BOUND BY NARRATIVE: AN IN-DEPTH EXPLORATION OF THE EFFECTS OF RACIALIZED, GENDERED, AND SEXUALIZED SCRIPTS ON BLACK BOYS’ SOCIALIZATION IN AND OUT OF SCHOOL CONTEXTS

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Abstract

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Using data collected from surveys, 32 in-depth interviews, and over 40 hours of classroom observations within an all-boys-all-Black high school, The Brotherhood Academy, this project explores two critical questions: 1) how do schools shape narratives of hypermasculinity and 2) how do these narratives inform Black boys’ performance and understanding of what it means to be man? Bridging the extant literatures on masculinities and race, gender, and sexuality, this paper offers a novel theorization of narratives of hypermasculinity that provides a framework for examining the implications of Black boys’ internalization of racialized, gendered, and sexualized scripts on performing manhood, which are often rooted in heteronormative, hypersexual, and deviant conceptualizations of masculinity. I find that even within a generally non-contested site for socialization, such as the Brotherhood Academy, which provides opportunities for resistance by bolstering a novel mission and value set rooted in destigmatizing what it means to be a Black man in society, these narratives of hypermasculinity still exist and negatively impact school actors’ ability to hold these
boys accountable to the school’s standards on manhood. These findings reveal the
bounded masculinity that gets propagated within school and has implications for Black
boys’ consequent socialization outside of school contexts.
To Marcus, my family (both found and biological), my community in Chicago, and the boys who made this research possible; this is for you.
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INTRODUCTION

High school is an important site for socialization. Not only does high school provide individuals with the tools, training, and preparation for becoming a productive member of society (Bowles & Gintis 1976; Bar & Dreeben 1983), it also instills and reinforces particular conceptualizations of race, gender, and sexuality in both constructive and detrimental ways (Jackson 1968; Best 1983; Mac an Ghaill 1994, 1996; Renold 2002; Garcia 2009; Pascoe 2012). Specifically, high schools are sites that not only create but propagate racialized, gendered, and sexualized scripts (Thorne 1993; Connell 1995, 2002; Bourdieu 2001; Pascoe 2012; Gansen 2017; Lindsay 2018). As we know from the psychological (Kniffley, Brown, & Davis 2018) and sociological literatures (Downey & Gibbs 2010), high school is a tumultuous period for individuals, particularly students from marginalized backgrounds, as most of their time is spent forming and reforming their self-concept and determining the pathways they want to pursue post-graduation (Goffman 1959; Staples 1978; Majors & Billson 1993; Pascoe 2012; Porter 2012; Morris 2012; Kniffley, Brown, & Davis 2018). This critical juncture in youth’s development can also become strained by out-of-school stressors, such as poverty, homelessness, lack of access to adequate resources, and not having a meaningful support network (Noguera 2003b; Alexander 2010; Davis 2017), which can lead to marginalized students’ experiences within high school to become an extension and reflection of their toxic milieu outside of school, which is often unstable (Shedd 2015).

Whether the school is tightly-coupled (Bidwell 1965; Meyer 1978) or loosely-organized (Gamoran, Secada, and Marrett 2006), the mission, value set, and
accountability structure that a high school indoctrinates into the learning environment is intended to level the playing field for students who otherwise would come to view school as a breeding ground for inequality as opposed to a direct path to mobility and garnering success outcomes (Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell 1999; Carter & Reardon 2014; Reardon, Cimpian & Weathers 2015). Teachers and other school actors play an important role as brokers and caregivers in helping marginalized students to eradicate differential access to a quality education (Gamoran, Secada, & Marrett 2006; Oeur 2018), however, this burden has unevenly fallen onto teachers exclusively, which absolves the need for a critical investigation of the school climate, which we know matters heavily in shaping student outcomes (McFarland 2001; Downey & Gibbs 2010).

These unequal realities in school are exacerbated for young, Black boys who are, arguably, one of society’s most targeted populations (Mac an Ghaill 1994; Sewell 1997; Sewell & Majors 2001; Noguera 2003b, 2008; Ferguson 2003; Nayak 2003; Harper 2004; Martino, Kehler, & Weaver-Hightower 2009; Morris 2012; Reichert & Nelson 2012; Nelson & Wallace 2015; Shedd 2015; Tatum 2017; Lindsay 2018; Oeur 2018). These boys not only face an inordinate amount of inequality within their communities, they also have to manage societal expectations around performing gender and sexuality in legible ways – or ways that confirm the racialized, gendered, and sexualized scripts that hold Black men as lawless, hypersexual, and a threat to the fabric of civil society (Neal 2013). While certain high schools, such as same-sex schools, attempt to eradicate the differential opportunity structure that Black boys are afforded (Young 2011), these attempts often fall short if they are not marked by structural changes at the organizational level (Meyer 1978; Hallett 2007; Shabazz 2015).
Obviously, these kinds of structural changes, while ideal, can often happen in a vacuum or non-systematically (Garcia 2009; Nelson, Maloney, & Hodges 2017; Lindsay 2018; Oeur 2018). For example, there are certain high schools that bolster a rich mission and value set (Wynn 1992; Reichert & Nelson, 2012; Reichert, Nelson, Heed, Yang, & Benson 2012; Dumas & Nelson 2016), however, if the school has a lax accountability structure in place to facilitate the successful achievement of the mission, it will be fruitless in its efforts (Willis 1977). For example, in the absence of accountability mechanisms, beyond punitive measures, racialized, gendered, and sexualized scripts continue to dwell within schools and shape the ways in which boys are able to perform masculinity both in and out of school contexts (Sewell 1997; Phoenix 2004; Pascoe 2012; Noguera 2008; Morris 2012; Shedd 2015). Furthermore, high school can often become a site in which Black boys have to engage in impression management – or perform their gender and sexuality in ways that school officials approve of, society condones, and that feels genuine to them personally (Goffman 1959; West & Zimmerman 1987; Majors & Billson 1993; Butler 2004; Alexander 2006; Lemelle 2012; Neal 2013; Ransaw 2013). This maintenance of multiple masculinities is unique to the Black, male lived experience in ways that schools are often underprepared to grapple with without firm, standardized accountability practices in place (Goffman 1959; Sewell 1997; Noguera 2003b; Young 2011). As such, Black boys often come away from high school unable to maximize their full potential or gain an adequate self-concept, which leads to the perception of schools as contributory to the downfall of Black men (Noguera 2003a).

Within the extant sociological literature on masculinities, much of the research has focused exclusively on masculinities as identities that are socially-constructed that
individuals subscribe to (Pascoe 2012; Pascoe & Bridges 2016; Keith 2017). Likewise, masculinities are not often examined as performances but, instead, as gendered identities that individuals consciously adopt. However, this project is interested in the strategic and circumstantial performances of hypermasculinity that do not always require the performer to identify with [hyper]masculinity to engage in such presentations. These performances of hypermasculinity are often subconscious and, thus, have insidious implications.

To this point, there has been limited research on how performances of masculinity vary by context, especially within school contexts. In the race, gender, and sexuality literature situated within school contexts, much of the focus has been on how inequality is maintained via racialized tracking, gendered play in school, and heteronormative and hidden curricula (Thorne 1993; Kehily & Nayak 1997; Neilson, Walden, & Kunkel 2000; Renold 2002; Buchmann & DiPrete 2008; Garcia 2009; Phoenix 2009; Lareau 2011; Ridegeway 2011; Reardon, Cimpian, & Weathers 2015; Gansen 2017). However, these two rich literatures have yet to be bridged to showcase how the maintenance of narratives of hypermasculinity within school contexts have deleterious effects on Black boys’ conception and performance of masculinity as well as the implications thereof.

In light of these critical gaps in the literature, this paper offers an in-depth exploration of an all-boys-all-Black high school in a Midwestern city, The Brotherhood Academy, to examine the extent to which schools shape narrative of hypermasculinity as well as how narratives of hypermasculinity, in turn, shape Black boys’ socialization in and out of school contexts. Specifically, this paper is concerned with narratives of hypermasculinity as opposed to other typologies of masculinity like toxic (Levant 1996)
or hegemonic masculinity, respectively (Connell 2002; Connell & Messerschmidt 2005; Messerschmidt 2018). Within the literature and in society writ large, hypermasculinity has been readily associated with the experiences of men of color, namely Black and Latino men (Mosher & Sirkin 1984; Ferguson 2003; Harper 2004; Richardson 2007; Lemelle 2012; Porter 2012; Hurtado & Sinha 2016), whereas toxic masculinity and hegemonic masculinity have been cited in reference to White men or Eurocentric conceptions of masculinity (Gilmore 1990; Connell 1995, 2002; Adams & Sarvan 2002; Reeser 2010; Pascoe 2012; Pascoe & Bridges 2016; Keith 2017).

The Brotherhood Academy has bolstered a novel mission rooted in destigmatizing what it meant to be a Black man in society. The mission was promoted through six principles of manhood, which was referred to as the school’s value set. They were as follows: relentlessness, integrity, solidarity, accountability, selflessness, and resilience. In addition, the school’s motto was ‘Believing’, which highlighted the school’s commitment to the mission and values on what it meant to be a man. To hold the boys accountable to embodying manhood as defined by the school, administrators promoted the ‘Three R’s’: respect, responsibility, and ritual, which were enforced through practices, like reciting a creed on a daily basis, which further outlined the tenets of manhood in more detail, having a strict uniform code of professional attire, and referring not only to teachers but each other by surnames. Therefore, manhood, as defined by the Brotherhood Academy, was more than a conceptualization or ideology, it was a practice and performance to be constantly honed over time.

Using data gathered from surveys, in-depth interviews, and classroom observations at the Brotherhood Academy, I discovered just how much accountability as
both principle and praxis mattered for shaping these boys’ understanding and performance of masculinity, especially those that deviated from the conceptualization of manhood as outlined by the school. Such departures had implications for their socialization outside of school contexts, particularly the reproduction of racialized, gendered, and sexualized scripts in their social interactions with other racial and gender groups, especially women. Not even the Brotherhood Academy could have prepared them for this reality.
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Narratives of Hypermasculinity

Typologies of Masculinities

The literature on masculinities and its relation to power is infinite. Before diving into these fields and discourses on masculinities, it is important to set forth a general, fairly non-contested definition of masculinity. To speak of masculinities is to speak about a hierarchical and bounded system of gender relations that, while rigid and immutable, do not presume that masculinity is linked or equivalent to men or maleness (Connell 1995). The focus, then, should be on the position of men in the gender order and the processes through which masculinity, and the performance thereof, has been unevenly linked to them (Connell 1995; Adams & Savran 2002; Reeser 2010; Pascoe & Bridges 2016).

Masculinities, thus, can be defined as the patterns and practices by which people engage in their position in the gender order (Ibid). This definition of masculinity is preferred because it highlights the fact that masculinities are multiple and not only linked to men; however, when subscribed to by men, these gendered and often sexualized scripts often have grave repercussions. This paper will be focused on Black masculinity. Specifically, the understandings and performances of Black masculinity that lead to the perpetuation of racialized, gendered, and sexualized scripts. This definition of masculinity is useful, then, to this endeavor because it highlights the reality that performances of masculinities are contextual and temporal and subject to change. Through examining the lives of Black boys in an all-boys educational setting, I will be able to witness how their conception and performance of manhood has changed over time, namely during freshmen and senior
year, respectively: two pivotal transition periods. Now, onto the literature on masculinities.

In psychology (Levant 1996), toxic masculinity is used to understand the cultural masculine norms that can be harmful to society irrespective of an individual’s gender. Toxic masculinity, despite its appellation, is not intended to demonize men, or those that identify as masculine, but rather to highlight the negative consequences of internalizing toxic traits that have been traditionally linked to men, such as dominance, self-reliance, and competition. Thus, toxic masculinity can be defined as, “an adherence to traditional male gender roles that restrict the kinds of emotions allowable for boys and men to express, including social expectations that men seek to be dominant (the “alpha male”) and limit their emotional range primarily to expressions of anger (Ibid: 261).”

In gender studies, scholars understand masculinity as hegemonic (Connell 2002). For example, expanding upon Jill Matthews’ (1984) gender order theory¹, Connell also recognizes masculinities as multiple and variable across time, individuals and cultures. Hegemonic masculinity thus is defined as practices that reinforce and legitimize men’s dominant position in society while simultaneously justifying the subordination of other men who do not conform to traditional, idealistic scripts on manhood. Conceptually, hegemonic masculinity desires to explain how and why men hold dominant social statuses over other gender identities, especially those that are perceived as effeminate.

¹ According to Matthews, in her pilot study on the historical construction of femininity, gender order theory highlights the fact that every known society distinguishes between women and men, while also allowing for variations in the nature of the distinctions drawn. Thus, the gender order is defined, “As systematic ways of creating social women and men, and of ordering and patterning relations between them, it is not logically necessary that gender orders should be hierarchical, inequitable, or oppressive (1984: 13).”
Sociologists have also used hegemonic masculinity as a theoretical model for understanding power relations and violence among ranked social classes in society (Bourdieu 2001). Deriving from cultural hegemony – or ‘the third face of power’ – (Gramsci 1971), hegemonic masculinity also refers to the cultural dynamics that a social group sustains to ascertain a leading position within the social hierarchy. However, both conceptions of hegemonic masculinity have been contested over time by scholars in and outside of gender studies and sociology (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005; Messerschmidt 2018). Connell & Messerschmidt, in “Hegemonic Masculinity: Formulation, Reformulation, and Amplification” adjusted their framework of hegemonic masculinity to address four critical areas: the nature of the gender hierarchy, the geography of masculine configurations, the process of social embodiment, and the dynamics of masculinities. All of which, allude to the significance of context in (re)shaping and (re)forming masculinity.

On Manhood

The construction of manhood based on these conceptualizations of masculinity can be best understood as a discursive process rooted in power. Being a man in society, thus, has less to do with biological or socially-constructed labels based on perceived sex and gender, respectively. Manhood, like gender, is performative; it is something you do and re-do based on the setting you are in (West and Zimmerman 1987: Butler 2004). While not explicitly about gender performance, in The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, Erving Goffman discusses how the maintenance of self is both a conscious and subconscious process in which people attempt to influence the perceptions of other people about a person, object, or event. This is done through regulating and controlling
information in social interaction. Self-presentation, thus, could be facilitated through ascribing to normative practices and principles of manhood. Such performances of gender could be defensive or assertive based on whether the performance is meant to match one’s own self-image or align with the audience’s expectations and preferences.

Understandings of manhood are also culturally-based (Gilmore 1990; Gutmann 2007) and varied given the lack of universality on what it means to be a “real” or “true” man. This, in turn, has led to many transnational societies building elusive and exclusionary notions of manhood vis-à-vis cultural sanctions, ritual, and trials of skill and/or endurance (Ibid). However, manhood is not a prize to be won; it is an extremely precarious identity to possess given the overarching racialized and sexualized media images of masculinity, which is rooted in, thus contributory to, inequality and can be used as a form of symbolic violence (Bourdieu 2001) (Ridgeway 2011; Young 2011; Pascoe & Bridges 2016). The theories on masculinity in the foregoing do not address racial variation, or the implications thereof, directly. However, we know that the formation of race and racism in the United States is heavily politicized and does not exist in a vacuum (Omi & Winant 2015). Racial formation is a dynamic and fluid process that holds race, like gender, as a social construct that is subject to change (Ibid). One way that racism and racial inequality continue to exist is vis-à-vis the dissemination of racialized scripts about what it means to hold a particular racial identity in society.

As such, this project is concerned with the manifestation and reproduction of racialized narratives of hypermasculinity in and outside of school contexts. Before exploring this, however, racialized masculinity and its effect must be differentiated from
both toxic and hegemonic masculinity as outlined above given that no two masculinities – or the performances thereof – are identical (Corbett 2011).

Racialized Masculinity: Hypermasculinity

The racialized and gendered script of hypermasculine has disproportionately been linked to Black men both historically and contemporarily (Lemelle 2012; Porter 2012). This stigma is rooted in a longstanding image of the Black man as a threat to White-female fragility and thus considered and treated as sexually deviant and repressive (Staples 1978; Serkin 1984; Collins 2004; Hopkinson & Moore 2006; Richardson 2007; Tonry 2011; Hoston 2016). Unlike the power afforded to individuals who subscribe to Eurocentric, idealistic conceptions of masculinity, Black men have experienced different outcomes (Collins 2004; Lemelle 2012; Porter 2012; Coates 2015), such as racial profiling and discrimination by the police (Davis 2017), being relegated to impoverished communities (Sharkey 2013), and social marginalization at the hands of White culture (hooks 1992, 2004a; Majors & Billson 1993; Young 2004).

The foregoing presents a dual dilemma for Black men: men generally define their self-concept based on the value-laden roles of protector, provider, and breadwinner within their families and communities, all of which necessitate power that Black men do not have (Alexander 2010). For the Black men who perform these roles, however, they are viewed as hypermasculine and socially unaccepted. In Cool Pose: The Dilemmas of Black Manhood in America (1993), the authors argue that Black men are unable to fill the roles associated with hegemonic masculinity and have turned to developing a ‘cool pose’ – or machismo, tough-guy persona – to obscure their frustration and marginalization. This ‘cool pose’ can also be understood as the unwitting internalization of racialized,
gendered, and sexualized scripts that delimit what it means to be a Black man. Such an internalization has deleterious effects, such as the reproduction of narratives of hypermasculinity being exclusively linked to Black men (Ransaw 2013). Jackson Katz (2006) also describes this as ‘the macho paradox’, however, he is specifically focused on why the men who have experienced trauma hurt women, igniting a self-fulfilling prophecy of internalizing racialized stigma. Mosher & Sirkin (1984) also find that Black men project hypermasculinity to combat feelings of powerlessness that have been systematically imposed on them by society. The desire, then, to hold a position of authority in a society that does not inherently value the worth of Black men and has systematically disenfranchised them could lead to their unsuspecting performance of hypermasculinity.

**Theoretical Contribution**

Before moving forward, it is important to define how this paper operationalizes hypermasculinity. For starters, this paper is concerned with the implications of performances of racialized, gendered, and sexualized scripts on Black masculinity. Narratives of hypermasculinity fell outside the theorizing on hegemonic and toxic masculinity, respectively, which have been generally linked to White men. Also, in applying and expanding upon their definition of machismo, – a hypermasculinity that obliterates any other possible influences on men’s attitudes and behaviors – (Hurtado & Sinha 2016) which has been linked to Latino boys and men in social narrative, I argue that this definition also applies to Black men in both covert and explicit ways. For example, hypermasculinity shapes Black men’s pathways in and out of mobility and as
well as their mental health outcomes, like race-related traumas/stressors (Kniffley, Brown, & Davis 2018).

For the Black men who do not subscribe to these normative conceptions of masculinity or reproduce the racialized, gendered, and sexualized scripts that exist about them are at risk for social delegitimization and marginalization. In *Looking for Leroy, Illegible Black Masculinities* (2013), Mark Anthony Neal found that Black men and boys are bound by their legibility – or ability to be read as criminal, violent, and hypersexual. Non-hypersexual Black men, thus, become exceptions to the rule that do not disprove the rule (Nielsen, Walden, & Kunkel 2000). As it relates to the maintenance of uneven power relations in society, the desire for legibility amongst Black men has been used as a tactic for calming the anxieties of White people who harbor bias towards Black men (Ibid). That is because legibility provides easily identifiable images of Black men. However, the effects of maintained racialized, gendered, and sexualized conceptions of Black masculinity across society are undeniable, especially within Black men’s primary sites of socialization, like schools.

Given this, this paper uses the following definition of narratives of hypermasculinity: the racialized, gendered, and sexualized scripts that are not only created, but propagated and performed, within major sites for socialization and used to defend Black men’s social positioning as second-class citizens. These scripts are rooted in heteronormative, patriarchal, hypersexual, and racist ideologies that hold Black men, in particular, as a threat to the fabric of civil society and law and order. These narratives have been extended from slavesque images of ‘the Black man’ as sexually deviant and a threat to White femininity. When present, these narratives of hypermasculinity have the
potential to negatively affect Black men who subscribe to and internalize these scripts, such as gaining a fractious self-concept and/or a unilateral definition and performance of masculinity rooted in heteronormativity and oppression. Important to note, however, those who internalize these narratives of hypermasculinity do not always perceive any negative consequences and, in doing so, can unwittingly reproduce them despite their deleterious effects.

**Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Schools**

Within the Sociology of Education literature, a longstanding debate has been whether schools serve as the great equalizer (Mann 1957) and, if so, for whom (Bar & Dreeben 1983; Downey & Gibbs 2010). Whether tightly organized (Bidwell 1965; Meyer 1978) or loosely coupled (Gamoran, Secada, & Marrett 2006) organizational systems, schools have always been sites of contestation (Foucault 1979) where inequality, differential success outcomes, punishment and coercion, and achievement gaps dwell (Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnel 1999; Buchmann & DiPrete 2008; Ridgeway 2011; Carter & Reardon 2014; Lewis & Diamond 2015; Reardon, Cimpian, & Weathers 2015; Shedd 2015). In addition, schools, like other social institutes, sort and organize their students according to their level of social capital and the extent to which they conform to the rules and standards of behavior as set forth by the disciplinary structure (Coleman 1968; Bowles & Gintis 1976). This well-maintained inequality within organizational sites that are intended to even the playing field for society’s most vulnerable populations has led to deleterious effects on students’ pathways in and out of mobility via schooling. For example, the school-to-prison pipeline (Rios 2011, 2017; Laura 2014; Kupchik 2016), which holds that schools no longer serve as a site in the promotion of individual’s life
chances or outcomes and, instead, become a staging area for prison (Foucault 1979; MacLeod 2009; Rios 2011, 2017; Laura 2014; Shedd 2015; Browne 2015; Kupchik 2016). Likewise, given the coercive surveillance technologies and policing strategies in schools, certain students are unable to distinguish schools from prisons, such that they no longer see the positive utility of schools on their career trajectories (Ibid).

The Case of Black Boys in School

Such policing strategies in school are also heavily racialized and gendered (Browne 2015; Rios 2011, 2017; Laura 2014; Shedd 2015). This kind of punitive environment is further intensified for young, Black men who remain one of society’s most targeted populations given their disproportionate rates of incarceration, experiences of police brutality, and exposure to poverty-stricken neighborhoods (Alexander 2010; Young 2011; Tonry 2011; Shedd 2015; Davis 2017). This not only leads Black men to question the purpose school serves for them, but it also negatively impacts their psyche – or sense and performance of self – (Goffman 1959; Kniffley, Brown, & Davis 2018) and their socialization post-graduation (Porter 2012). While the Black-male-achievement deficit was thought to be quelled long ago given major societal strides, like the election of the first Black president, Barack Obama, in 2008, Black men still largely remain social outcasts, plagued by structural inequalities that are historically rooted and adversely affects their current educational attainment (Hoston 2015).

Beyond the punitive environment within schools, there are also internal and external pressures for Black boys to perform gender and sexuality in particular ways (Best 1983; Thorne 1993; Sewell 1997; Sewell & Majors 2001; Pascoe 2012; Morris 2012; Gansen 2017). Usually, this involves Black boys attempting to strike a balance
between managing the impressions of peers and teachers (Goffman 1959) while simultaneously trying to locate a definition and performance of masculinity that feels the most comfortable or representative of who they are (Willis 1977). However, there is often a disconnect between the definitions of manhood that these boys learn about in school and society and their individual and group performances of masculinity given the demands of the context they are in (Mac an Ghaill 1994, 1996; Ferguson 2003; Nayak 2003; Harper 2004; Martino, Kehler, & Weaver-Hightower; Reichert & Nelson 2012; Reichert, Nelson, Heed, Yang, & Benson 2012; Nelson, Stahl, & Wallace 2015). Generally, the expectations for performing masculinity are heteronormative, which reproduces unilateral and inadequate understandings of gender, and simultaneously, race and class relations (Foucault 1978; Ingraham 1994; Kehily & Nayak 1997; Neilson, Walden, & Kunkel 2000; Renold 2002; Garcia 2009; Pascoe 2012; Gansen 2017). Most of which reproduce and reinforce gender and racial inequalities as well as toxic performances of sexuality that traverse the boundary on consent (Gansen 2017). Such performances complicate play and social interactions amongst boys (e.g. fear of being considered homosexual – “fag discourse”; Pascoe 2012) and between boys and girls, respectively (Renold 2002; Neal 2005; Gansen 2012). These gendered and sexual dynamics become intensified for Black boys who carry with them the historical stigma of being linked to rape culture and a threat to White female chastity during the slavery era (Richardson 2007; Lemelle 2012; Hoston 2016).

In spite of these racialized and gendered realities, Black men have not completely lost hope in the promise of schooling or its purported returns on providing them with opportunities for mobility (McFarland 2001; Noguera 2003a). Specifically, within the
context of all-male public schools (AMPS), Black boys are able to create an affinity to school in novel ways given this all-boys environment is akin to their other sites for socialization, such as their family and neighborhood (Noguera 2003b; Lindsay 2018; Oeur 2018). In an ethnographic study, Freeden Blume Oeur (2018) studied two AMPS’s and, however, found much to the contrary. While there was a significant amount of young, Black men that felt empowered by the AMPS, the organizational structure of the school aided in their emasculation (Willis 1977; McFarland 2001), which highlights a convergence of neoliberal ideology and Black respectability (Phoenix 2004). Even the schools with the highest likelihood of success and the best intentions could still fall short (Lewis & Diamond 2015).

Task of the Project

In an effort to destigmatize what it means to be a Black man in society (Neal 2005; Anthony 2013; Coates 2015; Dumas & Nelson 2016), it becomes important to closely examine Black men’s sites for socialization to understand how they come to define and perform masculinity. The AMPS is one of these critical sites, especially given that racialized, gendered, and sexualized narratives of hypermasculinity are not exempt from dwelling within them (Phoenix 2009). The following queries, thus, become imperative for exploration: Are these schools actually reconstructing the image of Black men in society or are they unwittingly perpetuating a hypermasculine narrative about Black men? If the latter, how are Black boys reproducing or combatting narratives of hypermasculinity? If they have internalized such racialized, gendered, and sexualized scripts, what effect does this have on these boys’ socialization in and outside of school contexts henceforth?
From the data collected through a mixed-qualitative study of surveys, interviewing, and classroom observations within an all-Black-all-boys high school, this study will explore these questions in depth, highlighting that even sites committed to eradicating inequality, and providing opportunities for meaningful resistance, namely destigmatizing the image of Black men in society, can remain complicit in their propagation of narratives of hypermasculinity that negatively impact Black men’s socialization dexterities.

Important to note, the framing of my findings below consider and build on two important pieces of work. The first, *Learning to Labor*, which was based on ethnographic research, investigated how the “lads” (i.e. working-class boys) located opportunities for resistance in school by rebelling against the rules and values administered and creating an oppositional culture (Willis 1977). However, these boys’ resistance to official norms only served to prepare them for working-class jobs, which reproduced their current social location. In my study, just as in Willis’, I found that resistance not only challenges systems of oppression, it (re)constitutes it, which has insidious effects. The second study by Daniel McFarland, “Student Resistance: How the Formal and Informal Organization of Classrooms Facilitate Everyday Forms of Student Defiance”, highlights the ways in which resistant behavior amongst students is the result of organizational features like social networks and instruction and could be rectified through improved classroom management. In my study, students “rebels” by treating their female teachers as props and their male teachers as peers, which enable them to perform multiple masculinities to maximize their sense of dominance in the classroom, which they do not possess in other contexts both in and outside of school (Mosher & Sirkin 1984). Taken together, these two
pieces allow my project to make a contribution to the sociological literatures on education, race, and gender, while considering the implications of resisting racialized, gendered, and sexualized scripts on performances of masculinity in and out of school contexts (Goffman 1959).
METHODOLOGY

Design

This research project deployed a mixed-qualitative approach of surveys, classroom observations, and in-depth interviewing to understand how narratives of hypermasculinity surfaced within an all-boys educational setting. Specifically, this methodology was aimed at uncovering how the formation and dissemination narratives of hypermasculinity contoured and endorsed racialized, gendered, and hypersexualized scripts that young, Black men incorporated into their emerging self-concept as well as their interactions with peers, teachers, and administrators within school. The implications this had on their socialization outside of school contexts was also explored. Specifically, this methodology allowed the young, Black men in the sample to share their ideologies about what constitutes manhood, who and where they learned how to perform masculinity, and how these understandings of manhood informed their worldview.

Limitations

Of note, this research project was conducted at an all-Black-all-boys charter high school, so I was uniquely positioned to hold race and sex constant in my study. This allowed me to make claims about how young, Black men within this setting performed masculinity in inimitable ways based on their lived experiences. However, I was cautious not to use this unique advantage to present or construct a master narrative of what Black masculinity is and how it is operative in society writ large, especially since I do not, by design, have a base or comparative group in my study. Instead, I was most interested in how masculinity was taught to and performed by young, Black men within a fairly non-
contested site given the rich mission and value set within the all-Black-all-boys high school.

Also, I did not directly survey or interview teachers, staff, or administrators. Therefore, my avenue into understanding how and why the young, Black men in this particular context performed masculinity in unique ways was vis-a-vis classroom observations. Classroom observations allowed me to capture the ways in which teachers’ and administrators’ varied interactions with students led to the emergence of narratives of hypermasculinity. I was especially interested in the latent or normalized reproductions of narrative of hypermasculinity that both teachers and students were complicit in. Although the school presented a strong mission and narrative around deconstructing the image of Black men as hypermasculine, classroom observations allowed me to glean whether, and to what extent, the teachers and administration were holding themselves as well as the students accountable to the school’s expectations for performing manhood (Jackson 1968).

Benefits

By using this compilation of qualitative methods, I was able to analyze the impact of harbored racialized, gendered, and hypersexual philosophies about manhood and masculinity, particularly the effect that such performances had on Black boys’ understanding of sexual consent as well as their socialization in an increasingly diverse polity post-graduation, which will be wholly dissimilar to the all-boys learning environment they were in.
Field Site

In the fall of 2018, I spent 6 weeks at an all-boys charter high school, the Brotherhood Academy, which was located within a Midwestern city. The Brotherhood Academy was one of few charter schools in the Midwest that was all-boys and one of even fewer schools that had an entirely all-Black student population, which made it the perfect site for exploration as this research was concerned with the narratives of hypermasculinity particular to the lived experiences of young, Black men; one of society’s most targeted populations (Alexander 2010; Young 2011; Tonry 2011; Shedd 2015; Davis 2017).

“Believing”: School Motto, Mission, and Values

At the Brotherhood Academy, the school’s motto was “Believing,” which was institutionalized to help hold the school officials accountable to ensuring that the young, Black men who attended the school were constantly reminded of their worth and value, which, arguably, was absent from society writ large. At the Brotherhood Academy, the administrators, staff, and teachers purported to believe in the potential and ability of young, Black men and, in turn, were committed to helping young, Black men achieve the school’s mission of gaining a high-quality-college-preparatory education that fostered and promoted college acceptance and success.

There were several ways that school officials were committed to helping hold students accountable to the above stated mission of the Brotherhood Academy. For starters, the school had 6 core values (i.e. relentlessness, integrity, solidarity,

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2 All of the names of people and places used in this paper were anonymized to ensure the safety and protect the identity of all participants as some of the findings contain sensitive, though not incriminating, information.

3 Adapted from the school’s actual motto; the message conveyed by the motto remains the same.
accountability, selflessness, and resilience) that students were grouped by randomly upon entering the Brotherhood Academy during their freshmen year. Each value group was comprised of around twenty students. The boys remained a part of these value groups throughout their entire high school career.

In addition, there was a scheduled homeroom period (also broken up by grade-level), which served as a meeting place for each of the value groups. During these value-group meetings, the boys and their value-group leaders (usually a male teacher at the Brotherhood Academy) were supposed to discuss the ways in which they have incorporated their value into their lives to create a space for growth and reflection. The point of these value group spaces was to provide socio-emotional support as these boys grappled with the harsh realities of their livelihoods, especially the implications of being young, Black men. In addition, these spaces also functioned as a bonding site between each of the boys and their value group leader.

**Uniform Standards**

In addition to the value groups, the boys at the Brotherhood Academy were required to wear a uniform, which consisted of khaki pants, a white buttoned-down-and-collared dress shirt, a necktie, two-button blazer with the school’s crest, and black or brown dress shoes. Boys were also not allowed to wear their hair long. This included their facial hair as well, which had to be cleanly shaven. The purpose of the formal uniform requirement was to help usher these young, Black boys into adulthood vis-à-vis professionalism. In addition, a formal dress code was supposed to instill within the young, Black men values around appearance, hygiene, and self-presentation.
School Culture

The school, in its recruitment efforts, also bolstered a strong school culture that helped foster positive self-esteem and high achievement amongst the students. One way of holding the boys accountable to achieving this was through helping them to live by the Brotherhood Academy creed, which they recited every day during morning assembly. In addition, a positive school culture was maintained through the Three R’s: respect, responsibility, and ritual. In complying with respectability politics of the school, students and staff members were to address each other by surnames only (e.g. “Good morning, Mr. Butler” or “Hi, Ms. Williams”). To foster a sense of responsibility amongst the young, Black men of the Brotherhood Academy, they were held to a strict code of conduct sanctioned by the Dean of Students. Lastly, ritual was preserved through daily practices intended to help usher the young, Black men of the Brotherhood Academy into manhood and reinforce feelings of community and self-worth.

Sample

During the 6 weeks I spent at Brotherhood Academy, I observed a total of two formal classes, one of which was led by a Black male teacher, Mr. Harvey, (freshmen English) and the other (senior honors Science) was led by a Black female teacher, Ms. Barkley. I also observed two senior homerooms for the value groups Relentlessness and Accountability, respectively, which were both lead by the same Black, male teacher, Mr. Johnson. In addition, I observed one freshmen-level homeroom for the value group Integrity, which was led by a Black, male teacher, Mr. Harim. Lastly, I observed morning assembly, which was held every day before the formal start to the school day.
All students were required to attend morning assembly because this was when attendance was taken for the day.

From these various observations, I was able to recruit students to survey and interview for my study. In total, I surveyed and interviewed 32 young, Black men (19 seniors, 13 freshmen). I interviewed young, Black men in their freshmen and senior years, respectively, because I was interested in how these two transitional phases (both in and out of high school, respectively) informed their reception, construction, and performance of manhood as outlined by the school. More than anything, interviewing young, Black men during their freshmen and senior years, respectively, allowed me to examine the effects of conditioning over time, which informed these boys’ understanding and performance of masculinity in and outside of school contexts.

Procedure

*Classroom Observations*

While in the classroom, I sat at the head of the room to get a full view of the classroom, especially the teacher and all of the students. In each of the classrooms I observed, the teacher normally dwelled in the middle of the room and conducted most of their instruction from that position while the students’ seating was split on either half of the room, creating two semi-circles. To capture my observations, I kept a notepad in which I took detailed notes of the interactions between the teachers/administrators and students. When possible, I took down precise quotations. The way I structured my daily notes was to first jot down the date and time of class I was observing, write a brief summary of the assignment, task, and/or goal the students were working on for the day, and then take detailed notes of moments of transgression in which students deviated from
the set agenda. Specifically, the instances and context in which these boys’ performances of manhood aligned with and differed from the definition of manhood outlined by the school. To thoroughly capture the variability of the latter, I created categories (e.g. physical, verbal, combination, other) to organize how they boys performed masculinity within the classroom setting. Likewise, I used the same categories to take note of how teachers performed, reprimanded, and/or endorsed these racialized, gendered, and sexualized scripts on manhood.

*Interview and Survey*

At the start of each class I observed, I introduced myself, my institutional affiliation and backing, and a synopsis of my study, including a brief overview of the study, the benefits to participation, and explained how the boys could receive an incentive of $25 via check (a nominal payment for participating) if the interview and survey were completed. If the boys only completed partial of the interview or survey, they would be given $12 via check as a token of appreciation for their time. Every individual I recruited for the survey and interview saw both through to completion and received full payment for participation. For freshmen students who were under the legal age of assent, they were given a parental consent form for their parents to sign and return to me within 3 business days of receipt. The seniors in my sample who were 17 or older were allowed to sign an assent form to participate in the survey and interview on their own behalf.

The actual survey and interview were individually scheduled with each one of my recruits to ensure that it took place during a time that was both convenient and minimized disruption to students, teachers, administrators, and security guards (who patrolled the
hallways and were not completely aware of my intents and purposes at the school). In addition, I only surveyed and interviewed the boys during one of their free periods, such as lunch or study hall. In the event, that our interview ran over the time allotted for the period, I was authorized by both principals and the Dean to issue a late pass to students, so they had special permission to enter their next class and walk through the hallway without being penalized for being tardy.

On average, it took the boys about 5-7 minutes to complete the written survey, which consisted of ten biographical questions about where the boys lived, such as their proximity to essential resources, and if they perceived their neighborhood as safe (see Appendix A: Survey and Appendix B: Descriptive Table). The interview itself was semi-structured (see Appendix C: Interview Questionnaire) and included questions that fell into the following broad categories: family, school, student engagement, discipline and punishment, criminal record and arrest history, post-graduation plans, and big-picture reflection. Implementing these interview parameters allowed the interview to flow thematically; however, there were a number of instances in which additional follow-up questions were asked as well as times where some of the questions in the interview guide were not asked directly because it was addressed in the student’s response to another question. The interviews lasted between 23 minutes (shortest) to well over 2 hours (longest) with the average interview lasting 1 hour and 11 minutes.

**Note on Privacy**

During the interview, I used a high-quality voice recording app on my phone for transcription purposes. Immediately after the interview ended, I backed up the audio file
to a secure, password-encrypted folder on my computer and permanently deleted the copies off of my phone.

**Analytical Strategy**

Upon completion of data collection, I began analyzing my findings to locate major themes. First, I began by transcribing each of my interviews by hand. Although more laborious and time consuming, I elected to transcribe all of my interviews by hand to familiarize myself with my data and become enmeshed in the lived experiences and narratives of the boys in my sample. This process also made data analysis more interpersonal. Likewise, given that I am focusing on narratives of hypermasculinity, it is important that the researcher knows both the breadth and scope of the narratives disseminated, thus by going back and listening to the boys’ interviews repeatedly, I was able to remember the full context in which the interview took place, including the small minutiae, such body language, important pauses, and moments during questioning that they reserved for reflection.

After transcribing all of my interview data, I turned to my fieldnotes from the classroom observations. I elected to write one comprehensive memo to highlight major themes and key findings from my observations. I started this process by organizing the memo by the name of the class and date in which the observations occurred. Next, I rearticulated the instances in which narratives of hypermasculinity emerged. To do this, I highlighted the key actors involved, parties responsible for evoking the narrative of hypermasculinity, and the response/course of action taken (both by peers, the teacher, and the disciplinarian if applicable).
Once I completed this step, I started to categorize these incidents more broadly based on my perception of why the narrative of hypermasculinity emerged. The themes I located were peers vying for dominance, teacher’s inadvertent complicity in the (re)production of narratives of hypermasculinity, and inconsistent accountability measures. These themes aligned with some of those identified within other major studies on Black masculinity (hooks 1992, 2004a; Majors & Billson 1993; Ransaw 2013).

Methodological Note on Choice to Hand-Code

While many researchers use NVivo or other qualitative analysis software to assist with coding their data, I wanted to engage deeply with my own findings, allowing myself to push back against what I thought I saw in the moment of data collection by systematically hand-coding my findings after being removed from the field for some time (Nelson, Burk, Knudsen, & McCall 2018). This provided me with the chance to reflect upon my own experiences.

In addition, while robust, NVivo and other data-analysis programs are imperfect and often require the researcher to have already located, in the very least, some preliminary themes to aid in the coding process. Instead of using this type of intermediary, I opted to do the heavy lifting myself. To ensure that I alleviated as much researcher bias as possible, I took meticulous notes on how I went about organizing and coding my findings, including how I located patterns amongst the narratives of hypermasculinity that emerged in the classroom (Riessman 1993).

Given that my interview questionnaire was semi-structured with questions broken up by theme, locating trends within the interview data was a more straightforward process. From the interview data, I found that these boys self-concept and definition of
manhood were informed by societal and interpersonal perceptions and definitions of masculinity that were heavily racialized, gendered, and sexualized in particular ways. This and other implications for these boys’ socialization in and outside of school contexts will be explored in the Findings section below.
FINDINGS

To examine how schools shape narratives of hypermasculinity and, in turn, how these narratives inform young, Black men’s understanding and performance of manhood both in and out of school contexts, the findings below will be broken up into three sections. The first section will showcase the boys’ perceptions of school climate, namely the extent to which they subscribe to the school’s mission and set of values around manhood and brotherhood. Through interview data, this section will also shed light on the gendered, racialized, and sexualized climate at the Brotherhood Academy, specifically how the variability in the ways in which accountability is administered leads to the boys’ adoption and performance of hypermasculinity – a presentation of masculinity that is neither endorsed by the school or society and is rooted in racialized, gendered, and sexualized scripts on Black masculinity. Such variation in the modes of accountability for wrongdoing, as I explicate in the concluding remarks of this paper, has and will continue to lead to these boys’ inability to see school as the great equalizer, which has deleterious effects on their pathways in and out of mobility post-graduation as well as how they engage with an increasingly diversifying polity.

The second section will focus on these boys’ performances of masculinity with special attention given to how these performances differed in the presence of peers, teachers and administrators, as well as myself. In addition to highlighting the varied enactments of manhood, this section will also capture teachers’ and administrators’ differing responses to these boys’ performances of hypermasculinity. While some teachers, mainly the one female teacher I observed, tried to help the boys by redirecting
their energy towards focusing on the class material, there were other teachers who uncritically and openly allowed the boys to perform hypermasculinity in ways that did not align with the definition of manhood the school bolstered, but that also perpetuated racialized, gendered, and sexualized scripts. Tensions arose due to the disconnect between these boys’ personal definition of what it means to be a man and the school’s unidirectional definition of manhood. I argue that this has led to an internalization of narratives of hypermasculinity, which has impending consequences for their socialization in and outside of school contexts, especially with regard to their interactions with young women.

Lastly, the third section will contextualize the foregoing by showcasing the variation in how these boys articulate societal and individual conceptions of what it means to be a young, Black man compared to a young, Black woman and White people writ large. Such varied perceptions, especially when juxtaposed with these boys gendered and sexualized performances of masculinity, illuminate the insidious nature of narratives of hypermasculinity on their impending socialization both in and out of school contexts. By (un)consciously internalizing racialized, gendered, and sexualized scripts, these boys are doing two things: (1) perpetuating narratives of Black men as not only hypermasculine but as complicit and uncritical in their ascription of a bounded masculinity and (2) gaining a narrow understanding of how accountability works outside of their school setting, particularly as it relates to consent and sexual engagement with women. The latter point is particularly relevant given the sociopolitical climate we are currently in which the movement and hashtag #MeToo⁴ has dominated social discourse

⁴“The ‘me too’ movement was founded in 2006 to help survivors of sexual violence, particularly Black women and girls, and other young women of color from low wealth communities, find pathways to
on rape culture, which has historically been linked to Black men who have been viewed as sexually aggressive and deviant (Mosher & Serkin 1984; Richardson 2007; Lemelle 2009; Hoston 2016; “Why #MeToo Needs to Talk About Predatory White Women,” 2018).

Navigating Manhood: School Climate and Its Effect on (Re)defining Masculinity

Unlike other Charter High Schools in the Midwest region, what distinguishes the Brotherhood Academy is its distinctive mission and value set, which is centered on manhood and brotherhood. In addition, the Brotherhood Academy is one of few high schools that has a curricula and school structure tailored to privileging the lived experiences of young, Black men. While some might criticize the school for a lack of racial and gender diversity, the young men of the Brotherhood Academy have come to admire the school given its unique positioning, which allows it to bolster an ethos rooted in Black pride (Lindsay 2018; Oeur 2018). However, when I asked my interviewees to describe the extent to which the Brotherhood Academy was influential to their trajectories, their responses were highly variable, which lead me to believe that under the guise of destigmatizing what it means to be a Black man in society, there was something more insidious at play within the school.

“Being Around My Brothers”

Facilitating the transition to manhood is one of the core objectives of the Brotherhood Academy. One of the ways that this is accomplished is through the all-boys healing. Our vision from the beginning was to address both the dearth in resources for survivors of sexual violence and to build a community of advocates, driven by survivors, who will be at the forefront of creating solutions to interrupt sexual violence in their communities.” Taken from: https://metoomvmt.org/about/#history
academic setting, which is marked by an all-Black-male staff and administration to serve as positive models for the boys. However, through interviews with the boys at the Brotherhood Academy, it became clear that not everyone benefited from the absence of women. There were several boys who perceived that the presence of girls would not help foster positive peer relationships or broaden their socialization skills. Instead, it was perceived that the presence of girls within the Brotherhood Academy would serve as a disturbance to the boys’ learning environment. Marvin J., a senior, highlighted this by stating,

*Um, I just feel like the all-boys thing plays a big role in the distractions. I don’t got to worry about… like in grammar school, I was getting distracted by girls. At this school, I feel like I focus more…*

Similarly, Blade, a freshman, when describing the Brotherhood Academy stated,

*Good school, good teachers, and they keep everyone on track. No girls bothering them. I don’t have problems with girls or anything, but sometimes it’s just…girls throw me off track, so it’s a good school for a boy so they can be focused…*

The absence of women at the Brotherhood Academy not only affected these boys’ socialization skills, but it also negatively impacted the sorts of messages about manhood that the school endorsed and disseminated, which normalized male dominance and women’s inability to train young, Black boys on what it means to be a man. As a result, this created an environment for the few women that were present at the Brotherhood Academy to feel as if they were unable to hold boys accountable to the standards of manhood that they were expected to adopt. This was likely because women were not included in the decision-making processes around or the outlining of the school’s tenets on manhood that were disseminated to the students. Given that women were not valued in the process of creating and broadcasting the novel narratives of masculinity that the
school endorsed, how are students expected to value the presence of women in school and view them as more than merely a disruption to their transition to manhood?

Despite the absence of women, however, Drake, a senior, found the all-boys setting was helpful to his discovery of the kind of man he wanted to be. We shared the following exchange.

INT: How would you describe this school?
D: It really teaches (you) the values of being a man. We have the creed; we really worship it and we say it together every morning to instill that in us. This school opened up a different part of myself and really showed me who I am as a person and the many things I have to learn as I keep growing, so it's a pretty good school for being disciplined.

Interesting to note, many boys in my sample noted that their self-actualization was prompted through various ritualistic practices, such as reciting the creed and internalizing the core values of the school. For example, Chris, a senior, spoke directly to this saying,

The way I could describe it, like... I didn't like the Brotherhood Academy coming in; it really changed me without me even knowing. I'm a whole different person. I feel like I wouldn't be the person I am today if I ain't come to the Brotherhood Academy. They help kids in ways that the kids don't understand, like it really made me be a man by the core values and then saying the creed every day. It really sinks into you without you even paying attention to it, so I feel like the Brotherhood Academy got a good thing going on with the young, Black men and trying to help people be different, especially with the men we have around us (names the Assistant Principal and the Dean). The Dean is like an Uncle to me. They are our father figures such that if someone like me that don't got their daddy in their life like that, it could be a set example of a father figure, so I feel like it's a good environment in a sense.

Reciting a creed on a daily basis was one of the ways in which the Brotherhood Academy epitomized ritual, one of The Three R’s, and facilitated a positive school culture for the boys. The creed allowed the boys to internalize particular values of manhood that the school set forth. The boys had no creative agency, thus, in shaping the tenets of manhood they were expected to adhere to. Within the creed, the boys recited heteronormative scripts
about masculinity that were rooted in providing for their family, community, and the world as well as serving as their brother’s keepers. In addition, and perhaps most importantly, within the creed the boys declared the importance of striving towards a future in which they were always held accountable for their actions. Of all the values that the Brotherhood Academy bolstered, accountability was the one that was the most contentious, both ideologically and practically. While the boys strived to be accountable for their (in)actions, certain school actors did not positively aid in this process and often had highly variable, inconsistent modes of holding these boys to a standard of performing manhood as outlined by the school, which presented several problems. This was especially the case in how discipline was maintained at the Brotherhood Academy.

**Disciplinary Climate**

During the interview, the boys were asked about the disciplinary climate both in terms of the kinds of punishment (e.g. detention, suspension, phone calls home, ‘log entries’ by teachers) they received as well as their perception of the harshness of the disciplinary climate at the Brotherhood Academy on a scale of lax to strict. The boys were also asked whether they saw parallels or differences between the disciplinary climate at the Brotherhood Academy and a prison. Across my sample, the results were mixed and dependent on a number of factors, such as how frequent the boys personally experienced punishment or got in trouble in school. However, the lack of consistency in the ways and how often the boys were punished created an environment in which they did not have a standard for learning what accountability looks like in and out of school contexts.
There were some students who saw the disciplinary climate as very strict. Tyler, a senior, said, “The Brotherhood Academy is very disciplinary. Like I said, our Dean is very tough, so he got strict rules.” Tyler was never punished in school but noted having friends that received detentions for “being late to class or a lot of tardies”. He went on to say, “I got friends that live all the way out in the suburbs. Like, it's a lot of people here that live in the suburbs and be getting here late.” Demario, a freshman also stated, “It's strict because of the structure of the school. We can't have bookbags in the classroom; we can only go to our lockers every 3 periods.” Alfonso, a senior, stated, “It's real strict because of the new principal. Last year, it wasn't that strict. They make us get haircuts and if you don’t have the right uniform, you can't come back to school.” Marvin R., a senior, described the disciplinary climate as beyond strict, calling it “over powered”. He went on to explain, “Over powered because when people here discipline, they think they have to make an example out of somebody. You can discipline somebody and just have a conversation with them and let them go; they think of consequences. Everything that's discipline doesn't have to be consequences.” Similarly, Drako, a freshman, described the disciplinary climate as strict because “They'll (the teachers and administrators) try to get you a detention. If you get three tardies, you get a detention; it's stupid to me. There's a lot of students in the hallway, we can't all walk through each other; there's going to be some students left in the hallway.”

On the contrary, there were students who did not find the school all that strict when compared to other schools. Bill, a senior, stated, “I don't think it's as strict as other places. I've heard of other schools that are very strict. In terms of wearing suits and things like that, it might be intimidating to other people, but to be honest, some people just don't
act right in this school, so it doesn't really matter. It's not really strict at all to be honest; it's just right.” Similarly, Jawon, a freshman, stated, “I think it's more lenient, like I went to another charter school in middle school and I had to transfer out of there because I got one hundred or something detentions and here, I got zero, so I think it got to be lenient or it might just be the maturity of me. It depends on what teacher, but when you get to the Dean, he's very fair, so it's not the teachers, it's the Dean that makes the system fair.”

These varied perceptions of the disciplinary climate’s level of strictness seemed to be based upon each individual student’s proximity to the disciplinarian or their track record of receiving punishment. The disciplinary climate also varied based on arbitrary, inconsistent factors like what day of the week it was. KJ, a freshman, described the disciplinary climate as follows, “…some days they want to be all over you and sometimes they don't. I don't have any problems, though.” Chris expressed similar sentiments, stating, “It has its days. You could be playing with someone for 5 seconds and get suspended for that, but like, it has its days. It could be like that (disciplinary) sometimes and other times they be really lenient; it's really up to how they feel, like how the Dean and the stuff feels.” He went on to draw parallels between this kind of randomized punishment and racialized interactions with the Police. Specifically, Chris said,

*It's the same way with the Police, like you never know what kind of Police Officer you'll run into based on the color of my skin. It could go good and they might not be on nothing or they could be on all type of stuff and send me to jail. With the Dean, it could be a day he not feeling well and he'll be on that, so everybody be on their toes because everyone can get suspended, so I just feel like it's real similar.*
This variation in the perception of the disciplinary climate at the Brotherhood Academy was not inconsistent with how some of the boys drew parallels between the school climate and a prison.

_School-to-Prison Pipeline Revisited_

Within my sample there was some variation in the extent to which the boys drew similarities and differences between the disciplinary climate at the Brotherhood Academy and a prison. Majority of the boys, however, saw notable parallels between their school and a prison. KJ said, “I would say it's similar because it's strict, but kids find a way to get around the rules and do what they want to do. The kids from a bad environment think it's strict and hard but really it's what they need.” This speaks volumes to the negative effects of inconsistent accountability structures in place which can quickly transform a positive learning environment into a coercive one that is akin to a penitentiary. Drako built on this noting that at the Brotherhood Academy, “They control your hair, they control what you wear, they control your shoes. It might as well be a prison because they control everything.” Similarly, Bill elaborated on the encroachment of freedom in school by identifying a discrepancy between the intentionality of the school in preventing young, Black men from interacting with the Criminal Justice System and the coercive control that happens in actuality. He stated, 

_I feel like this school is built to take you away from the prison system, but at the same time, it does have similarities. In prison, they make you wear the stripes, or the orange shirts and we all got to wear blazers and ties, walk in a line, be formal and be like robots to society; be the same, have haircuts. You know in the military, they don't let you wear your hair out and things like that, so I do believe that things do need to change, and people need to build their personality and what they want to do with their life. I don't believe that anyone should control anything that you do._
While the school’s intention in mandating the boys to wear a blazer and have their haircut a certain way is aimed towards shifting the narrative around Black masculinity beyond racialized, gendered, sexualized scripts to focusing more on the positive attributes and contributions of Black males, namely showing that Black men can exude professionalism, these boys feel like the uniform and performance requirements are coercive and limit the freedom they have in shaping and defining how they perform manhood. This creates a disconnect between their and the school’s understanding of what it means to be a man. An exchange with Markavion, a senior, highlighted this:

INT: How do you think it (the disciplinary climate) compares to the criminal justice system?
M: Sometimes they let you slide, sometimes they don't. You got to take it like a man.
INT: What do you mean ‘take it like a man’?
M: It's your actions, do what you got to do.
INT: So, like being accountable? You think that's a part of manhood?
M: Yes.

Similar conceptions of manhood were magnified within the classroom setting where I had the opportunity to observe these boys’ performances of masculinity as well as the extent to which teachers intervened or contributed to their presentations of masculinity that did not align with the overarching mission and value set of the school.

Performing [Hyper]masculinity: The Role of Accountability on Black Boys’ Perception of What it Means to Be a Man

While at the Brotherhood Academy, I observed morning assembly, two classrooms (i.e. freshmen English and senior honors Science), and three homeroom periods (i.e. 2 senior-level and 1 freshmen-level). During the classroom observations, I witnessed how the boys in my sample performed masculinity to manage the impressions of various school actors (Goffman 1959), namely to appear cool in the presence of
friends, assert dominance, especially in female-led classrooms, and navigate relationships with authority figures (Majors & Billson 1993; hooks 2004a; Ransaw 2013). In large part, these performances were in sharp contrast to their own personal definition of what it means to be a man (more on this in the next section).

As these boys navigated different understandings of manhood based on the setting they were in and the company they kept, accountability structures, or the absence thereof, became critical to my theorizing on how and why these boys’ performances of masculinity were so variable. Without a consistent accountability structure in place, these boys lacked the buy-in necessary for performing manhood as instituted by the school. In the absence of such an impetus for performing masculinity as outlined by the school, these boys were left to their own devices to figure out what it means to be a young, Black man in a society that is rife with racialized, gendered, and sexualized expectations of their worth. This involved attempting to strike a balance between breaking down media images and narratives of young, Black men as innately deviant and prone to criminality (Hopkinsn & Moore 2006; Porter 2012) coupled with managing the expectations of manhood based on what they learn and witness within school, home, and their communities (Ferguson 2003; Pascoe 2012; Oeur 2018). Even more, with school-level accountability only being administered in the form of corrective measures like phone calls home, detention, suspension, and expulsion, these boys gained an adversarial view of school despite it having the best intentions (Lewis & Diamond 2015).

*Mr. Harvey’s English Class*

In Mr. Harvey’s first-period English class, students generally talked loudly amongst each other until class formally started, which was never on time. The boys could
be found discussing basketball, video games, junk food, and girls even after the formal class bell rung at 9:03 am. Class usually did not start until about 9:30 am, leaving only 20-25 minutes for Mr. Harvey to explain the ‘Do Now’ (i.e. bell-ringer) and assignment of the day and get the boys engaged enough to start, let alone complete, their assignment(s). During the time leading up to class actually starting, Mr. Harvey could be found planning the lesson for the day at his desk or on his phone sending text messages or browsing through social media. Of note, the class expectations, as outlined by Mr. Harvey, were as follows: respect, no side conversations, and no use of phones in class. All of which were punishable by a phone call home, removal from class, or a parent/teacher conference based on the number of infractions committed after the student received a formal warning. Not only did Mr. Harvey allow students to violate these rules, he was also in violation of one of the rules himself. Once Mr. Harvey finally explained the assignment, he usually had to spend additional time trying to corral students as they actively protested about not understanding the ‘Do Now’, not wanting to work on the assignment because “it takes too long” to complete, or “having to look through the entire (work) book” to locate the answer.

During one period, a student, the only one seemingly on task, asked Mr. Harvey to check his answer for the ‘Do Now’. Mr. Harvey read the answer, told the boy it was wrong and proceeded to erase his answer and write down the correct answer for him and said, “Now, it’s right.” This was one of several examples of Mr. Harvey not holding his students accountable, even at the level of helping a student to find the correct answer on an assignment as opposed to giving it to them willingly, which ran counter to the school’s creed that encouraged the boys to take responsibility, work hard, and be accountable. The
other students in the classroom did not seem to notice and continued to talk to one
another, now at a conversational noise level, but still obviously off task. Lackadaisically,
Mr. Harvey, still on his phone, tells the rest of boys to complete the assignment because it
is due at the end of class and he will be putting grades in that same day for the upcoming
report card pick-up day.

Obviously, there seemed to be a disconnect between rule enforcement and rule
adherence in Mr. Harvey’s classroom. While Mr. Harvey may not have thought that he
had to adhere to the rules because he set them in place for his students to follow, this
decision had negative consequences on these boys’ perception of Mr. Harvey,
specifically their view of him as a peer as opposed to a teacher. For example, in the
middle of another class period, the students felt comfortable negotiating their punishment
with Mr. Harvey. He got fed up and told the students he will call security if the boys did
not start their assignment. One boy responded by saying, “He isn’t serious. He won’t do
it!”

Likewise, the boys perceived Mr. Harvey as someone they could joke with and
speak to colloquially despite the obvious power differences in place. For example, Mr.
Harvey generally allowed off-topic commentary to occur until he got to a point of
frustration, which was inconsistent and dependent on day and his overall mood. For
example, during popcorn reading, Mr. Harvey joked and said that a student’s voice
sounded like Peter Griffin, a character on the hit sitcom Family Guy. The student blushed
and put his head down for the duration of class, not finding humor in the joke while the
rest of his classmates laughed hysterically. Mr. Harvey laughs along. Another incident
involved Mr. Harvey arguing back and forth with a student. The student made a joke
about Mr. Harvey’s “baby mother” to which he responded by saying, “I have to find her first. Is your Mom busy?” Laughter and yelling filled the classroom. Clearly, the boundary between joking and seriousness and, simultaneously, the roles of teacher/administrator and student, become blurred when the teacher becomes the culprit of sexual banter, like alluding to dating the mother of one of his students.

Similarly, another incident involved a conversation between a student and Mr. Harvey revolving around sexually transmitted infections/diseases (STI/Ds). A student asked Mr. Harvey if he “had ever gotten burned”, which colloquially refers to having received a STI/D. However, it became clear that this was not what the student meant to ask and was referring to a tattoo that he saw on Mr. Harvey’s arm. Mr. Harvey said, “I don’t think you mean burned. You’re asking about my tattoo.” The boy nodded, agreeing with this clarification. However, another student chimed in saying, “No, he meant you got burned in your mouth” insinuating that the teacher had an oral STI/D. Another student says to the initial student, “You’re going to college to major in headography.” Another boy asks, “what does that mean” and they boy who made the comment responded, “Sucking dick with your big head ass!” Mr. Harvey laughed. Once again, rule enforcement became increasingly challenging given the playful relationship Mr. Harvey had with his students, which made it difficult for students to know when to take him or his expectations for maintaining class order seriously. It became unclear, then, the extent to which Mr. Harvey condoned these boys’ use of profane language and sexual discourse or was simply allowing them to express linguistic freedom, which they were largely denied in other arenas of the school given its strict disciplinary climate. Undeniably, though, Mr. Harvey’s lack of intervention spoke volumes even if he did not.
For example, Mr. Harvey rarely interrupted or punished derogatory commentary about women. This was especially significant given the all-boys setting these boys were in and their lack of engagement with women. As such, the allowance of sexual discourse, in the absence of women, inadvertently normalized this kind of hypermasculine, misogynistic rhetoric. In one class period, the students were doing popcorn reading again, yet this time they were reading a story in which the female lead character was struggling with an eating disorder, obesity, and other issues surrounding self-image. While reading about her struggles with eating, the boys erupted in laughter noting that she was probably “eating a hearty breakfast of porkchops.” Mr. Harvey said nothing and called on another student to pick up reading.

There were only two instances in which Mr. Harvey responded to a student by saying that he should not say certain things in the presence of women (referring to me). However, this came only after many sexualized comments by both students and Mr. Harvey went unchecked. Even more, telling the boys to not make comments in the presence of women is not equivalent to encouraging the students to not make such kinds of comments period, especially when women are not around to defend themselves.

The first incident went as follows: at the end of class, Mr. Harvey told the students that he would be absent from class the following day because he was traveling to Mississippi. One student asked if he was travelling to visit a “bop” in Mississippi, which is a colloquial reference used to symbolize a girl that is freely gives fellatio. Other students inquire if Mr. Harvey is going to Mississippi to cheat on his girlfriend. This line of questioning goes on for several minutes as the students tried to pry into Mr. Harvey’s
personal and sexual life. After getting visibly annoyed with their line of questioning, Mr. Harvey finally told them that they should not speak that way in my presence.

The second incident involved a heated debate between two students that, if it did not deescalate quickly, would have led to a physical altercation. The argument started as a conversation about who the better basketball player was between them. From here, things intensified pretty quickly as one student said, “You must like dick because you always talking about me!” Another student said, “I’m not on that gay shit you fucking faggot! Just because your Grandma molested you as a child doesn’t mean I won’t beat your ass! Take your panties out of your ass!” The other student walked out at this point, stating that he “would beat the other student’s ass” if he did not leave the room. After the student left, the teacher finally exclaimed, “There is a female in the room (referring to me)” After the class ended and everyone left the room, both boys apologized to me for their use of profane language but, notably, were not apologetic for the content of what they said. Mr. Harvey never spoke to me about the incident.

The next day in class, the students had a female substitute teacher, Ms. Regal, while Mr. Harvey was away travelling. She wore a whistle around her neck, which I quickly learned was used to command the attention of students without having to raise her voice or yell. Ms. Regal started the class promptly on time with her lesson prepared in advanced. The ‘Do Now’ and assignment for the day was already posted on the board and she told the boys to begin their work immediately. The boys ignored Ms. Regal and continued talking and breaking the class rules per usual. Ms. Regal said, “There’s too much talking, too much fussing, too much anger in this class. Let’s even the tone.” The boys ignored her and continued being on their phones and having side conversations. She
went on to say that she would begin placing checkmarks by the student’s names who were found to be in violation of the school’s code of conduct and would inform Mr. Harvey of their bad behavior. One student responded by telling her that she “won’t do it.” He then proceeded to move his hands in a shooing motion, brushing her off, saying, “Stop talking to me.” Another student said to Ms. Regal, “Get out of your feelings and take your panties out of your ass.” At this point, Ms. Regal began selectively walking around to help the few students with their assignment that seemed to be on task. Taking such drastic measures, like selective teaching, to command respect from students, seemed to be a general trend amongst some of the female teachers at the Brotherhood Academy.

Ms. Barkley’s Honors Science Class

Similar to Mr. Harvey’s English class, the students in Ms. Barkley’s class would spend a majority of their class period talking, yelling, and off-task. However, Ms. Barkley adopted a different strategy for dealing with them, which involved ignoring them and only focusing on the students that were interested in learning and getting their work done. Unlike Mr. Harvey, Ms. Barkley did not engage in colloquial, off-topic conversations with the students. She maintained an air of professionalism and distance, which she thought would allow her to garner these boys’ respect, which was necessary in a male-dominated setting. There were only a handful of students who were consistently on task and did their work every class period; they usually sat together at the same table, segregating themselves from their playful peers (Tatum 2017). Oftentimes, Ms. Barkley would go to this table and teach the lesson directly to them, excluding everyone else. Near the end of class, the rest of the students would usually protest about not knowing what they were supposed to be doing or what the assignment of the day was. Ms. Barkley
seemed unconcerned that the majority of her class did not know what the assignment was due to their disengagement throughout class. From my observations, it seemed that she believed this would encourage them to focus more the next time the class met, but it did not; it only furthered the disconnect between Ms. Barkley and the boys who already had a limited amount of respect for her because she was a female.

In regard to holding students accountable for their actions, Ms. Barkley usually told students to quiet down, get on task, or generally ignored them. Unlike other teachers, she rarely formally punished them. After one class period I asked why she does not punish students or get security involved when they blatantly break the rules and disrespect her authority. She responded, “I have in the past, but I stopped because it won’t do anything. I sent them down before for misbehaving in class and the disciplinarian sends them right back to class or sometimes escorts them back to class and the bad behavior does not stop.” Therefore, instead of continuing to punish these boys, Ms. Barkley noted that she “just focuses on the boys that want to learn.” However, this had unintended consequences, often leading students to perceive that Ms. Barkley was a pushover that would not hold them accountable to following the rules and expectations of the classroom, which these boys took to mean that they could perform whatever kind of manhood within the space that maximized their sense of dominance. However, this was part and parcel of a larger problem within the school: formal punishment does not work, in part, because the teachers and administration are inconsistent in their own practices of holding boys to a higher standard of respect and responsibility. This had trickle-down effects to the classroom level where many of the varied enactments of masculinity occurred.
Like Mr. Harvey, Ms. Barkley’s students often tried to bargain and negotiate the class rules to fit their needs. However, instead of viewing Ms. Barkley as a peer, they often perceived her as a prop. For example, there was an instance where students were working on their science reports in the computer lab and a student had in headphones listening to music while working. Ms. Barkley told the student to take their headphones out and the student refused, arguing that he was “doing his work”. In other words, the boy felt that it should be permissible for him to break the rules given that he was on task. Ms. Barkley did not respond and merely walked away without making the student remove his headphones.

The view of Ms. Barkley as a prop had adverse effects, in part, because of the obvious gender differences between her and the students. What distinguished Ms. Barkley’s relationship with her students from Mr. Harvey’s was that it was not mutual as Ms. Barkley never made profane jokes or sexual commentary that would lead the boys to believe that she was anything more to them than their teacher. The sexualized perception these boys had of their relationship with Ms. Barkley, thus, blurred the boundary of consent given the ways in which they showed her affection or engaged in physical “play”. This was very different from the ways in which these boys interacted and engaged with male teachers, which at most involved a handshake or single-armed hug with chest distance. Therefore, the variation in these boys’ performances of masculinity around female and male teachers, respectively, had major implications for these boys’ subsequent socialization with women, especially given the political moment we are in in which the belief that Black men are contributory to rape culture is endemic (Collins 2004; Alexander 2006).
The kinds of physical play that these boys engaged in with Ms. Barkley included, touching her hair, giving her long hugs that extended downwards to the small of her back, grabbing her neck while standing behind her back, as well as popping her skin with their fingers. Most times, Ms. Barkley physically moved away from these boys to signal her discomfort or unease; however, these boys were either unaware of the gestures she was sending them and/or simply did not care. Either way, their physical touching continued for the duration of my observations. Likewise, Ms. Barkley did not reprimand the boys for these behaviors, so they likely could have erroneously assumed that their behaviors were acceptable. This was confirmed by several other exemplars.

For example, one student would continuously ask Ms. Barkley for a hug at the start of every class period, especially during times in which this student had broken the rules and perceived that a hug might lessen the severity of the transgression. Another student asked Ms. Barkley if she used to be called, “‘Sha Sha’ back in her sorority days?” Sha Sha was the abbreviated version of Ms. Barkley’s first name, which was Shayla. Not only did the student think it was okay to call Ms. Barkley by her first name, but to also gave her a pet name, which they were well aware was a violation of the school’s code of conduct which mandated that everyone be referred to by their surname. There was another incident in which a student tattled on another student, telling Ms. Barkley that the student was talking about her “backside in an inappropriate way”. Ms. Barkley just ignored the comment. Similar to Mr. Harvey’s students, Ms. Barkley’s students lacked accountability for their performance of aggressive masculinity despite the deleterious effects it had in and outside of school contexts.
Unfortunately, these gendered and sexualized interactions were not limited to Ms. Barkley’s classroom, though this was the only female-led class I observed. During my interviews, several students mentioned the gendered and sexualized way that students interacted with female teachers compared to their male counterparts, which led me to believe that they were aware, on some level, of the implications of their performances of manhood that reinforced racialized, gendered, and sexualized scripts. For example, Drako and I shared the following exchange.

INT: Are there things your peers say/do in class that you don’t like?
D: Yeah, like in my math class, no one listens to her ‘cause she a female.
INT: What do you think about that?
D: They don’t respect females. Any other class, they usually don't act like how they act in that class, like they be out of control and I think it's because she a female.
INT: That's interesting. Do you think that it's because it's an all-boys school and you don't have many interactions with women?
D: Mhm.

While the general disrespect and rule-breaking was universal across the classrooms I observed, regardless of the gender of the teacher, I observed that boys’ performances of masculinity differed tremendously based on the gender of the instructor. Whereas it seemed that the boys, in the very least, respected Mr. Harvey, which was highlighted in their comfortability speaking to him colloquially and maintaining a joking relationship, the treatment and lack of respect that the substitute teacher, Ms. Regal, experienced coupled with undesired physical affection and touching that Ms. Barkley endured was telling of the ways in which these boys thought they could take advantage of female teachers by asserting their dominance as the leaders and rule setters of the classroom environment. Nigil, a freshman, confirmed this by stating,

INT: What is the classroom setting like and how does your teachers structure their classes?
N: Well, most of the time the classes are quiet; it might be a few jokes here and there, but most of the time, it's quiet unless it's like a female teacher, then they kind of walk over the teacher.
INT: Why do you think they do that?
N: Because, I feel like it's more dominance.
INT: Do you see the female teachers trying to gain dominance back?
N: They try to, but they just end up calling security.
INT: And security is usually a male person?
N: Yeah.
INT: Generally, do you think your peers will respect a male teacher more?
N: Yes.

This lack of respect for female teachers also seemed derivative of their lack of representation within the school which, if they were, could provide them with more authority over (re)constructing the definition of masculinity that the school enforced. Carl confirmed this by saying,

INT: What about the female teachers? Do you think having female teachers in an all-boys environment makes a difference?
C: Not really because there's two or three at the most.

While this seemed like an easy-enough fix of simply hiring more women to the faculty and staff at the Brotherhood Academy, the entire school climate also needed restructuring, particularly the modes of accountability endorsed versus what was actually administered. Even within classroom spaces that were fairly non-contested, such as homeroom, boys were still receiving racialized, gendered, and sexualized scripts and lax modes of accountability that endorsed, even unwittingly, performances of masculinity that were hypermasculine.

*Homeroom with Mr. Johnson: Alumni Visit Day*

For many students, homeroom was their favorite period of the day. Not only was it a time to catch up on class assignments, pick up missed work due to an absence or suspension, or get a jump start on homework, it was also a time for relaxation. However,
the school defined homeroom as a space intended to provide the boys with an opportunity to reflect on the sociopolitical climate and world news as it related to being a young, Black man in America. This could have been prompted through watching a historical or current film that celebrates Black culture or a discussion of contemporary issues like poverty, urban violence, and police brutality. However, this was rarely the case. Most of the time, the students watched Netflix or used their cellphones during homeroom. Interestingly, though, one homeroom period I observed was dedicated to providing the boys with advice and mentorship on the transition to college.

This Alumni Visit Day consisted of alumni of the Brotherhood Academy from the previous 10 years going around to senior-level homerooms to share their experiences in college and in life since graduating. Initially, I thought this would provide an opportunity to observe the ways in which the Brotherhood Academy positively influenced these young men’s performance and understanding of manhood outside of school; however, I was mistaken. It became abundantly clear that the Brotherhood Academy underprepared these boys for engaging with women.

One alumnus said that the greatest advice he could give to the boys was that “experience matters”. He went on to explain how the women he met in college were accustomed to being around both girls and boys whereas he was not given that opportunity due to the all-boys environment at the Brotherhood Academy. Without going into detail, another alumnus interjected saying, “Girls really be trying to set you up. That’s why I got kicked out of school. I was at a Predominately White institution (PWI) and I had to deal with White girls and rape cases.” Another alumnus said, “If you aren’t getting girls now, don’t go to college and think you gone get them. No girl wants a
Similarly, one boy expressed how women could be “self-interested” and “only concerned with their own advancement”. He said, “Regardless of what ya’ll say about females, they’re in class and getting 4.0’s and passing classes. Some will help, but most will watch you fail while you lay in their bed.” The transmission of these narratives only served to reinforce the hypersexual, gendered, and racialized scripts that have been attributed to Black men as sexually deviant and aggressive (Mosher & Sirkin 1984; Alexander 2006; Hopkinson & Moore 2006; Richardson 2007, Lemelle 2012; Hoston 2016) while simultaneously presenting a stereotypical image of women as docile, manipulative, and self-interested (Steele & Aronson 1995; Collins 2004; Hallett 2007; Ridgeway 2011).

Given these boys’ interactions with the alumni, whose opinions and advice they revered highly, it was important to consider the effects that sustained narratives of hypermasculinity had on these boys’ perception of what it means to be a man in the long run. These boys’ exchanges with the visiting alumni also highlighted the unfortunate reality that they would likely carry these racialized, gendered, and sexualized understandings of manhood and femininity with them to college, the workplace, and other critical sites for socialization.

**Actualizing Hypermasculinity: Racialized, Gendered, and Sexualized Societal and Interpersonal Perceptions and Definitions of Manhood and Womanhood**

To contextualize the foregoing, I asked my interviewees several questions to determine their opinions on societal views of Black men compared to Black women and White people writ large. For comparison purposes, I also turned the question back on the boys, asking them to divulge their own view of other Black men, Black women, and
White people, respectively. Given these perceptions of other racial and gender groups, I asked the boys to define what they thought it meant to be a man as well as where their definition of manhood stemmed from (e.g. the school, a family member, within themselves/based on lived experience, or something else entirely). This line of questioning was purposeful for two reasons: (1) it allowed me to glean how the boys’ varied outlooks on Black masculinity, when compared to other racial and gender groups, informed their own definition of what it means to be a man and (2) I was able showcase how these boys performances of masculinity in the classroom differed significantly from their personal definition of manhood. To the latter point, I will preface this by saying that the boys in my study were hyperaware of the racialized narratives of hypermasculinity that existed about them; however, there was a disconnect between knowledge of these narratives and the unwitting reproduction of these narratives through the performance and internalization of racialized, gendered, and sexualized scripts in the classroom setting while among teachers and peers.

*Societal Perceptions of Black Men*

Overall, the majority of the boys’ understanding of how society viewed Black men were negative. Alfonso said that society viewed Black men, “As gangsters, thugs, all that. Like the White dude that just shot up the club in California, they probably say he has a mental disorder and stuff like that. A Black person could probably not do anything, and we'd get judged cause of our skin color. They try to put out the bad stuff.” Similarly, Steven, a senior, said, “They view us as savages, like they view us as people who don't have common sense.” Joe, a senior, expressed similar sentiments, but also went on to explain how differential power relations informed this negative viewpoint. He stated, “It's
all based on power and money. If people are in this neighborhood, we're seen as low class and people look down on that. The people with money and power to achieve their dream gets looked upon like they did what they had to do.” The maltreatment of Black people was also perceived as being rooted in slavessque narratives of Black men as property and, thus, subject to subordination. Jake also expressed that Black people were viewed, “As a threat. It's installed in our heads since we're young. They (White people) try to be us in so many ways, but they won't admit it. They hate us, but they love everything that we do. Every other race got their reparations for what was done to them (during slavery) and we still haven't got our 40 acres and a mule; we're still treated like crap.”

Other students turned a critical eye to the role of the media in propagating such narratives of hypermasculinity associated with Black men. Bill said,

...a couple of years ago, I was looking at Black people, like it is always Black people that's doing something wrong, but you don't ever see another race doing something wrong and that's because of the media, so it's how we look at ourselves and how everyone else looks at us. I think we're portrayed as savages who don't think; they (White people) just do. (We are) monsters that just like to steal, kill, but there's a reason why we steal; there's a reason why we do everything that we do. You may not like it, but if we're starving, if we're in trouble, we're going to do things to get us higher in the end.

This presumes that in society writ large there is lack of understanding about Black people’s motivation for performing masculinity in ways that are contested (read illegal) yet essential to their survival. Kool-Aid Man, a senior, also expressed his frustration with media narratives, stating,

...a lot of our actions are displayed on TV, like we're always doing these things: rob, kill, all of that. The people who watch the news see this and they're like, 'Oh, these African-American boys are at it again. They're messing up, they're doing all kinds of things, they don't care about anything!' Personally, I don't think that that's right. Society sees African
Deniro, a senior, spoke directly to a harsh racialized and gendered reality: society is not set up for Black men to succeed given the prevalence of poverty and police brutality, which is disproportionately directed towards Black men. He said, “I think society is set up for Black people to fail because there is so much poverty and police brutality and no one is taking the blame for it. If a White police officer shoots a Black person, it's because he felt threatened.” Jay, a senior, spoke to police violence towards Black men as well, viewing White Police Officers as wanting to ensure the demise of Black people at all costs. He said society views Black men “As ignorant monkeys because if they didn't see us like that then they wouldn't profile every Black person they see and treat us like a waste of space. A lot of White Police Officers see these Black men as a waste of space; they want us to keep doing what we do: shoot at each other.” This kind of policing was not wholly dissimilar to what the boys experienced at the Brotherhood Academy within the coercive disciplinary climate. Such parallels between the school environment and the Police highlights why, for some of the boys, the Brotherhood Academy was not easily distinguishable from a prison.

When I asked where he thought these racist viewpoints came from, PR, a freshman, alluded to the cyclical nature of how narratives of hypermasculinity get perpetuated. He said, “Caucasians implant this in their kids and then their kids go to school and plant it in the other kids and then their friends too, so it just happens for generations and generations.” Beyond, the cyclical nature of narratives of hypermasculinity, Jawon also expressed that these scripts were created out of fear, stating.
I think White people fear us. That's why they do so much to keep us down. Prime example, our President right now does everything to keep us down...different races. They fear us. In the song Nas made, he said 'They scared of us, they scared of us.' They fear what we can do with our mind. No matter what we (are) doing...you could be out doing whatever you (are) doing, bad or not, or you could go to college and still come out doing whatever you want to, and they still know we are mentally strong. I just feel like they're scared of us no matter what we do. We could be lawyers and doctors and they'll be scared that we're coming for their job. Black people, I feel, we fail ourselves because we see ourselves as scarier than what White people fear, like you know how some people say, 'Black people do this because they're Black', then why don't you change the view of Black people instead of just saying what Black people do; you could change it.

When Black men begin to see themselves as aligned with what White people fear, they can become susceptible to internalizing the racialized, gendered, and sexualized narratives that were created to invalidate their worth and contribution to society (Staples 1978).

Nonetheless, in contrast to these largely negative views of Black masculinity that inform these boys’ emerging self-concept, their personal view of other Black men was mixed. While some boys viewed other Black men positively, some boys had notable criticisms of their Black-male contemporaries, which was worthy of exploration.

Interpersonal Views of Black Men

On a positive note, Chris spoke about the strength of Black men through the lens of family reunification, which, for him, was critical to ensuring Black men’s ability to strive in and beyond their families and communities. He said,

_We (are) on the come up. We're on the way to becoming more conscious of everything around us. We (are) doing more for the community. The Black male was obsolete at one point, but now we (are) coming back together. The Black male wasn't in the household at one point, but we (are) coming back around. Now, that the Black man is starting to come back into the family, that's when you see the Black family really strive. Not saying the mother can't do because she can, but it's just better when it's a whole unit._
Tyler also talked about the importance of family in his view of other Black men, especially having a father present. He said, “Ugh, I view them as my brothers. We're good people, but we need our fathers to step up and set good examples, like step up and you know, keep people out of the street. Yeah, that's about it.” Again, we see the reemergence of heteronormative scripts of the father as the head of the household and being responsible for training young boys on the transition to manhood.

However, Jake, a senior, was more critical and stated, “A lot of them are confused; they fall right into the trap. They're just playing the game in the White man's world. It's been installed in them to do things this way and they just don't know it or see it.” Similarly, Blade said,

\textit{For me, my personal view (is that) they (are) always trying to kill their own race, but they're not going after White people though. If ya'll got beef with White people, don't be killing all us Black people and trying to be cool with the White people. You can be cool with White people without killing. Make the world peaceful and harmonious. When Black people act like that....they just acting dumb; being somewhere they not supposed to be at.}

It was clear that Blade, just as some of my other interviewees, believed that Black men had not yet reached their full ability, which could be stifling. AJ, a freshman, stated, “We have potential, but we don't strive for greatness, like we're not motivated to do good or anything. Not all of us, but some of us. I think it's the way people grew up. Some people just get doubted so much to the point they just believe it.” This also spoke to the power of narratives of hypermasculinity, which, when internalized, negatively impacts Black men’s self-concept.

Presenting a counterargument to these criticisms, Kool-Aid Man said, “I don't think we should be perceived in this kind of picture actually. I do think we make certain
choices that might lead to messed up acts, but so does every other race; we're no different than them. I think it's messed up that we're differentiated.” Likewise, Marvin R. argues that there are Black men who are doing positive things and others that are not; however, the overarching value of Black men should not be attributed to one portrayal of Black masculinity. He says, “…There are really some Black men out here that are taking care of their business. It's just some Black men out here on the streets and some people just look at that, like you can't base your judgement off of that one image.” Similarly, Jawon said, 

I don't really know how to answer that; I'd have to get specific. I think every Black man is unique; we have our own way of thinking, our own way of doing things. You could go in any classroom right now and ask us the same question and I bet you they all give you a different answer; we all boys, but we all unique… one thing I will say about Black men is that we got to be a little stronger. Some of us having drinking problems or are out here beating on women, so Black people got to be more mentally stronger. I always been this strong or had to because of my little brother or sister. My dad put a lot of responsibilities on me, like he scared me when said if he ever dies, (I have) to take care of my brother and sister.

Taken together, these boys’ mixed interpersonal views of other Black men shed light on the multitude of influences on Black men’s formation of self. These boys are not only combatting hypermasculine scripts that constantly attempt to undermine their value in society, they are also battling pressures to rigidly perform masculinity as outlined by the major sites for socialization that they participate within. These sites, in an attempt to encourage a uniform performance of masculinity rooted in destigmatizing what it means to be a Black man in society, are actually perpetuating a unilateral conception of manhood that is heteronormative and not based on the boys’ unique characteristics or lived experiences, which has negative repercussions for these boys’ view and treatment of [Black] women.
To place these conversations in a larger arena on gender relations, I asked these boys to compare societal as well as their interpersonal views of Black men, respectively, to the extant views about Black women. These boys’ view of Black women varied widely and highlighted the ways in which racialized, gendered, and sexualized scripts impacted certain bodies differently.

For example, Blade did not have much to say about Black women, but he made it a point to emphasize several sexualized stereotypes that exist about Black women, stating, “To be honest, I don't have nothing to say about them. I been near a lot of young, Black women. They act like they want to be on the street. If they want to be like that, then I don't have any control of that.” I asked Blade to clarify his view of Black women and he said, “They act like any other girl on the street act…be selling their body and be out. They can't be acting like all that, but when they find out their parents got shot, they (are) crying like they should have did something better.” I also asked how this compared to how society viewed Black men and he said, “Sometimes, society views Black men as if they don't care about women; they only care about getting to second base and throwing them aside. With Black women on the other hand, they try to get to males and play them and take their money. I can't blame anyone.” Similarly, Ibn said that society views Black women, “Like girls on the street or dirty Black people, like they're supposed to wear fake hair and everything; ghetto.” Alfonso said, “Um, they view them the same as Black men, but it's more lenient towards them. It's some of them that get a lot of judgement too…” Given the all-boys environment at the Brotherhood Academy, these stigmas about Black women became hard to challenge, yet
alone eradicate, which negatively impacted how female teachers were perceived and treated.

While one would think that these stereotypical views of Black women should not exist given these boys’ love and respect for their mothers who are also Black women, I found much to the contrary. Even though these boys revered their mothers, other Black women, specifically their female teachers at the Brotherhood Academy, were often viewed as bodies to be sexualized and disregarded. Nigil theorized that this could be due to the impression management that Black women engage in for the sake of appealing to Black men. He stated, “I feel like they will (Black women) try to downgrade themselves to impress a Black man or something.” Building on this, Drako was able to express his distinctive views about his mother but noted that this was different from the overarching view of Black women in the world. We had the following exchange:

INT: How do you think society would view Black women? Does it compare to Black men or is it different?
D: [laughing]
INT: What would society say about your Mom?
D: That she's an independent, hardworking woman.
INT: So, do you think society would say similar things about other Black women?
D: They should, but there's an image that they're good for nothing.

Drako’s laughter in this situation was interesting and should not be written off as a non-response to the question posed. His laughter was at once a signal of discomfort as well as a portrayal of coolness (Majors & Billson; hooks 2004a; Ransaw 2013). As a tool, humor can be used to exemplify power – or to position these boys as dominant or in control of the situation (Kehily & Nayak 1997), which underscores why the boys were so playful in the classroom setting. In addition, given the seriousness of the question asked – how you think society views Black women – his laughter, even unintentionally, reinforced
normative, hierarchical conceptions of race and gender that locates Black women at the bottom of the social order (Ibid). Logan also used his Mom as an exemplar when describing his mixed view on Black women. He expressed, “Black women, I mean….Black women are crazy; it's positive and negative too. The positive is stay on their good side and you won't see their bad side. Once you see the negative side, you'll wish you never seen the negative side. It's like, I picture both sides for my mama; she did not play.” These societal and interpersonal views of Black people starkly differed from those of White people.

Societal Views of White People

For comparison purposes, I asked these boys to theorize about how these societal and interpersonal views of Black men and women, respectively, compared to the extant collective views about White people writ large. The findings were fairly consistent across the board.

Marvin R. discussed how White people in society are viewed as if they are above the law given the lack of accountability they received for committing perceivably worse criminal offenses than Black people. He said, “They (society) look at them like they got it, like they're superheroes and aren't going to hurt us. If a Black person shoot somebody, they probably shoot one person, but if a White person shoots somebody, you hear about school shootings and them killing their families.” Similarly, Kool-Aid Man said, “For some reason, the things they (White people) do don't get highlighted like African-American young men do. It's mostly Black people that get negatively depicted on TV and it's unfair, I think.” The role of social media and news outlets in shaping these perceptions of White people, just like other racial and gender groups cannot be ignored.
The difference, for Bill, however, was that social media positively impacted his critical worldview (Newkirk 2002). While he grew up holding White men to a standard of near perfection, social media helped informed Bill’s critical disposition on who the real threat to national safety and security was. He stated,

_Honestly, growing up, I viewed White men like people that could just never do anything wrong. I would walk through a group of White men before I walked through a group of Black men. Nowadays, I’m more on social media. Sometimes social media can be a bad thing and sometimes it could be a good thing, but honestly, I learned that the people who are the aggressors are the people in the dark you never know; the people in the suits – the White people in the suits. Those are the guys you got to look out for; those are the enemies, not us._

When I asked why he felt like this, Bill responded,

_Because you just look around you and where I am, you never really think like, ‘They're doing wrong; they're monsters.’ You actually think, ‘Why are they doing this?’ There's always a Black guy on the corner saying, 'Loud! Loud', somebody with drugs or drinking or with guns and things like that. You just think, 'What put them in that position? What did they have to go through at the job? What did they see?'_

As Bill alludes to, the rationale undergirding Black men’s criminal actions should come under scrutiny. In other words, society should seriously consider why Black men were placed in the position to view crime and violence as a legitimate pathway to garnering mobility and success. As a result, Black boys’ internalization of racialized, gendered, and sexualized scripts, despite their deleterious effects, could be purposeful in ways that White people do not have the frame of reference or lived experience to comprehend.

The idea that White people were perfect and could do no wrong was not unique to Bill. Steven, speaking about White men in particular, said, “I feel like they view White men as the perfect people, like they do everything they're supposed to do. Their lifestyle is different than ours, so they don't have to go through the stuff we go through and
actually know the reason why we do certain things. The way they were brought up is different.” I asked Steven to elaborate more on these differences and he said, “I would say they wouldn't have to worry about their parents stressing about certain things, like bills. I feel like they wouldn't have to worry about that. I feel like going outside every day, they wouldn't have to worry about that cause it's like we do because of the areas we live in, the people that live in the area; we have to worry more about that.” Likewise, Jawon brought up a lack of relatability between he and White people, stating, “I haven't had too many encounters with White men, but the ones that I have were all cool. They would ask me how I'm doing on some buddy-buddy stuff. They could always be nice to me and have a smile on their face, but they could never relate. They can be kind, but that's one thing they could never do: relate…”

This lack of relatability could lead White people to become overly curious about Black people. Boogie, a senior stated, “I view young, White men as very curious about our race. I feel like sometimes they'll say things, but they don't really get why it angers us. They're curious, but at the same time, they're dangerously curious about the African-American race.” A potential side effect of White people’s misplaced curiosity could be their ascription of implicit bias – or outright racism. For example, Carl, explains his perception of White people as, “Racist. You know when you go around them, and they be holding their purse real tight. They be quick to call the police if you're doing something they don't like.” Similarly, Logan said, “…Sometimes when you go to a different state, it can be racist because I experienced racist stuff too. There was this one White man, he cussed me straight out. I couldn't do nothing to defend myself.” For Black people, White people’s inquisitiveness could also lead to an outright hatred of White people, as opposed
to White power, which should be differentiated (Bonilla-Silva 2001, 2012, 2014; Doane & Bonilla-Silva 2003). Blade said,

*To tell you the truth, I hate White men because they always got something to say about Black men like, ‘We created this. We created that.’ My thing is, if you created all these things, where is the evidence? Where’s the proof? That’s my thing. The only thing ya'll ever did was enslave us and make us do ya'll bidding. If it was my way, ya'll (White people) would not be on this planet...*

Undeniably, these varied perceptions of Black and White people, respectively, have shaped and informed, even unwittingly, these boys’ sense of pressure to perform masculinity in particular ways both in and outside of school contexts. These societal perceptions, in particular, are something that they carried with them and used to form and reform their own definition of what it means to be a man (Kniffley, Brown, & Davis 2018).

*Defining Manhood*

To contextualize the foregoing racialized, gendered, and sexualized scripts that exist about manhood and femininity (Anthony 2013), I asked the boys to define what it means to be a man and to share who and/or what informed their definition of manhood. Such delineations of manhood should be juxtaposed with how these boys actually perform masculinity in the classroom (as illustrated in the previous section), which has serious implications for the way that their masculinity will get diagnosed in other contexts outside of school.

Across the board, the majority of the boys in my sample held an extremely normative definition of manhood rooted in men serving as providers for their families, taking responsibility for their actions (even the actions of others), and setting a positive example for others to follow (Gilmore 1990; Ingraham 1994; Neilson, Walden, & Kunkel...
When asked what it means to be a man, Cameron, a senior, stated,

*Having responsibilities, holding yourself accountable, holding other people accountable, providing for your family if you have one or providing for loved ones any time you can, being true to yourself and others, and loyalty. Loyalty is an important one, not just to other people but to your beliefs; you got to be willing to die for them.*

Likewise, Chris defined manhood by stating,

*To be a man, you got to be able to take care of your family in an honest way to you. If you (are) taking care of your family in an honest way, even if you (are) slinging dope or something, you still taking care of your family and you're providing for them. Now, one thing I can say is being a man is being accountable for your actions. If you out here in the streets taking care of your family, you should be able to... anything that comes with that, you should be able to take accountability for that like, 'Alright I know what I was doing; this comes with the streets.' You can't be out here in the streets and try to put your wrongs on somebody else. That's not what a man supposed to do. A man is someone who takes care of his family to the best of his capability in the best way he can. You just got to be real to yourself too, don't just be out here following waves and trends and stuff like that...*

Similarly, Marvin J. defined manhood as taking on financial responsibility, “I feel like to be a man you got to be paying all of your bills and taking care of your home. You can live in an apartment, but as long as you pay your bills, you're a man. You have to have a job; that's being a man. I'm not saying being too independent; you want some independence.”

Smart Kid, a freshman, ironically, expressed rule adherence as a part of his definition of manhood, stating, “You have to follow the rules about being a gentleman, get an education, and take care of your kids.” On the contrary, Jay was willing to break the rules if it meant ensuring he was in the optimal position to provide for his family. He stated, “To be a man is really just setting a standard for what you feel is right and take
care of your family no matter what the outcome is. If you can't get a job and you know you have to do this, like go outside and sell weed, I don't care. I'd rather do this, knowing I can't get a job, and still be able to take care of my family and put food on the table.”

When I asked Jay what informed this definition, he said,

J: My father actually sold weed and he sold crack. Literally, he put his life on the line just to provide for me. Even when they were shooting outside, he still came in the house with money or something for me instead of just leaving, like how they describe Black men as deadbeat fathers; he wasn't a deadbeat.

INT: Would you do similar things to provide for your family?

J: Yes, if I couldn't find a job, yes!

Interesting to note, some boys cited being raised by a single mother as shaping their normative outlook on manhood, especially due to the absence of positive male role models in their lives. Bill stated,

We have to be providers, you know. We have to do a couple of things: make sure our families are good, things like that. Honestly, I don't really think highly of a man; I just never looked at it that way. I was raised by a female; that's all I know, female. All I know is that one day I'm going to marry one. I just don't look at men highly; I just don't. Looking at the way my Uncle is, how my brothers-in-law are, I just don't have pride as a man. Not saying I want to be a girl, but at the same time, the choices that are being made, I don't appreciate them.

However, awareness of the important role that Black women played within their family did not alter how these boys engaged with and treated their female teachers at the Brotherhood Academy. To this point, Marvin R. and I had an interesting conversation about what he thinks it means to be a man. While he initially struggled with forming his definition of manhood, he cited a debate in history class on whether a woman can raise a man as causal to his newfound perspective. Despite his initial affirmative view that women can raise men, Marvin R. ironically held fairly traditional and heteronormative values on the performance of gender roles within his future family unit:
INT: Why were you struggling with the question of manhood?
M: Because the question they asked us was, 'Can a woman raise a man?' We had a debate on that. This was the only time in history class that we had fun. I didn't even talk about the article; I was just ready to lay down the facts. I said, 'You all know that most successful men were raised by their Mama? Lebron, Jay-Z, other Black men were raised by their Mama.' I'm close with my Dad, but not really. Me and my Dad aren't even talking right now because of some of the things he does. The Dean has been more of a father figure to me.

INT: Do you think that people expect certain things of you because you're a man?
M: Yeah, not saying they shouldn't, but everybody thinks that because you're a man you're supposed to be the provider of the family; that's a stereotype. Not saying it's right, but it's some people that (think) the woman wears the pants in that relationship and she (should) do all the things that a man supposed to do. He probably just doesn't have that dog in him to grind for his family.

INT: What do you think about that?
M: I think it's funny, but sometimes I don't like it. I think that every man should be the leader of the household and their family.

INT: What if the woman wants to be the leader?
M: They can shine together, but one person can't do all the shining except if it was me, I want to shine on my own. I'm going to tell my wife she can stop working...well it depends.

INT: What if she wants to be the leader of your household?
M: Then she can get another household; she won't be the leader of my house.

INT: What role do you expect her to play then?
M: I'm batman, so she got to be Robin. If I need help with the little decisions, then I'll ask her, but other than that I'll make the big decisions. Not saying that's right, though, because there are some women that want to take on big things and can handle that pressure, but I like the pressure; I like challenges.

This was an insightful exchange. Even though Marvin R. seemed critical of conservative gender roles and expectations on who can and should lead their household, citing examples of celebrities being raised by single women and doing well despite the absence of a father figure, his own personal disposition was rooted in a reproduction of a male-led household in which his future wife would operate in a subordinate position. Thus, Marvin
R. was internalizing a hypermasculine script on normative gender performance within the context of family.

PR held a more equalizing view, holding that the workload between men and women in the household should be evenly distributed. We had the following exchange:

INT: Do you feel like there are certain expectations that people put on you because you’re a man?
PR: Yes, they expect you to provide for your family, but we also have a wife to help with that.
INT: Do you think it should be equal?
PR: It should be equal, like if you have a kid. You helped to make that kid, so it should be equal.

However, PR was the minority in my sample with a similar stance on gender equality within the home.

Taken together, these findings highlight several tensions, namely between principles and practices of masculinity, which will be further explored in the discussion and conclusion section below. Important to note, the implications of these findings are not only relevant in the context of school reform or eradicating the Black male achievement deficit, these findings also have significant insinuations for changing national narratives and discourses around the worth and value of Black men in society writ large through understanding and dismantling racialized, gendered, and sexualized scripts on masculinity within major sites of socialization, like schools (Wynn 1992; hooks 2004b; Phoenix 2009; Corbett 2012; Dumas & Nelson 2016; Nelson 2016; Nelson, Maloney, & Hodges 2017).
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The objective of this paper was two-fold: (1) demonstrate how schools shape narratives of hypermasculinity and (2) illustrate how the creation and maintenance of such narratives inform Black men’s performance and understanding of manhood in and outside of school contexts. To accomplish this, this paper used a mixed-qualitative design of surveys, in-depth interviews, and classroom observations within an all-Black-all-boys high school, the Brotherhood Academy. Despite the school’s convincing and novel mission and value set on manhood and brotherhood being oriented towards dispelling extant racialized and gendered myths about Black masculinity in society, I found that Black boys are bounded by the racialized, gendered, and sexualized scripts – or narratives of hypermasculinity – that are propagated within the school. The perseveration of narratives of hypermasculinity within these boys’ major site for socialization had implications for both their performance and definition of manhood. To systematically present the findings gathered from my in-depth exploration of the Brotherhood Academy, they were broken up into three substantive sections, just as these concluding remarks will be but first a summary of the major findings.

Overview

The first section explored the boys’ school climate, which highlighted the extent to which they benefited, or not, from being in an all-boys learning environment. In addition, this section also highlighted the boys’ perception of the strictness of the disciplinary climate at the Brotherhood Academy based on the kinds and frequencies of punishment they received, which allowed them to draw similarities and differences
between their school and a prison. The second section focused on the boys’ performance of masculinity in the classroom setting and was particularly concerned with examining the moments in which those enactments of masculinity deviated from the school’s expectations of what it meant to be a man. Special attention was given to the instances in which these boys’ performances were aligned with the racialized, gendered, and sexualized societal scripts that exist about them. Lastly, the third section dealt with examining the varied perceptions and definitions (i.e. societal and interpersonal) of manhood and womanhood that these boys contemplated, even inadvertently, while forming their own understanding of what it meant to be a man and perform masculinity. More specifically, this section was interested in teasing out the moments in which there was a disconnect between the manhood these boys expressed as adhering to and/or valuing versus the kinds of masculinity they performed in the classroom among peers, teachers, and myself which varied widely.

Final Remarks on School Climate

As it relates to the school climate at the Brotherhood Academy, the school culture revolved around principles of respect, responsibility, and ritual (also known as ‘The Three R’s’). The mission and value set were also constructed with the sole intention of dispelling the extant racialized, gendered, and sexualized myths that exist about Black men in society through training boys to present themselves in the best light at all times, which involved constantly managing and negotiating the impressions that other people have of them (Goffman 1959) and working arduously to prove them wrong. Successful actualization of this involved performing manhood, as outlined by the Brotherhood Academy, at all times – both in and outside of school contexts, to set an example for the
next generation of young, Black men to follow in their image. An exemplar of this was the boys’ daily recitation of the creed, which aided in these boys’ ability to internalize what it meant to be man. Lastly, embracing and showcasing this definition of manhood necessitated professionalization, which involved ‘looking the part’. This included wearing suit jackets, ties, having their haircut a particular way, and addressing their peers only by their surnames. ‘Looking the part’ also aided in these boys’ sense of command and dominance over their performances of masculinity inside of the classroom; it provided them with a sense of freedom and agency that they lacked in other contexts.

Despite the surface-level benefits of attending the Brotherhood Academy as set forth in the school’s novel mission and value set on manhood and brotherhood, it was critical to explore these boys’ outlook on whether an all-boys setting was beneficial to their learning outcomes and perception of the utility of school. While some boys benefited greatly from being amongst other Black boys exclusively, this was generally at the expense of women being grossly underrepresented within the school. As such, many of the boys I interviewed viewed the presence of girls at the school as a distraction to their learning outcomes and saw no real benefit to having them in the classroom. Beyond the handful of female teachers at the Brotherhood Academy, the absence of women served as not only hinderance to the boys’ ability to have a traditional high school experience, but to gain the proper socialization and communication skills necessary for interacting with their female teachers in school as well as women in the world generally. This was exemplified via the sexualized and gendered conceptions of women’s intrinsic value that were disseminated during the Alumni Visit Day, which highlighted the effects
of carrying racialized, gendered, and sexualized scripts to other major sites for
socialization.

This was also apparent in the boys’ limited definition of women in the world
beyond sexual and stereotypical scripts and tropes, which they expanded upon in their
interviews. Interestingly, most of the boys’ frame of reference for understanding women
were their mothers whom they highly revered. However, the image they held of their
mother was to be distinguished from their overarching view of female teachers as
pushovers and easily manipulated, which was also reflected in their performances of
masculinity in the classroom. Juxtaposed with these boys’ colloquial, peer-like
interactions with their male teachers, like Mr. Harvey, these boys’ treatment of women as
props at the Brotherhood Academy could be framed, then, as a tool for bolstering their
sense of dominance in the classroom.

The disciplinary climate at the Brotherhood Academy, which oscillated between
“over powered” (Marvin R, a senior.) – or overly strict – and very lenient (when
compared to other kinds of institutions, like prisons) based on arbitrary factors, like how
a particular staff member felt on a given day of the week, proved that without consistent
accountability structures in place to hold these boys to the school’s standards for
performing masculinity, these grave gendered outcomes were, unfortunately, inevitable.
For instance, the school’s mission and value set defined accountability as a core principle
of manhood to be facilitated through affirmative and ritualistic acts, such as reciting a
creed and internalizing shared principles of manhood and belonging to a homeroom and
adopting a particular value to embody. However, in practice, accountability was enforced
via formal and strict punishments, like suspension, detention, and expulsion, which we
know has limited success in correcting long-term behavioral problems (Foucault 1979; Ferguson 2003; Rios 2011, 2017; Laura 2014; Kupckik 2016). In turn, these boys’ performances of masculinity that were not aligned with the school’s mission and value set only served to reinforce heteronormative and hypersexualized narratives of masculinity that often went unchecked. This discrepancy between intention and impact could provide these boys with a false perception of how accountability works in other realms of society, which might be more stringent and unrelenting than the staff and administration at the Brotherhood Academy.

In addition, while it is expected for a school’s disciplinary climate to have some variation based on how frequently a student receives punishment or how often they interact with the disciplinarian, the boys’ take on the discipline environment at the Brotherhood Academy varied widely. Specifically, there were students who viewed the disciplinary climate as similar to a prison given the coercive nature of the school structure. For example, much like in prison, students had to wear uniforms, have their hair cut a certain way, and they did not have any freedom over when they could leave school. For example, Marvin J. drew parallels between the presence of surveillance technology, like security officers with walkie talkies, within both institutions (Kupchik 2010; Rios 2011, 2016; Laura 2014). Other students thought that the disciplinary climate at the Brotherhood Academy was slightly different than a prison, citing that they could sometimes break the rules in school, like use their cellphones, eat in the classroom, wear headphones and listen to music, as well as take advantage of the female teachers without getting in trouble, which was telling. The students were able to get away with these sorts of infractions given that certain teachers, like Mr. Harvey, would often show a lack of
regard for the school rules around the performance of masculinity by breaking or not enforcing classroom guidelines, which I observed directly.

**Final Remarks on Performances of Manhood**

At the Brotherhood Academy, I observed morning assembly, which was held every day before the formal start of class, two formal classes, (i.e. freshmen English and senior honors Science), and three homeroom periods (i.e. 2 senior-level and 1 freshmen-level). While in the classroom, I found that although the structure of the school (i.e. the mission and value set) upheld a particular kind of masculinity that they hoped the boys would adopt and perform by the time of graduation, the classroom site, although part and parcel of the same structure, presented itself as a different entity entirely. Within the classroom, the boys could perform different kinds of masculinities based on who their teacher was and the demands of their friend group.

While in Mr. Harvey’s English class, I observed how efforts to hold the boys accountable for alternative performances of masculinity that did not accord with the mission and value set of the school fell short because they were not uniformly enforced or respected. During any given class period, Mr. Harvey could be found stalling the start of class due to a lack of preparedness or by being on his phone. This image of Mr. Harvey was juxtaposed with the classroom expectations that were posted in large font at the head of the classroom, which were mutually agreed upon by he and the students. Not only did Mr. Harvey rarely enforce these rules to students who were found in violation, he would also break them himself by engaging in sexualized banter with his students and allow them to spew hypermasculine, misogynistic rhetoric that often went unchecked.
There were only two instances in which Mr. Harvey intervened on students’ sexual commentary, which only occurred after the incident had already been escalated to an extreme point. Due to this, the boys in my sample were well aware that Mr. Harvey, though revered as a Black-male role model, was someone they could have a playful relationship with. They knew that he was not going to hold them to a higher standard of performing masculinity in ways that did not evoke historical slavesque images of Black men as sexually aggressive and deviant and they used this to their benefit in the classroom. Specifically, these boys used their peer-like relationship with Mr. Harvey as an opportunity to perform whatever kind of masculinity they perceived would maximize their social capital (Coleman 1988) and sense of dominance within the classroom amongst their peers (Levant 1996).

Much to the contrary, in Ms. Barkley’s class, she often had to go to extreme measures of selective teaching to the few students who self-segregated themselves from their playful peers and seemingly wanted to learn (Tatum 2017). The other students would spend the class period talking loudly, on their phones, listening to music, and making several attempts to negotiate their punishment with Ms. Barkley given their perception of female teachers as pushovers. In my conversations with Ms. Barkley, she was well aware that the boys in her class were going to do whatever they wanted to do and there was little she could do about it to hold them accountable. After following the proper protocols for punishing students that were off task and in violation of the rules only to have these boys get off unscathed by the disciplinarian, Ms. Barkley ceased reprimanding the students in her class. The boys, however, took this to mean that they could do whatever they wanted and ‘get over on’ the female teacher.
In actuality, Ms. Barkley was fed up with the lax and gendered accountability structure in place at the Brotherhood Academy that only seemed to be present when she punished her students. To this point, in the absence of women in positions of authority to help shape and inform the mission and values on manhood at the Brotherhood Academy, these sorts of gender inequalities are bound to reoccur (Buchmann & DiPrete 2008; Ridgeway 2011; Lewis & Diamond 2015). In a future study, it will be important to examine the extent to which a teacher can confidently and devotedly enforce a mission, value set, or behavioral norm that they took no part in shaping or, by design, are not represented within. What are the gender differences that get normalized and reproduced as a result?

The gender differences at the Brotherhood Academy were magnified to a dangerous level given the physical relationship that the boys in Ms. Barkley’s class had with her, which was unrequited. While Mr. Harvey would often contribute to the boys’ banter and sexualized discourse, Ms. Barkley always physically moved away from the boys when they would touch and/or make sexual comments about her body, signaling her displeasure. However, this was often ignored, which highlighted a complete lack of respect and regard for the female body or Ms. Barkley’s personal space. Someone other than Ms. Barkley may not have been as lenient with holding these boys’ accountable for their undesired sexual advances.

**Final Remarks on Perceptions and Definitions of Manhood and Womanhood**

Beyond the transmission of narratives of hypermasculinity within the Brotherhood Academy, the boys in my sample were also managing expectations from the media (both news outlets and social media), law enforcement, and their families on how
they should perform masculinity. These boys were hyperaware that the gendered and racialized expectations for being a man that they are faced with differed from those of Black women and White people, respectively, writ large. Therefore, in the last section of my findings, I explored how these boys actualized masculinity in ways that are both reflective of their lived experience but that also feels genuine.

Despite the overarching negative scripts that exist about Black men coupled with the uneven power and privilege that White people in society occupy, these Black boys were not performing masculinity in ways that dispelled the myths about Black men in society (Staples 1978). Instead, these boys had internalized racialized, gendered, and sexist scripts to impress their friends and exude dominance in the classroom; however, this had spillover effects to the other spaces and institutions these boys occupied. The pressure to oscillate between these varied portrayals of masculinity according to the setting and company these boys were in can be both unrealistic and overwhelming as well as disastrous to their psyche and knowledge of self (Goffman 1959; Kniffley, Brown, and Davis 2018).

Also, I found that the majority of the boys in my sample adopted a very traditional, heteronormative definition of what it means to be a man, arguing that manhood entailed caring and providing for their family and children (both financially as well as taking on the leadership role in their household), being responsible for one’s actions through accountability, and being independent. However, in practice, these boys’ performance of masculinity differed tremendously. In large part, this was due to the school’s inconsistent standards of holding these boys accountable to performing masculinity as outlined in the mission. In turn, this created an adversarial learning
environment in which the boys could not realistically meet the school’s expectations of adopting uniform traits, values, and characteristics of manhood. Likewise, the Brotherhood Academy, through its formulaic conceptualization of manhood, was unable to enhance or challenge these boys’ personal definition of what it means to be a man, which was largely shaped by the other contexts they participated in. As a result, the Brotherhood Academy became a site in which the kind of manhood bolstered, despite its intentionality, encouraged conformity as opposed to individuality. Hypermasculinity, thus, became the only script that these boys could access to leverage their positionality in the classroom setting at school.

The priority of manhood for these boys, then, was never exclusively about destigmatizing the image of Black men in society as outlined by the school mission; it involved something more discreet and harder to redress in a school mission and value set alone. Black boys are uniquely positioned to manage multiple masculinities for the purpose of maintaining a ‘cool pose’ for their peers (Majors & Billson 1993) – or vying for dominance in the classroom – however, the sorts of masculinities they perform are often heteronormative and rooted in societal perceptions of Black masculinity as hypersexual and deviant, which can negatively affect their developing worldview and understanding of the historical and contemporary implications of their performances. If a school, like the Brotherhood Academy, is not committed to presenting the multiplicity of Blackness, masculinity, and their intersection, future definitions and performances of Black masculinity in and out of school contexts will continue to be bounded and reproduce racialized, gendered, and sexualized scripts that limit the availability of Black men’s opportunities for mobility.
Implications

While this paper is not arguing that these boys’ performances of hypermasculinity within major sites for socialization, like the Brotherhood Academy, should be taken as their true and accurate understanding of what it means to be a Black man, these presentations of masculinity should be used to reimagine the ways in which boys are being ushered into manhood and simultaneously how these boys are held accountable, beyond punitive means, for their actions. This is especially important if those hypermasculine actions implicate these boys as victims of antiquity whereby they could be framed as sexually aggressive and deviant. These slavesque images of Black men have all but become formally institutionalized in society (Alexander 2010); however, they are some of the most powerful scripts that exist about Black men and have and will continue to be used to justify positioning Black men as causative to the emergence of the #MeToo movement.

Dispelling such narratives of hypermasculinity and their hold on Black men, will require a comprehensive restructuring of places like the Brotherhood Academy, which, while well-intentioned, disseminate a unilateral definition of manhood that is flawed for several reasons: (1) there is no universal Black-male experience, thus an institution can and should not train Black boys on how to be men without understanding the complex, unique lived experiences and skillsets they individually possess, (2) discussions of manhood cannot effectively be had without first having a conversation about personhood (i.e. what does being a good Samaritan entail?). By racializing and gendering the training these boys receive on identity formation and the transition to adulthood, these boys will always look to other major sites for socialization to provide them with similar patriarchal,
normative preparatory tools for the real world. Lastly, (3) the lack of female, non-cis-gendered, and LGBTQ-IA+ staff at the Brotherhood Academy is not representative of our current society (Alexander 2006; Pascoe 2012). Given that schools are students’ primary site for socialization, it is critical that the faculty and staff are archetypal of diverse communities and lived experiences, which these boys will have no choice but to interact with in college or the workforce post-graduation. In the absence of these kinds of diversity, what remains is a racialized, gendered, hypersexualized conception of masculinity that is bound to get reproduced and reinforced in and beyond school contexts.
APPENDIX A:
SURVEY

Biographical Info Sheet

1. Name

2. Where do you live (address or neighborhood)?

3. Where do you go to school?

4. Describe your neighborhood (in terms of race, class, gender, or any other salient features of the people who live there?

5. How far is the closest grocery store from your house?

6. How far is the closest healthcare facility from your house?

7. How far is the closest bank from your house?

8. Do you like where you live? Why or why not?

9. Do you consider your neighborhood safe? Why or why not?
Table 1: Descriptive Statistics Based on ‘Biographical Survey’ Administered Prior to Interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception of Neighborhood Safety (e.g. based on presence of crime, social disorder, and sense of security and/or general well-being)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Safe</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsafe</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conditional</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception of Diversity Within Neighborhood (e.g. based on race, class, and gender of people who live in the neighborhood)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heterogenous (e.g. the neighborhood is predominately comprised of people of a different race- and class-based identity than the participant)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homogenous (e.g. the neighborhood is predominately comprised of people who share the same race-and class-based identity as the participant)</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response*</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proximity to Basic Resources (e.g. including grocery store, bank, hospital/urgent care within 5-mile radius)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Close</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Far</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response*</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Affinity to Neighborhood: “Do you like where you live?”</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*'No response’ = respondent left question blank on survey
APPENDIX C:
INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

Family

1. Describe your relationship with your family.
   a. Who do you live with?
   b. Does your parent(s) or guardian(s) work?
      i. What is their job?
      ii. Do they make enough money to support you and the cost of living?
         1. Do they receive any government or state-issued financial benefits?
            a. If so, do these benefits help?
            c. What is the highest level of education your parent(s) or guardian(s) completed?
            d. Is your home environment safe?

School

2. How do you get to school every day?
3. How long does it take you to get to school?
   a. Who and what do you encounter en route to school?
4. How would you describe your school?
5. Describe your school day (i.e. class schedule).
   a. What’s your favorite class?
i. Why?

1. Describe the classroom setting?
   a. What do other students say/do that you like/dislike?
   b. What does the teacher say/do that you like/dislike?

b. What’s your least favorite class?

i. Why

1. Describe the classroom setting?
   a. What does the students say/do that you like/dislike?
   b. What does the teacher say/do that you like/dislike?

Student Engagement

6. Describe your teachers.
   a. Do you like them?
   b. Do you feel like you learn from them?
   c. How do the teachers and administrators treat you at school?

7. Describe your relationship with your peers.
   a. Have you ever experienced peer pressure or bullying?
      i. If so, what was the reason?
         1. Have you informed a teacher or the principal?
            a. If yes, what was their response?
            b. If no, why not?
         2. Did your peers stop their behaviors?

8. What extra-curriculars are you involved in at school?
   a. Do teachers or other school personnel support you by attending these events?
i. If yes, how does that make you feel?

ii. If not, why do you think this is?

**Discipline + Punishment**

9. Have you ever served detention or been suspended from school?
   a. What was the alleged offense?
   b. Did you think the punishment was fair?
   c. Do you receive other kinds of punishment in school?
      i. How often are you punished in these ways?
      ii. Do teachers explain why they punish you?
         1. How does their response (or lack thereof) make you feel?
         2. How does this make your family members feel?
         3. What is your response to being punished?
         4. Did you stop the behaviors that you were punished for?
            a. Why or why not?

10. Have your close friends served detention or been suspended from school?
    a. Do you know what the alleged offense was?
    b. Do you agree with the punishment they received?
       i. Why or why not?

11. Overall, how do you view the disciplinary climate at your school?
    a. How does the disciplinary climate at your school compare to the criminal justice system outside of school?
       i. In what ways is it similar or different?

**Criminal Record/Arrest History**
12. Have you ever been arrested?
   a. If yes, what was the alleged offense?

13. Have you ever been profiled by the police?
   a. On what grounds (race, gender, class, clothing, something else)?
   b. How did this make you feel?
   c. How did you respond?
      i. Did you report this incident?

14. Have you ever committed an illegal act in and/or out of school?
   a. What was it?
   b. Why did you commit the act?
   c. Was it a one-time act or is it ongoing?

Post-graduation plans

15. What are you planning to do after graduation?
   a. Is furthering your education (at any point) an option?
      i. Why or why not?
      ii. Do you feel like furthering your education, in general, is advantageous?
         1. Why or why not?
   b. How do you plan on making your dreams come true?
      i. Whose help do you need?
      ii. What are the resources you need to access to do so?

Big-Picture Reflection

16. How do you think society views Black men?
a. Is there any truth to this viewpoint?
   i. In what ways is it true or untrue?

b. How do you think your teachers view Black men?
   i. Where do you think their viewpoint comes from?

c. What is your view of other Black men?
   i. Does anyone hold similar views as you?
       1. Who are they?

17. What about young, Black women?

   a. How do you view them?
   b. How does your teachers view them?
   c. How does society view them?
   d. How do these views compare to views of Black men?

18. What about young, White men?

   a. How do you view them?
   b. How does your teachers view them?
   c. How does society view them?
   d. How do you think these views compare to views of Black men and Black women?

19. What does it mean to be a man?

   a. Where does this definition of manhood come from?
   b. Do you know anyone that holds the same view as you?
       i. Who do you know that holds a different view?
   c. Are there certain expectations people have of you because you’re a male?
i. Are there certain expectations you have of yourself because you’re a male?

ii. How does this differ from expectations people have of females?

“***This concludes the formal interview. Thank you for your participation. Do you have any questions for me?”


41. hooks, b. (2004a). *We real cool: Black men and masculinity*.


