WATERING SEEDS:
THE SOCIALIZATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN ADOLESCENT MALE MASCULINITY

BY

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THESIS

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Abstract

When it comes to looking at the African American males' conception of manhood, there is a need for future research exploring the entire life span in order to get a better understanding of the socialization process that takes place as well as shifts in masculinity ideology that will occur throughout the course of a lifespan. In order to understand the traumatic experiences that are attributed to the intersectionality of race and gender for African American males, it is necessary that we begin to examine the socialization settings as much as the socialization process in order to full comprehend the influence that masculinity has during the adolescent stage of development. The purpose of this study is to explore the socialization of masculinity for African American adolescent males enrolled in a youth intervention program in Illinois. In order to explore such a phenomenon, the research design utilized qualitative methods, specifically an observational case study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2011) composed of a participant observations, a questionnaire, and focus groups in order to acquire natural, rich data that will provide answers to the guiding research questions:

1. How do they define what it means to be man?
2. What social agents have shaped their definition of what it means to be a man?
3. How has their perception of what it means to be a man impacted their lives?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

To be black and male in America, positions one to be classified as an "endangered species" due to their cultural adaptations in response to the systemic economic and social pressure imposed upon them by society because of their race and gender difference (Hunter & Davis, 1994). Carter G. Woodson *(2010)* expressed concern for the youth due to the belief that the *miseducation* process began during the adolescent stage of their lives, for both boys and girls, cultivating "deeply rooted insecurities, intra-racial cleavages, and inter-racial antagonisms" (p. 6). According to Parham and McDavis (1987) African American male adolescents are both creators of and created by influences that emanate interactions among cultural, structural, personal, and contextual factors (p. 282). Currently, there have been very few studies that have focused on the socialization of masculinity ideologies for African American adolescent males and the impact it has on their lives. The purpose of this study is to explore the socialization of masculinity for African American adolescent males enrolled in a youth intervention program in Illinois. In order to do so, the study will be guided by the following questions:

1. How do they define what it means to be man?
2. What social agents have shaped their definition of what it means to be a man?
3. How has their perception of what it means to be a man impacted their lives?

Dr. Phillip Bowman (1989), a social psychologists at the University of Michigan, proposed that there needed to be a shift in the way that researchers studied the perceptions of manhood (p. 142). Furthermore, when it came to looking at the African American males' conception of manhood, especially among African Americans, he suggested that future research needed to look at the entire life span in order to get a better understanding of the process that takes place as well as the shift in one's ideology that occurs throughout the course of a lifespan. Bowman (1989) went on to state that among Black men, who are higher at risk for chronic role strains and related psychological, the problems that they face do not just occur at a point in time;

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"they evolve out of interactions between past role experience, immediate role barriers, and adaptive efforts" (p. 142).

In order to understand the traumatic experiences that are attributed to the intersectionality of race and gender for African American males, it is necessary that we begin to examine the socialization settings as much as the socialization process in order to full comprehend as the influence that masculinity has during the adolescent stage of development. However, the truth is that African American males learn what it means to be an African American man from a variety of sources, which makes it difficult to single out a dominant force when it comes to their socialization process (Staples, 1978, p. 122). Harris (1995) suggests that the process of forming a masculine identity while being exposed to conflicting norms and values can be stressful for African American youth (p. 279). Depending upon their environment, many African American male youth have redefined their masculinity ideology to encompass sexual promiscuity, mental and physical toughness, thrill seeking, and the use of violence to express themselves in order to be acknowledged as a man by other members of society. Harris (1995) attributes the development of such a discourse as a means of "compensating for feelings of powerlessness, guilt, and shame resulting from their inability to enact traditional masculine roles" (p. 280). Although African American adolescent males are both, "creators of and created by influences that emanate interactions among cultural, structural, personal, and contextual factors" (Parham & McDavis, 1987); there is a need to identify the agents that heavily influence their socialization in order to develop ways to enhance their masculinity literacy and provide an alternative progressive masculinity discourse.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

This study is framed by social constructionism and the Vgotksy's social learning theory. In order to understand the context in which I analyze the cadets' discourse and behaviors, descriptions and critiques of the aforementioned frameworks are provided below. Ultimately, I acknowledge that although masculinity is socially constructed – as well as femininity – it still must be promoted, accepted, and enacted as a part of a socialization process that begins as soon as the sex of humans are assigned when they are born.

Social Constructionism

Social constructionism refers to the figured worlds[1] unique to every individual is made real by way of social processes and interactions (Young & Collin, 2004, p. 375). The knowledge that we acquire is created by the institutions that govern us, and disseminated through the social practices that take place in and between social groups. According to Young & Collin (2004), the knowledge is sustained by the social processes that manifest in various ways throughout society (p. 376). This is made possible because the knowledge is historically and culturally specific as the language use shapes the figured world of individuals rather than reflects reality. In doing so, the language then becomes both a pre-condition for thought in addition to a form of social action (Young & Collin, 2004p. 377). As a result social construction theorists argue that the focus of inquiry should be on the interaction, processes, and social practices that contribute to the development of these figured worlds. In order to do so, social constructionism does more than just suggest that something is socially constructed, it points to the historical and cultural implications for analysis. According to McGuire, Berhanu, Davis III and Harper (2014), the "traditional" ideology as to what it means to be a woman or man, in terms of how one should act

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[1] Figured worlds are simplified, often unconscious and taken for granted theories or stories about how the world works that we use to get on efficiently with our daily lives. We learn them from our experiences which have been guided, shaped, and normed by the social and cultural groups to which we belong (Gee, 2010, p. 95)

according to their gender, is socially constructed[2] (p. 260). One of the most frequent critiques of social constructionism is that it is grounded in the fact that the construct is either not real or that it assumes reality (Stam, 2001).

Social Learning Theory

Leo Vygotsky's social learning refers to the notion that human beings simultaneously negotiate their social role in relation to other people while developing their understanding of society and the ways in which it works as in addition to the how language works. This process is continual, starting when we are children constructing knowledge that will guide our development over the course of our lifetime. Most important, Vygotsky argued that the mind cannot be understood in isolation from its surrounding society. By accepting the notion that one's socialization influences the learning process that takes place within an individual – no distinction as to whether or not it is positive or negative – I am willing to argue that although masculinity is socially constructed, it must still be introduced and cultivated within individuals according to their culture. Critics of Vgotsky's social learning theory – typically biological theorists - argue that Vgotsky completely ignores the biological state of the individual. More specific, he rejects the differences individuals have in terms of their genes and difference in learning types.

Vgotksy (1978) posed that "learning may play a role in the course of the development or maturation of those functions activated in the course of learning; development or maturation is viewed as a precondition of learning but never the result of it." (p. 80). In addition, he adds that "learning is completely and inseparably blended with the process of development" (Vgotsky, 1978, p. 81). When it comes to social constructs, the development of the accepted constructs goes hand in hand with the learning. Specifically, one's masculinity ideology will change over the course of one's lifetime as the individual continues to learn new things about what it means

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[2] Individuals learn from their parental/guardian influences, peer interactions, and the media's message about expected behaviors of them as gendered beings

to be a man, accepts them, and then embraces the development process that enables them to achieve the status in both discourse and behavior. As a result, social learning theory was chosen as a framework to provide a tested theory that will enable me to truly assess the impact that the participants culture has on their perception of what it means to be a man in addition to the ways in which their perception has impacted their lives thus far. Despite common critiques of Vgotsky, his social learning theory acknowledges that males are learning what it means to be a man at the same time that they are developing into man, and the most important contributors during this process is the various social agents that they will encounter. Meanwhile, their significance of certain social agents will have a different impact on each participant. For instance, the literature speaks to the impact that fathers have in the socialization of masculinity but that does not mean that we can overlook that every male will have their fathers in their lives. For those that do not, the significance of a "traditional" social agent will differ but that does not mean that it will necessarily be a positive or negative difference because there are other social agents that will come into play.

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

The following literature review is composed of constructs that are integral when it comes to understanding exactly what masculinity is, the gender norms associated with it and the ways in which it differs according to one's culture.

Masculinity Ideology

Levant and Richmond (2007) define masculinity ideology as, "an individual's internalization of cultural belief systems and attitudes towards masculinity and the role of men" (p. 131). Masculinity ideology - which is heavily dictated by members of the middle class – informs males - from various cultures, races, and ethnicities - of the behaviors that have been deemed socially acceptable and unacceptable for them. Within the last two decades, there has been a shift by researchers utilizing social constructionism to gain further insight into masculinity ideology. One of the first to do so was Dr. Joseph Pleck, he proposed that masculinity should be viewed as a cultural construction moving forward, in contrast to the psychological and biological perspectives that were leading the field at that time (Pleck et. al., 1993, p. 14). Pleck et al. (2008) stated that "masculinity ideology is the individual level construct that links individual males to their culture's construction of masculinity" (p. 88). In addition, Pleck, Sonenstein, and Ku (2004) suggest that the important fact of men's lives is not that they are biological males, but that they become men through a complex process of interaction with the culture which educates as to the gender scripts that are appropriate to their culture. In other words, males act in the ways they do, not because of their male role identity, or their level of masculine traits, but because of their conception of masculinity internalized in response to their socialization within their culture.

In spite of the ability to formally assess the masculinity of individuals, America is grounded in traditional masculinity which has led to the informal evaluation of the masculinity of others. When it comes to the "traditional" masculinity ideology, a common criticism made by social construction theorists is that the gender role norms, according to Brannon's "blueprint for manhood", allude to there being a single standard or set of expectations for masculinity. Nonetheless, this is an invalid assumption in light of the differences that exist within cultures. Because masculinity is a social construct, ideals of manhood may differ for men of different social classes, races, ethnic groups, sexual orientations, life stages, and historical eras (Levant, 1996, p. 261). As a result, social construction theorists suggests that we should no longer refer to masculinity as singular, but that there is a need to acknowledge it as masculinities due to the complexity that it encompasses (Pleck et. al., 2004, p. 90). Moving forward, we must remember that, "the male gender role is characterized by a set of expectations for male behavior, and these expectations are constantly changing" (Pleck et. al. 1993, p. 18). This change can result in internal conflict if the male is incapable of becoming the man that he aspires to be according to his own masculinity ideology.

Abrue, Goodyear, Campos and Newcomb (2000) found that traditional masculinity ideologies develop when boys begin to internalize cultural norms and expectations about appropriate behaviors from families, relational groups, and society (p. 75). These norms than serve as a means for them to process information about themselves and the world as they see it. Wade & Rochlen (2013) determined that "the conceptual formulation of traditional masculinity ideology in contemporary American culture has focused on gender norms that have various negative consequences such as anti-femininity, homophobia, emotional restrictiveness, competitiveness, toughness, and aggressiveness (p. 2).

Gender Role Norms

According to Sinn (1997) there needs to be a distinction between the types of gender norms that are associated with the "traditional" gender role (p. 120).

> **absolute norms.** These are norms that dictate how men should act simply because they are men. An example of an absolute norm would be "a man should never back down when facing trouble"

> **relational norms.** There are norms that dictate how men should act in relations to others, such as women, children, etc. An example of a relational norm would be "Father are better able than mothers to decide the amount of a child's allowance"

However, Pleck et al., (1995) argues that masculinity ideology is grounded in absolute norms with little acknowledgement of relational norms. Such a viewpoint can encourage women acquiring any type of job, while being adamant that it is unacceptable for men to embrace subordinate roles. For example, one may have no issue with female fire fighters while at the same time struggle to support male secretaries.

> **correlates of the male role.** After conducting a literature review on the male role, Thompson Jr., E. H., Grisanti, C., and Pleck, J. H. (1985) identified four possible correlates: (a) homophobia; (b) type A behavior; (c) self-disclosure; (d) decision making power in relationship, of the male role.

> > *homophobia.* American males are expected to conform to enact a heterosexual lifestyle, meanwhile condemning those who do not adhere to the pressures of society to do so. Thompson Jr. et al. (1985) suggests that homophobia may be more than just the rejection of homosexuality, but a component of a broader theme of anti-femininity promoted in the male role (p. 424).

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type A behavior. Thompson Jr. et al (1985) determined that type A behavior, in

men, is enacted through rapid speaking, impatience, preoccupation with work,

concern about being evaluated by peers and supervisors, in addition to the general

"aggressive, competitive" nature of men (p. 416).

self disclosure. "Men, especially those who adhere to the "strong and silent"

masculinity ideology, are said to have difficulty disclosing personal details about

themselves, even to significant others (Thompson Jr. et al., 1985, p. 416).***"***

decision making power in relationship. Thompson Jr. et al. (1985) speculate that

"the drive to be self-assured, decisive, and independent is the basis for men

tending to use greater decision-making power and assume leadership roles in

interpersonal relationships" (p. 417). As a result, there are behaviors and

attitudes, according to the individual's culture, that have been identified as a

means to maintain power and control in various situations, not excluding love

relationships.

Pleck et al., (1995) argues that masculinity ideology is grounded in "absolute norms"

with little acknowledgement of "relational norms". Vygotsky would suggest that these norms

will differ according to the culture of the individual.

Black Masculinity

For this literature review, I am going to focus solely on the African American and the

development of their masculinity ideology, typically referenced as "Black masculinity". Harris

(1995) expressed that the enactment of "Black masculinity" has both costs and benefits, but the

standards and norms associated with this alternative tend to lead to more negative consequences

than those that chose to adhere to the "traditional" European American male role norms (p. 280).

Unfortunately, "Black masculinity" is framed as a problem, in which, "Black men are portrayed as troublesome or deviant, docile, and hyper-sexual, yet refusing to take ownership of their family responsibilities" (Hammond & Mattis, 2005, p. 115). The negative portrayals of the African American man enacting "Black masculinity" has contributed to the misrepresentation and negative perceptions associated with this population, which have further decreased, the majority of the population's, opportunities for social mobility. The middle class, those who have the most influence on masculinity ideology, have yet to nor do they appear to be working on providing an alternative and equitable form of masculinity for African American males (Roberts-Douglas & Curtis-Boles, 2013, p. 12). Nonetheless, there is a consensus among Black scholars and activists that the unidimensional concepts associated with manhood are problematic and maladaptive because they do not provide the tools necessary to meet challenges and overcome the obstacles that come with being Black and male (Hunter & Davis, 1994; Robert-Douglass & Curtis-Boles, 2013).

Cool Pose

According to Franklin and Boyd-Franklin (2000), the quest for visibility[3] for African American men is determined by the choice that all must make to decide as to whether or not they are willing to suppress the attributes that are deemed acceptable by Whites, and the society at large (p. 35). Ultimately, they must choose between "a societal assimilated identity based on Anglo-European norms and an identity incorporating the distinctiveness of being African American (p. 35). This choice is made as an attempt to overcome the psychological impact of repeated encounters of prejudice and racism due to them being identified as and treated according to the stereotypes associated with black men (Wade & Rochlen, 2013, p. 1). For some,

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[3] Invisibility syndrome is "an inner struggle with the feeling that one's talents, abilities, personality, and worth are not valued or even recognized because of prejudice and racism" (Franklin & Boyd-Franklin, 2000, p. 33)

rather than engaging in the daily choosing as to whether or not to remain true to themselves, there is the opportunity to adhere to the alternative which manifests in the form of "cool pose"

"Cool pose" is "a ritualized form of masculinity that entails behaviors, scripts, physical posturing, impression management, and carefully crafted performances that deliver a single, critical message of: (a) pride; (b) strength; (c) control in response to the daily struggles that African American face (Majors & Billson, 1992, p. 2). It is arguably the case that for African American males, the alternative masculinity ideology serves as a coping mechanism that can be utilized to empower them and render them visible to a society that refuses to acknowledge their existence, at the least as equals, as men. Although the primary goal of "cool pose" is to portray a calm demeanor in addition to a false sense of control amidst the social chaos, discrimination and trauma that they are subjected to, it has enhanced the negative social and academic outcomes of those that adhere to it (McGuire, Berhanu, Davis III & Harper, 2014). Majors & Billson (1992), suggest that the actual striving for masculinity hinders African American males because it is grounded in the masking and suppression of their feelings. Those that embrace "cool pose" mask their feelings by expressing themselves through their enactment of the discourse of those deemed cool: (a) pimps; (b) athletes; (c) entertainers. Majors and Billson (1992) used cool pose to explain as to why African American males, in comparison to their peers, are more likely to: (a) die earlier and faster from suicide, homicide, accidents, and stress-related illnesses; (b) be deeply involved in criminal and delinquent activities; (c) be suspended from and drop out of school; (d) have more volatile relationships with women. Unfortunately, this discourse of masculinity will continue to exists among African American youth, and develop into African American men that enact "Black Masculinity", as long as the opportunity structure for other expressions of their masculinity remain blocked by the forces of institutional racism.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes a qualitative research paradigm to explore the socialization of masculinity ideology for African American adolescent males enrolled in a youth intervention program in Illinois. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2011), qualitative research is "an approach to social science research that emphasizes collecting descriptive data in natural settings, uses inductive thinking, and emphasizes understanding the subject point of view" (p. 2). Furthermore, I chose to conduct an observational case study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2011) utilizing a questionnaire, participant observations, and focus groups in order to acquire natural, rich data that will provide answers to the guiding research questions. I have chosen to conduct focus groups and participant observations because humans poses both a private and public identity. Walker (2004) states that one's private identity is reflective and vulnerable whereas their public identity is visible and peer oriented. Initial observations will be used to learn more about the participants as well as provide direction for questions that will be posed during the focus groups. With that being said, each method would provide a different lens of the cadets masculinity ideology, both consciously and subconsciously. In order to conduct a sound observational case study, there is a need to identify a good physical setting to study that is used in a reoccurring way by the same group of people (Bogdan & Biklen, 2011, p. 61).

Site

For the study, I conducted the research at a youth prevention program, in Illinois, oversaw by Illinois National Guard to provide "at-risk" youth with a second chance by equipping them with a General Education Degree (GED) in addition to the support and resources needed to enroll in a community college or enlist in the military. For the last twenty-two years, the program has conducted two sessions per year, in order to achieve their goal of graduating eight

hundred cadets. The program consists of two phases that span over the course of a year and a half. In order to graduate from phase one – residential phase - cadets must complete objectives taught during two hundred hours of classroom instruction in addition to daily activities. The objectives - established by the National Guard Bureau – are as follows:

1. Academic Excellence
2. Job Skills
3. Physical Fitness
4. Leadership/Followership
5. Health, Sex Education & Nutrition
6. Life Coping Skills
7. Responsible Citizenship
8. Community Service

Each cadet must complete all objectives in order to graduate from the residential phase of the program and move into phase two.

Phase two – post residential phase – consists of the cadet returning to their community to continue their education or enter the job market. The goal of phase two is to encourage continued growth and change over the course of twelve months – the length of phase two – and beyond. During this time, cadets are eligible to receive a financial stipend and scholarship to assist them with continuing their education, vocation, or other job related training. In addition, they are assigned a mentor responsible for aiding the cadets in their pursuit of the goals that they set for themselves.

Participants

In order to participate in program, cadets must meet the following requirements:

1. 16 to 18 years old at the start of class
2. participate voluntarily
3. a resident of Illinois
4. a United States citizen or resident alien
5. have withdrawn or been expelled from previous high school
6. have no court cases pending
7. have no felony convictions, not on adult probation
8. drug free at time of processing

9. mentally and physically capable to complete the program

At the time of the study, the program was in their second month of the first phase. When the session began, there were two hundred and thirty-nine cadets with sixty-one percent coming from Cook and neighboring counties. One hundred and eighty of those cadets were male, all of whom were placed into four different teams – the Wolf Pack, the Wrecking Crew, the Spartans, and the Dawg Pound.

While casing the joint – a process in which the researcher will explore the site in question in order to make informed decisions about the research design, documents to collect, people to interview, and actions to observe (Dyson & Genishi, 2005) - it was brought to my attention that the Dawg Pound was the least acclimated to the program's culture, resulting in over half of their cadets being moved to another team or getting kicked out of the program. At the time, there were only thirty-one cadets remaining from the initial seventy-four cadets that started the program as members of the Dawg Pound. According to staff, most of the cadets were kicked out for fighting, sneaking in illegal substances, or voluntarily withdrew from the program because they refused to abide by the rules. Many of the fights were race related between themselves and the White and Latino cadets. Taking into account the culture of the Dawg Pound – as well as the fact that they only had thirteen students that self-identified as Black and/or African American – I decided that I would focus the study on these cadets. The low number of African American cadets was ideal because I would be able to include all of them in the study – preventing any cadet becoming alienated from their racial group. It was apparent that teams were divided by racial groups, evidenced by White, Latino, and Black cadets gathered in different areas of the classroom, lunchroom, and common areas. In addition, thirteen cadets allowed me to conduct

two focus groups – the initial plan was two to three – because the ideal number of participants in a focus group is six to eight (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013).

Cadets. It is imperative that I take the time to introduce each cadet in order to put his ideals, both verbally and non-verbally, in context. It is my hope that by providing the reader with such information, one will be able to see each cadet as an individual in contrast to being a participant in a study. Furthermore, doing so will allow the reader to gain a more in-depth understanding of the complexities that comes with researching masculinities. Despite similarities – race, gender, and class – the cadets have very unique ways in which they choose to enact their masculinity. However, one cannot overlook the manner in which their masculinity ideologies have resulted in them all being in the same program for "at-risk youth". There is no denying that post completion of the study, as well as the program, that their enactment of their masculinity ideology will heavily influence the paths in which they will chose for their own lives.

Jet, at eighteen is one of the oldest cadets to participate in the program, as well as the study. Since he was eighteen, he did not need parental permission to participate in the study, and he did not hesitate to let the other cadets know that they were still babies. Jet's father died when he was younger, so he grew up with his mom, two sisters, and older brother. Jet's mother is a high school principal, and his all of his siblings have either graduated or were enrolled in a post-secondary institution. Jet dropped out of high school because he felt as though selling drugs would provide him with a better quality of life in contrast to getting an education. Prior to enrolling in the program, Jet was in and out of juvenile detention for selling drugs. In addition, he was shot in the back of the head when he was sixteen years old by the "opps" – slang term for the opposition. Jet

expressed that he knew it was inevitable – that he would get shot – because there were a lot of people that envied him and his cousins because of the amount of money that they were making and the materialistic things that they had. He went on to explain that getting shot is a part of the "game" – selling drugs – hence he isn't afraid to die, but he is afraid to spend an extended part of his life locked up in prison. Jet was the "OG" - slang term for original gangster, a nickname given as a sign of respect among peers – and he was treated as such by his African American peers on the Dawg Pound. Jet joined the program because he knows that - according to the law – he can now be charged as an adult if he continues to do the same things that he was once doing which increases the likelihood that his worst fear will come true.

Kevo, who was seventeen years old, was chosen to be one of four squad leaders – each team is split into four squads - by staff and his peers. Kevo has the respect of all of his peers, not just his African American cadets, because he accepted responsibility for all cadets on the Dawg Pound. Kevo was observed helping the Latino and White cadets with their homework while the other African American cadets choose to work together away from the other racial groups. Kevo lived with his mother who works in a day care, father who is a security guard, and his two siblings. He is the only cadet who has a positive relationship, if any relationship at all, with his father. He has an older brother who he does not talk to because their relationship is strained due to a number of physical altercations. Both his parents attended college but did not graduate. His mother works at a day care and his father is a security guard. Kevo dropped out of high school because he would constantly get into fights with peers that were the "opps". When his mother refused to transfer him to another school, Kevo stopped going to school and started

working full time at a local daycare. Kevo's reason for joining the program is to position himself to be a "working man" like his father as well as make his mother proud – she was disappointed when she learned that he dropped out. After the program, he intends to move to New York to live with his aunt and start a new chapter of his life.

Tre is anxiously waiting to become a father at the sixteen years old. Tre lived with his mother, a security guard, and some of his siblings. His relationship with his father is no different than the relationship that his father has with his other ten kids – different mothers - due to being in and out of jail most of their lives life. He is very close to his older cousins, who are two to three years older than him, they exposed him to having sex and selling drugs during middle school.   The decision to drop out of school was made when Tre realized that he could make more money if he wasn't wasting eight hours a day in school. In addition, going to school increased his chances of getting caught and locked up for one reason or another.   His reason for joining the program is because he wanted to position himself for a better life so that he can be a father to his unborn child.

Zay, who is also eighteen, does not have the same status among the group despite having a similar background to Jet. Unlike Jet, he does not brag about past to the other cadets. Zay lived with his mother, a medical assistant, and little sister prior to being kicked out of the house when his mother learned that he was involved in a gang. He then went to live with his father who sells drugs to fund the pursuit of his rap career. Zay stated that he dropped out because he was more focused on navigating his community than on performing in the classroom. Upon the completion of the program, Zay is going to enroll in a community college in order to transfer into a university that would allow

him to pursue a career as veterinarian. Every night, Zay likes to lay in his bed in deep

thought about his future while staring at the stars – which are harder to see back where he

is from.

Kobe, who is sixteen years old, is known as the hot head of the group. He admits

that his temper has constantly gotten him into trouble at home and at school. His mother

told him that he gets his temper from his father, who is currently locked up and has been

for awhile. As the oldest of three siblings, he would take care of his siblings while his

mother worked in the local factory. With pride, Kobe considers himself to be a mother's

boy because he did not have to resort to selling drugs, like the others, because his mother

took care of his needs and wants. As early as fifth grade, Kobe recalled feelings as

though his teachers did not care about his education. At one point, he said that he went

an entire year with a series of substitute teachers that lacked the knowledge, skills, and

resources necessary to teach him and his classmates. Eventually, Kobe dropped out

because he didn't feel the need to waste time going to school and when he did attend he

usually ended up getting into fights with peers. Kobe didn't want to enroll in the

program, he was dropped off by his mother and not given the option to return home

without completing it. After graduation, Kobe intends to enroll in a community college

in hopes of transferring to a more competitive collegiate football program in order to

make his dream of playing professional football come true.

Skip, the self-proclaimed best entertainer (dancer) during the current session, has

been dancing as an amateur for a few years. At sixteen, he aspires to have a career

similar to Chris Brown so that he can take care of his mother, younger sister, and older

brother. Over the course of the study, Skip's sexuality was constantly subjected to

ridicule because he is a dancer. On most occasions Skip will ignore the other cadets, but he will respond verbally when he has had enough. Skip admits that he would get into a lot of fights at school, and the reason that he refrains from doing so is because the program is a second chance for him. Throughout the course of the study, Skip's participation and demeanor were very inconsistent because he was struggling with no longer having a child on the way due to a miscarriage.

AM, at sixteen, is treated as the little brother of the group despite being the same age as most. He lives with his mother, who is active in the military, four siblings and his step-father. His biological father is currently locked up for selling drugs. AM shared how he would try to sell drugs in order to get "street cred" – respect from his peers in the community – but it would usually result in him getting beat up and robbed. He admits that he is no longer at his high school because he was too busy trying to follow in his father's footsteps, but enrolled in the program because he wants to change his life and be a better role model for his little brother. The cadets were adamant that some people are not built for the game, and AM is one of those people. Over the course of the study, he consistently has got into many verbal altercations with his peers – many of which would have become physical if cadets weren't worried about getting kicked out of the program. Instead of putting their hands on him, the other cadets would take his money, dessert, and clothes. Similar to a big brother, his peers would not allow cadets from other teams to "bully" AM in any way, shape, or form.

MC has spent his entire seventeen years as an only child with his mother - who is a registered nurse. He does not know much about his father. His mother kicked him out of the house when she learned that he was fighting dogs for money. MC had been kicked

out of numerous schools for various reasons, and eventually dropped out when he learned that he could make money for fighting dogs. MC enrolled in the program after hearing about it from a former cadet who previously completed the program. After graduation, he intends to enroll in a community college, with Kobe, in hopes of transferring to a more competitive collegiate football program in order to make his dream of playing professional football come true.

Tez, Flo, Chubbs, and Cutty were extremely reserved throughout the course of the study. According to the questionnaire, they had a lot in common such as being sixteen years old, their father were in out and out jail growing up, and they dropped out of high school because they struggled and didn't feel like anybody cared to help them. When asked about their plans after the program, neither of them were able to answer the question simply responding "I don't know!"

Role of the Researcher

For the observation portion of the study, my role will be classified as a participant observer. Taking into consideration the cadets that I will be working with, there is a dire need for them to trust me. During my initial site visit, I heard cadets questioning as to whether or not I was a representative of the judicial system because I was dressed according to my work dress code – tie, button down shirt, slacks, and dress shoes. As a means of building rapport with the cadets, I made sure that every time I was on site I was dressed according to my culture – urban. I was very intentional about wearing the latest shoes and clothes – fortunately this is a part of my own identity outside of the workforce.

When I was introduced to the staff and cadets, they were informed that I was a student at the University of Illinois coming to observe them and that they were to give me the same treatment attributed to staff. Initially, this created a barrier because cadets are required to

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address all male staff as sir. I immediately informed them that they do not have to call me sir, and that my only expectations is that they will treat me with the same respect that they would like me to treat them with. In order to earn their trust, I subjected myself to a series of questions that they strategically asked to get an understanding of who I am and whether or not I could be trusted. Questions would be about my fashion, leisurely activities, where I was from, and what I planned to do with my degree. If I did not adhere to their interview process, I more than likely would not have been able to conduct the study at this site because they would have been less likely to be honest with me about certain things that were critical pieces of knowledge necessary for the effectiveness of the study.

Data Collection

    Participant observations. According to DeWalt and DeWalt (2010), participant observations are a method in which "researchers take part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of a group of people as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines and their culture" (p.1). Bogdan and Biklen (2011) defines it as an "approach to qualitative research where the researcher is simultaneously a participant and an observer spending prolonged periods of time in the subject's natural environment, unobtrusively collecting data" (p. 274). Each observation – three were conducted over the course of two weeks - lasted roughly two to three hours in locations where cadets had the freedom to interact with myself with little concern for the ramifications for what they said or did. Observations took place in the classroom, barracks, cafeteria, common area, and the "trap"- an empty room converted into a weight room when a former cadet donated a bench press and some free weights. During this time, I observed the cadets' discourse as well as their interactions with each other, staff,

and myself in hopes of gaining an understanding of the ways in which they enact their masculinity. Observations were jotted as scratch notes and were then written up as field notes immediately after I left the observation site.

Questionnaire. Harris (2014) defines questionnaires as the "information collecting tools of survey research" (p. 1). He goes on to explain that questionnaires not only dictate how we think about issues, but also what we choose to do with the information that we acquire. Prior to developing the research, I had to consider what information I deemed necessary to provide insight into the cadets' backgrounds. Doing so allowed me to gain knowledge about who they were prior to the program, as well as potential common themes that were worth exploring during the focus groups. Harris (2014) advises that questionnaires be administered after the qualitative research is conducted, doing so allows the researcher to better understand what to ask in the questionnaire as well as how to ask it. The questionnaire was developed and administered after the participant observations with intentions of obtaining the following information about each cadet (a) age; (b) hometown; (c) last high school attended; (d) parents' education level; (e) parents' profession; (f) number of siblings (age and gender); (g) are they sexually active (if so what age did they become sexually active); (h) do they have children.

Focus groups. The focus group is a particular type of group interview where the moderator – researcher or evaluator – asks a set of targeted questions specific to elicit collective views about a specific topic (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013). Focus groups allow researchers to capture what it outside their capacity for direct observation. Furthermore, it allows for researchers to gain an understanding as to how events and issues are interpreted by subject populations by integrating their multiple perspectives.

Typically, researchers are then able to discover and explore new concepts that may present themselves as a result of the group dialogue that they will facilitate either by using structured or semi-structured protocols.   A couple of the questions posed were: (a) what do you think it means to be a man; (b) who or what has shaped your view of what it means to be a man.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is described by Bogdan and Biklen (2011) as the process of systematic searching and arranging of transcripts, field notes, and other materials that are accumulated in order to enable the researcher to come up with findings. The analysis of the data began by coding the focus groups by looking through the transcriptions for reoccurring words, phrases, and ideals that stood out. Afterwards, I developed coding categories in order to better sort and analyze the qualitative data. The codes themselves were more activity, event, and narrative in nature – all focusing on their socializations of masculinity. With the different codes in mind, I went through the field notes in chronological order looking for matching or contradicting discourse and behaviors that supported or negated the views shared by individuals as well as the group. I then look through the questionnaires to see if there were any similarities among the cadets that could possibly influence their responses to the questions posed in the focus groups. After completing the coding process, I revisited the focus group transcriptions in search of support for the existing codes in addition to seeking out new codes that may have been previously overlooked. The final step was sharing my interpretations with the entire group in order to authenticate their credibility. During this dialogue, cadets were given the opportunity to elaborate for clarification if they felt the need to do so.   I concluded data analysis by placing codes in themes to be utilized for the development of assertions for my findings.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore the socialization of masculinity for African American adolescent males participating in a youth intervention program in Illinois. Based on the data, three overarching themes presented themselves throughout the questionnaire, participant observations, and the focus groups. First, their masculinity ideology aligns with the "traditional" hegemonic masculinity that is circulated, accepted, and practiced throughout America. Second, their perception of what it means to be a man has been heavily influenced by the various social agents that they have encountered throughout the course of their lives. Third, their masculinity ideology has drastically impacted their lives in ways that have hindered the opportunities for upward mobility available to them to achieve the quality of life that they desire.

A Man's Gotta Do What a Man's Gotta Do

Overall, they defined a man by his ability to showcase his heterosexuality, toughness, power, authority, competitiveness, and the subordination of gay men in order to be perceived as a man by society (Frosh, Phoenix & Pattman, 2002). Most important, the cadets expressed that a man is achieved manhood status based on his ability to do what he has to do in order to take care of his responsibilities – regardless of his age, race, class, or education. While some admitted that they lacked an understanding of what a man is, every cadet seemed to agree with Flo when he said that "a man is not a man if he is not taking care of his responsibilities." These responsibilities varied according to one's circumstances and perception of what they are responsible for. Furthermore, they supported the notion that a man's actions should speak louder than his words – an ideal presented to the group after Skip commented that "a man doesn't try to push a car with his mouth." Kevo added:

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A man is recognized as a man based on his actions, not on how he looks. A man can be from anywhere and come in all different sizes, shapes, and colors but all that matters is that he is doing what he gotta do to keep the lights on!

Social Agents

According to Vygotsky's Social Learning theory, their perception of what it means to be a man has been influenced by the environment in which they are socialized. An example of such is provided when AM explains that "everything a man is, is determined by what he has been through." The following are the social agents that were mentioned to have influenced their views as to what a man is.

Product of my environment. The cadets were adamant in their belief that the environment in which one resides has a significant impact on the man that boys become. When asked what influenced the man that they aspire to be, Kevo answered:

> It's all about your environment. If you hang around with a bunch of immature ass kids you're going to be an immature ass kid. You hang around with some wise men, you gone learn from the wise and be very wise, and if you grow up around working men then 9 times out of 10 you will be a working man. It's all about your environment, if you around gang members than you gone be a gang member, that's just how it is. It's all has to do with your environment.

Skip responded that "a man is defined by the way he comes up and that a man cannot be a man if he did not go through anything." AM added "everything a man is, is determined by what he has been through…a man doesn't give up when hard times come." For many of them, hard times were constant in their households headed by a single mother. As a result, when they saw an opportunity to help their mothers they did not hesitate to do so regardless of whether or not it was illegal. Kobe defended the actions of his peers when he pointed out "sometimes the wrong way is the right way when it is the only way!" Many of the cadets admitted that they resorted to illegal means in order to help their mothers take care of their family.

My father was supposed to teach me. Out of the twelve cadets that participated in the study, only one felt that their father served as a positive role model for what it means to be a man. When asked if there was anybody who shaped their perception of what it means to be a man, Kevo responded, "My daddy shaped my view of what it means to be a man." Jet stated that – unlike Kevo - he didn't learn how to be a man from his father – who died when he was younger – but does feel that men are necessary for the development into manhood because "a man will teach another male how to be a real man, will show a young man how to be a grown man by giving him all the basics as to how to be a man." Others – Cutty, Chubbs, and Tre – did not hesitate to admit that they did not know what it means to be a man. AM pointed out that, "our dads were supposed to provide an example, so we could at least know the basics." Tre – who has a child on the way – admitted to the group that he is worried about being a father stating "I can't show my son – assuming he has a son – how to be a man because I'm not a man yet and I truly don't know what it means to be a man." He went on to say that his father has never really been in his life because he has been locked up for most of his life. As a result, he and his older cousins have been forced to learn what it means to be a man on the fly – their fathers are also not in their lives – through various experiences in their neighborhood.

My mama is my father. The role of mothers in the socialization process was apparent as most of the cadets attributed their perception and enactment of manhood to their mothers. Flo acknowledged that he never had a father figure – his father is currently locked up - and it was his mother who taught him how to be a man. AM agreed saying that his mother "taught him how to be a man, what a man looks like, and how a man acts…she had to do so because his father was never around!" He went on to say that "women are

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the main factor when it comes to what makes you a man." Flo agreed stating that "I didn't start thinking about the type of man that I wanted to be until I saw my mama struggling to pay bills and my daddy wasn't helping." Skip went on to say that the birth of his baby sister – when he was seven years old – triggered his thoughts about being the type of man that protects his family. He stated that, "it was the moment when I held her for the first time that I realized that I was going to have to beat people up in order to protect her when she got older."

At one point during the focus group, Tre initiated deep thoughts by his peers when he suggested that "anybody can be a man, male or female. My mom is a man to me, she is my father and I trust that she can teach me how to be a man!" Following this comment, there was a long period of silence as the cadets were clearly struggling – according to their facial expressions and body language - as to whether or not they should accept or reject this notion. Jet was the first to respond:

> I don't think it is right, but I do know that there are women that know how to be a man. As I see it, woman can raise men to be men, they can raise men better than some of the dudes that I wouldn't call men, cuz every male is not a man…some of these dudes out here act like females.

Kevo emphatically refused to accept that woman can raise a man, despite the contradiction in his statement, "I don't think that a female can help make you a man, other than making you grind harder!" Zay admitted that he wasn't sure if he agreed or disagreed but acknowledged that his mother was the one who taught him that no matter what, "a man has gotta do what a man's gotta do"

Although the cadets appeared to agree on the significance of having a male role model, many of their initial responses - to my inquiry as to who were their role models – were similar to Kobe's who responded, "I don't have a male role model, my OG – slang

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term for mother – is my role model because my dad has been locked up my whole life."

Tez agreed that his mother was also his role model, but not because his father was locked

up or dead. He went on to share that, "my dad doesn't work so my mother takes care of

everything. He really doesn't do anything except sit around all day. I always tell myself

that I'm not going to be like that!" This ideal served as a form of support for the

previously mentioned idea that the cadets struggled to accept – gender norms typically

assigned to men. Cadets used this view to justify their acceptance that women can not

only raise men, but that they can also serve in male capacities – previously stated by Tre

and Kobe. The group as a whole consistently stated that a man "sacrifices to take care of

his responsibilities" because "ain't nobody else gonna take care of your responsibility."

For the majority of the cadets, they have watched their mother sacrifice to put a roof over

their heads, clothes on their backs, and food in their stomachs all in the name of doing

what needed to be done in order to take care of their responsibility. In the end, that is all

that matters – doing what you have to do to get things done.

The athlete, the criminal, and the entertainer. When asked to identify men that they

look up to, they mentioned prominent athletes, criminals, and entertainers with one

outlier – Bill Gates. The mentioning of Kevin Durant, James Harden, Jay-Z, 50 Cent,

and Chris Brown aligned with the Cool Pose ideology as African American male youth

are force fed these images of cool. Even Kevo choose to name an individual that he has

seen numerous times on tv rather than naming his father who he truly admires. When

questioned as to why they choose these individuals to look up to, the cadets responded

that each individual was able to overcome their circumstances by way of accumulating

wealth that would enable them to do whatever they want including taking care of their families – more specifically, their mothers.

Masculinity Ideology and Lived Experiences

When asked as to whether or not their perception of what it means to be a man has impact their lives, their responses included their experiences in school, relationships with others, and the illegal means they resorted to in order to take care of their responsibilities. In addition, their observed behaviors and discourse would showcase that their masculinity ideology also impacted sexual activity and homophobia.

School. All of the cadets acknowledged the value of an education and agreed that it was the best way to achieve upward mobility in society. However, each one of them is no longer enrolled in a traditional secondary education institution due to different circumstances that were common for each cadet but each choose to deal with it in a different way. Kevo expressed, "I always knew that it was important for me to go to school. It was the people that I went to school with that made it hard for me." Kevo was constantly getting into fights at school, when asked as to why he could not walk away he responded "If I walk away, it'll make me and my guys look like a bunch of bitches and I will get clowned on the block…so I had to either get down or don't go back to school!" The cadets supported his decision because the worst thing to do is take a L – lose a fight – or be viewed as a bitch by one's peers. After asking his mother to transfer him, he then decided to get a job and no longer go to school in order to avoid conflict. On the other hand, Tre dropped out of school to sell drugs because he felt that doing so allowed him more money – to take care of his responsibilities – as well as decreased the likelihood that he would get incarcerated. Kobe stopped going to school because he felt that his

teachers didn't care to teach him, he recalled one year in which he didn't have a teacher so his class was taught by various substitutes throughout the course of the school year. Chubbs admitted to no longer applying himself because school got harder as he got older and his mother only rewarded him financially for As and Bs. As a result, he resorted to making money in the streets.

Peer relationships. When it came to their relationships with peers – both at school and at home – the cadets advocated that their pride and right as men were at the forefront when it came to handling certain situations. Ironically, they pointed out that pride is the reason that a lot of men die where they are from, all because they don't want to be perceived as a bitch. Jet explained that he now understands that he was shot because he was living his life for the wrong reasons, prior to that moment he was living to entertain others and make his peers jealous. That jealousy is what resulted in him being shot but someone who hated the fact that he was sixteen driving a BMW while they were waiting on the bus. Tre chimed in, "There is nothing like knowing that niggas his age and older niggas were hating on him because he was getting money, fresh as hell, and riding clean while they walking!" When asked as to why they were motivated by the hate, cadets stated that it is a part of their culture, "It's all about Guns and Butter" – *Baby Boy* reference. Kevo said that the most important thing to him is that nobody would think that he is a bitch, including his own family. He was passionate when he stated that he is going to fight his brother when he sees him because his brother snaked – sucker punched – him at the grandmother's funeral. Kevo then added, "We can be cool after we fight, but first he gotta know that he ain't gonna get away with that shit!"

Illegal activities. Kobe stated that "there is a right way and a wrong way to do things, and sometimes the wrong way can be the right way!" For many, they resorted to the wrong way to take care of their responsibilities – for most was helping their mothers take care of the bills. MC was kicked out of school so much that he knew it would be hard for him to get a job worth keeping. As a result, he ended up fighting dogs in order to make money. He admits that he didn't see much wrong with it, but knew that he was in the wrong due to his mother's reaction when she found out. Despite not needing to do so, AM started selling drugs in order to receive the respect of his peers. Unfortunately, it resulted in him receiving less respect after constantly being beaten up and robbed. Throughout the course of the program, AM continued to be bullied by the other cadets because they felt as though he was not built for the game that he has tried to gain status in. Many of whom have urged him to choose a different path before something bad happens to him, but he fears that once he returns he will do the same things that got him in the program. All of the cadets were emphatic in that they are not scared to go to jail, but they are afraid to spend extended periods of their lives locked up in prison.

Sexual activity. Nine of the cadets self-reported that they lost their virginity during middle school – ranging in age from twelve to fourteen. The other three lost theirs while in high school, either fourteen or fifteen. Even though they completed the questionnaires on their own in silence, it is possible that the cadets may have reported what they felt their peers would also report. When asked the significance of becoming sexually active the cadets stated that there motivation to doing so was because they would no longer be viewed as lame –slang term for uncool – by their peers and older family members. Tre told a story during middle school in which he was guided into a room by his older

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cousins – in the room was a naked girl of high school age – and told that he better not be a bitch. Chubbs said that his first encounter occurred when his uncle had a grown woman give him head, he was twelve at the time. At one point, I asked the cadets if they regretted losing their virginity. The overwhelming response is that although their lives became more complicated after they started engaging in sexual activity, they have come too far to even imagine life without it. Jet explained, "It's this toxin inside of us, these hormones that we get the urge to release"

Homophobia. Time and time again, Skip was called gay by his peers – mostly behind his back. When he introduced himself, he expressed that he was the best dancer in the program. I overheard the cadets laughing saying that he's gay because he dances and that "men don't dance, females do!" During the women's history month program, Tre pointed out Skip dancing to the group and whispered to him, "Look at that fruitcake, always dancing, he even dancing while he sits." When telling the group the reason why he lost his virginity – girls were attracted to him sexually because he could dance – one of the cadets mumbled that he was gay. Skip addressed the comment saying "I don't care what y'all think because I get way more pussy than you!" After inquiring as to why some of them think that he is gay, Tre clarified "He may not be gay, but he acts…feminine, like a female." Tre explained that dancing is meant for females to do on guys and "most guys who dance are gay whether openly gay or down low." Kevo added that there are certain things that guys don't do, like get their nails done.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study is to explore the socialization of masculinity for African American adolescent males enrolled in a youth intervention program in Illinois. I was able to achieve this purpose by utilizing participant observations, a questionnaires, and a focus group to gain insight into their conscious views and subconscious discourse and behavior. Throughout the course of the study, it was apparent that the cadets struggle with their understanding of what it means to be a man. Even those that were willing to admit that they did not know what a man is contributed to the conversation with definitive statements as to what differentiates a man from a boy. As males, we are all socialized to understand the gender norms that we are expected to adhere to. Despite being from different neighborhoods, the cadets appear to have very similar views of what it means to be a man and how men should act. This was evident when the cadets consistently talked about providing for and protecting their families – both are accepted gender role norms assigned to males according to the "traditional" dominant masculinity ideology. The bigger thing is that the cadets have been accustomed to believe that these standards are the sole determining factors as to whether or not one can be perceived as a man. In order to further understand why this is the case, there is a need to explore not only their neighborhoods, but the males that they have encountered over the course of their socialization. Unfortunately, these expectations that they have placed upon themselves – taught to them through their enculturation process – are exactly what contribute to the gender role conflict and strain that is prevalent amongst the African American male population.

Taken into consideration their definition of what it means to be a man – doing what needs to be done to take care of one's responsibility - the ability to achieve the status is heavily determined by the opinion of others as to whether or not one is doing what they should be doing

as a man. This supports Vygotsky's Social Learning Theory in it that cadets are simultaneously

negotiating their social role in relation to other people while developing their understanding of

society and the ways in which it works. However, the cadets consistently contradicted

themselves when statements such as Jet's notion, "if you're a man, you don't care about what the

next man thinks" was supported as fact. Jet received the upmost respect as the leader amongst

men despite sharing that everything that he did was to receive the approval – whether jealousy or

admiration – of his peers. Jet was later kicked out of the program for sneaking in illicit drugs, it

was rumored that he did so in response to pressure from his peers outside of the program. For

Kevo, his need to not be viewed as a bitch resulted in him jeopardizing his future by dropping

out of school in addition to maintaining his role in a strained relationship with his older brother.

Most important, many of the cadets motivation for joining the program was to position

themselves to do something different with their lives in order to make their mothers proud of the

man that they have become. Prior to being kicked out of the program, Jet shared with the group:

> "How do I do different when it is all that I know? I see other people going down a path
> that I know that I shouldn't go down but I don't see an alternative. I want to be a good
> father, with a good job so that I can take care of my family just like I am supposed to, but
> I don't know nobody that has done it?"

Outside of Kevo, the cadets' limited view of the options available to them are a direct

reflection of the lack of exposure to different men of color other than the over-saturated athlete,

entertainer, or criminal. From the beginning, the cadets would acknowledge that they were

surprised to learn that I was working on my doctorate merely because I looked like them – not

just race, but also fashion and demeanor. Unfortunately, my presence and various conversations

did not help them to see that they are still in a position to do whatever it is that they would like.

Outside of Zay, the other cadets foresaw themselves working to take care of their families with

intentions to make sure that their sons will remain engaged in school and ultimately acquire a

college education. The others – Kobe and MC – who mentioned possibly going to college are

not going in pursuit of a more obtainable career. Their motivation for doing so is the pursuit of a

career as a professional athlete which there are views arguing in support of or against this being a

positive.

In order to change the current trends associated with African American males, there is a

need for studies seeking the answer to Jet's question. The issue is not that an alternative does not

exist, but that they were not provided with an alternative by their families, schools, communities,

the media, and other social agents. Despite being from different communities, their masculinity

ideology and enactment according to their beliefs as to how one achieves manhood was similar

for each cadet. Their belief that one's environment dictates the type of man that boys will

become proves that there is a need for the exploration of various African American communities

in order to better understand the ways in which they influence the outcomes for their youth.

More specifically, we need to identify the people, places, or things that are deemed necessary or

detrimental to the development of the African American adolescent males.

Implications

As a result, there is the need for the development of a progressive Black masculinity that

will change the course of the future for Black men. Not only must we change the dominant

ideology that is transmitted throughout the Black community, but we must also provide

alternative images that combat the current images mass produced in the classroom, the media,

and throughout society. In addition, there is a need for the development of new policies and

procedures developed and implemented in the institution of education. Numerous studies, such

as the annual report by the Schott Foundation, have shown the ways in which current policies

such as zero tolerance and No Child Left Behind have disproportionately impacted Black male

youth in terms of their discipline rates, graduation rates, and post-secondary enrollment. For many of the cadets, they felt that engaging in illegal activity was more of a necessity rather than a choice because education was no longer a valid option to accessing a better life. The current policies have limited the opportunities for Black males to achieve upward mobility, resulting in the acceptance of illegal alternatives – in order to do what it is they feel that they need to do. The study conducted by Harper and Davis III (2012) debunked the notion that Black males do not care about an education, support for this was provided in the responses of the cadets. However, the cadets' stories revealed the ways in which the current policies and procedures led them to make a misinformed decision as to whether or not getting an education would make a difference in their lives.

Limitations

Overall, the program in which the cadets were studied was a limitation due to its military culture and strict structure. The timeframe in which the study was conducted was reduced to three months, rather than two months, because the administration preferred to have a month with the cadets in order to get them acclimated to program. During this time, they tend to lose a lot of cadets for various reasons which impacted the number of cadets that could have participated in this study. After casing the joint, I planned to conduct the observations in their classroom seeing that it was one of the only time in which cadets were not in the presence of their staff – active or retired members of the Illinois National Guard or reserves. However, this changed after the first observation because their staff would sit outside the classroom as to police the cadets while they were in class. In addition, there were a number of instances in which observations were postponed because the cadets had to participate in a community service project or public appearance throughout the state. The biggest inconvenience is that three of the initial twelve

cadets – Jet, Cutty, and Tez - were kicked out of the program within a month of the study

starting. This change resulted in a different vibe when meeting with the cadets to discuss my

findings, as well as eliminated one of the cadets who contributed to the conversations the most.

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