"CAN YOU HELP ME?":
EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF A MENTORING PROGRAM ON HIGH SCHOOL
MALES' OF COLOR ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT AND SELF-PERCEPTION IN SCHOOL

By

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ABSTRACT

CRITICAL INVESTIGATIONS INTO INTERNS' URBAN TEACHING APPRENTICESHIP EXPERIENCES

By

Curtis L. Lewis

The K-12 schooling experiences of African American and Latino males are often characterized as a pipeline to prison. African American and Latino students are suspended and expelled from school at higher rates than any other racial group. The failures that African American and Latino males face in K-12 schools limit their opportunities as adults to become active participants in the workforce; instead many become participants in crime, unemployment and the criminal justice system. Mentoring programs and/or youth development programs have been implemented in schools and communities to help at-risk African American and Latino males.

The dissertation was guided by this major question: How do high school males of color describe and make sense of their academic engagement in school and self-perception while participating in an ecologically structured school-based mentoring program? For the ten high school males of color in this study I do an in-depth analysis using program observations, interviews, and data from journal writings to examine the meaning of their experiences in the program.

The ecological systems theory will help to explain how specific activities and functions that occurred within the various levels of the IMPACT's program ecological structure influenced the high school students' experiences in the program. Furthermore, I will use the different levels of the program's ecological system to describe how the activities and functions at those levels may or may not have an influence on the high school students' other settings that are located at

each individual's micro system level.   Also, I use the ecological systems theory to conceptualize the high school students' experiences at various levels of the program's ecology, how those experiences interacted with other levels of the IMPACT program's ecological structure and whether or not it influenced the high school students academically and personally.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the high school males who afforded me the opportunity peek into their lives. I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to my sons (Romney and Kamani), my mother (Shirley Lewis), brothers (Tyjuan, Quincy, and Christopher), sisters (Cynthia and Shawndra), nieces, nephews, grandparents (Robert and Mercedes Lewis), and childhood Best Friend (Jeffrey Warren).

To my sons, Romney and Kamani Lewis: you are one of the main reasons why I work as hard as I do. You two are my motivation to be the best person I can be. Being a father has taught me a lot about myself! I appreciate the support and patience you both have as I learn what it takes to be a great father to two wonderful young men. There is nothing I would not do for you two and Daddy loves you both more than you could ever imagine! This is all for you!!!!

To my brothers (Tyjuan, Quincy, and Chris) and my sisters (Cynthia and Shawndra): I am so appreciative of your love and support in life! You all are the first set of friends I ever had and I am forever appreciative of not only your brother- and sisterhood but also your friendship! I appreciated your love, support, and understanding throughout this quest to receive my Ph.D. Unconditional Love to you all!

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Dr. Sandra Crespo and Dr. Sonya Gunnings: thank you for your support throughout my doctoral program. Greta Trice: thank you for your support and encouragement throughout my educational career in Michigan. Thank you Drs. Marvin McKinney, Patricia Farrell, and Donna-Marie Winn for your support during the data collection, analysis, and write-up of this dissertation. Dr. John Lockhart: thank you for your support and willingness to read very sloppy drafts of my ideas. Your willingness to help me think about my work has been very

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I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Chris Dunbar, Dr. David Kirkland, Dr. Avner Segall, and Dr. Peter Youngs for your support throughout this dissertation process. Dr. Youngs: thank you for the support you've shown since my first year in the program. Your dedication to making me a better writer and critical thinker gave me the skills and confidence to excel at this level. I would like to give a special thanks to my advisor and dissertation chair, Dr. Dorinda Carter Andrews. I cannot express the level of appreciation and respect I have for you. Without your support throughout this process I would have not been able to complete this degree to the level of rigor that I have. You have been the best advisor and dissertation chair anyone could ask for. I thank GOD that you were selected as my advisor and I have appreciated all of the things you have taught me throughout this process. I feel I have earned this degree because of your hard work and dedication.

YOU ALL ARE APPRECIATED!!!

PREFACE

Three years ago, a professor who knew of my research and career interest asked me to attend a meeting about a new research project. The meeting was about new collaborative research project with a university and a local school district, focusing on promoting the academic success of African American and Latino males in grades pre-kindergarten (preK)-3rd grade. After attending a few meetings I was still not sure what my role would be in the project. A few weeks later, I was asked to participate in a quasi-interview with a few people who were part of the research project. As a result of that meeting I was given the opportunity to develop and implement a mentoring program for males of color, which became one of the most important experiences in my graduate school career. My involvement in the development, implementation, and directorship of the mentoring program sparked a personal interest in finding ways to improve the life trajectories of males of color, specifically, African Americans and Latinos.

This program was developed with the goals of providing alternative ways to improve the academic success, social competency, self-efficacy, job-related skills, and self-perception of the young men who would participate in the program. To that end, I wanted to explore how African American and Latino high school males described, understood, and made sense of their experience in the IMPACT Mentoring Program. Since I spent so much of my time in the mentoring program, it only made sense for me to attempt to explain and interpret with the high school students what was happening for them in the program. With that, I set out on a mission to attempt to authentically represent the experiences of the African American and Latino high school males who participated in this program.

Many of the young men in the mentoring program were labeled as some of the most "vulnerable," "at-risk," "disengaged," and "troubled" young males in their schools. The

characteristics that would support those labels included low test scores, social/behavioral issues in school, failing grades, single family homes where a mother is the sole provider, being teenage fathers, etc. The characteristics are the same ones that are used to label and dismiss countless other African American and Latino males in high school. Although context, family structure, community support, etc., may vary from place to place, the intent of this dissertation is not to categorize African American and Latino males as having a uniform way of thinking or behaving, but to shed some light on characteristics that may be shared and provide some ideas that, if adapted to fit the specific context in which others live, could prove to extend beyond the context of this dissertation study.

"Even in the midst of our worse struggles, our forefathers knew that part of our advancement and growth began with a sound education" (-Unknown Author). This quote originated from an unknown author who wrote this when schools for African American freed slaves were being established. For those African American and Latino males in the midst of their worst struggles, many of them are or have not received a sound education. Why should we care about the educational struggles of African American and Latino males? Better yet, why do I care? Why conduct research in this area? It is very simple—it is for my former elementary classmates who I saw fall between the cracks and end up in jail or dead; it's for young men like Arthur Tyles, Andre Malcolm, Corey Hatter, Raheem Washington, just to name a few; it's for my best friend Jeffrey Warren who was killed at the hands of another African American male who was a product of a broken foster care system, who in turn became angry, bitter and turned to violence as a way of expressing these emotions. It's for my former student Ricky Taylor who often talked with me daily after school about his frustrations with life and how he was going to persevere in spite of his many challenges, but was shot and killed the day before he turned

sixteen, due to senseless violence in a place he considered a refuge. These young men will never get the opportunity to be successful and make positive contributions to society. I seek to publicize this mentoring program for all the African American and Latino males who are reaching their hands out and asking for help, yet are being ignored—I hear and see you! My hope is that this research provides anyone who reads it the opportunity to make sense of and appreciate the lives of the young men that decided to share with me (us) who they are and who they aspire to be. It is with this knowledge that we can begin to provide the necessary help needed to make a difference in the lives of young men who from a very early age, have asked for our help, but have been repeatedly ignored.

Some might think that this research is too personal for me. I would argue that all research develops from our own inquiries, inquisitive minds, or quest to investigate and hopefully find answers to the questions and problems that intrigue us as researchers the most. This research is just the beginning of a much needed line of inquiry that not only explicates the problems, struggles, and failures of some African American and Latino males, but attempts to solidify plausible solutions through a careful examination of how African American and Latino males who are struggling in urban K-12 schools make sense of their experiences in school and beyond.

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Introduction

The [Mis]education of the African American and Latino Male
A National, State, and Local Problem! A Pipeline to Prison?

> I think that we should take the Impact Program and start a movement across this country. Because I feel like this program is a movement. I feel like I am a part of something big. Being a part of this I see how this can help so many males of color that are struggling in school and society. It's good that it started here and is helping us, now it needs to spread (Raymond-High School Mentor/Student).

What's the Problem?

This movement referred to in the above quote is the IMPACT Mentoring Program. This program is part of an initiative by a local public school district located in the midsize city of Jamesville and the locally situated large public university's effort to improve the academic and social success of males of color in the K-12 school district. In the statement above, Raymond, a high school student/mentor in the program, described the Impact program as a "movement." What did he mean by the word movement? Does he want people to become more aware of this program and simply replicate it in other places? Does he think the problem facing males of color are so pervasive that a call to action is needed to get control of the problem? Questions like these are what I seek to answer with this study.

The historical use of the term *movement* has often implied the reorganization, restructuring, or overhaul of a current state of being, functioning, law, system, etc. (Van Deburg, 1997). Raymond also uses the word "help" in reference to males of color. The word "help" implies that someone needs assistance or guidance in order to progress or move forward. To synthesize, Raymond (an African American) believes that some action needs to be taken to help

those males of color[1] who are struggling both academically and socially in school and society. What are some of the problems that males of color are facing in school and society?

Before the onslaught of disheartening statistics, it is important to note the many males of color who graduate from high school on time and are making positive contributions to their households, communities, and society. As illustrated by the recent election of the United States' first African American president, there are positive males of color making great contributions to society. However, what hasn't changed over many decades is the disproportionate number of males of color who are marginalized and displaced from schools, and subsequently limited in their ability to be positive contributors to their own lives and communities.

African American and Latino males are often described as "disenfranchised" or "endangered" in our K-12 schools and society (Gibbs[i] 1988; Hare, 1987; Jordan & Cooper, 2003). In many of this county's largest cities, a number of them are dropping out of school at alarming rates, and achieving academically at a lower rate than their White male counterparts. The aforementioned high drop out rates, school suspensions and expulsions, the overrepresentation of African American and Latino males in special education, and serious underrepresentation in Advanced Placement (AP) or college preparation must be noted and carefully examined (Garibaldi, 2007; Kearns, Ford, and Linney, 2005; Klopfenstein, 2004; Kunjufu 1990, 2005; Martin, 2000; Noguera 2003; Schott Foundation Report, 2008).

As opposed to their white counterparts, African American males suffer from shorter life spans, higher mortality rates, and poorer quality of health. African American and Latino males have a higher percentage of incarceration, and many are growing up in single family homes where the mother is the sole provider (Hall, 2006; Noguera, 2003). Consequently many of these

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[1] In this dissertation, the phrase "males of color" refers to African American and Latino males.

young men are pushed into despair. The failures that African American and Latino males face in K-12 schools limit their opportunities as adults to become active participants in the workforce; instead many become participants in crime, unemployment and the criminal justice system. In 2009 the National Urban League reported that African Americans are twice as likely as Whites to be unemployed, three times as likely to live in poverty, and more than six times as likely to be incarcerated.

There has been a plethora of scholarly research, and often times, bleak national discussion in the media and in our schools that has documented the "trouble" that many of our African American males in K-12 schooling are currently facing. The barrage of scholarly work that has supported the perceived "trouble" that our African American K-12 students are facing has been well documented. Scholars (Brown and Davis 2000; Klopfenstein, 2004; Kunjufu 1990, 2005; Linney, 2005; Noguera, 1995, 2003, 2008; Polite and Davis, 1999) have saturated the discourse with the plight that is often referred to as the "endangered" paths of African American and Latino males.

Recent reports from the New York University Steinhardt's Metropolitan Center for Urban Education, The College Board's Advocacy and Policy Center, The Urban League (2009), The Schott Foundation (2008) among others have documented the issues facing African American and Latino males in our K-12 schools and beyond. For example, the K-12 schooling experiences of African American and Latino males are often now characterized as a "pipeline to prison." The College Board's Advocacy and Policy Center (2010) report states, "the kids in the pipeline have been retained at least once; they've been suspended at least once; they have low GPAs; very little credit accumulation in high school; and they're behind at least one grade level (6.)"

Results from the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) show that African American and Latino high school males scored an average of 29 points below White students in reading and 28 points below White students in math (NCES, 2007). Further Black, Latino and Native American males also represent the lowest number of students taking Advanced Placement (AP) courses in high school (The Schott Foundation Report, 2008). The persistence of the achievement gap between African American and Latino males and their White counterparts has led to a stark contrast between the educational aspirations and accomplishments of each group. It also has a significant affect on the positive life outcomes and upward mobility of males of color in society.

In a recent report the College Board Advocacy and Policy Center (2010) argues that there is a "Third America" that is often ignored by mainstream society. The report states:

> this America is often captured in popular television documentaries and newspaper stories and includes frightening statistics about unemployment, poverty and high rates of incarceration. The citizens of this Third America are primarily men, and mostly men of color. These men now live outside the margins of our economic, social and cultural systems. They are the byproduct of many societal failures — including the failure of our nation's schools (p.4).

In addition, across all races, young women are outperforming young men with respect to high school graduation rates. White women perform 4 percentage points better than white men, while African American, Hispanic, Native American, and Asian women outperform men in their ethnic or racial group by nine, nine, seven, and two percentage points, respectively. Analyses indicate that African American women earn two-thirds of the college degrees awarded to African American students; while, for Native Americans and Hispanics, the number is 60 percent (College Board and Advocacy and Policy Center, 2010). Whether one talks about prisons, where African American males are almost half the inmate population and Hispanics constitute 20

percent, or whether one talks about violent crime, where young black men are five times as likely to be murdered as whites, the situation in many of these communities must be seen as a crisis. Below is a summarization of some startling statistics facing African American and Latino/Hispanic males. Some of the following statistics from the Urban League (2009) help to illustrate how the K-12 failures of these males often lead to dismal and limited options for prosperity in their adult life.

- For African Americans, the proportion holding a high school credential was about the same in 2006 as it was in 1986 (about 84 percent).

- Meanwhile, the proportion of Hispanics holding a high school credential increased from 59 percent to 65 percent.

- School completion rates for Asian Americans and Native Americans in 2006 were 91 percent and 71 percent, respectively; trend line data to 1986 on these populations are not available.

- With regard to college attendance, enrollment rates for young African Americans (18 to 24) increased from 22 to 32 percent, while Hispanic enrollment rates increased from 18 to 25 percent.

Across the board, males from all racial and ethnic backgrounds are likely to be suspended at about twice the rate of females. In the case of black males, however, the rate is almost three times as high. "Status dropout" rates for 16 to 24-year- olds tell a similar story. Here, while black males are more likely than whites to be dropouts, the rate for Hispanic males is almost four times that of whites. Arrest and incarceration rates for men of color are extraordinarily high. One recent estimate holds that the chance of a young African American man going to prison is one in three. Meanwhile, about 20 percent of male inmates in state or federal prisons are Latinos,

almost two-thirds of them between the ages of 18 and 34. In the foreseeable future, it is apparent that if current demographic and educational attainment trends continue, especially for men of color, the overall educational level of the overall American workforce will probably decline.

So what can be done to narrow the achievement gaps among Black and Latino and White males? How do we increase the number of Black and Latino male students who graduate from high school and obtain a bachelor's degree? How do we increase the options (college and/or work) beyond high school for these males? How do we prepare "at-risk" males of color for academic and social success in school for the work force beyond high school? The need for these males to be successful in K-12 schools and in society is important to the overall productivity of our society.

Scholars (Hall, 2006; Holland, 1996; and Ogbu, 1990) have argued for the increased implementation of positive mentorship programs in schools. They argue that the lack of positive adult males of color in schools and at home contribute to the lack of academic and social success for these males in schools. They also contend that positive mentoring programs that are focused on the academic and social success of males of color would help to alleviate some of the issues they face in school. Since mentoring programs are generally aimed at helping underserved youth cope with adverse social and economic circumstances that place them in "at-risk" or "endangered" categories (Hall, 2006) it would be important to house more of these programs in K-12 schools where the downturn of these students' lives often begin.

Rationale for Study

> Sometimes I feel like no one is listening to me. I mean I feel like I am not being heard. I would like to be considered sometimes. The world around me sometimes seems to be collapsing itself around me. Who is here to help, where are my friends, family, mom and dad, teachers, the school, someone in the

community, do the politicians care, police, your actions or livelihood are often influenced by others, what they do, how they do it and even how it might be impose on you, so why can't they help you when you need them (Jimmy-High School Mentor/Student)?

One could argue that this statement is a cry for help, an articulation of frustration, or simply a criticism of the people surrounding Jimmy, a high school mentor. Though more time will be dedicated to him in later chapters, this statement captures the purpose of this research. Jimmy begins by discussing how he feels no one listens, as if he is talking to people who either do not understand him or who may not be interested in what he has to say. He also appears to express some invisibility, lack of attention and/or lack of appreciation with the statement, "I would like to be considered sometimes." The aspect of the statement most relevant to this section is when Jimmy proceeds to discuss where he could receive the necessary help (with what is unclear) and how the actions of others influence how he lives and acts. Jimmy ends with asking the question: "why can't they help you when you need them?" This last question is what I will explore in later chapters when I discuss the influence of the IMPACT mentoring program on the high school males like Jimmy.

This study is intended to enhance current research on the influence of mentoring/youth development programs on African American males and also to illuminate an approach to mentoring that assists in the redirection of the negative trajectory that far too many of our African American and Latino males face. The dissertation was guided by the following major question: *How do high school males of color describe and make sense of their academic engagement in school and self-perception while participating in an ecologically structured school based mentoring program?*

The following research questions guided my dissertation inquiry:

1. How do the high school males of color describe and understand their experience in a school-based mentoring program?

2. How do these males describe and understand their relationship with their college mentors and elementary-aged mentees?

3. How, if at all, does the ecological structure of the program shape these males' academic engagement and self-perception?

Theoretical Framework

When the IMPACT program was developed, those involved including myself were trying to conceptualize a mentoring program structure that would involve more aspects of the student's environment, hence Urie Brofenbrenner's (1979) theory of ecological systems theory was explored. Brofenbrenner's theory was helpful in conceptualizing and understanding the necessary environmental factors and people that play a role in the cultivation of the high school students' academic and social development. The ecological structure of this program, which I will describe more fully in the next chapter, is what I argue makes the IMPACT program unique and thus contributes knowledge to the field of discourse and research on mentoring, its impact on African American and Latino males' self perceptions, academic engagement, and personal development. In this section, I discuss Brofenbrenner's ecological systems theory and how the adaption of this theory was developed within the IMPACT program to fit the nature, needs, and environment of the high school students' lives.

Brofenbrenner (1979) uses the ecological systems theory to explicate the conceptualizations of environments and relationships in terms of systems. He explains a

particular environment as a nested arrangement of structures, each contained within the next. He articulates the systems and their functions and relationships in an individual's life as follows.

1. **A microsystem** is an immediate setting containing the learner (e.g., home, day care center, classroom, etc.) A **setting** is defined as a place in which the occupants engage in particular activities in particular roles (i.e. parent, teacher, pupil, etc.) for particular periods of time. The factors of place, time, activity, and role constitute the **elements** of a setting.

2. **The mesosystem** comprises the interrelations among the different and potentially exclusive (possible non-interactive) major settings containing the learner at a particular point in his or her life. Thus, for an American elementary school child, the mesosystem typically encompasses interactions among family, school, peer group, television; for some children, it might also include church, camp, or work place, although the last would be less common in the United States than in some other societies. In sum, the meso-system is the collection of Microsystems that an individual moves through and regularly interacts within.

3. **The exosystem** is an extension of the mesosystem embracing the concrete, local social structures, both formal and informal, that impinge upon or encompass the immediate settings containing the learner and, thereby, influence and even determine or delimit what goes on there. These structures include the major institutions of the society, both deliberately structured and spontaneously evolving, as they operate at the local community level. These include, for example, the world of work, the neighborhood, mass media, agencies of government (local, state, and national), the distribution of goods and services, communication and transportation facilities, and informal social networks.

4. **Macrosystems** are the overarching institutions of the culture or subculture, such as the economic, social, educational, legal, and political systems, of which local micro-, meso-, and exosystems are the concrete manifestations. Macrosystems are conceived and examined "in structural terms but as carriers of information and ideology that, both explicitly and implicitly, endow meaning and motivation to particular agencies, social networks, roles, activities, and their interrelations" Brofenbrenner (1979, p.15). Whether children, parents, pupils, teachers, or other persons directly involved in the learning process have any place or priority in these macro-systems is of especial importance in determining how such persons are treated and interact with each other in different types of educational settings.

Brofenbrenner (1979; 1998) suggests that the ecology of education is not and cannot be confined to investigations in strictly educational settings. Thus what happens or fails to happen in an educational setting depends in large part on events and relationships in other spheres of the person's life. Brofenbrenner's ecological systems theory helps to explicate the influence that people, programs, ideas, etc, can have on the overall development of an individual. His theory strongly conceptualizes how the school-based mentoring program structure interacts with the individual (the high school mentor) and their other settings. My adaptation of Brofenbrenner's ecological theory is as follows.

As Brofenbrenner (1979; 1998) suggests, each individual is involved in various settings that make up their microsystem. For the high school students in this study, that includes the home environment (parents, parents' values, community values), the school and the IMPACT mentoring program. The IMPACT mentoring program is a setting in the microsystem level of the high school students' ecology. The IMPACT mentoring program has its own ecology that is

structured independently of the home and school settings in the high school student's microsystem. Furthermore, I contend that each of the settings (home and school) in the individual's microsystem has its own separate ecological system, yet interacts with other settings within their microsystem. Thus, the IMPACT mentoring program could influence how the high school student interacts with the other settings in his microsystem. The following is an explanation of my adaptation to Brofenbrenner's ecological systems theory. Starting at the macrosystem level, I explain the IMPACT Mentoring Program's ecological structure and the elements that make up those levels.

The **macrosystem** consists of IMPACT mentoring program's culture, values, and norms set forth by the goals and mission of the mentoring program that are explicitly articulated by the program's staff and understood by each high school student. The **exosystem** consists of the various program activities that are structured to give the high school students opportunities to interact (at the meso-level) with the various settings in the program's micro-system (work as mentors with preK-3rd grade students and Thursday Training sessions). Figures 2 and 3 illustrate my re-conceptualization of these two layers of Brofenbrenner's Ecological Systems theory.

Figure 1 illustrates the macrosystem level of the Ecological Systems Theory. The left represents Brofenbrenner's interpretation and the right reflects the IMPACT Mentoring Program. The IMPACT program goals, values, and culture (norms and expectations) influences what happens at the other levels.

Figure 1. Macrosystem
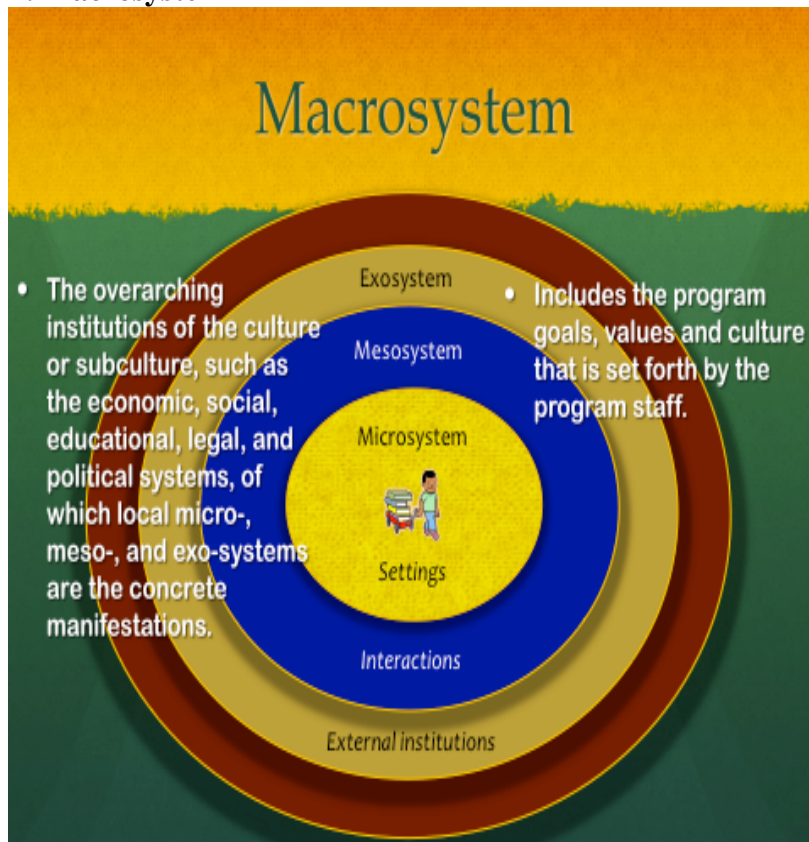
Figure 2 illustrates the exosystem level of the Ecological Systems Theory. The left represents Brofenbrenner's interpretation and the right reflects the IMPACT Mentoring Program adaptation. The IMPACT program's activities were influenced by the values, goals, (norms and expectations) at the macrosystem level.

Figure 2. Exosystem
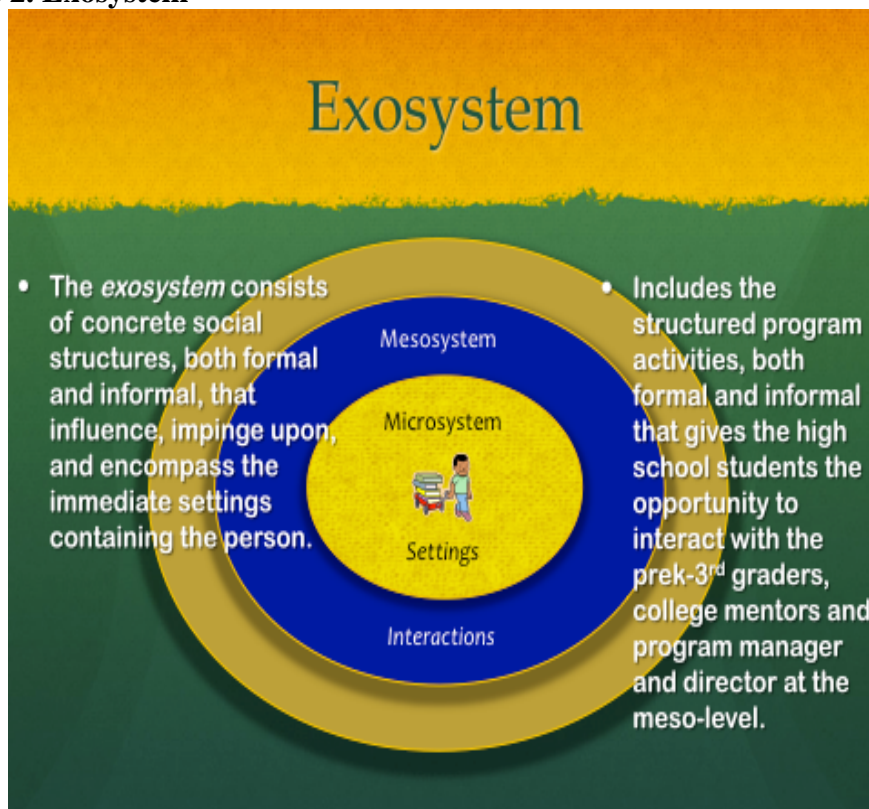
The mesosystem of the IMPACT Mentoring program involves the various interactions that occur between the high school mentors and other persons and components of the program. This primarily includes interactions between the following two groups: the high school students and the college mentors, program manager and director; and the high school students and their elementary-aged mentees they work with. The interactions that occur when the high school students are mentoring the elementary aged students are a part of the mesosystem and will be discussed in the data chapters. The mesosystem also involves the weekly mentor training sessions, and the interactions between the high schools and their peers. Moreover, the mesosystem illustrates the interactions and relationships that are developed and cultivated

between the high school students and the other individuals (program staff and preK-3rd grade students). Figure Four illustrates these ideas:

Figure 3. Mesosystem
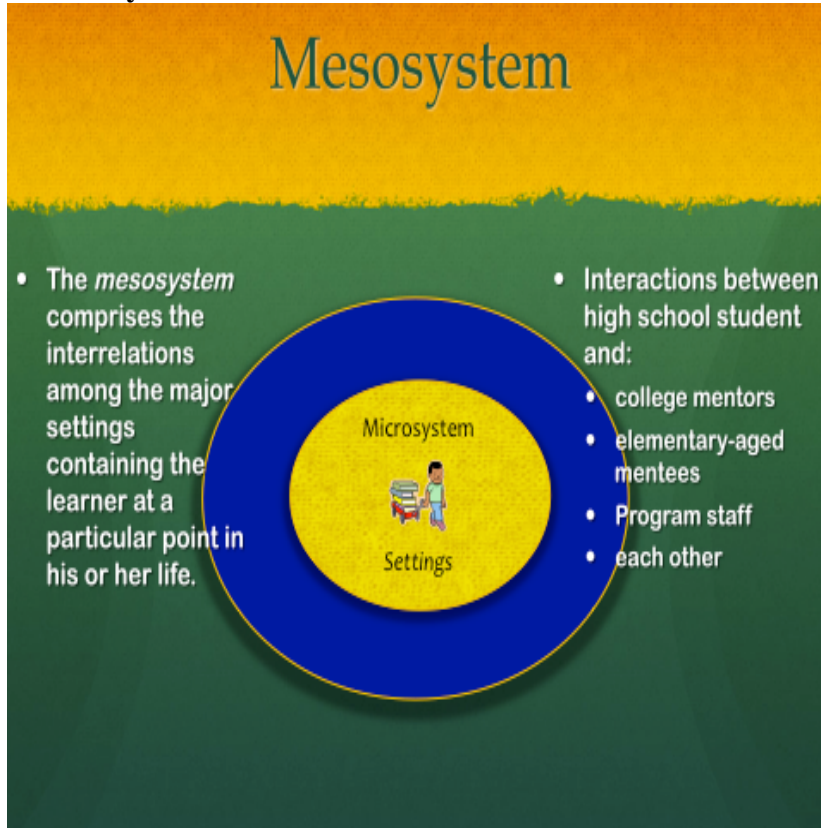
Lastly, the **microsystem** of the IMPACT mentoring program consists of the various settings (as mentors of the preK-3rd grade students; and as mentees during the Thursday sessions) that the high school students are involved with in the IMPACT mentoring program. Figure 5 illustrates these ideas:

Figure 4. Microsystem
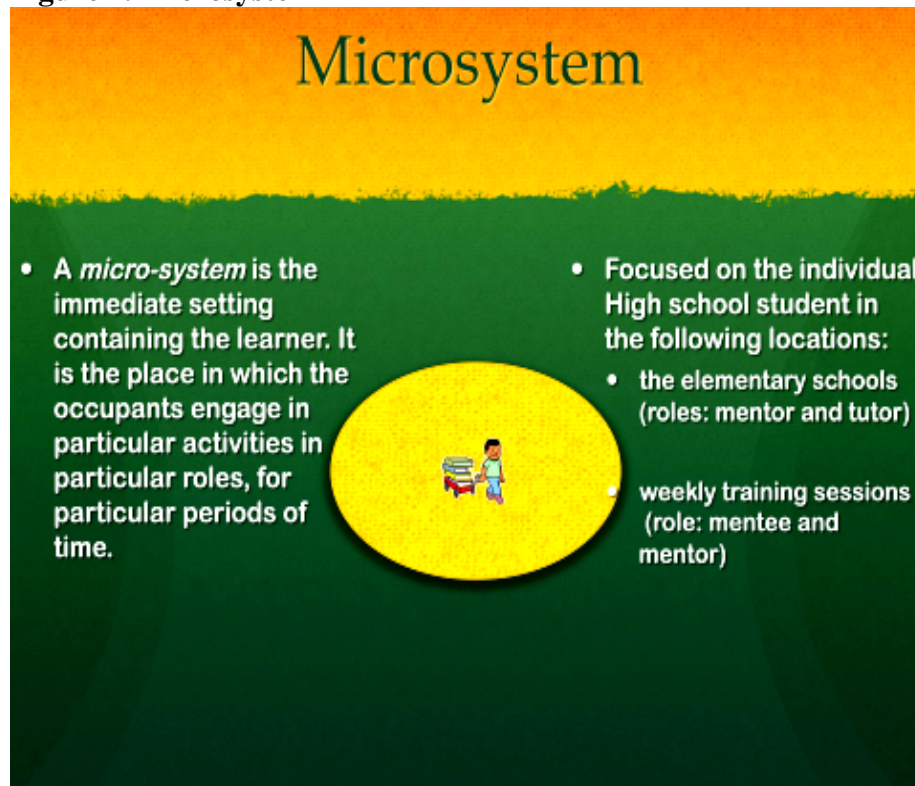
In sum, the ecological systems theory helps to explain how specific activities and functions that occurred within the various levels of the Impact's program ecological structure influenced the high school students' experiences in the program.

In chapters five through seven, I discuss the various activities that occur at the meso- and exo- levels of the program's ecological system and how the high school students describe and make sense of those experiences. Furthermore, I use the different levels of the program's ecological system to make sense of how the activities and functions at those levels have an influence on the high school students' other settings that are located at each individual's micro system level. Also, I use the ecological systems theory to conceptualize the high school students' experiences at various levels of the program's ecology, how those experiences

interacted with other levels of the IMPACT program ecological structure and whether or not it influenced the high school student academically and personally.

In chapter two, I provide a brief description of the IMPACT program purpose, program structure, and goals. In chapter three I provide a review of the literature relevant to this research investigation. I also provide an explanation on how this research enhances and fills in the gaps of current research on mentoring programs for males of color. In chapter four, I describe the methodology used for the study. I also provide an explanation of the structure of the IMPACT mentoring program. Chapter five examines how two of the settings (home environment and school environment) in each of the high school students' ecology influence their orientation toward school and their self-perceptions. Hence, these experiences in both settings have a direct influence on how students view themselves and their level of academic engagement in school.

In chapter six I discuss the role that the IMPACT mentoring program had on the high school students' academic engagement. As another setting in the high school students' ecology, the argument is made that the IMPACT mentoring program's ecological structure provides students with experiences and relationships (developed and cultivated at the mesolevel) that provide the support, structure, and accountability (that occurs at the exo- and macrolevel) that may help the high school students redirect their attitudes and energies toward school. This chapter also explores how activities (role as mentors, Thursday training sessions, etc.) that take place at the exosystem level of the IMPACT program played a role in the high school students' enhanced thoughts about and engagement in school.

Chapter seven focuses on the role that the IMPACT mentoring program had on the high school students' self-perception. This chapter discusses how the relationships developed and cultivated in the mesosystem level (but influenced by the structures and activities in place at the

exosystem level of the program's ecological system) helped to re-shape the high school students' thoughts about themselves. I also discuss how the Impact program's values, program goals at the macro-level of the program ecological system influenced their self-perception.

Finally in chapter 8 I provide an in-depth analysis and discussion of my interpretations of the IMPACT Mentoring Program's influence on the high school males' academic engagement and self-perception as discussed in previous chapters. Further in this chapter I also discuss the implications of this research for the implementation of school based mentoring programs and importance of the research findings for providing alternative opportunities for African American and Latino males who may be struggling academically and/or socially in school.

[1] Gibbs (1988) and Hare (1987) were used because they are two of the original scholars to use the term 'endangered' to refer to negative issues related to African American and Latino males in school and society.

Chapter 2

What is IMPACT?

In this chapter I provide a detailed description of the IMPACT Mentoring Program, and the roles of the high school mentors, college mentors, program directors, and manager. Mentoring young men of color evokes classroom thought and discussion on a broad range of other educational issues including:

- Academic achievement and student drop out rate

- Youth violence prevention

- Diverse values and voices within the classroom

- The importance of arts-based curriculum

- Socially and culturally responsive education

- Critical urban pedagogy

- Student empowerment and agency

The following is a detailed description of the IMPACT Mentoring Program Structure.

Program Description

The IMPACT mentoring program is entering its second year as a part of a collaborative research effort between Michigan's Jamesville School District and a local University's Office of University Outreach and Engagement. The IMPACT mentoring program is designed to focus on the academics, personal wellness, and mental growth for young men of color in the Jamesville School District. This is a tiered mentoring program that involves college mentors mentoring high school students and high school mentors who are mentors to the preK-3rd grade students.

The high school students are paid through the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) and/or the City of Jamesville.

The high school mentors are placed in a classroom with a group of elementary students along with a teacher, and are given the opportunity to assist the kids with tasks such as reading, writing, arts and crafts, and social activities. The IMPACT mentoring program creates positive cross-generational relationships with young minority males. This program gives the high school males an opportunity to give back to their community while gaining valuable work experience. The college students also work with the high school students on their academic and social success in school. The IMPACT mentoring program goals are as follows:

i. To enhance the positive character development and academic success of young boys of color ages 3-8.

ii. To enhance the social success of young boys of color ages 3-8.

iii. To increase the literacy (reading & writing) and math skills of young boys of color ages 3-8.

iv. To assist high school mentors of color to develop effective job skills and promote the academic success of young boys of color.

v. To promote community civic engagement and personal confidence, promoting cross-age and cross-generation mentor-mentee relationships.

vi. To positively develop the self-perceptions, male identities, and moral engagement of the high school mentors.

vii. To aid in the establishment of job-oriented skills and work ethic.

viii. To facilitate academic confidence, persistence, and achievement.

Role of Program Director

The program director is significant in the development and implementation of the IMPACT mentoring program. The program director is responsible for researching, planning, developing and implementing the mentoring program's mission, activities, and evaluation. The program director is also responsible for the hiring and supervision of the program manager and college mentors. The program director meets periodically with the IMPACT staff to discuss the evaluation and improvement of the program. Finally, the program director serves as a liaison between the IMPACT mentoring program and other local community agencies.

Role of Program Manager

The program manager assists the program director in the hiring and supervision of college and high school mentors. They work as the primary supervisor on site with the mentors. Similar to the program director, the manager also assists in the development and implementation of the mentoring program's mission and activities. Finally, the program manager is to meet with the program director to report on the progression of IMPACT, provide mentoring and guidance to college and high school students, and communicate with teachers and other school staff.

Role of College Mentor

The college mentors were students at either the local university or community college. The college mentors' primary responsibilities were to provide leadership and guidance for the high school mentors and to act as their immediate supervisors. They also worked with the high school students on setting and meeting their academic and social goals in school. At times they

were also responsible for creating daily lessons for the mentoring and tutoring aspect of the program with the preK-3rd grade students.

Role of High School Mentor

Under the supervision of the college mentors and program manager the high school students assisted the classroom teachers with activities geared towards the enhancement of the academic success of the preK-3rd grade students. They also worked one on one or in small groups with the preK-3rd grade boys on various academic content. Finally, the high school mentors assist the program staff in the development of the program's mission, goals, and activities.

High School Mentor Job Expectations

The high school students are given clear expectations when they enter the program. They have a particular dress code that they are expected to follow. Some of the guidelines include the following: no baggy clothes, no hats/doo-rags, shirts tucked in at all times, and the program uniform and name tags must be worn at all times. The rules and expectations set forth by the program staff include the following: no tardiness, no fighting, no disrespectful behavior toward staff, the preK-3rd grade students, or each other. If the high school students fail to obey the dress code and/or the rules/expectations set forth by the program staff, then there would be the possibility that they would be removed from the program.

The IMPACT Mentoring Program Structure

The IMPACT Mentoring Program operates in the five intervention schools: Donnely, Richards, Fowler, Wilson, and Woodworth. The IMPACT Mentoring Program takes place on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays from 3:30-5:00pm. A college supervisor and a high school student assist in the supervision of the program. The program manager supervises all of the IMPACT staff (college and high school mentors). One college mentor works at each site along with at least two high school mentors. The college student supervises the high school students and also participates in after-school activities with the preK-3RD grade students. Finally, the program manager visits each school weekly and can meet with teachers and the school principal as needed.

Lessons and Activities

Lessons and structured activities are created to support classroom learning. Daily lessons will encompass the following subject areas: language arts, math, character development, and arts and crafts. The IMPACT mentoring director and IMPACT teacher(s) assist in the development of the daily lessons. Each high school student and college student receives weekly training from the program director on the lessons and activities. One-on-one and group mentoring between the high school students and preK-3rd grade students is available.

Student Assessment

Each high school student completes a daily progress report on each child they work with (Appendix D) that is turned in to the college mentors. Teachers and other PAS team members

will have access to this information as well. The IMPACT mentoring staff and teacher evaluate the high school students on a weekly basis.

Personal Development

The high school students have opportunities during the Thursday training sessions to work on various aspects of their personal development. Students receive daily assistance with their homework. Topics covered with the high school mentors ranged as follows: academic and social engagement in school, career aspirations, self perception, male identity, manhood, masculinity, personal development, job skills, developing mentor/mentee relationships, and child development. These topics are covered during various discussion forums, activities, or through one-on-one mentoring.

Chapter 3

Literature Review

"Mentoring is a brain to pick, an ear to listen, and a push in the right direction."
John Crosby

This quote captures the true essence of the impact that mentoring could have on an individual. Mentoring is a rather traditional method used to provide guidance and support to others. Scholars such as Gordon (2009) and Maguire, C.P. (2005) argue that mentoring can have an impact on the lives of those who are mentored, providing similar opportunities that the quote by John Crosby suggests. In chapter 1, I discussed issues facing young men of color. Unfortunately, some of the issues like dropout rates, the lack of academic achievement/success for many in K-12 schooling, higher percentage of incarceration rates, shorter life spans and poorer quality of health have plagued African American and Latino males for years. This issue has definitely not been ignored, programs such as "My Brother's Keeper," "Doorway To Success," "Rites of Passage," among countless others have been instituted in an effort redirect, motivate and encourage the efforts of young African American and Latino males. The success of mentoring programs such as those cannot or should not be judged solely on the immediate success of the participants but also on long-term implications. What role have mentoring programs had on the academic success and personal development of African American and Latino males who have participated in them?

In this chapter, I provide a review of literature relevant to this research. First I briefly review the literature that explores the academic achievement of African American and Latino males in K-12 schools. I also review the literature on school-based mentoring programs, and mentoring programs for males of color. Then I provide a rationale for this study and how it

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attempts to enhance the current literature on school-based mentoring programs for African

American and Latino males. Finally, I define the key terms that will be used in the study.

K-12 Experiences of Males of Color

A recent publication by the College Board Advocacy and Policy Center (2010)

documents the progress of males of color in United States K-12 public schools. The College

Board Advocacy and Policy Center (2010) argues the following:

> There is, however, a Third America. This is an America that is almost totally
> ignored by mainstream society. This America is often captured in popular
> television documentaries and newspaper stories and includes frightening statistics
> about unemployment, poverty and high rates of incarceration. The citizens of this
> Third America are primarily men, and mostly men of color. These men now live
> outside the margins of our economic, social and cultural systems. They are the
> byproduct of many societal failures — including the failure of our nation's
> schools (p.2).

I start out this section of the literature review with this excerpt from the College Board Advocacy

and Policy Center (2010) because it articulates concisely the issues that many of our African

American and Latino students have faced. The words often used to describe the conditions of

many of America's males of color in K-12 schooling and beyond, are "marginalized,"

"endangered," "imprisoned," "dropouts" (Kunjufu 1990, 2005; Linney, 2005; Noguera, 1995,

2003, 2008; Polite and Davis, 1999).

In earlier research, scholars have documented the marginalization, retention, and

academic failures of African American and Latino males as early as elementary school (Bennet

and Harris, 1981; Chapa and Valencia 1993; Delfoe and Carson 1997; Kaufman, 1991; Reyes

and Valencia, 1993). Chapa and Valencia (1993) specifically focus on the schooling experiences

that lead to the lack of success of males of color. Meanwhile, Reyes and Valencia (1993) argue

the cultural disconnection that males of color face in schools. DeGarmo and Martinez (2006)

contend that "academic disparities are well documented for Latino youth and particularly

worrisome are rates of school dropout" (267). The dropout rates of Latino and African American

males have been among the highest in the nation for years. There have been scholars who

attempted to explore causal relationships between the lack of success of African American and

Latino males.

Previously, other scholars (Gándara, Larson, Rumberger, & Mehan, 1998; Pulido, 1995;

Steinberg, Blinde, & Chan, 1984; Steinberg, Dornbusch, & Brown, 1992; Velez, 1989) have also

explored possible causes for relationships for academic disparities in Latino youth. In their

studies they attempt make correlations between school dropout and poor academic performance

and substance use, but the reasons they state for dropping out are unclear. Early explanatory

perspectives have focused on personal or cultural deficiency (e.g., Spanish language retention).

Over the last decade, a body of research has emerged that examines structural barriers such as

discriminatory behaviors and institutional practices (Marćıas, 1993; Stanton- Salazar, 2001) and

the role of acculturative strains and internalized minority status (Rogler, Cortes, & Malgady,

1991; Vega, Khoury, Zimmerman, Gil, & Warheit, 1995). So how do you begin to address the

issues facing African American and Latino males?

Several scholars have argued for the increased implementation of positive

mentorship/youth development programs in schools, most notably: Grossman & Bulle, 2006;

Hall, 2006; Holland, 1996; Ogbu,1990. Moreover, other scholars (Fashola, 2003; Hirsch, 2005;

Woodland, 2008) illuminated the significance of youth development programs for Black males.

All of these scholars indicate that the lack of positive adult males of color in schools and at home

contribute to the lack of academic and social success for young males in school. They also

contend that positive mentoring programs that are focused on the academic and social success of males of color would help to alleviate some of the issues they face in school. Since mentoring programs are generally aimed at helping underserved youth cope with adverse social and economic circumstances that place them in "at-risk" or "endangered" categories (Hall, 2006) it could be beneficial to schools to house more of these programs in K-12 schools—where the downturn of these students' lives often begins.

Masculinity

The word and concept of "masculinity" will be used explicitly and at times implicitly throughout the dissertation. For this study masculinity is defined as a social construct (Kimmer and Mesler 1989). It is based on how society views the gender roles of males in society. Males and females are socialized into roles based on gender. These roles often help shape how men perceive themselves and how they are perceived by others. According to Gause (2005), masculinity is represented and defined in various media, genre, texts, or icons. Black masculinity is presented as well, but it is often in opposition to the "other" and/or dominant culture.   He further states that the representations of black masculinity in the United States are historically structured by and against dominant (and dominating) discourses of masculinity and race, specifically (whiteness) (19). For Latino males, Janey (2003) explores the use of the term that is synonymous with masculinity, "machismo," and how some scholars define it as Latino or Hispanic men who have a good work ethic. Janey (2003) has found the use of the word to mean strength, male dominance, and providing for the family (p.9). In this study the use of masculinity will be defined using the conceptual meaning described by those who have studied both African American and Latino males. Therefore, it will be used to describe actions or

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language that objectifies male dominance, strength, and includes risk taking, machismo, aggressive social skills, and sexual promiscuity.

Mentoring Defined

Prior to investigating the role and effect of mentorship, the operational definition of mentorship must be established. Flaxman (1992) describes mentoring as being a "one-on-one relationship of a pair of unrelated individuals of different ages, carried out over time, and formed to support the development of the younger person, although the mentor also benefits from the relationship. Historically, such mentoring occurred as young people and adults came together in the community, the schools, or the workplace." Flaxman (1992) describes the purpose of mentoring as to increase the understanding of youth and effectively influence the lives of mentees by their interactions with the mentor. Flaxman (1992) also illustrates mentoring as historically existing in some form or fashion, but not always being formally called "mentoring." These relationships have normally been developed through natural means. Currently, mentorship is designed purposefully for the assumed "proper" development of an adolescent. To continue, he establishes two goals that mentorship has: 1) to take care of the youth and 2) to make the youth resourceful. These components include protecting the youth from environmental issues that may be set up to make them fail.

This protection operates in the form of education about policies, benefits, and the consequences of certain decisions. In succeeding in this education, the youth become resourceful as they learn trades and specific ways of life to promote and increase their chances for individual success, further developing the youths' social literacy and interpersonal ability. This is done by the use of specific techniques used by the mentor, which include: modeling, feedback,

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contingency management, instruction, questioning, task structuring, and cognitive structuring. Each technique can be used in developing and maintaining a relationship between a mentor and mentee. In addition, Flaxman makes a point to establish that mentoring is not only for underprivileged or at-risk youth. Mentorship (types of mentors and those who are mentored) must exist for all spectrums of adolescents regardless of circumstance and context, because all youth need this type of development.

Grossman and Rhodes (2002) provide an example of empirical evidence that supports particular features of mentorship. In their study, Grossman and Rhodes (2002) investigated the predictors and effect of duration in mentorship relationships, specifically comparing two groups (experimental and control) to determine the effect of time spent on the success of mentoring relationships. For this study, 1,138 youths from Big Brothers Big Sisters programs were randomly assigned to the experimental or control group. The experiment organized participants into four groups depending on the duration of the mentor/mentee relationship: less than 3 months, 3 months to just under 6 months, 6 months to just under 12 months, and 12 months or more. This study found that youth who were in relationships that lasted a year or longer reported improvements in academic, psychosocial, and behavioral outcomes; and fewer effects emerged among youth who were in relationships that ended between 6 months and 1 year or between 3 months and 6 months. Also, youth who were in relationships that ended within 3 months reported drops in self-worth and perceived scholastic competence. This research provides empirical evidence that the duration of mentorship relationships is important in the success of that relationship and resulting effect for the mentee. Although not all mentees are assumed to be high risk, this study provides evidence that supports the need for persistent and sustained interaction between both the mentor and mentee.

In addition to this empirical evidence, Spencer (2006) examines the role of mentorship through conducting interviews with 24 participants (12 adolescents and 12 adults) from surrounding mentoring programs like Big Brothers Big Sisters, who had been in a continuous mentorship relationship for at least a year. This study investigated four relational processes between the two individuals: authenticity, empathy, collaboration, and companionship. Each concept was examined to better understand the mentor/mentee relationship and its effect. This study found that the relationship between the mentor and the protégé was contingent on both parties working together to make the relationship stronger. Both parties needed commitment and emotional involvement, which contributed to the adult becoming more significant to the adolescent. In many cases that Spencer (2006) reports on, the adult was faced with the task of carrying the load of the relationship as the adolescent took the first few months to evaluate the trustworthiness and consistency of the adult. The consistency of the adult allowed the adolescent to naturally open up more, which increased the authenticity and engagement of the relationship. These mentioned factors are proven essentials in the success of a mentor/mentee relationship.

Quarles, Maldonado, Lacey, and Thompson (2008) add further empirical evidence as they investigate the perceptions of both the mentor and the mentee in Big Sisters programs. This paper was presented at a conference that focused on the importance of education and the factors that are involved in the education of youth. As indicated by this research, one factor in the proper education of youth is mentorship. In the literature review section of this study, Quarles et al., conceptualizes three components of mentorship that seem necessary to document for the particular purpose of this literature review: self-efficacy and mentoring, aspirations and mentoring, and possible selves and mentoring. Self-efficacy is cited from Bandura's *Social Cognitive Theory*, which defines it as the belief that an individual's judgments regarding

personal capabilities to organize and implement required plans of action will produce desired outcomes. Furthermore, Quarles et al., (2008) states through referencing Pajares (2002), that self-efficacy "forms the foundation for motivation, feelings of well-being, and personal accomplishment." To continue, aspirations are discussed as being a result of choices that an adolescent makes during this period of his/her life that may dictate the future choices or limitations that may exist as a result. In this case, mentoring could potentially act as a bridge between the proper choices and the absence of limitations for an adolescent in future adulthood. "Possible selves" is a concept that exemplifies the future or desired future that an adolescent sees or envisions for him/herself. This concept represents an individual's hopes, dreams, and even fears of what the future holds or could potentially hold. The role of the mentor is to attempt to combine the envisioned self with the individual who desires it by providing the proper resources that can contribute to the adolescent's success (Quarles et al., 2008).

Ryan, Whittaker, and Pinckney (2002) discuss mentoring as it relates to schools. In this article, the writers outline the proper format for creating a successful mentoring program in relation to an unsuccessful program. Ryan et al. (2002) describes a successful mentoring program as facilitating the development of mentor/mentee relationships, resulting in the social, emotional, academic, and/or economic growth of the youth involved. Furthermore, this article highlights that the most successful mentee/mentor relationships are those that last for long periods of time. Mentors and mentees need opportunities to meet and interact on a regular basis with one another for the purpose of creating relationships that can develop into a transactional dynamic between the mentor and the mentee. This article also outlines the necessity for mentors to be screened before partaking in mentorship roles. Hall (2006) disagrees with the notion of screening mentors however. Hall (2006), states that it may be necessary to give those who have

made mistakes in the past a chance to mentor younger individuals who may be about to make poor life choices. Hall claims that society should not assume that these individuals are unfit to mentor youth because of their past experiences. According to Hall, the prohibition of mentorship may prevent a necessary factor in successful mentorship (mentors who have faced dilemmas and made the wrong choices, but have grown and moved beyond those choices), thus providing more of a transactional relationship between mentor and mentee.

Ryan et al. (2002) continues the discussion of mentoring by providing a step-by-step process in creating a mentoring program: 1) identify program goals, 2) designate a program coordinator, 3) select students to be mentees, 4) recruit and select mentors, 5) match mentees and mentors, 6) gain parent permission, 7) provide education for mentors, 8) provide space and resources for mentoring, 9) promote communication among participants, and 10) monitor effectiveness of the program.

Mentoring and the Value of School Based Mentoring (SBM) Programs

Flaxman, Ascher, and Harrington (1988) defined mentoring as a "supportive relationship between a youth or young adult and someone more senior in age and experience." Thus the mentor offers support, guidance, and concrete assistance as the younger partner goes through different periods of their life. Flaxman et al. (1988) also distinguishes the difference between natural and planned mentoring. Natural mentoring occurs when "adolescents and young adults use the guidance of someone other than their parent to help them pass through a stage of development." Meanwhile, planned mentoring takes place when an adult or young adolescent uses a program deliberately to accomplish the same purpose. Most SBM programs are considered to be planned programs that deliberately set forth to accomplish the goal of providing

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guidance to the life of those they mentor. Flaxman et al. discussed natural and planned mentoring as if they cannot co-exist. I contend that mentoring programs can be a form of natural mentoring. Although there were some planned goals for the mentoring program I was a part of, there were also natural mentoring experiences that occurred, which I elaborated on in the previous chapter.

Moreover, school-based mentoring can assist in the development of a positive relationship between teachers and students. The development of the identity of the males of color through conversation and a close examination of themselves through conversations with other males of color (mentees) are valuable to the academic and social success of the student in school.

Scholars like Karcher and Herrera (2007) advocate for school-based mentoring because it provides students with the opportunity to receive academic and social success. SBM is an adaptation of the traditional mentoring model for schools. Karcher and Herrera (2007) believe that involving schools can help programs reach groups of youth who may not otherwise be served, but school-based programs and their matches must adjust to the structure of the school. To maximize the effectiveness of SBM programs, Karcher and Herrera (2007) noted that it is important that there be mentor training, staff support, and the maintenance of contacts that could very well extend beyond the school year and into the summer. Harcher and Herrera (2007) suggest that the longevity of the mentor/mentee relationship is vital to the success of the mentor. Many scholars suggest that youth development/mentoring programs should not only promote healthy relationships amongst students and adults, but that they should also be intentional in providing youth, specifically males of color, with varied experiences (Hall, 2006; Lakin and

Mahoney, 2006; Larsen and Hansen, 2005). They further explicate that mentoring programs should provide culturally relevant experiences for the youth.

Although there is some research on the do's and don'ts of mentoring, and suggestions are made regarding the role of the mentor and mentee, there is limited research on the effectiveness of mentoring programs for minority students, specifically, males of color. To measure the success of mentoring programs would be a tough task to accomplish. How would you measure its effectiveness, and how would you know the degree to which the mentoring program had a positive impact on the youth's life? There is definitely a need for some form of qualitative or quantitative research, involving a pre- and post-test that could determine some outcomes that could be traced to the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of a mentoring program. This kind of research is needed to enhance the literature on the influence of mentoring programs, whether those programs are school- or community-based.

In recent history, there have been attempts to create and develop programs to address the needs of students who are experiencing academic crisis. Historically, these programs have been unsuccessful in assisting students, thereby increasing the rate of dropouts. In years prior to 1998, a limited amount of research was done on the impact of mentoring in general. Some research provided very little insight into the role of mentoring. For example, Royse (1998) noted that some initial research on the Milwaukee One-on-One program showed no improvement in grades during the academic year and Baltimore's RAISE project found that students remained far below average in academic performance and above average in risk of dropping out. However, at the time this research was done, little other research existed on the effects of mentoring programs on adolescents. This factor shows that no specific conclusion can be drawn about mentoring based on these findings.

A somewhat empirical research method exists to investigate the role of mentoring on minority males. Scholars such as Colley (2002), Quarles et al. (2008), and Royse (1998), have speculated on possible research frameworks to use and on the issues that continue to affect male minority youths. However, not much research exists yet on implemented programs that properly compete against the social issues of minority youth. This literature review attempts to investigate the research that does exist concerning mentoring, specifically the mentoring of minority male youths. Because these ethnic groups continue to face a crisis, continually falling behind their white counterparts in their academic achievement and increasing in dropout rates and criminal charges, it is necessary to compile literature that speaks to these issues, possibly providing steps to decrease these instances through creating effective guidelines for a successful program that counteracts such problems.

In the study by (Quarles et. al (2008), the researchers interviewed groups of various race/ethnicity mentorship relationships. The findings show that both the mentors and mentees agreed that the relationships were very instrumental and beneficial for the mentee concerning the building of self-confidence, building belief in personal abilities, and feelings of self-efficacy. Mentors were able to effectively recognize the strengths and weaknesses of their mentees, which allowed them to serve as better role models throughout the relationship. Mentors were also able to provide direct interventions (tutoring, shopping, and academic counseling). Responses of the participants indicated that mentors were very much attuned with the needs of the mentees as they were able to respond to various challenges effectively, while simultaneously capitalizing on the strengths of the mentees and properly developing their weaknesses, which increased their self-efficacy (Quarles et al., 2008).

Although this study looked directly at the relationship between mentee and mentor as it relates to the Big Sisters program, it does provide analysis on mentorship in general as these programs are run in very similar ways and the desired effects tend to parallel one another on the broad spectrum. In this case, it is important to note that proper mentorship within any demographic can create positive relationships for adolescents, while indirectly influencing their self-efficacy, aspirations, and possible future selves.

To examine the role of mentoring, Royse (1998) focused on an outcome evaluation of a local mentoring program (The Brothers Project) that targeted African-American teens between the ages of 14 and 16 who were living in a female-headed household and who had less than grade equivalency in reading, math, and science. Royse (1998) created an experimental and control group as part of his research design, which found that the amount of time the mentor and mentee spent together played a major role in the effectiveness of the program. Such findings create steps in the right direction concerning the components of mentoring and the factors that contribute to the success of mentorship. One other factor is social inclusion.

Colley (2002) presents a description of mentoring, mentoring programs for social inclusion, and the benefits of mentoring for the mentors and mentees. She notes that mentoring is the "in thing" and that it has become a major feature of initial education and professional development in context ranging from business to teaching. Particularly, Colley (2002) discusses the growth of mentoring at three levels: the rapid expansion of mentoring for social inclusion, the emergence of engagement mentoring, and a new model of mentoring for social inclusion. Based on these three levels, Colley (2002) argues that not only does the engagement of mentoring present such a risk to young troubled youth, but its prescription of the mentor's role and its

emphasis on feelings may also represent a 'flip side' of the same controlling process toward those who act as mentors. This shows that mentorship both benefits the mentor and the mentee.

The Mentorship of Minorities

In investigating the role of mentoring on the success of youth, it is important to consider the context in which a particular group of youths exists. Different youths with different situations are in need of diverse strategies in mentorship. There are various factors that inhibit the process of mentoring for different groups of people. Ogbu (1990) examines the need for mentoring programs geared towards African American youth. He also argues for a more culturally relevant approach to mentoring. He discusses the fact that most students or mentees initially see no need in being mentored. Most youths are in situations that they feel are inescapable. Ogbu (1990) contends that this is not a phenomenon that emerged so recently but rather a problem faced by African Americans as a minority group, therefore having an effect on how African American youth are mentored. Ogbu (1990) argues that the absence of role models of mainstream success in the inner city is due to the adaptation to involuntary minority status, which produces traditional success models different from those of the mainstream and makes the adoption of mainstream role models problematic.

To counteract the problems that Ogbu (1990) discusses, Mitchell, Bush, and Bush (2002) reference the Motivated Action Towards Achievement and Transformation (MAAT) program, which focuses on African American boys in a public school setting. The program reflects a history of other programs that have singled out the experiences of African American boys in schools. The program had the following components: academic development, counseling, cultural development, and parent education. The males were selected from grades 6-8 and were

chosen according to the following criteria: reading scores, cumulative grade point average, and habitual office referrals. The program model was established in an effort to increase the academic achievement among African American male students. Another goal was to counteract the risk factors that are often associated with African American males in the political and social context (Mitchell et al., 2002). The authors discuss that an isolated program for African American males is a way to combat existing literature that documents the hardships that African American males face in schools and society. According to the authors the literature became saturated with "endangered species" rhetoric, and that the need to create a program to improve these conditions was vital. The article outlines in detail some of the issues that African American males face while also noting the needs of African American girls. The students involved in the program spent less time outside the classroom, and thirty-six of the forty-five made academic gains (Mitchell et al., 2002).

In the mentorship of minorities, it is also necessary to evaluate the social context in which minorities exist. Ianni (N.D.) discusses the cultural, social, and behavioral context of mentoring as it relates to minorities. This author makes the claim that one cannot assume that all minorities are in need of the same type of mentoring. Because many minorities exist in different cultural contexts according to Ianni, it is important to evaluate the context that each mentee is in, thereby being able to successfully identify the specific needs of that minority. Key elements to investigate are: 1) the personal and cultural development of each mentee, 2) the formation of personal identity, social role, and self-concept, and 3) development and environmental stresses due to such factors as poverty, minority status, and parental difficulties.

Each component addresses particular necessities for proper mentorship of these individuals. For personal and cultural development, Ianni (N.D.) describes the misconception

that adolescents are similar across the boundaries of location, community, and culture. It is crucial to evaluate need according to the assumption that each individual's experiences may be different. For the formation of personal identity, social role, and self-concept, it is noted that a supportive presence is available from other caring adults as adolescents make the transition from childhood to adulthood. Finally, the development and environmental stresses section details the consequences of each of these factors. When assessing the needs of a mentee, it is essential that the factors mentioned above are examined to understand the most efficient role for the mentors during the mentor/mentee relationship. Without this assessment, mentorship may be ineffective for particular minorities.

Hall (2006) discussed the importance of school-based mentoring and how this form of mentoring could provide alternate ways to functioning in society for young men of color. He discussed how school-based mentoring curriculum ought to be socially and culturally relevant for males of color. He also mentioned the notion of encouraging students to inquire and think analytically about their world, as well as proliferating alternative avenues in their decision-making processes—differing from the unilateral directional way of teaching. He contends that it is important for boys of color to have a space to discuss issues pertinent to their lives.

Hall (2006) outlines various issues that exist within United States society which inhibit the progress of minorities through education. Particular factors include: lack of willingness of adults to engage in mentorship, ineffective teaching that does not address the cultural needs of minorities as students, and existing "no tolerance" policies that threaten the cultural expression of minorities, thereby pushing students of these ethnicities outside of the school walls. To address these issues, Hall outlines the factors that are necessary in the effective mentorship of minority youths. Hall attempts to position mentoring as a cultural practice that necessitates

school-based and community-based mentoring, assisting minority youth with increased self-awareness and acknowledgment of the power they possess. He argues that this must be done to fight against the assault which public institutions and government policies are bringing against youth.

Mentoring Young Black Males (1992) provides a framework for developing and conducting locally operated mentor programs. In this document the Urban League provides the history and rapid development of mentoring programs, while also providing the rationale and importance of such programs in communities. The Urban League provided its definition of a mentor as: someone who assists in the growth and development of a younger person, and helps the mentee to address his/her concerns, needs, education, and career aspirations over an extended period of time. The Urban League also provided important activities that could be beneficial in establishing and maintaining these relationships. They also provide information on the factors involved in training a mentor and the types of individuals who would make good mentors. Additionally, the Urban League provides ways to evaluate the effectiveness of the mentoring program. This document provides a very basic structure to organizing and maintaining mentor programs at the community level. It also offers valuable insights into preparing the mentee for the mentoring relationship because the potential benefits to them are maximized if they understand their role and take ownership of it.

Mentorship Across Different Spectrums

LaVant, Anderson, & Tiggs, (1997) presents a focus on mentoring at the higher education level. They specifically address the lack of African American men enrolling in colleges and universities compared to African American women. LaVant et al. discuss the idea that Black

men are given the opportunity to participate in higher education, and a support system has been put in place—the ancient art of mentoring—and how this support continues to be a viable alternative working in favor of Black men. The authors also define the mentoring process, outline its theoretical framework, note approaches taken by several universities, and provide recommendations for implementations of these programs elsewhere. They discuss how mentoring programs should be carefully designed so that the needs of the mentees are met. LaVant et al. (1997) argues that mentoring programs should have a clear purpose and objectives and include activities that are tailored towards meeting the objectives and program goals. LaVant et al. (1997) concluded that the executive leadership within the institution must be genuinely committed to formal mentoring, resources (human and financial) must be allocated for support of the program, a university committee should be established to identify Black males who might be potential program participants, a training program must be developed for faculty and staff who are selected to serve in the program, and also external (local) community support must be developed for faculty and staff who are selected to serve in the program (LaVant et al. 1997).

"Mentorship" is a word that often operates under negative connotations. Because of this, it is important to investigate the role of mentoring on the success of individuals who may not necessarily be in need of assistance. To discuss this concept, Freeman (1999) reports on the perception that high achieving African American students had on mentoring, their definition of a good mentor, and ways in which mentoring aided them in reaching their academic potential. Freeman notes as a part of her study and purpose that there is an assumption that high achieving African American students don't need to be mentored. To test these issues and assumptions, Freeman (1999) conducted a qualitative study of about 60 students who were identified through

Ebony magazine as high achieving students who were accepted to major universities. The students found the mentor/mentee relationships to be important in their initial adjustment to college. She concluded that mentoring, when done well, includes the giving of advice and passing of messages, involves genuine feelings of care towards mentees' growth and development. Mentees were also provided with someone they could trust and who would encourage them to do well. Freeman (1999) also noted that the mentors took on roles of second mothers and fathers away from home for these students. This was important for the success of these students. Freeman (1999) stated that it pushed these students to achieve higher than they assumed they would be able to, although, they were considered high achievers from the start.

In addition to this, Sawyer (2001) researched the role of mentorship regarding youth-to-youth. He specifically used high school students to mentor elementary school students and evaluated the affect of that experience on both the elementary students and the adolescent students. Sawyer wanted to investigate whether mentoring would increase the desire of an adolescent to pursue a career in teaching. What his study found is that students who mentor are more inclined to understand their roles and the issues that exist regarding the importance of mentoring elementary children after embarking on mentorship. Through interviews, Sawyer was able to investigate the intentions behind the adolescent mentors and what emerged as important to them as a result of their experiences throughout the program. Many of the adolescents suggested that more resources be available to the elementary students. Sawyer found that three mutually supportive activities emerged from all the adolescent mentors: teaching as a process, working with their elementary protégés, and contributing to multilayered views of self in relation to their role. After observation, Sawyer noted, "the mentors became reflective and insightful when describing their activities in working with their protégés. They felt that they contributed

greatly to the children's education. In an initial focus group discussion, the mentors listed the three most meaningful aspects of their job: (a) working with kids, (b) teaching the children what they do not know, and (c) making friends." This study shows that youth-to-youth mentorship plays a large role in the development of both adolescents and children. Hall (2006) states that mentorship is transactional, which according to the study done by Sawyer would hold true based on the responses of the adolescent mentors. This shows an example of both parties benefiting from youth-to-youth mentorship.

DeBolt (1991) offers a different perspective for mentoring. Debolt (1991) examines mentorship as it relates to teachers mentoring newly employed teachers. During his examination of the role of mentorship in education as it relates to teaching, he outlines key theoretical frameworks that increase the effectiveness of mentorship in general. Although his topic of discussion does not directly include the mentorship of minority male youth, understanding the foundation and results of his analysis can assist in the structuring of effective mentorship programs in general as DeBolt (1991) provides a perspective of mentorship that also includes peer-to-peer mentorship. DeBolt (1991) investigates the existing programs that cater to the mentorship of newly employed teachers. During his investigation, he outlines necessary aspects of mentoring to be considered: 1) goals, 2) training of mentors, 3) support for mentors, and 4) identified strengths and weaknesses of each program. For goals, DeBolt describes the importance of outlining specific goals for an organization. These goals enable a program to establish strategies that would be geared toward the achievement of the specified goals, thereby creating a plan of attack that would increase the efficiency of the program and its success. The training or preparation of mentors is, according to DeBolt, essential to the success of a program and furthermore desired by mentors. Such preparation allows mentors practice with knowledge,

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skills, effective teaching practices, and conferencing skills. These examples provide mentors with more understanding of their roles as they relate to mentee youth.

Rationale for Study of Mentoring Programs

There have been a number of mentoring programs geared toward African American and Latino youth. Schools and communities have often worked together to create programs to enhance the educational outcomes of males of color. The literature available has documented the issues concerning African American and Latino males. The effects of mentoring programs on the academic success and social success of students are inconclusive. Furthermore, most of the programs developed for males of color are often not researched for their effectiveness. There are programs that have been shown to influence social success and increase the student's interest in school; however, the literature lacks substantial empirical evidence that demonstrates a direct correlation between a child's involvement in mentoring and an increase in grades and towards the success of students in the school. The literature is also inconclusive on whether same-gender and same-race mentoring programs have an influence on the students more than mixed-race/gender mentoring programs. The literature does suggest that mentoring programs have a role in some aspects of youth's perception of self and self-esteem. There is definitely a gap in the literature on the role that an ecologically structured mentoring program has on males of color.

This research will enhance the literature on the role of same race and same gender mentoring programs on the academic engagement and self-perception of African American and Latino males. This study will also enhance the literature on the role of school-based mentoring programs on students of color.

This study is intended to enhance current research on the influence of mentoring/youth development programs on African American males and also to illuminate an approach to mentoring that assists in the redirection of the negative trajectory that far too many African American males face. The dissertation was guided by this major question: How do high school males of color describe and make sense of their academic engagement in school and self-perception while participating in an ecologically structured, school-based mentoring program? The following research sub-questions further guided my dissertation research:

1. How do the high school males of color describe and understand their experience in a school-based mentoring program?

2. How do these males describe and understand their relationship with their college mentors and elementary-aged mentees?

3. How, if at all, does the ecological structure of the program shape these males' academic engagement and self-perception?

Definitions of Terms

Academic Engagement

A student's level of engagement in school is often a determinant factor in how academically successful he or she will be. Some of the high school males demonstrated very similar levels of academic engagement, while others demonstrated totally different levels. Jones (2009) defines academic engagement as the extent to which all learners are motivated and committed to learning, have a sense of belonging and accomplishment, and have relationships with adults, peers, and parents that support learning. I will use this definition as I discuss the academic engagement of the young men. It is also important to note that this academic

engagement is often measured using multiple tools like student surveys, standardized test scores, grades, etc. For the purposes of this study, I use data from the interviews, observations made in the program, students' attendance rates, and their grades to discuss their level of academic engagement.

Self-Perception

According to Manning (2007), the terms self-concept and self-esteem are often used interchangeably. They represent different but related constructs. Self-concept refers to a "student's perceptions of competence or adequacy in academic and nonacademic (e.g., social, behavioral, and athletic) domains and is best represented by a profile of self-perceptions across domains" (p.36). For this study, I define self-perception as a student's understanding, interpretation, and subsequent confidence in their academic and nonacademic knowledge, behavior, and self-worth.

CHAPTER 4

METHODS

This study seeks to understand how young high school males of color describe their experience in a gender focused and ecologically structured mentoring program through investigation of the following overarching research question: How do high school males of color describe and make sense of their academic engagement in school and self-perception while participating in an ecologically structured school based mentoring program? The research study draws on the experiences of the young males as both mentors and mentees in the program, through which I collected observations of them in both settings (as mentors and mentees), interviews, journal/reflective writings, and observations made outside of their role in the program.

Program Context and Research Site

The program takes place in a small Midwestern urban center of Jamesville. The school district has approximately 16, 000 students with a range of diversity both racially/ethnically and economically. The district has 25 elementary schools, four middle schools, three high schools, and two special-use facilities. The IMPACT Mentoring Program takes place in five of the district's elementary schools.

The participants of the program were all high school males of color from various schools in the local community. They were part of a larger research project that primarily focused on the academic and social disparities that exist among boys of color in K-12 schools. Project IMPACT is a research project that focuses on the academic and social success of boys of color in grades preK-3rd. This research project has three components: professional development for teachers, parent involvement, and mentoring.

The goal of Project IMPACT is to provide opportunities for males of color from preK-3rd grade to improve on their academic and social success in school. Hence the project provides professional development opportunities for teachers on best practices for teaching males of color, providing workshops and opportunities for parents to discuss their role in the success of young males of color, and ways parents and teachers can work together more effectively. The mentoring program provides opportunities for young high school males of color to work with teachers in the preK-3rd grade classrooms as mentors to the students whose parents elected to be a part of the research project.

During the summer month, college mentors, high school students and preK-2nd grade males of color were involved in a summer program. During the summer program the high school students worked in classrooms with teachers, and the college mentors served as both their immediate supervisors and mentors. A two-week mentor training for the high school students was developed that focused on job skills (dress, attendance, etc), working with younger kids, and mentoring. The high school students worked in the classroom fours days each week, with the fifth day tailored towards more professional and personal development activities, led by the college mentors. Over the course of the summer (two months) the high school and college mentors spent an average of 20 hours a week together. The program also continued throughout the school year. Appendix A includes the program expectations in the appendix section of the dissertation.

Mentors in the Program

There were a total of 18 high school mentors in the IMPACT mentoring program. They all ranged from the age of 14-18 and were students in grades 9-12 at the time of the study. Demographically, there were 15 African American and 3 Latino males. Most of them attended

public high schools in the city where the research took place. Two of them attended schools in nearby suburbs of the city, although their residence was within the city limits. The high school students were paid a modest amount for their participation in the program, not in the research.

Selection of Participants

There are a total of 18 African American and Latino high school males who are a part of the program. All of the young men were selected to be a part of the mentoring program based on at least one of the following requirements: Special education student, not living with biological parents, or low income; these requirements were set forth by those who fund the high school mentors (WIA and City of Jamesville Human Relations Dept). My study includes 10 participants. These 10 males were selected because they participated in the 2009 summer school component of the program and continued to be involved as mentors during the 2009-2010 school year.

The Participants

The 11 high school mentors that volunteered had to meet the following criteria: to be a high school male of color in grades (9-12); a minimum of one year participation in the mentoring program; and have participated in all of the mentor training sessions. A total of 18 young men in the program but only there were only 10 high school males that were eligible to participate in the study. In the end of the summer session of the program, I discussed my research project with all of the high school mentors to solicit their interest in the research project. At that time, I clearly stated to them that their participation or lack thereof would have no bearings on their position as a paid high school mentor in the program. I also made them aware of what would be required of them (potentially three interviews, observations in the after school mentoring program and the

Thursday training sessions, review of journal reflections, video recordings, etc.) that was noted in the consent form.

The participants' demographic (self-identified) makeup for this research was as follows: two Latino and eight African American males. Three of the participants were seniors; two of them were juniors; two of them sophomores; three were freshman. Eight out of the ten participants lives in a single-family household. The table below will illustrate the demographic information discussed above

For the ten participants in the study I do an in depth analysis of their experience in the program. In addition to what I mentioned previously, these 10 participants were chosen because they were all a part of the program for more than a year and they also offered some interesting/compelling insight into the lives of the young men in the program. Their stories illuminate some of the themes discovered during the data analysis. I was also very clear to them that their willingness or choice to remove themselves from the study at any time during the data collection process had no effect on their status in the program as mentors.

Research Methodology

Each of the proposed research questions, which guide and influence the design of this research, are connected to a layer of the conceptual framework. The proposed research questions are as follow:

1) How do high school males of color describe and understand their experience in a school-based mentoring program?

2) How do these males describe and understand their relationships with their college mentors and elementary-aged mentees?

3) How, if at all, does the ecological structure of the program shape these males' academic engagement and self-perception?

Based on my proposed research questions, a qualitative methodology allows me the opportunity to investigate in-depth the experiences of the participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Qualitative methodology is defined as a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Furthermore Denzin and Lincoln (2005) state, "qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world" (p.3). This research is an attempt to make sense of the experiences of the young men in the mentoring program and how their interactions and involvement in the mentoring program shape their self- perception and academic engagement in school.

This is an interview/observation study in which I focus on how the participants describe and understand their experiences in the Impact mentoring program. Creswell (1998) defines ethnography as a description and interpretation of a cultural, social group or system. In this study I am providing a thick description (Geertz, 1971) of a particular group of Black and Latino males of color in the midwestern town of Jamesville. With that, it is also important that the context in which these young men describe their experience be taken into consideration. Moreover, the data collection was a prolonged process that involved myself (the researcher) in a participant observation role at times. Creswell (1998) states, that ethnography as both a process and an outcome of research involves prolonged observation of the group, typically through participant observation in which the researcher is immersed in the day to day lives of the people or through one on one interviews with members of the group.

The use of interviews and observations as an aspect of qualitative research entails being able to participate "with" people and not "on" people to understand how they make meaning of situations, their culture, ideas, etc. Though I am focused on the high school mentor, this study

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involves me as I cannot write a study about these students' absolute reality without filtering it through my own perspective. Britzman writes, "research is about constructing particular versions of truth, questioning how regimes of truth become neutralized as knowledge, and thus pushing the sensibilities of readers in new directions" (2000, p. 38). Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw write, "the goal in fieldwork, then, is to generate theory that grows out of or is directly relevant to activities occurring in the setting under study" (1995, p. 167). They eschew the idea of grounded theory because they contend that at every stage of the ethnographic process, the researcher uses some theory to make some sort of sense of the situations. I recognize that the theories I hold about the world help construct what I observe in it and how I represent it.

Data Collection

Most of the data was collected on-site during the students' involvement in the mentoring program. The use of multiple sources of evidence allows for the development of converging lines of inquiry. The triangulation of the data allows for the findings or conclusion in this study to be more accurate and convincing, and helps to validate the research by providing multiple perspectives (Yin, 2003). The data sources include participant interviews, participant observations, participants' written work, and the Piers Harris scale that measures self-perception. In this section, I will discuss the rationale for using each and how I plan to use them.

In August 2009 I sent home consent forms. I also included a letter to the parents explaining the program and the research project. Most of the parents are familiar with the program from their son's previous experience in the program. I conducted three semi-structured interviews with the high school students that spanned across the academic school year August 2009-June 2010 (Seidman1998). Kvale (1996) contends that the "qualitative interview is a construction site of knowledge… an inter-change of views between two persons conversing

about a theme of mutual interest" (p.2). By having conversations with the participants about

certain topics/issues of our mutual interest at the time of the interview, I hoped to be able to

develop deeper understandings of the experiences of these young males of color. The semi-

structured interviews assisted in addressing all three of the research questions proposed. All of

the interviews took place at the elementary schools where the high school students were mentors

in. The following outlines the purpose of each interview and which research question(s) they

addressed.

Interview 1 (December 2009)
The first interview focused on student demographic information and how the students

perceive their academic engagement in school. This 30-45 minute interview addressed the

study's main research question: How do high school males of color describe and make sense of

their academic engagement in school and self-perception, while participating in an ecologically

structured school based mentoring program? Questions focused on the students schooling

experience, their thoughts about their academic ability and their home environment.

Interview 2 (April 2010)
This interview focused more on their thoughts and attitudes about the mentoring

program, its structure, and their relationships with the college mentors. The interview addressed

all three research questions. This interview also provided clarity and a more in-depth

understanding of some interactions that I observed at the mentoring site. The length of the

interview ranged from 45-min. to one hour.

Interview 3 (June 2010)
This 60-minute interview captured participants' experience in the program for the

academic year. It followed up on students' initial thoughts about their academic engagement and

self-perception, their thoughts about the structure of the mentoring program, their relationships

with the elementary aged mentees and their college mentors, and their overall thoughts about how, if at all, the structure of the program shaped their academic engagement and self perception.

Participant Observations (August 2009-June 2010)

The participant observations were another form of data collection used in this study. In the observations I looked for activities centered on the relationship building between the high school and college mentors. I also observed the overall structure of the program along with activities that promoted the academic and social success of Black and Latino males. I conducted three observations that were an hour long (thirty-six total) with each participant while they were working in the elementary schools as mentors/tutors of the younger students. These observations allowed me to observe the setting that the participants were in, what the environment was like, and how they behaved in another setting. In addition, it provided me with a sketch of their mentoring practices and interactions with the college mentors and elementary students. This was important to observe for any indication of how their interactions with the younger students may have influenced their own thoughts about school. I listened to things that they said to the younger (elementary) students and how it may or may not have translated into how they feel about or act in school. I took and organized the notes into fieldnotes that were coded, organized into themes and analyzed.

I also observed the high school students when they were all together on Thursdays during the study hall and mentor/tutor training. These observations gave me insight into how the high school students' involvement in the mentoring program was (not) shaping their thoughts about school and their academic engagement and self-perception. The high school males were also part of discussions centered on academic engagement in school, social and political issues in

school and society, and other topics of interest to them. These discussions also provided insight into how they perceived of themselves, schooling and other issues that may affect their self-perception. I kept notes and videotaped these discussions. The videos were used to capture the dialogue and used as another set of eyes for me as the researcher. I reviewed the videotapes and made observation notes from them. The videotapes were used to analyze the dialogue that occurred during the discussions between the college and high school students. It was also important for me to examine their relationship and interactions with their peers.

Student Documents Collection

I also collected students' journals and other written materials they produced as part of the program. The college mentors or program manager initiated the journals before or after a group discussion. These journals were often used to help the young men brainstorm ideas or concepts that were discussed in the group. The journals were viewed by the college mentors and program manager often to gain a greater understanding of how the high school students were thinking about certain issues. The students were often involved in group conversations about topics like schooling, race, gender, issues facing Black and Latino males, etc., and they wrote reflections following those conversations. So in addition to the videotape of these conversations, I had written documents to analyze as well. The students often shared things in their journals or written assignments that they did not share in the conversations, the interviews, or demonstrate during the observations that I conducted.

Data Analysis

I analyzed the interviews, observations, and the documents (journals, reflective writing, etc.) of each individual participant. The notes taken during the observations became field notes and were analyzed and coded for themes that are similar or different from those created from the interviews. I first conducted open coding, reading through all of the data and analyzing it based

on its content (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, 1995).   I read all texts, tagging data with codes that reflect possible analytic categories. From the initial reading of the data I began to create memos recording my impressions, issues and more importantly, themes that emerge through the open coding process. Some potential themes included the role of the college mentors, the influence of the structure of the program on their thoughts about school, their academic engagement, etc. After the initial reading, I reread the texts and initial memos with my research questions in mind to identify major themes. Then I grouped the major themes from this second reading of the data and conducted a more focused coding based on the themes that emerged.   From there I wrote integrative memos to link data together and understand themes more deeply between participants, to check for commonalities.

   I used the data analysis tool Atlas TI to analyze my data as I have listed above.   I examined each interview (interviews 1-3) individually and then looked for common themes within and across participants. These themes became a part of my overall analysis and interpretation of how the participants understood and described their experiences. Some of the themes are below. I refer to some of them as claims in subsequent chapters.

- The academic expectations and inquiry set forth by the mentoring program staff gave the high school students the support needed to develop an increased desire to do well in school.

- The various schooling experiences and home environments yielded various academic identities amongst the high school students.

- The various activities that occurred at the mesosystem (work with preK-3rd grade students), level of the program facilitated the increase in academic engagement.

- The role and interactions with college mentors and program manager and program director influenced how the young men perceived themselves as young men of color.

- The various activities that occurred at the exo- and meso- levels influence their thoughts about themselves. (current selves v. possible selves)

- The high school students' role as mentees helped to give the high school students an awareness of the importance of helping others and giving back to their community.

- The development of positive male relationships (text, outings, phone calls) with other high school mentors and program staff helped to facilitate a family-like environment for the young men that gave them a sense of belonging that they may have not received in other settings (school and community).

- The activities that occurred at the exo- and macro- levels (the creed, trips, community assignments) of the program helped the young men to think about their roles as young boys and future men in society and potential future fathers.

Table 1 illustrates how the questions, conceptual framework, and analytical strategy match the method that I used to collect the data. The table also shows what level of the conceptual framework the question addresses. The conceptual framework informed my data analysis. Each of the research questions asks about a particular aspect of the program's ecological system. Therefore the data that I analyzed gave me information about how each of the particular systems function, and their influence, if any, on the high school students' academic engagement and self-perception. As I analyzed the data, the information was categorized based on where it fits on the conceptual framework. So data that stems from a particular level of the system was coded and analyzed as a part of that system and what direct or indirect influence, if any, it had on the high school student. I chose to only use data from the interviews and observations (field notes) in the write up of this dissertation because the themes from the observations and interviews were more salient. Furthermore, the students often repeated things they shared in their journals that they discussed in group discussions and their individual interviews

Table 1. Research Methods

Question	Method	Whom	Analytical Strategy	Conceptual Framework
How do high school males of color describe and make sense of their academic engagement in school and self-perception while participating in an ecologically structured school based mentoring program?	Interview 1 and Observations Document Analysis	High school mentors	Transcribe interviews and create field notes from observation. Code and develop themes	Micro, meso, exo, and macro levels.
How do the high school males of color describe and understand their experience in a school-based mentoring program?	Interview 1 and 3 Observations Document Analysis	High school students	Transcribe interviews and create field notes from observation. Code and develop themes	Exo, meso and micro levels
How do these males describe and understand their relationship with their college mentors and elementary-aged mentees?	Interview 2 Observations as mentors and mentees Document Analysis	High school mentors	Transcribe interviews and create field notes from observation. Code and develop themes	Meso and micro levels
How, if at all, does the ecological structure of the program shape these males' academic engagement and self-perception?	Interviews 1 and 3 Document Analysis	High school mentors, college mentors and program manager.	Transcribe interviews and create field notes from observation. Code and develop themes	Macro and micro level

Complexity of My Role

In this study, I am the program's director and the researcher. These dual roles are something that I was aware of and thus prepared myself for accordingly. The dual role that I served had its challenges and advantages. When I initially began the solicitation of participants, I was the mentoring program's director. Once the research data collection process started, I was strictly the researcher. The program's manager took on the responsibilities as the program director as I conducted the research. This meant that I did not take part in the daily decision making process nor did I take on any responsibilities with the payroll as I had in the past. Although I am aware that the students probably still saw me as the director of the program, I tried to be as deliberate as possible about my role as the researcher. When I was there to simply observe the high school students were aware of that and I was left alone to do just that. As I observed them, I often reiterated to them my role as the researcher and not the program director. I was not there to evaluate them but to learn from them.

One of the advantages that I had as the researcher was establishing trust and a comfort level with the students. They were very comfortable with me and willing to be as honest as possible about their feelings and ideas. I did not have to spend time building relationships with the participants or asking for permission to be a part of their culture. I was already in.

I do understand that I am a male of color conducting research on males of color, so I do have a particular lens that I am bringing to my interpretation of the data. However, because I was aware of this as a researcher I made sure to ask clarifying questions to the participants during interviews. I was also involved in valuable program for young men when I was in the 8th grade and I understand how important mentoring could be if it is implemented in a structured way. The program that I was involved with was crucial for me at the time because I needed male

role models due to the absence of my father in the home. My personal experience may have influenced my desire to be involved in this program and I took the necessary steps to guard against that as a researcher.

Validity

Although issues of validity may be of concern, I have addressed this issue in my study by developing a research design supported by Creswell (1998) that allows for the following; prolonged engagement and persistent observation- (observations that occur over an extended period of time one academic school year; triangulation-the use of multiple data collection methods (field observations, multiple interviews, and document analysis); peer review and debriefing (committee members input into the progress and direction of the study). Clarification of researcher bias is also addressed. I have been very reflective about my role as researcher and carefully monitored this throughout the study. It is also important to note that most of the activities that were observed for the study were conducted by the college mentors and/or the program manager. I also had a volunteer conduct the first set of interviews with each participant. After I observed each activity there was a debriefing session with either the college mentors or the program manager to share my thoughts and what I observed that particular day. Member checking-I also shared some preliminary thoughts about the interviews, transcripts, analytical thoughts and thoughts about themes that I noticed with all of the participants to make sure I represented them and their ideas accurately. Finally, I used multiple methods of data collection to ensure that I obtained multiple viewpoints and perspectives on what I was observing and interpreting.

Chapter 5

The Home and School Environment

Chapter 4 examines how two of the settings (home environment and school environment) in each of the high school students' ecology influence their orientation toward school and their self-perceptions. A "thick" description is provided of their home environments (relationship with parents, parents' level of school involvement, etc..) and some of their personal experiences in school. Furthermore, I suggest that the home environment influences how they interact with and make sense of their school setting. Subsequently, both experiences have a direct influence on how the students view themselves and their academic capabilities.

A child's home environment is at the core of his/her ecological system (Brofenbrenner, 1979). The home is just one of the settings of the microsystem. What is performed and learned in the home will likely have implications for a child's self-perception and how they interact in school and in the community. Furthermore, the child's school and community are also micro-level settings in a child's ecological system. Like Brofenbrenner (1979), I argue that the home has the most immediate influence on the child and thus influences how they interact with people and those entities that make up the other settings. The school would be the second most influential setting in a child's ecological system. The school and home are the two places where a child learns most of their initial values; manners; thoughts and understanding of themselves; work ethic and initial perceptions of the world around them.

In this chapter, I provide an in-depth description of the high school male mentors. All of the young men have unique qualities that had been cultivated and molded by their home and school experiences. Each of the high school students had various elements in their home environment that significantly influenced how they engaged in school. Their home environment

influenced their commitment to school, the value and level of work ethic they put into school, how they perceived themselves academically and their role in society as young men. Additionally, the school environment and the experiences that many of the students had in school further shaped their thoughts about self and school. With that, the following claim will be discussed:

Claim 1: The home and school settings in the students' micro-system level of their ecology shaped their orientation toward school and how they perceived their role as young men.

In each student's home setting there are particular elements that impact that home environment.[1] The level of education that a parent(s) has, the marital status of a parent, the level of work that a parent has, the kind of neighborhood they reside in, all directly influence a child's home environment. Additionally, what school a child attends, its resources, level of teacher quality and commitment, and parent involvement, among other things, impact the kind of schooling experiences a child may have (Anyon 2005; Noguera 2003). In this section, I provide an account of how each high school student describes and perceives his home and school settings.

Alonzo Martinez[1] is a 15-year old Hispanic male who had been in the program for 15 months at the time of the study. He lived at home with his mom and stepfather and two other siblings in a working class community. His family emigrated from Mexico, and they were working toward acquiring American citizenship. Alonzo wasn't sure if his biological dad was living in Mexico or California at the time and he had very little communication with him. For Alonzo this lack of communication with his biological dad didn't seem to bother him much, because he was young when he last saw his dad. He also referred to his stepfather as his dad, although they didn't have a very strong relationship. "My step-dad is the father figure in our

house but I really don't look up to him or anything. Our mom is who we really listen to. Well, I do look up to my grandfather a lot" (Interview 1, December 2009). Although there is a male figure in the house, his role in Alonzo's life is limited and he considers his mom to be the primary caregiver and authority figure in the home. Alonzo's home setting lacks a strong male presence. However, he did acknowledge having a strong respect for his grandfather who lives in a different state and visits infrequently. The most impressionable element of his home environment was the lack of a strong male role model. This lack influenced Alonzo's self-perception and often disturbed him:

> Man it would be nice to have more positive male role models around me. Sometimes I want to hear from other males about how it feels to be a man, or what it takes to be a man. I mean I love my mom but she can't teach me that. She can only tell me what she thinks. And I don't talk to my step-dad about that at all, so I am out here learning it on my own I guess (Interview 1, December 2009).

Alonzo believed that he was learning how to be a man on his own. More importantly, his statement above illustrates a desire to find other conceptions of manhood, other than what he knows. He recognized that his mother could not provide this conception for him and that he has to resort to self-help to shape his perceptions of the world and his place in it. Although his brother Juan was only two years older than him, Alonzo found some refuge and identity in their relationship. He often followed the lead of his older brother, which didn't always have positive outcomes. His actions as a young teenager were being guided and motivated by another teenager who also lacked effective guidance. His older brother Juan engaged in criminal behavior and was disconnected from the school setting. As a result of following his brother, Alonzo was no stranger to trouble. Likewise, Alonzo's perception of manhood centered on getting into fights and finding ways to survive:

> Me and my brother got into a lot with people around the community. We had to stand up for ourselves. I always knew my brother had my back. I mean we did some things that we shouldn't have but hey what other choice did we have. I mean you have to survive.

Alonzo, with the guidance and leadership of his brother (his only conception of manhood), developed this survival mode mentality that is often associated with young men who come from homes that lack strong father figures (Ferguson, 2001; Kunjufu 2003; Lareau 2003). Alonzo constructed, with the guidance of his brother, that to be a man you needed to be able to protect yourself. To be a man was to be tough and emanate a strong attitude toward others so that he has a tough image that people would respect (Ferguson 2001). This tough image allows him to behave in a manly way. This conception of manhood influenced his self-perception. Alonzo often stated: "I am a young man and working towards being a man, so to me being tough and standing up for yourself is what I have to be right now." For him it was more important to be tough and to have that image than anything else at the time. He perceived himself to be a young man who had to protect himself and be tough to be respected. This conception was influenced by his lack of guidance (father figure) from his home setting, coupled with the culture of his community, a poor and often violent neighborhood.

Alonzo's home setting had an influence on his orientation toward school. His family's economic struggles forced him to prioritize what was important to him.

> We had to help our mom out…I mean she struggled a lot and so we didn't want to ask her for things because we didn't want to stress her out so we got it ourselves. I needed to make sure I did what I needed to do to help out or at least not have her worry about looking out for me (Interview 1, December 2009).

There were times when his step-dad was the only person with a job in the household. As a result, Alonzo's schooling was not of primary importance, creating a livelihood to help his family was. Consequently, this influenced his orientation towards school and he increasingly

focused on ways to help his mother rather than focus on school. School became a secondary concern to him and it was evident in his grades and attendance. Scholars have argued that for many youth whose family struggles to meet the necessary requirements of survival (food and shelter), school becomes a secondary concern for the children (Ram and Hou, 2003; Ream and Rumberger, 2008; Simons-Morton and Rusan, 2009).

Another element of his home setting that affected his orientation toward school was his native language. Most of the language spoken at home was Spanish and Alonzo often talked about how it was difficult transitioning back and forth between speaking English at school and speaking Spanish at home. Alonzo talked about how when his family first came to the United States that he felt awkward in school because he would always have to take a test to see how well he spoke English.

He talked about how he felt embarrassed because he was always pulled from class to work with an assistant. "I felt embarrassed to get pulled out of class all the time to get help, I felt like I didn't need the help but no one seemed to hear me." Feeling embarrassed affected his confidence in school. "I started to feel a little dumb in school, didn't think I could do anything. I mean I was treated that way by the teachers sometimes. Then I couldn't come home and get help from my parents because they really couldn't speak English." For Alonzo his environment in school and home didn't paint a very promising academic future; he was losing confidence in his academic ability and couldn't find refuge at home because of the language barrier that existed between the school and his home. His parents' primary focus as working class immigrants coming to this country was to try and establish stability and familiarize themselves with being in a new place. Not to place sole blame on the parents for their lack of awareness or ability to help

Alonzo, the two settings (home and school) that exist at the micro-level didn't provide him with the support he needed to do well in school; consequently his attendance and grades were poor.

This illustrates an example of how Alonzo's family environment influenced his schooling experience. At no fault of his parents, the dominant language at home is Spanish; however, in school it is English. Scholars like Delpit (1988) and Ladson-Billings (1999) discuss the disconnection between the home and school environments for children. Delpit (1988) raised the need to value the culture and home language of students, while teaching them the dominant language. For Alonzo, this appeared not to be the case. This disconnect or lack of interaction between the two settings caused some disconnect and assisted in the facilitation of an apathetic disposition toward school:

> I wanted to give up in school. It was frustrating for me. I felt like school was a waste of time. I didn't feel a connection with school and I was getting tired of it. It was very tough for me to study or do anything. And then when I get to school they treat me like I am different. I got tired of taking those test every year to prove myself. I just didn't care anymore (Interview 1, December 2009).

Alonzo's apathetic disposition towards school developed because he lacked support from home due to his parents' primary focus on survival, the low level of academic support they showed, and the lack of social and academic support that the school did not provide for him. Alonzo stated, "My mom did what she could do, she was learning the language too, so she couldn't help me much in school and I didn't want to bother her much because she had enough to worry about" (Interview 1, December 2009). The language barrier earlier in his schooling experience arguably created the disconnection and isolation that he discussed. His lack of support and disconnect with both the school and lack of support from his home environment created Alonzo's apathetic disposition toward school.

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Alonzo's experiences in school also influenced his lack of confidence in school. The language barrier and lack of support from school personnel negatively impacted his confidence and as a result his academic aptitude suffered greatly. Most notably, Alonzo identified his lack of confidence in school during the middle school years. Likewise, his focus on providing financial support for his family was perpetuated by his academic struggles. For him it became logical to focus on the family's financial struggles rather than on improving his grades. In addition, his conception of manhood as portrayed in the home setting was further perpetuated by his school setting:

> I had to go to school or I would get in trouble. It was something that I did but I also knew I wasn't learning much some of the time. So like some of the other students I didn't take school serious…I wasn't focused it was a time for me to hang out with friends (Interview 1, 2009).

Although he was required to go to school, he consciously acknowledged his deficiencies in school. Instead of trying to do well in school, his degree of apathy forced him to focus more on his image in school rather than his academics. He was more concerned with the young ladies he could attract, or how tough or cool he seemed than what with school. His frustrations with academic failure and discontent within the home setting pushed Alonzo to spend his required school time (mandated by law) focused on his image—his concoction of manhood—something he felt more comfortable about. Like so many males who see themselves at or near the bottom academically, they find other ways to cope with school (Gause, 2005). Gause (2005) discusses how some males find ways to cope with their academic deficiencies by focusing on things that they feel more confident about. Further, scholars (Connor, 2005 and Kirkland & Jackson, 2009) contend that acting cool is often associated with a self-dignified expression of masculinity. Although Alonzo was a Latino male, this characterization and explanation of acting cool seemed

applicable to him as well. For Alonzo, his image was something he felt he had some confidence in; therefore he focused more on that rather than on doing well in school.

Juan Martinez is 17 years old and lives with his mother and stepfather. Juan is an immigrant from Mexico and is working, along with his parents and other siblings, toward acquiring United States citizenship. Juan is the older brother of Alonzo and since they lived in the same household some of the things stated here may seem repetitive. Juan is very fluent in both Spanish and English. He has been in this country for a few years now. Juan has bounced around from school to school. He was failing all of his classes, was suspended on a weekly basis at school, and was heading toward repeating the 9th grade. He is currently two grade levels behind boys his age. The fact that he was two grade levels behind didn't seem to bother him at all. In one of the interviews conducted, when he was asked how he felt about being two years behind those his age in school, he replied: "You know I don't really think about that, imma get finish when I do. I don't compare myself to other people or even let what they are doing or not doing bother me." Juan displayed this "I don't care" attitude when it came to his academics. Juan's attitude was very similar to his brother Alonzo and this is no surprise. As I stated earlier about his brother Alonzo, Juan was the catalyst for some of his younger brother's attitudes.

As noted earlier, in this family school is not the primary focus. Juan and Alonzo's mother wanted them to do well in school, but she had other pressing concerns like the family's financial stability. This supports scholars such as Anyon (2005), who contends that parents in poor families are struggling to make ends meet at home and are incapable of providing the kind of guidance to help their children navigate through school successfully. Likewise, because these parents exhaust so much energy in maintaining multiple low-wage jobs, they lack the time and aptitude to help their children with academic complexities. Subsequently, this family's main

focus and priority was economic survival. Juan felt it was important that he contribute

financially around the house as opposed to making the honor roll for academic achievement.

While I am not concluding that his family didn't want him to do well in school and would likely

be delighted if he did, in this family it was more important to survive financially rather than

thrive academically. Although there was an older male present in the home he was not perceived

to be a leader or an authority figure. As a result, Juan internalized his role as the oldest sibling to

be the one whom the family would count on for financial assistance as well as identify with as

the man of the house. He often talked about how he had to be there for his mother and that he

had to be sure he protected the family. He also felt it was his responsibility now as the oldest

child to contribute financially to the household:

> I have to be the one helping out around the house more. It's more important for
> me to bring money in the house and I had to find ways to do that, so I started
> doing a bunch of other illegal things to find ways to get money. It was something
> that I felt I needed to do, and sometimes school would be the last thing on my
> mind (Interview 1, December, 2009).

Juan goes into an explanation of his reasons for not caring much about school in the

aforementioned excerpt. This statement is important because often times students who show no

interest in school would get labeled as bad, troubled, and/or lazy students, however Juan is none

of these. He wants to take care of his family first and complete dedication to school will not

produce the immediate financial returns needed to provide for a family. He struggled with

identifying how academic success today could improve his future financial status; most notably

he was more concerned about his present financial state. Juan was compelled to be the financial

provider more than the student. His disinterest in school was not as much because he didn't see

any value in school, rather, it was more important to be the provider at home. Instead of going

home to do homework, he went home to find ways to provide for his family, albeit legally or

illegally. This created a quandary for Juan because he knew school was important but that the

financial struggles in his home were of more importance. Moreover, instead of going to school

and doing his work in school, his disinterest led him to focus more on what Alonzo focused on—

his construction of manhood. Like his brother, Juan was more focused on showing his toughness

in school, which led to multiple fights and long-term suspensions.

> I got into a lot of fights in school. I didn't let anyone mess with me or my
> brother. When they messed with my brother they were messing with me. My
> brother was smaller than me so people would mess with him before me, but then
> when they messed with Alonzo, that meant I was involved. It was something I
> had to do to protect my family. No one would get away with messing with my
> family, not in school or in my neighborhood (Interview 1, December 2009).

When asked later in the interview why he felt he needed to protect the entire family, he stated: "I

have to be the man of the house. Nobody else can do it, so I need to" (Interview 1, 2009). Juan

seemed to have constructed what it means to be the man of the house. As a Latino male this

construction of manhood or masculinity (machismo[1]) that Juan displayed is not uncommon in

Latino culture. Sue and Sue (2003) argue that the characteristics associated with machismo are

equated with strength, male dominance, and being a successful provider and protector (10). Juan

felt he needed to be the financial provider, protector, and tough one in the family.

Beyond the influence of the home setting, the school setting also influenced his self-

perception. Juan, like his younger brother, Alonzo, lacked significant confidence in his

academic capabilities. I have addressed how the home setting influences the school setting, but

independent school experiences also contributed to Juan's disinterest in school.

> I think I can be successful in school if I tried hard enough. But I think that's me
> trying to hype myself up. I ain't never really did, so I do doubt whether I can do
> it. I mean that might be part of my problem that I really don't think I can do it. I
> mean I don't have an interest in it, but there is also something deep down that
> makes me believe I couldn't do it…I mean I really don't want to be seen as a
> school boy anyway. I just don't think that's me. I need to make that money right

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now and school ain't bringing that money like I need right now. The teachers don't really care, nobody tries to help you, so you are on your own anyway. Hey, if they don't care about teaching, why should I care about learning in their classroom? I can do it on my own. I mean I know school is important but I ain't never did well in it so I might need to try something else and just do it myself (October 2009).

Juan was very honest about his problem in school and what that meant for him. His statements above illustrate his lack of confidence in his academic ability and his disinterest in performing due to other external factors. Although he initially stated that he could do well in school, he later discussed his doubt. Since he has never done well in school, he truly doubted his potential to improve. Juan also points out the disinterest he thinks teachers show in his school. Based on Juan's account, a disinterested and disengaged teacher also contributed to his need to disconnect with school. He felt they didn't care, so why should he? He felt his time would be better spent learning on his own. Noguera (2003) reveals that some teachers in poor urban schools possess the same dispositions as Juan describes. Unfortunately, many students who feel marginalized often find themselves like Juan—disinterested, which leads many to drop out (Noguera 2003; David 2004). Furthermore, his frequent suspensions and trouble, in and out of school, created a lack of confidence that affected his self-perception and ultimately his tenacity to succeed in school and life.

Juan: I like who I am but I think I might just drop out of school and get my GED.

Interviewer: So why do you feel like you should drop out of school?

Juan: Because I think it is going to be hard for me to catch up and I am starting to think that I can't catch up anyway. I mean school isn't for everyone anyway so maybe I should just drop out anyway. I mean I was suspended so much that I spent more time out of school than I did in school. I often wondered is my life one full of trouble.

Interviewer: Why would you say that your life is full of trouble?

Juan: Well because I think it is. Like I said I always get in trouble inside and outside of school, so you start to think that's just who you are…a troublemaker.
Interviewer: How much of it do you think you control?

Juan: Well I have some control over it but I honestly think people just start to think that I am a troublemaker and begin to treat me that way. It's like once I got in trouble the first time people expect you to all the time. That begins to wear on you a little, almost made me want to get in trouble because its what people thought of me…expected me to be. I sometimes wonder if I would just get in trouble all my life.

Juan's internal conflict that he has between what he thinks people perceive him to be and who he thinks he is creates a very conflictive notion of his self perception. He started to see himself as a troublemaker. He started to take ownership of that idea and believed that was who he had become and probably would be for the rest of his life. He did not show pride in this but instead it was as if he had surrendered to what he felt his life had become.

Juan's attitude toward school was created partly by his home environment and school experiences. His parents' lack of support was not because they didn't care but because they were forced by other factors such as the language barrier, cultural differences between home and school, and their focus on economic survival. Consequently, this created a home environment for both Alonzo and Juan that focused primarily on providing the necessary things needed to survive. Additionally, the lack of support that they received from school, resulted in Alonzo feeling isolated and Juan did not internalize nor could he articulate how school would benefit him in the long-term.   These dispositions were often characterized as apathetic however they were premised upon the mere notion of survival. In summary, Alonzo and Juan's home and school settings of their micro-system ecological level contributed to their disinterested orientation towards school, it further influenced how they perceived themselves.

Ben Miles is a 16-year-old African American young male who was in the 10th grade at the time of this study. Ben lives with his mother and younger siblings. Ben and his mother have

a pretty good relationship. He often praises her for raising him without his father's assistance

and how much that makes her a special person to him. Ben often talked about how he receives

great support and encouragement from his mother and other family members. To the contrary,

he often discussed his discontent with his father. "I am really trying my best everyday not to be

like him. He is really not a good man. He hasn't really been there for me that much, and I don't

understand why." In this statement Ben expresses anger with his dad for not being there for him.

The idea that he does not want to be like him illuminates the degree to which Ben does not care

for his dad. In other conversations about his dad, Ben would never have anything positive to say

about his dad and a repeating theme around that conversation would be his efforts to not be like

him:

> My role model is my mother. I mean that's who I have. I don't feel bad for
> myself, I mean after awhile you get use to it. My mom teaches me what I need to
> know. My father bailing out on us makes me a better man. I want to be a better
> man. It would be nice of course to have a father figure at home but hey I can
> learn that on my own. I mean I am sure there will be people in my life that would
> help me with learning what it means to be a man. I sort of already know, my
> mom talks to me about all the time (pause)…I mean sometimes I think to myself -
> like mom how do you know how to be a man, you are a woman, but hey I guess
> she does (pause)…she is the man and woman of the house and now I have to be
> more of a man of the house now since I am getting older (Interview 1, December,
> 2009).

Ben talks about his mother as his role model and how she has taught him things about being a

man. He does question her ability to do that as a woman, but he realizes that she has performed

both the mother and father role in the household. Jackson and Scheines (2005) discuss how

single mothers often have to perform the role of mother and father when there isn't a male

present in the home. This family dynamic has motivated him to step into the man of the house

role although it may likely be earlier than his present capabilities. While his home environment

is a supportive one, the lack of a father figure has notably impacted his self-perception at his

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current age of 16. He conceptualized his role as the man in the house as the protector. He

subconsciously feels the pressure of taking on the role that his father would have performed had

he remained in the home. Unlike Juan and Alonzo, Ben did not feel the need to take on the

financial responsibilities but he did internalize the role of protector.

> I have to make sure I step up to protect those that I love. Since I am the oldest
> male in the house, I have to make sure I protect the house. If someone is messing
> with my young siblings or mother, I have to be there to protect them (September
> 2009).

As the oldest male in the home, Ben embraces the responsibility of being the protector and feels

the need to protect his family. Conversely, in a two-parent household this is the role of the

father. However, since Ben's family lacked this dynamic he embraced the role of protector.

"Hey, I am becoming a man quick, but it's okay…I like it" (Interview 1, December 2009).

For Ben, this role of the protector doesn't have a negative affect on his school

experiences. He separated the two and acknowledged that while he was the protector at home, in

school he was expected to be the best student he could be.   As a result, he attended school

regularly and excelled academically. Ben knew good grades were something he had to maintain

because it was something his mom expected and monitored often. "I know if I don't get good

grades my mom was going to kick my butt" (Group Discussion, October, 2009). He has the

support at home therefore he doesn't have to infuse himself totally in the role of being the male

figure at home. Likewise, because his mother can financially support the family, Ben is able to

focus more on being a successful student. His mother has been involved in his academics since

he was in elementary school.   Unlike most parents, her level of engagement did not dwindle as

Ben reached the middle school years. Kunjufu (1990), Neblett and Chavous (2009), and other

scholars have found that parents become less involved in their student's education (attending

parent/teacher conferences, assisting with homework, etc.) once they reach middle school. Ben's

mother was at all his of parent/teacher conferences and made frequent visits to the school to

check on his progress.

Ben's entire schooling experience has been as a special education student. Most of his

core classes (math and language arts) were in special education. He was a very diligent student,

who often talked about the importance of doing well in school and how he really strives to get

good grades. He articulated these perceptions in our first interview together.

CL: Do you like school?

Ben: I really like school, it's fun to me.

CL: What makes school fun? Or enjoyable?

Ben: Well I like my teachers and my friends at the school. They are all nice to me and my
teachers want me to do well.

CL: So, how do you think teachers, and other school personnel view you as a student?

Ben: Well, let me see (pause)…I think they think I am a good student, that I work very hard and
I treat others like I want to be treated. The teachers and principal always tell me that I work very
hard in class and that I'm a positive student in the school.

CL: What makes them think that you are a positive student?

Ben: I don't cause trouble, I am helpful…almost like the teacher's pet (laughing). But seriously I
take school serious, I come to school ready to handle business, its something that I am motivated
to do. I am disappointed when I don't do well in school, so getting high marks-I mean high
grades is a must for me.

CL: Where does all the motivation to do well come from?

Ben: Well my moms want me to do well and I don't want to disappoint her. Plus I always
wanted to do well, I want to be seen as a smart kid and smart kids get good grades.

Unlike the young men I have discussed so far in this chapter, Ben's experiences with teachers

have been very positive. He received the support he needed in school from his teachers,

counselors, and other school personnel. Ben discussed that he is motivated to do well because of

his mother and himself, examples of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. His grades throughout the program hovered around a 3.0. He also took a lot of pride in being a smart student. This is contrary to a lot of the literature that talks about how African American students, specifically males, often try to avoid the stigma of being smart because it's considered by their peers to be "acting White" or not acting "Black." Ogbu and Fordham (1986) highlight the issue that many high achieving African Americans face in school when they are accused of "acting White." They contend that African Americans who want to do well in school are often accused by other African Americans of "acting White" and this stigma alone can deter some African Americans from performing well in school; however, Ben was more excited about being a high achieving African American student. The support and encouragement he received from his home and school setting of the ecological micro-system afforded him specific confidences that students like Juan and Alonzo lacked.

Likewise, Ben had confidence in his academic ability to do well in school and perceived himself to be an intelligent and capable young man and his school and home settings helped to cultivate that belief. Ben wanted to be known as an intelligent African American male. His motivated and high achieving orientation toward school propelled him to succeed in school. Scholars (Conchas, 2006 and Thompson, 2007) who have studied high achieving African American students suggest that common predictors among high achieving African American students are their positive outlook, supportive home and school environment, and high academic confidence. Ben often discussed how he wanted to go to college as well. He received a two-year scholarship to use at the local community college upon his completion of high school. In the same interview, Ben talked about how receiving this scholarship really gave him something to look forward to. Although Ben did not articulate how the scholarship influenced his motivation

to do well in school, he implicitly stated on a number of occasions that he was excited about attending the local community college.

For Ben his home and school settings provided him the support he needed to excel academically. Contrary to other subjects in this program, Ben's home and school micro-level settings were supportive. And a result, they provided him with the needed to engage and perform well in school. Although, Ben took on the role of the protector and lacked a male in the home to identify with, this didn't negatively impact his school setting because his mother and the school setting were very supportive. Furthermore, unlike many other African American males who receive special education services, Ben was grateful for the support and encouragement because it gave him the motivation to succeed.

Darnell Davis is a 17-year-old African American male who lived with his mother and one other sibling. He was the second of three born to his mother and father. He lived in a working class community that he often would describe as "bad." Darnell felt that his mother and grandmother were very supportive of him. He didn't talk much to his father, so his mother was the primary caregiver. He had a pretty volatile relationship with his father. Darnell often discussed his discomfort with the relationship.

CL: Who do you think supports and encourages you to do well in school and in life?

Darnell: My mom, and other family members support, pretty much the family on my mom side.

CL: Why do you say only those on your mother side of the family supports you?

Darnell: Well because my dad side of the family is whack. I mean I don't talk to my dad much and when we do, he talks about what he wants to do and of course he never follows through on anything. I get tired of that (pause)….I mean he then have the nerve to get mad at me when I don't call him. (laughing) (pause). I mean he is my dad he should be calling me. That's why I don't trust people now. It's hard for me to do that…I can't trust my own dad.

This relationship with his father plays a role with how Darnell thinks of himself. He struggles to trust people and also takes awhile to relax and get comfortable with people. Later in that dialogue he talked about how this relationship with his father pushes him to be more to be a better person. It also causes him to struggle to find a sense of who he is:

> I mean not having a father at home you are around your mother all the time, so you don't really know what it means to be a man, what that might look like. So I guess, but I really don't know. I am not as confident when it comes to that. I will learn by doing the opposite of what my father did (September 2009).

Darnell was not sure what his conception of manhood was. He was around his mother and grandmother a lot as a teenager and was searching for what it would mean for him to act like a young man. Since he struggled to trust people, especially other men due to his relationship with his father, it was difficult for him to learn from other men who were around him. "I have uncles that are around but I don't really want to deal with them" (Interview 1, December, 2009). Instead, he is willing to guess what manhood is based on what his father failed to do. As such, his conception of manhood would be what his father is not. The problem with that approach for Darnell is the fact that he measures his father's inadequacies based on what his own ideas of fatherhood are. He felt his father was irresponsible, so Darnell wanted to do all he could to be a responsible adult. He worked very hard to take care of his responsibilities.   For him to be responsible meant to find a job and be independent. His lack of a father figure pushed him to become more responsible and independent. He did not have the desire like Ben to be a protector, and he didn't take on the responsibility of being the man of the house or the financial provider like Juan and Alonzo. On the contrary, he equated manhood with independence and self-sufficiency. Although he conceptualized his idea of manhood, his lack of a positive relationship with his dad made him reluctant to open up to others. As a result, he was shy and soft spoken when communicating with unfamiliar people.

While Darnell's mother generally supported him in school, she did not consistently encourage him to achieve academic excellence. For example, as long as he stayed out of trouble in school and in the neighborhood she was fine:

> I mean my mom was supportive of me in school, but she didn't push me hard to do my best. So I didn't push myself hard. My dad never asked when I did talk with him so it was up to me to push myself…and for the most part I didn't do that (Interview 1, December 2009).

He acknowledges his mother's support but also recognizes that her support was a basic general notion—stay out of trouble. Since Darnell was shy and liked to stay to himself this was not a difficult task. Therefore, he attended school when he waned to and did the bare minimum to receive passing grades. He was not highly motivated or encouraged to do much beyond that at home.

Darnell's lack of self-confidence was portrayed in his school experiences. He discussed how he never really raised his hand in class or participated in class discussions. Instead he would sit in the back of the class and be quiet. He was not engaged in school and lacked motivation. This lack of participation in school can be contributed to his lack of confidence as well as earlier childhood experiences in the home setting:

> I can remember being a little boy and when I was little with my dad and mom, I remember when my mom would leave to go live with my grandmother because her and my dad would argue. Well when we were left with him, he never made us go to school. I remember missing almost a month in school. Me and my brother would just sit around the house watching TV and school was never something we had to think about. It almost ruined my 3rd grade…. Because of this experience I was tested for special education because I had missed so much class and gotten so behind they thought I had a learning problem. Before I took the test in 4th grade I was put into a classroom (pause) well I don't think it was a special education room but I know it wasn't a lot of kids in the room and I would get some extra help from a teacher's aide. I didn't qualify for special education but the teacher told my mom that I was a little behind since I wasn't in school for awhile….I think that's why I didn't mind missing school in the past after 4th grade because I was kind of use to missing school (Group Discussion, November, 2009).

This series of events for Darnell still has an affect on his perceptions of school. The fact that he has behind his grade level and was considered for special education services did not help to make him more confident. Additionally, his parents' lack of support and lack of attention to his studies fostered an attitude that school was not important. It is implied by the fact that he did not go to school for over a month and his parents, specifically his father who he was staying with at the time, did not seem to value the importance of school. Although this occurred earlier in his life this specific example from his home setting has played an important role in his self-perception and how he engages in school. School was a place where Darnell went and did what he needed to do to move forward, but not a place where he felt he was important enough to put forth a lot of effort. When taken as a whole, his relationship with his father and the early childhood experience within the school setting all created a young man who lacks personal and academic confidence and engages very little in school. Rashid (2009) discuss the influence that familial issues and negative schooling experiences at an earlier age can have long-term affects on the child's academic confidence.

Darnell and his family moved from place to place a lot growing up. He moved a few times in the two years he was in the program. His mom was the sole financial provider. His mother had a boyfriend, but Darnell did not talk much to him and really despised the fact that he didn't contribute to the welfare of the family. Darnell never referred to him as a father figure, step-dad, or anything significant. This was another element in his home environment that really upset him and made him more withdrawn from people. Darnell was considered low-income as defined by the Michigan Works Workforce Enforcement Act. Darnell was never expected to help with the welfare of the family. His mother took care of the basic needs of the family.

Darnell took a different approach to his home environment than the young men that I discussed earlier:

> I am a child, I don't want to have to take care of people right now. I think it's my mom's responsibility and that stupid man who is staying at our house. I mean if he is staying there then he needs to be a man and handle his business. I hate that he doesn't. So I know I ain't really about to do nothing. Any money that I have is for me, and I buy the things I need but I am not paying for anything else. It's not my responsibility (August, 2009).

Darnell is very clear about his role. He doesn't feel compelled to increase his level of responsibility in the household. He was only concerned about his independent. He seems to acknowledge that he is a kid, and that people should be taking care of him. Some of this is due to the fact that he thinks his parents failed him some when he was younger. His statements can be interpreted as anger or a sense of restitution, about his mom making up for what she did not do when he was younger. His home setting influenced Darnell's perception of himself as a young man, his conception of manhood, and orientation towards school. It was also evident that his negative schooling experiences cultivated his perceptions of his academic capability and pushed him to be withdrawn and disengaged in school.

Deon Lawson was a 16-year-old African American who was recommended to the IMPACT program by a juvenile intervention program run by the prosecutor's office. He lived with his mom and older brother in a working class community. Deon's father was not really as involved in his life as he would have liked him to be. He often talked about how angry it made him that his father wasn't involved much in his life: "I mean it makes me mad to think that my dad lives in the same city as I do and I barely see him. I mean it's just me, my brother, and my mom. I try not to let it bother me as much anymore" (Group Discussion, September, 2009). Deon wanted to show everyone around him that he wasn't very angry about his dad's role in his life. Like the statement above he often stressed the fact that he wasn't going to let it bother him

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anymore. Deon would often say, "he ain't never been around, so I can't miss what I ain't never had" (Interview 1, December 2009). However, there were things that Deon did that contradicted his thoughts. He proudly walked around with his dad's nickname. His dad's nickname was "Snoop" and Deon was called "Lil Snoop." Deon had a choice on whether he wanted to be called that and showed no hesitation in using the name. The other high school students in the program as well as his peers in school and his neighborhood called him that. It was a name that he took pride in.

Although Deon was angry about his dad's lack of involvement in his life and often talked about how he did not bother him anymore, his actions showed the contrary. The pride he exhibited in being referred to as "Lil Snoop" revealed a desire to feel connected with his dad in some capacity. Likewise, since he didn't have a strong direct bond with his dad, the use of his nickname meant having some form of tangible connection to him.

Deon not having a strong relationship with his dad also could be connected to his desire to be a father so early in his life. He mentioned many times to the IMPACT program staff that he impregnated someone. However, every time we would check back with him, he mentioned that the young lady would have a miscarriage. This occurred a few times throughout his time in the program. Whether this is true or not, it was clear that he was okay with being a dad before completing high school. In a large group discussion Deon stated, "I really don't mind having a kid right now, I think I am ready to be a father. I mean I would like to graduate first, but hey if it happens it happens" (Group Discussion, October, 2009). To him being a father connected him with being a man or demonstrated his ability to be a man. His conceptualization of manhood was tied to being a father. Although his father wasn't present for him, he assumed that being a man would involve becoming a father himself. He didn't think about the financial implications

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or the fact that he would have to spend time with the child. He was unable to conceptualize how this would change his life and hinder him from hanging with his friends. Being a father for him was one way he could demonstrate his manhood. Like Alonzo, Juan, and Ben, he talked a great deal about the being tough and protecting his family. The tough man image was something that Deon exhibited a lot. He wanted to make sure everyone knew he was tough and wouldn't surrender to anyone:

> I do what I have to do. In my hood we have to fight sometimes to let people know who we are. Hey, it's what I have to do. I don't want nobody to think I am a punk. I won't be a punk for nobody. And if my family is involved I am down for whatever. My family is all I got. It's going down for real if family is involved. You have to show people that you are a man and protecting yourself and your family are part of that (Interview 1, December 2009).

It is clear to Deon that a man is shows that he can protect himself and is willing to show that through fighting if he needs to. Since he was left to develop his own conception of a man, he developed one that some scholars would label as "black masculinity." Scholars such as Ferguson (2001), Hall (2006), Kunjufu (1995; 2003) and Sewell (1997) posit that black men often exhibit what many would call black masculinities, which embody toughness and hyper sexuality. It is believed that for Black males, masculinity takes on this persona that is often perpetuated by the media. With that, many young males who are fatherless often are left to imitate from the media what it means to be a man, which often leads into what is characterized as Black masculinity—toughness and hyper sexuality. Deon definitely demonstrated characteristics associated with one conception of Black masculinity.

He often talked about his lack of trust of people and how he never wanted to ask people for anything. The fact that his dad often didn't follow through on promises he had made to him made him very hesitant to trust others.

Deon: I don't like to ask people for things.

CL: Why not?

Deon: Well because I don't want to be disappointed. I just try to get it myself. I would rather just find a way myself to get it, so then you don't have to count on people to do it for you and then they don't come through…you get tired of people not keeping their promises.

Later in the conversation I asked Deon when he developed this defense mechanism and he often

talked about the fact that people in his life would not keep their word. More specifically, he

talked about his dad and how he would say he was going to get him things and very seldom did.

He didn't trust people and didn't like anyone to do things for him. These occurrences pushed

him to be more independent and make some risky decisions in an effort to be self-sufficient.

Deon engaged in illegal behavior and resorted to stealing to provide for himself.   When he was

asked why he committed these illegal acts he simply stated the fact that he "needed to get some

money in his pockets." It was as if he felt he had no other choice but to do it because he couldn't

trust or depend on anyone else to do anything for him. His lack of a father figure at home,

similar to Darnell, made him more independent and not as trusting of others. His desire to get

involved with illegal activity was motivated by his lack of a male role model as well as his desire

to remain independent and not be a burden on his mother who felt worked hard enough. Also

similar to Darnell, Deon's perception of manhood meant being responsible and independent. He

didn't feel the pressure to be the provider of the household because his mom was capable of

managing these matters. His home setting—lack of a father—influenced his conception of what

it meant to be a man and also influenced his desire to be independent, a protector and the desire

to be a young father. All of these characteristics that he developed influenced how he thought of

himself and also influenced his orientation towards school.

During his earlier years in school he was motivated and very positive. However, upon reaching high school he began to perform below his capabilities. His interest in money, girls, and social status in both his neighborhood and school superseded his commitment to education. Additionally, his legal troubles became a major primary concern. Consequently, he failed a few classes and was often suspended from school. The suspensions were the result of insubordination and fighting. Since his father was not reliable and disappointed him on so many occasions, he did not trust others and was reluctant to ask for outside support. As a result, he worked to obtain independence by any means necessary, which led to his legal issues and ultimately affected his schooling experiences.

Deon talked about how he felt some people at his school were not very supportive of him and didn't understand his life. "I like the students at my school because we understand each other; the teachers don't really understand me. I feel like part of the reasons I got into trouble at school was because no one took the time to hear me. They wanted to boss you around but never took the time to listen to your issues" (Interview 1, December 2009). This definitely had a negative influence on his orientation toward school. His desire to be heard was connected to his father's failure to communicate and connect with him. Deon earnestly desired a relationship with his father. He often talked about how his father never checked on him when he got into his legal troubles. It was as if he was crying out for help and he wanted support and protection from his father. He also felt that when his mom talked with him, she never really listened. So to go to school and not be heard only increased his level of frustration. "Man I wish someone would listen to me, my mom don't, Dad never did and the teachers don't either. It really frustrates me" (Interview 1, December 2009). Deon didn't think teachers listened to him and felt they only wanted to demonstrate their power over him and he resented this. As a result, he would respond

in inappropriate ways that often led to suspensions. Deon's frustrations with his experiences in high school are similar to the findings that scholars such as Duncan (2002), Howard (2008), and Hall (2006) suggest help to perpetuate the marginalization of Black males in schools and society. During this time in his life he felt that he wasn't as happy as he could be. "I wasn't as happy as I can be during that time because I was dealing with family issues, legal issues and school issues" (Interview 1, December 2009).

While Deon felt his mom did not listen to him, he did express that he has a positive relationship with her. His mom was supportive of him and she encouraged him to do well in school and in life. She was very active in his schooling and Deon often talked about how annoying that was to him. "My mom is always at the school, she never missed a parent/teacher conference. All the teachers knew her too. I didn't like her being all in my school like that" (Interview 1, December 2009). That encouragement from his mom wasn't enough for him. The fatherless presence, lack of support and understanding in his home and school settings prevailed and influenced his thoughts about how he perceived himself as a young man, his actions, and negatively altered his orientation toward school.

Quincy Gardner is a 16-year-old African American male who lives with his mother and siblings in a low-income housing project. His parents were separated for a few years and as a result his relationship with his father changed:

> My father and I are really not that cool anymore. I mean once I found out about how he treated my mom I really didn't like him as much anymore. Don't get me wrong that's my dad and I will always love him but I am kinda of mad at him right now. I kind of feel like he left us out there on our own (September, 2009).

Quincy's disappointment with his dad was due in part to the influence it had on the financial stability of his family. Quincy talked about how before his dad left they lived in a nice house in

a good neighborhood. Now his mom can no longer work because of a disability, they lost the house and were forced to move into housing projects. He felt responsible for the family's well-being. Although there were older siblings outside of the home, he was the oldest in the house and the role as "man" was now his responsibility. He experienced the many pressures associated with being a provider as well as the pressure of trying to be an emotional support system for his mother. Like all the other participants that I have discussed so far, Quincy also lacked a father figure in the home. As a result, he, like the others assumed the role of financial provider and protector for his family. "I have to be there for my family. Nobody else will be. My father isn't there we can't depend on him anymore. I have to step up. I have to help around the house and be there to protect them" (Interview 1, December 2009).

As a result, he embraced the role of financial provider and protector, and his perception of himself changed as it related to these new roles. "I wanted to be a kid because I am, but I can't do that now, I have to become a man" (Interview 1, December 2009). His conception of manhood, like the other young men, was construed based on his lack and not on anything he was taught. As a result of Deon's father's departure from the home, his mom struggled emotionally and this negatively impacted her overall health. He talked about how he had to be there for his mom and that there were times she would sit at home and cry because she felt her family had fallen apart. Quincy didn't like to see his mother hurt and wanted to relieve her pain, so he would push himself to do more around the house to make things less burdensome for her:

> I am the one who takes care of my family now. I take care of my brothers and sisters and I take care of my mom. It has made me an angrier person now. I don't talk to many people now because I don't trust people anymore. If my dad can just get up and leave and do us dirty, then why can't anybody else? Hey I am out here alone trying to do the best I can (Group Discussion, November 2009).

This role as provider and protector was his conception of manhood that was developed because of his lack of a father figure at home. Taylor, Leashore, and Toliver (1988) and Kafele (2009), studied the provider role and implied that it is something that African American males take very seriously in their communities. They also argue that despite the perception that many African Americans are not present in the lives of their children, those that are take their roles seriously. They also talk about how being able to provide financially for their family is the most important factor in their conceptualization of manhood.

The lack of male providers and fathers in the home pushed these young men to take on roles they were often unequipped and unprepared to handle. Quincy admits that he would prefer to be a kid instead of the forced role of provider and protector, however it is a reality that he and the other program participants felt were their only logical options.

Quincy feels like his dad abandoned him, which led him to develop a lack of trust in people. He didn't trust people to be there for him because the one person he did trust left him "stranded" as he would say. It also made him an angry young man. His anger and lack of trust reached a paranoia state where he felt people were always out to get him. This was evident in the increased number of fights that he was involved in. These fights occurred in school and his neighborhood. Since he felt he had to be the man of the house he felt compelled to protect himself and his family. In many instances this protection involved using physical force against those who were a perceived threat to him or his family. Subsequently, he was often suspended from school, which later caused conflict in his home setting. For example, some of his disputes would threaten the safeness of his home environment. He mentioned a few times that his life was threatened by those who lived in his neighborhood, which in turn increased his level of paranoia.

Quincy: I want the respect I deserve from people. I want people to treat me like I deserve to be treated. I am man and I deserve that kind of respect.

CL: What does being a man to you mean?

Quincy: Well it means taking care of your family and doing whatever it takes to take to protect and be there for your family.

CL: Do you think you do that?

Quincy: Yes, I have to, every family should have a man there to do these things and since my dad is not around much I have to do it, so that makes me a man. There's a part of me that wants to go back to being a kid but I know I can't.

CL: Do the people in your family consider you to be a man?

Quincy: Yes they do.

His need to engage in physical altercations is directly connected to his idea and construction of manhood, as the protector. Furthermore, his lack of trust developed as a result of his relationship with his father. The anger that developed was a direct result of the unwanted role as provider. This role forced him to exude a degree of toughness that is often associated with hyper-masculinity (Katz, 2000; Sewell, 1997). This disposition that was created in his home setting influenced his orientation toward school as well.

Quincy's grades plummeted during this time. He was constantly getting into trouble at school because he had a quick temper and would get into fights. His quick temper was something that increased as his role at home increased. "I am more upset now and I feel like exploding sometime and this started to happen when my dad left. I feel a lot of pressure on me right now." This pressure that Quincy felt to be the primary caregiver both financially and emotionally, was far too much for him to handle at that age.

According to Quincy, his school setting wasn't very helpful to him either. He did mention that school was a place for him to escape the things happening in his home. However, he felt that teachers at his school set people up for failure:

> I like hanging with some of the people at my school, but I don't think the teachers are there to help us. I feel like they set us up for failure. They say things or do things to agitate some of the students just to get us kicked out. Some of the teachers don't even care if you learn. I mean if you don't care they sure won't care about you.

His educational experiences were all negative. Furthermore, he attended a school where he didn't feel supported, which further perpetuated his level of distrust in people. He knew he could do better in school and understood the importance of doing well but was overwhelmed by his personal situation at home. School merely provided an environmental change for him while the lack of support and negative energy persisted and ultimately led to his lack of engagement in school. While he was somewhat motivated to do well in school, his primary focus was on being the man of the house and engaging in activities that he felt solidified this role.

Quincy felt that getting angry and fighting were effective in getting heard and earning respect. Since he was viewed as the man of the house, he felt outsiders should respect him as such, which created a problem because his peers and school personnel saw him as a young man and treated him as such. For Quincy that wasn't good enough, and he wanted to receive the respect that he felt being a man would give him. It was an internal conflict between what he perceived himself to be and what others thought of him. Since his family thought he was a man, he felt that others should as well. His school and home setting failed to keep him motivated in school, and he in turn became less engaged in school. His home setting exalted him into a premature manhood that affected how he perceived himself. This self-perception was a result of his new role and influenced his actions at home and school. His experiences in school perpetuated some of the feelings he had at home and thus only made him withdraw more from

the school setting. Unfortunately, Quincy's home and school settings negatively impact his self-perception and academic engagement.

Jason Whitmore is 18 years old and a senior in high school. He was the last child of three born to his mother and father. Jason lived with his mother in subsidized housing and had been receiving special education services since the third grade. Jason also had a child of his own, and although he didn't have much of a relationship with his dad, he understood the importance and valued his role as a father. Jason's relationship with his mom was volatile. They argued quite a bit over things, and he often felt that he was not supported as much as he could have been:

> My mom and I don't always get along. I mean she supports me but for some reason we don't get along much. I hoped it would be better especially since I don't really have the support of my dad. She is the only parent support that I have (Group Discussion, August, 2009).

Jason understands that his mother is the only support that he has and therefore wants to have a better relationship with his mom. However, because of their volatile relationship he left her home and moved in with the mother of his child. As a young father, student, and football player Jason often felt conflicted about his priorities. He wanted to be a good father but also enjoyed playing football. In order to be a good father he knew he had to work. Therefore, making money was his first priority and, playing football was second. Unlike the other young men I have discussed who perceived their role as the financial provider, Jason was indeed a father and lived the role of the provider. As a result of this acknowledgement and commitment to being a father, school became obsolete while fatherhood became his immediate priority:

> School was something I knew I needed to finish at some point in school but I had other things to worry about. I had to be a father and I needed money to do that. School isn't bringing in money so I know I have to spend my time focused on

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taking care of me and my daughter. My mom doesn't do anything for me and so I have to look out for me, my daughter and my girl. Football makes me happy so I like doing that, but when that season is over its all about work for me (Interview 1, December 2009).

School was no longer a means to an end for him—rather it was as if school would get in the way of him being able to provide for his family. His engagement in school was almost non-existent. He barely went to school on time and often talked about how his teachers just allowed him to do meaningless things in class and passed through classes. Jason was only concerned with being a good father at this point in his life. He didn't have any confidence in his academic ability, and during his senior year he was reading and writing at a 3rd grade level. His math also lingered around a 3rd grade capability.

As a young man growing up in a poor family environment he was socialized to understand the importance of making money. Lareau (2003) expounds on the idea that there are different behaviors and values that are attached to families of lower socio-economic status (SES) over middle- to upper-class families. To this end, many lower-SES families and children are distracted with financial issues around the home instead of working hard in school. "Once I got old enough I knew I had to get a job. After football season my next thing to focus on was work" (Interview 1, December 2009). The need to make money only increased once he became a father.

In this dialogue with Jason it is clear to him that he thinks school is not for him, and he also believes that school personnel feel the same way. His view about school is enhanced by his perceived notion that others (school personnel) validated for him. His negative view of his academic ability is often swayed by how others characterize him. As with the cycle of socialization (Harro 2000), a person's desire to be or to act a certain way is often determined by their interaction with others in society. In Jason's case he had a negative viewpoint of his

academic ability since he was diagnosed with a learning disability. "I've been in special education since the 3rd grade and I haven't felt no confidence in my ability to read, write or do nothing in school. It was like a bad dream that was taking a long time to end" (Interview 1, December 2009). Since his time in special education he was socialized into thinking that he was not academically capable. His feeling of being academically incapable, coupled with how he was treated by the teachers and school personnel, constructed a student that was academically frustrated. Scholars such as Duncan 2002, Howard 2008, Noguera 2003, and Kunjufu 1990; 2003, often talked about how many males of color felt academically different or marginalized in schools. These thoughts are often brought on by how they are perceived and/or treated in school.

Larry Anderson is a 16-year-old African American male who at the time of the study was in his second year in the program. Larry lives with his mom, stepfather and two siblings. He had a very volatile relationship with his stepfather when he first began the program. In an interview he mentioned: "Man, my stepfather and I always argued, I didn't really like him much…(pause) but I think things are getting better now between us, maybe I am maturing." This relationship has had a huge affect on Larry's attitude at home and also in the program. He didn't say anything about his biological father that was positive. It appeared as if he didn't exist. His anger towards his biological father for his lack of presence could have affected how he treated his stepfather:

> I don't talk to my biological father. He doesn't mean anything to me. It bothered me sometimes that he never came around. I felt unwanted. But my mother was always there for me. She is my best friend….I am happy that she is married and seems to be happy but that does nothing for me. I don't really talk to her husband. We actually don't get along at all…things are different around the house now that he is here, but I don't let it bother me. (Group Discussion, November, 2009).

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These perceptions made it difficult to engage in a relationship with his stepfather. Larry had an opportunity to engage in a relationship with a potential father figure, but chose not to and that decision could have been influenced by his lack of relationship, disappointment and lack of trust with his biological father. Rather than become more independent like the other young men discussed, to the contrary, Larry became more withdrawn. He felt more comfortable being introverted. Harper, Terry, and Twiggs (2009), argue that one of the things African American males do when they are dealing with issues similar to Larry's, is to become withdrawn or isolated. This isolation can show in how they interact with others (peers, family members,) or it could affect how they interact with school (academic engagement, school personnel). Larry definitely appeared to show symptoms of isolation with his peers and in school.

Larry didn't have the financial pressures to perform at home like a few of the other high school students in the program, but he understood and was aware of his mother's financial struggles:

> Sometimes I wish I could help my mom. I hear her talking about some of the money issues, not being able to pay bills and stuff like that…I want to help. But I realize I really can't help, but I know one day I will be able to help her, just not right now (Interview 1, December, 2009).

He is aware of his mother's financial concerns but doesn't see how he can help her. He also didn't have the pressure to be the financial provider like the other young men who didn't have a their fathers in the home. Although his relationship with his stepfather wasn't a healthy one, his stepfather's presence played an integral role in fulfilling the financial provider role along with his mom. His mother's focus on working and trying to provide for the family also took the pressure off of him and would have allowed him to focus on academic success. However, Larry was failing all of his classes in high school. He really didn't care about his grades and didn't show any interest in improving them either. He was obviously aware of his academic failures in

school but no one actively urged him to do better and there were no consequences at home for poor academic performance.

During his earlier schooling experiences, Larry talked about how he was pushed by teachers to do well. However, as he moved up in grade levels, Larry felt that teachers no longer pushed him to excel and permitted him to be quiet and reserved during class. Consequently, he became content with putting forth only a miniscule effort and yet still progressed to the next grade. Although he was content with mediocrity, he knew there was something wrong with that. As a result, the lack of teacher encouragement led him to believe that teachers didn't care whether he learned the material or not and that they were there only to get paid.

CL: So how do you feel about school?

Larry: School is cool, there are some things that I like about school and things that I don't like.

CL: So what do you like and dislike about school?

Larry: I like some of my friends at school, but I don't like some of the teachers, I ask them for help and then they take the answers and try to brainwash what you think.

CL: What do you mean by brainwash what you think?

Larry: They try to make you feel like you shouldn't have answered the question, that you are not listening if you ask a question. I just don't like that. They don't seem to care about what I think.

Larry distrusts some of his teachers, he believes that they try to brainwash students to think certain things. Larry had very negative experiences in school and often talked about those experiences and how they have made him apprehensive about trusting or building positive relationships with school personnel. These experiences have made him apathetic towards school. He talked a great deal about his experiences in school, getting suspended a few times and being around teachers who he didn't like or who he perceived didn't care. Larry didn't pick up all of

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the characteristics that the other males did—like financial provider or protector—instead his reaction to his home setting was one of isolation. His decision to isolate, withdraw from others, and his inability to trust and develop meaningful relationships were all a part of his coping strategy. He perceived himself as young man but was not really interested in sprouting to manhood like some of the other young men. It was almost as if his development was stunted and this directly influenced his orientation toward his school setting. The school setting further perpetuated his self-perception and lack of academic engagement as a result he didn't care much about himself or school.

Jimmy House is a 18-year-old bi-racial (African American and White) young man who is not really doing well academically in school. Jimmy was adopted by his aunt (who he calls "mom") and her husband. His biological mother died when he was an infant and he doesn't know who his father is (beyond the fact that he is African American). Jimmy has lived with a few of his family members (mom, dad, sister) throughout his time in the program. In a conversation with Jimmy he often talked about the lack of stability he has experienced in his life. "I would like to have some stability in my life. It often times get so hard for me to do anything because I wonder where will I end up next."

He often wondered about these things because he moved between his parents who now have been divorced for a few years now. His relationship with his mother is very volatile. They constantly argue over things that Jimmy thinks are not importance. So he often gets upset at his mom for what he perceives to be frivolous arguments. These agreements often lead to him being asked to leave the house or he does so on his own. At times he would also hold multiple jobs while still trying to stay in school. However, it became difficult for him to balance his life as well as find ways to develop a positive relationship with his parents. Although Jimmy and his

dad didn't have the level of disagreement that he had with his mom, Jimmy still felt that he

needed to get more support from his dad. In one of the interviews Jimmy talked more about this

dilemma.

CL: Do you feel that you are encouraged to do well in school at home?

Jimmy: Yes, I do for the most part. I mean my mom and dad supports me and wants me to do
well, but I feel the pressure now because I am getting older that I now have to do well in life so I
can take care of them.

CL: Why do you feel that pressure?

Jimmy: Well the pressure is there because I am pretty much taking care of myself right now. I
buy my own clothes, and a lot of times I am feeding myself.

CL: Why is that the case?

Jimmy: Well (pause)…I just do things for myself…I mean my parents don't have the money,
and I am pretty much on my own. It's all up to me now. I mean my parents want the best but
they say it but the actions really are not there.

CL: So how do you think you handle all of this and also try to maintain your focus in school?

Jimmy: Its tough, that's partly why I am not doing as well as I could. I mean, I like school but I
don't like the school that I attend as much. That has a lot to do with how I feel right now about
my grades.

CL: Why do you say that?

Jimmy: Well, because I am one of only few Black people in the school, I get treated differently.

CL: By who?

Jimmy: By the teachers, well some of them, they assume things about me because of my race,
and also I hear racial comments from classmates all the time…sometimes it makes me not as
interested and a little withdrawn from people at school, just don't want to be there sometimes.

CL: So do you think you can do well in school?

Jimmy: Yes, I do, but I don't focus like I should. It's hard at times to stay focus when I don't
sleep much.

CL: so why don't you sleep much?

Jimmy: Well partly because I am working late hours and its sometimes hard for me to study.

In this interview, you can observe how Jimmy attempts to make sense of why he is struggling in school. However, he doesn't seem to have any solutions to resolve the issues. He also talked about the role that his racial identity has on his attitude toward school. Duncan (2002), Howard (2008), Noguera (2003) as well as other scholars write about the influence that racism has on the academic engagement and success of African American males in schools. For Jimmy, his schooling experience often modeled some of the issues that scholars such as Duncan (2002) and Howard (2008) have discussed in their research on the K-12 experiences of African American males. His relationship with his parents made him more independent; however, he didn't take on the responsibility of being the financial provider because his parents needed him to. Instead he was more focused on himself and providing for himself, similar to Darnell. Jimmy wasn't interested in demonstrating the hyper masculine traits of toughness that some of the other men demonstrated. His lack of a strong male presence emasculated him; he was often questioning whether he was man enough. "I sometimes wonder if I will ever be man enough" (Interview, 1 December, 2009). Researchers like Sciara (1975), Staples (1982), Taylor, Leashore, and Toliver (1988) discussed how some young men who lack strong father figures or male role models often feel emasculated because of their lack of a male presence. With that, many of them lose confidence in themselves academically and socially.

The fact that he was dealing with both school and home issues made it difficult for him to balance his life. Therefore, at times he would seem to lose control of his life. For example, he would be on an academic rollercoaster; one semester he had a 3.0 and the next his grades were below a 2.0. When asked about this change in his grades, he talked about how he stopped caring

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and just did the bare minimum. Jimmy, unlike the other participants that I have mentioned who displayed the apathetic dispositions toward school exhibited a true desire to have academic success. He talked about doing well more than the other participants that I have mentioned, however, his home environment and schooling experiences impacted his disposition toward the school setting. One day he was all about his academic success and the next he could care less. Jimmy suffered from a lack of support at home and a strong father figure in his life. His occasionally volatile home setting developed a young man who lacked self-confidence. He often overcompensated for that with overly confident behavior, but he was open about his lack of confidence. He perceived himself to be less of a man and at times less of a person. He didn't trust many people and so, like some of the other young men, he pushed himself into an isolated world where he could only depend on himself. Conversely enough, he did become more independent and his priority was to provide for himself, which affected his level of engagement in the school setting. Additionally, the school experience described by Jimmy also perpetuated his lack of self-confidence and engagement in school.

Raymond Wilson is an 18-year-old young man who has been a part of the mentoring program since he was 16 years old. His home and school setting is unlike the other young men in the program, but there are some commonalities related to his disposition toward school. He is a senior in high school and lives with his mom and brother. His dad lives in Texas and has been incarcerated most of his childhood. Raymond attended a suburban school where he was one of only a few Black males at his school. His grades in school were average and often he discussed his struggles about staying focused and dedicated to his schooling. He often discussed the role that his dad played in his focus in school:

> Sometimes I miss my dad so much that I just don't care. I try to act like it doesn't bother me but it does. I sometimes feel unwanted or uncared for and so I often

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wonder why care about school and doing well. I don't it just really bother me sometimes when I think about other people and how they have fathers around and I don't (Interview 1,December 2009).

Unlike the other young men discussed in this chapter, Raymond was very vocal about his fatherless presence. Raymond yearned for his father presence but it did not make him act any differently. Instead it was something he just talked about a lot and wished he had. The men in his church played a significant role in providing some male guidance for him. He also talked directly about how that influences his ability to focus in school.

During his elementary and middle school career he attended the local urban district. When he entered high school his mother chose to put him in another school district because she felt he had a better chance to achieve academically by attending the more affluent school district. Raymond discussed in a meeting how he felt that he really was not excited about attending the high school in the suburban district but felt that it could help him focus more in school:

> I thought going to Jackson High School was going to be the key to me focusing like I should in school. I wasn't as focus as I should have in middle school, so new school, new friends, would bring a fresh start. Well that didn't happen as easily as I thought. Although I do feel the work and expectations were higher at Johnson High school, I didn't do the things I needed to do and fell right back into the same track of doing the bare minimum to pass, and needing extra motivation just to get up sometime to go to school (Interview 1, December 2010).

This excerpt shows that he thought the change of scenery would be good for him, but it didn't help much with his motivation and focus in school. Raymond attended a school where he had perceivably good teachers, high expectations, and lots of resources. So it is not clear why he did not do well in school.

Raymond's relationship with his mom is fairly positive. They had their typical disagreements, and that may have led to him leaving the home to stay with relatives for a few days but overall they have a pretty good mother/son relationship. He talked to his mom about

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things going on in his life, he often listened to her advice, she supported him financially and emotionally, and he talked about how much his mother means to him on a daily basis. In a group conversation he stated, "I know I say this a lot, my mom gets on my nerves, but she is all I have. She means a lot to me, she loves me and I know that because she wants the best for me. I can also talk to her about some personal things (pause) well not all (laughing)." Similar to Larry's mom, Raymond's mom took care of things so that he would not have to take on the responsibility of taking care of himself and his family. Unlike the other young men, Raymond had supportive male role models around him like his church pastor. For Raymond, church was important to him and, along with the support of his mom, provided a secondary level of support for him that the other young men in the study did not have.

So, Raymond attended a fairly good school and had a supportive mother, so why wasn't he able to do well in school? Even moreso, why did he often display disdain, lack of focus, and motivation to do well in school? His GPA was closer to 2.0. So in a conversation that Raymond and I had in an interview might begin the process of unpacking some of the questions behind his lack of motivation and desire to do well in school.

CL: How do you feel about school?

Raymond: Its cool! (pause). I mean its tough at times, it is often times very difficult to focus, but its cool with me.

CL: What do you mean it's difficult to focus at times?

Raymond: Sometimes I am motivated to do well and sometimes I am not. I mean sometimes the class work becomes a lot for me but I think I do a nice job holding on, but then I get discourage sometimes when I am making the progress I want or I see others moving at ease.

CL: What do you mean moving at ease? Do you think you are not as capable as the other students?

Raymond: umm…(pause)…no that's not it. I can do it, I just sometimes don't want to, would rather play, hang with friends, or talk on the phone or something.

CL: Okay, how do you think teachers view you in school?

Raymond: Well…(pause). I think they view me as a nice and respectful guy who isn't working to his potential.

CL: So why don't you think you do well or are as motivated as you need to be?

Raymond: That's a good question. I really don't think I can tell you. I mean, I know I work hard when I want to and like at the beginning of the semester I am motivated to do well, but I don't keep that same drive or determination to do well. I lose the focus and get distracted. I mean I almost look for distractions.

CL: Why do you see yourself looking for distractions?

Raymond: Because I want to find a way out. I don't want to study even though I know my mom and some of my teachers expect that from me, I mean I know y'all want me to do well in school. I mean, sometimes I wonder if school is for me (pause) I think it is though, I know one thing, I am graduating.

In this interaction, Raymond tried to make sense of his struggle with me. Like many typical teenagers he wants to do better but sometimes allows distractions to take his focus away from schoolwork. His lack of motivation and ability to be easily distracted almost prevented him from participating in his graduation ceremony. Toward the end of his senior year he was told that he did not pass one of his required classes. He was extremely devastated by this and wasn't sure how he was going to tell his mother. His mother had already planned and scheduled his graduation party and was sending out invitations to his graduation. He decided to talk with an administrator in the school and was told that he could participate in the graduation ceremony but had to make the failed class in summer school. This decision was met with less discomfort and he now felt comfortable talking with his mom, knowing that he could participate in the graduation ceremony. If was difficult to identify reasons why Raymond did not do well. In an interview, Raymond and I discussed this incident.

CL: So, how do you feel about not receiving your high school diploma during graduation?

Raymond: Well I was a little disappointed in myself. It just didn't feel right at first being there knowing that I am really not getting my diploma. I think that's when everything hit me. I really felt bad but realized at that point it was nothing I could do.

Me: So what can you do now?

Raymond: Well I can just look to the future and begin to work hard towards making sure I pass the class this summer. I mean that's not an option for me right now. I have to pass...(pause) what does is look like for me to be going to back to high school. Oh no, that will not happen, if I ain't never been serious I don't have a choice now…I must pass this class.

Me: You seem to have a greater deal of desire to do well now.

Raymond: Oh yeah, I do. Its too bad I have it now and didn't have it then…but hey like I said what can you do.

It took the embarrassment of not receiving his diploma to motivate him to try harder.

Raymond struggled throughout his senior year to stay focused in school. He received the

encouragement from home and also received the support from school that the other young men

did not. However, for Raymond this was not enough, and he learned the difficult way—going to

summer school. Raymond did not have the financial burden or the need to act tough like the

other young men in the program but he still suffered from a lack of academic engagement that

almost cost him his diploma. Raymond discussed how he wished he had a father to be there for

him and to push him to do well because he was tired of hearing his mother preach to him about

his grades. "Sometimes it would be nice to have a man fuss at you sometimes, I get tired of my

mom yelling…I mean at least a man won't yell all the time" (Interview 1, December, 2009).

Here Raymond expressed his annoyance with his mother yelling all the time. It is as if he is

tuning his mother out and instead wishing he had a father there who could balance things for

him. For Raymond the absence of his father played a huge role in his behavior toward school.

He had turned a deaf ear to his mom and she was no longer effective at motivating him to do well in school. Scholars (David, 2005, Ferguson, 2000; Polite & Davis, 1999) discuss the influence that the lack of a father presence in the home can have on a child's academic engagement. Raymond had a relatively strong support system but he still failed to capitalize on it and one could only speculate the role his father could have played in that.

Summary

In this chapter I have discussed how the home environment and school experiences influence and shape a young man's orientation toward school, their engagement in school, and how they perceive their role as young men. These two settings—home and school—that are positioned in the micro-level system of the high school students' ecology impacted each student differently. Some of the students felt the need to focus more on being there for their families, thus neglecting their academics, while others attempted to balance school and provide for their families. Meanwhile, some of the students were so affected by this that they chose to do neither—they didn't focus on school nor did they attempt to assist their family financially. All of the males in the study either had no father figure in their household, or lacked a strong father figure presence. Moreover, none of the young men lived with or had consistent, positive relationships with their biological fathers. Instead, their mothers were the sole-providers of each household. In a previous chapter, I discussed the issues that so many African American and Latino males are facing: lack of father figures and mothers as the sole providers (Noguera 2003). The participants in this study mirrored the lives of so many other males of color that scholars (Brofenbrenner 1967; Garibaldi, 2007; Kearns, Ford, and Linney, 2005; Klopfenstein, 2004;

Kunjufu, 1998; Martin, 2000; Noguera 2003) have discussed and brought to the forefront of conversations on education in this country.

The participants chose to deal with the lack of a father figure differently. Some of them assumed they had to take on the role of the man of the house to fulfill the void that an absent father did. Juan, Alonzo, Quincy, Ben, and Deon felt they needed to be the providers and the protectors. They took on the role of the man and created an image of what they felt the man should do. They developed the tough mentality that often characterizes African American and Latino males' attempts to demonstrate their manhood, which in turn, makes them hyper-masculine (Ferguson, 2001; Kafele, 2009; Kunjufu, 2003; Sewell, 1997). This toughness often leads them to focus more on their image and self-perceptions, rather than on the consequences of their actions. For these young men the hyper masculinity characterization pushed them to attempt to over-compensate for what they lacked—fathers. The need to showcase toughness will be further explored in a later chapter. While on the contrary, there were some young men like Darnell, Jimmy, and Jason who responded to their home setting in a different manner. They became more independent and less trusting of others. They didn't feel they could trust people and so they were more interested in doing things for themselves. Larry withdrew from social relationships because of the hurt he felt from the lack of a relationship with his dad.

Family financials impacted and influenced the students' commitment to the school setting. Like many children who grow up in poor environments, survival and economic stability (Anyon, 2005; Lareau 2003), take precedence over school performance. It's a need for instant gratification that school can't offer that pushes students like Juan, Alonzo, and Quincy away from school, and their primary focus becomes survival. Furthermore, the school setting contributes to their self-perceptions and orientation toward academics. As noted earlier, some of

the young men didn't have positive experiences in school. They often felt disconnected (Duncan 2001; Howard 2008) or marginalized from school. Some of them blamed their teachers and other school personnel for why they felt disconnected or lacked interest in school. Some of the students like Juan, Alonzo, and Jason felt that taking care of their families was more important to them then sitting in the classroom hoping that being in school will help them in the future. Their future was today and tomorrow wasn't something they could worry about.

It's important to note the difference in how the school and home environments influenced them in different capacities. There were similarities in their communities, family structures (single-parent homes), socio-economic status, and educational settings. But the young men described, interpreted, and reacted differently to their similarly situated environments.

Most of the young men felt that their race didn't play a factor into their experiences at school. They often discussed how their success was up to them and that race was not a major factor in how they perceived themselves or in how they engaged in school. Most importantly, the home and school settings had the most influence on how they perceived themselves and to what degree they engaged in school. In the next chapter I will discuss a new setting, the IMPACT mentoring program, that became situated in the young men's ecological system influenced their academic engagement.

Chapter 6

Academic Engagement

I know my freshman year I know I only went to school like 50% of the time. I just didn't go to school all the time. My sophomore year of school, I went to school almost every day, but I didn't care much about going to class on time and honestly I did a lot of skipping. I barely did my work in school too. I would do just enough to pass the class. Well now I go to class all the time. I'm barely tardy. I'm never absent unless I got a doctor's appointment or something, but other than that I am not. I am just more focused on my academics and making sure I am turning in assignments like I should. I just feel better about things now.
-Darnell

In the statement above, Darnell discussed his lack of engagement during his first couple of years in high school. Darnell has been in the mentoring program since his junior year, and as a senior when he discusses school, he talks about how things began to improve for him since his involvement in the IMPACT program. In this chapter I provide an in-depth look into how these males' involvement in the IMPACT mentoring program influenced their academic engagement in school.

Academic Engagement Defined

A student's level of engagement in school is often a major determinant in how academically successful he or she will be. Some of the high school males demonstrated very similar levels of academic engagement, while others demonstrated totally different levels. Jones (2009) defines academic engagement as the extent to which learners are motivated and committed to learning, have a sense of belonging and accomplishment, and have relationships with adults, peers, and parents that support learning. I will use this definition as I discuss the academic engagement of these young men. It is also important to note that academic engagement is often measured using multiple tools like student surveys, standardized test scores,

grades, etc. For the purposes of this study, I use data from the interviews, observations made in the program, students' attendance rates, and their grades to discuss their level of academic engagement.

In this chapter I discuss the influence of another setting that recently became part of the students' ecology–the IMPACT mentoring program. I explore how the high school students' involvement in this program re-shaped their thoughts about their level of engagement with, and interaction in, school.

The IMPACT Program: A Setting in the Child's Ecology

For the high school males in this study, the IMPACT mentoring program represents a micro-level setting in their ecology. As previously stated, the IMPACT mentoring program, like the home and school settings, has its own ecological structure capable of influencing how the high school students interact with and make sense of the other settings in their ecology. With that, I present findings that suggest the IMPACT mentoring program had an influence on the high school students' increased academic engagement, and influenced their dispositions and their interactions with school. The IMPACT program also provided support academically and socially that many did not receive in their home setting. In this chapter, I use the following three claims to describe and analyze the experiences of the high school males in the mentoring program, and how those experiences influenced their academic engagement in school:

1. Claim 1: The academic expectations and academic-oriented activities set forth by the mentoring program staff gave the high school students the support needed to develop an increased desire to do well in school.

2. Claim 2: The high school students' roles as mentors to the elementary-aged students helped them make sense of their own schooling experience; subsequently, increasing their academic engagement.

3. Claim 3: The development of positive male relationships with other high school mentors and program staff helped to create an environment for the young men that gave them the support and encouragement they may have not received in other settings (school and home).

Claim 1: The academic expectations and academic-oriented activities set forth by the mentoring program staff gave the high school students the support needed to develop an increased desire to do well in school.

The mentoring program staff was very deliberate in its efforts to not only set high academic expectations, but to also provide activities that promoted, encouraged, and supported the development of an increased desire to do well in school for the young men in the program. These activities included: weekly Thursday training sessions, group discussions, setting weekly individual goals with the students, requiring weekly progress reports, and meeting with school personnel (teachers, principals, counselors) as needed. All of the aforementioned activities occurred at the exosystem level of the IMPACT Mentoring program. The activities are part of the concrete social structures, both formal and informal, that influence and encompass the immediate settings (school and home environment) containing the person. Figures 8 and 9 illustrate ecology of the IMPACT program and the activities that are a part of the exosystem level.

Most of the high school males were intentionally recommended to the program by local school district personnel because of the program's potential academic benefits to the students. At the beginning of the high school students' entry into the program, the academic expectations were made clear to them. Although the students were not performing well academically in school, they knew from the start that the program expectation was that they take the necessary steps to make improvements in their grades. The IMPACT program's academic expectations are:

- High school students must receive a 3.0 the following quarter after they start the program.
- High school students are expected to attend school daily, including:
  - Attend all classes
  - Be on time to all classes
- High school students cannot get suspended from school.

The program staff and the high school students agreed that a 3.0 grade point average (g.p.a) would be the goal for every student in the program. For many of them this was the first time they ever talked about getting a 3.0 g.p.a. "Man, I don't know. This is going to be tough, but I am going to try. I never even thought about getting a 3.0. I was just trying to pass" (Juan, September 2009).

Juan's comments are representative of many of the young men in the program. Some of them never considered trying to achieve a 3.0 g.p.a, while others never felt they could do it. The idea that they could get these kinds of grades seemed far-fetched. "Whew, I mean this will be tough, I mean real tough. I will definitely have to work harder than I ever have in school" (Larry, September, 2009). Years of low expectations, either self-inflicted or shaped by their home and school environments, prevented some of the males from trying to achieve more in school. Patterson (2006) and Williams (2007) explicate the notion that sometimes youth develop a "culture of failure" due to environmental influences in their community that often display a disdain for hard work and doing well in school. Most of the high school males had a very pessimistic view of school achievement; something they (or I) noted surrounded them at home and in school. The program staff[1] was very aware of this culture of failure and set out to create an environment that worked to reduce and eliminate this way of thinking. It is one thing to expect students to improve their academic achievement in school and another thing to put

structures in place to help facilitate this process. These structures provided the guidance and support many of the students did not have at home or school to help reach this goal.

Another program expectation was for the students to attend school daily. A lot of the high school students had not developed a habit of attending school and class regularly. Most of them would show up to school, but very seldom did they attend every class. The program staff believed that it was important for them to get into the habit of going to class regularly as a prerequisite to doing better in school. The program staff, with the assistance of local school district personnel, provided bi-weekly attendance records for all the students in the program. The only acceptable and excusable absences were due to illness, a doctor's appointment, or family emergencies.

Finally, the program staff expected the students to refrain from getting suspended from school. If they were suspended from school for any reason, they were not allowed to participate in the program until they returned to school from their suspension. Similarly, if students were absent from school, they were not expected to participate in the program for that day. One of the many factors that led to students dropping out of school was the attendance rate. Research suggests that the more time students spend out of school for various reasons such as suspensions, tardiness, or absenteeism, the more likely they are to be disengaged and remove themselves completely from school. Griffin (2002) and Taylor (2002) argue that predictors such as attendance, suspension rates, and poor grades often lead to student disengagement, and eventually, dropping out. Taylor (2002) argues that the process many minority students experience before they completely drop out is academic disidentification. Many of the high school students that were in the IMPACT program had either already disidentified from school

or were very close to doing so. The program staff was aware of this and wanted to set some clear goals that could possibly stop this process. Juan stated the following:

> I had to really think about whether I wanted to be in this program because there was some strict stuff going on. I mean we couldn't skip, get suspended or nothing. Those were [was] my problems in school and so I knew it was going to take a lot for me to change those ways…. I was thinking about dropping out before I started this program… but I am going to try (Group Discussion, September 2009).

Juan's remarks were an indicator of how many of the students felt in the program. The program expectations appeared to have re-directed some of their thinking about school. Some of them seemed motivated to put forth a level of effort that they had not before. The program staff did not expect to see drastic changes in their grades without an increased desire to want to do well, and students' willingness to participate in this program gave them some encouragement to put forth some effort they hadn't before. Darnell stated, "I like this program and I want to stay involved with it, so I am going to do what I need to do to meet the expectations" (Group Discussion, September, 2009). Eight of the students reported they were never challenged before to do well in school, so in a competitive sense many of them wanted to challenge themselves. For years, scholars (Delpit,1988; Ladson-Billings, 1998; and Noguera, 1996) have discussed the influence high academic expectations can have for students, in particular the often-marginalized poor and minority students. The program's first step was to get the high school students to believe they could do well in school. All of the students, except Ben, had pretty poor grades entering the program, so it was clear to the program staff and students that a lot of work needed to be done to meet the expectations set forth by the program staff.

The Partnership Meetings

The meetings that occurred between the mentoring program staff and the school district personnel were an important aspect of the exosystem and mesosytem levels of the program's ecological structure. At the beginning of the school year the mentoring program staff, local school deputy superintendent, the student services specialist, the principal, assistant principal, counselor(s), and public safety officer(s) met with the high school students in IMPACT who attended that particular school to discuss ways everyone could work together to improve the schooling experiences of the young men in the program. The meetings served the following purposes:

   a. To inform the schools about the program and which of their students were involved.

   b. To collaborate on ways to communicate between the schools and program about academic and socially-oriented progress in school.

   c. To build a sense of unity/community and a support system between the program and school staff for the high school students.

The meetings were scheduled by the student services specialist, and all took place over a two week period at the four high schools the students attended. Jimmy and Raymond, because they were enrolled in surrounding school districts, did not participate in the meetings. We held the meetings before the school day began so that parents and students could attend the meetings. Each student was asked to bring any questions they had and to bring their academic goals for the school year to share with the school personnel. In a group discussion with the high school students, they reflected on those meetings:

Juan: The meetings we had at the beginning of the year were pretty helpful for me because when I got in trouble in school they didn't suspend me. Instead they call Mr. Jones or Mr. Smith.

Larry: That was the same thing for me. I felt like they showed a little favoritism (pause), well not really. I mean it was nice to have them know about the program.

Alonzo: Well the principal told me that I was going to get suspended if he didn't know I was a part of the program. I was happy for that.

Deon: The meeting was cool because it seemed like they took us serious.

College mentor: Who is 'they'?

Deon: I mean 'they' like the teacher and the principal. It was like we have more respect.

This conversation is representative of what all the males said when they discussed the influence that the meetings had on their school experiences. A few times throughout the year, the school principals called program staff to talk about students they were having problems with. In the eyes of some school personnel, the program staff seemed to personify the role of parent. For example, at one point, Jose was getting into altercations with other students in school over a period of two months. Instead of just simply sending Jose home, the school decided to set up a meeting between all the parties involved in the altercation, along with the student service specialist, the parents, and the principal. This was done because Jose was a part of the program, and they wanted to work with him instead of keeping him out of school.

The partnership meetings helped the students gain slightly more trust in school personnel that they hadn't had before. It also gave them a dash of hope that they could do well in school. The fact that they were able to attend a meeting with school personnel to find ways to make their schooling experiences better demonstrated to the high school students that just maybe the school had an interest in their success. For example, Deon said in a group discussion:

> It was nice to be in that meeting with the principal and other people from the school. When I usually meet with that many people from the school it's because I

am in trouble about to get suspended or something… So it was nice for me to be there and see that they want to help. It makes me want to do my best now. They know I am in this program and what the program expects so now I have to do my part (October 2009).

Deon's excerpt shows the impact that the partnership meetings, even though it was just one time, had on the students. To be in a meeting with school personnel for something positive was new for many of them, and gave many of the high school males some motivation to do better. For the first time, many of them saw a group of people working together to help them be successful in school. "After that meeting I know I have to do better, the school knows I am a part of this program now" (Alonzo, Group Discussion, October, 2009). Like Deon, Alonzo felt the meeting put more of the responsibility on him to do well. The young men were now going to be held accountable by the program staff and the school. Goddard (2003) contends that relational networks, norms, and trust can facilitate a level of support or social capital that could propel students to doing well in school. The young men were able to establish a positive connection with school personnel and the school district central administrative staff that they had not had before. The high school students then felt they had everyone expecting much more from them, and so they felt motivated to get engaged in their academics. The meetings at each school proved to be a valuable activity that the IMPACT program initiated that helped some of the young men take a step towards alleviating the culture of failure dispositions that so many of them wallowed in.

Thursday Training Sessions

As figures 8 and 9 illustrate, the ecological structure of the IMPACT program allowed for various opportunities and activities to occur that could help with increasing students' academic engagement in school. At the exosystem level of the program, formal structures were put into

place to help facilitate the increased academic engagement and subsequent academic achievement of the males in school. The structure(s) that I also call activities occurred mostly during the weekly Thursday training sessions of the program.

The Thursday training sessions were a very important component of the IMPACT program. The high school students, college mentors, program manager, and director were all part of these sessions, with the college mentors and program manager leading most of the activities. The three hour sessions included study hall, mentor group meetings (that also included one-on-one meetings with college mentors), and mentor/tutor training sessions as well as group discussions around specific topics pertaining to students' personal and professional growth. The amount of time that was spent on the activities listed above varied depending on the nature of the topic or needs to focus on particular topics. In the next section I discuss each of these activities and how the high school males describe and understand their experiences in each of these activities.

Study Hall

For the entire academic school year the high school students had to participate in study hall on Thursdays. The rationale for this was to demonstrate the importance of studying and also to provide academic assistance from the college mentors. Each high school student had to bring in either their homework or something that they could work on that would help them academically. So in the cases when the high school students said that they did not have homework (which often happened), they were supposed to use the time to study concepts/ideas that they might be struggling with or could use assistance with. At the beginning, many of the high school students struggled to remember the expectations set forth. They would come with

the typical excuses: "I didn't have any homework" or "I forgot to bring something." This was a typical and well-established behavior, as they had become accustomed to not doing much work outside of school. In an interview, Jason talked extensively about this:

CL: How would you describe your study habits?

Jason: What study habits? I don't think I study much at all. I go to class and do my work in class and that's about it for me.

CL: So you don't study?

Jason: Not really, never really had to. I did my work in class and turned it in.

CL: I understand turning your work in during class but did you ever have to study for tests? Exams?

Jason: Well, we had tests and exams but I never studied for them. I mean we would review what was on the test during class with the teacher but that was about it. (pause). And I actually never really thought about studying outside of school. This question is making me think about that. Is it a bad thing that I never study?

Jason did not really feel he needed to study. He was passing his classes and, as discussed in the last chapter, allowed to do very little in class, so he never felt he needed to study. Interestingly, only during this interview and at this point in his academic career, did Jason ask whether it was a bad thing that he never really thought about studying, indicating that this habit was never something he discussed with anyone as a valuable and necessary academic skill. Jason's comments are indicative of the thoughts that some of the other high school students felt. For example, Juan said:

> It's hard to sit down and study something. I mean it's something I have barely done in my life obviously by the look of my grades (laughing), but it's just hard for me to do…. I am trying to get better at it. It's hard for me to focus (November, 2009).

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For Juan, and the other students, The IMPACT program asked them to do something that was difficult for them, because it was a behavior they had never engaged in.

The program staff had to persuade the students that there were benefits to studying, and the college mentors demonstrated this behavior by bringing their own work into study hall. This deliberate design showed the students that studying is important at every level of schooling, and helped motivate students. After weeks of enforcing the importance of study hall and the act of studying and learning content, the high school students began to buy into and accept the fact that studying could benefit them. For example, Alonzo said:

> It was kind of cool to see the college mentors working on their harder work. I mean I want to get to college at some point, so I see that studying is something I have to do….but at first it was hard for me to study…I couldn't stay focused on my work. I just kept trying to get better at it, and I think I am now (Alonzo, October, 2009).

Alonzo acknowledged that studying was a habit he needed to become comfortable with, and as a struggle worth working through. Some of the high school students were able to pick up on the importance of studying because some of them had engaged in this activity in the past at home or school. Darnell and Jimmy did not struggle much to get focused during study hall. Jimmy had to study a lot at his school and knew that in order to do well he needed to study more. He really appreciated the fact that the program gave him time to study, saying "I really like the fact that we get to study. It's something that I appreciate and actually wish we could spend more time on Thursdays doing" (October, 2009). Darnell stated:

> I know in order to get my grades up that I have to study more. It's something I have tried before, but not hard enough. Now I am ready to put forth the effort to study harder…. The support y'all give us makes it easier to do (October, 2009).

Darnell appreciated the support to develop good study habits he received from the college mentors and his peers. A lot of the young men were initially resistant to the idea of study hall,

but quickly warmed up to the idea once they saw value in it for themselves. Some of them began to see this value once they started to study for tests and quizzes and their grades on these tests and quizzes improved. "I appreciated the study hall now. I thank Mr. Wallace for helping me study for my algebra test. I got a good grade on the test for the first time all semester. I'm studying every week now (laughing)" (Deon October 2009). The high school males were beginning to change their attitudes toward academic success and began to buy into the fact that participating in study hall could help them become more successful. They were starting to fight against the "culture of failure" that scholars like Patterson (2006) and Williams (2007) discussed, as these young men started to believe that they could be successful. The culture of study hall is one that gives young men the support they need to gain the academic confidence initially needed to perform well in school. Harper, Terry, and Twiggs (2009) contend that supportive academic environments that promote high academic expectations and social support can help to develop academic confidence. The study hall provided the expectations and support the young men needed to help them think more positively about their academic ability in school.

As months went by, all of the students seemed to value the time they spent studying in the program. During a discussion about restructuring the Thursday sessions, all the high school students overwhelmingly voted to keep the hour of study hall time untouched. Even though some of them still struggled to stay focused the entire time and would forget to bring something to study, they were all beginning to believe in the idea of studying, a significant accomplishment in itself. The results of this vote showed a change in their thoughts about the importance of studying, since the young men's vote to keep study hall illustrated their increased desire to do well in school. The young men believed in what the study hall provided for them—support and confidence—to make the necessary effort to increase their engagement in school. Study hall

gave them a boost of efficacy that they could study, and that was verified by their increased academic performance. Although many of them may not have received this kind of support at school and at home, they had the support of the program staff and the IMPACT's program structure to assist them academically.

There were two aspects of study hall that increased the high school students' academic engagement: the males got to study with the college mentors and they were also able to receive help with their work. To see the older males of color (the college students) studying proved to be motivational to the high school males as well. Hall (2006) and Gordon and Boyd (2009) expound on the idea that providing a space for boys that is geared towards uplifting males of color can prove to be valuable to them academically and socially in school. The study hall component of the IMPACT program provided the space for the young men that differed from their experiences in school, in particular, that they were in an environment where a culture of support and motivation helped facilitate a positive environment and associated attitudes toward studying (Hall, 2006). The high school students were being mentored, guided, and provided a model of how to study and the value of studying. Gordon and Boyd (2009) broadly advocate for programs similar to IMPACT to be done with struggling African American males.

The One-on-One Meetings

The one-on-one meetings were conducted on a weekly basis, either with the program manager or a college mentor. During these meetings, the program staff member would talk to the high school male about things going on in their personal lives, such as how things are at home with parents and siblings, and any personal, academic, or social issues they might be dealing with in school. The home and schooling questions were important because the program

staff was interested in what was happening in the students' lives and support them through those things. The program attempted to supplement and compliment the activities as well as provide support in areas where students may or may not be receiving it. In a small group discussion with some of the participants, they discussed the value they felt the one-on-one meeting provided for them:

College Mentor: So how do you all feel about the individual meetings that you have with either a college mentor or the program manager?

Deon: I like it too because I can kick it (hang out) with my college mentor and we don't do that as much as I would like.

Larry: I like it too, but I like it because I like talking about my goals that I need to set and how to go about getting them done. I think the meeting really helps keep me focused.

Jimmy: Well it depends on who it is and if I feel like talking (pause). I think it's important for me though because it's like someone checking up on me.

Raymond: It gives me time to sit with my mentor and talk to them about anything, I mean that's the point of the program for me is to take advantage of the support and resources I have.

The program staff often asked for feedback on certain activities to gauge whether IMPACT should continue them or not. For the high school students, it appeared the meetings provided them with some value. The high school males determined the value or purpose of those meetings since each had their own needs, which varied depending on experiences relevant at the time.

The high school students felt that they had someone on a weekly basis to talk to about any issues they were having at school. The opportunity to build on their existing relationships with the college mentors added value to the meetings, as they didn't exhibit the typical power dynamic of a meeting with school personnel. Instead, it was a meeting that was very comfortable for the high school students, because they felt the program staff genuinely cared for

them and wanted to help them do better in school. As Joe and Davis (2009) suggest, they were the kind of conversations that a parent or family member would have with them—supportive and strict—and could occur at dinner or at anytime at home. Scholars (Hall, 2006 and Woodland, Martin, Hill, and Worrell, 2009) assert that school-based mentoring programs that focus on the individual and implement opportunities for the student to talk with mentors in a one-on-one setting could prove helpful in their academic success in school, by giving them the opportunity to ask questions and problem solve as needed, something rare for academically struggling students (Hall 2006). Harper, Terry, and Twiggs (2009) advocate for these kinds of conversations to occur in more structured counseling sessions rather than unstructured one-on-one meetings with college mentors like the IMPACT program's. However, I would argue that although we did not call the one-on-one meetings structured meetings, there were structured elements to them. Though there may be benefit to counseling sessions, it was impossible for IMPACT to provide them because the program does not currently have licensed counselors.

Progress Reports

The progress reports were a method used to hold the high school males accountable on a weekly basis for their performance in school. Since most of them did not have parents who regularly checked up on their progress, the program staff felt it was important to do so. During the weekly one-on-one meeting, the high school students were also responsible for returning their weekly progress reports and talking about their issues/concerns/successes in school for that week with a college mentor. If the high school student had any issues, the college mentor discussed ways to resolve the problem. If the high school student had academic problems, then a plan would be implemented that might require the college mentor to visit the high school student

at school. College mentors also arranged for meeting outside of the program to tutor high school students after the program's hours. All of these were informal activities that occurred at the discretion of the high school and college mentor.

The students thought the progress reports were tedious at times, but they knew it was something that they were expected to do. "I used to hate doing the progress reports but not as much anymore because my grades are getting better. You don't want to keep bringing bad grades or a bad report every week. You start to feel bad for yourself" (Deon, November, 2009). Deon's account of his experience with the progress reports highlighted his changing perception about negative reports. It was as if he started to feel ashamed of his effort in school and was unhappy to bring negative weekly reports. This accountability started to influence how he felt about himself, and he became motivated to do better academically because he did not like these negative feelings

This activity was one of the few things done in the program that held the high school students accountable for their actions. The fact that they had to come every week with a progress report and talk with someone about their actions and decisions put them in positions to defend those actions and to think carefully about what they did. For many of them, it was the first time they were consistently held accountable for their actions in schools. "Turning in those progress reports and sitting down talking about them to someone else was not something I was used to. I never went to parent/teacher conferences in high school so this was like that without the parents" (Larry, February 2010). The high school students were not only being held accountable for their actions with the progress reports, but they were also given the opportunity to work with people who wanted to see them make the necessary progress and assisted them to do just that.

As I discussed earlier, the fact that the young men were held accountable for their actions in school was something foreign to them. Hall (2006), Holt, et. al (2008), and Noguera (2003), among other scholars, insist that holding students accountable is valuable in preparing them for life beyond school. Hall (2006) further explicates that mentors in school-based mentoring programs should hold their mentees accountable for making progress towards goals set forth by the program. Although some of the students' progress reports did not immediately show growth in their academic achievement, the students were learning that they were going to be held accountable for their actions and behaviors in school on a weekly basis. The progress reports and the one-on-one meetings were activities that the IMPACT program used to hold the young men accountable, and also encourage and support their increased academic engagement in school.

Group Discussions

During the Thursday sessions, the program staff took time to have whole group discussions with the high school students about various topics. Some of the discussions dealt with academic issues, others with their role as mentors, and still others with personal development like what it means to be a man, what does love mean, etc. In the next chapter, I will examine some of those discussions on personal development.

During one of the Thursday meetings, a conversation took place about students' academic goals for the school year. At the time, many were not performing well academically. The recently released semester grades showed that 8 out of the 10 participants had done poorly. A conversation ensued about their academics and whether they accomplished the goals set forth at the beginning of the semester. I led the discussion on this topic, and it was the first time in a while that I had taken the lead on any conversation in the program. The conversation occurred

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because the high school students appeared to have been losing their focus in school. The college mentors, program manager, and I met to discuss the academic progress of each student in the program.

At the conclusion of this meeting we decided that many of the students had not met the goals they set forth at the beginning of the academic school year. Since this was the midway point of the year, we felt it was time to have a conversation with the students about their academic progress. We began by asking the students to answer the following questions: What goals did you have at the beginning of the school year?; What are your goals in life?; What do you want to do after high school?

A lot of the goals that they shared ranged from things they could do better at home or at school. Many of them were very eager to share their goals with each other and the program staff. The following is an excerpt from that conversation:

CL: Okay, so who else wants to share their goals.

Jimmy: I want to get a 3.0 GPA and get on the right track. My life goal was to start helping my mom around the house more, like taking out the trash.

CL: Did you accomplish those goals?

Jimmy: No.

CL: Okay, next person who wants to share….

Quincy: My goal was to pass all of my classes.

CL: Did you do that?

Quincy: No.

CL: So what do you all think you need to do to do better next semester?

Raymond: Think ahead.

Jimmy: Have some ambition and desire to get it done.

CL: Ok, so it appears to me that y'all know what you need, but it seems like it's a problem with the execution of the plan.

Raymond: Yes, at times I get distracted and fall off of my goals.

CL: So what are you going to do differently? What steps can you take to get you closer to accomplishing your goals?

Jimmy: I was just thinking about that today. I am going to start getting up earlier than I used to and get to school in enough time to meet with my teacher for the class that I am struggling with. Want to eat breakfast, work out, and get to my Spanish teacher, and I actually did that today and it made my day go faster and made me feel like I accomplished something today.

Alonzo: I studied today and went to all my teachers and asked if I had missing assignments.

Raymond: Get my grades up for government and get there early enough to get it done.

Ben: So if you came to our schools and didn't let us know that you were coming you would notice us getting distracted easily, playing around sometimes, which then will get us away from our work and then we end up in the situation some of us are in now. Then once we start heading down the hill, then it's hard to stop.

Juan: I would like to stay on top of things and staying ahead and begin to talk with teachers more about my work.

CL: Okay interesting points, next person.

Quincy: Turn in my homework all next week on time. I haven't been doing that at all. I know I need to do that.

Larry: I need to stay focused in class, turn in a weekly progress report so I can keep up with my progress.

This discussion took place for about thirty minutes, and it demonstrated how these students understood the importance of keeping goals, and their struggle to execute the actions needed to accomplish their goals. Throughout this exchange of dialogue, there were some participants who seemed more engaged in the conversation. For example, Deon was very disconnected from the conversation for unknown reasons, while Juan appeared more interested

in distracting others than paying attention. I mention this because it seems ironic that some of the students appeared disengaged in a discussion about their academic engagement, mirroring some of the attitudes the high school students displayed in school. But the high school males were also illustrating an attitude shift, as they began to understand the importance of setting goals and completing them. Some of the students had never set any personal or academic goals, while others admitted their lack of follow-through and were beginning to hold themselves accountable. IMPACT's expectations were beginning to affect students' attitudes as they began to expect a lot more of themselves. The high school males were beginning to question the negative behaviors in which they were involved, actions they previously ignored or condoned because they were never forced to analyze the impact of their actions on their academic and personal growth.

The uniqueness of this program activity was that it held the high school students accountable for their actions to the entire group. The group discussions about their work and progress in school seemed to motivate them to want to do better in school, just so they didn't seem like a hypocrite in front of their peers. While some reported feeling intimidated by this activity, it forced them to think carefully about what they were doing and whether they were maintaining their goals. "It was embarrassing talking about your goals and what you didn't do with the whole group. I almost wanted to make up a story so that I would look like I did what I said I would. But I know the college mentors or Mr. Wilson or Mr. Lewis would have double-checked" (Jason, January 2010). These group discussions helped them to see how others were making similar mistakes and how they could possibly avoid those mistakes, while giving them the time and space to discuss how to increase academic and personal success in school. Hall (2006) suggests that providing the space for the young men to talk with each other about some of

their issues could prove valuable in motivating them to do well in school. This appeared to have been the case for the high school students in the IMPACT mentoring program as well.

Claim 2: The high school students' role as mentors to the elementary-aged students helped them to make sense of their schooling experience; subsequently, increasing their academic engagement.

While the high school students were mentored by the college mentors and program directors, they were also mentors to the elementary-aged students. As previously mentioned, the high school mentor's role in the program was to be mentor and tutor the preK-3rd grade boys of color. This is an interesting concept because one could question how effective marginalized high school students could be in mentoring and tutoring anyone that young. Furthermore, one might wonder whether high school students would receive any benefit from working with preK-3rd grade students.

Their work with preK-3rd graders (exosystem) and the interactions that ensued (meso-system) was also very important in the high school males' increased desire to do well academically in school. As they worked, they would often see themselves in the preK-3rd grade students. They would notice their academic struggles or behavior and saw some of the things they did in school that prevented their own success in it. In a group discussion, some of the males expressed the influence working with the younger kids had on their engagement in school:

Jimmy: How can I work with students and tell them they are doing something wrong and that they need to improve on some things and I ain't doing that? They don't realize this, but they help me want to do better in school.

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Larry: I know I think the same thing…I feel like I am a hypocrite. I am not doing my best so how can I help them? Makes me think that I need to do better.

Juan: I do agree with y'all. I mean for me it's motivation, but it's also good for me to tell them what not to do. I want to do anything I can to help them.

Deon: Well I am not going to say it's okay, I mean I am now doing better and feel a lot better about what I am doing now, and part of my motivation to do better is for them.

Jimmy, Larry, Juan, and Deon discussed how their work as mentors with the younger kids made them feel hypocritical but also motivated them to do better. It also appeared that they wanted to do better for the preK-3rd graders as well.

This excerpt from a discussion about the influence the younger students had on them also illustrated an aspect of the IMPACT program that occurred at the exo-level and meso-levels of the program. The structured time set on Mondays through Wednesdays provided the opportunity for the high school students to work with the preK-3rd grade students; however, the interactions and relationships were developed and cultivated at the mesosystem-level of the program. The students discussed how these relationships also held them accountable for their actions. It was difficult for them to face the fact that some of them were not doing well in school themselves but were working three days out of the week helping others improve academically. They were not only tutors, but were mentors to the preK-3rd graders as well. The elementary-age students looked up to the high school students as role models and big brothers.

Some of the high school students felt the pressure to do well now, but it was easier said than done for them. For example, Jason said:

> I am a father and a mentor now to a bunch a kids. It ain't just about me anymore. I have to do better now. I mean I use to have this lazy attitude about school and in my last few months left I need to pick it up (pause). I need to do better, for my daughter and for the kids who I work with everyday….I am always preaching to them about paying attention and doing their work and stuff like that, and now I

have to make sure I am doing that too. It's only right that I do it too. (February 2010).

Jason expressed his desire to do better in school for the younger students he worked with, as well as for his own daughter. Jason's comments were indicative of what the other eleven participants said about the influence their roles as mentors had on them. In spite of this, some of the high school students still struggled to improve their grades. What did happen was that many of the students began to work harder in the program because they didn't want to feel like liars or hypocrites to the younger boys. For the first time in their K-12 schooling experience, most of them had people (program staff) who expected them to do well, and in turn they also had people (preK-3rd graders) who looked up to them and counted on them to help them out. To have the younger students depend on them gave the high school males a sense of accountability, but more importantly, a reason to do well. They cared for and appreciated the relationships with the preK-3rd graders so much that they wanted to do well so that they would not be hypocrites to them.

The high school students felt pretty good that their work with the preK-3rd graders helped them improve academically. It didn't seem to bother them that they were forgetting things they should have known, and there were some things they learned more in-depth because of their work with the younger students. This confidence that they gained was also because they felt they were teaching someone else how to do something. Teaching the younger students how to do something gave them a lot of confidence in their own academic ability as well:

> It felt so so good to teach the little ones about adding and subtracting. I felt like a teacher there for a minute. And they learned it, it was tough for me to help them understand it, but it was really cool once I started making sense to them. It reminds me a little of myself when the teacher is trying to teach me and I get frustrated. But those kids didn't give up… they kept trying…. So I guess I need to remember not to give up in class too (Quincy, November 2009).

Quincy was reminded of his experiences in school but was also encouraged and motivated by the effort of the younger students he worked with. Quincy mentioned that watching the younger kids hang in there and not give up motivated him to do the same. To see how these younger students reacted to certain things pushed many of the high school males to scrutinize their own behavior in school. It also reminded them of some of their own school behavior and how the results of such actions were mostly negative:

> I see Jacob acting a fool all the time in the program and it reminds me of how often I play around in school and also how I get mad so easily now. I try to talk to him to let him know that it's not cool what he is doing. I don't want him to get in trouble like I did in school. I hope he listens (Deon, February 2010).

Deon, like other high school students, wanted to help the younger students work on some of the negative behaviors that they displayed. Watching the younger guys helped him think about some of the negative behaviors he has in school that may cause him to lack focus and do well in school. In general, the experience helped the high school males to think about some of their behaviors in school, and pushed them to think more carefully about some of the things they did that would get them suspended from school. Raymond stated, "Working with the younger kids helped me think better about my decisions I make in school, I see how not paying attention could be a problem for you" (Interview, 1 December 2009). Raymond sees who the younger kids' lack of focus or other behavioral distractions often gets them in trouble and distracts them from learning. Seeing firsthand how this negatively affects the preK-3rd grade students pushed the high school males to watch what they did in school, and improve on their behavior and academic engagement in school. Brofenbrenner (1967) discussed the value that working with younger youth could have on academically struggling high school students. But there has not been much research on the influence that such an activity could have on high school students. This research and the data I have shared definitely fills in some gaps of the literature in this area.

Claim 3: The development of positive male relationships with other high school mentors and program staff members created a familial environment where the high school boys held each other academically accountable.

So many of the high school students lacked positive male relationships at home and in school. As discussed in chapter 4, many of them lacked a father figure at home. The relationships they formed with the older males in the program were important as the high school students attempted to make the necessary steps toward more engagement in school. These positive male relationships were developed on two fronts: among the high school students and among the program staff.

Some of the high school males talked about the "brotherhood" that was formed between them. The positive relationships they created with each other were helpful in allowing them to think more carefully about their efforts in school, and they started to hold each other accountable for their level of engagement in school. If one young man was suspended from school, the other high school students would chastise him. If someone failed a class, the others said something about that. The program goal was to achieve a 3.0; however, the young men had an unwritten rule between them that failing a class was unacceptable, and openly expressed that, as captured by Ben:

> It doesn't take much to pass a class, so there is no excuse why you should fail a class. We have study hall, people here all the time to help us, so no one should be failing a class… that's not cool. You don't have to work that hard to pass a class. You can't be in this program and failing classes—not cool (Ben, February, 2010).

Ben expresses his problem with a high school student failing a class, especially given the amount of support they receive from the IMPACT program. Darnell echoes these sentiments:

If you fail a class you should not be allowed to work in this program. You can't be failing classes now since you are in this program. You could say you didn't have the support, or people were not there for you, but now you can't say that. If this is a brotherhood we need to hold our brothers accountable for their efforts in school. This program is about helping us do better in school and if you are not doing better then you obviously don't want to and should not be in this program. We should push each other to do better and not just wait on the college mentors or Mr. Wilson or Mr. Lewis to push us. I know it's hard for some to get the 3.0, but failing a class shouldn't happen (Darnell, February, 2010).

Darnell passionately expresses his disdain for those who are not able to pass all of their classes, because the relationships and closeness they felt with each other made it reasonable for them to expect more from each other. The males wanted to do well in school, and that was something that became a collective effort. The collective effort was something that developed over time because of the relationships and trust they began to develop with each other through the program. For many of the males this program was like family to them, and everyone wants their family to do well. Some of the young men took this accountability with each other seriously, and used it to motivate themselves to do well:

There were days when I didn't want to go to school or even do my homework. But I knew that if I didn't do well in school or someone found out that I missed class that I would have to hear it from someone. I mean Darnell would notice I wasn't in school and would probably text me asking me where I was… so I get up and go (Duncan, Interview 2, April 2010).

The young men established this level of accountability on their own, and most of the program staff was unaware of just how deeply this became established. It demonstrated the students' level of belief in IMPACT's program goals and expectations as they began to embody and expect success of themselves and each other. It appears that the sense of brotherhood the program facilitated helped to create a culture of achievement that the young men had not experienced in other settings in their ecologies. The young men started to believe in themselves and encourage each other to do well. This level of brotherhood created a familial environment

that involved support, care, and encouragement of one another. Further, this familial

environment was one with academic success as a core value and all of the young men in the

program came to understand and embrace that notion.

The relationships with program staff were developed at the meso-system level of the

IMPACT program. The program staff was very dedicated to making sure the high school

students understood they could contact any of the program staff members outside of work hours.

This was a program policy because the staff understood that situations about which the high

school students might need advice or someone to talk with certainly occurred outside of work,

and that this support might be nonexistent at home, school, or in the community. So every high

school student had their particular college mentor/supervisor's phone number and the program

manager's phone number.

The program staff either called or texted the high school students a few times weekly to

check on them. So many of the high school students were not used to anyone, specifically a

male, checking up on their well being regularly. This helped to create a very positive and

supportive environment for them.

> The college mentors, you, and Mr. Wilson are like family to me. I mean I know if
> I had a question about my work, I now know I have someone to call or talk to. If
> I am having a problem at school, I know I have someone to call to help me out. I
> mean, don't get me wrong, my mom is supportive too, but she has a lot of other
> stuff on her plate….My relationship with my college mentor has really helped to
> keep me focused in school (Raymond, Interview 1, December 2009).

Raymond's statements were echoed by other high school students in the program as well. Most

of the young men had some form of support from family, but due to some of the circumstances

discussed in the previous chapter, had access to limited levels of support. Darnell said in an

interview:

My mom wanted me to do well in school. She supported me doing well in school, but she didn't really care whether I got a 3.0 or not. It's nothing negative towards my mom, but we never really talked about that. We talked about that in this program a lot and y'all pushed us to work towards that. I mean if I wasn't a part of this program I would have continued to go through school doing just enough to pass. Since I have been in this program my grades are way better, I have over a 3.0 every quarter now, and I am taking an AP class. An AP class? I would have never even thought about AP nothing if it wasn't for this program. The relationship that I have with some of the people here are stronger than some of my family members. I do well because I want to make y'all proud of me too (April 2011).

Here we see Darnell expressing the influence of his involvement and relationship with the program staff on his desire to do well in school. The level of support, expectations, and accountability that the program provided for him propelled him to want to do better in school. The IMPACT program motivated him to expect more from himself, most strongly exemplified in his reference to the AP class.

In an interview, Deon started to get a little emotional as he was describing his relationship with a particular staff member in the program, who he felt he could trust and depend on, while pushing him to want to do well in school. Issues of trust and dependability were things that Deon struggled with before he started the program, but he indicated how supported he felt in the program:

I don't like disappointing people who care about me. I mean this program the people in it has shown me love and I don't want to let nobody down. I know I am trying a lot harder in school than I did before I started the program. I am making better decisions in school that I didn't make before. I am doing my work. My GPA is back to at least a 3.0 now. I appreciate this program and the support I have (Deon, Interview 2, April 2010).

Deon was often disengaged from the program and school at the beginning of his involvement in the program, but became more engaged because he started to trust what the program stood for and the people in it. It took a while for him to build that level of trust in the program and so he

initially scrutinized everyone in the program to see if they could be trusted, since he was afraid of the disappointment he would feel if others didn't follow-up on their promises. Once Deon received that confirmation he was able to make the necessary steps he needed to be successful in school. Colley (2002) argues that same-gendered mentoring programs for troubled youth could bring transformation in the student behavior that could have long-term benefits. The fact that all the mentors/mentees were males allowed for discussions and relationship building that could have been hindered if the mentor/mentee relationships were mixed-gender.

The availability of the staff was never inappropriately used or abused. On a few occasions the high school students, when they were caught in a situation at school where in the past they would act on their own and find themselves in trouble, would text or call a college mentor or program manager. An example of this occurred when Juan was sent to the office at school and was about to get suspended for a day but instead he called me, Mr. Wilson, and another college mentor on the phone to discuss the matter. Mr. Wilson decided to go up and talk with Juan at school. Mr. Wilson was able to meet with Juan, the assistant principal, and the teacher to discuss the issue. After a lengthy conversation the school decided not to suspend him and instead Mr. Wilson and Juan sat in the library to complete the work that precipitated the conflict in the classroom.

This incident illustrates the importance of the partnership meeting that I discussed earlier in this chapter. The high school administrative staff knew about the program and allowed us to come in and assist Juan in this situation, whereas he would simply have been suspended in the past. It was also important that Juan could trust the program staff enough to call for help to make an appropriate decision. Juan mentioned that in the past he would probably have gotten into a bigger argument with the teacher and principal and then would have been suspended:

I didn't want to get suspended because I knew I couldn't come to work and I didn't want to miss a day of work so I thought it was best to call one of y'all. I mean that's what y'all tell us to do. It worked out well for me, I would have usually gotten suspended, so I am glad I called. (Juan, October, 2009).

Juan felt comfortable calling a program staff member because it was clear that it was okay, but he also knew that he would get the support he needed. In the past, he would have been suspended, but more importantly, he would have missed an opportunity to learn about this behavior and complete his work. It was important for Juan to see that he could get the support he needed at school and that there was an alternative way to deal with issues that occur in school that could produce positive results. This may have seemed far-fetched for him because he very seldom experienced positive results in school. The meeting with the school personnel was also very helpful in this situation because the principal knew that he was in the program, so he not only allowed Mr. Wilson to come in and meet with Juan in lieu of the parent, but he was also not as quick as he might have been in the past to suspend Juan.

Deon was involved in a similar situation with a teacher that he didn't get along well with. According to Deon, the teacher picked on him a lot in the class, and one day the teacher told Deon to stop talking when he felt that he wasn't talking at all. An argument ensued, during which Deon texted me (luckily he didn't get in more trouble for texting). We talked through the situation, and I basically told him to relax and just do what the teacher asked him to do. Deon expressed how upset he was and that he wanted to leave the class, but I convinced him to stay in class and told him that we could talk in more detail after school. Deon agreed and after school we talked more about how to handle this situation. In both of these cases, the relationships Deon and Juan formed with the program staff allowed them to do what Hall (2006) calls, "bridging the gap between teachers and students" (p. 42). Hall (2006) explains that school-based mentors

serve as advocates for students by providing strategies for them to deal with situations that they may not know how to deal with, and also provide the teachers with someone that the student trusts that could directly deal with the student's behaviors. As Hall (2006) discusses, this likely results in a win-win situation for all involved, especially the students who received the advocacy and support needed to navigate their way through schools.

Though Jimmy discussed the lack of support he received from home and school, he developed a very positive relationship with his guidance counselor. When his guidance counselor needed to have a meeting with his parents about his progress in school, Jimmy felt his parents wouldn't show so he asked if it was okay for someone from the IMPACT program to come instead. Jimmy was confident and comfortable enough in his relationship with some of the program staff to sit in for, and assume the role of, his parents. From that meeting with the guidance counselor, some of the program staff became surrogate parents for him. Since he was of legal adult age, his counselor would call a program staff member instead of his parents if she had any concerns with him. To Jimmy, this was the kind of support in school and at home that he was looking for and now it was starting to happen for him:

> It's pretty cool to get the support from my counselor at school. She is the only the person I can talk to at school…. I am glad that she communicates with the program because y'all are my support as well. It's nice to see that people care about my education and well being at school. It makes me feel good and I do want to do better in school and put more energy into what I am doing there because I know I have some people to answer to (Jimmy, Interview 2, April 2010).

Although Jimmy expressed his appreciation for the support he received from both the program and school, I would argue he already had some level of engagement in school, since he was driving over 45 minutes to get to school on a daily basis, which is not typical of a disengaged student. What the support system did for him was make him work harder in school, and it

provided people he could talk to or receive guidance from when needed. When all of the high

school students talked about the relationships that they created in the program, they all referred

back to the idea that they had supportive and trusting relationships with people who were

invested in them doing well in school. Gordon and Boyd (2009) contend in their study of

mentoring programs that having long term, consistent, trusting relationships were important in

achieving positive results. However, they suggest that this should occur in more traditional ways

and do not suggest support beyond what occurs within the program. In the IMPACT program,

the support went beyond verbal support to the actions that supported those words, allowing the

high school students to use their energy to do better in school.

The IMPACT program had similar characteristics with other school-based mentoring

programs, but it was also unique. The tiered approach to the IMPACT program made it a

calculated approach to mentoring that set it apart from traditional school-based mentoring

programs that have been discussed in the literature. Most traditional school-based mentoring

programs are usually between the high school student and an older adult, and are mixed-gender.

The IMPACT program was tiered so that the high school students also had an opportunity to be

mentors as Brofenbrenner (1967) recommended in his study. This experience had an influence

on the high school students as well. The high school students had dual roles as mentors and

mentees, and in this chapter I have attempted to illustrate the influence this structure had on their

academic ambitions. Furthermore their relationships with the college mentors and other program

staff gave them the opportunities to learn strategies from older adults on how to handle volatile

situations in school that they would not have successfully resolved in the past.

This tiered approach to the IMPACT mentoring program was also ecologically designed.

Most school-based mentoring programs have a traditional and simple approach—student and

older adult relationships with some interactions with teachers and school staff. The ecological structure of the IMPACT program helped to facilitate activities that influenced the high school students academically, socially, and personally. Moreover, the ecological structure also developed an infrastructure to support students that is uncommon in traditional school-based mentoring programs. It addressed the needs of the students from multiple settings of the child's ecology: home and school.

Summary

Increasing the high school males' development does not mean their grades drastically improved. Many of them had spent years without the support from home and school needed to be successful, and were seldom held accountable for their actions or academic achievement in school. So to expect many of them to automatically change their behaviors would be unrealistic. Moreover, to think that it would take a short period of time to do that would be naïve. For many of the males, this was the first time they were held accountable for their actions in school and even encouraged to do well. The only level of accountability any of them received from school was through suspensions due to some of their inappropriate behavior. Getting suspended for misconduct was what many of them were used to, but suspensions only reduced their engagement in school.

The structured activities that took place at the exo-level helped to facilitate the relationship building that took place at the meso-level. These relationships were important to the transformation of some of the young men towards exhibiting more interest in school. The program was more focused on changing their mindsets first, with the hope that their level of success in school would increase because they find themselves more interested in doing well in

school. Ogbu (1990) discussed the importance of providing mentoring programs for at-risk students of color, advocating for mentor/mentee relationships that are same-race oriented. Scholars such as Hall (2006), and Woodland, Martin, Hill, and Worrell (2009) support the concept of same race mentor/mentee relationships. Although the high school students do not discuss the fact that the program staff also consisted of males of color, it would be irresponsible of me to ignore the fact that the program was a same-race, school-based mentoring program. I will discuss this aspect of the program below.

At first, many of the high school males were not convinced that doing well in school would do anything for them. Their environments at home and school did not demonstrate to them that a good education was something necessary. And for some of them, it was all about finding ways to survive and get, by any means necessary, the money to pay the bills. The working class (Lareau, 1987) mentality that so many of the males came from often elicited the need for immediate gratification instead of long-term gains that school would bring. So, many of the males had to be convinced that, even though their family might be struggling economically at home, going to school and being educated will help them in the future. The program staff was very clear that achieving in school was a goal and part of the purpose of the program. It was also clear that going to college was not the only option towards a successful path, but a main program goal was to help provide the young men with options that so many of them would not have had, based on their past trajectories. Not all of them immediately jumped on the bandwagon, but some of them almost jumped at the chance for these opportunities.

All of the high school students made some effort to change their desire to do well. Out of the ten students that were part of the study, nine of them increased their grade point averages. All nine increased their attendance rates and the five of them who were scheduled to graduate

that year from high school did, and all attended either a community college or four-year institution. All of the five who went on to college have discussed how the program had an influence on their desire to go to college. All of them stated that college was not an option for them before this program.

Chapter 7

Self-Perception

I like who I am, I think I am smart and intelligent, I mean I like who I am, I wouldn't change anything about me. But I think certain people in society may view males of color as these thugs, people who don't want things and umm…but its nobody fault but males of color in society…I mean I look at some of the males of color in my classes school and all the teachers don't treat them bad or view them negatively, they actually make them view them a certain way based on how they act, some of them don't do anything in school and that's the picture that the teacher may have (Darnell, Interview 1).

Self-Perception Defined

According to Manning (2007), the terms self-concept and self-esteem are often used interchangeably. They represent different but related constructs. Self-concept refers to a "student's perceptions of competence or adequacy in academic and nonacademic (e.g., social, behavioral, and athletic) domains and is best represented by a profile of self-perceptions across domains" (p.36). For this study, I define self-perception as a student's understanding, interpretation and subsequent confidence in their academic and nonacademic knowledge, behavior and self-worth.

Who am I? How do I carry myself? What do others think of me? These are some of the questions that the high school students in the mentoring program grappled with as they attempted to develop their self-perception. Darnell's quote from his first interview exemplifies the dilemma that so many of the young men were faced with. There is a perception of who they are as Black or Latino males that may or may not support who they think they are. Messages are often sent by the media, what they see in their community, what they may have been told by family, how they are treated by teachers and other school personnel and how they might perceive others in their school to think of them.

These messages are both positive and negative in nature, and lend themselves to contradictions that may lead to no sense of self, or – a sense of confusion of who and what self's capabilities. Figure 9 shows the various factors that influence the high school students' self-perception. While the IMPACT program influenced the students' self-perceptions there are other influences located in other settings of the microsystem level that shaped and sometimes contradicted how they viewed themselves. One of the informal goals of the mentoring program staff was to give the young men a platform to re-orient some of their negative self-perceptions.

In this chapter, I will discuss how the relationships developed and cultivated the meso-system level of each students' ecological system helped to re-shape the high school students' self perception.   In conjunction, with how this was influenced by the structures and activities in place at the exosystem level of the program's ecological system. Additionally, I will also discuss how the Impact program's values and goals at the macro-level of the program's ecological system influenced the students' self-perception. In this chapter, two claims are used to describe and make sense of the experiences that the high school students had in the mentoring program that influenced their self-perceptions.

1. Claim 1: The interactions and relationships with the Impact mentoring program staff influenced how the young men perceived themselves.

2. Claim 2: The program activities provided a platform for the high school students to reshape their construction of manhood.

Claim 1: The interactions and relationships with the IMPACT mentoring program staff influenced how the young men perceived themselves.

Who am I? "I am who you say I am."

Jimmy was a little less confident in his physical appearance (dress, skin complexion, attractiveness, etc) than most of the young men in the program. He rarely stated anything

positive about his physical appearance. He did not like his skin complexion; he disliked his

height, and did not like his hair. This apparent dislike for self was something that affected his

self-esteem in public and began to affect how he felt about his ability to be successful. Jimmy is

bi-racial, and his racial identity was the impetus for this lack of confidence.

> It's difficult at times for me to feel like I belong among any racial group. The people I grew up with were all White and everyone at my school is White. Before this program I never really dealt with Black people. That was tough sometimes because it was like a part of me I wasn't aware of…. also the fact that my biological dad was apparently a Black man is tough because I will never know who he is, and so I always felt that part of me was left out. I was never sure of myself…felt misunderstood because no one around me could understand me anyway, so I just kept things to myself. So this program and having good relationship with other Black males has been very helpful in helping me learn about that side of me (Jimmy Interview 1 December 2009).

Jimmy is very honest about his upbringing and how his racial identity affected his thoughts about

himself. It was not until his involvement in the program that he began to feel some attachment to

the African American culture. The fact that he was surrounded by all males of color allowed him

to connect with and understand his cultural heritage. Scholars, (Hall, 2006 and Ogbu, 1990)

contend that same race mentoring could have a positive affect on the mentee. For Jimmy, these

positive male relationships gave him the opportunity to identify with individuals who embodied

a part of his makeup with whom he had limited and meaningful interactions with.

Jimmy had a great relationship with Mr. Wilson, the program manager of the Impact

mentoring program. Mr. Wilson was someone Jimmy definitely considered to be a role model.

This relationship also allowed him to critically address his concerns about his self-perception and

lack of self-confidence.

CL: Who is someone you can trust in the program?

Jimmy: I can trust Mr. Wilson.

CL: Why do you think you can trust Mr. Wilson?

Jimmy: Well I think I can trust Mr. Wilson because he helps me become a better person and holds me accountable.

CL: What do you mean he holds you accountable? How does he do that?

Jimmy: Well if I am acting up in the program not doing my job like I should he will call me out on it. We also talk a lot about how and why my actions are the way they are sometimes.

CL: How are your actions? Say more about that.

Jimmy: Well… (pause). I think that I am often not very approachable or may come off as upset and when he noticed that the takes me to the side and we talk about it. He is the one person whose opinion matters to me, that I respect what he says, and I try to reflect on my actions and ways of improving after we talk.

CL: Why he is different from some of the college mentors who you could also talk to?

Jimmy: Well, I don't know. He is real. We can talk about anything and like I said I can trust him. He cares about me…. (pause). I mean he is someone who I look up to, I wouldn't mind being like him. He is smart, tall, and liked by many (pause)…I mean he is perfect (laughing).

This relationship with Mr. Wilson gave Jimmy someone to talk to. This trusting relationship was important for Jimmy, because it gave him a platform to discuss things that he struggled with. It was the kind of relationship that Jimmy wanted with his father. Mr. Wilson became not only a mentor and role model for Jimmy, but he became a father-like figure for him. Mr. Wilson was someone that he respected, took advice from, and admired a great deal.

Throughout Jimmy's time in the program his relationship with his mom was estranged and his dad was not very involved. Consequently, Mr. Wilson became a substitute for what he did not have at home.

> Man, you know I really look up to him. He is the one person that can make me cry. I cry because I know he cares and wants the best for me. I really enjoyed when we have a chance to talk one on one because he helps me think not only about my actions but my relationship with others and how I think of myself. I am

starting to gain a lot of confidence in my ability and my self and I have really learned a lot about myself because of my interactions with Mr. Wilson. I feel like he understands me and we are alike in ways and I want to be smart, tall just like him. We have a lot in common (Jimmy, Interview 2, April, 2010).

The relationship that developed helped Jimmy begin the process of gaining confidence about his physical attributes, learn more about himself and deal with some of the issues he had with his racial identity. It was the first time for him that he had a positive relationship with another African American male. Ensher and Murphy (1997) state that same race mentor/mentee relationships could positively affect the quality of the mentoring relationship. Further, they contend that perceived similarities and psychosocial support contributes positively to the mentoring relationship and can have a positive effect on the mentee's confidence and other relationships. Jimmy's relationship with Mr. Wilson provided him with confidence, and motivation to try harder in school and gain a more positive self perception.

Jason also had a negative perception of himself academically and his ability beyond athletics. He perceived African American students to be more interested in athletics and White students to be more engaged in their academics. Jason's confidence in school versus his confidence as an athlete supported his belief. Scholars such as Nasir (2008) discussed how students that hold strong identities as African Americans suffer in academics or their identification decreases when they view being African American as antithetical to doing well in school. Nasir's (2003) concept is definitely connected to Jason's idea about the ability to be African American students. This perception was something he adopted for himself as well. "I'm okay with being expected to play football. This is what I am good at. Playing football gives me the motivation to go to school. After football season, I lose interest in school" (Jason, Interview 1, December 2010). He did not believe in his ability to do well in the classroom, and his primary purpose in school was to play football.

As a special education student Jason was cognizant of his academic issues which further influenced his self-perception. During his time in the program he developed a great relationship with the entire program staff. When he first started in the program he was very hesitant about doing any writing assignments that were asked of the high school mentors as part of their training and personal development. On a couple of occasions he tried to quit the program because he just wasn't interested in doing any sort of writing.

However, as a result of the strong relationships developed and the consistent interactions with the college mentors and program manager, Jason's confidence in writing abilities improved. The program staff was aware of Jason's hesitation about his writing abilities and overall ability to read, write and speak, therefore the program staff developed a plan to support his growth in these areas. Furthermore, they set high academics expectations for him and peeled away the athletic "shield" that he hid behind for so many years. Coincidentally, he became more comfortable speaking in front of the group.

> It was a struggle for me when I first started the program. You know I didn't like to talk in front of people, I was scared to write (pause). I mean I am still scared to write (laughing)…but I am getting better at it. I mean my relationship with the college mentors, Mr. Wilson and Mr. Lewis has really helped me feel better about myself. I am more positive about what I can do. I actually want to do more because I feel I can do more now (pause). I mean the things yall did for me like working with me one on one, pushing me to do better; not giving up on me was stuff I didn't get from school. I mean they made it easy for me, let me sleep in class and that didn't help me, it made it worse for me. I mean I like the fact that I didn't have to do much work, but I wasn't feeling good about myself. Now I feel like I need to do better. Yall talked to us all the time about our potential and how we could do what we put our minds too…I think about that all the time now… I feel like I can do more than just play football (pause) I mean I seriously know that I won't be making a living playing football so I better believe I can do something else besides play football (laughing) (Jason, Interview 3 June 2010).

This excerpt demonstrates the growth that took place in Jason as a result of his interactions with some of the program staff. He talked about his experiences in the classroom and how the past

culture of low expectation had influenced his self-perception.   Since his teachers did not expect

anything beyond playing football, likewise, he internalized that playing sports was all he could

do. Jason was never challenged to think beyond his athletic capabilities therefore he was content

and never worked towards academic achievements. Jason acknowledged and recognized that he

still had his work cut out for him but he made a conscious effort to think more positively about

his overall potential. It was as if he was beginning to take the football helmet off and feel more

confident about his ability to do other things.

Larry was a very quiet high school student who also lacked the confidence in himself and

his academic potential. He had no clue as to what his future would hold beyond high school. At

times he wondered if he would complete high school. This was evident in his lack of effort in

school and the disposition he demonstrated when he started the program. He didn't talk much

during group discussions and didn't talk much to staff or to the other high school students. He

began to develop a relationship with one of the college mentors, Mr. Walton. He worked at the

school with Mr. Walton on Monday thru-Wednesday. This relationship heightened when Mr.

Walton began to meet with Larry outside of school for lunch or dinner. Additionally, Mr. Walton

visited Larry at school. Subsequently, Larry blossomed in the program and seemed more

confident. Larry was even selected as one of the two most improved high school students.

Larry's relationship with Mr. Walton was instrumental in both his personal and social progress.

The following is an excerpt from Larry's third interview,

Larry: When I first started the program, I was a little shy. I wasn't sure what was going on and

didn't think I was worthy of a job like this. After working with Mr. Walton for a few months my

relationship with him grew. He came to see me at school and that was pretty cool…it showed he

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cared about me. We would text from time to time after work and that really motivated me to want to do better.

CL: You seem to talk more in the program, what brought about that change?

Larry: Well, I feel more comfortable…I mean Mr. Walton really helped me understand what I needed to do and that gave me confidence. I actually believe more in myself because of it.

Larry's relationship with Mr. Walton was crucial in his development in the program and in his own personal confidence. In the case with Jimmy and Larry, Mr. Wilson and Mr. Walton served as a bridge to their success. The relationships that they developed with the program staff members provided a source of motivation, encouragement and positive reinforcement that was otherwise lacking in the home and school settings. The older men in the program became personal confidantes for the high school males. Hall (2006) alluded to the potential of these relationships when school based mentoring programs provide the opportunity to develop strong mentor/mentee relationships. According to interviews and discussions from the high school students, the relationships between the high school students and program staff were instrumental in their growth as mentors in the program and their personal growth.

When Darnell entered the program he was not very confident in his abilities to speak in front of people or his ability to be a good mentor/tutor. "When I first started the program, I wasn't sure that I could be a good mentor or tutor. I was struggling with my own confidence. How was I going to be able to help someone else out?" (Interview 1, December 2009) In the beginning, Darnell was timid in his interactions with the preK-3rd graders and the program staff. He was extremely soft spoken and seemed unmotivated to express his thoughts in large group discussions. Darnell developed a very good relationship with two people in the program: a college mentor Mr. Jones and myself.

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Mr. Jones was close in age, and they both shared similar interest in playing basketball. Darnell's interest in basketball and the relationship they developed due to Mr. Jones's one on one interaction with him created a positive and thriving mentoring relationship.

> I appreciate my relationship with Mr. Jones. He has been very helpful to me as a high school mentor because I have been able to gain some confidence in what I am doing with the little kids. He talks to me about ways to get better and also let's me know when I am doing well. At first I was very worried I wouldn't do a good job. Well honestly I didn't think I could do a good job but Mr. Jones helped me build my confidence in myself. He talked to me a lot about some of the things I can do well and that made me feel good. He helped me build some confidence in myself as a person, which also helped me be a better mentor to the little kids (Interview 1, December 2009).

Mr. Jones interactions with Darnell produced a more confident and responsible mentor and tutor to the younger kids. The compliments he received from Mr. Jones along with the positive influences, equipped him with the ability to build his overall confidence and self-perception. As a result, he became more vocal in the program and was chosen as one of the high school leaders in the program. Woodland, Martin, Hill and Worrell (2009) contend that the development of positive relationships, and not necessarily particular activities that the mentor and mentee engage in can provide opportunities for students to build confidence in themselves. For Darnell, the positive relationship he built with Mr. Jones definitely increased his self-confidence.

As I discussed in the previous chapter Juan is a young man who struggled both socially and academically. Consequently, these struggles caused him to lose confidence in his ability to succeed academically and to be successful in life. However, his relationship with the college mentors and program staff increased his confidence in his chances of completing high school as well as the opportunity to live a productive life.

Juan: Before I started school I really wanted to drop out of school.

Interviewer: Why did you want to drop out of school?

Juan: Well I wanted to drop out of school because I was tired of always getting in trouble. I felt that was who I was—a troublemaker. I started to lose confidence in my life and what I could be.

Interviewer: What do you mean lose confidence in your life?

Juan: Well I felt like I wasn't happy in my life and that I couldn't be successful, that I didn't think I could do anything positive in my life.

This excerpt from an interview with Juan illustrates his extreme lack of self confidence himself and his future potential. Later in the conversation he began to talk about how his relationships with the program staff and college mentors and how both helped him gain confidence in himself.

> My mind is starting to change a lot right now. Being a part of this program gave me the opportunity to meet people like Mr. Walton, Mr. Jones, Mr. Wilson, and Mr. Lewis. Yall all helped me think about my life in a better way. I have a little more confidence in myself that I can be somebody….the program could have let me go when I was getting in trouble in school and they didn't. They helped me and gave me ways to think about what I was doing. I knew I had close relationships with them that I could call them and ask for advice when I needed it. I had people who I trust and could talk to…..I really appreciated the relationship I had with the college mentors and Mr. Wilson and Mr. Lewis. They really helped me become a better person and to feel better about myself (Interview 2, April 2010).

Juan really valued the relationships he had with the program staff. These relationships helped him to redirect the negative disposition he had towards his self-perception and gave him hope that he could do better- like Darnell he gained confidence in himself.

The Love/Hate Relationship

Quincy and Mr. Wilson had a very unique relationship. When Quincy first began the program he had a very volatile relationship with Mr. Wilson. The two of them had an incident earlier on in the program that Quincy struggled to move past. Quincy typically a very quiet student during the program and was one of the best high school mentors in the program because of his skill in interacting with the preK-3rd grade students. However, after a few months Quincy and Mr.

Wilson developed a solid and productive relationship. Quincy became receptive to Mr. Wilson and this relationship continued throughout the program.

Quincy: I appreciate my relationship with Mr. Wilson. At first I didn't really like him but after we hung out a few times we started to get very close. I mean I told him things that I didn't tell anybody. Mr. Wilson knew how to get me upset and I guess that's the part about our relationship that I didn't like as much. But I guess I needed someone to be on me.

CL: When did it all click for you that Mr. Wilson would be there for you and that the two of you would have a very good relationship?

Quincy: I can remember when we were talking one day during a Thursday session and he told me how much a good mentor I was to the little kids. That made me feel so good about myself. You know for the most part I was very quiet and didn't talk to others much. I didn't trust most of the people in the program. It was a lot going on in my life with my family and I was losing faith in myself. I really was getting to the point of leaving the program and just giving up. But when he said that to me, I felt like wow….it was really cool for him to say that about me…and it just got better from there.

The relationship that he is described with Mr. Wilson was helped Quincy feel more positive about himself. Mr. Wilson's words of encouragement and acknowledgment of his skills and the subsequent relationship that developed gave him motivation to continue in the program. Quincy was also very vocal about his relationship with some of the other staff in program as well. "The other college mentors are like big brothers to me, I am glad to have them around. They allow me to take the opportunity to be a kid again. I mean I am the man at the house…here I look at myself like a kid, learning from other people"(Group Discussion February, 2010). As previously mentioned, Quincy is the adult male in the house and doesn't have a male figure in the home to emulate. This program and the relationships established with the program staff allowed him to act his age and learn how to be a man from some of the program staff such as myself.

Who Do I Think I Need to Be?

Deon believed that a person had to protect themselves by fighting and doing whatever necessary to survive in community where this type of behavior isn't interpreted negatively by rather a necessary evil. This was often the disconnection that many students felt between the culture of their community and often their homes, and the middle class culture of schools (Bourdieu, 1992). When we recognize that there are individuals in our society who feel they must survive and earn respect by acts of physical violence, we should likewise recognize that these same individuals deem this behavior perfectly acceptable. It is important to recognize this specific construction of self-perception because this is what Deon believed. This destructive self-perception can vary among settings (i.e. home, community, individuals). Deon similar to Quincy believed that fighting was necessary to gain respect. Conversely enough, none of the other young men would disagree with this concept. To refuse to fight could go against their perceived masculinity and idea of "toughness" and even their idea of manhood.. This is the result of young men raising themselves and finding out what it means to be a man on their own and from what they perceive those around them think (Ferguson, 2000). For many of the young men this often created a paradox. For instance, although they wanted to demonstrate a level of toughness they did not want to get into trouble for it, nor did they want to tarnish the positive image that they wanted to portray. For Quincy, his relationship with the program staff, in particular, Mr. Wilson helped him to think differently about his self-perception. However, this was more challenging in Deon's case. Deon struggled more than any other high school mentor to gain a positive relationship with the program staff, specifically, the college mentors. It was tough for him because he struggled to mask his insecurities about himself as a young man. As discussed in chapter 4, Deon didn't trust anyone and was learning how to become a man based

on how he saw others behave in his community, in the media or the other male figures in his

family. He often talked about how his mother said he was acting like his dad. Deon's

relationships with the other college mentors gave him the opportunity to show his male prowess,

to practice his toughness; however, there was one relationship that was able to peel away at his

tough guy image that he often displayed. Coincidentally, it was Deon and I who developed a

very strong and productive relationship.

Interview 2 with Deon

Interviewer: So who is someone you admire or would you say is a role model to you?

Deon: Umm…(pause). Mr. Curtis Lewis

Interviewer: Why is he a role model for you?

Deon: Because he is there for me, I mean he really cares about me. I mean there are people who say they care but I know he cares about me because he shows that.

Interviewer: Do you have examples of how he shows that?

Deon: Well we talk on a regular about things going on in my life…he gives me advice when I ask. He also gets on me when I am not doing well. He is the main reason why I am in this program and he has been there for me since this program.

On the contrary, in public conversations, Deon would was quick to say he does not have a role

model nor anyone he looks up to. It appeared that he wanted to give the perception that he was

on his own and needed no one's help. He wanted to be perceived as someone who can do things

on his own. To further illustrate, Deon kept his feelings about our relationship to himself and

from the other high school students. It is unclear why he behaved this way however it was

evident to others in the program that he demonstrated a high level of respect for me. I was the

only person that could get him to redirect his negative energy into something positive. As a

result, I was the only person in the program who could directly influence Deon's behavior.

Deon and I attended local college and football games. During these outings we were able to talk about matters that troubled him. He often talked about his insecurities with speaking in front of people and his lack of confidence in himself. He shared that he didn't think he was a good mentor. Early in our interactions, I realized that his bravado, tough guy attitude was a guise (Katz, 2000), a way to mask his insecurities. In our interactions, Deon was able to share his insecurities with someone he could trust and simultaneously find productive ways to address them. I often made myself available to speak with him and over time I gained his trust. We would communicate frequently both in and outside the program. Our conversations were productive and proactive – he sought my advice on matters before reacting to them. This was a huge development for Deon and positively impacted the perception he had of himself.

> I think the relationship that I have with Mr. Lewis is one that has really helped me think about how I can handle myself better. I am thinking more about things before I act now. He really cares about me and I know that because he shows that and just doesn't say it. To have someone care for me like he does and who also helps me become a better man is good for me. I feel better about myself and I feel more comfortable (pause)…well I feel confident too (Interview 2, April 2010).

The relationship between Deon and myself helped him gain confidence in himself and challenged some the self-perceptions that were detrimental to his future. Like the others, Deon albeit challenging, gained a lot from the positive relationships developed with the program staff. Although I did not discuss every relationship that was established between the high school students and program staff, each of the high school students in the program gravitated to one of the program staff members and can identify a person whom they count on as a result of the their participation in the program.

These relationships and interactions with the program staff greatly influenced how the high school males perceived themselves. Many of their home and school environments created

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conceptions of manhood and self that resulted in a lack of confidence and the skill necessary to

prosper both academically and socially. On the contrary, these environments created a

hypermasculinity mentality that often precipitated negative behavior. The program staff

members provided the source of support and guidance that would help them reevaluate and

reframe their negative self-perceptions. Irvine (1989) contends that Black teachers often have to

take on the role as cultural translators or cultural brokers for their students of color. While, Mr.

Walton and Mr. Wilson are not teachers they served as cultural translators or mediators for the

young men. The program staff members helped the young men make sense of who they were

and some of their actions and assisted them in re-thinking those thoughts and actions. Moreover,

the positive relationships appear to be temporary substitutes for ones they did not have with their

fathers.

**Claim 2: The program activities provided spaces for the high school students to reshape
their construction of manhood.**

The program's goals are as follows:
Program Goals

- Enhance the positive character development and academic success of young boys of color

  ages 4-8.

- To promote community civic engagement, positive character development and personal

  confidence, promote cross age and cross generation mentor-mentee relationships.

- To facilitate academic confidence, persistence and achievement.

- To encourage personal wellness, mental and intellectual growth

The aforementioned goals represent the core of the program. The goals are placed at the

macro-system level of the program that directs and influences all the other levels of the

IMPACT's program ecology. It is what drives all activities and interactions that occur within the program.

To Fight or Not to Fight? That is the Question!

The following activities that are discussed in this section were influenced by the following IMPACT Mentoring program goal: To promote community civic engagement, positive character development and personal confidence, promoting cross age and cross generation mentor-mentee relationships.

The high school students had a difficult time navigating what Sewell (1997) and other scholars call hyper-masculinity. As discussed in Chapter 4, some of the young men struggled with their conception of manhood and what it meant to be a man. This "tough" guy persona is what so many of them emulated. Fighting was one way many of the young men felt they could display their "toughness." The high school students were involved in a group conversation about the culture of fighting, bullying and violence that plague some of their communities.. This topic of conversation was relevant to all of the young men. They all had experiences with physical violence, either from fights or violent acts that they have been in or acts they have witnessed either at home, school or in their neighborhoods. This conversation allowed the young men the space to discuss an issue that affected their lives (Hall, 2006). An excerpt of this discussion is as follows:

Quincy: Well, you know, well yall know I always get jumped on when I am at school or in my neighborhood at home. People always try to mess with me because I am a bigger guy but I am quiet. So people try to test me and I have to show them I am not a punk, I have to earn their respect. I mean even when I got jumped on by those dudes at the end of the school year last year, the fact that I fought them back meant I got me some respect, doesn't mean that they won't try it again but hey at least they know now that I will fight back."

Juan: "Well I feel you Quincy, I find myself needing to protect myself and let people know I ain't no punk. I've been jumped before but I fought back.

College mentor: So do you think girls have to go through this as well?

Darnell: Well I think it's different for girls.

Larry: Yeah I think it's different for girls, I mean they fight too.

College mentor: What do you mean it's different for girls?

Alonzo: I mean girls have to fight but not as much as we do.

Deon: Yeah.

Quincy: Plus they fight over dumb stuff like boys or he say she say stuff…we don't when boys have to fight its deeper than that.

College mentor: What makes it so deep for boys to fight?

Juan: I mean we been talking about bullying today and boys don't want to be bullied

Darnell: (Interjecting) I mean girls don't want to either.

Juan: (laughing) right….right…but for us we are expected to fight. I mean girls being called a punk or the "B" [Bitch] means one thing and when we get called that it means another…I mean a boy don't want to be called a "B."

College mentor: So do you think society view boys as fighters?

Deon: Well boys of color especially

Quincy: Oh yeah I mean Black boys are looked as being tough

Juan: Yea I agree I mean Mexicans too, you see all the movies out that with the Black and Latino gangs'….they are mostly men, and what do they do? Fight!
{Entire group laughs}

Jimmy: Well I go to a majority White school and I don't see this much as an issue like you all are talking about. I mean the students in the school have fights and people are bullied but it's not as intense as you all make it seem.

Most of the high school students appear to acknowledge and accept the idea that earning respect

by fighting is part of what they do. They also think that it's how some people in the media

portray them (Ferguson, 2000; Kunjufu, 2005; Noguera 2003). Whether other races, cultures or genders take on this same understanding, one could only speculate, but for those young men they believe it's a part of who they are. The discussion gave the young men the space to express their thoughts about something they were dealing with. It gave them an opportunity to voice their concern without being judged negatively. Hall (2006) discussed how young men of color rarely get the opportunity or the space to express issues of their interest in schools, and so a school based mentoring program should provide the safe space and opportunity for the young men to do that.

During a Thursday training sessions was the young men watched the video clip of the African American male who was beaten to death in Chicago after leaving school. Rivalry gangs had a huge fight after school, and this particular young man walked right into the fight and attempted to rescue his friend who was being attacked by a mob of students. As a result, he was hit a few times with a 2x4 inch stick across the head and body and was stomped in the head and laid helplessly on the ground. A bystander used their phone to record this brutal act of violence. It made national news and the edited clips shown to the young men were the subject of a stimulating conversation.

The purpose of showing this video was to help the young men begin to challenge their thoughts and perception of themselves as young men and young men of color. The young man in the video was killed and so we wondered how they would feel about the fact that a fight led to a death, and explore if earning respect and not being viewed as a "punk" was so important that it was worth risking their lives. The conversation was intriguing and engaging. The conversation immediately following the video is transcribed below.

College mentor: So what are yall reactions after watching that video?

Darnell: Man, it was pretty sad to me…dang he actually was killed just walking home from school.

Juan: Yeah that was messed up, why was he attacked?

Quincy: I mean he could've been attacked like that just because, I mean I grew up there and so I know how it is…it's like what we talked about before….this is a perfect example of that…sometimes you have to fight just because…you might just be walking home and need to protect yourself.

Alonzo: But did they have to kill him…I mean hit him once and then when you see him on the ground they should have left him alone…I mean they kept hitting him…that's what so messed up about this.

Deon: Well I don't know yall…I mean I am sorry he is dead…I don't want nobody to die…but why didn't he find another way home…if he knew they were fighting why would he just find another way home?

Quincy: I mean what if that was his only way home?

Deon: I mean there has to be another way home, whether he finds a longer or just go somewhere else just to avoid the fight.

College mentor: So you are talking about the fact that he should have found another way home instead of the fact that he was killed.

This conversation became rather contentious as the college mentors began to demonstrate

extreme frustration with how the high school students responded this tragic event. In a

conversation before and after the discussion with the high school students, many of the college

mentors discussed that they thought the video would "wake" some of the high school students

up. To help them understand how brutal fighting can be. Although many of the high school

students seemed desensitized to the fact that the young man had died, as if it happens all time

around them, there were a few of them who did see the severity of the situation.

This discussion demonstrated the fact that as much as the college mentors wanted to give

them a "wake up" call about violence amongst males of color, other environmental settings at the

microsystem level like the school, community, and the media culture influences a great deal of

how these students conceptualize or make sense of their environment (see figure 9). This

concept is congruent with Oliver (2006) work that explores the social ideologies, which black

males embrace, in an attempt to define and embody cultural stereotypes, pertinent in the urban

community. Many of the young men seemed to have defined what is right or wrong based on

what they have learned from their communities. Although the young men didn't immediately re-

frame their thinking about how their actions or the way they perceive themselves influence their

actions, the discussion allowed them the space to explore these issues. The video and discussion

gave them something to think about for the future. A week later, Juan mentioned: "You know

that video made me think about how bad fighting can go…it definitely made me think about my

actions"(Group Discussion February 2010). The program staff was aware that immediate re-

shaping of their self-perception was unlikely however Juan's statement gave the staff and myself

hope!

What is Love?

A discussion that took place often in the Impact mentoring program was centered on the

word love. The young men initially were very hesitant to talk about the word love around a

room full of men. They were very uncomfortable doing this because for so many of them they

never talked about this with anyone and most certainly not in a group of all men. It was also

difficult for them because so many of them couldn't articulate what it meant to them and how to

express it towards others. This is worthy of discussion because many of them seemed more

honest about their feelings toward love and began to articulate it in ways that revealed how the

program helped develop their thinking about the concept of love.

The word love for me is something that I needed to think about first for myself. I think first for you to love anything you must love yourself. I learned that because I struggled to show myself love. I think not trying hard in school and getting in trouble in the streets isn't showing love to yourself. I think a lot of us in here don't show love to ourselves because we didn't try to do better for ourselves (Darnell, August, 2009).

Darnell, was connecting the lack of ambition to not loving oneself. When he said this, a lot of the young men began to talk about how loving oneself is something that you have to learn to do. Quincy talked about how loving himself was something he had to learn to do. "I didn't always love myself, I still struggle with that, but I am trying to do better with that. Working with the little kids and having good relationships with some of yall is love to me too and it helps me love me more" (Quincy, August, 2009). The fact that the young men were discussing the word love and what it meant to them encouraged them to examine other parts of themselves.

The program staff was deliberate in making sure they told the young men that they loved them on a regular basis. At first most of the young men struggled with hearing those words. Some of them would cringe as if they saw or heard something gruesome. A lot of them would say that they never heard a man say that to another man.

It was weird to me to hear men say I love you to each other. I never seen that before. I don't remember hearing that from my dad and so to hear yall say that to me was uncomfortable to me at first (Deon, September 2009).

Deon struggled with the use of the word in the program but after awhile he along with the other students started to use it more themselves and towards how they talked about their feelings towards the elementary age students they worked with. The more they seemed to embrace the word, the more positive they felt about themselves. It was as if they had discovered a new word or feeling that they could demonstrate first to themselves and then to others.

Yall got us using the word love a lot…I mean before I never thought much about this word, I heard my mom use it towards me and I knew it meant someone cared

about you, but after all of our discussions about it, it has become a word that I am more comfortable with and also something that I feel like I understand more. I know what loving myself mean now, I know how to do that and what that looks like to me. It makes me feel good about myself. I mean love yourself before you can love anyone else. I mean people think if you use that word you are soft, and that's not true. It's something we should all use more even if you are a man (Ben, September 2009).

Ben's perception of himself changed because before he thought using that word around other men was something that made you "soft" not living up to your strength as a man. The frequent use of the word in the program appeared to help the young men think more positively of themselves and also challenge their misconceptions about those who use that word and what it says about them.

The following two activities discussed were influenced by the following three program goals at the macrosystem level of IMPACT's ecology: (1)To promote community civic engagement, positive character development and personal confidence, promoting cross age and cross generation mentor-mentee relationships; (2) to facilitate academic confidence, persistence and achievement; (3) and to encourage personal wellness, mental and intellectual growth.

The Career Fair and Exploration

The career fair was an event that the high school students were very excited about. The event concluded a month long professional development training that included the high school students learning and developing resumes, cover letters, exploring and writing a report on their careers, learning how to interview, and working on their verbal and non-verbal skills. This training was organized and planned by the program manager and college mentors. There were various professionals who volunteered their time to come and speak with the students about various topics based on their level of expertise. The students were responsible for completing a

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comprehensive portfolio that included all of the aforementioned documents. The program staff

solicited volunteers to come in for an all day career day workshop. The program staff was very

deliberate in their efforts to have men of color come in to be a part of the career day. They

wanted the young men to see other positive men of color in professions like medicine, law,

engineering to contradict what they see in the media and in their own lives.

Jimmy: The career day fair was really a nice experience. I mean for me to see young and older
men of color in professional roles was something that I never really get to see. I mean we see the
rappers, basketball players on t.v. but that's pretty much it. To talk with them and hear about
their story made me feel like I could do it as well. It also made me feel good about myself as a
male of color.

CL: Why did you feel good?

Jimmy: Because it gave me pride to see other men of my race doing well and trying to live
successful lives. I mean I felt good about myself.

    Jimmy's interview excerpt supports why the program staff felt that it was important to

make sure the students had an opportunity to interact with positive and successful men of color.

The career fair was an opportunity for the young men to learn about careers of interest.   Tatum

(2005) argues that it is essential for black young people to learn positive cultural images and

messages outside the usual black/white paradigm, to critique and reject negative stereotypes

learned from the dominant white culture. The young men left the career fair feeling more

hopeful about their future after high school. Before the program and this career fair many of the

young men did not see many males of color in roles beyond professional entertainers; however,

the career fair highlighted men of color who were doctors, lawyers and engineers. They

exhibited a heightened sense of motivation about their futures.

    Other students talked about how the career fair helped them gain confidence in

themselves and acknowledge how hard work and dedication could produce desired results. Many

of the young men had lofty childhood dreams but felt their academic failures and personal

mishaps would prevent these from coming into fruition. Many of them felt it was too late for

them to improve their chances of success and/or never received the necessary encouragement

and motivation from others to work diligently towards these goals of success.   Some desired to

be a lawyer or engineer but could not conceptualize what it required to accomplish these goals.

Therefore, their participation in the professional development training and career day gave them

the opportunity to explore and learn more about the things they were interested in, in turn

motivating and encouraging them to work towards those professions.

> It was my first time learning that I needed to be good in math in order to be an
> engineer. I like building things and putting things together so to know what I
> have to do, tells me what I need to make sure I am learning in school. Listening
> to that guy talk about how he use to get in trouble and now he is doing well makes
> me feel better about my future. I have made some mistakes but feel like I can still
> reach my goals in life (Quincy, June, 2010).

For so many of them they were given a dash of hope and encouragement that they too could

achieve despite some of the obstacles that they had to face. As with Jimmy and Quincy, the

other young men shared in a discussion after the career fair that they felt better about themselves

because they had learned a lot about their profession and had also met and networked with other

men of color with similar experiences that still managed to become successful productive

citizens. Although a number of the young men had made negative decisions in their lives they

could still make the necessary changes to turn their life around. The space that the career day

activity provided for the high school students gave them hope despite their past failures and a

more positive outlook on their future.

The Creed

The high school students in the Impact program created the program's creed. The program staff wanted to have a motto or creed that would represent what this program meant to those who were involved in it. The high school students each were responsible for writing their own individual creed and each individual creed was merged into the model creed for the entire program – the final creed was the work product of the high school mentors. They were required to remember and recite at the beginning and closing of each Thursday training session. The young men took a great deal of pride in remembering the creed and it   supplemented the other programs that were geared to improve their confidence. The PAS creed is as follows:

Today is a new beginning in which we strive to succeed through intellectual, academic and social growth

Today is struggle, tomorrow is victory, and everyday is a chance for success

Helping those to follow in our footsteps is our duty

We take our opportunities and turn them into achievements

For when there is no hope, we believe we can do all things

From our roots to our leaves, we believe that we inspire others to grow around us

We are living portraits and the very epitome of the need to succeed

We will not allow our mistakes to become our life

Our past is motivation to where we desire to be and education will take us there

If one succeeds, we all succeed, for we are here to improve and develop the future moments of our legacy

We know we have the choice to succeed, being thankful for the seed that has been planted

We hold the power to change our life; for this is our moment, our time

> The creed gave me something to live by. I mean it was so powerful to me, I say it all the time at school to myself…I say it at home as well. It's like a code to how to live my life now. It's something that I definitely will remember for the rest of my life (Darnell, Interview 2 April, 2010).

The young men really took pride in that creed; it made many of them feel more connected to the program and what its principles. The creed also gave them a sense of confidence and motivation to stand for ideas and concepts that would help them live a productive life for themselves and others.

> The creed is like my Bible. It helps me think about how to value life and myself and how I can contribute to society. It makes me feel good about myself and gives me some confidence that I am making a difference (Juan, Interview 1, December, 2009).

For most of the young men, the creed meant a sense of unity, an attachment to something, pride, confidence and a sense of purpose. "I now feel like I have a purpose in life, it makes me feel more confident in myself (Alonzo, Interview 2, April 2010). Alonzo summarizes the thoughts that so many of them have for the program and what the creed does for them. It gives them something they can feel a part of, since so many of them have been marginalized from school-they now feel a sense of belonging (Gordon and Boyd, (2009); Hall (2006); Ogbu (1990).

Summary

In this chapter, the relationships that the young men had with the program staff occurred at the meso-system level of the program. The development and cultivation that took place at this level of the program's ecology had a positive influence on their thoughts about themselves. Many of these young men didn't have fathers or other positive male role models that they could talk to or learn from. Many of them were looking for people to guide them towards more successful thinking. Some of them were lacking confidence in themselves because they were

seldom told anything positive. Furthermore, many of them hadn't interacted with successful

men whom they could relate to. For some, the men in their lives including their fathers were not

positive role models. However, the program staff became role models and father figures that so

many of them yearned for. Interacting with other males of color fostered in them a true since of

capability—as such their dreams and goals become a reality and a tangible possibility. They no

longer were idealizing Kobe Bryant, Lebron James and Lil Wayne (rapper) but they identified

with Mr. Wilson, Mr. Walters (college mentor), Mr. Jones (college mentor) who are successful

in their own right and more importantly people who they could talk to and learn from in person

and not on television.

The activities that occurred at the exo- level of the program also contributed to the young

men's development of a more positive, less violent, more hopeful self-perception. The values

and goals of the program that steered the direction and purpose of the program helped facilitate

healthy relationships that produced healthy and capable young men. The words to the program's

creed spoken everyday became the guide in which they were to live their lives moving forward.

The young men gained a sense of purpose and confidence in their life and simultaneously

gained a support system that would give them the love and support needed as they returned to

their respective homes, schools and community settings each day.

Chapter 8

Discussion

"Today is a new beginning in which we strive to succeed through intellectual, academic and social growth. Today is struggle, tomorrow is victory, and everyday is a chance for success…"
                                        -IMPACT mentoring program creed

As encouraging as those first two sentences are in the IMPACT program's creed, it is just as exciting and encouraging to know that there are young men who believe and try to conceptualize their lives in such a manner. To know that although today might be a struggle but tomorrow could be victory and every day beyond that is a chance for success could inspire even those at the most vulnerable, hopeless, dark, and desperate levels of their lives to imagine a beacon of hope. After I finished a group discussion with the young men, I was asked the following two questions: "What made you want to be successful in life and do the things you are doing?"; and, "Did you have any help becoming successful?" Quite honestly, I paused for a few seconds to think about those very straightforward, but thought-provoking questions. I knew who played a significant role in my life up to that point, but never thought much beyond that. I understood why the students asked those questions. I was a young, African American male who like many of them grew up in an urban environment, albeit my urban environment being much larger. I had recently told a very brief synopsis of my childhood that was very intriguing to many of them because they realized that we shared some similar childhood experiences associated with neighborhood violence and impropriety that are often a result of the economic struggles of a community. Those two questions were the catalyst that sparked my interest in studying this topic.

I felt it was very important for me to share my story with them, but it was more important that the young men had the opportunity to create their own. It was in this instance that I sought

to explore their stories. In my direct involvement with the young men it was clear that their involvement in this program went beyond the small monetary compensation that they receive, and there was something else that the young men were receiving that extended beyond monetary value. As the young men began to engage in the program's mission and goals they began to reflect and make sense of who they are, reflect on their home and school experiences, and start to think differently about their current school and life trajectories.

With this, I set out to understand and examine the experiences that the young men had in the IMPACT mentoring program. The young mens' experiences in school and at home influence and help them construct their perceptions of themselves academically and as young men currently and in the future. In this study I attempted to answer the question: How do high school males of color describe and make sense of their academic engagement in school and self-perception while participating in an ecologically structured school based mentoring program?

In this chapter, I discuss the four major findings related to the overarching research question. These findings include (a) the ecological structure of the program influence on the high school males' academic engagement and self-perception, (b) same-race and same-gender mentoring, (c) the males' conceptions of manhood and how these concepts influenced their self-perception, and (d) the concept of surrogate mentoring as it relates to the relationships that developed between the high school males and the program staff. I also provide a discussion of the various nuances present in the development and re-shaping of the young men's self-perceptions and academic engagement in school. Further, I discuss the implications of this study for structuring school-based mentoring programs, for K-12 education, and for future research.

Discussion

High School Males Making Sense of Their Lives!

The young men involved in this study were very honest and descriptive about how their home and school environment influenced their academic engagement in school and self-perceptions before entering the IMPACT mentoring program. Chapter four provided a description and brief analysis of the young mens' home environments and school experiences that have had an influence on their academic engagement and self-perception. The ten participants shared some commonalities in their home and school experiences; however, their reaction to these experiences varied. Some of the high school males used their experiences to motivate them to do well in school while others lacked the motivation. Moreover, their home environment influenced their conception of manhood and their current roles as young men. All of the young men were aware of the negative perceptions that are often associated with males of color in society: high drop out rates, high incarceration rates, and aggressive behavior (Davis, 2005; Noguera, 2003). Although many of them were headed in the direction of dropping out of school, and had some involvement with the criminal justice system and displayed some aggressive behavior (fighting), they all adamantly reassured themselves in the interviews and group discussions that they were different from what the negative perceptions of African American or Latino males are at the societal level. The high school males were naïve or in denial about how some of their actions supported some of the negative societal perceptions of African American and Latino males.

Working with 'At-Risk' Youth—An Ecological Perspective

"At-risk" youth usually refers to those who are troubled, failing academically, and often perceived as a menace to their communities. Although there have been a number of programs, research, reform, and government efforts developed and implemented to combat some of the behaviors that many labeled at-risk embody, very little has been done to eradicate the systemic issues that often induce such at-risk behaviors. With any of us fortunate to consider ourselves successful, our current conditions have been influenced by a number of environmental and familial factors. There is a fair assumption that if people are born into the middle class, they usually attend middle class high-performing schools, live in middle class neighborhoods, and thus develop middle class values (Bourdieu, 1973; Lareau, 2003). Contrarily, if people are born into a working class/poor family single parent home, they usually live in working class/poor neighborhoods, attend poor underperforming schools, and have limited community resources (Howard, 2008; Noguera, 2003). Coupled with factors that social identity markers such as race can play in a person's experiences, these predetermined conditions can often determine what kind of future a child could have. It is important that we continue to find ways to alleviate these issues in a structural and programmatic way—addressing the structural problems that often plagued those labeled at-risk.

The mentoring program provided the high school students with strategies to make them more successful academically and to combat the attitudes and behaviors that exacerbate their marginalization and exclusion in schools. Some of those activities included weekly discussions on issues that occurred in the classrooms they mentored in, issues in their own high school classrooms, and societal issues facing males of color. These discussions gave them the opportunity to think critically about the structures in place in schools and society that may cause

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them to be marginalized. The program provided them some strategies needed to navigate the often-oppressive educational system. The fact that the students were involved in a program where they focused on issues that were pertinent to them and supervised by those who have lived through similar experiences and similar racial backgrounds proved to be beneficial to their new outlook on life and success in school. I found this to be very important to the high school mentors. One cannot highlight enough the value that the closeness in age and race played in how the high school males perceived the college mentors. Aspects of this mentoring program, such as relationship building and trust, are foundations that these young men did not have in their schools and/or homes.

The IMPACT Mentoring program staff wanted to extend beyond the typical mentoring program by developing a program that would not deal with the individual child as if he exists separate from other environmental influences. The ecological structure of the program allowed for the program to interact with the various ecologies of the high school males, including home and school. From an ecological perspective, the home, school, and IMPACT are three settings in each of the high school males' microsystem (see Figure 10). Thus, this study primarily focused on the influence of the program on the high school males' microsystem level, and not the other layers of the high school students' ecology.

In IMPACT's microsystem level there were two settings that influenced the young men. These included their roles as mentors in the **after school program**, and their role as mentees in **Thursday Training sessions**. These two settings located at the microsystem level of the program gave the young men the opportunity to engage in activities that helped them reflect on their self perceptions and academic engagement in school (see Figure 5 from chapter 1). At the mesosystem level of the IMPACT program the young men had various interactions with the

preK-3rd grade boys, each other, and the program staff. These interactions connected to the structured activities at the exosystem level and were created to allow space for the young men in the program to discuss issues that were relevant to them and could help them grow and develop their ideas around their self-perceptions (see Figure 3 from chapter 1). The activities that occurred in the Thursday meetings, like study hall and the one-on-one meetings occurring at the exosystem level, provided another layer of support for the young mens' academic growth. All of the structures and activities were guided by IMPACT's goals and values, which represent the macrosystem level of the program (see Figure 2 from chapter 1). Figure 10 illustrates IMPACT's place in a high school male's ecological system.

Brofenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory helped to explicate the complex structure of the mentoring program. The ecological structure of the IMPACT mentoring program made it a unique approach to school based mentoring. The different layers of the ecological systems theory allowed for a program such as IMPACT to provide the necessary structure and activities that worked seamlessly to influence the high school students' academic engagement in school and self-perception. Additionally, the ecological structure allowed IMPACT's program values and goals to create a culture that countered the culture that some of the young men were experiencing outside their participation in the program. Mentoring programs that lack this approach or fail to recognize the various factors that are working simultaneously to influence an individual's life could possibly miss the opportunity to affect the child holistically.

Traditionally, school- and community-based mentoring programs focus on the academic and social aspect of the child's life (Colley 2002). Moreover, traditional mentoring programs are not often structured in ways that allow for these programs to focus on the child beyond the school environment. The current literature also lacks the mention of ecological structure

programs. This study will add to the current research on mentoring programs by adding the influence of a tiered, structured, ecological mentoring program for African American and Latino high school males. This research study illustrates the influence that a tiered approach that includes the role of program manager, director, college mentors, and preK-3rd grade students has on the high school males' academic engagement and self-perceptions. This tiered approach coupled with the ecological structure of IMPACT provided the space and opportunity for the young men to build relationships with others that were facilitated by their involvement in the program as mentors and mentees. IMPACT's ecological structure provided space and opportunities for the young men to reflect and reshape their self-perceptions and it increased their engagement in school. These conclusions show the benefits of a tiered mentoring approach and ecologically structured mentoring programs on high school males and will enhance the limited research on both ecologically structured mentoring programs and a tiered mentor/mentee structure. This study enhances the research on mentoring programs and provides a more holistic approach to mentoring. It also enhances the scant research on the benefit of same-race, same-gender mentoring programs where previous studies have shown inconclusive results on the effectiveness of same race/gender mentoring (Fashola, 2003; Holt, 2008). The results of this study substantially reveal the effectiveness of same-race, same-gender mentoring.

Same Race, Same Gender Mentoring

When asked about the influence of the mentoring program on the young men's conceptions of their racial and gender identity, most of them did not think that the program had any influence on how they think of themselves as *males of color*. There is a slight contradiction, however, in some of their responses to that statement and how they responded overall to the influence of IMPACT on their academic and self-perceptions, as can be seen in chapters 5 and 6. My attempt to make sense of this contradiction is that some of the young men felt that their race and gender were not constructs that can be changed; these aspects of their identity are just who they are. I would argue that their conceptions of manhood were directly linked to racialized constructions of gender identity. Moreover, being African American and Latino in our society is constructed in a certain way that is very different from being White and being male. Further, I would argue that there were some implicit and explicit implications that a same-race and gender orientated program had on the experiences of the young men in the program. The same-race and gender orientation had some influence on how they reshaped their self-perceptions and increased their engagement in school.

Another benefit of having college mentors who were not only the same race and gender of the high school students was that they were also very close in age. The relationships developed between the high school males and the college mentors partly because many of them shared the same experiences (growing up in similar communities and school settings) and shared a closeness in age. Many of the college mentors were a year or two removed from high school themselves, so many of them listened to the same music, watched the same television shows, etc. The shared interests made it a lot easier to make connections and develop a level of trust that would possibly take longer if the age gap was wider. The high school males were able to see other men of the same race who had similar experiences (suspensions, truancy, lack of father

figures, etc.) make it to college. The relationships that were developed and the influence that the college mentors had on the high school students will definitely contribute to the literature on mentoring programs.

All of the high school students, preK-3rd graders, and program staff members were African American or Latino males. For some of the young men it was the first time they were surrounded by so many positive role models. In chapters 5 and 6 Jimmy often discusses the positive influence that the all-men of color structure had on his academic and personal growth. This experience afforded him the opportunity to learn from other males of color—something he lacked because he grew up solely around White people. It was also important to Jason who often talked about how he initially believed that African Americans were only good at sports. His relationships with the program staff and involvement in various program activities like the career fair with males of color in academic professions allowed for the reshaping of his thoughts. Because of his experience in the same-race and gender program Jason began to think about other professions he could explore beyond football.

The same-race and gender structure also encouraged and motivated the high schoolers to work harder on academics. Darnell referred to his involvement in the one-on-one meetings and his relationship with some of the program staff members as motivation for him to work harder in school. He often referred to the study hall sessions as one of the motivational factors in his increased motivation to do well in school. Darnell often discussed the influence that seeing other males of color studying, specifically the college students, was encouraging for him. Some of the other high school males mentioned the influence of studying with their peers and older males of color as a show of support and brotherhood. All of the high school students referred to the fact that having other males of color checking up on them via the more formal one-on-one meetings

or the informal communication (texting, phone calls, outings, etc.) was something that they appreciated and had limited interactions with in the past. Bryant and Zimmerman (2003), Gratham (2004) and Hall (2006) support the idea of same-race and gender mentoring programs for at-risk adolescents because the programs can provide them with the positive role models that many of them lack in their home, school, and communities. For example, Hall (2006) provides a detailed description of the benefits of developing a same-race mentoring program. He found that same-race mentoring programs provide males of color with the support and "safe place" to explore issues that are relevant to their lives that could have implications on their self-confidence. Gratham (2004) further explicates that having the presence of same-race mentors could prove critical for a youth's development and success in school. Figure 11 demonstrates a mentoring session with a program staff member leading a discussion with high school males.

Conceptions of Manhood

Unfortunately, none of the young men in this study had their biological fathers living at home. For most, their fathers did not have a presence in their life. Out of the ten participants only two had a male presence (stepfather) in the home, and even those relationships were not very strong. As stated a few times throughout this dissertation, many males of color, specifically African American males, grow up in homes where the mother is the sole provider—financially and emotionally (Noguera, 2003). Many of these males grow up developing their ideas of manhood from other males in their family, community, or the media (Davis, 2005; Gause 2005; Sewell, 1997). In the media, males of color are often stereotypically portrayed as tough, aggressive, and violent (Majors & Billson, 1992; Neblett, Chavons, Nguyen, Sellers, 2009). The

high school males in this study developed three different conceptions of manhood: toughness, financial provider (independent), and feeling emasculated.

Students like Alonzo, Deon, Juan, and Quincy learned a conception of manhood from their interactions in their community that led to violent activity (fighting) and other illegal activities. Ben, Darnell, Jason, Raymond, and Larry felt the need to be more independent; and Jimmy felt emasculated. In past research, Sewell, 1997, argues that males without father figures often feel emasculated because they lack a male role model; however, there is limited research that focuses on how young men such as Ben, Darnell, Jason, Raymond and Larry turn out to be more independent (financial providers) and/or withdrawn instead of turning to violence and/or illegal activities.

The young men came into the program with a view of manhood that was influenced by their home and school environments. Some of the young men felt that they had to exude their tough man attitude to earn the respect from others; some of the other students felt the need to be the financial providers for their families, thus taking time and focus away on school and more on making money. This tough man mentality also coerced them in to fighting, or the culture of fighting that often led them to school suspensions and/or legal troubles. Ferguson (2001) posits that, "fighting becomes, therefore, a powerful spectacle through which to explore trouble as a site for the construction of manhood" (182). She further explicates that fighting is often used synonymously with being violent or aggressive. For some of the high school males fighting demonstrated their toughness—a construction of manhood that they subscribed to. The activities and discussions provided by IMPACT assisted the young men in reshaping their attitudes about manhood. As the young men began to reshape their ideas of manhood their self-perceptions and academic engagement were positively affected. They started to believe that being a man

involved not showing how tough you are, but that it means being more responsible in school, their home, and community. Fighting or acting tough was no longer the only option they felt they had to show demonstrate their manhood. Figure 12 illustrates the pre- and post-conceptions of manhood that the young men displayed and the IMPACT program activities that helped to reshape their conceptions.

Surrogate Mentoring

What implicitly occurred within these conversations is what I call "surrogate mentoring." I use this term to represent the level of mentoring that takes place beyond what is considered traditional mentoring and extends into traditional parenting roles. Parents are typically those adults who provide guidance and teaching about values, such as what it means to love. I am not arguing that the parents of the young men were not having similar conversations with their children, but due to the lack of a father presence many of the young men began to look to many of the mentors and adult program staff as father figures in their lives. So the college mentors became surrogate older brothers, and the program manager and I (program director) became surrogate fathers for the young men. The adult black men in IMPACT taught the high school men things about manhood that were counter narratives to what they had learned and internalized from their home and school environments. The surrogate relationships with black male college mentors and program staff were part of the structure of the program that provided the young men with relationships that many yearned for. It was one of the unintentional results of the program that was connected to the influence that the same-race and gender mentoring has on the young men. The surrogate relationships were critical in reshaping the conceptions of manhood that I discussed previously. These relationships extended beyond the typical relationships that the

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literature suggests should occur. Instead, familial-like relationships developed due to how involved the program staff was in the lives of the young men. The relationships that were created precipitated an environment that cultivated the relationships beyond a typical mentor/mentee relationship and into a loving surrogate family-like bond that many of the high school males desired.

The studies that were mentioned in the literature review were limited in their discussion of influence of same-race, same-gender or ecologically structured approaches to mentoring. The studies that were done on the effects of same-race mentoring were inconclusive; however, the results of this study nuances those conclusions and provides some implications for structuring mentoring programs that are same-race and gender ecologically. The different levels of IMPACT create a new segment of research literature on mentoring programs that has never been empirically addressed.

Implications for Structuring Mentoring Programs

As Duncan (2002) explicates, the first step to improving the academic and social success of males of color in school would be to listen to what they have to say about their experiences. What I have attempted to do in this study is to illuminate ways to improve the experiences of males of color in schools; to assist the young men in developing a counter story to the negative experiences that many of them had in school and to demonstrate a positively constructive program that helped to motivate students to perform well in school, and provide them with the skills and tools needed to be successful in life.

Mentoring programs, if implemented effectively and have clear goals could prove to be successful for the students involved. It is also important that a level of trust is established

between the mentor and mentee. Finding ways to develop those trusting relationships could prove valuable for them academically and socially.

Mentoring programs must be created with the child in mind. The time must be allotted for the child and his or her mentor to develop relationships that are not temporary but potentially long-term[1]. Our most vulnerable students need more than our typical one-on-one two hour a week mentoring sessions. Instead, our most at-risk students need mentors who are capable of being cultural mediators as Irvine (1987) suggests to help students navigate their way through school. To this end, I suggest that mentoring programs take an aggressive ecological approach where they are not only focused on getting to know the child but also on getting to know the aspects of the child's life that influence the child the most. To do that, school-based mentoring programs should provide spaces for students that allow them to explore some of the issues that they are grappling with most. When applicable, it is important that mentoring does not occur in isolation. Mentoring in isolation means to mentor the child without bringing in key components of the other settings they interact with. Parents, as well as school personnel, should be well informed, and when applicable, involved in the process. For example, the mentor should have periodic conversations with the parent(s)/guardian(s) of the mentee to check on how the child is doing in the home setting. They should also be invited to participate in activities that may display the academic and social growth of their child.

It is also important to provide the mentees opportunities to not only receive some form of help and assistance, but to also be provided with opportunities to assist others. This can be done through volunteer opportunities or by asking the mentee to become a mentor of someone either in their family or to someone in their community.

Mentoring—A Hands-on Approach!

The typical youth mentoring program requires a minimum of about two hours weekly where the mentor and mentee spend time with each other. This time could be spent in various ways: talking with youth about social issues, working with youth on some academic concerns, spending recreational time, etc. Moreover, the typical relationship is often short-term: the year-long relationships are often established only to fulfill a personal, professional, or educational requirement. Many of our most at-risk, vulnerable, endangered or any other word short of saying doomed youth, are often paired with mentors in programs where the sole purpose of the program is to give interested young adults an opportunity to test out whether they want to work with these kinds of youth, with no regard for their social, cultural, racial, or gender mismatch.

I do not disregard the positive influence that mixed race, culture, or gender matches have on youth. What I am suggesting here is not that those youth programs as such are not valuable and do not provide the necessary temporary guidance that the youth may need in the short term. Instead, there need to be more than short-term solutions tossed at long-term problems. Long-term problems that have spent a lengthy time developing need to have an ecological, more holistic approach to address the complex issues that often exist with our most disadvantaged youth.

Implications for School and K-12 School Administrators

This program also has implications for K-12 school administrators. As administrators in schools where there is a high population of minority males who are at risk of failing and dropping out of schools, administrators and other staff members should reach out to local universities and community organizations to find ways to partner with them on school-based

mentoring programs. Programs like IMPACT could be one step in the right direction toward

alleviating all of the dismal statistics concerning males of color in schools across the U.S.

Schools should find ways to implement programs for their at-risk youth—male or female—who

are struggling academically and socially in school. Most programs currently in place focus on

the academic achievement aspect of the child's failures, but there must be more of a

comprehensive approach to dealing with our most vulnerable youth. Their problems are not

usually simple ones. We must find creative ways to tap into the child holistically. These

programs should be located in the schools and include the input of the children, parents,

community members, businesses, local politicians, organizations, teachers, and other school

staff. If programs continue to only focus on one aspect of a child's being then we will continue

to miss the opportunity to holistically affect the child. The programs should not intend to

infiltrate the child's home environment as though the parent is not doing a good job. Instead,

school districts could provide programs to use school-based mentoring programs to provide

opportunities for high school students to work with students in middle and elementary schools.

This study has shown the positive influence that these programs have on at-risk high school

students.

Implications for Future Research

Further research could be done to examine how males perform academically and socially

in school after their involvement in the program. It would also be important to talk with the

parents of the young men to see if and how these young men have changed at home. It would

also be important to closely examine the impact that mentoring the preK-3rd graders had on the

high school students. Finally, it will be important to see the impact that this program had on the college mentors and the younger preK-2nd grade students in the program as well.

Future research on this topic could include a longitudinal study that would follow the young men beyond their time in the program to see if the things they learned in the program are embodied beyond their tenure in the program. Funding could be secured for a program like IMPACT to implement in other school districts where young men of color are struggling academically and socially in school to see if the program can be effective in other contexts. This program could also be implemented and researched for its viability with struggling high school women of color as well. Finally, a qualitative study needs to be done on the influence of the high school and college mentors on the preK-3rd grade students to measure the value of the program on their thoughts and feelings about school and themselves due to their involvement in the program.

It would also have been helpful to interview the college mentors and program manager about their experiences with the high school males in the program. I did not interview the teachers or any of the school personnel about their views of the young men in class. The high school students' home environments were described from their perspectives, so to interview the parents/guardians whom the young men lived with could have also been useful to provide another perspective on the experiences of the men in their home environments. This study only focused on the students' qualitative views of their self-perceptions, but a survey or a self-perception scale to gather quantitative data on the possible changes in their self-perceptions could prove valuable.

Limitations of Study

This study has some limitations. Research was conducted with only ten participants, so the results can't necessarily be generalized to other males of color. It is also important to note that there were only two Latino males in the study, so most of the data collected was on African American males. With that, it is important that the indication of males of color in this study does not lump African American and Latino males together as if they will always have shared experiences.

Conclusion

The Counter-story

The young men entered IMPACT with a story already being written. Although most of the young men came from similar racial, gender, social class, family structure, and school environments, each story was unique to the individual. Some of their stories had similar elements, like the lack of a father figure, a mother as the sole provider, the need to be the "man" of the house, failing grades, low academic engagement, low-self esteem, and negative self-perceptions. The IMPACT program helped the young men begin to think about their lives differently.

My approach to this work evolved around giving voice to the high school males' experiences. Scholars have used critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000) to highlight the importance of voice in examining the school experiences of males of color that can be represented by stories that *counter* dominant, deficit narratives of black and brown males in society (Duncan, 2002; Howard, 2008). The IMPACT mentoring program and the high school males' experiences in the program, presented a counter-narrative to the lives that the young men

were living before they entered the program. The four themes that derived from this research: the ecological structure, same race and gender, conceptions of manhood, and the concept of 'surrogate' mentoring, all factored into how the program influenced the high school males' academic engagement and self-perceptions. The activities embedded in the ecological structure of the program provided the young men with another perspective to the life that they were living. The relationships that were developed and cultivated helped the high school males construct a counter narrative to the narrative that was being written before their involvement in the program. Through the many discussions and activities provided to them in the mentoring program, a lot of the students expressed a sense of empowerment, a renewed sense of purpose, and revitalized self-perception.

Race plays an important role in the students' lives and who they are as individuals, both negatively and positively. The students seemed to struggle with what Duncan (2002) mentioned as the "contradictory formula." He argues that Black males largely reject their subservient place in the gender hierarchy of schools and appropriate alternative forms of black masculinity that further stigmatize them (132). The males in the study often demonstrated this contradictory formula. Some of the males expressed a desire to do well academically but did not seem supported in their endeavors. They also had to fight against the low expectations placed on them as males of color, the oppressive structures that often exist in schools, and the pressure of other members of their home and community who do not value academic achievement. As the high school students progressed through their mentoring program, their social interactions with the college mentor (males who overcame the contradictory formula) coupled with group discussions and field trips that challenged their perception of themselves and those like them, helped to transform their thoughts and beliefs about what it meant to succeed academically and socially in

school. My hope is that all of the young men live up to the following excerpt from IMPACT's

creed that they recited everyday:

"Our past is motivation to where we desire to be and education will take us there.
If one succeeds, we all succeed, for we are here to improve and develop the future moments of
our legacy. We know we have the choice to succeed, being thankful for the seed that has been
planted. We hold the power to change our life; for this is our moment, our time."
                                                   -IMPACT program creed

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