinity for Black males are
criminal and endangered species. Davis noted that the desire to define masculinity according to normative understandings, coupled with the importance of Black males’ racial awareness and identity, is heightened in adolescent Black males, in the context of racial oppression, and influences academic achievement.

Other researchers argue that limited parental involvement in school or nontraditional family structures affect academic achievement among K-12 Black males. Bryant (2000) noted that it is the responsibility of Black “parents to guide their children in development of wholesome and productive attitudes and behavior” (p. 10). Bryant stated that, for many Black males, this critical guidance is not provided. Mandara (2006) found that Black males with high parental involvement in homework and limited counterproductive time under parental supervision had better academic achievement than did Black males without such parental involvement. Donnor (2006) noted that high parental involvement increases the chances that student athletes will perform well in academics. Overall, parental involvement is recognized as having a positive impact on academic achievement among Black males.

**Academic Resilience and Academic Achievement**

In the research on the educational experience of Black K-12 males, academic resilience often is related to achievement. Gayles (2005) defined academic resilience as “academic achievement when such achievement is rare for those facing similar circumstances or within a similar social context” (p. 250). Academic resilience is difficult when Black males develop such perceptions as expressed by Dead Prez (2000): “To advance in life, they try to make you pull your pants up. Students fight the teachers and get took away in handcuffs. And if that wasn’t enough, then they expel y’all.” Black
males who demonstrate academic resilience are those who believe that the educational system provides an opportunity for social mobility, despite their peers’ poor academic performance and negative encounters with discipline policy.

The general lack of academic resilience among Black males influences the trajectory of their educational careers. For example, lower high school graduation rates have been correlated with lower academic resilience (Roderick, 2003; White & Rayle, 2007). Payne, Starks, and Gibson (2009) noted that Black males who possess a street life orientation, an “ideology of personal and economic gain,” can, nevertheless, embrace academic resiliency and achieve academically (p. 36). Black males who perform well in inadequate schools are examples of students with academic resilience; however, their success often is linked to involvement in extracurricular and after-school programs.

**Black Greek Fraternities and Academic Achievement**

Research suggests that Black Greek fraternities have assisted young Black males in the development of leadership skills and can increase their matriculation rates (Cuyjet, 2006; Harper, 2008; Harper & Harris, 2006; Patton & Bonner, 2001; Patton, Bridges, & Flowers, 2011). Kimbrough (1995) studied a total of 61 members and non-members of Black Greek organizations and found that 92% of Black Greeks self-identified as leaders. Kimbrough and Hutcheson (1998) found that 53% of students in Black Greek fraternities performed well academically and were members of academic honor societies. Black Greek fraternity organizations offer participants opportunities to develop positive racial identity, which some argue can increase the likelihood of graduation (Harper & Quaye, 2007).
School organizations such as Black Greek fraternities encourage academic success and provide opportunities for leadership development via grade point average membership requirements and community service initiatives. Alpha Phi Alpha, the nation’s oldest Black fraternity, requires undergraduate students to maintain a 2.5 grade point average (on a 4.0 scale) to qualify for membership (Alpha, 2013). Kappa Erwin and Marcus-Mendoza (as cited in Kimbrough, 1995) stated that higher levels of cognitive and leadership development have been found among students involved in school organizations as compared to students who do not have such involvement. Barker (2010) noted that the nine Black Greek organizations that comprise the Pan-Hellenic Council require all members to make a commitment to community service. As can be seen, community service requirements and mandatory grade point averages can increase academic achievement among Black males in Greek fraternities.

**African-centered Approaches to Increasing Academic Achievement**

Based on the concern over underachievement among K-12 Black males, research also has focused on African-centered extracurricular programs that address issues pertinent to Black males. Successful after-school programs serve as a second home, where youth can enjoy friendships with other youth and receive mentoring from adults (Hirsch, 2005). Kafele (2009) argues for the importance of such after-school programs to assisting Black males’ transition to adulthood and increasing their academic achievement. Kunjufu (2005), Derge-Butler (2009), and Porter (1997) all have advocated for African-centered educational reform and rites-of-passage after-school programs as remedies for the problems of Black males in K-12 schools.
African-centered or Africentric educational programs attempt to engage Black youth in an understanding of African-centered history and African-centered cultural values as a means to improve academic performance. They provide an understanding of African societal contributions that many schools often disregard or minimize. Africentric programming offers Black students an opportunity to “develop critical thinking and group protection to bring about self-determination for Black people” (Porter, 1997, p. 66). These programs possess the potential to improve academic performance among Black youth because they offer a cultural connection to successful individuals and to historical and contemporary events as well as to certain activities conducive to academic achievement.

A component of many African-centered after-school activities are rites-of-passage programs. Rites-of-passage programs offer Black male students an opportunity to develop positive self-concepts via activities that reflect “traditional African manhood” and Maulana Karenga’s Nguzo Saba principles of Umoja (unity), Kujichagulia (self-determination), Ujima (collective work and responsibility), Ujamma (cooperative economics), Nia (purpose), Kuumba (creativity), and Imani (faith) (Derge-Butler, 2009; Kunjufu, 2005). These programs offer participants opportunities to engage in conversations about African history, politics, sex, family responsibilities, exercise, diet, and masculinity, led by older Black males who can aid young Black males’ transitions to adulthood. African-centered programs are used to reinforce collective worldviews and values that are shared by the people of the African Diaspora.
Summary

The literature presents a clear link between Black males’ academic underachievement, academic resilience, and low skill acquisition. Roderick (2003) stated that lower graduation rates often are seen among students who do not possess strong academic resilience or highly developed basic skills. Black Greek fraternities can increase academic achievement via grade point average requirements and mandatory community service participation. The research on African-centered programs indicates that rites of passage can potentially increase academic achievement among Black males. Such programs offer an African-centered perspective of history often disregarded in schools as well as mentoring by older Black males.

Although there is significant research on the education of Black males in public schools, there is limited research on the conditions that Black males encounter in policy schools and the potential impact of Africentric programs. African-centered programming and rites-of-passage programs are criticized for the high values placed upon the Black experience and their lack of attention to participating youth of multiple identities (Banks, 1993; Singer, 1994; Sleeter, 1996). Ginwright (2004) argues that African-centered programs must move beyond an emphasis on West African and ancient Kemetic (Egyptian) history, culture, and values to engage youth of multiple racial and sexual identities, or they will remain limited to addressing the diverse experiences and identities of Black males in K-12 education settings.

The experiences of Black males in K-12 settings are complex and require analytical tools that can make meaning of their behaviors. As such, in the sections below, the theories that can be used to provide such meaning are presented and discussed.
Theoretical Foundation

**Resistance Theory**

Resistance theory, as applied to education, provides an understanding of student responses to school conditions, empowers the voiceless to create change within schools, and provides an analytical tool to understand the experiences of Black males in schools. Resistance theory helps us to understand passive and active acts of resistance in relationship to cultures, schools, and the dominant society (McLaren & Kincheloe, 2007; Solorzano & Bernal, 2001) and to make meaning of student actions that are oppositional to school authorities, cultures, and policies (Noguerra & Cannella, 2006).

Giroux (2001) argues that acts of resistance can be understood as conscious decisions that are critiques of school conditions. He stated that resistance theory “has the potential to provide new theoretical leverage for understanding the complex ways in which subordinate groups experience educational failure, and directs attention to new ways of thinking about and restructuring pedagogy” (p. 107). Giroux takes an approach to resistance theory in education that proposes the importance of using less-dominant voices to shape pedagogy in schools.

The myriad ways that Black males engage in resistance to school are not seen as the impetus to create change within schools or the larger community and often are categorized as deviant (Akom, 2006; Flores-Gonzalez, Rodriguez, & Muniz-Rodriguez, 2006; Noguera & Cannella, 2006; Stovall, 2006a). Willis (as cited in Noguera & Cannella, 2006) undermines the value of resistance and categorizes all student noncompliance as simply deviant behavior. Nevertheless, resistance has the potential to serve as transformative for Black males who develop a greater social understanding of
their resistance and the methods to achieve social justice (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Solorzano & Bernal, 2001).

Ferguson (2000) argued that schools serve as vehicles to punish Black males and transport them directly to the prison system. In the school in which she conducted research, she found that “three quarters of those suspended that year were boys, and, of those, four-fifths were African American” (p. 2). Ferguson related these disciplinary trends to the isolation of Black males and to the labeling of these youth as “criminally inclined.” When they resist school policy and culture, young Black males in K-12 schools often are categorized as delinquent and unfit for an education and are punished with detention, expulsion, suspension, and/or identification as “problem children” who “need to be fixed” (Ginwright & Camarata, 2006). According to Giroux (2001), however, we should make meaning of these behaviors as a critique of the pedagogy and the school culture.

Solorzano and Bernal (2001) separate resistance behavior into categories, including reactionary, self-defeating, conformist, and transformation. Reactionary resistance includes oppositional actions to authority, school policy, and school culture that are not motivated by a critique of social conditions. For example, Black males who choose not to complete homework due to decisions unrelated to the curriculum or social justice are participants in reactionary resistance. Self-defeating resistance includes student behaviors that may be motivated by oppressive social conditions; however, these behaviors do not function as a means to break free from individual oppression. Black males who drop out of high school display self-defeating resistance behaviors (Fine, 1991).
Solorzano and Bernal (2001) defined conformist resistance as behaviors with social justice motivations that lack the social consciousness to seek collective remedies. Black males who internalize oppression and blame themselves, their families, and communities are participants in conformist resistance. Transformative resistance is the use of oppositional behaviors, motivated by oppression, to pursue actions that remedy injustices. Black males who do well in school, despite expectations and structures that support underachievement, exemplify transformative resistance (Cammarota, 2004; Gayles, 2005; Solorzano & Bernal, 2001).

Students and teachers can utilize collective resistance behaviors to engage in transformative resistance and improve schools. Solorzano and Bernal (2001) stated that, in student transformative resistance behavior, “the student holds some level of awareness and critique of her or his oppressive conditions and structures of domination and must be at least somewhat motivated by a sense of social justice” to create change (p. 319). Protests and boycotts that contested educational conditions in Los Angeles communities, led by Chicana and Chicano students, were presented as examples of transformative resistance by Solorzano and Bernal. Valenzuela (1999) depicted unified resistance behaviors among U.S. Mexican students in response to the school’s lack of culturally relevant curriculum. Danns (2005) discussed transformative resistance and presented the example of yearlong protest among Black teachers at Farraguat High School aimed at changing curriculum, classroom conditions, and structures of power within the Chicago public school system.

Resistance theory provides an explanation for the resistance behaviors of Black males in K-12 educational settings in which teachers adhere to Friere’s (2007) “banking
concept of education” and do not invoke critical thinking among students. When Black males understand that teachers believe that they “know everything and the students know nothing” (Friere, 2007), these students engage in behavior that is deemed “criminally inclined” (Ferguson, 2000), including vandalizing school property, refusing to attend class, and/or exhibiting poor academic performance. In particular, poor academic performance may be a response to an understanding of social inequality and “a sense of the futility of trying to change their location within this hierarchy through academic achievement” (Gayles, 2005, p. 251).

Resistance theory, however, cannot address all behaviors in which Black males in K-12 schools engage in opposition to school discipline policy, school culture, or curriculum. Giroux (as cited in Solomon, 1992) believes that oppositional behavior must have sociopolitical significance to be seen as resistance. In keeping with this, individual Black males may participate in behaviors absent from their own sociopolitical consciousness. For example, acts of poor academic performance may simply be defiant for the sake of defiance and not necessarily a critique of the school and broader social inequalities.

One weakness of resistance theory is that it can be used to categorize all oppositional behaviors of Black males in K-12 education settings as acts of transformative resistance. Resistance theorists also have been criticized for labeling behaviors as a means to bring about collective change rather than as acts for personal gain (Solomon, 1992). Thus, the theory of resistance in education can be used inappropriately to categorize all oppositional behaviors as resistance, and it offers little insight into how race influences resistance. Further, in policy high schools, where only
the top students are selected and “classes develop students’ critical and analytical skills,” resistance theory does not offer an analysis of resistance behaviors.

**Critical Race Theory**

Critical race theory had its beginnings in the 1970s as a response to critical legal studies, which took an elite and Eurocentric perspective and failed to address how race and racism influenced rights (Corbado, 2011; Crenshaw, 2011; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ortiz & Elrod, 2002). Developed by largely White male liberals in the 1970s, critical legal studies uses a Marxist lens, void of race, to analyze the legal system in the United States (Carbado, 2011; Jennings & Lynn, 2005; Tate, 1997). Critical race theory explains the relationships between race, racism, and power in the post-civil rights era. By offering a critique of social inequalities and supporting policy, critical race theory can act as a tool to eliminate racism and the subordination of people of color (Matsuda, 1995; Solorzano & Bernal, 2001).

Proponents of critical race theory held their first conference in 1989, and some argue that this was the beginning of the critical race theory movement (Cho & Westley, 2002; Crenshaw, 2011; Harris, 2001). Attendees included students, researchers, lawyers, authors, activists, and others who met to discuss ways to take action against racial inequalities, based on the theory. Many of the persons in attendance from critical legal studies expressed concern about “race, pedagogy, and affirmative action at America’s elite law schools” (Crenshaw 2011, p. 1264). Delgado (2001) one of the attendees of the first conference, put forth five essential tenets of critical race theory to explain the relationships between race, racism, and power:
The first feature, ordinariness means that racism is difficult to cure or address. The second feature, sometimes called “interest convergence” or material dimension adds a further dimension. Because racism advances the interests of both White elites (materially) and working class people (psychically), large segments of society have little incentive to eradicate it. A third theme of critical race theory, the “social construction” thesis holds that race and races are products of social thought and relations. Another, more recent, development concerns differential racializations and its many consequences. A final element concerns the notion of a unique voice of color. (p. 9)

These tenets have influenced many of the writings that provide the foundation for the critical race theory movement (Delgado, 2001). The final element, which concerns the voice of people of color, is important to understanding Black male students’ experiences in education.

Critical race theorists in education attempt to make meaning of the permanence of racism, the failures of civil rights laws, misguided colorblind ideologies, and the property rights of Whiteness and their impact on inequality (Gunby-Decuir, 2006; A. P. Harris, 2001; C. I. Harris, 1995; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006). Critical race theory supports the use of Black male narratives to explain their role as resistors to the education process. In law, narratives can serve as counterclaims to the “legitimate” language of the court system (Bell, 1987, 1992; Ortiz & Elrod, 2002; Ross, 2002). Critical race theorists in education provide counternarratives (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006; Montoya, 2002) to the dominant educational stories. These counternarratives
challenge the systemic nature of White supremacy in the United States and international contexts (Gillborn, 2005).

In regard to the use of narratives in critical race theory, Delgado (2000) views the “ingroup” as the dominant voice and the “outgroup” as the suppressed voice. In a broad societal context, White narratives often are in accordance with the ingroup, and people of color, including Black males, often compose the outgroup. Delgado stated, “[Narratives are] the prevailing mindset by means of which members of the dominant group justify the world as it is, that is, with Whites on top and browns and blacks at the bottom” (p. 60). Counternarratives challenge the dominant discourses of power, policy, and history.

Bell (1987, 1992) found narratives to be highly effective in explaining race and racism-related inequalities. Bell uses allegorical stories to discuss how race, racism, and power influence inequalities. Geneva Crenshaw is Bell’s fictionalized advocate for racial and economic equality, who, among her many talents, possesses the ability to time travel. In the opening chapter of “And We Are Not Saved,” Crenshaw time travels to a meeting held by the framers of the constitution. She magically appears, protected by an invisible force field, and attempts to plead a case for people of color and women to the delegates. Before she can finish her opening comments, someone pulls out a gun and attempts to take her life. This story, similar to others by Bell, indicates the historical privilege of White identity in excluding and eliminating non-whites from power in the United States.

Critical race theory in education also makes meaning of the property rights of Whiteness and how they influence inequalities. Race is an invented, social historical concept codified by law and validated via cultural and material economies (Gotanda, 1991; Haney Lopez, 1996; C. I. Harris, 1995; Omi & Winant, 1994; Vaught, 2011;
Winant, 2001). Harris demonstrates how the social and legal construction of White identity has facilitated inequalities based upon the concept of race. She argues that the racialization of Africans and Native Americans provided an ideological basis for the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the conquest of the Americas. Harris supports this notion by stating that, in the United States, only Blacks were enslaved and that the property rights of Whites were acknowledged over that of Native Americans. These were the foundations of Whiteness as property.

Harris (1995) argues that Whiteness functions as a property that produces and facilitates inequalities. Drawing similarities to how property is defined in legal studies, Harris offers an explanation of how Whiteness enables the right of disposition, the right to use and enjoyment, the right of valued reputation, and the absolute right to exclude. The right of disposition entails the inability of White identity to be transferred to persons of color. Whiteness involves the use of White identity to fulfill desires and exercise power. Whiteness functions as a right to exclude because it enables Whites to prevent people of color from accessing individual and systemic privileges. Gunby-Decuir (2006) argues that seeking access to equitable educational facilities is an attempt to access the property rights of Whiteness.

Solorzano and Bernal (2001) argued that a strength of critical race theory is that it provides a race-conscious context to understand the experiences of Chicano/a students in urban education systems. Critical race theory also provides a race-conscious context to understand the experiences of Black males in K-12 education. In the area of education, Donnor (2006) and Dixson (2006) noted the value of critical race theory to understand the narratives of Black males’ educational experiences. Critical race theory also
contributes to our understanding of student resistance behaviors that operate as a critique of oppression and the need for social justice and includes the notion that Black males can develop resistance strategies that bring about change, based on an understanding of the social world (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001).

Although critical race theory is important to understanding why Black males choose resistance as a response at the intersections between race, racism, and power, it also has several limitations when focused on the educational experiences of Black male K-12 students and the relationships between race, transformative resistance, and policy schools. It has been criticized as not giving enough attention to identity, language, immigration concerns, ethnicity, phenotype, and sexuality (Solarzano & Bernal, 2001). Critical race theory is limited in its analysis of Black males in K-12 education settings that embrace multiple identities. For example, Black males may identify as Black and White or Black and Latino or a variety of multiple racial and ethnic identities, but there is a limited analysis of these experiences within the critical race theory paradigm. There also is limited focus on Black males who have diverse language backgrounds or speak English that is not accepted in classrooms. Additionally, Black males in K-12 schools may identify as homosexual, transgendered, or in a host of other ways, and little attention is given to these identities in critical race theory.

Kennedy (as cited in Bell, 2005) claims that critical race theorists “fail to support persuasively their claims of racial exclusion or their claims that legal academic scholars of color produce a racially distinctive brand of scholarship” (p. 81). Critical race theory often is criticized as not being a legitimate theoretical paradigm due to its use of narratives or other methods not recognized as “traditional.” Further, one could make the
argument that critical race methods and their accompanying analyses are not distinctive from other scholarship and do not provide a clear understanding of the resistant behaviors of Black males in K-12 settings. In regard to policy high schools such as UHS, where over 50% of the student population is of color and 90% graduate, critical race theory fails to address how Black male students achieve academic excellence and proceed to college. For these reasons, critical race theory alone cannot provide a comprehensive understanding of Black males in K-12 schools.

**Intersectionality Theory**

Intersectionality theory concerns the implications of race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, class, age, and other social constructs (Collins, 2004) and can provide a lens to explore the experiences of Black males in K-12 schools. The major assumptions of intersectionality include “(1) contextuality and dynamism of intersections, (2) mutual constitution, and (3) matrix of domination” (Murphy, Hunt, Zajicek, & Hamilton, 2009, p. 9). Contextuality and dynamism of intersections concern race, gender, ethnicity, age, sexuality, and other factors, with a perspective specific to the individual experience. Mutual constitution involves identifying how constructs of power specific to racism, sexism, classicism, and heterosexuality cooperate to maintain inequality. The matrix of domination highlights the ongoing relationships between social constructions and how they continuously change (Murphy et al., 2009). Intersectionality theory’s emphasis on social constructions and experiences is critical to understanding the experiences of Black males in K-12 educational settings.

This theoretical paradigm, developed out of women of color feminist thought, suggests that race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, class, age, and other social constructs
simultaneously interact and, thus, affect individuals’ experiences (Collins, 2000; Glenn, 1998; Murphy et al., 2009). Crenshaw (1995) noted that the concept of the intersectionality among race, gender, sexuality, and class, coupled with politics, provides insight into how domestic violence policies affect women of color. The experiences of Black males in K-12 schools also are affected by the multiple social constructions highlighted in intersectionality theory.

Intersectionality also concerns a person’s choices and outcomes as a result of his or her place in society, as marked by relative privilege or oppression (Murphy et al., 2009). Intersectionality allows for intersectional analysis at the micro (individual) level of race, gender, class, sexuality, and age (Murphy et al., 2009). Collins (2009) argues that understanding how race, class, gender, sexuality, age, and ethnicity interact allows one to understand how systems of oppression are maintained. Intersectionality offers an analysis of gender that takes into consideration the historical, cultural, and social definitions of womanhood and manhood (Glenn, 1998). Young Black males often are pressured to define themselves according to the historical, cultural, and social definitions of Black manhood. The class component of intersectionality theory offers insight into how socioeconomic status influences K-12 Black male experiences, while the sexuality component allows for an understanding of the sexual identities that Black males assume. An analysis that includes age helps us to understand how experiences are affected by perceptions of age-appropriate behavior.

When focused on the relationships between race, transformative resistance, and policy schools, intersectionality has strengths as a theoretical framework. This theory helps us to understand how the social construction of race is interconnected with other
social constructs that reproduce and maintain oppression. Intersectionality offers an encompassing perspective that takes into account the lenses of race, gender, class, sexuality, and age when attempting to understand the experience of young Black males. In Torchton policy schools, where students test for admittance and represent various socioeconomic backgrounds, intersectionality theory offers an analysis of how Black males of similar ages and a variety of sexual identities may interact. Importantly, intersectionality theory provides a perspective to examine how race, class, gender, sexuality, and age work together to influence acts of resistance.

Intersectionality also presents limitations in terms of providing an analysis of the experiences of Black males who attend policy high schools. The theory does not help to explain how Black males respond to racially based inequalities nor does it offer a means to understand transformative resistance in policy high schools, where some Black males may not have concerns with the oppression of their gender or sexuality. Intersectionality theory has been criticized as being an outdated framework that limits participants’ experience through the imposition of race, class, gender, sexuality, and age labels (Taylor, Hines, & Casey, 2011). Black males must be made aware of these labels as social constructions for intersectionality theory to have relevance as an analytical tool of their experiences. Intersectionality theory also is criticized as simplifying gender, sexuality, and ethnicity as equally oppressive constructs (Umut, Haritaworn, Gutierrez Rodriguez, & Klesse, 2011). Black males in K-12 educational settings do not experience gender, sexuality, ethnicity, age, and race as equally oppressive constructs. Intersectionality theory is a theoretical framework that does not encompass the many
experiences of Black males in K-12 settings or offer potential remedies to assist transitions to adulthood.

**Positive Youth Development Theory**

Positive youth development theory focuses on providing the needed resources to empower youth to take control of their lives. According to Larson (2000), “A central question of youth development is how to get adolescents’ fires lit, how to have them develop the complex dispositions and skills needed to take charge of their lives” (p. 170). Positive youth development theory posits the need for youth-adult coalitions that prepare youth for adulthood. This theory, which is applicable to young Black males, calls for the use of adult mentors in extracurricular activities in schools, community centers, non-profit organizations, and churches (Larson, 2000; MacPhee & Seligson, 2004; Pollack, 2004; Roth, Brooks-Gun, Murray, & Foster, 1998; Yamishiro, 2004).

Some youth development theorists place an emphasis on the roles that teachers can assume to encourage learning and to improve the lives of young people (Noam & Fiore, 2004; Pianta, 1999). Positive relationships with teachers have been shown to increase the academic performance of youth (Noam & Fiore, 2004). There is also an emphasis in positive youth development theory on the importance of parent-child relationships during the transition from adolescence to adulthood (Pollack, 2004). Positive relationships with parents have been shown to decrease violent crimes, improve academic performance, and promote emotional stability among youth (Pollack, 2004). Adults and young people’s working together is an important aspect of the youth development literature.
Positive youth development theory advocates opportunities for youth to work with adults who desire solutions to community problems. Lakes (1996) stated that youth must have full membership in intergenerational alliances for the coalition to be successful and to lead to democratic action. Positive youth development programs grant youth complete membership in the organization and create positive behaviors that lead to healthy decisions in adulthood (Roth et al., 1998). Ginwright and Cammarota (2006) described a three-step social justice youth development model designed to empower youth to transform their lives and communities. First, youth must attain a holistic understanding of self that includes race, class, gender, and sexual identity. Second, they must develop a social consciousness that understands how inequalities shape their communities. Third, they must understand global oppression and how it relates to local oppressive conditions.

One strength of positive youth development theory is that it can offer adults and K-12 Black males opportunities to create social change. The application of positive youth development theory has been instrumental in the development of programs that debunk youth as a dangerous and out-of-control segment of the population (Kurtines et al., 2008; Roth et al., 1998). It has been used in action research to provide insight into how Black males engage in academic resilience in high school (Romero & Cammarota, 2009). Positive youth development theory offers an approach that teachers, coaches, and other school personnel can play in challenging racism, assisting academic achievement, and promoting transformative resistance with and for Black males.

Positive youth development theory also has limitations in terms of understanding relationships between race, transformative resistance, and the experience of Black males in policy schools. This theoretical paradigm places a strong emphasis on the
relationships between youth and adults but does not provide insight into how youth can empower themselves to improve their lives without the help of adults. The positive youth development models fail to recognize how Black youth can and do mature without the use of external services or the help of mentors.

This theory also fails to offer a critique of conditions of students of color in youth development programs. Positive youth development theory is a colorblind paradigm that does not consider the impact of race and racism on Black males in K-12 education settings. It discourages youth from acting alone to create transformative resistance and encourages actions taken in conjunction with adults. Youth development theory also fails to address the need for youth to have involved adults who come from similar backgrounds as those of the students whose lives on which they wish to have an impact. The focus on adult and youth relationships limits youth development theory in providing a complete analysis of the K-12 Black male educational experience; nevertheless, it is still useful due to its advocacy of adult and youth collaboration.

**Summary and Implications**

Resistance, critical race, intersectionality, and positive youth development theories can complement each other. Resistance theory complements critical race theory because resistance supports the use of student voices to explain how oppositional behavior is related to the impact of race, racism, power, and the property rights of Whiteness on young Black males. Together, these theories allow for a deeper analysis of oppositional behaviors as reactionary, self-defeating, conformist, or transformative. Critical race and intersectionality theories share an emphasis on providing an understanding of the impact of race and racism on Black males’ education experiences.
Intersectionality adds gender, sexuality, class, and age to strengthen critical race theory’s focus on race, racism, power, and the property rights of Whiteness. Youth development theory serves as a link between the theories and provides actions for adults and youth to pursue to counteract the experiences of Black males in K-12 schools.

Resistance, critical race, intersectionality, and youth development theories help us to understand the potential for transformative resistance among Black male students in a policy high school. Resistance theory provides an analysis of Black males’ oppositional behaviors that may or not be motivated by social oppressions. Critical race theory assists in our understanding of how Black males make meaning of schools, whereby race, racism, power, and the property rights of Whiteness determine educational opportunities. Intersectionality theory assists with an understanding of how race, class, gender, sexuality, and age can interact to create multiple oppressions for Black males (Collins, 2000, 2004; Glenn, 1998; Murphy et al., 2009). Youth development theory provides a lens to explore the impact of adult mentor relationships on identity development and the potential for coalitions with Black males (Noam & Fiore 2004; Pollack, 2004).

Together, resistance, critical race, intersectionality, and youth development theories provide multiple means of analyzing the Black male experience in policy schools in terms of transformative resistance. Solorzano and Bernal (2001) stated, “The majority of resistance studies provide information about how youth participate in oppositional behavior that reinforces social inequality instead of offering examples of how oppositional behavior may be an impetus toward social justice” (p. 310). Most resistance studies do not contain an analysis of the multiple ways that student resistance can be engaged to positively affect academic achievement. Studies that examine resistance
among Black males do not have the theoretical frameworks of resistance, critical race, intersectionality, or positive youth development theory as a foundation. Additionally, such research generally does not focus on Black males who attend policy high schools.
III. METHODOLOGY

My identity as a Black male graduate student at Torch University influenced my methodological approach to the study at UHS. As I began graduate school at Torch University, I learned of a study that analyzed whether a diversity initiative could support students of diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds. My own high school experiences, as described in the introduction of this dissertation, shaped a desire to assist other Black males through their journey in the education system. In the attempt to do so, I designed this study as a qualitative interview study that uses data collected in Year 4 of the aforementioned larger study. I sought to document the experiences of seven Black males who attended a policy high school and to analyze their resistance behaviors. To this end, I analyzed the experiences of seven senior students and members of a youth-development program called the Psi Guys.

Qualitative interview studies use questions that provide a needed disruption to the uniformity seen in quantitative studies and rely on a small sample of a population to gather data and develop interpretations (Weiss, 1994). Researchers who employ qualitative interview studies often categorize questions as structured, semi-structured, unstructured, or in-depth (Britten, 1991; Bloom-DiCicco & Crabtree, 2006; Green, 1993; Miller & Glasner, 1997). This study employed a structured interview script with open-ended questions, to engage participants in casual conversation about their experiences. The decision to use a qualitative interview study with structured interview questions was based on the desire to collect in-depth data on specific dimensions of the students’ experiences, which was made possible by my positive relationships with the students.
Interview questions were developed with the assistance of another graduate student and two professors in the College of Education at the Torch University. We used Billson’s (1996) work as a template for questions that would enable us to gather information on the students’ community environments, self-concept, experiences with race, involvement with the Psi Guys, and career aspirations. Together, we developed 59 questions that concerned race, self-concept, four years of student experiences, and academic and career plans after high school (Appendix A). I did not create a separate interview protocol from the full four year study. However, I was allowed access to these interviews and participated in developing the questions in regard to the after-school program. The interview data reported in this study are from only Year 4 of the project.

As a graduate student who worked closely with the implementation of BMAI at Uhuru High School, I developed a positive rapport with many students. The seven students who were selected to participate in this study were among a total of approximately 80 Black males enrolled in a policy high school with a total of approximately 800 students. They had achieved senior student status at UHS and held multiple viewpoints of the school. Each of the students shared some involvement with the Psi Guys, whose members included a total of ten Black males and two Latino males. When it came time to complete this one-year qualitative interview study, I contacted each of the student participants through phone calls, text messages, and emails. We mutually decided on a time to meet after school to conduct interviews.

Interviews with the study’s participants took place in one of three locations at Uhuru High School, the school cafeteria, the science teacher’s classroom, and the dean of
students’ office, or at the participant’s home. Each of these locations was selected for various reasons.

The school cafeteria, the dean of students’ office, the science teacher’s classroom, and the students’ homes provided spaces where students felt open to discussing the interview topics. Uhuru High School’s cafeteria was where these students ate lunch and talked with friends. It served as an ideal setting for students to relax and take a break from the academic demands of Uhuru. The dean of students’ office also facilitated interviews because it had a small couch, and the dean allowed for the privacy necessary to conduct an interview. The science classroom was the best school location to hold interviews because it was a location familiar to students who participated in Psi Guy activities, and all students knew of its location. Students’ homes were selected as the result of their involvement in after-school programming that interfered with their availability to participate in interviews.

To enable students to feel comfortable talking about the various areas of the interview protocol, I engaged in several activities. Before beginning an interview, I politely asked everyone, with the exception of the interviewee, to leave the room. For the two students who were interviewed at home, I informed the parents of the nature of the work, and they provided us with privacy to talk. I dressed casually, in jeans and a T-shirt, for all the interviews to help students to perceive me as a peer and not as a teacher, administrator, or authoritarian figure. Students were told, “Relax, talk, and just be honest,” before I pressed “record” on the digital recorder.

The location of the interview determined how it was conducted. In the cafeteria, where I held one interview, the respondent and I sat next to each other in a comfortable
corner of the cafeteria. The dean of students’ office had a small yellow couch, where another participant and I sat for his interview. In the science classroom, where I interviewed three study participants, we sat at the students’ desks across from each other. At the students’ homes, we sat at their kitchen table and talked like family over a meal would. In each of the locations, I occasionally took notes via a laptop computer or by hand in a notebook to document the participant’s style of dress and insightful statements.

As noted, two professors, another graduate student, and I developed structured, open-ended questions that concerned community environments, self-concept, race, four years of experience at Uhuru High School, involvement with the Psi Guys, and career aspirations. Despite questions’ being organized by topic, I did not follow a predetermined route to ask the questions. While I covered the content of the interview script, I allowed for the conversation to develop and, when students answered multiple questions in their responses, moved around the list of interview questions. Additional questions were asked when students did not provide enough information or responses were unclear. Some students were more vocal than were others, which contributed to differences in the length of time it took to conduct the interviews.

Student interviews were scheduled for completion in one session; however, there was some variance of this. Depending on the student, an interview ranged from 45 minutes to three hours. The interviews with the more vocal and outspoken students lasted at least two hours. The less vocal students answered the questions with direct and concise responses in approximately 45 minutes. Due to limited time and other after-school obligations, there were three students whose interviews I had to complete in multiple sessions.
The interviews were part of a four-year study to which I was given access and were transcribed by a paid transcriber. All of the interviews were transcribed using a desktop or laptop computer, Microsoft Word, and Olympus software. Transcribed interviews were placed into a format that included the name of interviewee and date of interview in the upper left corner of the document. The text of the interview followed the questions, and student responses were clearly identified.

My analysis of the interview data approach was informed by critical race theory methods. I placed high value on the comments of the students, as critical race theory poses that research should include the voices of people of color to establish the need to change social conditions (Delgado, 2001; Dixson, 2006; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006; Parker & Lynn, 2002; Stovall, 2006b). According to Solorzano and Yosso (2002), Delgado-Bernal (1998), as cited by Bradley (2009), CRT methodology:

a. Acknowledges the intercentricity of racialized oppression—the layers of the subordination based on race, gender, class, immigration status, surname, phenotype, accent, and sexuality. This intercentricity of race can assist in searching for answers related to the experiences of people of color;
b. Challenges the dominant ideology, by challenging White privilege; it rejects the notions of neutral researcher or objective researchers, and exposes deficit informed research that silences and distorts epistemologies of people of color;
c. Is committed to social justice leading to outcomes that eliminate racism, sexism, and poverty, and empowers subordinated minority groups;
d. Centers experiential knowledge, recognizing the experiential knowledge of people of color is legitimate, appropriate and critical to understanding, analyzing and teaching about racial subordination;

e. A transdisciplinary perspective, one that insists on analyzing race and racism by placing them in both historical and contemporary contexts. (p. 67)

Critical race theory methods challenge conventional qualitative inquiry that assumes an objective or neutral stance to participants. As such, these methods embrace the value of Black male voices to explain their own experiences.

I coded the data to identify words, phrases, and events that reflected resistance, critical race, intersectionality, and youth-development theories. To identify themes consistent with resistance theory, I looked for words and phrases such as “I did,” “we did,” “issues,” “situations,” “punished,” “detention,” and “suspension.” To identify themes consistent with critical race theory, as applied to the students’ lives, I searched for words and phrases that included “race,” “racist,” “Black,” African American,” “White,” “Latino,” “Mexican,” and “the way I look.” To identify themes associated with intersectionality theory, I looked for words and phrases such as “my age,” “male,” “Black,” “African American,” “we from,” “raised,” and “race.” For youth-development themes, I searched for words and phrases that included “Psi Guys,” “we and Mr.,” “I and Mrs.,” “you helped,” and “teacher.”

Interview transcripts were formatted to assist the coding process used to cull out themes that would address my research question. Using Microsoft Word, I assigned a number to lines to help reference key words and phrases that indicated a connection or challenge to the theoretical framework of this dissertation. For example, youth
development theory was assigned a 3. Thus, any line that had the number 3 in the left margin indicated a comment that concerned coalitions between adults and the youth. Coding was done with the use of Microsoft Word and Excel as well as by hand.

When a computer was unavailable, interview transcripts that had been printed were coded by hand. I assigned each theoretical framework a color and highlighted comments that provided evidence of or challenges to the premises put forth in theory. Pink, yellow, red, and green were used to represent resistance theory, critical race theory, intersectionality theory, and youth development theory, respectively. For example, when I came across a comment that appeared to be related to resistance theory I highlighted the words with a pink highlighter pen. It took considerably longer to code by hand than it did to use computer software.

In Microsoft Excel, I created a spreadsheet to help organize student responses to the interview questions. I began by constructing a table with three columns. The three columns were labeled “theme,” “pseudonym,” and “date.” Student comments that reflected the assigned theme went under the theme column. The pseudonym column included the assigned, culturally-sensitive names of the students. Dates that reflected when the comments were made appeared in the last column.

These qualitative interview collection methods allowed me to provide an analysis of the data in six months. Following the completion of each interview, I again ensured the student that his identity was secure during the course of the study and would continue to be protected in the written analysis. I followed the steps outlined above to identify words and phrases and then patterns and themes consistent and inconsistent with the
theoretical paradigms of resistance, critical race, intersectionality, and youth development
theories to explore the resistance behaviors of Black males.
IV. FINDINGS

Many Black males engage in resistance to school policy and school culture through a variety of behaviors, and, as such, I began this dissertation by recalling my noncompliance with school identification policy. Black males’ resistance behaviors are perceived as passive, active, negative, and, sometimes, neutral but rarely as positive or as critiques of school policy and school culture. Familiar, and often perceived as negative forms of student resistance, include defying school uniform policy, missing school, cutting classes, and doing the minimal amount of work to “just pass.” Black male students at Uhuru High School participated in these forms of resistance; however, these resistant acts were later used to build community and to develop an organization to make an impact on school policy and school culture.

This chapter presents the results related to the research questions: “How do Black male students make meaning of resistance behavior in a policy school?” and “How can these behaviors be used to engage transformative resistance in members of a culturally-relevant youth-development program?” The findings are drawn from an analysis of the interviews of seven students enrolled at Uhuru High School. The chapter begins with an introduction of the seven students who participated in the interviews during their senior year at Uhuru High School, with a focus on two students, the extroverted James and introverted Nathan. It continues with a discussion of a youth-focused program, the Psi Guys, and illustrates how the program engaged transformative resistance among participants.

The interviews with these seven students provide insight into the relationship between race and policy schooling. They contain the students’ perspectives on the
advantages and disadvantages of attending Uhuru High School and how race influenced their experiences. James and Nathan are highlighted based on their participation in activities developed over the course of four years as well as their differences in terms of their personalities, as noted above, and home neighborhoods. They articulated how the Psi Guys developed and how the group equipped them with the skills needed to succeed at Uhuru High School and after graduation. As participants in the Psi Guys, the students were able to discuss how the program served as a vehicle to create changes within school culture and school policy. While these seven students could not speak for all Black males, their experiences as members of the Psi Guys illustrate the role of youth-development programs in assisting Black males to engage in transformative resistance.

**Listening to the Voices of Young Black Males**

There were seven Black males who decided to enter Uhuru High School as the first cohort under BMAI. The seven students, listed in Table I received consent from their parent(s) or guardian(s) and provided assent to participate in this study. The study participants’ names (pseudonyms) include James, Tom, Nathan, Tijuan, Osei, Eric, and Claude. They were residents of Brunsgreen, South Torchton, and Torchton Heights.

Students in the first BMAI cohort became the foundation of the Psi Guy youth-development program. Three students were from single-family homes, which is important to indicate, based on the research that suggests that familial involvement influences academic achievement among Black males (Bryant, 2000; Mandara, 2006). James, Tom, Nathan, Tijuan, Osei, Eric, and Claude comprised the first group of students that began as freshmen in Uhuru High School in September of 2007.
Although the voices of all seven students are used throughout this study, as noted, those of James and Nathan are highlighted. Respectively, they represent the mixed-income neighborhoods of Brunsgreen and South Torchton. As senior year interviews revealed, they have different personalities and perspectives, as influenced by their experiences at Uhuru High School. James’ interview brought out his leadership qualities and an outgoing personality, whereas Nathan’s interview presented a young man of limited words and an introverted personality. Both James and Nathan were active participants in the Psi Guys’ activities.

James and Nathan looked physically different and came from different types of homes. James was from Brunsgreen, was 5’10,” and weighed approximately 160-175 lbs. Nathan lived in South Torchton, was 5’7”, and weighed 120 lbs. James lived with his mother and twin sister in a Brunsgreen apartment, whereas Nathan was an only child, who lived in a South Torchton house with his mother and father. Nathan was an introvert, who was soft-spoken and kept a small group of friends. James had an extroverted personality and inherent leadership skills, and maintained a larger circle of
friends. As interpreted from James and Nathan’s senior interviews, their unique outlooks on life and personalities influenced their interactions with peers, Uhuru High School faculty, and others.

**James from Brunsgreen**

James lived in Brunsgreen, which is about one hour by public transportation from Uhuru High School. He had a twin sister who attended a local high school in Brunsgreen and a brother who lived near South Dakota and worked as a music producer. James participated in extracurricular sports at Uhuru High School in addition to his involvement with the Psi Guys.

In the interview, James talked about the advantages and disadvantages of attending Uhuru High School.

V: What would you say were the advantages of coming to this school?

J: I got out the hood, that’s number one.

V: Why is that an advantage?

J: I mean, before Torchton, I never even, I never even came downtown before, you know? And it’s like, a lot of things I didn’t see, a lot of things I didn’t get to experience because, in Brunsgreen, that’s all I know, the hood, that’s the only thing I knew. And it’s like I didn’t go outside of that. So now, it’s like, since I came to Torchton, I sometimes, I go to the north side to hang out. I’ve been places, like restaurants that I never even knew about. Then, it was just like a Chinese restaurant, McDonald’s, Burger King, but now it’s like, I’m going to like places, that I never even heard of like __________. It’s an expensive, like fine, dining restaurant, and I got to go to it for free in my French class, and things like
that. Um, and a lot of schools in the poor neighborhoods like Brunsgreen, like they don’t even sometimes get opportunities to do things like that, so I guess coming to school at Torchton in such a great area like downtown, you see everything. You see different people. In my neighborhood, I may see a Latino person like one out of 20, 30 people, and, it’s like, down here, I see everything. And it just helped me build a better character to what I can talk with those types of people. I mean, ‘cause, at first, I could only communicate with just African Americans. But now, I could start a conversation with anybody because I’m used to the atmosphere, so that’ll help me later on in the corporate world.

James acknowledged that leaving Brunsgreen and attending Uhuru High School exposed him to experiences unavailable to many in his neighborhood. His attendance at Uhuru High School allowed him to access a side of Torchton that he, as a Black male from Brunsgreen, did not know existed. He was exposed to different restaurants and developed the ability to communicate with people of various ethnic and racial groups. Critical race theorist Yosso (2006) defined linguistic cultural capital as the “intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in one or more languages and/or styles” (p. 177) and social capital as the networks and communities to which people assign value. James takes pride in being able to communicate with people outside of the Black community.

James also talked about the disadvantages of coming to this school.

V: What would you say were the disadvantages of coming to this school?
J: Um, disadvantages. I don’t see any disadvantages. I never regret that I came to Uhuru. I mean, some things didn’t work how I wanted to because, I mean, just
the stereotype of a black man. But the thing is, over time, I began to prove that I’m not just the stereotype that you believe I am. I mean, but things don’t always work the way you want them to. I had a few problems, got over it, and I’m still being the person that I am, and I’m still successful at what I’m doing. So I really wouldn’t say there are any disadvantages.

In this excerpt, James indicated that he had to counter preconceived ideas related to his being a Black male from an underserved community. He stated, “I mean, some things didn’t work how I wanted to because, I mean, just the stereotype of a black man. But the thing is, over time, I began to prove that I’m not just the stereotype.” Such comments potentially reflect a school culture that includes negative assumptions of Black males. To counter the stereotypes, James found the strength within himself and turned to adult allies.

James also reflected on an incident with the dean of students that involved James’ being accused of a gang affiliation:

V: Were you upset about anything in this school? It could be treatment by teachers, discipline policy . . . Is there anything that made you upset in this school?

J: A lot of things. For an example, my freshman year, I was pulled out of lunch ‘cause they wanted to have a meeting with me, Mr. Jackson, Mr. Stan [lead counselor], and a few other people. And Mr. Stan and Mr. Jackson, they were on my side. I guess they [dean of students and English teacher] thought I was a Latin King because I wore my hat a certain way, I wore certain colors. And, also, that was at the time I went by Prince James, my rap name, and I clearly had Prince
James, and I had a crown on my folder, and they, they put the pieces together and though I was Latin King. I never really wore gold or anything, but that’s what they thought. Just because of, just, they didn’t know anything about me but the way I look, the way I dress, and where I’m from. And it was a real big problem. Just grades, um . . . um, well back to what we were saying. Grades, um, discipline, everything. But I guess that’s what the administration still looks at, involvement, grades, and just discipline, whatever. It’s not like that for me anymore, so I guess that’s what they say when I’ve changed. So, yeah, those were the issues.

Here, James referred to “the way I look, the way I dress, and where I’m from.” This comment implies that racism, gender, and class influenced this encounter with Uhuru High School administrators and teachers. Critical race theory and intersectionality theory posit that social constructs influence experiences in schools. This experience shaped James’ perceptions of race at Uhuru High School.

As seen in the excerpt below, James’ perceptions of race changed over the course of his four years at Uhuru High School.

V: How have your views changed about race since attending Torchton?

J: I could say a lot about my own race. And that’s just, I know that, coming from Brunsgreen, a lot of the Black people that I view, and I watch their character, it was just this bad image, you know? And it was just like, dang, is everybody like this? So just an example is like when I went on a college tour to HBCUs [historically Black colleges and universities]. It’s like, at first, when I came to Torchton, I’m like okay, I gotta set a good, like, black man that’s trying to get on
the same thing as me, that’s aiming for the same thing.” But then it was like, you know, going back to my neighborhood, it was just like, “Dang, I don’t wanna be in like a community like this, like an all-Black school, if I gotta deal with something like this. But then it’s like, um, watching the black people in Torchton just to see that not all of the people that’s from my neighborhood are like the people at Torchton. And mostly the HBCU Morehouse, when I got on there, it was like I saw a bunch of Black people actually, like, working together, and they build a great college that’s maintaining its good image of a Black man, building Black men, and it just showed me that, like, not only it’s not all just what you see on TV. We’re not what you see in Boyz in the Hood or Menace II Society. We can be people like Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, and other great black figures. Um, race in general, I guess that’s just, I learned a lot about many races, I didn’t know. Mostly Latinos, ‘cause I have some Latinos [who] are like brothers to me, so I’ve learned a lot about their culture. Recently, I was the MC of a Latino show. So that was pretty, um, that was fun, actually. Um, I guess, just in general, I learned a lot about many different races.

James talked about the impact of visiting HBCUs on his perception of Black people. Prior to this tour and despite his enrollment at Uhuru High School, his comments reflect an adoption of negative viewpoints about Black people. James internalized racism and viewed the members of his Black community in Brunsgreen as participants in self-defeating resistance who lacked a desire to improve their lives. He did not acknowledge the impact of racism, power, or the property rights of Whiteness upon social inequalities. His interview reveals the stress of having to counteract ideas about his intelligence and
abilities that were racially and socioeconomically based. It is important to mention that the HBCU tour was not made possible by Uhuru High School; rather, it was made possible by the Psi Guys, of which James and Nathan were active members.

**Nathan from South Torchton**

Nathan lived in South Torchton, which is about an hour and a half by public transportation from Uhuru High School. In his senior year, he wore glasses, often had his hair styled in an Afro or in braids, and enjoyed wearing jeans and hooded sweatshirts. Despite his often-reserved demeanor, his interview revealed that he possessed a keen awareness of how he believed race influenced social inequalities.

When I asked Nathan about the advantages of attending Uhuru High School, it led into a conversation about how he experienced race.

V: Um. Okay, okay. What would you say are the advantages of coming to Torchton?

N: Uh, diversity. That’s about it.

V: Diversity? But no other advantages as far as, like, preparing you for college or anything like that, or . . .

N: I feel like you get more out of it as if, well, I feel like you get more out of it as a non-minority. That’s just bein’ real. If you’re Black, you’re not gonna get anything out of it.

V: How have other students benefited from attending Torchton? In what ways?

N: Um, they don’t get the same punishment. They don’t, I feel like they get, I don’t know, it’s like, low, low-key special privileges that they get . . . that they try
to keep under the radar. But at the same time they’re prospering faster than any of the minority kids . . . regardless of how hard we work.

V: Uh huh. What would you say are the disadvantages of coming to, to Torchton?

N: Uhh . . . vague, but like, out, vague, but noticeable, um, racial slurs . . . just like, it’s just racist. That’s my biggest disadvantage.

V: What is racist? I mean, racial slurs? Like, what’s happened to make you feel like . . .

N: Like, for an example . . . um, why do, for example, the PGs [Psi Guys]? Why do we need a supervisor, but the Jewish club doesn’t need one? Or why does, um, Ms. Makovitch [Assistant Principal] consider us just another dance team or a bunch of monkeys?

V: She said that?!

N: Yeah, why does she consider us just a dance team when we tell her what we are and we’ve given her a full explanation of what we are? We’re just a bunch of monkeys that are just dancing and just . . . It’s just no respect. For any of the, like the minority, like organizations. Latino club, they have to do their own thing. Like basically no school support . . . African American club. You don’t even hear about that anymore. There’s basically no African American club.

Nathan experienced both advantages and disadvantages as a student at Uhuru High School. He stated that an advantage of attending the school was diversity; however, he believes that diversity benefits White students more than it does students of color.

Nathan provided evidence when he stated that White students are disciplined differently
from students of color. In many ways, Nathan spoke to the property rights of Whiteness and how White identity possesses a valued right of reputation. It appears that the reputation associated with identification as a White student affords special treatment from the school administrators. He provided further evidence of this concern when he expressed that the Assistant Principal believes that the Psi Guys are “a bunch of monkeys” and that there is a lack of school support for student organizations that are comprised primarily of students of color. It is unclear whether the Assistant Principal actually called the Psi Guys “a bunch of monkeys.” In any case, Nathan clearly illustrated that race affects the experience of some Black males at Uhuru High School.

Nathan was asked about how his perceptions of race have changed since he began as a student at Uhuru High School in 2007.

V: How have your views changed about race since your enrollment at Torchton? You probably came in feeling one way, you know, but then, ‘cause I’m assuming, like, your grammar school . . .

N: I’m more pro-minority now [laughs].

V: You’re more pro-minority now?

N: Yeah.

V: So when you came in Torchton, you were more kinda like . . .

N: I kinda, like, used to be the stereotypical Black person. Um, I grew up around Hispanics, as well, so that just the only thing I knew. Neighborhood type of Black and Hispanic attitude . . . white people were okay, but a little, like, they look down on us, but now I see that we’re on equal, somewhat equal, like, playing fields with them. But at the same time, they still surpass us.
When asked about how his views of race have changed, Nathan mentioned having to act in a certain way to counter the views of “the stereotypical Black person.” Both James and Nathan felt the pressure to counter negative perceptions of their capabilities, as based in the intersection between race and gender. Intersectionality theory concerns how race, gender, sexuality, class, and age influence oppression. It appears that, when Nathan stated that he was “pro-minority,” he has adopted a perspective that place high value upon the experiences of people of color. His comment, “They [Whites] still surpass us,” further reveals a feeling that, despite his efforts, racism, specifically the oppression of people of color, is still a reality.

Like James and Nathan, Claude was involved in the Psi Guys; however, his experiences with race were different. He also was asked how his perceptions of race changed over his four years of attendance at Uhuru High School.

C: Oh God. [laughs]. Oh my gosh. I remember freshman year, it was like, I was always wanting to hang around with the African American crowd. Like, I wanna be around them, chill with them, sit at the lunch tables, talk to them, and talk to no one else, basically an African American. And, like, just stay around that crowd, ‘cause I felt like, I felt like it was more welcoming than to go into other lunch tables, per se, and start a conversation because it would be awkward. But, um, over the years it’s been very, it’s an adventure. It’s been very interesting to notice how I can go to an all-Asian table, sit there, and they won’t judge me. And I go, “This is very interesting.” And we push, they pushed my boundaries, see if I can get some more. So I go into the Latin American crowd and the African American crowd, here and there, and move over the to the Asian American, Mexican
American, um, and notice that, finally Caucasian, and notice that it’s not bad to try new things and go out of your comfort zone, let your guard down for a little bit and see what happens. Because most of the time they will, it will be a welcoming experience, and you’ll feel okay. Then you can have more trust, be more trustworthy and show trust and give respect, get respect back, and it feels really good. Over the years, I’ve been able to have some really good relationships with students of all genders and all races and all [sexual] orientations, basically, and it feels good.

Claude’s comments revealed the presence of racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual orientation grouping practices at Uhuru High School; however, he believed that none of these groups practices discrimination. He stated that, when he began high school, he had a desire to “hang around with the African American crowd,” but then he began to interact with students of diverse backgrounds. Claude’s experiences at Uhuru High School were overwhelmingly positive, and it appears that his identity as a Black male did not influence how he was treated. Despite these positive interactions, Claude decided to participate in the youth-development program the Psi Guys.

**Creating the Psi Guys to Engage in Resistance Behaviors**

The young men who participated in this study offered differing accounts of the origins of the Psi Guys. James, Nathan, Tom, Tijuan, Osei, Eric, and Claude revealed multiple perspectives of how Psi Guys developed from an idea to a youth-development program.

J: It started with me and a few guys; we just wanted to step. Jackson [admissions director], um, I guess that was around the time that *Stomp the Yard* came out. We
were all pumped about it. And Jackson, he was a Gamma, and he used to be on the step team in college. So we were serious about stepping, and he taught us. But, eventually, it became more than a step team, an organization...unity. And the main things we focus on [are] service, truth, and achievement. Service, meaning community service, giving back to the Black community, because we started off as a Black organization. Over time, we became an organization within in Torchton. We had to be more than and [give] back to all people.

N: Well, basically it started off with the, uh, we started off in the writing center, meeting up on Saturday, stepping...And then, from there, we just decided, like, um, to branch out and do, like, community service events and different things like that to help the community...and then, recently, we became a non-profit organization, where, and we branched out to different elementary schools and high schools and stuff like that. Well high schools, basically, to try to, like, spread the influence that, you know, people who can help people and give back to people...like that.

TO: The Psi Guys. Well, the Psi Guys got started with Mr. Jackson and, um, basically, that was the group of mostly, uh, kids, actually, uh, yeah, mostly kids. And we wanted to, you know, step, do, uh, the, like, the fraternities in college. So he started us off there, and we started stepping in shows, and we became the Psi Guys. And from that point, it evolved into a whole organization, which has, uh, a connotation of, or being looked at as, Black, just strictly Black. And, um, I don’t necessarily believe that’s a bad thing. I think it’s a good, it’s a good organization for Black people. I mean, if Black people [start] an organization and it helps
whoever wants to join it, I don’t see a problem with, uh, with, uh, majority Black students needing . . . and, you know, doing service learning and all type of, you know, good deeds.

TI: Well they got started in, like, a proposed idea. I was on the step team, and I was, like, one of the first people who tried a group [laughs]. I kinda quit after a while ‘cause I’m not really athletic at all or good at hand-eye coordination. But, basically, at first, I just thought it was just, like, a step team, not something, not something important? Not important, but it’s not something that I’m, not, like, a top priority. And then, down the road, I notice that it’s more than just, like, a step team. It’s like a brotherhood, and then you create a bond when you tour together ‘cause you have to, and it’s like a support group, too? So, and then I started supporting it . . . it was pretty cool.

O: The Psi Guy Academy, well, not an academy, the Psi Guy Academy is a group of individuals who work with each other based off of each other’s strengths. The Psi Guy Academy is also a self-funded organization where community service and the idea of success are held as paramount, as everything else comes second. You know, and the way we got started is just kids who needed direction. You know, kids who wanted direction, kids who came seeking direction, and what I mean by direction is direction to success, direction out of their current position. How I would describe the PGs is a family because, on the outside, we may seem like a well-oiled machine, but, on the inside, we’re discombobulated but still manage to find a way to work. You know what I’m sayin”? You know, we have
our faults, just like any other organization, but this is a real organization, and we do have standards. You understand what I’m sayin’?

E: Uh, we just, uh, Jackson, he just started a, uh, step team. It, it started off as a step team, and then it just grew into an organization. Like, just, keepin’, uh, it was really, at first, you know how Black people was just trying to stay together, ‘cause we was in a diverse school and didn’t know nobody. So we was just trying to keep all the Black people together? But it just expanded into an organization where anybody was able to join. So, it just started off as a step team, then it went to an organization.

C: I could give an answer; I don’t know if it’s right. Uh, I think it started with Mr. Jackson wanting to have, we had an African American club. But he wanted, a program that wanted, like, it’s more of an outgoing-in-the-community program that shows [the] African American side of, uh, achievement, of service learning, of being good citizens of Torchton, and also having fun. Like having the step team; many people perceive the Psi Guys as a step team, and it’s not that. It’s a service learning, uh, organization. I could say, personally, that goes outside to different, different parts, all sides of the city, different communities, and we put, they would put shows on, step shows, but also would describe the service learning aspect and the academic aspect, and the mentorship part, portion of it. And that’s how I think it got started: Mr. Jackson wanting to have a program where students, mostly low-income family students, could achieve greatness.

Each of the students offered a different account of how the Psi Guys began; however, the step team and an effort to build community, similar to other Black Greek
fraternal organizations (Patton et al., 2011) were common themes. James mentioned how it developed out a vision to step like the actors in the 2007 film *Stomp the Yard*. Nathan also noted the step-team component of the program and its community outreach efforts around the city. Osei described the youth-development program as a “self-funded organization” in which the members interact as a “family.” The step team was a critical component of the Psi Guys, but it was not the only factor that influenced the creation of the youth-development program.

In response to the resistant behaviors that many Black males demonstrated, Mr. Jackson, the Uhuru High School administrator mentioned in the interview excerpts, made an effort to develop a strong rapport with the students. He desired an extracurricular activity that would attract the students of the school’s BMAI who struggled academically or otherwise. Jackson wanted to begin a youth-development program for students who were not allowed or chose not to participate in Uhuru High School-sponsored extracurricular organizations.

Mr. Jackson wanted a youth-development program that all students were welcome to join; however, he also wanted it to specifically address the needs and desires of Black male students. He understood the importance of providing free spaces for youth of color to build community in schools that are interpreted as White spaces (Akom, 2006; Centrie, 2000; Collins, 2009). He wanted an organization that provided members with an opportunity to discuss and to address matters of school policy, school culture, and other social concerns. Uhuru High Schools had not established youth-development programs for Black students, and Mr. Jackson wanted to fill this gap.
As a result of Mr. Jackson’s membership in a Black Greek fraternity, he was able to guide the Psi Guys toward a similar model. Thus, the Psi Guys came to emphasize community service, academic achievement, future college attendance, Black cultural traditions, and familial relationships among students. When James was asked about the mission of the Psi Guys, he replied, “It’s ‘service, truth and achievement.’” Psi Guy members were required to complete community service hours beyond the service learning requirements of all Torchton public school students. They worked together to provide tutoring services and to pick up trash in underserved communities throughout the city of Torchton. Further, Mr. Jackson encouraged the Psi Guy students to participate in all activities, to do well in school, and to attend college.

As James mentioned in his discussion of how the Psi Guys developed, he was excited about the step team because it mirrored something that they had only witnessed in movies. The 2007 film *Stomp the Yard* features a young Black male who witnesses his brother’s murder and later joins an HBCU fraternity’s step team to prevent a similar outcome in his life (many of the Black Greek fraternities and sororities found at HBCUs have a step team). Similar to what was depicted in the movie, the Psi Guys perfected the art of stepping and won several competitions. The activities that the students engaged in as Psi Guys had a positive impact on their development. Nevertheless, the organization was not supported or encouraged by all members of the Uhuru High School administration.

The creation of a youth-development program that engaged students of color through its culturally sensitive outlets became controversial to some school administrators and staff. Jackson invited all students to join; however, because most
participants were Black or Latino, they developed a reputation as the “Black organization.” Nathan noted how some of school administrators and staff complained about the Psi Guys’ step team’s practice, which occurred in a hallway on the second floor.

V: How do you, how do the teachers perceive the PGs?

N: Wild animals. All over the place, just a dance, just a dance group in the middle of the hallway.

Nathan’s interpretation of the teachers’ perceptions of the Psi Guys is related to his and other Black male students’ experiences at the school. His interpretation illustrates negative perceptions of Black males in policy schools such as Uhuru High School. Nathan mentioned that he believed that the Assistant Principal, Ms. Makovitch, undermined the significance of the Psi Guys by referring to them as “a dance group.” His belief that the teachers perceive Black males, particularly the Psi Guys, as “wild animals” is an extension of interactions with the assistant principal and further demonstrates some administrators’ perceptions of Black males as inferior to other Uhuru High School students. Such stereotypes of Black males as “wild animals” reveal the need for youth-development programs that provide positive reinforcement and opportunities to engage in transformative resistance in policy schools such as Uhuru High School.

Comments provided by Nathan illustrate the school’s opposition to the Psi Guy organization. In actuality, the hallway was the only available space after school for the Psi Guys to practice and meet because the gymnasium, cafeteria, and other classrooms were occupied by school-sponsored extracurricular organizations. Despite opposition to
the Psi Guys, Jackson believed that there was value in the establishment of a youth-
development program to help improve the lives of young, Black males.

James was asked in the interview whether he saw himself as different from other
Black males in their neighborhoods and how the Psi Guys played a role in these
perceptions.

J: Uh, definitely. I mean, not in just appearance, just, I guess, a way that we
think about certain things. Just like, for instance, like, I didn’t skateboard before I
came to Uhuru. I started skateboarding because I saw a lot of people doing it, and
I just thought it was fun. Not that I wanted to be different from the people in my
neighborhood but because I just found it interesting. Like, I’d be skating down
the street or something, and I’d hear comments like, “Black people don’t
skateboard” and stuff like that. You tryna be White? And the thing is, and just
the way I dress. Like, if I dress a certain way, “You tryna be White?” And it’s
not tryna be White is an ignorant statement for one; it’s just a very ignorant way
of saying things. And I guess that made me notice that I have a different way of
thinking about it. And they’re just, like, close-minded. But it’s not their fault that
they don’t know any better, that that was an ignorant way of doing things. They
just don’t think in a certain way because they only think about what they know.
But Uhuru and Psi Guys, everyone that’s been involved in our four years in high
school has taught me that I don’t need to think of things in a broad perspective,
think of it in a way that everyone can view it.

Um, well, we [Psi Guys] did a lot of events. So, uh, it helps uplift the spirits of,
like, Black men. We do, like, workshops that teaches us certain things. So I
guess because the organization brought those certain things, and people will come in and have impact on our lives, it helped me have knowledge of different way of being, like you, for an example. You have a certain way of looking at things.

Um, my friend has a certain way of looking at things. But if you stuck into, like, this one thing, and everyone does the same thing that you do, it’s, you don’t know anything else. So the organization brought in different people from different schools, and they share those experiences. And now I’m able to have more knowledge about certain things and it just brightens up, uh, yeah.

James’ interview revealed the effect of his experiences at Uhuru High School and his involvement with the Psi Guys. It was uncommon for Black males in his neighborhood to use a skateboard for transportation or to wear tight jeans. James was influenced by students at Uhuru High School and members of the Psi Guys who skated and embraced a different approach to fashion. As a Psi Guy, he participated in workshops and met “different people from different schools,” which also influenced how he understood himself in relationship to other Black males. Due to the activities and alternative forms of expression that many of the Psi Guys embraced, James’ perspectives of himself and other Black males broadened.

Similar to James, Nathan talked about the differences he saw between himself and other Black males from his neighborhood. His interview revealed that, although his experiences at Uhuru High School and as a member of the Psi Guy were influential, they were not the only factors that shaped his differences in self-concept.

V: Do you see yourself differently from other Black males in your neighborhood?
N: Yes.

V: Yes? Why do you say that?

N: Always have.

V: [laughs] Why is that?

N: Uh, ‘cause ever since I was little, I was always told I was gonna be great. But, to some extent, I took advantage of it? Because I know I’m capable of doing, and I even came up with, like, this little phrase earlier that I’m smart enough to do everything, but too lazy to do anything. Like, I can do every single thing I put my mind to. Anything, I’m capable of doing it. But I’m just, I’m just not hungry.

V: Mmm, okay, okay. Well, how would you say, you know, other than people tellin’ you that you’re great and you realize that, you know, you have a lot of potential, how would you say that you’re different from other guys that are in your neighborhood? On your street, on your block, next door . . .

N: Regardless of there being a stereotype or not, they’re, like, hungry for achieving whatever they want to achieve, but I’m just too lazy to do it. They want something. And regardless of it’s me, the cop, drug dealer, whatever, they want it. I want it, but to an extent. Like, I’m not giving my full potential. And I know I’m not.

V: Uh huh, okay, okay. How would you say the Psi Guys has played, like, what role have they played in your understanding of how you’re somewhat different from other Black males in your neighborhood?
N: They really haven’t really noticed it. Because, I don’t know, I’ve always been the backseat type of person. I don’t really speak up, and they haven’t really noticed my full potential of what I’m capable of doing.

Nathan talked about being told at a young age that “he was gonna be great,” and it helped shape his approach to life. He also revealed that, despite this positive reinforcement of his potential, he was “just too lazy.” Nathan stated that other Black males in his neighborhood are “hungry” and want to achieve “something.” As a Psi Guy, his potential wasn’t revealed because he is a “backseat type of person” and doesn’t “speak up.” One interpretation of Nathan’s interview is that he saw himself as less determined than other Black males from his neighborhood to achieve what he saw as the impossible and that the Psi Guys were unable to prove otherwise. Despite Nathan’s active involvement, his perceptions illustrated how the Psi Guys were unable to empower or improve the worldview of all participants.

In the interview with Eric, he stated that the Psi Guys did not play an important role in how he saw himself. Similar to my approach with Nathan, I asked him about how he viewed himself in comparison to other Black males in his neighborhood and the role of Psi Guys in his perceptions.

V. Do you see yourself as different from other Black males in your neighborhood?

E: In my neighborhood, yeah, ‘cause I’m actually going to college and haven’t dropped out of school.

V: You don’t feel like the other Black males in your neighborhood are doing that?

E: Naw.
V: No? Do you feel like the PGs have played a role in this understanding?

E: Um, naw, ‘cause I was only involved my freshman year . . . I was only involved my freshman year, so, like, I really been on my own tryin’ to learn myself and who I am as a person.

Eric stated, “In my neighborhood, yeah, ‘cause I’m actually going to college and haven’t dropped out of school.” This is evidence of Eric’s belief that Black males in his neighborhood do not finish high school or attend college. He argued that the Psi Guys did not play a significant role in how he views himself or other Black males. It is possible that the Psi Guys were unable to reach Eric due to his involvement’s being limited to his freshman year.

Although Tijuan was more active than was Eric in Psi Guy activities, he expressed similar viewpoints in regard to the impact of the organization on his worldview.

V. Do you see yourself as different from other Black males in your neighborhood?

TI: Um, for a while, I didn’t. Kinda look down on ‘em, but I used to think that, I used to ask why they did what they, like, kinda sold themselves down.

V: Uh huh. By, uh, drug dealin’?

TI: ‘Cause now I see myself as one of them, but I just have the opportunity of going to Uhuru. So . . . it’s all about the opportunities that you get.

V: So what made that shift? At one point in time, you were kinda looking down upon them and saying, you know, “Why y’all selling yourselves short, but now you like, “I’m just like one of you; I just go to a different school.”
TI: Yeah, ‘cause I know that if I hadn’t come to Uhuru, I’d be just like them. And how, who I am, is just a product of [my] environment, and my environment happened to be Uhuru . . . so that helps.

V: Yeah. What roles would you say, like, the PGs have played in this understanding? In your understanding of how you are now, as far as seeing yourself as just a part of them, just, you know . . .

TI: Um, I don’t know. I don’t think the PGs changed that. It’s more, uh, me seeing how easy it is that you can mess up and end up just like them.

Tijuan stated that he sees himself similar to other Black males in his neighborhood but that he had other opportunities that he accessed as a result of being an Uhuru student. He did not, however, mention the Psi Guys as the opportunity that provided him with an advantage over other Black males in his neighborhood. When asked about the impact of the Psi Guys, he replied, “I don’t think the PGs changed that.” “That” is a reference to his perspective of the school’s environment as being critical to his identity development. Tijuan did not see himself as different from other Black males in his neighborhood. He believed that he had different opportunities due to his status as an Uhuru student and not because he was a member of the Psi Guys.

Another Psi Guy student, Osei, placed great emphasis on the role of the organization in his identity development.

V: Do you see yourself as different from other Black males in your neighborhood?

O: Naturally.

V: How? What ways do you see yourself differently?
O: I see myself differently in the path that I decided to take when it comes to my future, and what I mean by that is, I decided to actively be looking for my future instead of my future come find me. You know what I’m saying? I was active after, you know, after my parents started letting me make my own decisions. I became active in figuring out what I wanted to do instead of staying in the community, staying with my friends. You know, instead of being social within my community, I decided to branch out. I was not afraid to venture past my neighborhood. I was not afraid to venture past Torchton. You know, I let my curiosities guide me instead of what I thought I knew what was true.

V: Now how would you say the Psi Guys, the organization, has played into this understanding of self? How they played into you feeling like you’re a little bit different than the Black males in your neighborhood, on your block, you know?

O: It’s actually, I feel like they’re trying to dismember that thought process because that is a destructive thought process, because it makes you want to internalize the belief that African Americans that are in lower classes are not as good as you are. But, at the same time, it has taught me that, if you make the correct decisions, well, not the correct decisions, if you make the decisions that are most beneficial to you in your current position, as a Black man, you still can receive success.

The Psi Guys taught Osei “that, if you make the correct decisions, well, not the correct decisions, if you make the decisions that are most beneficial to you in your current position, as a Black man, you still can receive success.” The Psi Guys helped him to develop positive thinking, which he believes can lead to positive opportunities. Osei
gave the Psi Guys credit for expanding his views of society and for helping him to
develop positive self-esteem. Although it is difficult to measure the totality of the value
and the impact of a program such as the Psi Guys on a group of seven Black males, it is
possible to acknowledge its efforts to influence the abilities of these young men to make
an impact on school policy and school culture.

The Psi Guys’ Engaging in Transformative Resistance

Many of the Psi Guys engaged in transformative resistance, which involves the
collective use of resistance behaviors, motivated by a critique of school policy and/or
school culture, to create change. Osei, an active Psi Guy participant, provided insight
into how race influenced Black males’ transformative resistance at Uhuru High School.
This excerpt demonstrates how he believes Black males are perceived at Uhuru High
School and their roles in creating opportunities for transformative resistance.

V: Okay, okay, okay. So you started to say something about Torchton
Preparatory and Black males. Like, how do you feel the Black males here at UHS
are perceived? Does that make sense?

O: Yeah. I feel like they’re classified in a way that puts them in different types of
groups. Like, you have your [laughs], you have your rowdy African American
males and you have your non-rowdy African American males. You have your
African American males that like to test the waters, and you have those that don’t.
Um, and this is purely speculation, I don’t know if this is fact or not, I just feel
like some teachers or some faculty have a disproportionate view or a
disproportionate idea of what the African American males in UHS who like to test
the waters represent. Because, I feel like I’m a part of that but, at the same time, I
feel like I am looked at as exempt because I usually don’t find myself in situations where I am seen or I am looked at as the typical African American male. Because sometimes I feel like, you know, my brothers, like James and Nathan, they’re all grouped into that category. Because I see the way the teachers look at them, I see the way the teachers perceive them, because they have, because some of them have low grades, because some of them have low test scores, they are now the stereotype . . . and I feel like that’s unfair and feel that perception’s unfair. Because I know that they’re much more capable than that. But because they don’t meet that academic, because they do not meet that standard within this environment, that educational standard within this environment, then the teachers feel like they need not go any deeper because they do not meet that special standard so . . .

V: Now when you say test the waters, what do you mean by that?

O: They’re not the type to sit back and say, “Well, that happened, let’s just leave that alone, you know, let’s just leave it be.” They’re not that type to do that.

V: So what do they do in response to . . .

O: They find a way to rebuke or, yeah, rebuke, because they have, um, it’s hard for me to explain, like . . . they don’t, they don’t do injustice. They don’t like injustice. So what they try to do is talk people out, talk to people outside of school that we’ve been connected with over the four years, like you, Mr. Jackson, and they try to figure out what they can do in the school in order to either no longer have that [in]justice come upon them or detain it.

V: And you witness them do this or . . .?
O: Yeah.

V: Oh, okay. When?

O: Like with African American Lit!

V: Right, right. Talk to me about that. How did that actually go down?

O: Okay, so, long, like, basically, um, African American Lit was going to be taken out of the roster because not enough people signed up. But, we, I don’t, I don’t remember exactly what happened between the numbers and what was actually going on, but throughout that entire summer, we were fighting to get that class put into the roster. The class got put into the roster, but the class was going to be a, um, I forgot what the class was called. It was gonna be an extra, it was gonna be an extra class, meaning there was no credit for it. Then we had to fight more in order to get the class to be credited. So, the class was a zero period class; in the end, it was seen as a credit. So, we fought that entire battle throughout the entire summer, and we were the ones who, I think it was about 10 or 12 people in the class, we were the ones who had to wake up at 5:45 every morning to get to school by 7:10. You know, we were the ones who got parents in [and], you know, community leaders to come out and fight for this cause, you understand what I’m sayin’? We were the ones who went to town hall meetings and said, “This is not fair; we need this to be an active class.” You understand what I’m sayin’? So it’s, like, that’s what happened. And, you know, we felt that it was unjust, so we fixed it.

Osei presented the teachers’ perceptions of Black males as either “rowdy” or “non-rowdy” when he stated, “You have your rowdy African American males, and you
have your non-rowdy African American males. You have your African American males that like to test the waters, and you have those that don’t.” Osei asserted that the Psi Guys were part of the group that “tested the waters” or resisted. He made meaning of his resistance behaviors as a response to “injustice.” As Osei stated, “they [Psi Guys] don’t do injustice.” Instead, they actively engaged in transformative resistance to challenge the course enrollment policy for African American Literature on the behalf of the instructor and Uhuru High School students of color.

The Psi Guys’ efforts to change school policy are an example of students’ making the effort to engage in behaviors that can be considered transformative resistance. With the youth at the forefront of planning and organizing, the Psi Guys engaged in protest to school policy. Uhuru High School offered one class in African American Literature that was taught by a Black male teacher in the English department. As Osei stated, administration wanted to cancel the course because they claimed that it had low enrollment.

African American Literature was a class at Uhuru High School that explicitly analyzed the experiences of people of African descent and their contributions to literary works. It made attempts to develop students’ critical thinking skills and to redefine perceptions of diversity. When members of the Psi Guys received word of the plan to remove the class from upcoming course offerings, they began to organize among themselves and to devise strategies to prevent the administration from removing the course.

The majority of the participants in Psi Guys used their collective voices to contest the school administration’s decision not to offer African American Literature as a course
Students organized a petition for supporters to sign that indicated the importance of the African American Literature class and of keeping the current instructor. As a graduate student and former undergraduate major in African American studies, Psi Guys asked me to provide a letter addressed to Uhuru High School administration that stated the importance of having classes such as African American Literature. Psi Guys also encouraged students to register for the class until enrollment reached capacity. The youth gathered student signatures, letters of support, interested students to increase class enrollment, and a group of students to protest the cancelation of African American Literature class at the Uhuru High School student government meeting.

Students, parents, community members, staff, and administrators were asked to attend the Uhuru High School student government meeting and to listen to the students’ concerns. As a representative of the Psi Guys, James read the letter of support to the attendees and presented the petition to keep the class as an option for students in the upcoming school year. He also confirmed that more than enough students enrolled in the class. As a result of these actions and pressure from the student body, alongside much debate and deliberation, the school decided to offer the class for the upcoming school year. The Psi Guys were instrumental to this victory and demonstrated that resistance behaviors can be cultivated into transformative resistance.

The Psi Guy members recognized Uhuru High School’s unspoken rule that issues of race and racism were not discussed in open forums with youth and adults. This unspoken rule became a part of the Uhuru High School culture and affected the
experiences of Black males. In Tijuan’s interview, he discussed how his experience at Uhuru High School affected his views of race.

V: How would you say your views have changed about race, since your enrollment in Uhuru?

T: Um, it fluctuated. ‘Cause when I first got here, like, freshman year, I was like, oh, it’s diverse.

V: Uh huh.

T: I was like, oh, it’s all these people. As it went on, I still noticed that it was, like, uh, culture, uh, a cultural barrier? But that’s, I guess that’s, like, as far as how comfortable you are. But it’s still some, uh, parts, where, uh, people, uh, break that barrier, just not as often as I thought it would be.

Tijuan talked about perceiving the school as “diverse” when he arrived, but, after further thought, he acknowledged that “cultural barriers” were intrinsic to the school culture. From his further analysis, it is clear that he did not define school diversity in terms of an environment that encouraged people from various ethnic, racial, gender, and sexual orientations to develop positive interactions. His four years at Uhuru helped him and other Psi Guys to realize that this definition of school diversity was missing from the school culture.

The Psi Guys participated in additional efforts to engage in transformative resistance and change Uhuru High School’s culture of silence on issues the concerned race and racism. Their efforts were sparked by witnessing a group of White students play the board game *Ghettopoly–Ghetto Monopoly*. *Ghettopoly* is a board game modeled after the *Monopoly* board game; however, it stereotypically depicts conditions in underserved
Black and Latino/a communities. On the board game’s box is a Black male with a gun in his left hand and a liquor bottle in his right hand. In *Ghettopoly*, players land on properties such as Cheap Trick Avenue instead of *Monopoly*’s Boardwalk (Stehle, 2003).

A group of Psi Guy students witnessed a group of White students’ playing the racially offensive board game during lunch period and immediately went to Mr. Jackson to devise a plan of action to address their concerns. The Psi Guys wanted to prohibit the game from being played on campus and to create an annual forum that addressed the impact of social constructions.

A “Challenging the Isms” forum was organized by the Psi Guys to resist Uhuru High School’s culture of silence over the implications of social constructions. Psi Guys joined with other students of color to create a list of questions that concerned how racism, sexism, ageism, classism, and other socially constructed practices influenced education, media, and home life. The goal was to bring Uhuru High School students, faculty, and administrators together with activists and researchers to discuss the role of social constructions in producing inequalities. The Psi Guys also believed that the forum would provide them with a platform to articulate their experiences and address concerns about students being allowed to play *Ghettopoly* during lunch.

The Psi Guys successfully gathered Uhuru High School students, teachers, and administrators as well as graduate students, researchers, and community organizers to the school’s writing center to engage in critical conversations about social constructions. I served as the co-host, alongside a Psi Guy student, to propose questions developed by students to the panel (Appendix B) and to moderate discussions. Specific to Uhuru High School, the Psi Guys led discussions on the racial themes of *Ghettopoly* and the
challenges that they encounter as Black students. Psi Guys also served on the school panel and provided their multiple perspectives on their experiences with race and racism at the school. The forum was well attended, lasted for two hours, and provided an opportunity to discuss issues of race and racism within Uhuru High School and the broader society.

The Psi Guys resisted Uhuru High School’s culture of silence on issues of race via the “Challenging the Isms” forum. The forum was a part of a larger effort to bring about change in school culture practices. In response to the Psi Guy’s efforts, Uhuru High School’s administration prohibited the use of Ghettopoly on campus and allowed for an annual forum that addressed race relations. The Psi Guys’ ability to make an impact on Uhuru High School’s culture of silence on issues of race and other social constructions provides an example of how their resistance behaviors can be cultivated into transformative resistance.

There were several steps that the Psi Guys used in the process to develop transformative resistance. The students identified a problem with a school policy that threatened to eliminate an important class at Uhuru High School and devised strategies to express their concerns. With the leadership of other adults, they decided that petitions, support letters, and increasing class enrollment would be the means to overturn school policy. They also recognized that their school had a culture of silence in public spaces in regard to issues of race and racism. The Psi Guys responded by developing questions and asking adults to co-facilitate a forum for students and teachers in a public space. These acts of transformative resistance behaviors provide insight into the potential of schools, young Black males, and youth-focused programs.
V. DISCUSSION

A key finding of this study is the importance of youth-development programs to develop transformative resistance in policy schools where race continues to be a factor in the experiences of Black males. In their interviews, many students indicated how the Psi Guys helped them to develop positive perspectives in regard to themselves and other Black males and how the Psi Guys encouraged transformative resistance behaviors that lead to civic participation. The students’ efforts to develop petitions, support letters, and increase student enrollment to challenge school policy are examples of transformative resistance behaviors that lead to civic participation.

James and Nathan, in particular, stated that they benefited from their membership in the Psi Guys and noted that they received positive mentorship from other Black males, toured HBCUs, developed brotherhood with other members, and participated in community service initiatives. Importantly, the transformative resistance behaviors of the Psi Guys were motivated by a commitment to social justice for the purpose of actively addressing issues of marginalization and isolation. Black males, inspired by social oppressions, who do well in school, despite expectations and structures that support underachievement, also exemplify transformative resistance (Cammarota, 2004; Gayles, 2005; Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). In his interview, James presented such an understanding of transformative resistance.

V: So when you had these issues as far as them accusing you of being in a gang, what did you do about that? Did you, was there anything that you did?
J: There was nothing I could do but just prove ‘em wrong, and I did. I’m graduating, like . . . my grades are better than they ever been in UHS, and that’s all I had to do.

James and Nathan proved “em’ wrong,” as they graduated from Uhuru High School and are now attending an HBCU in Memphis, Tennessee. They chose this college based upon the tour they participated in as Psi Guys. James and Nathan expressed that their experiences as Psi Guys had a positive impact on their development as young Black males.

The experiences of James and Nathan as Psi Guy members and students at a top policy school provided a unique instance by which to examine transformative resistance among young Black males. They were able to make use of transformative resistance, with the assistance of a youth-development program, to make an impact on school policy and school culture. I witnessed how the Psi Guys provided a positive outlet to develop resistance behaviors among Black males that could be used to make an impact on a course-offering policy and the school culture’s silence on issues of race and racism.

The collective efforts engaged to sustain the African American Literature class is the most salient evidence of transformative resistance behaviors among Black males at Uhuru High School. The Psi Guys organized a student petition, gathered support letters, and increased class enrollment in an effort to make an impact on school policy. Their transformative resistance behaviors included collective actions motivated by a critique of school policy. For many of the Psi Guy students, the attempt to eliminate the African American Literature course, which gave voice to the experiences of African people, was an “injustice” and provided the impetus for and meaning to resistance behaviors. Such
opportunities to develop organizing skills against policies in schools can potentially assist
Black males in their transition to adulthood.

As noted, many schools fail to adequately prepare Black males to address the
relevant issues of their lives. Black males such as M-1 and Stic.man of Dead Prez (2000)
provide evidence of this problem, as seen in the following verses:

School is like a 12-step brainwash camp
They make you think if you drop out you ain’t got a chance
To advance in life, they try to make you pull your pants up
Students fight the teachers and get took away in handcuffs

And if that wasn't enough, then they expel y’all
Your peoples understand it, but to them, you a failure
Observation and participation, my favorite teachers
When they beat us in the head with them books, it don’t reach us

Whether you break dance or rock suede Addidas
Or be in the bathroom with your clique, smokin’ reefer
Then you know they math class ain’t important ‘less you addin’ up cash
In multiples, unemployment ain’t rewardin’

They may as well teach us extortion
You either get paid or locked up, the principal is like a warden

In these verses, Dead Prez (2000) acknowledges unfair school discipline policies,
lack of critical pedagogies, and the prison school cultures of the K-12 schools that they
attended as young Black males. The group criticizes school discipline policies that arrest
and expel students for fighting. The failure of schools to use critical pedagogy is
expressed as, “When they beat us in the head with them books, it don’t reach us.” Dead
Prez compares the school to a prison, stating, “the principal is like a warden.” Many
Black males, similar to those of Dead Prez, attend schools that do not provide students
with the necessary skills to address certain issues in their lives.
In the introduction to this dissertation, I talked about the act of resistance in which I engaged against school policy as a high school student. As a student, I believed that the mandate that students wear identification cards held implications beyond safety and preparation for the workforce. I believed that it was an attempt by school authorities, obsessed with order and control, to exert their power over students. I took it upon myself to actively engage in resistance by not wearing my identification card and was punished with a suspension. Although my resistance behavior was in response to school conditions that I deemed unfair, it was perceived by school authorities as simply defiant behavior. This act of resistance was not collective or motivated by social justice and, therefore, was self-defeating; I became another statistic among the suspension rates for Black males in secondary schools.

When Black males engage in acts of resistance as a response to school policy and school culture, their actions often are dismissed as simply defiant behavior; rarely are they viewed as a critique of school conditions or as a form of transformative resistance. The familiar, and often interpreted as negative, forms of Black male student resistance include defying a school’s uniform policy, missing school, cutting classes, and doing the minimal amount of work to receive a passing grade. The students who participated in this study engaged in familiar forms of resistance as students of Uhuru High School; however, via the views and values espoused in Psi Guys, these behaviors were intended as critiques of school conditions and later used to make an impact on school policy and school culture.

The Psi Guys, as a youth-development program, illustrated how familiar forms of resistance can be cultivated into transformative resistance. Influenced by Uhuru High
School’s BMAI, Black males engaged in resistance behaviors and challenged school policy and culture. If provided with the opportunity to participate in a youth-development program, Black males can shift resistance behaviors into transformative acts of resistance. The accounts of James, Nathan, and the other Psi Guys reflect this. Through petitions, discussion forums, and other efforts, the Psi Guys illustrated how youth-development programs can create opportunities for adult and youth coalitions to have an impact on school policy and culture.

James and Nathan’s experiences indicate how the Psi Guys, as an organization, supported the development of transformative resistance and subsequently influenced their ability to organize and engage in school policies and culture. The Psi Guys used the resistance behaviors that James and others demonstrated to challenge a school policy that determined course value based on the number of registered students. They used their organization and themselves as individuals to develop meaningful coalitions with adults to protest school policy and saw it overturned. The Psi Guys also successfully organized an annual forum to discuss the impact of social constructions, which served as resistance to Uhuru High School’s culture of silence over matters of race and racism. These student victories are evident of the power that Black males can posses when they engage in transformational resistance via youth-focused programs.

Most of the young men who participated in the Psi Guys experienced benefits from their participation in the program’s activities. The program provided members with opportunities to develop leadership skills, receive mentorship from Black males currently enrolled in local colleges, become involved with community service projects, and participate in a variety of other enriching experiences such as college tours and a step
team. Despite these benefits, not all of the Psi Guys valued what the program had to offer and divided their time with extracurricular, school-sponsored sports. All members did not participate in every activity and occasionally selected other social activities, such as playing video games at a local arcade with students outside of the organization. The Psi Guys offered its members many benefits, but, like other organizations that seek to develop transformative resistance, there was room for improvement.

Eric, Claude, and Tijuan provided a diversity of student perspectives among Psi Guy members. In their interviews, they explained that the Psi Guys did not play a significant role in how they understood themselves. It is possible that the Psi Guys had limited impact on the identity of Eric because his level of commitment declined after his freshman year. Eric’s limited connection to the Psi Guys is potentially related to the structure of the program and the services it offered. In his interview, in regard to the Psi Guys, Claude stated, “I don’t wanna be the same or what people think I should be,” and did not feel that the Psi Guys contributed the development of this perspective. Tijuan also presented indifference to the impact of the Psi Guys. In his interview, he stated, “I don’t know,” when asked whether the Psi Guys played a part in how he saw himself.

Eric, Claude, and Tijuan’s perspectives were contrary to others who praised the Psi Guys for helping them to develop positive self-esteem. These diverse perspectives represent the necessity for continued improvement of youth-development programs such the Psi Guys that seek to better address the issues relevant to the lives of Black males.

**Recommendations for Policy and Practice**

The findings indicate the potential for youth-development programs to create supportive spaces that can foster opportunities to engage in transformative resistance and
to assist Black males in their transition from youth to adulthood. A key finding of this study was the need for positive reinforcement, community engagement, leadership development, and close-knit communities for Black males as a means to ensure their success in school and beyond. The results also reflected the importance of listening to Black male voices to understand how race influences their schooling experiences.

In this section, I provide recommendations for policymakers who are concerned about Black male students in and outside of school contexts. Black Greek Fraternal organizations and Africentric schooling that focus on enhancing self-esteem and providing bonding opportunities through culturally relevant activities can assist the development of brotherhood among Black males (Derge-Butler, 2009; Harper, 2008; Harper & Harris, 2006; Kafele, 2009; Patton et al., 2011). For the majority of participants in the study, the Psi Guys provided an environment that supported transformative resistance through activities designed to engage the intellectual and physical talents of these young men. Although not discussed in this dissertation, Capoeira, Hip-Hop, and an African centered supplemental curriculum were used to engage students.

Levin, Belfiend, Muenning, and Rouse (2007) suggest that increased financial investments in the education of Black males could assist with academic achievement and present communities with positive economic gains. They identified five interventions that would increase high school graduation rates. These interventions include improved pre-school programs, class size reductions, child parent programs, teacher salary increases, and small learning communities. Levin et al. suggested that, if the public invests in the one-fifth of Black males who do not graduate from high school, at a median
intervention of $90,700, the investment would yield a return of $3.98 billion. A greater investment in the education of Black males can improve academic achievement and enhance the lives of young Black males.

Due to their potential to make use of transformative resistance to improve schools and positively affect educational experiences, youth-development programs should be considered social justice investments in the lives of Black males. Youth-development programs that incorporate this understanding of social justice possess the potential to improve the lives of young Black males and the schools they attend. Schools will benefit from the inclusion of Black males and students deemed “othered” in creating school policies and school cultures that increase their potential for learning. As this research suggests, youth-development programs have the potential to engage resistance behaviors to cultivate transformative resistance. Youth-development programs can equip young Black males to address issues pertinent to their lives.

The Psi Guys are an example of a successful youth-development program, led by a school administrator and connected to a Black Greek fraternity, that emphasized the importance of community service and changing school conditions. Black Greek fraternities can assist the development of leadership skills, encourage academic achievement, provide opportunities to engage in community service, and influence positive racial identity (Harper, 2008; Harper & Harris, 2006; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Kimbrough, 1995, 1998; Patton & Bonner, 2001; Patton et al., 2011). The Psi Guy students picked up trash in underserved neighborhoods and provided tutoring to students in K-12 schools as well as received mentoring from other Black males. Youth-development programs with a relationship to Black Greek fraternities can provide Black
males with invaluable opportunities and skills as well as have the potential to change school policies and culture.

Capoeira is another example of an activity that has the potential to support transformative resistance in Black males. By providing the means by which to develop a balanced body, mind, and spirit, the activity serves as a counterbalance to the experiences Black males may have in schools. Developed by enslaved Africans in Brazil, Capoeira incorporates self-defense with musical instruments, acrobatics, and philosophies that encourage collaboration and community. In Capoeira, participants play a jôga de (game of) Capoeira inside a circle (roda). The objective of the jôgo is to have a conversational exchange of physical and mental movements to demonstrate strength, flexibility, and collective philosophical understandings. These collective philosophical understandings include treating all people with respect, despite differences in racial, ethnic, gender, class, or sexual orientation. As Almeida (1986) stated, “During the jôgo, the capoeiristas explore their strengths and weaknesses, confronting their lack of knowledge, fears, and fatigue in an enjoyable, challenging, and constant process of self-improvement” (p. 11). The goal in most Capoeira games is to illustrate a respect for each other and the African traditions in Capoeira.

Based on my observations of five former Psi Guy students in the classes that I led as an instructor in Capoeira, I believe that, as a component of youth-development programs, Capoeira can support transformative resistance among Black males. These students, who now attend local colleges and universities, have shared with me how Capoeira helped them to develop their bodies, minds, and spirits. Through musical, oral, and written histories, they have furthered developed an awareness of how race and racism
continue to influence society. Capoeira has provided them with opportunities for global understandings of oppression and strengthened their sense of community.

Youth-focused programs that include elements of Hip-Hop culture have the potential to assist young Black males’ transition to adulthood and present opportunities for transformative resistance. Hip-Hop is an artistic visual and auditory tool that often is used to depict the lives of young Black males. The artist KRS-One (2003) said that Hip-Hop consists of nine elements: “Break dancing or b-boys, Emceeing or rap, Graffiti art, DJ-ing, beatboxin’, street fashion, street language, street knowledge and street entrepreneur realism.” These nine elements of Hip-Hop developed from a history of oppression in communities of color. Black and Latino residents of New York’s South Bronx community often are credited as the pioneers of Hip-Hop. Through popular media, Hip-Hop has evolved from block parties in the South Bronx to a highly profitable global product. Hip-Hop youth-focused programs can use the elements and platforms of Hip-Hop to inform Black males of inequalities and provide a means to encourage transformative resistance.

Particular elements of Hip-Hop were used to develop the social awareness of Black males during Psi Guy meetings. Participants appreciated Dead Prez’s (2000) song They Schools as reflective of their school experiences as Black males in the United States. Kelley (as cited in Ginwright, 2004) stated, “Hip-Hop culture provides not simply a voice for disenfranchised youth, but an identity that challenges racist practices, speaks to economic struggles, and sometimes provides a blueprint for the possibilities of social change” (p. 31). Many of the Psi Guys enjoyed Hip-Hop music, and a few aspired to be producers and emcees. The Psi Guys’ mentors used Hip-Hop music as a tool to discuss
their racial identities as presented in popular media and the reality of conditions in their communities. Youth-development programs that utilize Hip-Hop have the potential to offer participants a critical analysis of conditions in their community and inspire them to engage in resistance behaviors that have an impact on their schools and communities.

Progressive African-centered youth-development programs can potentially develop self-esteem among Black males by highlighting the historical traditions and societal contributions of African people. This self-awareness can provide Black males with the necessary confidence and desire to do well in school as well as enable them to interact better with diverse groups of people.

As a former facilitator of an African centered youth program, I can speak to the benefits that African-centered youth-development programs provide. The Mary McLeod Bethune program, for which I volunteered as an instructor and mentor, met on Saturdays in a major metropolitan city. It was, in some ways, modeled after the Black Panther Party’s breakfast program, and we began each day with serving the youth breakfast. Next, we divided the students into small groups and worked on reading assignments that focused on African contributions to society. Following reading and a short break to discuss individual and group concerns, we worked to develop the students’ math comprehension. Each of the engaged academic activities aimed to provide culturally relevant examples to assist in the development of academic skills. Many of the young Black male participants returned every week for the program and provided grade reports, which spoke to the success of an African-centered curriculum in enhancing academic achievement.
The role of Black Greek organizations, Capoeira, Hip-Hop, and African-centered pedagogy in the development of young Black males warrants further research. As seen with the Psi Guys, Black Greek organizations can provide access to Black male mentors as well as community service and leadership development opportunities. Capoeira has the potential to provide participants with a positive healthy outlet and an additional tool to build community through the exchange of conversation via physical movements. Hip-Hop has the potential for student voices to be heard through music, dance, and other creative forms consistent with the culture of this genre. African-centered programs have the potential to encourage self-esteem through assisting students to understand the historical and contemporary contributions of people of African descent.

Youth-development programs have the potential to raise the social consciousness of Black males and offer discussions about and strategies to make an impact on school culture and policy. As long as we continue to fail Black males in schools, they will understand school as *They Schools*, as institutions embedded with racism that fail to adequately prepare them to address certain issues in their lives. We need to create schools that support youth-development programs, which have the potential to enable Black males and other youth to live fulfilling lives.
REFERENCES


Gunby-Decuir, T. J. (2006). Proving your skin is white, you can have everything: Race, racial identity and property rights in Whiteness in the Supreme Court case of


Ortiz, V., & Elrod, J. (2002) Construction project: Color me queer + color me family = Camilo’s story. In F. Valdes, J. M. Culp, & A. P. Harris (Eds.), *Crossroads,*


Stovall, D. (2006a). From hunger strike to high school: Youth development, social justice
and school formation. In S. A. Ginwright, P. Noguera, & J. Cammarota (Eds.),
*Beyond resistance! Youth activism and community change: New democratic
possibilities for practice and policy for America's youth* (pp. 97-110). New York,
NY: Routledge.

Stovall, D. (2006b). Where the rubber hits the road: CRT goes to high school. In A. D.
Dixson & C. K. Rousseau (Eds.), *Critical race theory in education: All God’s
Group.

Strickland W. (1989, November). Our men in crisis: together we must meet the enormous

Tate, E. F., IV. (1997). Critical race theory and education: History, theory and


mistrust on the WAIS performance of Black students. *Journal of Consulting and
Clinical Psychology*. 49, 750-757.

depoliticisation of intersectionality talk: Conceptualizing multiple oppressions in
critical sexual studies. In Y. Taylor, S. Hines, & E. M. Casey (Eds.), *Theorizing
intersectionality and sexuality* (pp. 56-77). London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.


APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

SENIOR STUDENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

General

1. What difference (if any) has the BMAI made for you?

2. How has support for the BMAI changed during your four years at UHS? (among teachers, among staff, among students in general, among the BMAI participants that you began with.)

3. How has attending UHS made a difference for you?

4. Are there any suggestions/recommendations that you would make to another school about programs like the BMAI?

5. How have your relationships changed with teachers over the course of four years?

6. How have you changed in the four years?

7. Do you see groups within the school differently?

8. If you could do it all over again, would you come to UHS?

9. What were the advantages of coming to this school?

10. What were the disadvantages of coming to this school?

Race Perceptions

1. How have your views changed about race since your enrollment at UHS?

2. How have your views changed about yourself since UHS?

3. We’re interested in finding out how teenagers think of themselves racially. First of all, what do you call yourself in terms of race?

4. Have there been any instances when something bad or unpleasant happened to you just because you are Black? Did this sort of thing ever make you wonder whether Blacks were maybe not as good as whites?

5. Have you ever discussed any racial situations or racial problems at home? Give me an example.

6. How do you feel about a Black girl dating someone of a different ethnic or racial group?
1. What things would you say that you can do much better than the average boy your age?

2. If you could be different in any other ways, how would you like to be different? Why?

3. If you could grow up to be like any person you know, who would you pick? Why? What would you have to do to be more like that person?

Self Concept

1. If you were invited to a party and you were pretty sure you'd be the only Black there, how would you feel?

2. Would you live in an all-White neighborhood? In an integrated neighborhood? Would you go to an all-White school? Would you belong to the same social club similar to the PG club with some White boys your age? What about the same gang?

3. Would you invite a White boy to your house to watch TV or play video games?

4. Are you lighter, darker, or about the same color as other members in your family? If lighter or darker, do you feel you are treated differently? How?

5. Were any members of your family White, Native American, or African?

6. Do you think things are changing for Blacks in America?

7. Do you think there is ever any conflict between being Black and being an American?
PG Program (Be sure to prompt the questions and ask them separately)

1. Can you describe the Psi Guys? How did it get started?

2. What is the mission of the PG organization? Do you believe that it is achieving its mission?

3. How did you become involved in the PGs? Did you participate in other school activities when you began in the PGs? How are the PGs different from other activities/student organizations in the school? How did your participation in the PGs lead to participation in other school activities? Activities outside of school?

4. How has your involvement in the PGs changed over your four years at UHS?

5. What is the perception of the PGs among students at the school?

6. How does the school support the PGs? (WAIT to prompt until after they offer a response. But then: Do you receive a stipend? Are you in the yearbook? Are the PGs featured in school programs and performances? Announced in the school announcements?

7. How do the teachers perceive the PG organization? Principal? Other administrators?

8. What do you gain from being a member of the PGs? What are the benefits?

9. Is there anything negative that comes along with being a member of the PGs?

10. What does being a PG represent to you?

11. What are the PGs’ connections to the Psi Guy college fraternity?

12. In what ways, if any, does being a PG student impact the school? In what ways have the PGs affected the school?

13. How has the PG organization assisted your development as a student?

14. How has the organization affected your understanding of who you are as a Black male in society?

15. What attracts you to the PG organization? Why have you continued to stay in the PGs?

16. In what ways do you think being part of the PGs has made a difference in your experience at UHS?

17. How has the program changed since Jackson left? How has BMAI changed since Jackson left?
18. What organization might come after the PGs? What do you think will happen to the PGs after you graduate? What about the Psi Gems?

19. Do you see yourself joining a fraternity in college? Would it have to be a Black fraternity? Why?

20. What has your participation in the PGs taught you about yourself? About the school? About life? About your future?

21. Do you see yourself as different from other Black males in your neighborhood? How? If yes, what role have the PGs played in this understanding? How has the school shaped your perception of self?

**Former PG Students (Additional Questions)**

1. Why did you leave the PG organization?

2. Why didn’t you join the PGs?

3. Are there other student activities that you joined?

**Final Questions**

1. What are your plans for next year? (College?) Where? Which one?

2. What do you want to do with your life?

3. How did you select that college? Did the school influence your decision? How did you come to decide on this school?
APPENDIX B

PSI GUYS’ “CHALLENGING THE ISMS” PANEL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Opening Questions

1. Racism, sexism, ageism, homophobia, xenophobia, and classism are prevalent throughout the society. Why do you think one or more of these isms exist?

2. How can I address these isms as a teenage student?

3. It is argued that our brains naturally produce stereotypes. How can we police our brains to understand when stereotypes are harmless or offensive?

Race

1. This country now has a Black president. Is life changing for people of color? Is racism dead?

2. I’ve heard that certain Blacks who were born in America reference themselves as Africans in America, African, or simply Black. They refused to accept African American as their racial identity. Is it possible to be born in the United States and not identify as an American?

3. What can we do as youth to challenge racism in America?

4. There is a board game that uses stereotypical images of Black and Brown communities to engage players in a competition to attain stolen property, pimp hoes, sell drugs, buy crack houses, and pay gang protection fees.

What is the difference between a group of White kids’ playing Lil Wayne in their car for entertainment and the same group of White kids’ playing the aforementioned board game for entertainment in their school?

Dating/Relationships

1. What is the best way to approach a potential dating partner?

2. Why is it that lighter skin is preferred when choosing dating partners?
Gender

1. What role does Hip-Hop play in the formation of Black male/female identity?

2. Why are men seen as pimps when they have multiple sexual partners? And why are women who have multiple sexual partners called whores or worse?

Religion

1. What role would you argue that Christianity, Islam, and Atheism play in the current U.S. government?

Music

1. Why is African American music so degrading?

2. Why are Black men always depicted as thugs and gangsters in Hip-Hop?

3. Why is the music of Lupe Fiasco, Talib Kweli, and Common not promoted like Lil Wayne and Young Jeezy are?

Homophobia

1. In the Native American community, homosexuals are treated with special privileges, whereas in the African American/Latino(a) community, they are often ostracized or treated as inferior. How can these groups of people who have experienced similar oppression treat this subgroup of people differently?
VERNON C. LINDSAY  
8104 S. Luella Avenue  
Chicago, IL 60617  
(773) 633-3341  
vernonc.lindsay@gmail.com

RESEARCH AND TEACHING INTERESTS
African and African American Studies; Philosophy of Education; Critical Race Theory in Education; Qualitative Methodology; Youth Development; Resistance Theory; Intersectionality Theory; Critical Pedagogy; Bilingual Education

EDUCATION
Ph.D. (A.B.D), Policy Studies in Urban Education, University of Illinois at Chicago, Spring 2013 (expected completion)

B.A., African American Studies, minor in Political Science, 2005

TEACHING POSITIONS
K-6 Physical Education and Capoeira Instructor, Village Leadership Academy, Chicago, IL, 2009 to present.

Responsibilities: Teaching the African-Brazilian martial art of Capoeira to adults and children, developing and implementing lesson plans that correspond with Illinois physical education standards, encouraging students to embrace healthy lifestyles, and maintaining a positive class environment.

Adjunct Professor, Concordia University, Chicago, IL, January 2009–October 2011

TEACHING EXPERIENCE
Courses Taught
Race, Racism, Power and Hip-Hop, DePaul University, Chicago, IL, Summer 2012

Socially, Culturally, and Linguistically Diverse Students, Concordia University, River Forest, IL, Spring 2010, Summer 2010, Fall 2010, Fall 2011

Cross-cultural Studies, Concordia University, River Forest, IL, Summer 2010

Race, Racism, Power, and Hip-Hop, William Jones College Preparatory High School, Chicago, IL, Summer 2008
Poetry for English Language Learners, Mekelle University, Mekelle, Tigray, Ethiopia, Summer 2006

Conversational English for English Language Learners, Mekelle University, Mekelle, Tigray, Ethiopia, Summer 2004

**Other Teaching Experience (Teaching Assistantships)**

Introduction to African American Studies, University of Illinois at Chicago, Spring 2013

Philosophy of Education, University of Illinois at Chicago, Fall 2010

Youth, Education, and Urban Policy, University of Illinois at Chicago, Spring 2010

**Courses Prepared to Teach**

Philosophy of Education; Critical Race Theory in Education; Qualitative Methods in Education; Youth, Education and Urban Policy; Introduction to African and African American Studies; Race, Racism, and Hip-Hop; Socially, Culturally, and Linguistically Diverse Students; and Cross-cultural Studies

**RESEARCH EXPERIENCE**

Research Assistant, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2010-2011, 2007-2009

**INVITED PRESENTATIONS**

2011 *A Closer Look at How Culturally Relevant Physical Education Empowers Youth and Promotes Social Action*, Youth Development Summit

2008 *Meeting the Challenge to Diversity: An Action Research Ethnography* (with Dr. Pamela Quiroz and Endea Murry), AERA, Section G

2008 *From the Supreme Court to the Classroom; Nine Black Males Experience Race at a Selective Enrollment High School Post Brown V. Board of Education* (with Endea Murry), Critical Race Theory Conference: Toward a Critical Race Praxis in Education and Social Life

2008 *Maintaining Diversity in the Post-Civil Rights Era: An Action Research Ethnography* (with Dr. Pamela Quiroz and Endea Murry), Great Cities Institute at the University of Illinois at Chicago

2008 *Maintaining Diversity in the Post-Civil Rights Era: An Action Research Ethnography* (with Dr. Pamela Quiroz and Endea Murry), International Conference on Teacher Education and Social Justice

2007 *Hip-Hop Followed me to Afrika*, Louisiana State University Guest Lecturer Series

**ARTICLES IN PROGRESS**

Lindsay, V. *Shatila Knows How to Fight! Using an African -Brazilian Martial Art in a K-6 School to Encourage Academic Success.*
AWARDS, GRANTS, AND FELLOWSHIPS

2011  Diversifying Faculty in Higher Education Fellowship
2010  Fund for the Advancement of the Discipline Award, American Sociological Association/National Science Foundation
2010  Diversifying Faculty in Higher Education Fellowship
2009  Diversifying Faculty in Higher Education Fellowship
2008  Diversifying Faculty in Higher Education Fellowship
2008  Martin Luther King, Jr. Scholarship
2007  Certificate of Appreciation United Nations World Food Program
2005  African American Studies Departmental Award for Outstanding Academic Achievement
2005  Graduate with Distinction

PROFESSIONAL SERVICE

Reviewer, University of Illinois at Chicago: Education and the Public Good: Interdisciplinary Trends in Emerging Scholarship, 2008

Evaluation

CHANCE [Counseling Help and Assistance Necessary for a 21st Century College Education], University of Illinois at Chicago, September 2010-June 2011

PROFESSIONAL AND STUDENT MEMBERSHIPS

American Education Research Association
Tigray Development Association
Community Education Network
Graduate Students of Education
Capoeira Akebelan
Mojo’s Pen Literary Guild