THE LEADERSHIP GAP:
WHERE ARE AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALE STUDENTS?

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THE LEADERSHIP GAP: WHERE ARE ADOLESCENT AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALES?

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Victor S. Shin
Dedication

I dedicate this study to my parents, Boo Young and Jong Hee, who have sacrificed so much to provide a better future for me and my brothers. You have supported all my endeavors in my life, and you never stopped believing in me. Though you did not attend all my school events as a child and could barely speak to my teachers due to the language barrier, you realized how important education was. Though I may have been hard-headed and combative at times, I am truly grateful to have your love and support. You are the true definitions of hard work and sacrifice. 사랑해요.

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is to positively impact the youth through education. My job is not just a job. It is a vocation. I come to work to help children to form into young adults. God could not have blessed me more.
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ABSTRACT

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Victor S. Shin

Ebony E. Thomas

With incidences such as the Trayvon Martin shooting and the Freddie Gray death dominating the headlines, it is clear that racial tension and sensitivities are still prevalent in American society. These events highlight the struggles that many African-Americans are facing as a part of their daily lives. African-American males have had to overcome many obstacles and challenges to receive equal treatment, rights, and protections. Unfortunately, their journey for equality is long from over.

Cardinal Potter High School in Maryland was a diverse and supportive community. African-American males made up a large percentage of the student body. For many, opportunities associated with academic leadership activities had been underutilized. When it came to participation in Student Council and other formal leadership organizations, many African-American males were not choosing these organizations and mainly participated in athletics or cultural relevant clubs causing a leadership gap.

This qualitative research study looked at the various causes or influences on African-American males in participating in formal leadership activities. For this study,
leadership is defined as the ability to positively influence others in an official position or through participation. By interviewing 25 graduates of the school, I was able to determine if there were structural issues within the school and societal influences that attributed to this leadership gap. Further, I explored various other factors such as media, family life, peer groups, and other areas. Finally, I was able to identify motivating factors that influenced African-American males to take leadership roles and countered internalized beliefs on masculinity, success, and leadership.

The following research questions helped to direct this study:

1. What factors do African-American male alumni of Cardinal Potter High School attribute to the underrepresentation of African-American males in student academic leadership roles?
2. What factors of school culture do participants attribute to this leadership gap?
3. What aspects of the African-American community contribute to promote African-American male leadership?
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Chapter One

If you can’t fly, then run,
If you can’t run, then walk,
If you can’t walk, then crawl,
But whatever you do,
You have to keep moving forward
- Martin Luther King, Jr.

Introduction

With incidences such as the Trayvon Martin shooting and the Freddie Gray death dominating the national headlines, it is clear that racial tension and sensitivities are still prevalent in American society. These events highlight the ongoing struggles that many African-Americans are facing as a part of their daily lives. African-American males have had to overcome many obstacles and challenges to receive equal treatment, rights, and protections. Jaynes & Williams (1989) explained that the journey of African-Americans in US history continues to be mired with discriminatory practices and injustices. Unfortunately, remnants of these societal inequalities are still seen today and remain systematic, deeply embedded, and permeated throughout society.

A considerable amount of the research on African-American male students revolves around the achievement gap and inconsistently applied school policies and policy enforcement. According to Allen (2012), the majority research on the experiences of African-American males has been focused on low income subgroups and very little on the middle and upper income classes. Further, Fries-Britt (1998) argued that much of the literature has focused on the underachievement of those in the Black community, but there has been very little research on the academic leadership gap from this group. In this study, the leadership gap refers to the lack of participation and interest from African-
American adolescent males in formalized academic leadership programs including elected positions in Student Council and peer mentoring programs. From comparatively lower performances on standardized assessments to higher school dropout rates, Steele (2003) argued adolescent African-American males are lagging behind their peers in other demographic groups. Further, they continue to struggle at the collegiate level. According to Harper (2006), African-American males have the worst college completion rate out of all genders and all racial/ethnic groups.

African-American adolescent males must deal with various conflicting messages of success, leadership, and masculinity. Stereotypes in media and popular culture dominate the messaging targeted at the African-American community. Tucker (2007) elaborated, “Black men [in mainstream print ads], with rare exceptions, are represented as workers, athletes, laborers, entertainers, criminals, or some combination thereof” (p. 70). Further, Welch (2007) explained they are often portrayed as thugs or gang members in movies and television. In the news, violent crimes by African-American males are disproportionately reported than other racial groups (Chiricos & Eschholz, 2002; Surrette, 1992; Young, 1985). African-American boys are even viewed differently from their white peers. Goff, Jackson, Di Leone, Culotta, and DiTomasso (2014) found that African-American boys were viewed as less “childlike” than their white counterparts. Acknowledging the many obstacles and barriers, one could argue that leadership is not promoted to African-American males due to other priorities. The perceived societal limitations placed on African-American males seem insurmountable to most.
African-Americans must deal with many societal barriers that even economic prosperity and financial resources are not enough to overcome. Allen (2012) found that many African-American adolescent males from wealthy and successful families face the same innumerable challenges that their peers from lower economic levels face including microaggressions, discriminatory practices, and societal pressures from within the African-American community.

Peer influences are powerful factors in the lives of many African-American young males. They must understand and accept the communal perspective or be socially excluded. Boykin (1986), Boykin & Bailey (2000), and McCombs (1996) identified communalism as when “one’s social group is more important than individual rights and privileges” (p. 6). The messages on masculinity, leadership, and success are not defined by an individual’s perspectives or thoughts, but the collective sets the acceptable behaviors and practices. Unfortunately, these messages to African-American youth, especially males, are not encouraging leadership participation or community service.

The primary goal of this dissertation research was to enrich the understanding and scholarship concerning the leadership experiences of African-American male students in the middle to upper socioeconomic classes. By capturing the participants’ voices and experiences, I was able to contribute to this rarely researched topic. This study was able to identify the causes of the disproportionate under-representation of African-American male students in leadership positions outside of athletics at Cardinal Potter High School (CPHS) and provide possible ways to improve the numbers of African-American male student leaders. Further, this study does not discredit the abundance of benefits
associated with athletic participation including interpersonal communication skills, leadership development, intrapersonal growth, and group dynamics. For this study, leadership is defined as the ability to positively influence others in an official position or through participation.

As a Korean-American researcher who grew up near CPHS in Prince George’s County, Maryland, I have a clear understanding of the socio-economic environment at CPHS. I have witnessed the experiences of African-American males as a peer, teacher, administrator, and mentor. Being employed at CPHS for 12 years, I have established relationships with countless numbers of students and maintain contact with many of them. Having taught many of the participants in this study, I was acutely aware of my positionality and its impact on their responses. For many of the participants, I played a significant role in their leadership development as a CPHS student. Since I already had a good rapport with all the participants, I hoped they would be more candid in their responses. Finally, I am aware that I may be familiar with the experiences of African-Americans through research, interviews, and personal connections, but I will never have the ability to navigate the world as an African-American. I know that my perceptions of African-American culture are limited, so I will use the participants’ voices as my main means of understanding their experiences and challenges. The discourse of the impact of race on education and leadership must continue to address societal inequities by sharing the lived experiences and the voices of the marginalized.
The following research questions helped to direct this study:

1. What factors do African-American male alumni of Cardinal Potter High School attribute to the underrepresentation of African-American males in student academic leadership roles?
2. What factors of school culture do participants attribute to this leadership gap?
3. What aspects of the African-American community contribute to promote African-American male leadership?

**Background and Context**

Prince George’s County in Maryland is a predominantly African-American community with a substantial amount of economics resources. According to the 2014 Census, the median household income from Prince George’s County residents was $73,856 with a population of over 900,000 individuals. The county had a poverty rate near 10%, with 85.6% of its residents with a high school degree, and 30.4% holding a bachelor’s degree. According to the Brown (2015), five out of the top ten richest black communities in America are in Prince George’s County. Morello and Keating’s (2011) article highlighted that Prince George’s County is one of the most affluent African-American-dominated counties in the United States. The county attracts some of the top businesses in the nation with its strategic location to Washington, DC and northern Virginia.

Despite its economic prosperity, Prince George’s County continues to face challenges from a number of bureaucratic issues. As Fletcher (2015) described, Prince George’s County’s political leadership has been largely African-American. According to
Thompson (2011), the county has been plagued with scandals and embarrassments from corrupt and unethical behavior by elected officials. Barnette (2012) argued that despite having sufficient financial resources, Prince George’s County public schools ranked second to the bottom in standardized testing performance in the state of Maryland. Interestingly, Prince George’s County only spent about $10,408 per pupil, making it the underfunded jurisdiction in the DC metro area (Metro DC School Spending Explorer, 2015). Due to the poor funding and mediocre performance rates of public schools, parents continue to send their children to private and charter schools as alternative options.

Located in Maryland in Prince George’s County, Cardinal Potter High School’s families reflect the socio-economic status of those in the surrounding communities. CPHS’s student population was primarily comprised of African-Americans. However, the student academic leadership officers and representatives did not mirror the majority of the student body. Additionally, the administration, faculty, and staff did not reflect the student body population either. Despite having a global approach to education and celebrating its ethnic diversity, the school has not been able to gain traction with leadership development, outside of athletics, for the majority of its African-American male students.

CPHS opened its doors in 1964 by a Catholic religious order, the Brothers of Holy Cross, serving the sons of the working class families of southern Prince George’s County. The school mirrored the demographics of the surrounding region with nearly 100% White students. In 1992, Mother Superior High School, the neighboring all-girls
school, closed due to financial hardship, decrease in religious vocational staff, and low enrollment. CPHS was struggling to keep its doors open and decided to become a coeducational institution the following year to avoid its own demise.

In the 1990s, southern Prince George’s County continued to experience Black suburbanization. As more African-American families moved to the DC suburbs, White families relocated further into the outer suburbs. According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census (1982), the Black population in Prince George’s County increased by about 700%, growing from 8.7% to 37.3% from 1960 to 1980. Likewise, CPHS’s student body shifted radically and became predominantly African-American. Under a new administrative team, the school began to thrive and grow with a new focus and attention to curriculum development and teacher accountability. Further, more attention was given to discipline and developing school culture.

Most of the students at CPHS came from middle to upper middle class households. However, there were a number of students receiving financial assistance. According to the CPHS website (2015), the school provided over $1 million in scholarships and aid in 2014 and ranked fifth in lowest tuition in the Archdiocese of Washington, D.C. Additionally, CPHS academic offerings included the Project Pride Program, providing economic and academic resources for at-risk students, and the St. Joseph Program for students with language-based learning differences. Despite these focused programs, the socio-economic status of the majority of the students was fairly homogenous, families with stable finances and readily available parental support and involvement.
CPHS did not reflect the same representation of its racial makeup in its student leaders as Prince George’s County elected officials. Despite having a predominantly African-American student population, student leaders were mainly African-American females or White students. As found previously in my pilot study, African-American male students that participated in leadership programs or held formal positions were often ostracized by their African-American peers since many tended to gravitate toward athletic or cultural relevant programs (Appendix A).

Today, CPHS is a flourishing school operating at capacity enrollment with a lengthy student waitlist. According to privateschoolreview.com, it is the largest private high school in Prince George’s County with over 890 students (Welcome to Private School Review, 2015). Using the PCR Educator program, the school’s officials were able to determine the racial makeup of the student body based on questionnaires. From it, the student body was comprised of approximately 70% African-American students, 20% White students, and 10% of other or mixed races (PCR Educator, Rockville, MD). Interestingly, there were about 10% more female students in the school than male students. During this study, there were approximately 240 African-American male students attending CPHS. According to its Middle States Self-Study, CPHS’s faculty and staff were comprised of 66% White employees, 25% African-American, and 9% of other races. Only fifteen members of the school’s faculty and staff were African-American males, and only six were classroom teachers. The others worked in the athletics, administration, advancement, or maintenance departments. The school has attempted to recruit new faculty and staff of color, but it has been difficult to attract these candidates.
to apply. With such a diverse school, there seemed to be very few disciplinary issues that stemmed from racial differences or tensions.

CPHS participates in a strong, competitive athletic conference against some nationally ranked schools in sports such as soccer, basketball, football, baseball, and tennis. Athletic recruiting was clearly necessary for CPHS in order to field teams capable of winning championships. Unfortunately, it was not uncommon for many African-American male students to attend a high school based strictly on the school’s athletic reputation rather than evaluating the school’s academic program. CPHS has invested significant financial resources in its athletic programs to maintain its competitive edge in the cutthroat DC area private school market. Over the years, a select few CPHS graduates have become professional athletes in the National Basketball Association and National Football Association, bringing CPHS into the national spotlight.

At CPHS, the peer mentoring programs have suffered due to the increased size of the student body over the years. The Peer Ministry program provided 36 senior mentors to the entire 9th grade class. They would meet during the 9th graders’ Theology classes, but meetings conducted outside of scheduled times were inconsistent. Further, CPHS had five school counselors for approximately 890 students, giving each counselor about 180 students per caseload. With such numbers, it was difficult for counselors to make personal connections with all students. As the school has increased in size, many of its programs have not been able to keep pace with the speed of growth. At the time of this study, there were no mentoring programs specifically for African-American students.
Leadership development was a becoming a fundamental tenet of the school as students were encouraged to take ownership. Despite school demographics, however, there was a noticeable lack of formal academic leadership from African-American male students. Most of the school officer positions have been filled by African-American female students. In the past seven years, African-American males held only 8 out of 51 key student leadership positions. Further, many did not even run for any school leadership positions. The Campus Ministry program was also lacking African-American male leadership. It was not uncommon to have a senior female student mentor a freshman male student, due to the lack of male mentors. The only area that African-American male students tended to participate was sports or cultural relevant programs such as African Dance and Drumming, Step Team, Slam Poetry Team or the Black Cultural Alliance.

Despite having a wide spectrum of social-economic diversity, CPHS students were still pressured to buy certain brand-name clothing and high-priced items. The school enforced a strict uniform policy, but students still displayed signs of social class through accessories such as jewelry, backpacks, and electronic devices. Certain days were set aside for casual dress days when the students were not required to wear the school uniform. These days were used as fundraisers for school organizations or charitable causes. Often, the students came to school wearing outfits that cost hundreds of dollars, and it became a day of status and economic disparity.

The school has experienced a difficult history of turnover in academic leadership. Over the past six years, the school has seen four different principals. In the summer of
2013, the school selected a White male to take over the position of principal. Currently, the school’s administration is made up of three White males, two African-American males, and one African-American female.

The Board of Directors was charged with providing direction and fiscal responsibility in the operations of the school. According to CPHS’s website (2015), CPHS’s Board of Directors is comprised of 18 men and women, ten of whom are alumni of either CPHS or Mother Superior High School. However, there were only four members of color, and only one African-American male. The vast majority of the Board was comprised of White males including the Board Chair.

The school has made several programmatic and curriculum-based changes to engage students around issues of diversity, offering courses such as Traditional African Dance and Drumming, African-American Studies, Women Studies, and Latin-American Film and Culture. The school often celebrated its diverse student body and highlights it as a key strength for its success. Further, CPHS has incorporated a global awareness approach within its curriculum to promote diversity appreciation and cross-cultural understanding. All students must successfully pass courses such as Global Studies and World Religions to graduate. According to the CPHS website (2015), the school also sponsored a number of cultural clubs such as the Filipino-American Cultural Enlightenment (FACE) Club, the Korean Cultural Club, the Black Cultural Alliance, the Spanish Club and the French Club. Social justice was another important theme promoted at the school. Each year, the school sponsored Global Awareness Week, hosting speakers highlighting the inhumane and unfair treatment of people around the world. Finally, the
FACE Club hosted the Inter Cultural Exchange (ICE) Night where students performed and celebrated their cultures through music, art, dance, poetry, and other mediums.

In collaboration with the Campus Ministry and Student Life Offices, the school sponsored a summer leadership training conference through the Center of Ministry Development. CPHS was the first high school in the nation to use the YouthLeader program. According to Searle (2013), “the purpose of YouthLeader is to empower young people for Christian leadership in Church and the wider community” (p. 1). The program took approximately seventy junior and senior student leaders involved with Student Council, Peer Ministry, and other students selected through an application process for a five-day intensive conference in Baltimore, Maryland. In 2013, only fifteen of those students were African-American males. The vast majority of the African-American males accepted into the program completed the application process since they did not hold a formal leadership position. At the conference, students worked on various leadership skills including communication, negotiation, facilitation, and service. The summer conference has transformed CPHS’s student leadership and reaped significant benefits for the students and the school. Last summer, CPHS hosted a variation of the YouthLeader program called Potter Emerging Leadership Training (PELT). The goal of the program was not so much to prepare leaders for tomorrow, but to have them lead today.

**Rationale and Significance of the Study**

Prior to my current position as the Assistant Head of School/Upper School Head at an all-girls Catholic school, I served in many roles at CPHS including math and social
studies teacher, Assistant Principal/Director of Student Life, and Associate Principal/Dean of Programs. I was also the Student Council Moderator from 2007-2012 and the Sophomore Class Moderator in 2014. I coordinated and planned many school events such as charity drives, pep rallies, student elections, fundraisers and a host of other activities. I utilized student leaders to assist with all of our programs. In my various roles, I focused on empowering the students to become the leaders of their high school experience. Under my supervision, the students planned, organized, and executed events and programs. My role was to provide training, guidance, and support to the students and moderators. It was a difficult transition for some club moderators. Many were teachers that were used to direct the students and assign roles and tasks. As noted by Christman (1995), my new perspective to student leadership alienated me from other school officials because I wanted “to make decisions for the common good and not go along with the self-interests of the people involved” (p. 216). I wanted to shift the school’s culture to be more student-centered.

As a teacher of color, I have experienced my fair share of racist and negative encounters with others. However, my parents enforced messages of high expectations and academic achievement. These messages provided me with a plethora of opportunities and experiences that have benefitted my growth and development as a scholar and educator. Further, my involvement with leadership programs during my adolescent years greatly influenced me and my career trajectory. For instance, as Student Government President in my senior year of high school, I had to manage many responsibilities and continue with my rigorous academic studies. I was able to attend
leadership conferences and workshops to develop my communication and leadership skills.

This study will identify ways to engage African-American adolescent males to participate more in leadership positions and to foster a sense of leadership development and belonging. It will also allow me to continue to share the opportunities and benefits associated with formal leadership positions and membership into leadership programs with the students at CPHS as a researcher and practitioner.

Previously, as Associate Principal/Dean of Programs at CPHS, my responsibilities heavily involved providing leadership opportunities for students. I attempted to identify possible student leaders to participate in workshops, conferences, and programs. Whether it was during the school year or in the summer, a certain segment of the student body was developing their leadership skills. The students participated in opportunities associated with local, state, and national programs such as the Rotary Club of Maryland, the Hugh O’Brian Youth Leadership Foundation, the Maryland State General Assembly Page Program, Youth Leadership Greater Washington, and many more. Female students overwhelmingly applied for these positions, more than their male counterparts. Male students have to be identified and encouraged to even just apply to these programs.

Over the years, I have been concerned with the gap of African-American males in academic leadership positions. Although I have worked closely with student leaders for a number of years, I failed to explore why more African-American males did not participate in CPHS’s student academic leadership opportunities as a part of my practice. I encouraged them to participate and take more active roles in the school community.
Some complied and took minor positions while others refused to get involved. Harper (2004) stated that “young men generally prefer to identify themselves as standout athletes instead of academic achievers or campus leaders” (p. 4). This was certainly a plausible explanation for what I have observed throughout my 12-year tenure at CPHS. However, it is important to also understand students’ sense making for their choices as they are very likely influenced by their interpretation of the surrounding world. As such, pinpointing those influences might help me and other educators, both in and out of CPHS; create interventions that lead to improvement in high school students’ participation in our democratic system and throughout adulthood as voters, philanthropists, employees, etc.

Empowering African-American male students at CPHS is difficult because it often seems like they are disinterested with roles in leadership. Lee (1996) defined empowerment as a “developmental process by which people who are powerless or marginalized become aware of the power dynamics at work in their lives” (p. 9). Despite being in the majority student group at CPHS, most African-American male students had no interest in actively governing or shaping their school environment in the traditional ways that students have been known to do in high schools across the country. Nieto (1999) argued that the dominant group has a distinct advantage in education because their assumed knowledge and source of information were more common with their peer group. They had more cultural capital to succeed. African-American students would be categorized as having “cultural capital” at CPHS, but it seemed only the African-American female students were taking advantage.
Steele (1992) discussed the idea of the “stereotype stigma” that connected the lack of achievement among black students due to cultural and social context. At CPHS, African-American male students had not been able to overcome this idea despite being in the majority group. In this study, the apparent divide of cultural capital and stereotype stigma from African-American adolescent males was evaluated. I attempted to identify ways to empower these students to take formal academic leadership roles and to recognize the benefits associated with them.

At CPHS, there also seemed to be a disconnection for African-American male students between leadership and masculinity. Many associated leadership roles with weakness or not socially acceptable. Those that did run for leadership positions were often seen as an anomaly or outsider. Staples (1978) noted that the inability to attain masculine roles has kept African-American men from realizing even the most basic aspects of masculine privilege and power. African-American males were not taking opportunities to lead because it was not socially accepted within the African-American community. In addition, I attempted to identify if the historical inequities experienced by African-American males in the past were still influencing the lives of today’s adolescent males at CPHS.

I hope this study sheds light to administrators and researchers across the country on the various messages sent to African-American male students in regards to student academic leadership. Further, on a micro level, CPHS should look at the messages, whether subliminal or overt, they are sending their students. As these young men prepare for college and beyond, I want to see them become active participants in society and
fulfill their civic duties. For instance, the lack of African-American male teachers sends multiple messages to students. Harper (2004) noted the importance of African-American male students to connect with African-American male mentors who can shed light on the various definitions of manhood. This study will determine if the impact of role models was a factor in participating in student leadership programs.

We must also take into account the cultural messages that the students are receiving from their family members. Phelan’s (1998) cultural compatibility theory explained the differences in the patterns of school achievement in minority students. It addressed the different messages that the students receive from home versus what they receive from school. According to Cassidy (2002), “the family is considered one of the most proximal, and thus influential, contextual systems in youths’ lives” (p. 46). There may be significantly conflicting messages on leadership sent to African-American male students. Finally, CPHS should also recognize and address the cultural messages that were sent to the students by the media and entertainment industries. For instance, Williams, Martins, Consalvo, and Ivory (2009) found that outside of sports games, the representation of African-Americans [in popular video games] drops precipitously, with many of the remaining featured as gangsters and street people. Often, these messages were in conflict with the messages that were sent to the students by CPHS and their families.

With the affluence of the African-American community in Prince George’s County, the influence of resources seemed to be making a minimal impact on the messages African-American male students were receiving. The other factors dictated the
participation rates of these students. I would think that as resources and education were more readily available, higher participation rates in leadership opportunities would be apparent. This study aims to examine the extent to which these factors played into participation with academic leadership programs at CPHS.

African-American male students were missing beneficial and skill-building opportunities by not participating in leadership opportunities. McCollum (1979) found that leadership training directly increased one’s self-esteem and self-concept. These programs minimized the systematic and structural limitations placed on African-American male students. In addition to the title of these positions that can assist them in the college entrance process, they were able to gain valuable experiences and relationships with other students, teachers, and administrators. Figura (1999) highlighted that an impending leadership void is likely in the workforce. These students were placed at a disadvantage by not taking these opportunities that could help prepare them for their future careers or professions.

Unfortunately, the vast amount of research on the journey of African-American adolescent males focuses on the many discriminatory practices and obstacles they must face and attempt to overcome. This practitioner research will look to solutions and structural changes to help advance this pivotal sub-group. There are relatively few studies that examine the educational experiences of African-American middle-class students (Allen, 2010; Ascher & Branch-Smith, 2005; Ferguson, 2001; Hemmings, 1996; Horvat & Antonio, 1999; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Ogbu, 2003; Tyson, 2002). This
research will attempt to fill this void and help school leaders develop practical ways to engage African-American male students.

Having served as a teacher, coach, administrator, mentor, moderator, and director, my twelve years at CPHS have come with many experiences and interactions. The culmination of these experiences directly involved developing and running many of the academic leadership programs at CPHS. Through these experiences, there have been numerous opportunities to guide and mentor thousands of students both in and out of the classroom. Looking forward at my career beyond CPHS, I hope these experiences will make me a better school leader and advocate. I also wanted to make a lasting mark at CPHS, improving the perceptions on leadership with African-American adolescent males.

This practitioner research study focused on goals for practical, applied learning. For my own scholarship and professional development, this study directly impacted my day-to-day responsibilities. As a school administrator overseeing leadership programs, identifying what messages the school could be sending to students and looking for ways to engage underrepresented students in leadership positions and programs was extremely important. My role was to help students to reach their fullest potential. Despite inequalities in society, schools should be a place where students are presented with opportunities and allowed to thrive and achieve. Knowing the realities that some students face, a social justice lens by administrators and other educators could greatly benefit students who were not always given the same opportunities. The results of this study
may provide recommendations for school-wide initiatives or programs that help promote African-American leadership for both male and female students.
Chapter Two

"Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek."
- President Barack Obama

Review of the Literature

Utilizing a conceptual framework based on Bronfenbrenner’s (1997) Ecological Systems Theory and hermeneutic phenomenology, this study looked at the various influences on Black identity and leadership communicated to African-American adolescent males. This included influences from peers, family members, school officials and culture, and the larger society. Figure 1 illustrates the multiple sources of messages sent to African-American adolescent males. They must navigate through multiple worlds sending conflicting messages. Further, they must also decode various messages on their own identity as an African-American male.

The ideas and beliefs on leadership by African-American males are influenced by a number of factors. Using Bronfenbrenner’s (1997) Ecological Systems Theory, the roles of various environments influencing students were examined and studied. According to Bronfenbrenner (1997), his framework concentrates on the subsystems, or components, of the human ecological niche as well as the ways that these subsystems interact with and influence each other” (p. 3). From role models to the media and popular culture, family and culture, and other societal influences, students were bombarded by various messages of who they are and how they should act. With the wide appeal of social media, these messages are being sent at faster rates and in higher quantities.
Students were constantly sent messages from the mass media that shaped what they wear, say, act, and think in order to be an African-American male. Ferguson (2011) elaborated, “Unity is also affirmed through physical displays such as clothing style, through the formation of a group presence, as well as through open challenges and tests of the race-blindness of the institution.” (p. 216). They were also influenced by what they learn in school by taking classes such as U.S. History, American Government, and English. Additionally, messages were embedded within our society and culture. This was seen in the home lives of students, which may dictate why students behaved and thought in certain ways. Finally, role models humanized certain messages that were delivered to students. These messages were about themselves and the world around them.

For many, teachers and other school officials can serve in these roles as mentors. However, they can also embody societal inequalities at a micro-level in inconsistent enforcement of school policies and expressing negative attitudes towards African-American students. According to other studies, there is a benefit in having a racially diverse faculty and staff. Hawley (1989) noted, "The only opportunity many young people will have to experience the lessons that can be best taught in racially integrated learning environments is to be taught by a teaching corps that is racially integrated" (p. 34).

This study used an approach based on hermeneutic phenomenology. It revolved on "how people interpret their lives and make meaning of what they experience" (Cohen, Kahn, & Steeves, 2000, p. 5). Further, Creswell (2003) defined phenomenological
research as when “the researcher identifies the ‘essence’ of human experiences concerning a phenomenon, as described by the participants” (p. 15). Further, the focus of this study was more on African-American adolescent males and their individual experiences rather than creating monolithic or generalized findings. The interpretive nature of hermeneutic phenomenology was critical in developing a fuller understanding of the participants’ experiences. Polkinghorne (1983) described this process as concentrating on historical meanings of experience and their development and cumulative effects on individual and social levels.

Finally, this study incorporated the concept of Possible Selves. It focused on the individual study participant and personalized the findings. Markus and Nurius (1986) defined Possible Selves as “how individuals think about their potential and about their future. Possible selves are the ideal selves that we would very much like to become. They are also the selves we could become, and the selves we are afraid of becoming” (p. 954). The study participants learned more about themselves, but possibly helped shape the school’s culture for future students.

Using a qualitative approach, this practitioner research study explored the factors impacting the engagement and participation rates of male African-American students in academic leadership roles at CPHS. Semi-structured interviews with 25 CPHS alumni were the primary means of data collection. The ability to give the students a voice to share their experiences crystallized their thoughts and understanding. It “(introduced) into critical conversations the missing perspectives of those who experience daily the effects of existing educational policies-in-practice” (Cook-Sather, 2002, p. 3). I utilized
the interviews and analyzed the data to help draw conclusions dealing with the research questions.

Following Rubin and Rubin’s (2005) model of qualitative interviewing, this study “focus(ed) on depth rather than breadth; (I cared) less about finding averages and more about understanding specific situations, individuals, groups, or moments in time that are important or revealing” (Loc. 368). The experiences of CPHS graduates were compared to identify common themes and ideas on leadership and student engagement. As various segments of society evolve and change, the implications on African-American male students were studied. This study also identified ways CPHS can engage African-American males to take more academic leadership roles and to participate in leadership programs.

The voyage of African-American males in education has been long documented by scholars and researchers. From slavery, integration, and the ongoing fight for civil liberties and equality, the journey of this group has been arduous and difficult. The depictions and ideas of African-Americans were seen mostly negatively outside of the Black community. Ferguson (2001) noted, “After slavery was abolished, images of people of African descent as hypersexual, shiftless, lazy, and of inferior intellect, legitimated a system that continued to deny rights of citizenship to black on the basis of race difference” (p. 79). Despite many gains for African-Americans, there are still many remnants of segregation and discriminatory practices within schools. For instance, many African-American males are seen as a collective group by school officials. Bailey & Moore (2004) and Moore (2000) highlighted that African-American males were not first
seen as individuals. Assumptions and generalizations would often be made for individuals that were African-American regardless of their personal interests. However, many African-American women have been able to persist and overcome many societal obstacles, but many African-American men were still lagging behind. As Slater (1994) noted, it was clearer at the university level where black women were having more success than their black male counterparts. This does not minimize the societal barriers that all African-Americans must face regardless of gender.

The societal inequities for African-Americans go beyond schooling. Pettit and Western (2004) found African-American males were more prone to go to prison and less likely to graduate from college than their white counterparts. In addition, African-American males must deal with societal policies and structures that impede their ability to be successful. Racism, mass unemployment, pervasive violence, and police brutality pose as societal barriers and serious threats to youth and their families. Garbarino (1995) referred to these conditions as “social toxins,” a term used to represent the degree to which the social world has become poisonous to an individual’s well-being. African-American males must navigate society by avoiding these “social toxins”, but unfortunately for many, they are unavoidable.

In addition, adolescent African-American males often have to deal with several identity issues such as perceptions on masculinity, peer acceptance, self-esteem, and stereotypes. They are also inundated with messages from the media and popular culture. Many schools are finding it difficult to actively engage African-American males both in the classroom and activities outside of athletics. Many African-American males are
dealing with exclusionary practices from schools (Ford, Grantham & Bailey, 1999; Harry & Anderson, 1994). Most of these practices can be linked to the inconsistent enforcement of disciplinary policies toward African-American males.

This practitioner research study sought to examine several factors that influenced African-American adolescent males and how they navigated life. For instance, the culture within a school can shape the students’ views on leadership. This can be evaluated by reviewing school policies and procedures and their effect on African-American male students. Further, the identity and masculinity of African-American males, as shaped by society, was also explored. Finally, scholarship on student engagement and leadership development was addressed as it pertains to this study. In the sections that follow, literature was reviewed that focused on the journeys of African-American men. In particular, Black identity, school culture, school engagement tied with leadership development, and the larger African-American community and media will be explored.

*Black Identity*

Scholars argued African-American males must navigate through conflicting interpretations of masculinity (Brod, 1987; Connell, 1987; Kimmel & Messner, 1992; Segal, 1990). Whether the messages are coming from family members, peer groups, popular culture, or the media, these young men are bombarded with depictions of what it means to be an African-American man (Holland & Andre, 1987). In addition, the competitive nature among African-American males often creates hostile environments that only add to the complex idea of masculinity (Corprew, 2011).
The stereotypical and branded depictions of African-American males are prevalent in popular culture and society. African-American males are often portrayed in movies and on television in a stereotypical range from unintelligent to super-athletes to gangsters (Corprew, 2011; Cunningham, 1993, 1999; Cunningham et al., 2003; Davis, 2003; Swanson et al., 2003). According to Hoberman (1997), many Black males view sports or music as more promising routes to upward mobility than academic pursuits and education. They associate economic success and power with careers as NBA all-stars or hip-hop artists. Harper (2004) argued that male students are more likely to identify themselves as standout athletes instead of classroom stars or school leaders. This perception of success is prevalent throughout the African-American community regardless of socio-economic status.

However, participation in extracurricular activities, including athletics, creates a positive relationship with self-esteem (Holland & Andre, 1987). Thus, African-American males may have a healthy perception of self-esteem with their membership in extracurricular activities, but they are only primarily participating in athletics, which only exacerbates their misconceptions of success. Often, participation in non-athletic activities other than cultural organizations is not stressed in African-American communities (Arrington, 2006). This study attempted to understand the underpinnings of this stance in a non-essentializing way. Utilizing the thoughts and experiences of the participants, this study attempted to identify ways to engage African-American adolescent males into formal academic leadership positions and programs.
African-American males’ definition of masculinity is heavily influenced by same-sex peer groups (Blos, 1962, 1979; Chodorow, 1978; Harper, 2004; LaVoire 1976; Stoller 1964; Wainrib, 1992). They are very powerful because they often dictate the acceptable behaviors and practices of individuals even if the individual disagrees with the practice at hand. Ferguson (2001) noted the pressures felt by African-American males, “Friendship establishes boundaries that mark the group as being essentially masculine and within the group there are pressures to conform to expectations of appropriate masculine behavior” (p. 122). African-American male peer groups also accept the role of a troublemaker. Ferguson added, “The open and public defiance of the teacher in order to get a laugh, make things happen, take center stage, be admired, is a resource for doing masculinity” (p. 177). Failure to abide to the concepts of being a Black man would commonly result in social exclusion.

Kunjufu (1988) argued that African-American boys must make a choice between school achievement and peer acceptance. Most ideas connected with pathways to success in the mainstream society are not accepted by male youth in the African-American culture. This oppositional stance is limiting the opportunities and experiences for African-American males. Fordham and Ogbu (1986) stated:

Subordinate minorities like Black Americans develop a sense of collective identity or sense of peoplehood in opposition to the social identity of white Americans because of the way white Americans treat them in economic, political, social, and psychological domains, including white exclusion of these groups from true assimilation (p. 181).

School achievement and membership into school organizations are often associated with acting white or proper. Ferguson (2001) explained, African-American
males that “appear to adopt whiteness not as a guise but an identity, (are) seen as an expression of self-hatred and race shame (within the African-American community)” (p. 212-213). Thus, attributes and qualities common with white students are not accepted by most African-American male students. Ferguson added:

Black youth are pointing out a similar institutional relationship in the context of a racialized culture when they point out that “acting white” is a prerequisite for fitting in at school and is absolutely basic to any kind of success. This requirement ruthlessly excludes African American cultural modes as relevant and meaningful knowledge practices (p. 205).

For the most part, African-American male students that participated in activities outside of the norm are viewed negatively by their peers. Ferguson (2001) continued, “African American boys who were “doing well” had to deal not only with the possibility of exile from the racial community, but with being “unmanned.” (p. 215). This sense of demasculinization and loss of racial identity have steered many African-American males away from academic achievement and taking leadership roles. Hence, these students are often ostracized and ridiculed by their peers. These negative stigmas can severely impact the psychological development of a young person. They would rather protect themselves by not becoming a leader or separate from their peers and define themselves as an athlete or entertainer.

Within African-American peer groups, there is a sense of competition among African-American males. Morrison and Eardley’s (1985) described this competitive nature in the following excerpt:

Boys grow up to be wary of each other. We are taught to compete with one another at school, and to struggle to prove ourselves outside it, on the street, the playground and the sports field. Later we fight for status over sexual prowess, or money, or physical strength or technical know-
how…the pressure is on to act tough. We fear humiliation or exclusion, or ultimately the violence of other boys if we fail to conform (p. 19).

The pressures endured by African-American adolescent males on masculinity and manhood minimize the opportunities for these students. Their definition of masculinity is defined more by what their peers think than what they do as an individual. Ferguson (2001) stated, “Masculinity is constructed as the practice of power plays and brinkmanship” (p. 43). The competitiveness was also seen through physical appearance and fighting. For many, a sign of masculinity was how muscular you were or how much weight you could lift. Ferguson added, “The enactment of masculinity is also a thoroughly embodied display of physical and social power” (p. 171).

Finally, the link between masculinity and athletics transcended nearly all socioeconomic classes within the African-American community. In his study, Ogbu (2003) concluded, “Students from affluent families, like those from poor families, did not make the connection between their present schooling (and activities) and their future” (p. 169). The perceptions on education and leadership development for many youth in the African-American community are not seen as priorities.

*Society and Culture*

Using a Critical Race Theory (CRT) lens in education, African-American adolescent males are limited in their opportunities based solely on the color of their skin due to historical inequities, beliefs, and policies. Ferguson (2001) stated, “Race continues to be a ready-made filter for interpreting events, informing social interactions, and grounding identities and identification in school” (p. 17). The experiences of many African-American males are often tainted solely based on their race and appearance. For
African-American males, they view the world knowing the societal limits and barriers placed in front of them. Delgado and Stefancic (2000) added:

...racism is normal, not aberrant, in American society. Because racism is an ingrained feature of our landscape, it looks ordinary and natural to persons in the culture. Formal equal opportunity – rules and laws that insist on treating blacks and whites (for example) alike – can thus remedy only the more extreme and shocking forms of injustice, the ones that do stand out. It can do little about the business-as-usual forms of racism that people of color confront every day and that account for much misery, alienation, and despair. (p. xvi)

Regardless of their intellect, talent, or innate gifts, many African-American males are subjugated to ill-treatment, discriminatory practices, and lack of access to opportunities. According to Ladson-Billings (1998), CRT identifies racism as “enmeshed in the fabric of our social order” (p. 11). Unfortunately, many of these practices are now embedded in our schools still negatively impacting African-American students. Barnes (1990) concluded that African-Americans have been marginalized in the United States socially, structurally, and intellectually, and CRT helps to acknowledge the feelings and unique perceptions of racial minorities. Delgado (2001) added that a major theme of CRT is that racism is pervasive in U.S. society, deeply ingrained, often overlooking the experiences of people of color. CRT originally focused in the law to “confront critically the…historical centrality and complicity of law in upholding White Supremacy”, but today it is applied to several other fields including education (Cornel West, 1995, p. xi.).

Today, many school policies and structures are still in place that inhibit and limit the success of African-American males. For instance, the enforcement of school policies often is applied at higher rates and with harsher consequences to African-American males. Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, and Bachman’s (2008) study found that Black
students were more severely punished over subjective behavior at schools. They were sent to an administrator at higher rates than their non-Black counterparts for reasons such as disrespect and perceived threat. African-American males also experience more negative interactions with individuals outside of schools such as police officers and individuals in the community (Corprew, 2011; Cunningham & Spencer, 1996; Cunningham, Swanson, Spencer, & Dupree, 2003; Fine, Swanson, Spencer, & Dupree, 2003).

These practices continue to reinforce the belief that African-American males are troublesome and disruptive. Regardless of their abilities and talents, they are subjugated to unfair standards and policies. Steele (1992) discussed the idea of the “stereotype stigma” that connects the lack of achievement among Black students due to cultural and social context. It seems that African-American male students have not been able to overcome this idea despite decades of reforms and changes. These structural constraints often manifest into negative behaviors and attitudes towards schooling (Corprew, 2011).

Many African-American males reported that they do not feel any sense of school connectedness to their educational environment (Arrington, 2006). School connectedness refers to the extent to which one feels personally accepted, valued, supported, and encouraged by peers, teachers, and other adults in the school social environment (Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Lewis 2006). They do not feel like there is a purpose for their attendance and participation in school or at school-sponsored events. Thus, they are not motivated to achieve, be involved in school activities, or hold positions of
responsibility (Senior & Anderson, 1993). Whether institutional or social, racist behaviors are negatively related to school membership and evaluation (Arrington, 2006).

This study took all these issues into account. Even when dealing with school populations that are predominantly African-American, researchers and scholars must be aware that these issues still exist. African-American males may feel more connected to their schools since they most likely will have a sense of belonging being a part of the majority, but the presence of discriminatory organizational policies and societal structures are to be still assumed (Corprew, 2011).

School engagement/Leadership Development

Participation in school extracurricular activities can be an important aspect of leadership and skill development for students. Sutton and Terrell (1997) noted that participation in student government is an excellent opportunity to develop a variety of leadership skills. Wingenbach and Kahler (1997) highlighted that students develop “their leadership skills in communications, decision making, getting along with others, learning management of self, understanding self, and working with groups by participating in a combination of youth leadership organizations in school and/or community activities” (p. 19). Unfortunately, many African-American male students are not taking advantage of these opportunities. Many are shunning anything connected with these opportunities. According to Sutton and Terrell (1997), few practitioners and researchers have looked at identifying and developing leadership opportunities for African-American men. More work is needed in this area to fully understand and grasp the leadership development with African-American male students.
With low participation rates in leadership opportunities, African-American male students are only reinforcing the societal barriers that they must face. Loo and Rolison (1986) indicated that feelings of social and cultural isolation contribute to diminished leadership opportunities among African-American students. By not participating or taking leadership roles, African-American males are losing their voices by standing on the sidelines as others take advantage and make decisions. Unfortunately, this inaction could also be related as a learned behavior through decades of oppression and emasculation. DuBois (1965) described the perspectives African-Americans at the turn of the century having a “Double-consciousness” as the “sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others” (p. 8). This mentality could be linked to a limited approach of involvement of African-Americans because of constant surveillance and monitoring. Ferguson added (2001), “Blacks identified both as Americans, as “citizens,” and as a racially subordinated minority that was excluded politically and socially” (p. 209). There is a feeling of being a part of the group, but there are limitations to that participation and involvement based on race.

Even at the collegiate level, African-American males also feel that these student organizations are not relevant to their personal academic experiences (Sutton and Terrell, 1997, Willie and McCord, 1972). They become disconnected to several aspects of student life. However, many African-American men choose to develop their leadership skills by joining culturally specific school organization such as fraternities rather than school wide organizations (Harper, 1975).
Programs have been developed to engage students and to provide leadership development. However, many target those communities that have readily available resources and extensive support. Others do not effectively deal with the societal constraints placed on at-risk groups. Ginwright and James (1954) elaborated that many youth development programs rarely address how young people deal with racism, sexism, and homophobia. Students cannot develop healthily without facing these societal barriers. Ferguson (2001) noted, “Kids bring feelings of anger and frustration about racial inequality gleaned from personal experience, from family, neighborhood, television, movies, and popular music to decipher struggles with authority figures” (p. 199). More programs need to be developed that incorporate service learning since it is seen as an effective method for teaching and enhancing leadership skills and positive attitudes in youth (Boyd, 2001; Conrad & Hedin, 1983; Ladewig & Thomas, 1987; Yates & Youniss, 1996).
Chapter Three

I suppose leadership at one time meant muscles; but today it means getting along with people.
-Mahatma Gandhi

Methodology and Research Design

CPHS students were empowered to take ownership of the school and its many programs by school administrators and teachers. However, there was a lack of formal male leadership and club membership outside of athletics in regards to African-American students. These academic leadership programs included serving as a peer mentor, cabinet member, Student Council or Class officer. Most of the Student Council officers and participants in other leadership programs have been female students or non-Black male students. Often, there were no African-American males on the ballot to run for any positions. The National Honor Society, the Honor Council, YouthLeader and the Peer Ministry programs were also reflective of the noticeable lack of representation of African-American male leadership. African-American male students tended to gravitate solely to sports or cultural relevant programs such African Dance and Drumming or Black Cultural Alliance. Hence, the majority of leadership positions were being taken primarily by African-American female students.

This qualitative study sought to identify the causes of the disproportionate representation of African-American male students in leadership positions at CPHS. By utilizing the participants’ responses from semi-structured interviews, I recommended possible ways to improve the numbers of African-American male student leaders. In
addition, I attempted to identify the motivating factors for those African-American male students that have participated in formal leadership organizations.

Using an interpretive paradigm as described by Erickson (1986), this study’s design provided “immediate and local meanings of actions, as defined from the actors’ point of view” (p. 119). Naturalistic methods allowed participants to share their feelings on the many factors that molded their beliefs and behaviors. In particular, this study yielded students’ thoughts about the intersection of leadership and race. Maxwell (2013) elaborated that interpretive paradigms were about “(u)nderstanding the meaning, for the participants being studied, of the events, situations, experiences, and actions the participants are involved or engaged with.” (Loc. 674). By interpreting the voices and experiences of the participants, this study was able to identify the various factors influencing African-American male students in terms of leadership, masculinity, and success.

Setting

Most of the interviews took place at CPHS. The school sits on a fourteen acre campus in Maryland neighbored by an elementary school. It is located within seven miles of Washington, DC. Situated in Prince George’s County, CPHS serves a diverse economic population, but primarily its students are African-American, coming from the suburbs of Maryland and Washington, DC. In 2014, CPHS served approximately 890 students in grades 9-12. Over the years, CPHS has received numerous local accolades for being an excellent private institution. I received prior approval from the school’s
president and principal to conduct this research study. They were in full support of this study, and they were extremely interested in reviewing the findings.

For most of the participants, the individual interviews took place in an empty office to provide a familiar and safe environment for the participants. Since they all spent countless hours at CPHS, it was the most obvious place to interview the participants. They were familiar with their surroundings and knew the campus. Sirotnik (1990) stated, “(t)he local school is the setting where social, political, and historical forces affecting schooling are translated into practice” (p. 56). Many of the students felt comfortable in the interview settings since the school often reached out to its student body for feedback and insight on a host of topics. As a former school administrator at CPHS, I was already familiar with the school’s facilities, technology, and students. For those that I could not meet at CPHS, I met them at coffee shops, restaurants, or book stores throughout the DC/Baltimore area. Also, I interviewed a few of the participants at my new office.

CPHS is unique in that it is a Catholic school with a majority non-Catholic student body. The school’s openness to all people regardless of race, religion, or sexual orientation has benefitted the community providing a rich, accepting, inclusive, and diverse setting. Students were not pressured to convert to Catholicism, but they were educated in the teachings of the Catholic Church through monthly masses, mandatory theology classes, and a vibrant retreat program.

I was able to meet with all participants face to face. Since many former students come back to the DC area for Christmas and New Year holidays, the majority of the interviews were conducted in December during their winter breaks. Thankfully to social
networking and my contacts still at CPHS, it was very easy to coordinate and schedule the interviews with all the participants. Several alumni including women reached out to me to see if they could participate in this study.

Participant Selection and Selection Criteria

Using a qualitative approach, this practitioner research study involved semi-structured interviews as its main data collection method. I conducted individual interviews with 25 former students and four of those participants participated in a more in-depth interview with an additional interview protocol. Having taught at the school for twelve years, I have stayed in contact with many of these students over the years. I mentored quite a number of them having regular contact with them. Through word of mouth, others CPHS alumni wanted to participate in this study. Unfortunately due to time limitations, I could not broaden the scope of this research study.

According Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2013), purposive sampling allows the researcher to focus on a case’s unique contexts. By using a purpose sampling technique, I used predetermined characteristics in selecting participants to reveal information about their experiences that relate to the research questions. Convenience sampling was used to assist with participant selections. Johnson and Christensen (2008) stated that convenience samples include subjects who are available and volunteer to participate in the study. Many of the participants attended local universities and colleges because they were readily available and easier to schedule.

Participant requirements were listed below for each alumnus:

a) must be a male of Black descent
b) must have attended CPHS for three or more years
c) must have graduated within the past five years (2010-2015)  
d) must be at least 18 years old  
e) must be willing to discuss / disclose personal experiences as a CPHS student  

These requirements were used to recruit participants. Since I wanted to learn more about the African-American male experience at CPHS, I focused my recruiting efforts on recent alumni since I knew each one of them. In addition, I chose to only interview graduates within the past five years because I wanted to see what current school policies and features of school culture were impacting the African-American male students.

After a brief overview was communicated to the participants over the phone, an agreed meeting time was selected for the interview. As stated by Creswell (2013), it was important that I, as the researcher, review the purpose of the study with the participants. I made sure that I did this step with each participant in both verbal and written formats. I provided them with an overview of the study and gave them the informed consent form (See Appendix B). This added step was requested by the school because they want to be assured that all participants were aware of the purpose of the study and any risks associated with it. It provided information to the participants on the study’s confidentiality and participant rights. Finally, this study received full support from the school’s administration prior to its initiation.

Participant Profiles

This study began with 26 participants. Unfortunately, one participant’s transcript was lost due to technological difficulties, so that data was never analyzed. Participant profiles have been created for the remaining 25 participants in this study utilizing pseudonyms for the participants. The overviews included the participant’s graduation
year from CPHS, extracurricular activities, leadership positions, and current school or work status.

**Alfred** is a 2012 CPHS graduate. He was a member of the school’s Black Cultural Alliance, Debate Club, FACE Club, National Honor Society, and Photography Club. In addition, Alfred participated in the YouthLeader program. Alfred did not participate in any athletic programs at CPHS. He is currently a senior in college studying communication and design.

**Bradley** is a 2011 BMHS graduate. He participated in many school programs at CPHS including Band, Dance (tap), Football, and Soccer. Bradley was also a member of the school’s French Club and Fellowship of Christian Athletes. He served as a Peer Minister and YouthLeader in his senior year of high school. He played collegiate football. Bradley recently graduated with his bachelor’s degree in business management.

**Colin** is a 2013 CPHS graduate. He participated in many programs at CPHS including Dance Team, Life Information for Teens (LIFT), and Yearbook. He served as a member of Senior Cabinet, Peer Ministry, and YouthLeader. Colin is currently a junior in college studying economics.

**Darrell** is a 2013 CPHS graduate. He was a member of the school’s Dance (tap) and African Dance and Drumming programs. Darrell played Baseball for CPHS for four years. He is currently a student at a community college, and plays baseball for them.

**Ezra** is a 2013 CPHS graduate. He participated in many programs at CPHS including Dance (tap), Football, FACE Club, and Wrestling. He was also a member of the school’s Black Cultural Alliance and Slam Poetry Team. Ezra is currently a sophomore in college studying education.

**Fred** is 2011 CPHS graduate. His extracurricular activities at CPHS focused on athletics including Basketball, Football, Track and Wrestling. He participated in the school’s African Dance and Drumming program. Fred played Football in college, and he is a senior majoring in women’s and gender studies.

**George** is a 2015 CPHS graduate. He participated in many programs at CPHS including Baseball, Basketball, Cooking Club, Fashion Club, and Photography Club. He was a member of the LIFT program. George is studying criminal justice in college.

**Harris** is a 2012 CPHS graduate. He participated in many programs at CPHS including Bowling Club, Games Club, Soccer, and Teens in Action. Harris was
also a member of the National Latin Honor Society. Harris is a senior in college studying criminal justice.

**Isaac** is a 2010 CPHS graduate. His extracurricular activities at CPHS focused on athletics including Baseball, Football, and Wrestling. He also was a member of the Band program. Isaac is a senior in college majoring in audio engineering.

**Jacob** is a 2013 CPHS graduate. He participated in Soccer and the Adventure Sports Club at CPHS. In addition, Jacob participated in the YouthLeader program during his senior year. He played Soccer in his first two years in college. Currently, Jacob is a senior in college majoring in audio engineering.

**Kevin** is a 2014 CPHS graduate. His extracurricular activities at CPHS focused on athletics including Soccer and Track. He also was a member of the ACE Mentoring Club, Aviation Club, and Korean Culture Club. In addition, Kevin participated in the YouthLeader program during his senior year. Kevin is a mechanical engineering student in college.

**Lucas** is a 2014 CPHS graduate. He participated in many programs at CPHS including ACE Mentoring, Band, Baseball, and Frontiers of Justice. He also was a member of National Honor Society, and he served on Senior Cabinet and as a YouthLeader. Lucas is a sophomore in college studying computer science.

**Marvin** is a 2014 CPHS graduate. His extracurricular activities at CPHS focused on basketball. He served the school by participating in Peer Ministry and Student Government. Marvin was a YouthLeader in his senior year. Marvin played basketball in college. He is a senior in college completing his business administration degree.

**Noah** is a 2014 CPHS graduate. In high school, he was heavily involved in extracurricular activities such as National Honor Society, Tech Crew, and Teens in Action. He served CPHS by participating in Senior Cabinet and Peer Ministry. Noah was a YouthLeader in his senior year. He is a sophomore in college studying health administration.

**Oscar** is a 2011 CPHS graduate. He participated in many extracurricular activities at CPHS including Band, National Honor Society, Spanish Club, and Youth for Christ. He served CPHS by being a member of Senior Cabinet and being a YouthLeader. Oscar graduated college in 2015 with bachelor’s degrees in political science and Spanish.

**Peter** is a 2012 CPHS graduate. In high school, he was heavily involved in extracurricular activities such as ACE Mentoring, Baseball, Lacrosse, and Senior Cabinet. He was a member of the National Honor Society, Mu Alpha Theta Math
Honor Society, and the Science National Honor Society. Peter is a senior in college studying mechanical engineering.

**Quinton** is a 2015 CPHS graduate. He participated in many extracurricular activities at CPHS including FACE, Football, Lacrosse, Soccer, and Teens in Action. He also served as a member of Freshman and Sophomore Class Cabinets, and he was a YouthLeader his senior year. Quinton is a freshman in college studying sociology. He is also a member of his school’s Lacrosse team.

**Russell** is a 2013 CPHS graduate. He participated in soccer and track at CPHS. In addition, he was a member of the Aviation Club. Russell is a sophomore in college studying unmanned aerial systems.

**Stuart** is a 2015 CPHS graduate. He participated in the school’s theater and African Dance and Drumming programs. In addition, he was a member of the Slam Poetry Team. Stuart is a freshman in college studying media focusing on film & television.

**Travis** is a 2011 CPHS graduate. His extracurricular activities at CPHS focused on baseball and basketball. He also participated in Teens in Action. Travis played baseball in college, and he graduated with his bachelor’s degree in Sports Management/Business.

**Ulysses** is a 2010 CPHS graduate. He participated in Band, Choir, Football, Golf, and Wrestling at CPHS. He also participated in Teens in Action. Ulysses graduated with his bachelor’s degree in accounting.

**Vincent** is a 2013 CPHS graduate. In high school, he was heavily involved in extracurricular activities including ACE Mentoring, Band, Basketball, National Honor Society, and Soccer. Vincent served CPHS through his participation in Peer Ministry, Class Council, and YouthLeader. Vincent is a junior in college studying mechanical engineering.

**Winston** is a 2012 CPHS graduate. In high school, he was heavily involved in extracurricular activities including African Dance and Drumming, Black Cultural Alliance, Frontiers of Justice, Journalism, Soccer, and Track. He served CPHS through his participation with Student Council and YouthLeader. Winston is a senior in college studying American studies.

**Xavier** is a 2014 CPHS graduate. He participated in many programs at CPHS including African Dance and Drumming, Dance (Tap and Jazz), Fashion Club, International Thespian Society, LIFT, National English Honor Society, National Honor Society, Teens in Action, and Theater productions. He served CPHS
through his participation with Class Cabinet and Student Council. Xavier is a sophomore in college studying public relations and international communication.

Zachary is a 2015 CPHS graduate. His extracurricular activities at CPHS focused on athletics including Basketball, Football, and Track. He also participated in the school’s Dance program (ballet). Zachary is a freshman in college studying political science. He is also a member of his school’s football program.

Methods and Research Design

Individual Interviews and In-depth Interviews

Individual interviews took place in two forms. Initially, 25 former African-American male students were interviewed from volunteering or being recruited. I wanted to get a broad range of experiences when it came to participation in formal student leadership positions and programs. The interview sessions lasted approximately 45-60 minutes in length. The interviews had several guiding questions and subsequent follow-up questions were developed, as needed (see Appendix C). All interviews were recorded and transcribed utilizing Rev, an online transcription service. Throughout the interviews, I took copious notes to track my own thoughts and possible conclusions.

Interviews were very important in this study as they allow participants to share their experiences and stories. Rubin and Rubin (2005) stated that interviews allowed researchers to “detail the experiences, motives, and opinions of others and learn to see the world from perspectives other than their own.” (Loc. 388). Interviews allowed the students to delve deeper into their perspectives on the issue of African-American male student leadership. I oriented all participants to the scope and purpose of the study. The transcripts of the interviews were shared with the participants utilizing the member checking process. Interviewees were asked if they wanted to add or subtract anything
they have said. As noted by Creswell (2013), member checking ensured the experiences of the participants were accurately portrayed by verifying the information with them.

Of the initial group that wished to be a part of the in-depth group, I asked four CPHS alumni to participate in a more in-depth individual interview. Each in-depth interview lasted about 75 minutes. All interview questions were developed prior to the interviews, and all sessions had the same base questions, but additional questions were customized depending on the specific experiences of the participants from the data gained in the previous interview (see Appendix D). All interviews were recorded and transcribed. All participants had an opportunity to review the transcript to insure that their comments were portrayed in the proper context and meaning. Interviewees were asked if they want to add or subtract anything they have said. I also took notes to track my ideas and findings.

*Research Memos*

Throughout the data collection phase, I wrote memos to document my thoughts on this study. Miles and Huberman (1994) highlighted that research memos helped to “move easily from empirical data to a conceptual level, refining and expanding codes further, developing key categories and showing their relationships, and building toward a more integrated understanding of events, processes, and interactions. (p. 73-74). I was able to build my codes and look for commonalities among the interviewees. This reflective practice allowed me to improve my interviewing skills by determining what questions worked, what sequencing of questions was most effective, and any additional areas that I needed to focus attention. As a former school administrator at CPHS, I
wanted to be sure that my prior experiences and biases did not influence the interviews and data.

**Critical Friend**

Throughout this study, a former colleague of mine volunteered to be a critical friend. Since she worked at CPHS, she was familiar with the school culture and knew most of the participants. She provided valuable feedback on the interview protocols and the findings. Costa (1993) defined a critical friend as someone who “is a trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers critiques of a person’s work as a friend” (p. 50). The critical friend in this study brought a different perspective to this study because her interactions with the students were very different than mine as a school administrator.

**Sequencing of Methods**

I was aware that the sequencing of data collection needed to change as I carried out this study for a variety of reasons. As Maxwell (2013) noted, “Any component of the design may need to be reconsidered or modified during the study in response to new developments or to changes in some other component” (p. 103). This was because the experiences of the participants were unique. Some participants had mentors that greatly influenced their perspective on leadership while others did not. Others found that outlets for leadership development outside of school through other organizations such as Boy Scouts or church. As a phenomenological study, all of these influences were studied.

I began to meet with the 25 interview participants. I needed to revise my interview protocols after the first interview. My questions continued to get revised until
the fourth interview. After 3-4 interviews, I wrote a memo highlighting key themes and experiences from each participant. From the 25 interviews, I found four participants for an additional round of interview questions. These in-depth sessions attempted to gain a better perspective on the experiences lived by these participants. The level of school involvement varied greatly among the participants. Some participants were recruited as athletes and did not deviate from their sport throughout the years at CPHS. Others were heavily involved in Student Council serving in multiple roles. This allowed me to identify the possible influential factors impacting the students at CPHS when it came to leadership development. Again, I wrote memos at the conclusion of each in-depth interview to capture my thoughts and reactions. At the conclusion of the data collection process, I begin the coding process by reviewing the transcripts looking for overarching themes and relationships.

**Data Analysis**

I used several coding approaches in analyzing the data collected from the interviews. I performed a two-cycle coding process in the analysis of my data. As explained by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2013), I initially coded all the data according to several themes. After that is completed, I reanalyzed the codes to cluster them into smaller categories. This process was very thorough and has a built-in redundancy within its design. Dedoose, an online qualitative analyzing program, helped to organize the data and codes.

For the first cycle of analyzing the individual interviews, I used descriptive and emotion coding approaches. Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2013) described descriptive
coding in that the data collector “assigns labels to data to summarize in a word or short phrase-most often a noun-the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data.” (p. 74). This was a quick and easy process that allowed me to navigate through the transcripts. Since I was looking for perceptions, factors, and causes from the participants, emotion coding was an excellent approach as it “labels the emotions recalled and/or experienced by the participant or inferred by the researcher about the participant” (Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, 2013, p. 75).

The second cycle of analyzing was pattern coding. According to Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2013), this approach “can emerge from repeatedly observed behaviors, actions, norms, routines, and relationships” (p. 88). This process involved mapping, memo writing, and checking. I applied this approach across all data collected. In addition, the two-cycle coding process was used for the in-depth interviews.

Triangulation

Bednarz’ (1983) stated that triangulation was "the multiple employment of sources of data, observers, methods, or theories" in investigations of the same phenomenon (p. 38). I took all the analyzed and coded findings from the interviews and began to triangulate the data to look for common themes. The research memos were very valuable because they helped to guide me throughout the data collection process. This method allowed me to narrow down and refine my data collection. There was a lot of data that could be used for other studies, but I had to focus the findings to my research questions.
Using a qualitative approach, I used data from both types of interviews and saw if they intersected with the literature. According to Thurmond (2001), the benefits of triangulation included “increasing confidence in research data, creating innovative ways of understanding a phenomenon, revealing unique findings, challenging or integrating theories, and providing a clearer understanding of the problem” (p. 254). My findings were reliable and clearly addressed the questions in the study.

**Researcher Roles/Issues of Validity**

**Researcher Role and Positionality**

As a former administrator at CPHS, I was tasked with a number of responsibilities including teacher evaluations, program development, student leadership programs, and assisting with the day to day operations of the school such as monitoring lunches or chaperoning field trips. I interacted daily with the students providing guidance and direction. In addition, I provided the students with opportunities such as summer jobs, internships, conferences, and workshops; hence, I had a good rapport with the vast majority of the eligible study participants.

Despite leaving CPHS in July 2014, I continued to mentor a number of students, working with them one-on-one with college preparation. Having been the previous Director of Student Life and Student Council Moderator, I was very familiar with the leadership programs within the school, as I assisted in the recruitment of students into leadership programs. Over the past twelve years, I have witnessed the difficulties in recruiting African-American male students to participate in leadership programs. Not being African American, I still have been able to connect with the lives of students by
being available and engaged. I was invested into the futures of every student and will continue to work and research on their behalf.

When I began this study, I was concerned about being a Korean-American male researching the experiences of African-American students. I felt like I did not have a right to share the experiences of these students because I could never experience the feelings they had or the decisions they had to make. As a part of my findings, I realized that my ethnicity had very little to do with my ability to be an objective researcher and educator. My goal was to tell about the lived experiences of these young people.

Even though I am no longer employed by CPHS, I still have an excellent rapport with many of the graduates. These ties allowed me to conduct this practitioner research study in a thoughtful and caring manner. Many students continued to contact me for advice, assistance, job references, and guidance. I am hoping this study will have a lasting impression on the students, faculty, and administration at CPHS.

*Issues of Validity*

This study dealt with a few shortcomings. I needed to be aware of my positional status as a former teacher and administrator as it very likely skewed the participation and comments from the students. For instance, my name came up numerous times throughout the study from the participants’ responses. At times, administrators were seen as powerful and unapproachable individuals by students. However, the participants were informed that their comments would not result in any disciplinary consequences or be shared with certain individuals. They felt comfortable to be truthful without any retaliation since I no longer worked at the school. For most of the participants, I was still
seen as an authoritative figure, but I eased their fears by addressing them head on. My goal to improve the school climate for African-American male students at CPHS was clearly communicated to the research participants.

My research bias also needed to be addressed. Maxwell (2013) detailed, “Two important threats to the validity of qualitative conclusions are the selection of data that fits the researcher’s existing theory, goals, or preconceptions, and the selection of data that ‘stand out’ to the researcher” (Loc. 2724). It was difficult to not insert or control my biases into this study. I needed to continue to keep my goals always at the forefront of my research and analysis. I sought feedback from my peers and colleagues that aided in maintaining the integrity of this study. Seeing that this was an extension of my pilot study, I needed to be aware that the conclusions from this larger study may be different from my original findings. I did not want those themes and conclusions to influence this study unless they were a product of the data collection and analysis process.
Chapter Four

You have to recruit the best candidates even though they don’t realize they are the best candidates.
- Fred

Findings

The findings in this study were based on semi-structured interviews with 25 African-American male CPHS alumni who graduated between the years of 2010 to 2015. Four of these interviews were extended interviews utilizing an additional interview protocol. The participant responses provided relevant and intriguing information to begin answering the three research questions. Despite interviewing a wide range of participants with various interests and activities, they noted similar messages and experiences related to being a student leader and an African-American male. Attending a private, Catholic school serving mostly middle class families, the CPHS experiences of the participants mirrored many of the accounts in other scholarly literature and research. Financial resources and family support are often not enough to overcome societal perceptions and pressures on race, leadership, and masculinity for many African-American males. The students also provided ways in which the school could engage more African-American male students in leadership positions and engagement.

Whether a participant was an athlete or a class officer, they were aware of common pressures and expectations placed on them as African-American males. Many of these influences focused on athletic participation and came from several sources including their peers, family members, the school, and the media. Winston, a student leader and athlete at CPHS, elaborated:
There is a trend that athletics are the way to success, and I think that comes from an early age. That's something indoctrinated through media representations, through just kind of old traditional values, that if a family has been in this type of economic status for this long, and they see that Johnny can catch a football, that's great, that's the automatic thing.

The participants noted several factors that influenced the lack of participation in leadership opportunities of the majority of African-American males at CPHS. Lack of time, pressure to be an athlete, and various negative perceptions of activity in leadership programs were major obstacles and challenges influencing engagement and participation. However, those that did participate were strongly encouraged by family members and school officials to make an attempt to run for office or apply to a leadership program. To accurately portray the students’ voices, the excerpts have not been edited or altered.

Finding 1: Factors causing a lack of student engagement in leadership opportunities and programs

There were several factors that negatively influenced student participation and engagement in leadership programs at CPHS. Primarily, the participants that were student-athletes identified the lack of time to participate in anything outside of their sport(s). Pressures from school officials, primarily coaches, were felt by student-athletes that were interested in pursuing leadership opportunities since these activities interfered with athletic practices and competitions. Furthermore, participants acknowledged the negative peer perception of participating in leadership programs which included being viewed as not cool, submissive, feminine, and weak. Finally, participants reflected on being seen as either athletes or troublemakers, not potential leaders, by school officials, society, and media.
Finding 1a: Lack of time

Through the interviews, it was clearly evident that participants felt they did not have enough time to participate in activities outside of their sport(s) including taking on any major leadership role requiring a significant time commitment. The results from Ogbu’s (2003) study were similar in that many Black students were so busy with sports that they had little time for their schoolwork or to participate in other programs or extracurricular activities. The participants argued the school day and schedule at CPHS were not designed to support student-athletes. Since many practices and athletic contests concluded late in the evening, the participants had limited time to complete their homework. Participation in other activities was seen as impossible. There was a noticeable tension between participants in athletics versus other school activities including clubs and leadership organizations.

Marvin participated in basketball and served as a class officer his freshman year, but he felt he had to choose between the two activities. After talking with his parents, he decided to step away from his Student Council responsibilities. Marvin was one of the few African-American males that participated in CPHS leadership programs, but he felt the pressure from his coaches and friends to focus on basketball. Marvin played college basketball, but he still had regrets about not continuing his participation with Student Council. He reflected:

I personally pulled back for basketball. I then thought that I didn’t have my priorities in order, and I was thinking I wanted to focus on basketball more than I wanted to focus on Student Council. And that’s what I was saying; if I could go back and take it a lot more seriously I would’ve realized basketball should have come second.
Despite wanting to participate in other non-sports related activities, many of the students felt they did not have enough time to devote to anything but athletics. George was a two-sport athlete playing both baseball and basketball. He reflected:

I never did anything (clubs) for a long period of time because I was always playing sports, and so you know the schedule of practice and games. Between all that it’s hard for me to stick with something outside of sports.

Many student-athletes felt pigeonholed. Bradley played college football, but his preparation and dedication to the sport started much earlier. He reflected:

We all thought about playing sports in college, so we just felt like we didn't have time to focus on student government and still be able to focus on our craft. I guess you were kind of afraid of that type of leadership role. We kind of just stayed within our square.

Travis was another student athlete playing primarily baseball. He participated in a service organization. He commented:

I think I was just focused on sports, if it wasn't baseball or basketball, or grades. I thought that was a lot to juggle until you realize what other people have on their plates. Like I said, I wasn't class president, and I think I had a few other people that it was amazing to see them juggle everything. You pretty much are an employee of Potter. As much as they would take on at school, they would stay until 6 o'clock every day.

Noah did not participate in high school athletics, but he understood the struggles of his peers who did. He was heavily involved in extracurricular activities including leadership and service organizations. He shared:

I feel like a lot of the black males at Cardinal Potter go into sports. You see all of them on the basketball team and football team and stuff like that. That takes a lot of time. After school, I would stay late because I basically lived there. I would see they would be in practice till like 6. That’s also when club meetings would happen. That’s also when all the leadership cabinets and stuff would meet together, so they can’t really divide their time between basketball practice or basketball games and like being a student leader. So that’s why, I think it’s like a time thing, they pick sports over being a student leader.
Others cited the difficulties adjusting to the academic rigor and workload from middle school to high school. Adapting to the CPHS school culture and expectations was a challenge for many of the participants, especially those that came from public middle schools. Russell stated, “From where I came from, the workload changed a lot. As my mom said, I was always up at 1:00am doing homework. With that and sports on the side, that was a lot to handle.” When describing Student Council, George struggled with the thoughts of additional work from participation in the program. He recalled, “I caught myself saying I was gonna run my sophomore year, and I went into a meeting or something like, and I heard how much work it was, and I wasn’t trying to do it.” Lucas suggested that time should be built into the school day to support leadership opportunities for athletes. He commented:

You have to go to this, or we have a program that’s like we take time out of the day for everybody to go to this instead of making it an optional after school thing because most of the black males are playing sports. So they aren’t going to go because they are at practice or in the band. I just feel they should make more time to set aside to push people to be in this instead of when you have an option.

The demands and pressures to be a student-athlete were extremely high. The participants who were athletes needed to attend clinics, team camps, weightlifting sessions, film sessions, meetings, and training preparation such as preventive care, therapeutic exercises, and rehabilitation. All took time away from their studies and other activities. The time balance for a student-athlete was difficult and viewed as overwhelming for many of the participants, leaving them with very few options outside of athletics.
Finding 1b: Pressure to focus on athletics

Many of the participants mentioned they felt pressured to not participate in leadership opportunities and other extracurricular activities due to athletics. Many of their peers saw athletics as a means to success. According to Ogbu (2003), “Blacks went into sports because they perceived limited opportunity to get ahead through education and merit in the mainstream economy” (p. 156). These messages were reiterated from some CPHS coaches. Winston commented on his experiences:

I honestly think it starts in athletics because that's where it's grounded right now. I know personally for me and my experience I felt both in my involvement with soccer and with track, there was always kind of this ultimatum put in front of me when I would say, "Oh, I have to do this thing for something else." It seemed like that was kind of like an extra little thing and the sports will always come first, and that was always, with my coaches they had this thing like, "I don't understand why you're still trying to ask if you can go to it, I don't get why you're trying to prioritize." Not even prioritize necessarily. "Why are you trying to do other things? You should be here practicing." I definitely think that coach involvement is extremely important in getting them because a lot of these people are great leaders.

Some of the participants felt CPHS valued athletics on a higher level than other programs. Colin commented, “I would definitely say at Potter, it was more in favor of athletics.” Marvin added that coaches and teachers should be encouraging black males to participate in leadership roles outside of athletics. Many student-athletes struggled with an identity outside of athletics. Marvin elaborated:

I mean most black males end up being on the basketball team or football team, but I think they actually got to tell the coaches, tell the players or get the coaches, get the teachers to reach out… I don’t think a lot of the black males on the basketball team and stuff won’t come out for student government because they already have that role as basketball player or
football player. They should reach out to them and ask for more black leadership.

Parents influenced their sons in both positive and negative ways. They were the participant’s primary sources of messages on masculinity, leadership, and success. Some of the parents focused their attention on athletics, limiting their son’s participation to solely a particular sport. Fred played football throughout his high school and collegiate careers. His mother was a big influence on his life as an athlete. He reflected:

I remember when I was a little kid I would get hurt on the football field. I carried it over till today, probably not the best thing but I remember I got hurt one time on the field and I was laying out on the field and the trainer had to come out, after the game you would think she (my mom) would tell me “Are you okay?” She was like “No, if you get hurt on the field, I don’t care what it is, you get your ass up and walk over to the sideline and they’ll take care of you over there.” She told me not lay out on the field. Don’t show anybody that you’re hurt and I still do it today. Again probably not the best thing, but I remember when I dislocated my knee in practice I stood up and hobbled over to the sideline, then I collapsed there but she told me don’t lay out on the field. I guess that’s a life lesson I could say, even when you’re hurting, don’t show people that you’re hurting, get your treatment for it but kind of man-up in a way.

On the other hand, students that did participate in leadership programs cited the encouragement and support that they received from their parents. Winston participated in Student Council for a number of years holding several official titles. He cited the influence from his parents and the importance of role modeling.

Definitely both of my parents, and I think that also plays into why I wasn't focused on sports and wanted to explore other things. It's because growing up I saw my parents in leadership positions from a very early age, so that also just taught me that there are other things to do outside of sports. Because I had such a front-view to both of my parents who were very successful people in their careers and they constantly surrounded me with that, so definitely them. They just taught me how to have a great work ethic, how to balance work and family.
Xavier was extremely active in several extracurricular activities including Student Council and the dance program. His mother played a pivotal role on his views on leadership and service.

My parents always motivated me to not be afraid to step up and take leadership positions. All throughout middle school, I watched my mom be President of Catholic Business Network, President of the Homeschool Association, like all this stuff. I just had leadership role models right in front of me all the time. I guess that definitely did influence me wanting to become involved.

In addition, Vincent participated in a number of leadership programs at CPHS. He mentioned a message he received from another peer who was a student leader, “School isn’t everything. And (he was) involved in other things than school and sports.”

The participant’s parents played a very important role in guiding and molding their sons. According to the participants, future career and life preparation was the key development for many parents. They wanted to be sure that their sons were successful, thus they invested a significant amount of financial resources into their son’s education by attending CPHS. Many parents saw athletics as a primary vehicle for success while others stress academic and leadership achievements.

Finding 1c: Perception

For students, the perception of leadership programs and organizations from the participants focused around three main ideas. Many of the participants viewed these programs as unpopular or uncool. In addition, some of the participants recalled that participation in any programs outside of athletics was considered more feminine, questioning the individual’s masculinity or sex orientation. Finally, many participants
felt limited by the perception that African-American males had to be either an athlete or troublemaker.

The participants acknowledged that the negative connotations of their peers made them reluctant to seek out leadership positions. Many felt that their peers would chastise and ridicule them for any behavior outside the established norm of participation in athletics for an African-American male. Oscar shared his experiences of seeing the social exclusion of some of his classmates due to their unwillingness or inability to conform to the male stereotypes at CPHS.

If someone looked or acted different, if they fit more into the idea of what a feminine man was, then they were ostracized or treated a little differently, or talked about behind their back. That message was kind of that there is a way to act as a man.

Travis added, “I believe our (African-American males) priorities are sports or just being ... its sport or being a cool kid. I don't think you'd think being class president would be cool, I don't think that would be appealing.” Darrell did not participate in extracurricular programs outside of baseball. He explained why he and his peers did not participate in leadership programs like Student Council and Peer Ministry, “People probably feel they’re too cool for it. They don’t; they’d rather be a follower than a leader.”

Peter experienced and acknowledged the oppositional culture at CPHS. As Ferguson (2001) noted, “being a ‘good’ student is equivalent to losing one’s racial cultural identity” (p. 203). Fordham and Ogbu (1986) added, “To behave in the manner defined as falling within a white cultural frame of reference is to ‘act white’ and is negatively sanctioned” (p. 181). Peter excelled in the classroom and took some minor leadership roles in various school organizations, but he disliked the limelight and
attention that came with his successes because of his peers’ negative reactions. He reflected,

I think that people (African-American males) not applying themselves comes from fear of their classmates making fun of them, but those classmates making fun of them comes from their own insecurities within. They're like: I'm not doing as well in school so if that guy gets 100 then he's a White boy even if he’s Black. Oh, he's White, or he's a nerd, he's gay.

Many of the participants equated participation or membership in Student Council and other leadership programs as being submissive or feminine. Ferguson (2001) elaborated, “When boys want to show supreme contempt for another boy they call him a girl or liken his behavior to female behavior” (p. 173). These attributes were seen as not acceptable by the African-American male community at CPHS. Winston described his peers’ definition of masculinity:

Definitely devoid of anything being feminine. A lot of the emotional vulnerability. Showing love outwardly I think, trying to be romantic and things. If you have that you're not masculine. I think if you're devoid of that then you're kind of the ideal archetype of what people have masculinity conceived of, especially as a black male.

Marvin described why more of his peers did not run for Student Council or apply for Peer Ministry. He recalled, “They (his African-American male peers) thought it was kind of feminine. Just going in there and talking about your problems. I had a few jokes about joining Peer Ministry too.” Quinton added that the leadership gap of African-American males could be attributed to “A feeling of inadequacy, like the bitch thing is just to hide them feeling inadequate about it. Let me sugarcoat this and hide behind my real feelings about the situation.”
At CPHS, Xavier did not fit into the stereotype of participating in sports despite being African American. He was met with social exclusion from his African-American male peers which turned into bullying. Xavier remembered, “Yeah even through high school and stuff, I was teased and bullied a lot for being different, having different interests, and African Dance and dance in general were definitely a part of that.” Lucas recounted the mistreatment of one of his peers that deviated from the norm of masculinity. He recalled:

If you participate in certain things, maybe not gay but not what the guys were doing. I would remember (student) would get it really bad...just like a lot of the things he did, and I just feel like a lot of the things were just because he was doing things not a lot of people were doing.

The student-athletes in the study commented on the dual perceptions of being seen as an athlete or troublemaker by the school, and their peers felt they needed to embody one of those two archetypes. Ferguson (2001) saw similar behavior in her research. She noted, “Rule breaking on the part of boys is looked at as something-they-can’t-help, a natural expression of masculinity in a civilizing process” (p. 85). Kevin added, “As a black man at Potter, you're either seen as a troublemaker or someone who is good at sports.” For many, they felt like they had to fall into one of the two categories, limiting their opportunities and experiences. Stuart commented, “I think once people start seeing you in a certain type of way or in a certain type of role, you feel the pressure or you’re expected to stay in that role.” Zachary was a two-sport athlete, playing basketball and football. After he graduated from CPHS, he played football in college. He shared:
I could say for some people that they thought they had to sometimes be the center of attention or maybe be the person that's always getting in trouble or always joking around in the class, being the class clown or maybe playing sports.

When it came to peer acceptance and popularity, Peter felt limited in his participation in athletics to football or basketball.

You had to be a football player or a basketball player. You had to be a jokester in class. That was what was being a man. Definitely being a football player is what made you a man. If you weren't a football player or a basketball player, you weren't anybody.

With these perceptions, the challenges for African-American males to succeed in anything outside athletics were not socially acceptable. Social and peer exclusion were by-products for some of the participants that were student-leaders. The lack of opportunity ability to be anything other than an athlete or troublemaker resonated with many of the participants, limiting their positive impact on the CPHS and wider communities. The consequences of deviating from social norms would result in being ostracized or bullied.

**Finding 2: Obstacles or motivators from the CPHS culture**

In order to engage more African-American males to participate in leadership programs like Student Council, Peer Ministry, and YouthLeader, the school needs to make an active attempt to connect the relevancy of the leadership opportunities to the students and their futures. Mainly, this idea focuses around education and awareness. It is essential that the school continues to be countercultural when it comes to masculinity and leadership. The peer perspective is being influenced by society, media, and popular culture, thus limiting the possibilities for African-American males, defining masculinity
in terms of sexual promiscuity, material possessions, and physical appearance. Challenging these perceptions by providing alternative concepts and views is essential to success. Finally, CPHS must continue to have school officials who are invested in the students’ lives, to mentor and encourage them to participate in these programs.

**Finding 2a: Relevancy to students’ lives**

The participants highlighted that CPHS must do a better a job at connecting leadership programs and opportunities to enhance the African-American male students’ lives now and in the future. Unfortunately, many of these students have skewed priorities, thinking that athletics is the key to getting into college and being a successful professional athlete. As referred by Ferguson (2000), the likelihood for a student to become a pro football or basketball player is somewhere in the region of 1:10,000. Those statistics most likely have increased since their original publication.

Typically, the school promoted their leadership programs and opportunities through school-wide announcement or emails to the students. Noah commented on the importance of personalization and individualized approach needed to engage African-American males. He stated, “I guess first off explain the leadership roles to them and how it will help them down the line so you can like kind of cater to their interests in their future.” Vincent added, “(Potter officials) can promote it individually by going up to them and talking to them.”

Jacob addressed that the CPHS teachers, counselors, and administrators must show a connection these leadership opportunities with the futures of the students. He recommended:
Someone needs to let them (African-American males) know that this (leadership roles and programs) can help them grow as a person and grow going into college…They need someone to be able to help them and give them the knowledge that the attributes that they can gain from these leadership roles and positions.

Kevin added that the school must be strategic in how it engages the African-American males. The approach to a 9th grader should be different than a 12th grader. He elaborated:

You still have to relate it back to the people you are talking to. Like "Oh this looks good on college transcripts" to a freshman. As a black male that doesn't really mean anything to them because they're not focused on college at that point.

There needs to be intentionality towards student engagement in leadership programs.

The students need to be identified and targeted for encouragement and participation.

Knowing the cultural forces influencing the students, CPHS must make a concerted effort to motivate and inform its African-American male students of the host of benefits through their participation in these leadership programs. Stuart saw the limitations placed by school officials on African-American males. He cited:

(Teachers) looking at them (African-American males) through the lens of the stereotypical jock. If you get to know them, that’s not what it is at all. They’re full people even though some people might take on their persona of the quintessential athlete or the quintessential hyper-masculine male or things of that nature.

There were students that did not fully meet their leadership potential due to these misconceptions and limitations. The school and society missed possible leaders by not properly supporting these students, and we cannot measure this loss. It is unwise and detrimental to place limits on the potential of students. It is imperative that all students are supported and encouraged to lead and take a risk out of the norm.
Finding 2b: Peer perspective on masculinity and leadership

The African-American male students at CPHS were being bombarded by messages of what it means to be a man and notions of success. Many of these ideas revolve around finances, material possessions and sexual conquests. Athletics continued to play a huge role in the participants’ experiences. Vincent highlighted the models of masculinity shared by his peers. He commented, “If I was the man, I'd have the money, the cars, and the girl.” Phelan, Davidson, & Ya (1998) highlighted that peer groups have a great influence over the orientation young people adopt toward achievement. Further, Travis alluded to the physicality that many of his peers view as necessary to be a man.

You're the man if you have all these girls. Pretty much, you need to have your own. You need to have money, a nice car or house to just be the man or be viewed as the guy I want to be like. That would be the role model or typical figure as you'd see as the ultimate masculinity. Swoll, worked out and jacked. Everything. The money, girl, car, house.

The sheer amount of pressure to have sex with multiple girls in high school is clearly evident in the African-American male culture at CPHS. These pressures often lead some students to exaggerate or lie about their experiences to maintain a false bravado of masculinity and personal success. Ulysses reminisced about his high school days and what his peers attempted to do.

Just try to get as many girls as you can…Looking back, a lot of, well, a lot of people now are still all talk, but especially in high school. Somebody might say, "Oh, I'm talking to like four girls." They're barely talking to one.

The attention one received from the opposite sex along with athletic ability was equated with social status. Your popularity had less to do with who you were and focused more on sex and athleticism. Lucas added,
It’s about your attention from girls basically kind of defined more how masculine you were then the guys who weren’t getting attention from girls because they weren’t as attractive and like try to do the guy things more like in sports, like doing lots of sports stuff. All surrounding around girls, honestly.

George recounted the mentality of his peers regarding women and the CPHS school culture. As a young adult, he reflected on the misalignment of priorities of him and his peers. He cited:

Definitely was an era of machismo. Misogyny was a big thing. Conquer as many women as possible from 8 o’clock in the morning until you left at night and then sometimes on the weekends, too. It was terrible, but that was the culture that we created for ourselves.

Many of the African-American males at CPHS objectified their female classmates, seeing them solely as sexual objects. Zachary recalled taking a ballet class and the reaction he received from his peers: “They were like ‘Damn, he's about to get all that ass in that class…’ It was ‘You're lucky, you get to look at that ass for an hour and thirty minutes.’”

Within the African-American male culture at CPHS, there was a sense of competitiveness among the male students. While the students supported each other’s endeavors, they remained in narrow lanes including only athletics, sex, or material goods. To deviate from the norm and take a risk like running for Student Council, one would be considered insubstantial. Quinton stated, “It’s weakness, even though it’s a position of leadership to do something like that, to put yourself out there.” Winston ran for Student Council and saw the discrepancies between himself and his athletic peers. There was a hierarchy in terms of school programs that directly correlated with status and respect. Winston commented, “I didn’t get the same kind of respect from Student Council that my black male peers got through athletics.” Furthermore, Winston noticed the
competiveness between himself and his peers.

I think that high school, in terms of me and my black male peers specifically, the way we interacted was kind of like power struggle almost, just kind of like a showcase. If I can't get you with physicality, then let me sell you on this way.

As an African-American male, one could not lose face or respect. It was critical to maintain social stature and peer acceptance. The competitiveness with peers did not always have to be physical, but it could turn physical, if needed. Oscar noted that African-American males had “to be strong and stout, and you don't show too many emotions. You react in the right ways which is sometimes angry and fighting or wanting to fight.” George illustrated the necessity to stand up for one’s self. He stated:

Well, some people may look at a man as being big and tough, you know not running from a fight, if someone says something to you, you gotta have something to say back. I guess being strong, people at Potter think the bigger you are the more of a man you are, so people stay in the way more. But I think that’s what the biggest thing is being a man is you gotta be tough and you know if somebody wants to fight you or something like that then you always gotta fight back. You always gotta have an answer to someone or always fighting back. I think that’s what a lot of people, the student body at Potter think that being a man is.

Many of the African-American males at CPHS were more focused on their physical appearances than their participation in leadership opportunities and programs. Their time working out in the weight room and training not only assisted with their athletic performance, but it also added to their physical appearances. Their time commitment to staying fit became a priority as physical fitness was aligned with masculinity and success. Stuart commented on the mindset of his peers, “You’ve got to play sports, and you’ve got to be in the gym every day.”

In reading the literature on African-American males, it was not surprising to note
that academic achievement was never mentioned by the participants in conjunction with masculinity. Jacob shared:

I guess just being involved in sports was a big thing, always a big thing being involved in sports, being in the weight room. It was more of like a physical appearance that came with the masculinity instead of something mental, something like that.

Marvin commented on the emasculation of those students that did not participate in athletics or were not physically fit. The gender stereotypes were taken to the extreme by the African-American male students. Marvin stated:

It’s not about perseverance. It’s about being physically tough, strong getting in the weight room; it’s always something. It’s just not being feminine at all. You just had to be as masculine as possible and if not you got any type of gay joke.

The students were not only pressured to play sports, but they had to focus on their physical appearance to receive acceptance by their peers as men. The hyper-masculinization of African-American males in society, and the media was not only mirrored at CPHS, it was heightened for many of the participants.

_Finding 2c: Student engagement through school official investment_

Through the interviews, it became quickly apparent that invested and engaged adults in the students’ lives, particularly CPHS teachers, coaches, and administrators, were an important and impactful motivator and support for the students. Gadsden, Smith, and Jordan (1996) identified that schools are “ideal contexts for learning and teaching to flourish…(they) are communities where children and teachers develop mutual respect and where children are nurtured and supported” (p. 384). Despite not having a formal mentoring program, many members of the faculty took active roles serving as role
models in the students’ lives. According to Obgu (2003), “A role model is somebody a person wants to be like. It is a person a child want to be like when he or she grows up” (p. 160). Often, the school officials encouraged the participants to run for Student Council or apply for other leadership programs. Many school officials maintained strong relationships with students well after graduation. This supports the research which proposed that African-Americans males are greatly influenced, more than other subgroups, by the support and encouragement of school officials. (Foster, 1997, p. 122; Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 36; Lee, 2000, p. 57).

Mr. Brown and I were both CPHS administrators, and we were mentioned frequently by the interview participants. Coach Foster was identified by many of the participants who played football in high school. The participants noted a good number of other impactful school officials. The ability to actively engage the students was based on establishing relationships and providing time to nurture those relationships.

Mr. Brown was a prominent character in many of the participants’ experiences at CPHS. Serving as principal, he was a figurehead at the institution, impacting a countless number of students. The participants noted the Mr. Brown’s ability to remember the students’ names, giving him respect and esteem from the students. For many of the participants, they viewed him more than an administrator. To others, he was considered a family member. Bradley commented on this perception:

Mr. Brown, he's been a big part of my family for a long time, just because me and my brother and sister all came from Potter. I felt like he's like a long lost uncle somewhere. The thing I liked about him, every year, he knew every student's name, which was so strange and astounding to me. That he cheered, he would know every student's name. He wouldn't say,
‘How are you guys doing?’ He says their first names. It's probably so small, but it makes you feel so good.

Winston added that Mr. Brown was always welcoming, but at the same time he always demanded respect and had high expectations for the students. He recalled:

Another person that stands out to me is definitely Mr. Brown, just kind of as a patriarch leader in the Potter community… I think he knows how to play that line in between being firm and at the same time making sure he's a smiling face who knows everybody's name, which really helps with him when it comes to situations where he really needs to show his authority. It really comes unquestioned.

Alfred was impressed by the type of leader Mr. Brown was. The personal relationship that Mr. Brown established with his students was a hallmark of his leadership style.

Alfred elaborated:

I'd never known school principals were like that. I didn't even know any existed who were as friendly as he was, as involved as he was. I mean, he knew our names like the first day of school. I was like, I've only seen this, it was just like, I was like, I've only seen this guy a few times, I don't even remember telling him my name. How does he know my name? He actually, I mean, he just really, really cared about all the students. Like I said, he was just so involved. It was just amazing to experience.

Mr. Brown’s ability to engage with the students went above just knowing the student’s names. He worked to create relationships with the students. Bradley remarked about Mr. Brown:

People say, yeah, a name, but he actually got a chance to know you. He'll say, ‘Hey (Bradley), how you doing? How’d that math test go today?’ I'm like, how did you know I had a math test? I would say he's successful because he's changed so many lives.

Mr. Brown did little things to show that he cared about the students. Zachary reminisced:

He (Mr. Brown) was really outgoing. (He) wasn't one of these presidents or CEO's that just stayed in his office. He would come out and interact
with the kids. Come sit with you at lunch. That was something I really liked about him as well.

I had major reservations about conducting this study since I was so familiar with the school and participants. The findings reaffirmed my ability as an administrator to establish strong relationships with students to encourage and motivate them to succeed. Serving as Associate Principal/Dean of Programs, my ability to connect with students definitely left a lasting impression with many participants. Oscar commented, “Mr. Shin took a really personal interest in every student, and I think you kind of identified our strengths and our weaknesses, or just even our normal personalities and saw when we weren't being that.” Peter added, “I think that Mr. Shin really helped me along and gave me hope that I could do better.” Both were student leaders and benefited from our interactions over the years. I was invested in the students and actively encouraged many of them to take leadership roles within the CPHS community. Jacob was a soccer player who decided to apply to the YouthLeader Program in his senior year, after I provided some encouragement. He reflected:

Mr. Shin was definitely one of my favorites because he was real easy to talk to, and I guess he would put himself in our shoes when he was talking to us, so it was like we were just talking to another one of our friends. And he’ll listen to more than one side of the story so it would be real easy to talk to him and try to see things from a different perspective

I was able to get on the students’ level and connect with them. Despite being an administrator, I made a concerted effort to engage all students regardless of race, gender, or disciplinary record. Travis commented, “Mr. Shin tried to find the common ground with them (the students), and they actually listen.” Kevin remarked:
Well Mr. Shin was #1 because there wasn't a kid that you shunned away no matter what they did, I guess you could say the bad students; you still made a connection with them. I guess you could say you made them feel like they weren't alone, you said "hi" to everyone. You always joked around with everyone.

The students picked up on my intentionality in developing relationships with them.

Quinton recalled:

You have a way of like connecting with people, and it’s a genuine connection, and I appreciate how you can do that and still get everybody the attention that they need. That’s something that I definitely want to pick up on.

Unlike much of the literature on relationship between school officials and African-American males, students at CPHS felt like they had a more personal relationship with teachers and administrators. Colin recalled:

You were administration, but you weren’t just administration. You definitely had a personal relationship with all of us. You’re relatable; you were easy to talk to. It wasn’t like talking to a teacher as more like an elder … I mean you’re older than us, an older comrade with wisdom.

My ability to be present and reliable was noted by some participants. Just my availability and consistency to the students created an environment where they felt safe and could participate in programs. Unfortunately, many adults did not actively engage and listen to students, thus causing distrust and a rift between school officials. Alfred elaborated:

Mr. Shin, you were always very impressionable. You made an effort to learn about where we actually were as students, what we thought about. You were always present; I think many times students are more resistant to speak up or get engaged if there isn't some visibility. But reminding them that you are there for them with your presence is very helpful.

Respect, professionalism, accountability were three areas that some of the
participants mentioned regarding my leadership style. Winston stated, “(Mr. Shin) was someone who was very professional. Everybody in the school was a little bit afraid of him but also respected him, and he was such a young person to be in that type of role.”

Bradley added that I maintained the professionalism needed as an administrator, but I was still able to relate to the students. He highlighted:

Mr. Shin, definitely, because always joking around but always there and willing to talk to somebody. Of course, you keep yourself at the teacher, student level, but there are times when they need someone to talk to, so you'll kind of take yourself down to the student level, just to be more understanding and stuff like that.

Xavier added:

You were definitely one of the people that I spent most of my time with at school. From freshman year to senior year you were always there mentoring me and pushing me to do good things and do the right thing.

Coach Foster served as the head football coach at CPHS. Bradley was heavily influenced by his interactions with Coach Foster, on and off the field. Their relationship shifted from a coach/player relationship to a mentor/mentee relationship over the years. Bradley noted:

One of my role models was actually my high school coach, Bryce Foster. It's really funny because my freshman year, when I came in, I didn't like him at all. For some reason we just didn't gel, but, at the time, I guess probably have to say about my sophomore year, I sat down in his office and we had a talk. It was funny because everyone on the team used to call him a prophet because anything he said ended up happening. It was really weird. We became really close, and he definitely helped me. He coerced me into joining FCA (Fellowship of Christian Athletes), and that also was a really good decision for me. He really helped me out with a lot of things, whether it's early morning workouts, working on my practice, my football, whether him just being there just to listen and talk about anything, when it comes to looking for my college...What I liked about him, he wasn't just a coach. He was a mentor, and he wasn't always okay, trying to let you play college football. We're just trying to get you in school, trying to get you in
college. If you want to play football, cool. You can make that decision for yourself, but we want to get you to play. We want you to get into school, into a university, because the man needs to get an education. He was really big on education, and it's funny.

Ulysses added that his relationship with his football coaches helped in his formation as a responsible young man. He noted:

A lot of people try to give you guidance, but don't try to open up and share with you the mistakes they've made along the way. They were honest about things that they wish they could've gone back and done better, or problems that they currently are dealing with in their lives. Just being open and honest, I think that was the biggest thing for me.

Many teachers, counselors, and other school officials made lasting impressions on participants’ lives. For nearly every participant, the race or gender of the adults at CPHS did not matter to the participants. They did not care what the individual or role model looked like. They just needed to be present and engaged in the students’ lives. Fred highlighted his relationship with Mrs. Harper, a former English teacher. He stated, “(Mrs. Harper) definitely had a lasting impact on my life, not just at Potter, but it has continued and is still continuing now.” Xavier enjoyed his relationship with Mr. Gordon, a Social Studies teacher. He commented, “(Mr. Gordon) was just easy to talk to, even outside of the classroom. He wasn’t (just) my teacher; I felt comfortable enough to just talk to him about anything.” George reflected on his relationship with Mr. Billings, who was an Associate Principal/Dean of Students at CPHS. He reflected:

Mr. Billings has been there for me from freshman year and he’s always there pushing me making sure that I can get to do what I need to do. Keeping me on track and you know I can talk to Mr. Billings about anything.
Many of the school officials had established relationships with the participants, but the messages on engagement and participation on leadership programs was inconsistent. Some students were encouraged to take a risk and defy the social norms of the school. The students connected with individuals that were invested in their education. Those adults encouraged the students to perform and excel. Regardless of race or gender, these role models were able to challenge their students, but also encourage them when necessary. Stereotypes carried no meaning when relationships were involved.

Finding 3: Obstacles or motivators from the African-American community

The participants were impacted by various factors influencing leadership and masculinity outside of CPHS. Family members, media, and society were all pivotal factors for the participants. Some of these factors reinforced the ideas and beliefs on leadership and masculinity obvious at CPHS while others represented contrary viewpoints. In addition, it was interesting to note that many of the participants struggled to identify role models within the African-American community. If they were able to identify an individual, he/she was generally an athlete or entertainer. The participants were bombarded by conflicting messages of what it meant to be an African-American man, thus swaying their decisions to participate in school programs such as athletics, leadership programs, and others.

Finding 3a: Role of parents and the family

The participants received inconsistent messages of leadership and masculinity from their families, primarily their parents. However, this study cannot conclude if these inconsistent messages were specific to African-American households or if they were
present in most families. Many of the participants commented that their role models were their parents who embodied characteristics such as integrity, responsibility, trustworthiness, and gratitude. Parents encouraged and motivated them to achieve and work hard focusing on their futures. Orr (2003) commented, “Parents with a strong sense of the impact of their present behavior on future outcomes may be more likely to invest in their children’s education than may those who do not have this sense or have lost hope in the present-future connection.” While the impression of the participants about their parents emphasized the same ideas as CPHS, others focused on monetary or material possessions in terms of success. Furthermore, a number of the participants grew up in single-parent households run, headed by women. This family dynamic greatly shaped their foundational attitude of masculinity.

The participants quite often mentioned their parents as playing pivotal roles in their lives, helping to shape their beliefs and values. Zachary commented on his parents’ impact on his life. He elaborated:

(My parents told me) achieving my dreams and goals, that's success. That's what they always told me. It's about being happy. As long as you're happy as long, as you're comfortable, as long as I accomplish my goals, and I'm living how I want to live.

Marvin reflected on the positive messages on leadership he received from his mother.

My mom used to always tell me “You’re a leader not a follower” and “It’s always which way you take it. Hang with the wrong crowd do wrong things and you’ll end up like the wrong people but if you put your leadership skills to something positive, like student government, people will actually listen to you.”
Harris mentioned that his role model is his father. Despite not necessarily being told how to act, Harris saw his father lead by example providing him with concepts of success and responsibility. He noted:

My dad, he didn’t have a father in his life, and he’s been the epitome of a man to me because he’s the strongest example of someone who leads by example. Cause I see how he treats his mom and that has a big influence on how I treat my mom and I see how he carries himself. It always spoke out to me cause a lot of guys they try to say “I’m a man cause I do this or I have all these accolades underneath my belt” but my dad, he never did that, and my dad he’s very successful in my eyes. He’s gotten multiple promotions at work, he does well enough that my mom doesn’t have to work. Looking at our lifestyle now, being in a private school, our whole lives and then being in college and I didn’t have to take out loans. A lot of people don’t have it like that.

Xavier also realized the sacrifices his parents did for him and his siblings. He reminisced:

They both always been really hard working, and nothing has really been given to them ever. They both had to work for everything. They have, but definitely my mom considering that at 18 she came from a different country and kind of made her own way in the United States.

Many of the participants shared the messages on masculinity and leadership they received from their parents. Some of these messages echoed the societal pressures to not show emotions, weaknesses, or flaws. For some, it caused issues between the parent and the participant. Bradley mentioned his father’s demeanor:

My father is kind of the one who is still the cold heartedness. That's just kind of how it is. He's not a mean person, but he always has this look on his face, like if you don't know him and you look at him, you'd think he's upset all the time, but he's not.

Travis added when speaking about his father and how he expressed emotions:

You've got to be tough. You've got to know how to fight. You've got to be physically tough. Kind of like you've got to be instead of showing, you've
got to emotionless. You can't care too much and even if you do, you can't show it to people. Cry, no. If you do, cry by yourself, get yourself together so when you do present yourself to the world, nothing ... You hide everything.

Other participants highlighted the stereotypical beliefs on masculinity held by their parents. For many parents, anything that deviated from the societal norm was seen as homosexual or unacceptable. Men had to act and look a certain way, conforming to societally-defined gender stereotypes. Colin noted, “My dad is very traditional so men can’t have ear rings, they have to be cleanly shaven, always have a nice haircut. Put together.” Lucas shared his thoughts on his father:

Most black fathers kind of tell you what you should do...My dad was more so a pusher of the masculinity factor as in like how this is feminine, this is masculine. A lot of things he would consider to be feminine, he would really make it seem like it was wrong.

As a teenager, Isaac had difficulties with his father, because of his appearance. Being in a very patriarchal household, Isaac had a difficult relationship with his father because he did not meet his father’s expectations in his appearance. He recalled:

My father...was at one point the typical homophobic father, not necessarily, that I was ever gay or anything, but you know that whole phase in 08’-09’ where people like wore skinny jeans and scarves and stuff like that. He found that really effeminate which in retrospect, it was, but anytime we were seen like that it would infuriate him. I remember he almost threatened to kick me out of the house because he saw me wearing a scarf. And you know it's petty and whatever, its water under the bridge now. But at the time it was like "Wow you have some deep seeded issues if that's what pisses you off." So like him, it was really about not necessarily being a man's man and going out and killing a bear with my hands and stuff, but just like not.
Other participants recognized the materialistic nature and monetary focus of their parents. Their parents equated financial stability and material goods with success. Peter commented:

I find my mom is a little bit more obsessed with the money. She's a little more, “You've got to make money.” Do whatever is going to make you money for a long time. Baseball obviously can make me a lot of money but if I get hurt, then it's like you're done.

Oscar shared his observations of his mother, “I'm seeing more of her personality now. She's a little more monetarily driven and I think that her idea of success would be more insecurity and some kind of security through money.” Quinton remarked about his older brother’s ideas on success, “I’m pretty sure my brother has this mindset of material success, and I don’t try to bash but I can see how that could be a part of your success image, but that can’t dominate it.”

Russell grew up in a single parent household. He understood the many sacrifices that his mother made for him by sending him to CPHS. He commented, “My mom being a woman with two kids is pretty hard…she had to be the father role and the mother role… My mom raised me as a single mom, so that was motivation enough to do things I needed to do to make her happy. Show her that her hard work paid off.” Russell felt a layer of pressure to succeed, connected to his mother’s sacrifices. Ulysses also grew up in a single parent household with his mother raising him. Despite her efforts, Ulysses noticed a gap when it came to his understanding of the male experience. He elaborated, “There was just certain things she just couldn't teach me, like from a male perspective.”

Winston grew up in a divorced household. However, both his parents encouraged him to take leadership roles in high school. He remarked:
My mom especially really liked when I was running for Student Council because it showed initiative. And my dad, when I was Student Council President, it really showcased to my dad that I was growing up and my maturation through student leadership stuff.

Winston was keenly aware that his upbringing was different than many of his peers. His family members did not stress athletics. It was seen as an activity, not as a route to success. He elaborated on his parents as his role models:

Growing up I saw my parents in leadership positions from a very early age, so that also just taught me that there are other things to do outside of sports. Because I had such a front-view to both of my parents who were very successful people in their careers, and they constantly surrounded me with that, so definitely them. They just taught me how to have a great work ethic, how to balance work and family.

Parents played a pivotal role for many of the participants, providing excellent examples of masculinity, leadership, and success. However, some parents had limited perceptions on these topics. Those participants that pursued leadership opportunities at CPHS had parents that were heavily involved in their children’s academics and school lives. The messages from parents were clear and explicit in taking risks by participating in leadership programs. These participants were receiving messages of encouragement, support, and motivation from home and being reinforced at school.

Finding 3b: Role of the Black community, media, and society

The need for the Black community to actively change societal messages was highlighted by many participants. They felt there was too much of a focus on the negative aspects of the Black community, providing little hope and opportunity for African-American youth. Being Black in America was being narrowly defined by these distorted messages. Alfred commented, “I also think that Black males need particular
attention because we're more likely to see ourselves in the negative way that we are portrayed, see ourselves as non-leaders, or I guess faux-leaders.” Alfred continued, “The fact that there are some limited ideas of what black masculinity's supposed to be, and then most of those ideas are negative. It doesn't leave them with much else.”

Ezra noted these internalized concepts held by many African-American males. He shared, “Yeah, you're not supposed to be well spoken. You're not supposed to be self-sufficient. You're not supposed to be responsible. You're not supposed to be a man. You're just supposed to be like the boogeyman of society.” For many in this study and society, these thoughts and ideas became reality; they felt their options of success were so limited.

Many in the Black community narrowly defined success, associating it solely within the entertainment or athletic fields. While many of these individuals are excellent role models being socially responsive and using their status as a platform for change like Talib Kweli and Kendrick Lamar, others are propagating negative stereotypes associated with African-American males. Travis cited, “Nowadays I would say it’s (success) more about athletes and entertainment figures that has the biggest influence of African Americans now.” Through Ogbu’s (2003) findings, looking up to athletes, celebrities, and entertainers had two contrary effects on students. He explained:

One effect was that emulating these “heroes” diverted students’ attention and effort from academic work. The other effect was that students did not have the opportunity to observe how athletes and entertainers actually worked to achieve their success or fame; that is, they did not observe the process through which they had succeeded and gotten to where they were as portrayed in the media. (p. 166)
Unfortunately, the effects only added to the challenges faced by African-American males because, with this viewpoint, they become distracted from schoolwork, and they do not fully observe and understand the hard work and sheer determination needed to be successful as an athlete or entertainer. Isaac commented that popular culture is propagating this limited view on success in the African-American culture. He elaborated:

> It seems as though the facade for a Black male the only way to success is to be a rapper, be an actor, be a singer, football player, basketball player, what have you. This is the mindset that we have been conditioned to for years; you look on TV and the only successful person rapper, actor, entertainment.

There was a clear lack of readily identifiable role models in the Black community who were not athletes or entertainers. When asked about role models in the Black community outside of President Obama, nearly 75% participants identified an athlete or entertainer, though many could not identify a single person. President Obama was removed as a choice since he is such a prominent figure in popular American culture. While athletes and entertainers can be excellent role models, it was not surprising that most of the participants did not deviate from individuals in these fields. This can also be attributed to the ways the entertainment and media industries highlight on certain African-American individuals. The societal pressures placed on the participants have greatly impacted their views on leadership, masculinity, and success.

The elevation of athletes and celebrities in the media were highlighted by many of the participants. George commented on the shallowness of society focusing strictly on the physical appearance of men:

> I think that the media in society looks at masculinity the same way as the students here, and I think that’s why the students look at masculinity as
they do because of society and media. Because that’s the biggest, that’s what the kids look up to now on social media, they wanna be the celebrities and stuff like that. So, for example, masculinity, the ball players, the basketball players, they look at football players as being the most masculine because they are the athletes. I think that’s what the media portrays just the big tough guys are the most masculine. They don’t really look at the under, what do they have to offer as far as being a man other than their muscles? I think that’s how the media portrays masculinity at the most, is the muscles.

As seen earlier in this chapter, the peers of the participants echoed these thoughts in affirming that masculinity was tied to physical prowess and athleticism. Consequently, an ample amount of this pressure is from the perceived need to have sexual conquests and how society connects it to masculinity. Stuart elaborated:

The idea of hyper-masculinity is something that society tries to press a lot. It is rooted in systems of sexism - systems of misogyny - where it’s cool to objectify our women and it’s cool to be the dude that has a thousand women and five baby mamas. It’s crazy when you think about it because that’s not what being a man is at all; at least not the way I define it.

This issue of misogyny was clearly highlighted as a prioritization of society that the participants felt needed to be changed because of the negative consequences that could result from this societal message.

Finally, the societal need for African-American males to obtain physical prowess and athleticism leads to sexual conquests, thus an atmosphere of competition and fighting is created among African-American males. Alfred spoke about the impressions he felt about black masculinity. He stated:

Black masculinity according to media is very hyper-masculine…a lot of my peers, we felt like we were less black, less of a man because we couldn't really mess with, if we couldn't prove ourselves in ways such as fighting or something. I never fought, I thought of myself as less masculine that I couldn't.
Because he did not engage in fights, Alfred questioned his manhood because of the impressions of Black masculinity that society perpetuated. He believed his status as a Black man was at risk because he did not follow the defined cultural practices of masculinity in by fighting.

**Findings Summary**

The findings in this study focused on three main themes, each having several specific sub-themes. Through semi-structured interviews, the perceptions and experiences of the participants as alumni of CPHS revealed the pressures faced by African-American males relating to leadership, masculinity, and success. They shared your thoughts on the leadership gap from African-American males at CPHS. It was important to maintain the authenticity and integrity of the participants’ voices to share their triumphs and struggles at CPHS.

The first finding dealt with the participants, and how they faced several obstacles when it came to student engagement in leadership programs from the school culture and policies at CPHS. The lack of time to participate in leadership roles or programs was highlighted by many participants. Student-athletes had rigorous schedules between practices, competitions, workouts, film sessions, and their studies. Many recalled being overstretched just with their commitments to athletics and academics. They felt pressured that anything else added to their schedules would be impossible to manage. In addition, many of the participants cited the lack of encouragement from CPHS coaches to participate in leadership programs because it would take away from their athletic commitments.
The perceptions of these leadership programs were seen mostly negatively by the African-American males at CPHS. There was a perceived assumption within the school culture that the typical African-American male should participate in athletics particularly in basketball and football. Those that participated in leadership programs often had to deal with social exclusion and being ostracized. The participants noted that student leaders were seen as acting white or not masculine. These internalized concepts were overriding the messages from the school and parents. The participants noted that African-American males were seen by many as athletes or troublemakers limiting their opportunities for success.

The second finding focused around communicating the relevancy of these student leadership programs to the students and their futures. Participants identified that CPHS should personalize their approach in recruiting all students including African-American males to be student leaders highlighting the importance these programs for college and future careers. The approach in recruitment should be strategic and intentional.

In addition, the participants reflected on the misguided notions on masculinity, leadership, and success from their peers at CPHS. Their peers equated these concepts with money, sexual conquests, material possessions, and physical prowess. This also caused a sense of competition among their peers. This hypermasculinity was being reinforced by the media and society, but CPHS was attempting to redefine masculinity, leadership, and success for African-American males.

The school officials at CPHS really made an attempt to engage and connect to the students. The participants listed numerous teachers, coaches, administrators, and staff
members that played vital factors in their lives. Often, the school officials were role models. The participants shared that their favorite school officials just had to be approachable, visible, and available. The race or gender of the individuals did not matter to the participants. They just wanted to have someone invested in their lives.

The third finding in this study revolved around the motivators and obstacles from society impacting African-American males to participate in leadership programs. The influences and messages primarily came from family members and the media. Family members were cited as being both motivators and obstacles to the participants. There were supportive parents that encouraged their son to run for office or apply to a program seeing the value in these programs. On the other hand, there were parents the exasperated the stereotypical views on gender roles, masculinity, and success.

Finally, the societal messages of being an African-American male were shared by the participants. They were consistent in that these messages were typically negative and narrowly defined. A good deal of attention was given by popular culture and the media that aligned African-American males with celebrities or professional athletes. There was a clear problem since many of the participants could not easily identify role models within the Black community outside of athletes or entertainers. Many of the perspectives were similar to those shared by the participants’ peers at CPHS connecting masculinity and success with sex, misogyny, physical appearance, and money.
Chapter Five

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.
Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond imagination.
It is our light more than our darkness which scares us.
We ask ourselves – who am I to be brilliant, beautiful, talented, and fabulous?
Actually, who are you to not be?
-Marianne Williamson

Conclusions and Implications

In this final chapter, programmatic recommendations for CPHS made by the study participants will be shared. This study provided a space for the voices and experiences of 25 African-American male alumni of CPHS around issues of leadership development and race. Their suggestions for changes to CPHS are powerful due to their relationship to CPHS. After reviewing the findings and my analysis, I developed programmatic recommendations and changes for CPHS. In addition, these recommendations can be adopted by other schools across the country facing similar leadership gaps from their students. Further, I will connect the findings and recommendations with the literature in Chapter Two, and I will address possible areas of future study based off of this study’s findings. Finally, I will also share my reflections as a researcher and school administrator through this study.

The research questions posed in this study are listed below:

1. What factors do African-American male alumni of Cardinal Potter High School attribute to the underrepresentation of African-American males in student leadership roles?

2. What factors of school culture do participants attribute to this leadership gap?
3. What aspects of the African-American community contribute to promote African-American male leadership?

**Participant Recommendations**

An important part of this study was to capture the recommendations from the participants to help fill the student leadership gap at CPHS. By using their voices, these recommendations will hopefully be considered by CPHS administrators for future implementation. Some are more realistic than others, but all attempt to engage African-American male students in leadership programs. Since all the participants were former CPHS students, the recommendations were not based on theory or on an analysis by an outside consultant. They are more powerful since the participants lived the experience of being African-American male students at CPHS. Their voices described the stresses and motivations that they received. Despite not being current CPHS students, the experiences from the participants regardless of when they graduated from CPHS were fairly consistent. They all received similar messages on what defines being a Black man. Since they all no longer walk the halls at CPHS as students, the participants had more time to reflect on their journeys as African-American male students.

The participant recommendations revolved around the following themes: the need for strategic and purposeful messaging, explaining the benefits of participation in leadership activities, bringing in African American male speakers, recruiting African-American male faculty to serve as role models, developing new programs or augmenting current programs to incorporate leadership development, and ways to actively recruit
African-American male students by leveraging the relationships between school officials and the students.

According to many participants, CPHS administrators should be more strategic and purposeful in its messaging to its African-American male students regarding leadership and masculinity. It needs to breakdown the students’ preconceived notions on these concepts. The messaging should help to improve confidence and motivate African-American male students to participate in leadership programs. Alfred commented:

Making sure black males know that they're capable, they're not incompetent, that leadership is not a white thing, for example. Leadership is something they can have access to. That they can learn, they can be engaged with, it's really important. Just making sure that people feel like they can talk to leaders, authorities, where they are. I think it's very common for black males to feel like they're not equipped, to not feel as engaged in their home community. Feeling somewhat ostracized in some ways, or feeling the need to step outside their community. So being engaged with them, bringing them home is very important, letting them know they can get an active role.

Zachary shared his thoughts on the messaging to African-American male students. He stated:

I would say push across the point to African American males that they can be leaders in that way. It’s okay to be class president or class council like they can do it, too. Or push across the point that it is needed. People probably don't think it’s needed because it is very female-dominated.

Marvin suggested using the coaches and teachers that interact with many African-American male students to help engage them to look at opportunities outside of athletics. Often, these students are categorized simply as athletes having very little consideration in participating in other clubs or school activities. Marvin noted:

Most black males end up being on the basketball team or football team, but I think they actually got to tell the coaches, tell the players or get the coaches, get the teachers to reach out… I don’t think a lot of the black
males on the basketball team and stuff won’t come out for student
government because they already have that role as basketball player or
football player.

Darrell believed the school’s counselors could be the vehicle to help encourage and
connect more African-American males with leadership opportunities. He stated:

A counselor that takes over after the teacher and explaining what this is
about and what qualifies you, just trying to kids interested in doing those
different activities and stuff, the advantages of it and how it can help you.

Jacob echoed Darrell’s thoughts focusing on the importance of school counselors in
relaying pertinent information to the students at CPHS. He expressed:

I think a lot of them (African-American male students) just need
inspiration; they need like a guidance counselor kind of sort of. They need
someone to be able to help them and give them the knowledge that, the
attributes that they can gain from these leadership roles and positions
because a lot of them they only think about it as, they only look at it in
sports because it’s like an interest thing. It’s not something that they really
find interest in rather than like something they would find interest in like
sports, so something like student council position not a lot of them really
care about what’s going on in the school or something like that, or how to
make this school better.

Many of the participants understood the importance of leadership development as
graduates, but they recognized that it would have benefited them if they made the
connection earlier in their lives. Helping them to see the connections with these
programs and college and beyond is extremely important. Noah highlighted this
importance:

I guess first off explain the leadership roles to them and how it will help
them down the line so you can like kind of cater to their interests in their
future. I guess show them if they can time manage properly it can work
around their athletic schedule cause I’m not saying don’t be an athlete to
be a leader. You can still do athletic things just make sure they don’t clash
cause I feel like if they clash then they’re gonna choose being an athlete
over a leader so like help them so it can work around their football
schedule or the basketball schedule. And I feel like the coaches need to understand that too.

Utilizing peer relationships is a strong motivating factor for students to recruit their friends into joining or participating in school organizations. Positive peer pressure can be very powerful. Travis commented on the power of positive peer pressure. He stated, “I would say reach out or try get that one kid, and see(ing) if that one kid can pull another one in. It's hard to say but that would probably be mainly the only one.” By creating a culture of leadership participation and engagement for African-American male students, CPHS can help to fill their leadership gap.

Many participants highlighted the need to have more African-American leaders as guest speakers and role models for the students. By meeting these individuals, the African-American students at CPHS would see that people that look like them are capable of taking leadership roles and being successful in other arenas not only in athletics or entertainment. Ulysses urged CPHS school officials to be purposeful in their selection of guest speakers. He stated:

Bringing more black leaders in the community. Maybe not even just black leaders, but just successful black people, whether it's successful because they started a business, or successful because they work their way up in, maybe they're like county sheriff or something like that.

Lucas agreed that African-American male students need more role models that will inspire them to pursue avenues that they may never considered previously. He commented:

It’s a societal issue, but I feel like they (school officials) could help by showing people who are making change, people who are doing different
things like bringing in people who are black males that are successful or activists or leaders, business men and such to inspire them.

Travis coached club and high school baseball. He shared his experiences in coaching African-American male athletes and the importance of role models:

I can relate to them (African American players) better but that's where coaching is easy, you've got a lot more baseball players and they'll gravitate towards me like, "Oh, yeah, here comes the cool coach." What I experienced in college and here, just ... You try to find the common ground with them and they actually listen. I'm like, "Look, do this, do that." Just try this and let me know if it worked. Did it work? Yeah? Cool. Let's work on the next thing. They definitely do gravitate towards me and even, I'm younger, I would say. Probably because I am black, even our coach was and the majority is black. This one guy happened to be white.

Additionally, Bradley saw an opportunity to adjust the school’s curriculum to highlight successful African-American men, thus encouraging African-American male students to better understand leadership and to take a risk. He expanded:

Yeah, if i wanted to, it actually probably would've been if I had gotten some more knowledge about black African American males in power, see what type of work they've done, and how much progress they've made and stuff like that. I think that definitely would've helped me. It would've gave me a better insight to like, I could do something like that. I could change the way this campus thinks. That would have definitely helped me out.

Ezra agreed more role models as teachers at CPHS were needed and that the course content could be altered to depict different concepts of masculinity. He elaborated:

I think schools can hire more black males to have male role models in many kids' lives that don't have any. I think that's extremely important and that's very tangible. I think also presenting culture, media, texts, in books and different things like that, that present contrary ideas of what male masculinity is, what black male masculinity is, because often times, even
in a diverse school, you won't find diverse representation in course materials and things like that.

Many of the participants commented on the importance of creating new programs or augmenting the programs that are already present at CPHS to be more focused addressing the needs of African-American male students or incorporating more leadership development within these programs. Andre saw an opportunity within athletics since many African-American male students participated in these programs. He stated, “I would say make it mandatory for the captains of every sports team to do at least Youth Leader.” By adding leadership development to sports participation, the school is meeting the students where they are in regards to school activities. Xavier added, “Maybe some sort of program that focuses on athletes who want to be student leaders as well. I think something that is specifically geared towards student-athletes.” Alfred thought the programs should be more specific to African-American males tackling issues such as masculinity, perception, and gender equality. He added:

I think it would be useful to have some kind of workshop, or some kind of thing that discusses what masculinity is. I guess you could say that breaks down what we think masculinity is. I also think that black males need particular attention because we're more likely to see ourselves in the negative way that we are portrayed, see ourselves as non-leaders, or I guess faux-leaders. I think just in almost any cases, letting people know that position is for them, something they can do, is extremely important. And changing the idea of what a black male is allowed to be is extremely important. I think we should also, there also needs to be emphasis on cooperation between the sexes. I think in many cases there's this idea of one gender being dominant, or one gender belonging to a certain position in a place.

While informing the students about the benefits of leadership development program is important, focused recruiting was seen as crucial for many study participants.
By encouraging and identifying potential student leaders that are African-American males, school officials can help steer students to these opportunities and clear up any misconceptions on these programs. Fred commented:

By recruiting, I mean identifying leaders who don't realize they are leaders in the community and saying ‘Hey what do you think about running for the student council position,’ and then we brush it off saying, ‘I can never do that,’ and saying, ‘Yes, you can.’

CPHS is known for developing strong teacher-student relationships. By leveraging these already established connections and being purposeful in their messaging, more teachers could help in recruiting African-American male student leaders. Harris observed:

I think that the teachers could have encouraged more black males to want to run for these positions cause Potter was known for having these teachers that were so well-connected with students. There were a lot of kids who talked to teachers and even other faculty and told them personal problems so we already have that kind of connection with students. We could use that as a positive thing and try to get them to want to run for something like that.

Harris continued:

I think we should definitely encourage high school males, definitely black males to want to run for these positions cause there was nothing ever that made me want to consider running for SGA. Cause my mom of course she wanted me to think about doing it even in college but none of my friends did it. If one of my friends had brought it up, I probably would’ve been more likely to think about, if one of my teachers I was close to brought it up, I would’ve been more likely to do it.

Peter commented that his teachers expected a lot out of him. His teachers motivated to do better and to be successful. Peter was a recipient of a prestigious scholarship and continues to excel after his days at CPHS. He commented:
They (the teachers) didn’t look at me like oh, he’s just another student. It was like, oh no that's Peter. Peter, you know I expect this out of you. Yeah, you got a 90 but why didn't you get a 100, Peter? Stuff like that.

By maintaining high expectations and teacher-student connections, CPHS teachers can continue to encourage and motivate their students to step outside of their comfort zones to attempt new opportunities or experiences.

All of the participant recommendations are realistic and achievable. The participants were open and really wanted to share their honest feedback to improve the experiences of African-American male students at CPHS. Their candidness and thoughtful responses can be the foundation for real change. However, CPHS must be willing to allocate time, energy, financial resources, and personnel to address the leadership gap with its African-American male students.

**Study Implications for Cardinal Potter High School**

The study participants provided a plethora of ways to increase participation from African-American male leadership in leadership activities. These recommendations vary greatly in terms of resources whether it is personnel, curriculum development, time, financial resources or professional development. However, CPHS administrators must be committed to address the leadership gap from its African-American male students. The participants’ insights and reflections provide the administration with the first step in promoting African-American male leadership. More conversations need to take place, but this practitioner research can be utilized as the first step in addressing the issue. In this section, I will provide my recommendations for CPHS based off of the study’s findings.
Based on this study, CPHS school officials have work to do in terms of the students’ perceptions of the underrepresentation of African-American males in student leadership positions. They need to shift the perception that student leadership is merely a popularity contest and female-oriented. The apathetic approach that many African-American male students have is hurting the school’s culture in that fewer voices are being heard. In addition, the school must address the leadership void with the lack of African-American males in these positions. Instead of just tolerating these results, the school should be more active and engage the African-American male students directly. CPHS school officials must prepare all of its students for the future, not just a select group. In addition, leadership development should become a tenant of CPHS and its mission. By doing so, they will elevate the importance of leadership development for all of its students, and it would show CPHS’s commitment to address this leadership gap.

The participants clearly identified several factors that attributed to the underrepresentation of African-American males in student leader roles. Unfortunately, the factors are coming from various places including parents, teachers, coaches, peer groups, schools, social media, and popular culture. The difficult part is synthesizing through all the messages into a positive and coherent image of what it means to be an African-American male in the 21st century. Students are not being taught how to cope with this inundation of information. Ferguson (2001) determined, “Race continues to be a ready-made filter for interpreting events, informing social interactions, and grounding identities and identification in school” (pg. 17). There needs to be space made for critical discussions about their lives as Black men. If these students began to believe that athletic
and the entertainment industries are the only way a person can be successful, I can only imagine the ramifications it can have on the African-American community that is still overcoming a myriad of societal barriers. To properly address these issues, additional professional development for CPHS faculty and staff is needed in cultural competency and inclusion.

It is important that CPHS continues to work with teachers and staff to help them understand the multiple messages that are being sent to CPHS students. As a school, the faculty must help prepare the students to combat these messages. They must also show the students the benefits through formal leadership positions and club membership. Society paints success in a very materialistic manner for most. CPHS school officials must constantly remind its students that they have responsibilities as global citizens that can create change.

CPHS administrators should research and evaluate a new daily class schedule. Many of the participants cited the lack of time to participate in athletics and leadership programs like Student Council since athletic games and practices often conflicted with club meeting times. Many schools have developed schedules where clubs and school organizations meet during the school day. This would alleviate the pressure from student-athletes in having to choose between athletics and leadership programs. CPHS should also evaluate study hall periods for its students to better support the need for more time for student-athletes, so they can complete their coursework.

Students are often placed in the middle between a coach and a teacher/club moderator. CPHS administrators must do a better job at clearing up its line of
communications. Students are placed in very uncomfortable situations choosing one activity or another. If they fail to commit wholeheartedly, they are threatened with losing a spot on a team or time on the field during a game. The school must have its coaches understand the mission of the school. There seems to be no give or take when it comes to athletics. Students must commit 100% of their time outside of academics to their respective team. Despite the fact that most won’t play in college, the pressure to win and be successful is unnecessarily high at CPHS especially in its highly competitive athletic league. Win at all costs is a false-reality that many student-athletes at CPHS believe.

I realize that the students at CPHS connect with any role model regardless of race or gender. It is more important to have teachers that are engaged in the students’ lives rather than looking like the students. However, CPHS must recognize the importance of having role models for the students that look like them. A certain segment of African-American students will need role models that look like them (Bandura, 1986). CPHS must encourage its teachers to relate to students at this level. It should not be the same handful of teachers that are positively impacting student lives. Ezra felt CPHS needed more African-American role models as teachers and school officials. He elaborated, “I think (CPHS) can hire more black males to have male role models in many kids' lives, which don't have any.” There are a number of teacher hiring fairs specifically for candidates of color that CPHS should explore. In addition, the CPHS administration could recruit teachers from Historically Black Colleges to identify candidates that would be a good fit with the CPHS school culture.
CPHS should continue to talk with their African-American male students on developing ways to engage them into more areas of the school.Race is not spoken much at CPHS. Because the school has a diverse student body and very few racially fueled incidences, it is assumed that the school has an inclusive culture. However, I believe a constant conversation is needed to ensure that students feel valued and heard. The school can look for other ways to build leadership among its African-American male students. For instance, the school could develop more cultural specific organizations that focus around mentoring. It could pair a freshman African-American male student with a senior one. Since the seniors are much more reflective over their experiences, they could help guide and navigate their mentees. Perhaps the school could reach out to its alumni base to help further this cause since many have successful careers. Curriculum could be developed over microaggressions. The history of African-Americans can be told outside of February, Black History Month.

In addition, it is clear that African-American male students are often pressured to become athletes from their parents. These messages only exacerbate the other societal pressures. Unfortunately, some parents believe that their son or daughter will become the next LeBron James or Serena Williams. They do not have a good grasp on reality knowing that an infinitesimal number of student-athletes actually become professionals. The school should do a better job at informing parents of a balanced student-athlete. Nutrition and stress management are areas that continually need to be addressed. Students are making unhealthy decisions in both areas that could lead to detrimental life-long effects.
Findings in Relationship to Literature

In Chapter Two, literature around three main areas in regards to this study was reviewed. They were the following topics: Black identity, society and culture, and school engagement/leadership development. All areas had connections with the findings in this study. Participant interviews revealed that they experienced similar journeys and societal barriers to those African-American male students in various sources of literature.

Interestingly, this study’s findings through the participants’ experiences reinforced the Black identity literature around African-American male adolescents being categorized as solely athletes or troublemakers. Any deviation from the norms of being African-American males would result in social exclusion from peer and racial groups, questioning of one’s masculinity, and the possibility of lower self-confidence and independence. Leadership programs tended to fall into unaccepted activities by many of the participants’ peers at CPHS.

A few participants in this study recalled being harassed by their same-sex peer group if they participated in non-athletic programs or deviated from their peers’ activities. Similar to the findings in the research by Ogbu (2003), it was determined that African-American male students were ridiculed because they were acting White for “participating in sports and extracurricular activities traditionally dominated by White students and teenagers, and for talking properly” (p. 179). Many of the participants shared their internalized beliefs of African-American males being narrowly defined as mediocre students, stellar athletes, or entertainers. In this study, Peter did not want to
share his academic scholarship news with his peers because he did not want the negative attention from his African-American male classmates. Obgu continued, “the internalization of the beliefs that Blacks are not as intelligent as Whites translated into another belief, namely, that White students, not Blacks, were the ones who did well academically” (p. 85). The school officials at CPHS must continue to try to help the students to redefine success. Many see success solely on the athletic field or through money, thus it is important to highlight and publicize that African-American male students that are successful academically in the classroom.

Additionally, the systematic marginalization of African-American males by American society was experienced by this study’s participants. In a study by Ferguson (2001), it was found that “institutional practices continue to marginalize and exclude African Americans in the economy and society through the exercise of rules and purportedly objective standards by individuals who may consider themselves racially unbiased” (p. 19). However, CPHS was perceived by the participants as countercultural in that the majority they did not feel the school fostered or adopted the stereotypical views by society of Black males. Further Fordham and Ogbu (1986) elaborated on the lack of academic focus by African-American students. They stated, “one major reason black students do poorly in school is that they experience inordinate ambivalence and affective dissonance in regard to academic effort and success” (p. 177). CPHS must continue to combat these sentiments and provide support to these students by developing strategic programs such as mentoring and tutoring programs.
Through this study, many of the participants noted their regret of not participating in more leadership development programs and opportunities as CPHS students. As young adults, they now recognize the societal and personal benefits that these programs provide to students. The participants highly valued their relationships with school officials including teachers, coaches, and administrators. By leveraging these connections, an opportunity to engage more African-American male students into leadership development programs could be utilized. As Garibaldi (1992) stated, “Teachers, therefore, must challenge these young men intellectually and, when possible, provide them with immediate, continuous, and appropriate reinforcement as well as positive feedback for their academic accomplishments” (pg. 8). Since CPHS has strong student-teacher relationships as a hallmark of the school’s culture, they can be easily utilized to motivate African-American male students to fill the leadership gap.

**Future Research Suggestions and Questions**

There are many areas that future researchers could study in relation to this study. For instance, future research could focus on what activities the African-American male students participate in after high school at both the collegiate and post-collegiate levels. Perhaps, they may need more time to understand the value of these leadership opportunities and take advantage in the civic or collegiate arenas. With such struggles in terms of CPHS’s administration over the years, it would be interesting to see if that has negatively impacted the messages being sent to students. Additional research needs to be done at the high school level on African-American male leadership and engagement. There is very little information on student activities and participation rates.
I would also like to study the influence of CPHS as an independent, Catholic school in the results of this study. I question would other private schools find similar results or would public schools differ greatly. The school culture at CPHS is unique, but it is still being bombarded by societal influences and messages. A larger study would hopefully address these inquiries.

The conclusions from this practitioner’s research were not very surprising. However, I was slightly dismayed about the colorblindness from the students. I thought race would be a bigger factor when it came to their role models. I am very proud that the participants were able to look beyond race and gender. They are more focused on the individual and the relationship with that individual. It was also interesting to note that financial resources and parental support could not overcome the societal messages on leadership.

For this study, I would have conducted a co-investigation with a current student. Some students may not feel comfortable talking with me, so they may find it more appealing to speak with a fellow student. In addition, I could get a better perspective from someone actively receiving the societal messages. This participatory research approach is very appealing. I believe the data that would be collected would be richer and more in depth. My co-investigator could personally benefit himself and his peers.

Finally, a study focusing on the leadership success of African-American female students at CPHS would be intriguing. These women are thriving at CPHS, and it would be an interesting analysis evaluating what motivating factors are influencing their
participation and engagement. Perhaps the same factors that are inhibiting the male students from taking leadership roles are positively impacting female students. CPHS is a truly unique school and could be used as a sight for several future studies on school culture and leadership development.

**Final Reflections**

This study began with my reflections as a former administrator at CPHS. I reflected about the student leaders that I had the opportunity to work and interact with on a daily basis. However, I noticed that many African-American male students were not engaged or interested in leadership programs such as Student Council, National Honor Society, or YouthLeader. I wanted to see if I could encourage them to participate, but too often, I was met with comments such as, “I don’t have the time” or “my coach won’t let me participate.” CPHS must support and motivate their African-American male students to participate in leadership programs. If not, the school could be losing valuable student leaders and their voices.

By participating in leadership programs, students are able to develop and practice leadership skills which they can take with them to college and beyond. In addition, students are exposed to various opportunities such as scholarships, internships, networking, and vast array of other areas of growth. This being said, students are capable of developing their leadership skills through athletics. This study does not attempt to negate the positive personal and social development through high school athletics. However, this study does acknowledge the high rates of participation in athletics by African-American male students over leadership programs at CPHS. Too often, these
students equate success with monetary wealth primarily through athletic achievements or entertainment. CPHS must expose these students to a broader perspective on success.

This research study is very significant to my practice as a school administrator and to other educators across this country. As we look for ways to engage more students, specifically students of color in leadership programs, the findings from this study will help to effectively communicate information and opportunities to these students. It is also helpful in how we train and prepare teachers and coaches in understanding student development and school culture. Additionally, more two-way communication between the school and parents are needed. According to Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez (1992), “funds of knowledge” can be extremely helpful as parents can provide ample information about their child’s experiences and perceptions. Together, the school and parents can develop ways to help motivate and recruit African-American males to participate in academic leadership programs.

The findings of this study highlighted the importance of relationships between school officials and students. Interestingly in this study, race played a very limited role in these relationships. These relationships were very powerful motivators for students to apply and take a risk. Students are more readily willing to deviate from their peer accepted practices and norms if they receive support and guidance from school officials. As Weinstein, Madison, and Kuklinski (1995) found, some students will succeed even if they do not feel supported by their teachers, but research on teacher expectations suggests that these feelings have a powerful motivating effect on student performance. CPHS
school officials do a terrific job in establishing these relationships. Now, they must be used strategically and purposefully to fill the leadership gap at CPHS.

Further, CPHS school officials must continue to understand the powerful roles of schools in student personal development. As Ferguson (2001) recognized, school officials must acknowledge “the power of institutions to create, shape, and regulate social identities” (pg. 2). Continual conversations on race and identity are needed and cannot be ignored. As America continues to face racial and social injustices, students must be allowed to understand and question the world they must navigate and endure.
FIGURE 1: SPHERES OF INFLUENCE
APPENDIX A: Pilot Study

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MC QRM Stage 1

Introduction

African American males have had to overcome many obstacles. Their journey in American history has been mired with discriminatory practices and injustices. Unfortunately, remnants of these inequalities are still seen today and have become systematic and deeply permeated through our public education system. From low performances on standardized assessments to high dropout rates, adolescent African American males are lagging behind their peers from other demographic groups. They must also deal with various messages of what it means to be a success, a leader, and a man. Stereotypes tend to dominate the messages that are being sent to the African American community. The media outlets paint successful African American males primarily as athletes or entertainers. They are being portrayed in movies as thugs or gang members. Leadership is not being promoted or communicated to them.

In a democratic nation such as the United States, students are taught that elected officials should be representative of the constituency. It can be in ideology, religion, culture, race, or many other areas. However, there is a disconnect from the African American community when it comes to leadership and success. African Americans must deal with many societal barriers that even economic prosperity and financial resources are not enough to overcome the messages being sent to the African American youth especially males.
Morello and Keating’s (2011) article highlighted the fact that Prince George’s County in southern Maryland is one of the most affluent African American-dominated counties in the United States. The county attracts some of the top businesses in the nation with its strategic location to Washington, DC, and northern Virginia. Most elected, local officials are African American. Unfortunately in recent years, the county has been plagued with scandals and humiliations from corrupt and unethical behavior from elected officials. Barnette (2012) argued that despite having many financial resources, Prince George’s County public schools rank second to the bottom in standardized testing performance in the state of Maryland. Parents are sending their students to private schools as an alternative to local public high schools.

Similarly to Prince George’s County, Bishop McNamara High School’s population is primarily made up of African American students. However, the student leadership officers and representatives are not reflective of the student body. The administration, faculty, and staff also do not mirror the student body. Despite having a global approach to education and celebrating its diversity, the school has not been able to gain traction with leadership outside of athletics for most of the African American male students.

Most of the students at Bishop McNamara come from middle to upper middle class households. With yearly tuition at $12,500, Bishop McNamara ties for the third lowest tuition in the Archdiocese of Washington. The school offers several scholarships and financial aid assistance opportunities for its families. In addition, the school sponsors the Project Pride Program that provides economic and academic resources for at-risk
students. Despite these programs, the socio-economic statuses of the majority of the students are fairly homogenous.

I hope that this research project will help identify the causes of the disproportionate representation of African American male students in leadership positions and provide possible ways to improve the numbers of African American male student leaders.

The following research questions will help direct this study:

- At Bishop McNamara High School, what are students’ perceptions of the underrepresentation of African American males in student leadership positions?
- What factors do students attribute to the underrepresentation of African American males in student leader roles?
- What thoughts do students have about bolstering African American male leadership in student activities? These are all fine.
Background and Context

Bishop McNamara High School opened its doors in 1964 by the Brothers of Holy Cross serving the sons of the working class families of southern Prince George’s County. The school mirrored the demographics of the surrounding region with nearly 100% White students. In 1992, La Reine High School, the neighboring all-girls school, closed its door due to financial hardship, decrease in religious vocational staff, and low enrollment. McNamara was struggling to keep its doors open and decided to become a coeducational institution the following year to avoid its own demise.

In the 1990’s, southern Prince George’s County began to experience a shift in its demographics. As African American families moved to the area, White families moved further out into the suburbs. McNamara’s student body shifted radically and became predominantly African American. Under a new administrative team, the school began to thrive and grow with a new focus and attention to details. More attention was given to discipline and school culture.

Today, Bishop McNamara is a flourishing school with capacity plus enrollment and a lengthy waitlist. It is the largest private high school in Prince George’s County with 870 students. The school is comprised of approximately 70% African American students, 20% White students, and 10% of Asians and Hispanic students. There are about 10% more female students in the school than their male counterparts. With such a diverse school, there seems to be very little disciplinary issues that stem from racial differences.
Leadership development is a key tenet of the school. Students are encouraged to take ownership of the school. Despite school demographics, however, there is a noticeable lack of formal leadership from African American male students. Most of the school officer positions have been filled by female students. In the past seven years, African American males only comprised 8 out of 51 key student leadership positions. They are not even running for any positions. The campus ministry program is also reflective of the absence of African American male leadership. The African American male students tend to gravitate solely to sports.

At the staff level, there are not many African American role models within the school building. Out of 111 school employees, only 17% are African American. 71% are White. There are only nine African American males on staff. Out of those nine, only three are classroom teachers. The vast majority of African American staff members work in areas with little interaction with students such as advancement, admissions, or facilities. The school has attempted to recruit new hires of color, but most are not interested or unqualified. It continues to be a goal of the school’s administration.

The school has gone through some difficult times in terms of its leadership. Over the past five years, the school has seen four different principals. In 2010, the school selected its first African American principal. After 18 months, he was removed for a number of reasons including poor communication and lack of attention to details. He was replaced by an associate principal who was also African American. As a new search for a principal took place, the associate principal became acting principal. He applied for the position, but he was not selected as the best fit for the school. In the summer of 2013,
the school selected a White male to take over the position of principal. Currently, the school’s administration is made up of two White males, one White female, one African American male, one African American female, and one Asian American male.

The school has made several programmatic and curriculum based changes to engage students. The school often celebrates its diverse student body and highlights it as a key strength for its success. Further, Bishop McNamara has incorporated a global awareness approach within its curriculum to promote diversity appreciation and cross-cultural understanding. For instance, all students must take courses such as Global Studies and World Religions before they graduate. The school also sponsors a number of cultural clubs such as the Filipino American Cultural Enlightenment Club, the Korean Cultural Club, the Black Cultural Alliance, the Spanish Club and the French Club.

Finally, social justice is another important theme promoted at the school. Each year, the school sponsors Global Awareness Week and hosts guest speakers throughout the year highlighting the inhumane and unfair treatment of peoples around the world.
**Rationale and Significance of the Study**

Prior to my current position, I was the Assistant Principal/Director of Student Life at Bishop McNamara High School. I was also the Student Council Moderator from 2007-2012. I coordinated and planned many school events such as charity drives, pep rallies, student elections, fundraisers and a host of other activities. I utilized student leaders to assist in the process. In my roles, I focused on empowering the students and to become the directors of their high school experience. I wanted the students to plan, setup, and execute events. In addition, I wanted them to have a voice and to be heard by the school’s administration. My role was to provide training, guidance, and support to the students and moderators. It was a difficult transition for some club moderators. Many of them were used to directing the students and assigning roles and tasks. As noted by Christman (1995), my new perspective to student leadership alienated me from others because I wanted “to make decisions for the common good and not go along with the self-interests of the people involved” (p. 216).

In collaboration with the Campus Ministry and Student Life Offices, the school sponsors a summer leadership training conference through the Center of Ministry Development. Bishop McNamara was the first high school in the nation to use the YouthLeader program. The program takes approximately seventy junior and senior student leaders involved with Student Council, Peer Ministry, and other students selected through an application process for a five day intensive conference in Baltimore, Maryland. In 2013, only fifteen of those students were African American males. According to Seale (2013), “the purpose of YouthLeader is to empower young people for
Christian leadership in Church and the wider community” (p. 1). Students work on various leadership skills including communication, negotiation, facilitation, and service. The summer conference has transformed the student leadership and reaped significant benefits for the students and the school. The goal of the program was not to prepare leaders for tomorrow. We wanted them to lead today.

Currently, a part of my responsibilities involves providing leadership opportunities through programs and conferences for students. I try to identify possible student leaders to participate in these programs. Whether it is during the school year or in the summer, Bishop McNamara students are developing their leadership skills. Our students participate in opportunities associated with local, state, and national programs. It is interesting to see that female students overwhelmingly apply for these positions more than their male counterparts. I have to recruit male students, while the female students come to me in droves looking for leadership opportunities.

Over the years, I have noticed the lack of African American males in leadership positions. Although I have worked closely with student leaders for a long time, I have yet to really explore why more African American males do not participate in student leadership roles. I have tried to encourage them to participate and take more active roles. Some comply and take minor positions while others just refuse. Harper (2004) states that “young men generally prefer to identify themselves as standout athletes instead of academic achievers or campus leaders” (p. 4). This is certainly a plausible explanation for what I have observed throughout my tenure at McNamara; however, it is important to also understand students’ sense making for their choices as they are very likely
influenced by their reading of the surrounding world. As such, being able to pinpoint those influences might help me and other educators to create interventions that lead to students’ participation in our democratic system in high school and throughout adulthood as voters, philanthropists, employees, etc.

Empowering African American male students is difficult because it often seems like they are disengaged and apathetic to anything dealing with leadership. Lee defined empowerment as a “developmental process by which people who are powerless or marginalized become aware of the power dynamics at work in their lives” (p. 9). Despite being in the majority, it often feels like African American male students want to remain powerless or marginalized. Conducting this study may clarify the accuracy of my reading of this scenario. Neito (1999) argued that the dominant group has a distinct advantage in education because their assumed knowledge and source of information is more common with their peer group. They have more “cultural capital” to succeed. African American students would be categorized as having “cultural capital” at Bishop McNamara, but it seems only the African American female students are getting any advantage. Steele (1992) discussed the idea of the “stereotype stigma” that connects the lack of achievement among black students due to cultural and social context. It seems that African American male students have not been able to overcome this idea despite being in the majority group.

There seems to be a disconnection for African American male students between leadership and masculinity. Many see taking leadership roles as being weak or not socially accepted. Staples (1978) noted the inability to attain masculine roles has kept
Black men from realizing even the most basic aspects of masculine privilege and power.

I am hoping to see if the historical inequities of African American males are playing a role with this issue. Morrison and Eardley’s (1985) addressed the competing factors for African American males:

Boys grow up to be wary of each other. We are taught to compete with one another at school, and to struggle to prove ourselves outside it, on the street, the playground and the sports field. Later we fight for status over sexual prowess, or money, or physical strength or technical know-how…the pressure is on to act tough. We fear humiliation or exclusion, or ultimately the violence of other boys if we fail to conform (p. 19).

As a Catholic school in a fairly wealthy locality, I hope this study sheds light on the various messages being sent to African American male students in regards to student leadership. Bishop McNamara should look at the messages whether subliminal or overt they are sending their students. As these young men are preparing for college and beyond, I want to see if they become active participants in society and fulfill their civic duties. For instance, the lack of African American male teachers sends multiple messages to students. Harper (2004) noted the importance of African American male students to connect with African American mentors who can shed light on the various definitions of manhood.

We must also take into account the cultural messages that the students are receiving from their family members. Phelan’s (1998) cultural compatibility theory explained the differences in the patterns of school achievement in minority students. It
addressed the different messages that the students receive from home from what they receive from school. There may be significantly different messages on leadership being sent to African American male students. Finally, Bishop McNamara should also recognize and address the cultural messages that are being sent to the students by the media and entertainment industries. They could be in conflict with the messages that are sent to the students by the school.

With the affluence of the African American community in Prince George’s County, the influence of resources seems to be making a minimal impact on the messages African American male students are receiving. The other factors are dictating the participation rates of these students. I would think that as resources and education are more readily available, high participation rates in leadership opportunities would be taken. This study will hopefully address to what extent these factors play.

African American male students are missing out on beneficial and skill building opportunities by not participating in leadership opportunities. In addition to the title of these positions that can assist them in the college entrance process, they can gain valuable experiences and relationships with other students, teachers, and administrators.
References


Section 1: Methodology and Research Design

Central Research Questions

Bishop McNamara High School students are empowered to take ownership of the school. However, there is a lack of formal male leadership and club membership from African American students. Most of the Student Council officers and leadership club members have been female students. In the past seven years, African American males have only held eight out of 51 key student leadership positions. Often, there are no African American males even running for any positions. The National Honor Society, the Honor Council, and the Peer Ministry programs are also reflective of the absence of African American male leadership. The African American male students tend to gravitate solely to sports. Hence, the majority of leadership positions are being taken by African American female students.

The following research questions will help direct this study:

- At Bishop McNamara High School, what are students’ perceptions of the underrepresentation of African American males in student leadership positions?
- What factors do students attribute to the underrepresentation of African American males in student leader roles?
What thoughts do students have about bolstering African American male leadership in student activities?

I hope that this study will help identify the causes of the disproportionate representation of African American male students in leadership positions and provide possible ways to improve the numbers of African American male student leaders.

**Conceptual Framework**

The ideas and beliefs on leadership by African American males are influenced by a number of factors. From role models, the media and popular culture, family and culture, and societal influence, students are being bombarded by various messages of who they are and how they should act. Students are constantly being sent messages from the mass media that shape what they wear, say, act, and think. They are also influenced by what they learn in school by taking classes such as history and literature. Additionally, messages are embedded within our society and culture. This can be seen in the home life of students which may dictate why students do and think in certain ways. Finally, role models humanize certain messages that are being delivered to students. There may be other factors that help form and shape students, but have a minimal impact on the lives of young people.

Using various qualitative data collection methods, this practitioner research will explore what factors impact the participation rates in leadership roles in African American males at Bishop McNamara High School. I will use various qualitative methods such as focus groups and individual interviews. I am hoping this study will also allow me to work in collaboration with the students using participatory research.
Because this study’s issues are so salient to the school’s culture, inviting the students to work with me seems natural as the students will learn more about themselves and their peers. As Anderson (1994) noted, participatory research deals with “issues of vital importance to the community members are identified and studies in a collaborative fashion” (Loc. 704). Figure 1 depicts my assumptions for this study of the various factors impacting African American males’ perspectives on student leadership.

Following Rubin and Rubin’s (2005) model, this study will “focus on depth rather than breadth; (I will) care less about finding averages and more about understanding specific situations, individuals, groups, or moments in time that are important or revealing.” (Loc. 368). The study participants may not even realize the factors that help to direct their behaviors and thoughts, but perhaps discussions can take place to begin to unpack societal messages and norms. Hopefully, this study will also identify ways Bishop McNamara can engage African American males to participate in leadership programs.

For my own scholarship and profession, this study directly impacts my day to day responsibilities. Being a school administrator overseeing leadership programs, identifying what messages the school could be sending to students and looking for ways to engage underrepresented students in leadership positions and programs is extremely important to me. The results of this study can provide recommendations school-wide initiatives or programs that help promote African American leadership for both male and female students.
Using an interpretive paradigm as described by Erickson (1986), this study’s
design will provide “immediate and local meanings of actions, as defined from the actors’
point of view.” (p. 119). Naturalistic methods allow participants to share their feelings
on the many factors that are molding their beliefs and behaviors. In particular, this study
will yield students’ thoughts about the intersection of leadership and race. Maxwell
(2013) elaborated, interpretive paradigms are about “(u)nderstanding the meaning, for the
participants being studied, of the events, situations, experiences, and actions the
participants are involved or engaged with.” (Loc. 674).

Finally, this study will incorporate the concept of Possible Selves. It focuses on
the individual study participant and personalizes the findings. Markus and Nurius (1986)
defined Possible Selves as “how individuals think about their potential and about their
future. Possible selves are the ideal selves that we would very much like to become.
They are also the selves we could become, and the selves we are afraid of becoming.” (p.
954). The study participants will learn more about themselves, but possibly help shape
the school’s culture for future students.
Section 2: Participant Selection and Selection Criteria

(1) Setting

All aspects of the study will take place at Bishop McNamara High School. The school sits on a fourteen acre campus in Forestville, Maryland. It is located seven miles south of Washington, DC. Being in Prince George’s County, Bishop McNamara serves a diverse population, but primarily its students are African American coming from the suburbs of Maryland. The focus group will take place in the meeting room adjacent to the St. Joseph’s Library. The individual interviews will take place in my office. The school is an ideal study location because the students are being influenced by several factors, and they can be studied within a school’s context. Sirotnik (1990) argued, “(t)he local school is the setting where social, political, and historical forces affecting schooling are translated into practice” (p. 56).

(2) Participant Selection and Selection Criteria

The participant selection process is fairly defined. Bishop McNamara has approximately 865 students. Of those students, 476 are female, and 389 are male. There are about 220 students in each grade level except the senior class only has 199 students, and 92 of them are male. As I am exploring the experiences of African American males at Bishop McNamara, the participants must be African American, male, and at least 18 years old. Graduates could also be added to this study, but they are not readily available as most are in college. The age restriction was added to eliminate the need for IRB approval. With these criteria, only 15 students were eligible to participate in the study. Of those 15, I will ask five to participate in a focus group that had 3rd period free. I will
follow-up with individual interviews with three of them. Most of the study will take place during 3rd period, their free period, as to not disrupt the education of the students.

Despite being adults, all participants will need to get parental permission to participate in the study. I will provide a parental release form, and all participants must have it completed along with an assent form prior to participating in this study. This added caveat was requested by the school. This study has already received full support from the school’s administration. There may be some limitations in the experiences of such a small pool of eligible participants. I am hoping the participants actively contribute honestly and without reservations. As stated by Maxwell (2013), this study will help me in “(u)nderstanding the particular contexts within which the participants act, and the influence that this context has on their actions.” (Loc. 688).

**Section 3: Methods and Research Design**

**Data Collection**

*(1) Focus Group*

By conducting a focus group with the participating eligible students, I am hoping the participants will feel more comfortable environment to discuss this topic later in one-on-one interviews. I am also hoping that their insights from one another will bring forth new ideas and conclusions. They will be able to bounce ideas and further elaborate on each other’s thoughts. As Anderson (1994) noted, group interviews “are important in gaining a perspective on how others understand and interpret their reality.” (Loc. 3113).
Ideally, the focus group would have five students in it and will last no more than 60 minutes. All participants will be made aware of the purpose of the focus group and know that the study is not affiliated with the school. It is being done for my academic studies at the University of Pennsylvania. I will record and transcribe the session. In addition, I will take my own field notes to capture my own thoughts and reflections.

(2) **Reviewing Letters of Recommendations and Coding**

Of the study participants, I will review their college letters of recommendation from their teachers. As part of my responsibilities as an Associate Principal, I have access to all letters of recommendation through our Naviance program. I will ask permission from the Director of Counseling and the School Principal to incorporate this data. I will code them based upon the criteria for participating in Student Council, Honor Council, Peer Ministry, YouthLeader, and National Honor Society. By doing so, I am hoping to see if the comments coincide with the requirements for these leadership organizations. Maxwell (2013) detailed that this archival approach of primary documents makes researchers “(p)ull the central ideas together and see the possible continuity between and among them.” (Loc. 3734).

(3) **Individual Interviews**

Three students from the focus group will be asked to participate in individual interviews. This will allow the students to delve deeper into their perspectives on the issues at hand. I will orient all participants on the scope and purpose of the study. Each interview should last no longer than 60 minutes. All interview questions will be developed prior to the interviews, and all sessions will have the same questions. All
interviews will be recorded and transcribed. The transcripts will be shared with the students to insure that their comments were in the proper context and meaning. Rubin and Rubin (2005) stated, interviews allow researchers to “detail the experiences, motives, and opinions of others and learn to see the world from perspectives other than their own.” (Loc. 388).

**Sequencing**

The focus group will take place first. I am hoping overarching themes and causes will come from this method. It will allow me to focus and develop my questions for the individual interviews. Next, I will review and code the letters of recommendation from the teachers. I will be able to acquire information on the students’ leadership and service from the letters. In addition, I will be able to see if the students met the basic requirements for membership or candidacy into various leadership organizations or positions. This will allow me to update or add interview questions for the individual interviews. Finally, I will conduct the three individual interviews based upon the refined questions from the two prior collections of data. I will need to be aware that the sequencing may need some changing as I am going through the process. As Maxwell (2013) noted, “Any component of the design may need to be reconsidered or modified during the study in response to new developments or to changes in some other component” (p. 103).

**Data Analysis**
I will be using several different coding approaches in analyzing my data. Throughout the study, I will also perform a two cycle coding process. As explained by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2013), I will initially code all the data with several themes. After complete, I will reanalyze the codes to cluster them into smaller categories. This process is very thorough and has a built-in redundancy within its design.

For the first cycle of analyzing the focus group, I will use descriptive and emotion coding approaches. Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2013) described descriptive coding in that the data collector “assigns labels to data to summarize in a word or short phrase-most often a noun-the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data.” (p. 74). This is a quick and easy process that will allow me to synthesize through the transcripts. Since I am looking for perceptions, factors, and causes from the participants, emotion coding by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2013) will be an excellent approach as it “labels the emotions recalled and/or experienced by the participant or inferred by the researcher about the participant.” (p. 75). With three sets of data, I am hoping these approaches are both effective and efficient.

The second cycle of analyzing will use pattern coding. According to Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2013), this approach “can emerge from repeatedly observed behaviors, actions, norms, routines, and relationships.” (p. 88). This process involves mapping, memo writing, and checking. I will use this approach for all methods. As noted by Maxwell (2013), I am hoping to generate “results and theories that are understandable and experimentally credible, both to the people (I am) studying and to others.” (Loc. 721).
**Triangulation**

Bednarz’ (1983) stated triangulation is "the multiple employment of sources of data, observers, methods, or theories" in investigations of the same phenomenon. I will take all the coded findings from the three different data collection methods, and began to triangulate the data to look for common themes. If necessary, I will seek additional data. This method will allow me to narrow down and refine my data collection.

**Section 4: Researcher Roles/Issues of Validity**

*Researcher Role and Positionality*

As the Associate Principal/Dean of Programs, I am tasked with a number of responsibilities including teacher evaluations, program development, student leadership programs, and assisting with the day to day operations of the school such as monitoring lunches or chaperoning field trips. I interact daily with the students providing guidance and direction. In addition, I provide the students with opportunities such as summer jobs, internships, conferences, and workshops; hence I have a good rapport with the vast majority of the eligible study participants.

I also mentor a number of students, working with them one-on-one with college preparation. Having been the previous Director of Student Life and Student Council Moderator, I am very familiar with the leadership programs within the school, as I assist in the recruitment of students into leadership programs. Over the past eleven years, I have seen the difficulties in getting African American males to participate in leadership programs.
Issues of Validity

This study will deal with a few shortcomings. With having only 15 eligible participants, I may not be able to a complete picture of what is truly happening at Bishop McNamara. If the study lacks data, I will contact recent alumni that are in the area that will hopefully assist me, if necessary.

I also need to be aware of my positionality as it may very likely skew the participation and comments from the students. At times, administrators are seen as powerful and unapproachable. The students will be informed that their comments will not result in any disciplinary consequences or be shared with certain individuals. They should feel comfortable to be truthful without any retaliation.

My research bias also needs to be addressed. Maxwell (2013) detailed, “Two important threats to the validity of qualitative conclusions are the selection of data that fits the researcher’s existing theory, goals, or preconceptions, and the selection of data that ‘stand out’ to the researcher.” (Loc. 2724). It will be difficult to not insert or control my biases into this study. I need to continue to keep my goals always at the forefront of my research and analysis. Hopefully, I can get feedback from my peers and colleagues that will maintain the integrity of this study.
Section 5: Timeline

Mid-January 2014
- Develop focus group questions
- Gain consent to use letter of recommendation

Late January 2014
- Contact possible study participants
- Distribute parental/student informed consent forms

Early February 2014
- Finalize study participants
- Collect parental/student informed consent forms

Mid-February 2014
- Hold focus group study and transcribe the session
- Review and code letters of recommendation

End February 2014
- Code the focus group transcripts
- Write the analytical memo for the letters of recommendation

Early March 2014
- Conduct individual interviews
- Transcribe individual interviews
- Write the analytical memo for the focus group

Mid-March 2014
- Code the individual interviews

Late March 2014
- Write the analytical memo for individual interviews
FIGURE 2: INFLUENTIAL FACTORS ON AFRICAN-AMERICAN LEADERSHIP
References


The following research questions will help direct this research study:

- At Bishop McNamara High School, what are students’ perceptions of the underrepresentation of African American males in student leadership positions?
- What factors do students attribute to the underrepresentation of African American males in student leader roles?
- What thoughts do students have about bolstering African American male leadership in student activities?

The voyage of African American males in education has been long documented by scholars and researchers. From slavery, integration, and the ongoing fight for civil liberties and equality, the journey of this group has been arduous and difficult. Despite many gains for African Americans, there are still many remnants of segregation and discriminatory practices within schools. African American women have been able to persist and overcome many societal obstacles, but African American men are still lagging behind.

African American males are more prone to go to prison and less likely to graduate from college than their White counterparts (Pettit and Western, 2004). They must deal with societal policies and structures that impede their ability to be successful. Racism, mass unemployment, pervasive violence, and police brutality pose serious threats to youth and their families. Garbarino (1995) referred to these conditions as “social toxins,”
a term used to represent the degree to which the social world has become poisonous to an individual’s well-being.

In addition, adolescent African American males often have to deal with several identity issues such as perceptions on masculinity, peer acceptance, self-esteem, and stereotypes. They are also inundated with messages from the media and popular culture. Schools are finding it difficult to actively engage African American males both in the classroom and in-school activities. Empowering them to connect to their schools and classmates continues to be a struggle.

This practitioner research will look at the influence of school culture which includes school policies and procedures on African American males. The identity and masculinity of African American males will also be explored. Finally, scholarship on student engagement and leadership development will be addressed as it pertains to this study.

*School Culture*

Using a critical race theory lens in education, African American adolescent males are limited in their opportunities based solely on the color of their skin. Regardless of their intellect, talent, or innate gifts, many are subjugated to ill-treatment, discriminatory practices, and lack of access. According to Ladson-Billings (1998), this lens views racism as “enmeshed in the fabric of our social order” (p. 11). Unfortunately, many of these practices are now embedded in our schools still negatively impacting African American students.
Today, many school policies and structures are still in place that target and limit the success of African American males. Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, and Bachman’s (2008) study found that black students were more severely punished over subjective behavior. They were sent to an administrator at higher rates than their non-black counterparts for reasons such as disrespect and perceived threat. African American males also experience negative interactions with individuals outside of schools such as police officers and individuals in the community (Corprew, 2011; Cunningham & Spencer, 1996; Cunningham, Swanson, Spencer, & Dupree, 2003; Fine, Swanson, Spencer, & Dupree, 2003). These practices continue to reinforce the belief that African American males are troublesome and disruptive. Regardless of their abilities and talents, they are being subjugated to unfair standards and policies. Steele (1992) discussed the idea of the “stereotype stigma” that connects the lack of achievement among black students due to cultural and social context. It seems that African American male students have not been able to overcome this idea despite decades of reform and change. These structural constraints often manifest into negative behaviors and attitudes towards schooling (Corprew, 2011).

Many African American males do not feel any sense of school connectedness to their educational environment (Arrington, 2006). School connectedness refers to the extent to which one feels personally accepted, valued, supported, and encouraged by peers, teachers, and other adults in the school social environment (Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Lewis 2006). They do not feel like there is a purpose for their attendance and participation in school and school-sponsored events. Thus, they are not motivated to
achieve, be involved in school activities, or hold positions of responsibility (Senior & Anderson, 1993). Whether institutional or social, racist behaviors are negatively related to school membership and evaluation (Arrington, 2006).

This study will need to take these issues into account. Even when dealing with school populations that are predominantly African American, researchers and scholars must be aware that these issues will still exist. African American males may feel more connected to their schools since they most likely will have a sense of belonging being a part of the majority, but the presence of discriminatory organizational policies and societal structures are to be still assumed (Corprew, 2011).

Black identity

African American males must navigate through conflicting interpretations of masculinity. Whether the messages are coming from family members, peer groups, popular culture, or the media, these young men are being bombarded with depictions of what is means to be a black man in America (Holland and Andre, 1987). In addition, the competitive nature among African American males often creates hostile environments that only add to the complex idea of masculinity (Corprew, 2011).

The stereotypical and branded depictions of African American males are prevalent in society. They are often portrayed in movies and on television in a stereotypical range from unintelligent to super-athletes to gangsters (Corprew, 2011; Cunningham, 1993, 1999; Cunningham et al., 2003; Davis, 2003; Swanson et al., 2003). Money and sexual prowess are often associated with African American masculinity.
African American males often associate economic success and power with careers in professional athletics or the entertainment industry. Harper (2004) argued male students are more likely to identify themselves as standout athletes instead of classroom stars or school leaders. This perception of success is prevalent throughout the African American community regardless of socio-economic status. However, participation in extracurricular activities including athletics creates a positive relationship with self-esteem scores (Holland and Andre, 1987). Thus, African American males may have a healthy perception of self-esteem with their membership in extracurricular activities, but they are only primarily participating in athletics which only exasperates their misconceptions of success. Participation in non-athletic activities other than cultural organizations is not stressed in African American communities (Arrington, 2006).

African American males’ definitions on masculinity are heavily influenced by same-sex peer groups (Blos, 1962, 1979; Chodorow, 1978; Harper, 2004; LaVoire 1976; Stoller 1964; Wainrib, 1992). They are very powerful because they often dictate the behaviors and actions of individuals even if the individual disagrees with the practice at hand. Kunjufu (1988) argued that African American boys must make a choice between school achievement and peer acceptance. School achievement and membership into school organizations are associated with acting white or proper. Hence, these students are often ostracized and ridiculed by their peers. This negative stigma can severely impact the psychological development of a young person.
Within these African American peer groups, there is a sense of competition among African American males. Morrison and Eardley’s (1985) described this competitive nature in the following excerpt:

Boys grow up to be wary of each other. We are taught to compete with one another at school, and to struggle to prove ourselves outside it, on the street, the playground and the sports field. Later we fight for status over sexual prowess, or money, or physical strength or technical know-how…the pressure is on to act tough. We fear humiliation or exclusion, or ultimately the violence of other boys if we fail to conform (p. 19).

This competitive nature could be traced to the historical struggles that African Americans had to endure throughout history. Instead of mobilizing as a collective, they see each other as competition with limited resources and opportunities.

School engagement/Leadership Development

Participation in school extracurricular activities can be an important aspect of leadership and skill development for students. Sutton and Terrell (1997) noted that participation in student government is an excellent opportunity to develop a variety of leadership skills. Wingenbach and Kahler (1997) highlighted that students develop “their leadership skills in communications, decision making, getting along with others, learning management of self, understanding self, and working with groups by participating in a combination of youth leadership organizations in school and/or community activities” (p. 19) Unfortunately, many African American adolescent males are not taking advantage of these opportunities. According to Sutton and Terrell (1997), few practitioners and
researchers have looked at identifying and developing leadership opportunities for African American men. More work is needed in this area to fully understand and grasp the leadership development with African American adolescent males.

With low participation rates in leadership opportunities, African American male students are only reinforcing the societal barriers that they must face. Loo and Rolison (1986) indicated that feelings of social and cultural isolation contribute to diminished leadership opportunities among African American students. By not participating or taking leadership roles, they are losing their voices standing on the sidelines as others take advantage and make decisions. They also feel that these student organizations are not relevant to their personal academic experiences (Sutton and Terrell, 1997, Willie and McCord, 1972). They become disconnected to the several aspects of student life. However, many African American men choose to develop their leadership skills culture specific school organization rather than school wide organizations (Harper, 1975).

Programs have been developed to engage student and provide leadership development programs. However, many target those communities that have readily available resources and extensive support. Others do not effectively deal with the societal constraints placed on at-risk groups. Ginwright and James (1954) elaborated that many youth development programs rarely address how young people deal with racism, sexism, and homophobia. Students cannot develop healthily without facing these societal barriers. More programs need to be developed that incorporate service learning since it is seen as an effective method for teaching and enhancing leadership skills and positive
attitudes in youth (Boyd, 2001; Conrad & Hedin, 1983; Ladewig & Thomas, 1987; Yates & Youniss, 1996).
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MC QRM Stage 4 – Analytic Memo

My first interview for the pilot study was definitely a learning process. I went into the activity with little expectations because it was difficult to control the environment. I had done interviews in other studies, but I’d never done one on a student. As a classroom teacher, you have a fairly set lesson plan and have an instrument such as a test or quiz that measures student outcome. Because the teacher is an authority, there is a power dynamic. Students tend to be submissive and responsive to the requests of the teacher. However in this interview, the power lied with the student. I had to rely on the student for information to get the data relevant to my research. I could not prompt him to the answers as I did not know what they were. I wanted to know about his journey and experiences that helped mold him into the man he is today.

As I reviewed my interview with Student A and reflected over the transcripts, I realized that I have captured some important data. I have known Student A for a number of years, and I was concerned our relationship would cause some reactivity in the data. I did not want to influence his answers and I wanted to make sure that the data was authentic. Overall, I was pleased with the interview, but I wished I went further into gathering information. There were times where I should have asked a follow-up question or asked for more clarity. Even asking the question, “Why?” would have made a substantial difference. At the beginning of the interview, I was uncomfortable as it was a strange environment to be in a room with a student going over a list of questions. After a while, I think we both became more comfortable.

During the interview, the familiarity with Student A helped because I knew many of his mannerisms and body language. His answers seemed genuine, and I appreciated his candidness. When I was mentioned as a role model for Student A, I felt very awkward. I did not know if he mentioned me because I was interviewing him, and he thought I wanted him to say it. I did not want him to elaborate too much as it was strange to interview him about his role model that just happened to me. I was unsure of what to do since it wasn’t covered in class or in readings, but I managed to continue on with the interview. For a little, I was thrown off course, but I quickly recovered and went on to another subject area.

I was a bit wary at times because I felt like I was leading Student A too much to the answers I wanted to hear. I knew certain experiences that Student A endured, and I wanted him to confirm what I already knew. I quickly realized that our relationship only
helped in my data collection. Luckily after the interview, I read the transcripts and felt confident that his answers came out naturally without any pressure or directing.

I would have assumed that my position as an administrator would have an impact on the interview. I’m an authority figure and some students may not feel comfortable being critical of the school or its policies. However, I think I made it clear that I was interviewing Student A as a researcher and not an administrator. In future interviews, I should highlight this fact to reassure the participants that they can be free to speak honestly and openly.

Throughout the interview, I caught myself giving some affirming gestures and body language. I became acutely aware that this may influence how Student A may respond. I attempted to restrain myself from doing such actions, but I did not want to focus on my body language. This would have distracted me from the interview and the data coming from it. With practice, I know I can minimize the impact my gestures and body language can have in interviews.

As race is a primary focus of this study, it was interesting to see the influence of color blindness from Student A. He noted the importance of race, but he did not think it was necessary to have role models be of the same race as the students. The ability to relate to young people seemed more important. He focused more on actual relationships than physical appearance of individuals in his life. Influence to him was more personal and engaging. It would be interesting to see if this color blindness was a local phenomenon at my high school. This would require me to have multiple test groups, which would be an interesting study.

It was interesting to see the emerging themes while coding and analyzing the interview. At first, it seemed like there were no patterns emerging, but after re-reading my transcripts and seeking some assistance from my classmates, I began to notice recurring themes. They are the following: influencing ideas of leadership, characteristics of leadership, previous ideas on leadership, current ideas on leadership, societal influence on leadership (peers, society, school, etc.), and ways to engage students.

The various definitions of leadership were intriguing. Student A described his assumptions on leadership as a young student. Later, he gave a more salient definition of leadership as it evolved through his own experiences and interactions. It speaks volumes to the impact of role models on young people and how they help in creating definitions that may counter social influence or popular concepts in media or urban culture.

Student A remarked a lot on those that influenced his own concepts of leadership. From his own Peer Minister as a freshman, his peers, teachers, administrators, all were
instrumental in his formation as a student leader. Then, he described characteristics of those role models. Support seemed to be an ongoing theme from those instrumental figures in his life. Whether it was words of encouragement or positive daily interactions, the characteristics of the leaders help to define Student A’s own leadership development.

Societal influences began to emerge towards the middle and end of the interview. Whether it was perceived notions of leadership in the school community or in the media, they seemed to counter what the role models in Student A’s life wanted to share with him. The school officials were trying to be countercultural by exposing different outlets for Student A in terms of leading. Student A felt that many of his peers only saw athletics as their only outlet of leadership as a black male. Even Student A’s father pressured him to maintain his participation with the football team. It was disconcerting to see the negative reactions from Student A’s teammates when he decided to leave the team. They questioned his manhood and sexuality because he decided to leave the team to pursue other leadership opportunities. Yes, this can be attributed to immaturity, but the societal influence and cultural definitions of masculinity emanate from Student A’s vignette.

Student A provided ways the school could engage the student body especially black males in student leadership positions and activities. He focused on informing and publicizing the various student leadership opportunities as the ways the school could increase participation. Again, I believe this sub-topic could have been explored further with further probing and investigating.

I wished I delved further into the leadership influences on Student A from his family members or individuals outside of the school community. Due to conducting the interview during the school day in the school building, I should have seen that Student A would have immediately identified people within the school community when it came to those that have influenced his leadership development. The environmental conditions may have biased his perspective on leaders. By bringing up other individuals, I could have opened up a host of other influential people on Student A’s life.

I also felt like I missed an opportunity in getting more of the benefits of Student A’s participation in leadership positions or membership in school clubs and activities. I should have also explored more into Student A’s involvement in Peer Ministry and his influence on other students. He touched on it briefly, but an example would have been more concrete and beneficial to this study. My scope was too narrow and didn’t get at the benefits of leadership programs that Student A received in leading others.

Student A spoke more on a theoretical level on the benefits of leadership and didn’t give more of the practicalities. He mentioned other opportunities that resulted
through his participation in Peer Ministry, but I should have prompted him to address his intrapersonal growth through his experiences. By taking a reflective stance, Student A could have shared more about his development.

The interview could have incorporated more specific questions that could have gleaned valuable information. For instance, I could have inquired Student A, “What his expectations of student leaders were?” This would have created a framework in his understanding on student leadership. I could have also asked, “Who was a positive black male influence on your life?” Again, it would have been more direct to the data I was collecting.

Finally, I need to work on the framing of some of my questions. Some were too narrow in scope and didn’t get the information that I wanted to obtain. Follow-up questioning is difficult to predict, but practice will help in developing these skills. Overall, this experience was eye-opening and informative. As I reflect, I’m amazed at the amount and depth of data that I was able to capture. Many of my concerns and stresses were quickly alleviated. Student A wanted to share his experiences, and he knew that through his difficulties others could benefit. I look forward to more findings from this study.
MC QRM Stage 5

Data Analysis

Through a focus group and three individual interviews, I was able to collect relevant and intriguing information. Several themes emerged from the students, but the most pertinent dealt with the strength of various societal influences (peers, family members, school, and media) on the students in participating in student leadership programs or membership in extracurricular school organizations, the colorblindness of the students when it came to role models in their lives, and the reflectiveness of the students in not participating in more leadership opportunities. The students also provided ways in which the school could engage more African American male students in leadership positions and club memberships.

It was interesting to see the students’ definitions of leadership. There were a lot of similarities in the responses from the participants. For instance, Student D defined leadership as “helping to change somebody’s life and setting an example for others showing them the right way or path” (Interview, Student D, May 20, 2014, p. 2). Student R viewed leadership as “influencing others by taking what I know, learned, and experienced and trying to help someone else being there for someone else that might not have somebody to be there for them” (Interview, Student R, March 24, 2014, p. 2). He continued, “I’m big on influence and leading my example. I’m not afraid to do something first. I’m not afraid to step out or speak out on something in front of a group of people that might not have a voice to speak for themselves” (Interview, Student R,
March 24, 2014, p. 3). The students saw leadership in helping others often from a social justice standpoint.

**Societal Influences**

All of the participants noted the strong influence coming from several societal factors on participating in leadership or school extracurricular activities outside of sports. Student G stated, “Society defines our race. When you get older especially as a male, you need to become a professional athlete or some kind of businessman, and you need to have a lot of material things, and you have to flaunt them a lot” (Interview, Student G, June 6, 2014, p. 2).

Teachers and parents are often reinforcing the messages to the students that they should focus on athletics. Student T mentioned, “There aren’t people that tell us we should try to become president. It would help. No one thinks about it. They’ll say go out for sports team and stuff like that” (Focus Group, Student T, April 3, 2014, p. 1). Student R made a decision to give up playing football for his senior year in high school in order to be a Peer Minister. He stated, “My dad didn’t want me to give up football. He was really excited to come to the games. He wanted me to be a Peer Minister, and he was proud. But he didn’t see it from my perspective. He wanted me to balance both, and I knew it was going to be a conflict as I sat there and prioritized and looked at all my schedules. He just wanted to me to stay with football all four years and stick with it” (Interview, Student R, March 24, 2014, p. 6). As a soccer player, Student G felt pressured to focus more on getting rest to play soccer than do his studies. He expressed, “It is more of my coaches and a few classmates. When I was an underclassman I would
get asked, why are you doing this? You’re in the middle of the season; you don’t need to focus on your homework. You need to focus on practice and make sure you get enough sleep” (Interview, Student G, June 6, 2014, p. 3).

This pressure to perform in athletics starts at an early age for many African American males. Student T noted, “Sports are really pushed on them. You see parents driving kids to endless AAU games all across Maryland, but I have never see a parent you know make their kid get up early and take them to a speech class or anything like that. I feel like parents push their kids to do these sports and once they become good at the sport the focus is on becoming professional so that you can become rich pay for your family’s education” (Focus Group, Student T, April 3, 2014, p. 7). It seems the priorities for many are misaligned and lack proper focus.

There are parents that are trying to prepare their children for the realities of the world. Student G provided some advice from his mother. He stated, “She’s always telling me to act correctly in public. Even if you’re friends are acting stereotypical, set yourself away from them especially when you’re around a large amount of white people. Don’t be loud. Don’t fit the stereotype. Be as normal as possible. Don’t look like you’re getting into trouble. Don’t give anyone any reason like you’re looking for trouble. Making sure you are on your best behavior just like you would in front of your grandparents” (Interview, Student G, June 6, 2014, p. 8).

The pressure to not participate in school clubs and activities is also a part of the student body culture. Formal student leadership positions are seen as popularity contests for a select type of student. The positions are seen more as a resume builder than helping
the school. Student G elaborated, “A lot of people don’t really take them (student leadership programs) seriously, and they don’t see it as an opportunity to better themselves or their future” (Interview, Student G, June 6, 2014, p. 2).

Student R highlighted the fact that most African American students are disengaged from many of the school programs. He stated, “Honestly, they don’t really care too much for them. They are just something they see. They don’t pay too much attention to it. They don’t really look too much into it. I think most African Americans at McNamara don’t take the time to look into a certain club or organization like Peer Ministry or Student Council. They don’t know the whole gist of it” (Interview, Student R, March 24, 2014, p. 9).

Student R endured harsh criticisms and reactions from his teammates and friends when he decided to leave the football team. He recalled them saying, “why you being a b!#$%, what are you giving it up for? To do something else, you’ve been with us for three years” (Interview, Student R, March 24, 2014, p. 8). It was a difficult time for him as many of his teammates and friends abandoned him. He recounted, “My school friends and teammates didn’t talk to me. They just looked at me, laughed at me, cracking jokes, and I’m sitting here trying to do my leadership duties, and I’m constantly getting ridiculed. That was a daily thing for me” (Interview, Student R, March 24, 2014, p. 9). The disdain by the students is also echoed by Student T. He stated, “I feel like our classmates might not be that encouraging. If I were to tell my friends I was trying out for the football team, they would have my back. If I said I was running for president, they
would say that’s nice and might put up some fliers. They give more support to sports” (Focus group, Student T, April 3, 2014, p. 6).

Finally, the school sends conflicting messages to the students. Athletics is pushed heavily onto the students. Student G stated, “I feel that we are setting up our black males to not realize that there are other things than sports or getting in trouble” (Interview, Student G, June 6, 2014, p. 9). The school provides a bigger spotlight to celebrate the accomplishments of student athletes than student scholars. Student T elaborated, “There’s no glorification for people who have academic achievements” (Focus group, Student T, April 3, 2014, p. 4). The benefits of membership in extracurricular clubs and leadership roles are not being communicated to the students.

**Colorblindness**

Despite Bishop McNamara High School having very few African American faculty members on staff, the students were easily able to identify role models in their lives. It was interesting to note that the students chose a variety of individuals. They chose a racial diverse mix of individuals. They chose men and women. The students thought that the relationship with the individuals was more important than what race or gender their teachers were. The students were able to look beyond race in role models and became colorblind.

Student R identified Asian and White male administrators as his role models. He described, “Mr. S. is probably one of the biggest role models for me. He’s been there since my freshman year when I got in and before I got in. Mr. C. and he have been
looking out for me since freshman year making sure I’m on the right track and doing the writing thing making sure I’m on track to graduation and pretty much planning a future for me outside and in school trying to leave my mark on the school in the right way”

(Interview, Student R, March 24, 2014, p. 3).

Student T mentioned me as role model in his life. He described, “You do a lot of extra things like send us internships and scholarships which you don’t have to do, but you do to help us. You get mad at us for not going out for Peer Ministry. You told us we need more males to step up at school” (Focus Group, Student T, April 3, 2014, p. 2). Later, he elaborated more on our relationship. “You are the only person who ever told me or ever said that I should actually go out for a leadership role, nobody else has ever said anything like that to me, which makes me want to go out and do it. Like you got me involved, my junior year, I was not trying to do a leadership role or go out for anything school related other than sports, so I ran senior year but until that point no one ever pushed me to go in that direction” (Focus group, Student T, April 3, 2014, p. 13)

Student D chose Ms. W. as his role model. She is White and teaches senior level English. Despite having a reputation of being strict and unemotional, Student D gravitated to Ms. W. He noted, “This year, I would have to say that Ms. W. is a role model for me. In the beginning of the year, I thought maybe she was just picking on me, but, in actuality, she was pushing me to do better. Towards the end of the year, I started to learn more stuff than I had at the start which I did not know I was capable of doing” (Interview, Student D, May 20, 2014, p. 5). I asked him if he thought the race of a role model mattered. He responded, “Not at all because when someone is a leader, I don’t
look at their skin tone. It doesn’t affect with whether I’m learning or not. At the end of
the day, they’re trying to better me as a student” (Interview, Student D, May 20, 2014, p. 7).

Student G mentioned Mr. L. as his role model. Mr. L. is an African American
science and technology teacher with an extensive career in the military prior to teaching.
Student G cited, “Mr. L. is a big role model because he is pushing people to do something
out of the ordinary and trying to push themselves” (Interview, Student G, June 6, 2014, p. 4). Student W identified Ms. K. as his role model. She is a White, social studies teacher.
He stated, “She does a lot. She’s in a bunch of different organizations. She puts a lot of
effort into everything and still teacher” (Focus Group, Student W, April 3, 2014, p. 2).

The students connected with individuals that were invested in their education.
They encouraged the students to perform and excel. Regardless of race or gender, these
role models were able to challenge their students, but also encourage them when
necessary. Labels carry no meaning when relationships are involved.

Reflections/Suggestions

Since none of the study’s participants had formal leadership positions, they all
wished they could have done earlier in their high school careers. Knowing the benefits
now as seniors, the students realized how exposure at an early age would profit their
futures. Student D cited, “Freshman year, I definitely would have run for a leadership
role or maybe cabinet and basketball and clubs. I probably would’ve started my own
club. I wouldn’t have been so laid back as I was, and I would’ve taken advantage of the
opportunities that I had” (Interview, Student D, May 20, 2014, p. 6). Student G echoed
Student D sentiments. He said, “Freshman year, I would have run all four years. If I didn’t win Council, I would have run for Class Cabinet. I would have applied to be a peer minister. I probably would have just applied to everything as possible” (Interview, Student G, June 6, 2014, p. 7). All seemed to have some regrets over their passive approach to student leadership and involvement.

The students provided some innovative and creative ways in how the school could engage more African American male students. The school has a tough task in combatting the societal message that these students are receiving. Some of the ideas are very small and simple, while others are on a systematic level. Student G acknowledged, “We could bring attention to them (African American males) by bringing in more influential speakers to talk to us during retreats and things like that” (Interview, Student G, June 6, 2014, p. 4). Student R believed the school should focus more on awareness and information distribution. He stated, “Start off the year with a questionnaire asking if you wanted to join three clubs which three clubs would you choose with a list of all of them on a sheet of paper for everybody to look at. Some people don’t even know that we have certain clubs or cultural clubs. People don’t know, so they won’t go out for something like that” (Interview, Student R, March 24, 2014, p. 5-6)

Many times, participation involves a simple conversation between a teacher and student.

More school officials and teachers should encourage students to apply for positions or leadership programs. Student G noted, “It’s just stressing and constantly saying why don’t you do this, run to be president, it’s constantly drilling it into their heads. You can
do this. You are something other than an athlete. I feel like it also comes down to their coaches stressing to do other things than just athletics” (Interview, Student G, June 6, 2014, p. 7).
Findings

The school has some work to do in terms of the students’ perceptions of the underrepresentation of African American males in student leadership positions. It needs to begin to shift the perception that student leadership is a popularity contest. The apathetic approach that many have is actually hurting the school’s culture in that fewer voices are being heard. In addition, the school must stress the problem with the lack of African American males in these positions. Instead of just tolerating these results, the school should be more active and engage the African American males.

The students clearly identified several factors that attribute to the underrepresentation of African American males in student leader roles. Unfortunately, the factors are coming from various places including parents, teachers, coaches, peer groups, schools, social media, and popular culture. The difficult part is synthesizing through all the messages into a positive and coherent image of what it means to be an African American male in the 21st century. Students are not being taught how to cope with this inundation of information. If these male students began to believe that athletic and the entertainment industries are the only way a person can be successful, I can only imagine the ramifications it can have on the African American community that is still overcoming a myriad of societal barriers.

The students provided a plethora of way to bolster African American male leadership in school activities. It will take time and commitment for change to take place. However, the students’ insight and reflections provide the administration with the first step in promoting African American male leadership. Perhaps the school could
reach out to its alumni base to help further these issues. More conversations need to take place, but this practitioner research was the first step in addressing the issue.

This practitioner research is very important to my practice as the Associate Principal at Bishop McNamara High School. As I look for ways to engage more students specifically students of color in leadership programs, the findings from this study will help me to effectively communicate information and opportunities to students. It is also helpful in how I can train teachers in understanding our students.

At times, I have to track down students and beg them to run for offices or participate in leadership conferences. The school has many amazing connections that offer full or partial scholarships for several leadership programs. Often, I will get two to three students that will turn me down because they cannot miss a sport’s practice. The students dare not bring up the opportunity with their coaches for fear of retaliation through longer practices or punishments through physical activities like sprints or conditioning drills.

Students are often placed in the middle between a coach and a teacher/club moderator. Bishop McNamara must do a better job at clearing up its line of communications. Students are placed in very uncomfortable situations choosing one activity or another. If they fail to commit wholeheartedly, they are threatened with losing a spot on a team or time on the field during a game. The school must have its coaches understand the mission of the school. There seems to be no give or take when it comes to athletics. Students must commit 100% of their time outside of academics to their respective team. Despite the fact that most won’t play in college, the pressure to win and
be successful is ridiculously extraordinary especially in the highly competitive DC Catholic league. Win at all costs is a reality.

Societal messages will only become louder and more aggressive. Bishop McNamara does a fair job in preparing its students against these messages, but there is always room to grow. Since many of these messages are being relayed to the students by digital media and social networking sites, it is even more salient as the school launches a one-to-one iPad program next school year. The students will have constant access to these influences at the touch of a button.

It is important to work with teachers and staff to help them to understand the multiple messages that are being sent to our students. As a school, we must help prepare our students to combat these messages. We must also show the students the benefits through formal leadership positions and club membership. Society paints success in a very materialistic manner for most. We must constantly remind our students that they have responsibilities as global citizens that can create change.

I realize that the students at Bishop McNamara High connect with any role model regardless of race or gender. It is more important to have teachers that are engaged in the students’ lives rather than looking like the students. We can still get more teachers to relate to students at this level. It shouldn’t be the same handful of teachers that are positively impacting student lives. Teachers must embrace critical pedagogy and humanize themselves.

The school should continue to talk with the African American male students on ways to engage them into more areas of the school. Race is not spoken much at Bishop
McNamara. Because the school has a diverse student body and very few racially motivated events take place, it is assumed that the school has a good culture. However, I believe a constant conversation is needed to ensure that students feel valued and heard.

The school can look for other ways to build leadership among its African American male students. For instance, the school could develop more cultural specific organizations that focus around mentoring. It could pair a freshman African American male student with a senior one. Since the seniors are much more reflective over their experiences, they could help guide and navigate their mentees. Curriculum could be developed over microaggressions. The history of African Americans can be told outside of February, Black History Month.

In addition, it is clear that African American male students are often pressured to become athletes from their parents. These messages only exacerbate the other societal pressures. Unfortunately, some parents believe that their son or daughter will become the next LeBron James or Serena Williams. They do not have a good grasp on reality knowing that a minute number of student-athletes actually become professionals. The school should do a better job at informing parents of a balanced student-athlete.

Nutrition and weightlifting are two areas that need to be addressed. Parents are supplying their children with supplements that can be harmful for young people. Students are also weightlifting so early that it is impacting their physical maturity and growth.

I am looking forward to sharing my findings with the school’s administration. I’m hoping for a more concerted approach in program development when it comes to leadership and skill building. I also believe more people need to be at the table. Being an
administrator for seven years, the administration has rarely talked about race. It’s often swept under the rug along with the students’ best interests.

Future research should focus on what activities the African American male students participate in after high school. Perhaps, they may need more time to understand the value of these leadership opportunities and take advantage in the civic or collegiate arenas. With such struggles in terms of school administration over the years, it would be interesting to see if that has impacted the messages being sent to students. Additional research needs to be done at the high school level on African American male leadership and engagement. There is very little information on student activities and participation rates.

I would also like to study the influence of Bishop McNamara High School as a private, Catholic school in the results of this study. I question would other private schools find similar results or would public schools differ greatly. The school culture at Bishop McNamara is unique, but it is still being bombarded by societal influences. A larger study would hopefully address these inquiries.

The conclusions from this practitioner’s research were not very surprising. However, I was slightly dismayed about the colorblindness from the students. I thought race would be a bigger factor when it came to their role models. I’m very proud that they are able to look beyond race and gender. They are more focused on the individual and the relationship with that individual. It was also interesting to note that financial resources and parental support could not overcome the societal messages on leadership.
For this study, I would have conducted a co-investigation with a current student. Some students may not feel comfortable talking with me, so they may find it more appealing to speak with a fellow student. In addition, I could get a better perspective from someone actively receiving the societal messages. This participatory research approach is very appealing. I believe the data that would be collected would be richer and more in depth. My co-investigator could personally benefit himself and his peers.

A study focusing on why African American female students are thriving at Bishop McNamara would be an interesting analysis. Perhaps the same factors that are inhibiting the male students from taking leadership roles are positively impacting female students. There are several avenues that can be explored in future studies.

I had some issues with my focus group and individual interviews. I know I would be able to correct these errors if I had to redo this study. I would also seek more guidance when it came to my conceptual framework and literature review. Despite these few setbacks, I was able to learn a lot through this pilot study. My confidence waned through the entire process, but now I know I am capable of conducting a full scale dissertation study. My work can influence a lot of researchers, scholars, administrators, teachers, and students.
References

Student D. Personal interview. 20 May 2014.

Student D, Student G, Student J, Student T, Student W. Focus group interview. 3 April 2014.

Student G. Personal interview. 6 June 2014.

Student R. Personal interview. 24 March 2014.
APPENDIX B: Interview Consent Form

The Leadership Gap: Where are Adolescent African-American males?

The following research questions helped to direct this study:
1. What factors do African-American male alumni of Cardinal Potter High School attribute to the underrepresentation of African-American males in student leadership roles?
2. What factors of school culture do participants attribute to this leadership gap?
3. What aspects of the African-American community contribute to promote African-American male leadership?

Student/Alumni Interview

CONSENT FORM

Project Title: The Leadership Gap: Where are Adolescent African-American males?

DESCRIPTION: Since CPHS became a coeducational institution in 1992, the majority of formal student leadership positions have not been black males despite being a large percentage of the student body. The purpose of this survey is to examine the reasons behind this phenomenon and ways to increase participation rates for black males.

PROCEDURES: You will be asked a series of questions about yourself, your knowledge, and your experiences as a black male student that attended CPHS High School.

RISKS & BENEFITS: There are no anticipated risks associated with this study. You will not receive any direct benefit from participation. We cannot and do not guarantee or promise that you will receive any benefits from this study. However, information gathered from this study could lead to improvement in outcomes.

TIME INVOLVEMENT: This interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes to complete.

PAYMENT: You will not be paid to participate in this study.

PARTICIPANT’S RIGHTS: If you have read this form and have decided to participate in this study, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your identity will not be disclosed in any published and written material resulting from the study. You also agree to be recorded during the interview session. If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact the investigator.
CONFIDENTIALITY: Your involvement in the study will be anonymized and your confidential information will be protected on password-protected computers and electronic databases. This interview is confidential, and I will not disclose what you share. I will be compiling a report that will identify the major themes from the interviews and may use some quotes from the interviews. The quotes will not be attributed to any specific person and if a quote is recognizable, I will not use it. The recording of this interview and the transcript will be kept in a secure place and your name will not appear on the recording or on the transcript. Once I complete the research, I will destroy the interview recording and transcript.

Investigator:
Victor Shin
Victor.shin@gmail.com
Doctoral Student
University of Pennsylvania
Graduate School of Education

If you have questions about your participation in this research study or about your rights as a research subject, make sure to discuss them with the investigator, Victor, using the contact information listed above. You may also call the Office of Regulatory Affairs at the University of Pennsylvania at (215) 898-2614 to talk about your rights as a research subject.

You are asked to sign this form to show that:
the research study and the information above have been discussed with you and that you agree to participate in the study.

You will receive a copy of this signed form and the summary of the study that will be discussed with you.

________________________  ___________________________  ___________
Subject’s Name [print]        Subject’s Signature                Date

________________________  ___________________________  ___________
Witness [print]              Witness’ Signature                Date

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APPENDIX C: One-on-one Interview Protocols

Student/Alumni Individual Interviews

Introduction

Students/Alumni, thank you for agreeing to be a part of this study. As a former administrator and teacher at CPHS, I’ve had the privilege to interact with thousands of students. However, I’ve made some observations regarding student leadership. During most of my time here, merely a handful of our official student leadership positions and membership in honor societies have been filled by African-American males. Given that there is in fact a large population of African-American males in the student body, I’m interested in learning about why so few African-American males participate in formal student leadership programs such as Student Council, Peer Ministry, and National Honor Society.

This study is a part of my program at the University of Pennsylvania where I’m working on my doctorate in educational leadership. The results of this study will be shared with the school’s administration where program or school-wide changes could take place.

You were selected to be a part of this study because you fit certain characteristics. You are a current or former CPHS student that is also male, African American, and 18 years or older. **This interview session will last approximately 45-60 minutes.** I am requesting permission to record this focus group interview because I do not want to miss any information or misinterpret my notes. I may need to follow up with you regarding any questions that may arise later after reviewing the data. This interview is confidential, and I will not disclose what you tell me. I will be compiling a report that will identify the
major themes from the interviews and may use some quotes from the interviews. The quotes will not be attributed to any specific person and if a quote is recognizable we will not use it. The recording of this interview and the transcript will be kept in a secure place and your name will not appear on the recording or on the transcript. Once we complete our research, we will destroy the interview recording and transcript.

(Hand out consent forms)

By signing this document, you are consenting to having your comments be a part of this study. Your names will not be used in the study or shared with others.

(Collect consent forms)

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. How would you describe yourself as a CPHS student?
3. How would you describe yourself now as an alumnus (for graduates only)?
4. In high school, what extracurricular activities did you participate?
   a. Why did you participate in them?
   b. What did you learn about yourself from your participation?
5. Please identify and describe an example of a standout student leader.
6. What are your expectations of a student leader?
   a. What leadership programs (Student Council, NHS, YouthLeader, Peer Ministry, etc.) did you participate?
   b. Why did you participate in these programs? Why did you not participate in these programs?
   c. What did you learn about yourself from your participation?
7. If you could go back in time to high school, what would you have changed?
8. Please identify and describe your role model(s).
9. Tell me about your favorite adults at CPHS?
   a. What makes him/her/them your favorite?
10. Tell me about your least favorite adults at CPHS.
a. What makes him/her/them your least favorite?
11. In terms of your own life and career, tell me what success looks like.
12. Please identify and describe someone that is successful.
13. How would you define masculinity? What makes a man a man?
14. What family members were influential factors in your life, if any?
   a. What advice did they give you?
   b. What concepts on success did they share with you?
   c. What messages on masculinity did they share with you?
15. What messages on masculinity did you receive from the faculty and staff at CPHS?
16. What messages on masculinity did you receive from your CPHS peers?
17. What messages on masculinity did the media society send you as a student?
18. Outside of the President, who are some people in the African-American community that you feel are positive role models for our youth today?
   a. What makes them positive role models?
19. The vast majority of elected student positions at CPHS have been black females or white males.
   a. Why do you think that this is happening?
   b. Do you feel that’s a problem?
   c. Why or why not?
20. Is there anything else that you feel is important to share on this topic?

Conclusion

Thank you for participating in this study. I really appreciate your willingness to assist me and the school. I may contact you to get some clarification in some of your answers. In addition, I’ll need to follow-up with a few of you to participate in individual interviews. Please let me know if you would be interested. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me by email at victor.shin@gmail.com.
APPENDIX D: In-depth Interview Protocols

Student/Alumni Key Individual Interviews

Introduction

Students/Alumni, thank you for agreeing to be a part of this study. As a former administrator and teacher at CPHS, I’ve had the privilege to interact with thousands of students. However, I’ve made some observations regarding student leadership. During most of my time here, merely a handful of our official student leadership positions and membership in honor societies have been filled by African-American males. Given that there is in fact a large population of African-American males in the student body, I’m interested in learning about why so few African-American male participate in formal student leadership programs such as Student Council, Peer Ministry, and National Honor Society.

This study is a part of my program at the University of Pennsylvania where I’m working on my doctorate in educational leadership. The results of this study will be shared with the school’s administration where program or school-wide changes could take place.

You were selected to be a part of this study because you fit certain characteristics. You are a current or former Potter student that is also male, African American, and 18 years or older. This interview session will last approximately 45-60 minutes. I am requesting permission to record this focus group interview because I do not want to miss any information or misinterpret my notes. I may need to follow up with you regarding any questions that may arise later after reviewing the data. This interview is confidential, and I will not disclose what you tell me. I will be compiling a report that will identify the
major themes from the interviews and may use some quotes from the interviews. The quotes will not be attributed to any specific person and if a quote is recognizable we will not use it. The recording of this interview and the transcript will be kept in a secure place and your name will not appear on the recording or on the transcript. Once we complete our research, we will destroy the interview recording and transcript.

(Hand out consent forms)

By signing this document, you are consenting to having your comments be a part of this study. Your name will not be used in the study or shared with others.

(Collect consent forms)

Interview Questions

1. What is your definition of leadership?
   a. What were some influential factors when it comes to your definition of leadership?
   b. Who do you think is an excellent example of leadership? Why?
2. Why did you originally attend CPHS?
   a. Were there any people that influenced your decision? Who?
   b. What did they share with you?
3. Were there any students that you admired or saw as a mentor?
   a. What about them did you admire?
   b. Were they a student leader? Please explain.
4. Were there any adults that mentored you while you were a student? Who?
   a. Please explain some of their characteristics.
   b. What type of advice and assistance did they provide?
5. As a student, how did you view student leadership programs like Student Council, NHS, and Peer Ministry?
   a. How did your parents and other family members view these programs?
   b. How did your CPHS peers view these programs?
6. If you participated in student leadership programs, what were some skills that you developed?
   a. What led up to your participation?
   b. Who was involved with encouraging you to participate?
   c. How did you benefit with your participation in these student leadership programs?
7. What were some messages that the media and entertainment industries was telling you as a young African-American male?
   a. Did you agree with them? Why or why not?
8. What were some messages that CPHS was telling you as a young African-American male?
   a. Did you agree with them? Why or why not?
9. Do you have any regrets when it comes to participation in student programs (fine arts, clubs, athletics, etc)?
   a. Why or why not?
10. If you attended college, what extracurricular activities did you participate?
    a. Why or why not?
11. What are some ways CPHS can increase participation rates in student activities (aside from sports) from African-American male students?
12. Is there anything else that you feel is important to share on this topic?

Conclusion

Thank you for participating in this study. I really appreciate your willingness to assist me and the school. I may contact you to get some clarification in some of your answers. In addition, I’ll need to follow-up with a few of you to participate in individual interviews. Please let me know if you would be interested. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me by email at victor.shin@gmail.com.
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