Disrupting Discourses of Failure: Counter Narratives of Black Male Students and Academic Success

Brandi N. Williams
Syracuse University

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Abstract

In the twenty-first century, African-American males continue to be significantly “left behind” academically in comparison with other ethnicities and even compared to their female counterparts. Nonetheless, there appears to be one school that has been situated to have the “antidote” for this gap. This working case study draws on an interview methodology to investigate the programming experiences of alumni, former faculty, current faculty, and administration from a predominantly all-Black male school with a reported 100 percent graduation rate that is situated in the nation’s third largest school district. Through a critical race theoretical lens, the interviews present narratives that counter the dominant narrative of the failing Black male in U.S. schools while presenting voices of dissent that create a counter narrative challenging the programming and reported “success” of graduates from Urban Prep.
Disrupting Discourses of Failure:
Counter narratives of black male students and academic success

By

Brandi Nicole Williams
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MASTER’S THESIS

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Introduction

“There’s nothing in particular besides I went to a school that they didn’t get a chance to go to or they just didn’t get to go to a school that was serious about education” (Alumnus B, personal communication, July, 2012).

“Every course that I encountered really focused on the importance of African American history, which really motivated [me] to succeed in life” (Alumnus A, personal communication, July, 2012).

In an article of the representation of Black males in educational research, Haddix (2009) discusses the state of some Black males in regards to their writing habits and the role the United States’ education system plays in shaping students’ views or beliefs in their educational abilities. She posits “is it that African American boys are failing in our schools OR that our schools are failing African American boys?” (p. 343). My position is the latter. One of the ways this claim is made visible is through the starkly low percentages of Black males graduating from high school in comparison to other ethnicities. The Schott Foundation for Public Education in Cambridge, Massachusetts provides state-by-state data and information on the nation’s best and worst school districts for Black males every two years in a report entitled Yes We Can: 2010 Schott 50 State Report on Black Males in Public Education. The most recent report revealed that only 47 percent of Black males in the United States graduated in the 2007/2008 academic years in comparison to 78 percent of White males. In diagram one, The Schott Foundation mapped out the numerous amounts of states that were graduating 60 percent or less of their African American male students per year, while highlighting the small group of states where African American males had a greater chance of graduating at higher percentage rates.
According to the diagram, the states flagged in red graduated less than 50 percent African American males enrolled in their high schools; and those that are pink were not far behind with only 59 percent of their African American males graduating high school. What is astonishing about this data set was that the nation’s top three largest school district’s (New York City Department of Education, Los Angeles Unified School District, and Chicago Public Schools, respectively) were in states graduating less than 60 percent of African American males. If our largest school districts were having trouble graduating Black males, then the success rates of smaller school districts should seem bleak. However, according to this data set, eight of the 51 states have managed to graduate over 70 percent of their Black male students. If nothing else can be taken from the Schott report, one may tell that there is a will and a way being exerted by a few in an attempt to close the achievement gap and raise the graduation rate of Black male students.
However, those that are attempting to change the course and dialogue about the academic potential of young Black men are up against decades of scholarship that has made generalizations towards an entire ethnic group. Throughout the late 1980s, the 1990s and even more recently in the early 21st century a vast amount of scholarship concentrating on Black males and their involvement with society had exclusively focused on unfavorable one sided research that painted negative brush strokes of an entire community. Scholarship reporting rises in incarceration and crime (Alexander, 2012; Mauer, 1997; Pettit & Western, 2004; Steffensmeier, Ulmer, & Kramer, 1998; Warren, Chiricos, & Bales, 2011), education outcomes such as dropout rates (Kunjufu, 2010; Pettit, 2012; Wood, 2012), and graduation rates (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2013) revealed astonishing statistics that were valid and alarming. In particular were the educational inequities that were reported amongst Latino and Black males in comparison to their White male counterparts. An analysis of the experiences of a group of young Black males and their current and former teachers’ experiences at a Chicago urban charter school presented narratives that, among other things, provided a disruption of the presiding conversation of Black male failure.

The U.S. education system has been criticized for its historical mistreatment of non-White students and females (Campbell, Hombo, & Mazzeo, 2000; Kozol, 1992; Meier, 2004; Oakes, 2005; Sacks, 2007) along with the continued disenfranchisement of African American students in general and males specifically (Haddix, 2011; Haddix & Sealey-Ruiz, 2012; Kunjufu, 2002, 2004, 2005, 2009; Noguera, 2009; Noguera & Fergus, 2012). The increased concern of citizens can be viewed through documentaries such as *The Lottery (2010)* and *Waiting for Superman (2010)*. Documentaries such as these exposed weaknesses in the U.S. education system but also highlighted efforts by educational organizations that were attempting to repair a ‘broken system’. This broken system has specifically disenfranchised Black male students in three key ways: 1) through high dropout/push-out rates and low
graduation rates; 2) high incarceration rates of Black males that are increasing with help by the school to prison pipeline; and 3) the negative schooling experiences of Black males as displayed through overrepresentation in special education courses and the overuse of suspensions (both in-school and out-of-school).

The previously discussed 2010 Schott 50 State Report highlighted statistics of low graduation rates nationwide for African American males. Hacker (1992) researched dropout rates of African American males in the late 1980s and his findings of high dropout rates were mirrored by current reports of nearly 50 percent dropout rates. Hacker (1992) found that even in the “examination of class and gender, taken alone or together, does not account for the extraordinarily high rates of school dropout, suspensions, expulsion, and failure among African American and Latino males” (as cited in Ladson-Billings and Tate, 2006). Hacker’s assertion displayed that the disproportionately high rates of failure from Black and Latino males are not isolated incidents; in fact these incidents could be viewed as intentional acts. One can view the disproportionate mistreatments of Black and Latino males to be a continued historic practice of a society that has yet to deal with the racism of the past and present. Educators such as Carter G. Woodson (1933) and W.E.B. Dubois (1989) had a clear understanding and lived experience of the racial and social inequalities practiced in U.S. society, and they presented compelling arguments for considering race as the central construct for understanding inequality; thus supporting the idea that these are intentional acts and not isolated incidents. Scholars such as Ladson-Billings and Tate (2006) supported this idea in their text, and pushed people to theorize about race and use it as an analytical tool in order to understand school inequity.

Ladson-Billings and Tate (2006) presented an article that argued for a Critical Race Theory (CRT) perspective to be added to the education field in order to understand the continued inequalities that were present because of racism, property ownership and their intersections. They agreed that CRT
was needed in education, just as it was needed in the law, to understand the current inequalities in the school systems that granted more rights for property rather than for human rights or civil rights. The central propositions of their article were that 1) race continued to be a significant factor in determining inequity in the United States 2) U.S. society is based on property rights and 3) the intersection of race and property created an analytical tool through which we can understand social (and consequently, school) inequality (p. 48). Ladson-Billings and Tate (2006) further supported that these incidents were not isolated because “those places where African Americans do experience educational success tend to be outside of the public schools…the cause of their poverty in conjunction with the condition of their schools and schooling is institutional and structural racism” (p. 56).

The idea of schools using “push-out” methods is exemplified with the overuse of suspensions and harassment of those who refuse to assimilate to the “school environment.” Majors and Billson (1992) examined cool pose amongst Black males and argued that “many African American males are suspended or expelled from school for what they term ‘non contact violations’-wearing banned items of clothing such as hats and jackets, or wearing these items in an ‘unauthorized’ manner such as backwards or inside out” (as cited in Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006). Another method that I categorize as a “push-out” method is the overpopulation of Black males in special education programs. Hopkins (1997) looked critically at power structures, school and community in regards to educating Black males and found historically,

Public Schools in the United States have not contributed to the achievement of liberation for African Americans or for other minority populations. Rather than serve as vehicles for liberation for African American males and other people of color, public schools serve, at best as agencies of social, economic, political, and cultural reproductions. (Hopkins, 1997)
It had been shown that African American children generally were disproportionately tracked into remedial-special education- groups and three times as likely to be placed into special education classes while being half as likely to be placed in gifted or advanced classes (Hopkins, 1997). This effort to ensure the right to equal educational opportunities was recently supported by President Barack Obama and the White House in Executive Order 13621 entitled “White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African Americans” (2012) in which it is recognized and acknowledged that,

Substantial obstacles to equal educational opportunity still remain in America’s educational system. African Americans lack equal access to highly effective teachers and principals, safe schools, and challenging college- preparatory classes, and they disproportionately experience school discipline and referrals to special education. African American student achievement not only lags behind that of their domestic peers by an average of two grade levels, but also behind students in almost every other developed nation. Over a third of African American students do not graduate from high school on time with a regular high school diploma, and only four percent of African American high school graduates interested in college are college-ready across a range of subjects. An even greater number of African American males do not graduate with a regular high school diploma, and African American males also experience disparate rates of incarceration. (Exec. Order No. 13.621, 2012)

Fitzgerald (2006) noted in his work which explored the attempts to control Black males, that the U.S. system of racism had been the continued stimulus to paint a negative image of Black males that disproportionately allowed for them to receive higher rates of labeling for disabilities than their White counterparts and incarcerated them at higher rates. Fitzgerald purported that,

A system of control and punishment is evident in the treatment of Black male children attending public schools in the United States. This system is a byproduct of the rationale developed to
defend slavery (Feagin, 2000; Hutchinson, 1994). Because White males who controlled the school system viewed Black males as a sexual and physical threat, they created myths and manipulated stereotypes to justify the need for social control (Cose, 2002; Feagin, 2000; Hutchinson, 1994). (as cited in Fitzgerald, 2006, p. 38)

Fitzgerald (2006) further supported the idea for a systemic need of social control in the U.S. judicial system,

The social reproduction of racism is also apparent in the judicial system. In general, minority male youths have a higher probability of being jailed before they turn 18 years of age than their White counterparts. "Crime control" laws enacted over the past 20 years have affected minority children more negatively than they have affected White children (Brown, Russo, & Hunter, 2002). Black male youths in 1992 were 27 percent more likely to be involved in juvenile arrests than other races (Weatherspoon, 1998). In 2003, young Black males in the U.S. prison system continued to outnumber White males disproportionately (Tucker, 2003). (as cited in Fitzgerald, 2006, p. 41)

The extensive literature review conducted by Fitzgerald further documented the harmful effects of the over diagnosis of mental disorders and the overuse of medication on Black males as well as the continued use of ‘warehousing’ methods.

In the United States, warehousing practices traditionally included suspension, expulsion, retention, exclusion, and placement in alternative settings. For example, during the 1998-1999 academic year, Black students made up only 17 percent of the public school student population, but 33 percent of those expelled for periods longer than 10 days (Johnston, 2000). Expulsions in Chicago Public Schools rose from 14 in the 1992-93 academic year to 737 for the 1998-99 academic year. Blacks made up 53
percent of the student population, but 73 percent of those expelled (Harvard University CRP 2001:3). Black males were suspended and expelled at much higher rates than their White counterparts (Johnston, 2000; Skolnick & Currie, 1994). In the state of Wisconsin it was reported that 25.5 percent of Black male students had been suspended in the 1997-98 academic year (Harvard University CRP 2001:3). Black males were also less likely to be placed in advanced and honors classes, but more likely than others to have high rates of absenteeism and low scores on standardized examinations (Garibaldi, 1992; Oakes, 1985).

The problem with the U.S. education system is due to retaining a colonial style education system that favored a White male Eurocentric perspective of the world and events. This system continues to be situated inside of a larger system of capitalism and patriarchy, which places at a disadvantage those who are “othered” by gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and geographic location. Inside the United States, Latino, African American and Native American children continue to be disproportionately underserved in an institution that is supposed to be the ‘Great Equalizer.’

However, some research has found that it may also be the schooling experience of males and females, specifically how they experience school differently, that has added to the unfavorable behavior or attitude of Black males towards formal education. Plummer (2007) examined Caribbean boys and concluded, amongst other findings, that due to hard masculinities and taboos (associated with homophobia and misogyny) education had been led to appear more feminine and thus the value of it depreciated amongst some of the male population; work done in the U.S. also attest to similar findings (Allen, 2012; Gosse, 2012; Noguera, 2012). An additional explanation for high dropout rates and low academic achievement amongst Black males is that the dominant society of the United States does not challenge Black males educationally nor do they expect accountability of these students to not drop out of school.
The school-to-prison pipeline has been well documented (Davis, 2006; Noguera, 2008; Polite & Davis, 1999) displaying that Black males were disproportionately placed in special education, school suspensions and expulsions, and lead in school dropout rates, unemployment, and juvenile incarceration. Janice Hale (1994) terms the current education system as “incarceration education.” Instead of determining the best way to educate African American males, greater emphasis was on how to control and socialize them for the educational system to the prison system pipeline. Tyrone Howard (2008) supported Hale (1994) and made astounding correlations between low graduation rates and high incarceration rates for Black males.

There is a special thing happening in Chicago

The country’s third largest school district claims residence in the great city of Chicago, Illinois where school reform has set a precedent for the nation; yet this city has faced vast amounts of issues in its education sector in regards to educating children who fall into the categorical boxes of urban, low Socio Economic Status (SES), ethnic, English Language Learner (ELL) or English as a Second Language (ESL). Despite the ever-changing reforms that affect the education administration, teachers, parents, and most importantly the students, there is an organization that attempts to balance the playing field for Black males in the City of Chicago.

Chicago has a rich history of urban school reform and has been at the forefront of this reform since the 1980s. A brief historical summary of the Chicago Public School (CPS) system shows that school reform first began in 1897 with the establishment of the Chicago Federation of Teachers. These teachers advocated for progressive school reform and were supported by education reformists such as John Dewey and Jane Adams of Hull House, who challenged the dominant ideology of “Americanizing” immigrants (Quinn, 2008). Like many school systems across the nation, CPS established segregated
schools (by race and gender) which by the 1960s led to demonstrations that called for addressing inequalities such as overcrowding in Black schools, and ultimately for desegregation. After much trial, these inequalities were finally addressed by a federal desegregation plan in 1980 (“Chicago School”, 1980; “U.S. Chicago”, 1980). Chicago, in response to having a history of political and thus financial corruption through mismanagement of funds, soon faced successive teacher strikes and budgetary problems throughout the 1980s. The aftershocks have been recorded since the early 1990s through continuous threats to strike and resonating to the more recent February 22, 2012 decision by Chicago’s Board of education to close seventeen schools (Columbia Broadcasting System [CBS], 2012).

In 1988 William Bennet, then U.S. Secretary of education named CPS as worst in the nation (“Schools in Chicago”, 1987; Thomas, Latz, & Griffin, 1988). Since then, beginning in 1990, CEO Arne Duncan took the reins of Renaissance 2010; aimed to turn around CPS with one hundred new schools in ten years (Brown, Gutstein, & Lipman, 2009). This produced policies described as “innovative” in an attempt to raise overall academic achievement in CPS. 1995 marked the year that the Republican Party in Springfield gave Mayor Richard Daley control of the Chicago education system. Some reforms allegedly improved the Chicago educational system. Examples include the Reading Initiative of 2001 (Kelleher, 2002). In this initiative, reading specialists were dispersed to 114 schools that contained at least two-thirds of the student body below grade level reading. Another initiative was the Summer Bridge Program. This initiative was launched in 1997 with the enrollment of 22,000 third, sixth, and eighth grade unsatisfactory test takers (Catalyst Chicago, 1990). On July 24, 2004 during a Renaissance 2010 discussion initiative of charter schools in Chicago, Daley stated:

The fundamental goal of Renaissance 2010 is to turn around Chicago’s most troubled elementary and high schools by creating 100 new schools in neighborhoods across the city over the next 6
years, providing new educational options to underserved communities experiencing rapid growth. (Ayers & Klonsky, 2006, para. 2)

For the past 20 years, education researchers from the University of Chicago’s Consortium on Chicago School Research have asked “has progress been made in Chicago Public Schools?” (2011). Their findings were in contradiction with publicly reported data. As CPS gave the public impression of positive results of policy reform, the University of Chicago’s Consortium on Chicago School Reform found that

Racial gaps in achievement have steadily increased, with White students making more progress than Latino students, and African American students falling behind all other groups... despite progress, the vast majority of CPS students are at academic achievement levels that are far below what they need to graduate ready for college. (Luppescu et al, 2011, p. 5)

The Counter Story

Situated in the heart of downtown Chicago, Illinois is the headquarters of what some may consider a “newborn” non-profit organization. This organization has been featured in local and national newspapers and featured on news broadcast bringing great attention to the efforts of the employees and accomplishments of the students of Urban Prep Charter Academies for Young Men.

The school’s mission is to counter the imbalances of low Black male graduation rates in the Chicago education system. In 2002 a vision was brought to fruition by a group of African-American leaders and education entrepreneur Tim King. According to UPCA’s website, the mission is to “provide a comprehensive, high-quality college preparatory education to young men that result in graduates succeeding in college” (Urban Prep Academies, 2012). UPCA believes that a foundational way to bring
their mission to life is to build and maintain a positive school culture. One key way this positive school culture is visualized is through the daily recitation of the academies Creed:

We believe.
We are the young men of Urban Prep.
We are college bound.
We are exceptional-not because we say it, but because we work hard at it.
We will not falter in the face of any obstacle placed before us.
We are dedicated, committed and focused.
We never succumb to mediocrity, uncertainty or fear.
We never fail because we never give up.
We make no excuses.
We choose to live honestly, nonviolently and honorably.
We respect ourselves and, in doing so, respect all people.
We have a future for which we are accountable.
We have a responsibility to our families, community and world.
We are our brothers' keepers.
We believe in ourselves.
We believe in each other.
We believe in Urban Prep.
WE BELIEVE.
(Urban Prep Academies, 2012)

This Creed is recited during a period at the start of each day called Community, across campuses. Community A set aside time to provide school wide announcements that include recognition of peers for the accomplishments in their academics and extra-curricular activities. During this time the Urban Prep Creed is also repeated as an affirmation. With the implementation of the academies’ motto and the intention to hold each student accountable, UPCA hoped to instill positive self-esteem and high achievement in each of the students. UPCA opened its first campus in 2006 in the Englewood neighborhood; at the time this was the nation’s first all-male public charter high school. The West and Bronzeville campuses were opened respectively in 2009 and 2010. To date, UPCA schools are the only all-male public schools in Illinois.

Because of the strategic location and marketing strategies of UPCA Englewood campus, inadvertently it also became the nation’s first all-Black male public charter school and at one point
employed a 90 percent African American male teaching and leadership staff (Head, 2009); in addition they have reported success rates with young men entering high school with substantially low reading scores. The Englewood campus enrolled 165 Black male ninth graders for fiscal year 2006/2007. Of these ninth graders only four percent were at grade level reading at the time of admissions (Urban Prep Charter academy for Young Men, 2006-2007). In the spring of 2010 UPCA experienced its first graduation. This graduation made news headlines because “100% of the graduates being accepted to four year colleges and universities” (“100 percent”, 2008) was a feat that many of the neighboring high schools (suburban districts or Chicago Public School district) cannot attest to with a similar demographic of students. Substantial improvements like these are a phenomenon in and of themselves that are worthy of exploration.

### Research Focus

My research focus is counter narratives. My research questions are as follows: What makes Urban Prep a “success”? How does Urban Prep’s programming allow for Black male academic achievement? How is achievement (success) measured? I found a need to unpack and “dig” into the
inner-workings of this institution to uncover their blueprint for “success” this school has had with Black male academic achievement because of the large amounts of media coverage the academy receives for their work with this demographic in comparison to the CPS district. I examined UPCA as a potential model program to inform current and future “models” of education for Black males. I explore the ways this program is understood by multiple stakeholders affiliated with the school, including faculty, administration and alumni, and how its impacted them, so that others who are interested in integrating parts of this program, or replicating the entire program, have an understanding of why this school works.

The way in which I will seek to answer the research questions is through (A) interrogating the secondary school experiences of the alumni, (B) identifying the support structures, operation of the school, admission process, and allocation of financial/support resources, (C) discovering the significance of an all Black/male school, along with the positive and negatives of a gender and race specific school, and (D) uncovering and interrogating attributes of “success”; or rather the attributes of achievement since success is subjective.

Ladson-Billing and Tate (1995) contended that, “the voices of people of color are required for a complete analysis of the educational system” (p. 21). I propose that the voices of the key stakeholders (current students/alumni) and those who have a role in the implementation of educational curriculum (faculty/administration) are required for a complete analysis of the educational system. Critical Race Theory (CRT) has long been used by researchers for its methodological tool of counter storytelling in order for the marginalized and/or silenced group to be able to name their own reality. This case study embraces and employs CRT’s use of counter storytelling to give voice to not only youth who are usually kept out of dominant conversations about the type of educational programming that are provided to them, but current and former faculty and administration who present dissenting experiences.
This case study has the potential to influence educational policy through providing counter stories to the dominant narrative of the failing Black male in schools. By deconstructing and uncovering the aspects of success in this program, other schools may be able to use the tools and strategies implemented at Urban Prep Charter Academies to continue to close the achievement gap faced by Black and Brown students. In addition, the narratives of the alumni, faculty, and administration will shed light on areas that still need to be addressed or improved on by the education system, in general, and Urban Prep Charter Academies, specifically. Through this research, it is hoped that great strides will continue to be taken to address the needs of all students by providing educational environments that are accountable to student achievement.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

“The educational system as it has developed both in Europe and America [is] and antiquated process which does not hit the mark even in the case of the needs of the white man himself. If the white man wants to hold on to it, let him do so; but the Negro, so far as he is able, should develop and carry out a program on his own” (Carter G. Woodson, 1933, p. 68).

Research dealing with any ethnic group inside of the United States requires an understanding of the historical and present positionality of said group in the society. This is especially valid when discussing how the African American community has systematically been disenfranchised and historically treated as second-class citizens based on the pigment of their skin. An example of systematic disenfranchisement can be viewed through the education sector, in regards to access to education. The fight for equal access to education is not a phenomenon of the 21st century, but one that can be rooted in the spirits of enslaved ancestors of the African American community. Cooper (2002) notes that, Black educators and scholars (Foster, 1995; Hilliard, 1994; Irvine, 1990) asserted that historically, and in the light of social and economic realities, success in standard educational venues has always been a priority of the Black community.

This review of literature will begin with historical findings that support the notion that the fight for equal access to education is not a phenomenon of the 21st century. The historical findings will display African Americans’ battle for the right to be educated as well as the right for equal access to education.

Section two is a review of literature that positions African Americans, specifically African American males, as failures in academic settings; and subsequently on a larger scale, failures in life.
This review will examine statistics of the “school-to-prison” pipeline, the effects of teacher perception on students, graduation rates, dropout rates, and test scores for this demographic of students according to national and state data.

Section three provides a review of literature that attempts to disrupt narratives of Black male failure through highlighting and examining environments and strategies that have been able to aid in addressing the needs of the whole student. Some of these strategies emphasize the need for more Black males in teaching and leadership roles, implementing culturally relevant pedagogies, using “cultural synchronization”, as well as theories of caring/nurturing.

Section four discusses the charter school movement, a movement that continues to push the efforts of equal access to education for all students, specifically students underrepresented in college and underserved in traditional public schools. Within this section a highly visible and touted "successful" charter school will be highlighted.

**Historical Findings for the Battle to Access Education**

Siddle Walker (1996) discusses in her work on African American education in the segregated south how parents of African American children have always had differing views on how to best educate Black students. Siddle Walker gives examples from Boston during the late 1700’s and early 1800’s when Blacks requested segregated schools in order to shield their students from the harmful effects of prejudice received in desegregated schools. Other Black families requested that their children were allowed to enroll in desegregated schools because of the quantity and quality of resources that followed White students. Siddle Walker’s work supports my position of access to education not being a 21st century notion. She writes,
The history of divided opinions about how to best educate black children might be best explained by saying that black parents have historically sought the best in educational opportunity for their children. But in the face of forced choices—caring educational environment or equality in facilities and resources—they have differed on where best to focus their efforts. (p. 212)

With the 1983 publication of *A Nation At Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) school reform was put at the forefront of discussions among politicians, educators, researchers, families, and those with a stake in the success of the youth, whom are the caretakers of our nation’s future. However, prior to the publication of *A Nation At Risk*, the education of the African American community had been an ongoing mission that can be dated back to times of enslavement when enslaved Blacks would risk brutal beatings and torture, including death in order to acquire the skills to read and write (Cornelius, 1991; Foner & Pacheco, 1984; Wallenstein, 2007; Weber, 1978; Woodson, 1919) “for enslaved African-Americans, literacy was more than a path to individual freedom—it was a communal act, a political demonstration of resistance to oppression and of self-determination for the black community” (Cornelius, 1991, p. 3). The drive in the African American community to educate themselves for mental freedom did not stop after the Emancipation Proclamation as full advantage was taken by the recently emancipated enslaved in a fruitful ten year period also known as Reconstruction (1867-1877) where many of our Historically Black Colleges and Universities [HBCU] were established. In this time period was a flourishing disruption of the normative racist beliefs of the cognitive abilities of African Americans; as Blacks took governmental and state legislature positions, graduated from secondary and post secondary schools, led careers in medicine, law, and education, to name but a few examples of these disruptions. African Americans and groups such as the Freedman’s Bureau knew that education would lead to greater personal and group autonomy, and the possibility for upward social mobility. Due to violence from White secret orders to terrorize African Americans, along with a
depression (1873-1877), and finally the Compromise of 1877, the hopes of Radical Republicans and African Americans for an egalitarian society were halted (Mercer & Beckett, 2003).

African Americans continued to be viewed as second class citizen’s thus forcing them to attend schools that were drastically lacking necessary resources (i.e. financial, lab equipment, textbooks) that would inevitably only open employment jobs in the service sector for the majority of African Americans. Yet the African American community worked to strengthen their community schools while demanding better schools. This demand was supported by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People [NAACP] and Howard University Lawyers; involved in leading a civil rights campaign to dismantle segregation.

Between 1938 and 1950 legal precedents had been established in judgments against institutions of higher education that supported segregation; laying the platform for challenging segregated education at all levels. African Americans in five states participated in these cases challenging state education systems. They posited that segregated schools violated the Fourteenth Amendment and were harmful to Black students. The allegations charged to those five states led the Supreme Court to hear discrimination cases across the country (National Museum of American History). On May 24, 1951, Kenneth Clark used dolls of different colors, to test and measure how the children of Scott’s Branch school in Summerton felt about themselves. Clark asked the children to show him the “nice” doll, the “bad” doll, and the doll that “looks like you.” Ten of the 16 children said the brown doll looked bad. The results of those tests strongly suggested that forced segregation damaged the self-image of African American children. Even after a drawing segment in which the children were asked to color the outlined gendered figure the same color as them, it was noted that many of the dark children colored the figure White or

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1 The five states that participated in the cases were Clarendon County, South Carolina; Topeka, Kansas; Farmville, Virginia; Washington, D.C.; and New Castle County, and Delaware.
yellow. Clark concluded “prejudice, discrimination, and segregation caused black children to develop a sense of inferiority and self-hatred” (Brown V. Board, n.d.). The ruling of the landmark civil rights case Brown v. Board of Education Topeka, Kansas 1954 declared that segregated schools did violate the fourteenth amendment. Thus ending the long held “separate but equal” precedent of Plessey v. Ferguson 1894 and igniting the civil rights movement of the 1950’s that hoped to dismantle segregation permanently and achieve first-class citizenship for the African American community (“Separate is Not Equal”, n.d.).

The significance and importance of those cases and actions by the Black community are in a general sense to show evidence that the fight for equal access to education is not a phenomenon of the 21st century “the quest for quality education remains an elusive dream for the African American community. However, it does remain a dream-perhaps the most powerful for the people of African descent in this nation” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. xv). Specifically, when the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education Topeka, Kansas Supreme Court case mandated public educational institutions to become integrated; but the integration of schools has also meant the denigration of education for Blacks. The integration of schools resulted primarily in Black students getting bused to White schools which were presumed better and Black teachers and administrators being displaced because of the closing of their community schools. Tilman (2007) discusses the effects of desegregation on African American education leaders and the displacement caused and lost by forcing states to integrate.

Tilman cites Ethridge (1979) who researched the time period immediately following the Brown v. Board ruling, 1954-1965, in which Whites believed that the reason Black students were not learning was partly due to Black principles who were not ensuring that their students were being educated. In this time period Ethridge also found that in many Southern states more than 50 percent of the African American principles were dismissed. Ethridge (1979) concluded that, “thousands of educational
positions which would have gone to Black people in the South under a segregated system have been lost for them since desegregation” (p. 231). Using a one-sided integration move of busing Black students into White schools that did not even recognize their new students as humans, there were no pedagogies implemented with a focus on non-European culture; let alone any acknowledgment that these pedagogies were needed to cater to the enrichment of the student’s academic achievements. By not using these pedagogies generations of African American students, may have been left without full knowledge of their identities and location in history and society (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Tillman, 2009). Tilman (2007) asserts that,

One of the unintended consequences of the Brown decision and the subsequent desegregation of America’s schools (particularly those schools in the South) was the loss of Black principals. The firing of African American principles led to the silencing of voices and exclusion of specific racial, social, and cultural perspectives that were critical to the education of Black children. (p. 55)

In regards to my case study, the importance of reviewing the fight for access to education and the effects that the desegregation ruling has had on Black teachers and administrators is to highlight that Urban Prep Charter Academy initially made concerted efforts in hiring Black administrative leaders and teachers. The Schott Foundation for Public Education (2009) compiled a 50 state report on the opportunity to learn in America in where they discuss the continued fight for access to education for students in the U.S. who are non-white; which will be discussed in a later section. In addition to providing an environment where Black students can be in a “segregated” environment that receives the same quantity and quality of resources, if not better, than predominately White populated public schools.
African American Males as Failures


Black males are portrayed...in a limited number of roles, most of them deviant, dangerous, and dysfunctional...this constant barrage of predominately disturbing images inevitably contributes to the public’s negative stereotypes of black men, particularly of those who are perceived as young, hostile, and impulsive. Clearly, the message say’s: If they entertain you, enjoy them (at a safe distance); if they serve you, patronize them (and don’t forget to leave a tip); if they threaten you, avoid them, (don’t ride the subway). Thus, young Black males are stereotyped by the five ‘ds’: dumb, deprived, dangerous, deviant, and disturbed. There is no room in this picture for comprehension, caring, or compassion of the plight of these young men. (p. 3)

Although this quote may seem dated it speaks volumes to the short distance that some have come in almost 20 years in continuing to paint this same dismal picture of the current state and future of young Black males. This quote is relevant to this review of literature because it lays a backdrop of the running pre-conceived narrative that many teachers-let alone the public- have when encountered with their male students of color. This publicly portrayed image of Black male youth has an enormous impact on self-perception on a personal and academic level, as well as teacher’s perceptions of their students. This is important to note because this may have an impact on the rates of graduation, dropouts, suspensions, expulsions, retention, and academic achievement.

In the United States, Black and Latino males have the lowest graduation rates when viewed against the overall student population. This is made alarmingly clear since efforts by education
researchers and organizations have taken a stake in monitoring and attempting to accurately reporting the statistics on graduation and dropout rates through independent estimates. These types of reports are needed as official high school graduation and dropout rates have been unreliable for some time due to the lack of data systems developed to accurately track students and compute graduation rates (“Dropout Nation”, 2012). Hacker (1992) as quoted in Ladson-Billings and Tate (2006) stated that through the “examination of class and gender, taken alone or together, does not account for the extraordinarily high rates of school dropout, suspension, expulsion and failure among African American and Latino males” (p. 15). Hacker places the dropout rate for African American males in some large cities at close to 50 percent. Majors and Billson (1992) as cited in Ladson-Billings and Tate (2006) also support Hacker and “argued that many African American males are suspended and expelled from school for what they term ‘non-contact violations’-wearing banned items of clothing such as hats and jackets, or wearing these items in an ‘unauthorized’ manner such as backwards or inside out” (p. 15).

An example of the inaccuracies is reported by Greene and Winters (2006) whom state that the Current Population Survey (CPS) and the National Educational Longitudinal Survey (NELS) report graduation rates that are similar to each other and higher than independent estimates based on the U.S. Department of Education’s Common Core of Data (CCD). However, CPS and NELS both overstate graduation rates due to problems with finding and following marginalized and disadvantaged people, such as dropouts, due to the inability to be reached by sample surveys. Focusing on the class of 2003, Greene and Winters (2006) used enrollment and diploma data reported by NCES from the CCD files. Calculations of graduation rates followed a simple formula:

\[
\text{graduation rate} = \frac{\text{regular diplomas in spring of 2003}}{(\text{estimated number of students entering ninth grade in 1999}) \times (1 + \text{population change between fourteen-year-olds in the summer of 1999 and seventeen-year-olds in the summer of 2002})}
\]
The researchers noted that estimates were needed due to the “ninth grade bubble” wherein many ninth graders are repeating the ninth grade, making the enrollment number higher than other grades. It estimates that only 70 percent of the students earn a high school diploma. About 78 percent of White students and 72 percent of Asian students graduate high school, but little more than 53 percent of Hispanic and 55 percent of African-American students take home their diploma. In each racial category evaluated females graduate at a higher rate than males, with a particularly large difference for Hispanic and African American students. Only 49 percent of Hispanic males and 48 percent of African American males earn a diploma. Greene and Winters (2006) also find that district-level results suggest that high school graduation rates are problematic in the nation’s most populated school districts, and are highly disturbing in the nation’s largest school systems, which graduate fewer students of color and male students.

The following study was added to this review for literature because as Greene and Winters (2006) data support the unreliable tracking of graduation rates and dropout rates, the touted 100 percent graduation rates of Urban Prep have come into question as well (Abagond, 2012; “More Funky Numbers”, 2011; “Urban Prep ‘Miracle’, 2012). Since Urban Prep’s first graduating class the number of entering freshman has never equaled the number of graduating seniors leading myself and others who have been following Urban Prep to question their motives in falsely reporting 100 percent graduation rates every year. This is not only a personal contention as a researcher, but a theme that occurred in a few of my participant’s interviews.

On the state level, and more specifically the city level, Roderick (2003) examines the transition to high school among African American youth in Chicago. This study adds to the review of literature discussing the low percentage of Black males graduating from high school. Roderick obtained data from 17 females and 15 males of African American descent from eighth grade to twelfth grade. A key finding
of Roderick’s that connects to my case study is that the boys experience more dramatic declines in their grades between eighth and ninth grade and are viewed more negatively by their ninth grade teachers. Roderick also finds that only 40 percent of the males graduate; this finding has continued to be consistent with the current Schott foundation study (2012).

Dropout statistics and subject competencies are an additional area to graduation rates that Black males seem to be lagging in and disproportionately affected by. Irvine (1990) notes in her work on Black students and school policies that the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reports that only 20 percent of African American 11th graders could perform complex reading task, while 53 percent of American European 11th graders were able to do so. The NAEP (2009) reports in their long-term trend data that there is a 53-point gap in reading proficiency between White and Black 17 year old students. Irvine also notes that Black males are twice as likely to drop out of high school and suspended three times as often.

The most current research conducted by Stillwell and Sable (2013) on the number of high school completers, the Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate (AFGR), and the dropout data for grades 9-12 for public schools in school year 2009-10 finds that 3,128,022 public school students received a high school diploma that year resulting in a AFGR of 78.2 percent of students who graduated. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) United States totals include the 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia. Because the findings are based on universe survey data, no statistical tests were conducted. All rates (i.e., Averaged Freshman Graduation Rates (AFGR) and event dropout rates) are calculated based on counts of diploma recipients, dropouts, and student enrollments reported by state education agencies. Diploma counts for Connecticut and dropout counts for the District of Columbia are imputed. The average was highest for Asian/Pacific Islander students (93.5 percent), followed by White students (83 percent), Hispanic students (71.4 percent), American Indian/Alaska Native students
(69.1 percent), and African American students playing catch up with only 66.1 percent graduating. This study also finds that across the United States, the calculated dropout rate is lowest for Asian/Pacific Islander students at 1.9 percent and White students at 2.3 percent. However the dropout rates for American Indian/Alaska Native, Black, and Hispanic students are at 6.7, 5.5, and 5.0 percent, respectively. The final finding of this study that is relative to my case study is that across the United States the dropout rate is also higher for males than for females at 3.8 percent and 2.9 percent, respectively. This dropout rate for males is higher in every state. This research is important as it supports the continued picture being painted that Black students continue to not fare as well as other students in U.S. public schools when it comes to graduation rates and dropout rates.

The Schott Foundation (2009) provides one example of why Black students may be at the receiving end of high dropout rates and low graduation rates. The Foundation composed a report discussing states where students, specifically historically disadvantaged students, are given the opportunity to learn. Among their many findings, the foundation finds that only six of 12 states offer Black students an equal Opportunity to Learn in schools with good records of achievement and graduation, while most do not. An Opportunity to Learn is “a high-quality, high-access public education, or an opportunity to learn” (p. 2) Also, those schools where Black students have a good Opportunity to Learn are in states where there are relatively few Black students and the quality of the schools are quite high. The states where Black students have the least chance of attending good schools include some, such as New York, with large numbers of Black students and generally good schools for others. The one state that is relative to my case study is Illinois. According to the Schott Foundation (2009) Illinois offers a mediocre 30 percent chance of Opportunity to Learn for their Black students.

To add to the data on inequities in education to Black males in Illinois, Holzman (2004) with the Schott Education Inequity Index (SEII) highlighted disparities in the quality of education provided to
African Americans by examining high school graduation rates of Black and White non-Hispanic males to illustrate the absolute effectiveness-or lack of it-in the education of African American boys and the differences between the success of the Black male population and that of their White peers. Their findings on Illinois reveal that Chicago Public Schools have the largest enrollment of Black males in the state (10,000) and that in the 2002 year two-thirds of those males did not graduate with their cohort. They also find that both groups of males have graduation rates drastically lower than the states, but only 33 percent of Black males graduate; which means a little more than 36,000 Black male students graduate out of a possible 110,532 enrolled Black male students in the 2001-2002 school year.

In this same study Holzman (2004) finds that in the 2001-2002 school year Black students account for 52.5 percent of public school enrollments and receive 27 percent of the out of school suspensions, and 25 percent of the expulsions. Holzman also finds that Black students account for 72 percent of “Total Mental Retardation” classifications in Chicago, while White students account for slightly fewer than eight percent; Black males also disproportionately represent those students classified with “Specific Learning Disabilities.” To further get the point across Holzman shows that Black males make up 26.23 percent of the total student body and disproportionately have the highest percentages in the following categories: out of school suspensions (18.66 percent), total expulsions (21.51 percent), total mental retardations (41.41 percent), and emotional disturbances (57.05 percent); Black males high percentages are only followed by their Black female peers. White students hold disproportionately high rates in the category of developmental delays. The validity that comes forth from this data is that in the last decade there has not been a concerted effort in decreasing the push-out of our Black students, and Black male students specifically.

Representations such as these further effect the way we as a society are viewing Black males, and further demonstrates our lack of concern for their academic achievement and goals' and thus their
achievement in life. Continuous efforts to push students out of the school and out of the public education sector through disproportionately suspending and expelling students (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010), and over-classification of mental and psychological disorders continues the message of Black people, specifically men, being un-trainable, un-educable, unwilling to conform savages that must be put out of the education institutions and thus shuffled into the school-to-prison pipeline for potential “rehabilitation.”

Disrupting Black Males Failure

Fortunately there are many educators and scholars who are taking the reins in an attempt to reverse the stigma held against Black males and their educational potential. Scholars explore the impact on environmental spaces, the ethnicity and/or gender of teachers available to Black male students, methods of cultural synchronization, othermothering, and countless other strategies to aide in the cause for closing the academic achievement gap for Black male students; all in the attempts to give them a helping hand to a future with opened doors.

One avenue that researchers are exploring, that may help young Black males increase their academic achievement, is building up a positive self-perception and their self-confidence (Green, Nelson, Marton, & Marsh, 2006; Gordon, 1995; Rascoe & Atwater, 2005). One avenue of achieving this is through mentorship programs. Wyatt (2009) hypothesizes that providing an environment that fosters supportive relationships for male students through a school based mentoring program (Brotherhood program) will yield gains in Black male student’s academic achievement. The school population included in this volunteer based study averaged 1,700 students each year, are 90.5 percent were African American students; there are 307 students who participate in the Brotherhood program in total from 2004 to 2008. Wyatt examines the Grade Point Averages (GPA) and uses questionnaires during the fifth
year to gather the findings. Wyatt finds that because of the Brotherhood program there is a 16 percent increase in the cumulative GPAs between 2005 and 2008; those non-Brotherhood males perform 60 percent and 48 percent lower than Brotherhood members in 2006 and 2007, respectively. An additional finding that is relative to my case study and the development of self-perception to increase Black male academic achievement indicates that participation in a mentoring program can improve student academic achievement and foster personal growth and aspirations for success. Wyatt’s findings also suggest that there is a need to provide continuous academic, personal/social, and career development support to males through the use of mentoring groups.

Wyatt quotes and cites in his article Day-Vines & Day-Hairston (2005) whom provide statistics regarding the educational attainment and mortality rates of African American males. Day-Vines and Day-Hairston (2005) findings align with mentoring work like Wyatt’s (2009) through a statement made suggesting that mentoring programs can be instrumental in improving the academic and social achievement of African American males,

Individual counseling and small-group counseling represent effective media for promoting healthy pro-social behaviors among urban African American male adolescents. Such counseling approaches facilitate social/emotional well-being in maladaptive behaviors…school counselors will have to establish relationships that exude warmth, nurturing, trust, and personal respect (Day-Vines & Day-Hairston, p. 239).

Wyatt (2000) measures the effectiveness of an Afrocentric male mentoring program with Black males to explore the academic progress, self-concept, and communal responsibility of the young men through participation in this Afrocentric male mentoring program. Through measuring the GPAs of the
Black males Wyatt finds a consistent increase in GPA’s from the pre-test range to the post-test range; showing a significant change in the self-concept of the participants.

Cross (2011) discusses mentoring programs that have been assisting in Black male achievement. These programs are not created to just assist in the academic achievements, but to get students “off the streets” by providing a safe space where the view of the problems that many low-income urban youth face is “not the child per se, but as the child and linkages across the boundaries of institutions and culture” (p. 17). The mentoring program that utilizes this theory is a mentoring program in Chicago (Saulny, 2010) designed to target up to 3,000 at risk students with mentors whom provide supportive interactions and activities inside and outside of schools to attempt to reduce gang involvement and the “lure” of street life while making the “lure” of school involvement and academic success more appealing. The program also hopes to increase school attendance and academic success.

Cross (2011) also cites Urban Prep Charter Academy for Young Men’s mentoring program that takes an alternate theory of the problems students faced through a more student-centered lens “emphasizing the student as a system of needs, attitudes, and interest, and the creation of a school culture and management designed to meet the range of needs the students bring to school” (p.17). Cross suggests that through Urban Prep’s multifaceted counseling and supports that make possible the “rigorous academic program grounded in high expectations” (p. 17) the students are privy to a range of extracurricular activities but were also able to increase academic achievement and have high graduation rates. Another program that is cited in this chapter is the New York City Cash Incentive Program. In this program students (mostly from low-income families) were rewarded with a cash incentive for school attendance, grade point average, performance on high-stakes test, and application to college (Boseman, 2009; “Details on NYC’s”, 2007). The results of the cash incentive program suggest that entering midlevel-performing students show improvements in all areas, although the results do not show dramatic
improvements. Two separate studies conducted in 2008 and 2012 research school expenditure and its effect on academic achievement, student performance, and test scores. Both find that scores got worse or stayed the same; and that the more crucial question was how the money is getting used and where it is being used.

Lips, Watkins, and Flemming (2008) explore beliefs held by citizens and policymakers suggesting that the more resources provided to schools will improve student opportunities. They also view an annual poll-2004 to 2007- where American adults list insufficient funding and resources as top problems facing public schools in their communities. Lips et al. (2008) challenge these ideas by viewing if historical evidence and academic research support these commonly held views by addressing two questions: How much does the United States spend on public education? What does the evidence show about the relationship between public education spending and student’s academic achievement? The researchers find that historically, American spending on education has continued to increase since the mid 1980s at the state, local and federal level according to the U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). However, when long-term spending trends are compared with long-term measures of student academic achievement-using the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading examination- from 1970 to 2004, they find that spending increases but reading scores remain relatively the same. Leading to the conclusion that spending does not correlate with achievement.

Even when spending is viewed alongside high school graduation rates from 1990 to 2005 the average graduation rate only increases by one percent from 73.7 percent. Taking into consideration decades of federal aid pouring in to equalize opportunities for all students, there continues to be a persistent achievement gap with Black and Latino students compared to White students; even more so the researchers find that in the 2005 to 2006 school year graduation rates for White students remain
higher, 80.6 percent, in comparison to those of Black students, 59.1 percent, and Latino students, 61.4 percent. As far as academic scholarship exploring the relationship between education expenditure and academic achievement, Lips et al. (2008) found a lack of consistent evidence. What they did find was that leading researchers acknowledged that it was not so much of how much was spent but on how the money was being spent (“Does Spending”, 2008).

De Peña (2012) analyzes national trends in education from 2009 to 2011 in a state-by-state analysis of education spending as a percentage of total state spending, as well as a comparison of average graduation rates and average American College Testing (ACT) scores per state. De Peña concluded that higher spending alone does not guarantee better student performance. De Peña finds that as of 2010 the United States total annual federal spending on education exceeds $809 billion dollars, more than any other industrialized nation. De Peña’s analysis supports the previous work done by Lips et al. (2008) and finds that even with elevated education funding student test scores are still mediocre both internationally and domestically “in comparison to previous performance rates commensurate with less funding” (“Throwing Money”, 2012).

While analyzing state trends to better highlight the relationship between education spending and student performance, De Peña was able to demonstrate how spending impacts student performance, but finds a lack of correlation between performance measures- she exemplifies that a number of states report excellent graduation rates but below average ACT scores. De Peña’s analysis leads to the following conclusions that support the previously stated study: Since 2009 when the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) began investing hundreds of thousands of dollars into education, and the competitive financial initiative of Race to The Top (RTTT) more states are spending money on education. However, between 2009 and 2011 those states that are spending the most on education do not have the highest student performance or the highest ACT scores. On the other hand those states that had
are spending the least on education do not have the lowest graduation rates or ACT scores (“Throwing Money”, 2012). Thus how the money is used and where it is used is more crucial to education than the amount of money spent “higher levels of funding do not ensure higher graduation rates, nor do they directly correlate to higher test scores on the ACT. Improving education requires multifaceted efforts, not solely increased funding” (De Peña, 2012).

In addition to exploring mentorship programs as a tool to assist in Black male students positive self-perception and academic achievement, some scholars research how the presence of Black teachers can positively impact the student and their academic achievements. Irvine (1989) cites work by Pritchy Smith and Rodman (1989) who utilize data that predict that the minority teaching force will be five percent by 2020, which is significantly lower than the 12 percent of minority teachers in 1980. More current data from the Center for American Progress (Bireda and Chait, 2011) find that many schools (urban and rural) are predominately Black and Latino students, yet Black and Latino teacher’s account nationally for only 14.6 percent of the teaching workforce. According to the Center for American Progress (2011) nationally, minority student’s account for 40.7 percent of the public school population. The Center for American Progress also find that in over 40 percent of public schools there is not a single teacher of color, and where minority teachers are disproportionately hired (urban and high-poverty schools) the staffing is still predominately composed of White teachers. This data is made even further startling when Pritchy Smith and Rodman’s (1985) projection aligns with the Center for American Progress’ finding of no teachers of color being present in over 40 percent of public schools “a minority teaching force of five percent would mean that the average student, who has about 40 teachers during his or her pre-collegiate years, could expect, at best, to encounter only two minority teachers during his or her entire school career” (as cited in Irvine, 1989, p. 51).
The urgency for more minority teachers is not happening within the vacuum of minority communities, but is reaching national attention so that in 2010 Secretary of Education Arne Duncan launched Teach.gov, a national initiative to recruit the next generation of teachers that will hopefully be more reflective of the ever-increasing diverse student population,

I’m very concerned that increasingly, our teachers don’t reflect the great diversity of our nation’s young people, and so making sure we have more teachers of color and particularly more men, more black and Latino men, coming into education is going to be a significant part of this Teach Campaign (Duncan as cited in Bireda and Chait, 2011).

Bireda and Chait (2011) also made a substantial claim of the importance of Black teachers in the classroom,

Increasing the number of teachers of color is not only a matter of a philosophical commitment to diversity in career opportunities. Teachers of color provide real-life examples to minority students of future career paths. In this way, increasing the number of current teachers of color may be instrumental to increasing the number of future teachers of color. And while there are effective teachers of many races, teachers of color have demonstrated success in increasing academic achievement for engaging students of similar backgrounds (as cited in Dee, 2004, p. 1).

While Bireda and Chait (2011) highlight the significance of more teachers of color in the teaching field as an instrumental way to increase future enrollment in the field of education for students of color, the wording they use for teachers of color to be “real life examples” ascribes to past notions of Black teachers being needed primarily to serve as role models (Hawley, 1989; Loehr, 1989). Irvine (1989) presents additional explanations for the need for more Black teachers in her work (1990), a study conducted with over 50 high and low level ability high school students. She finds two groups of
responses to whom their role models are: a) the high achieving students note familial members or nationally recognized civil rights activist, politicians or writers; wherein the lower achieving students note familial members and entertainers and sports figures. Irvine (1990) posits that the lack of teachers being mentioned as role models stems from less sustaining and powerful relationships being built with teachers at the high school level due to the numerous amounts of teachers that a student comes in contact with. In addition Irvine suggests that Black students, like White students, do not cite teachers as role models because “teachers are not held in high regard by the general public…perceived as underpaid, powerless women who work under objectionable conditions because they ‘instinctively’ love children” (p. 53). Irvine suggests that the need for Black teachers is more appropriately placed in the category of mentor, rather than role model “mentors are advocate teachers who help Black students manipulate the schools culture, which is often contradictory and antithetical to their own” (p. 53).

Both Irvine (1989; 1990) and King (1993) portray Black teachers as being more than role models for Black students and a necessary presence for all students. According to Meier et al. (1989) the over placement of Black students in special education programs, high suspensions and expulsion rates can be countered and lowered by higher percentages of Black teachers. In their work it is indicated that the presence of Black teachers is associated with more Black students being placed in gifted classes and graduating from high school. What has become more attractive in educational research are the practices and pedagogies of African American teachers and the effects that these practices have on Black students. The specific practices regarding the way that African American teachers views, experiences, and the way that their attitudes contribute to developing their teaching pedagogy to assist them in being agents for social change (Foster, 1990, 1993; Hilliard, 1994), in addition to assisting them in constructing their classrooms and lessons to be culturally relevant to their students lives (Ladson-Billings & Henry, 1990). African American teachers are not only constructing their lessons, classrooms and pedagogy to be
relevant to the students lives, but to also be equipped to teach them the realities of embracing a rigorous curriculum and fighting the injustices these Black students faced in the world (Ladson-Billings & Henry, 1990; Henry, 1992). Included in using a culturally relevant pedagogy, many of these Black teachers (men and women alike) adopt the use of “other mothering” (Collins, 1990; Henry, 1992) and an emancipatory pedagogy (King, 1991) in where the teachers are nurturing the students and taking care of the “whole student”—academics, emotion, psyche, behavior, health and wellness—-and teaching them to critically evaluate mainstream concepts, values and practices. The pedagogy that is associated with this demographic of teachers is one that is desirable in all educators. For African American teachers are able to do all of this through using an ethic of caring, and having a strong sense of their purpose and the positionality of themselves and their students in society (Ladson-Billings, 1990, 1992; Ware, 2002).

Black female teachers are not the only ones utilizing these techniques and pedagogies—as most of the teachers in the previous studies are women; Black male teachers are as well, especially in regards to taking up “other mothering” (Collins, 1990). Collins (1990) notes that African American males are historically included as surrogates in the community using the idea of caring for each other. African American male teachers use nurturing tools of showing affection, being problem solvers, and listening to their students “by acting as other-mothers, Black teachers demonstrated a historic and cultural aspect of what has been described in the moral development literature as an ethic of caring” (Ware, 2002, p. 27). Jawanza Kunjufu was just quoted in the *Southern Florida Times* positing that there is a need for more Black male teachers and leaders to assist Black male students in achieving academically.

There are many schools in (Broward) county with not one Black man in the building…Black boys are not experiencing Black male teachers. Yes, there are security guards, (physical education) teachers, custodians, and administrators. But how many Black male teachers are in Broward County? Without more Black male teachers, the future of (the Black) race will depend
on mothers…a woman cannot teach her son to be a man. We need men to get out there; be leaders and role models. (Roby, 2013)

Although the final statement is controversial in and of itself, there are many scholars that support the position that Black males are lacking in visibility in teacher and leadership roles, and are needed to combat the low academic achievement rates of Black male students (Kunjufu, 2010; Morris & Morris, 2013). Black male teachers and leaders are also needed to serve as a positive visual presence for Black female students as well (Crowell, Woodson, & Rashid, 2013).

The Charter School Movement

Educating males in separate spaces has taken place in spaces such as boarding schools, Christian and other parochial schools, as well as military academies. In the last two decades single-sex schools and classrooms have been adapted in public and charter school spaces as a means to raise academic achievement, especially with Latino and Black males. Thus far, research on single-sex schools has been inconclusive on the effects of attending single sex schools/classes and the raising of academic achievement, especially for males. Jackson, (2012) researches single-sex schools, student achievement and course selection in Trinidad and Tobago whom assign students to secondary schooling based on an algorithm that helped avoid bias and to measure those students who attend single sex schools versus those who do not. Jackson’s study concluded many things; of those that are important to my case study are that most students perform no better at single-sex school, single-sex schools have no effect on over 85% of student, single-sex schools have large positive effects only on students with strong preferences for single-sex schools, and some girls benefit from single-sex schools but boys do not. Goodkind, (2012) conducts a critical theoretical review on single-sex education being purported as a means to improve the educational experiences and performance of low-income youth of color since No Child Left Behind Act. Her review reveals no documented benefits to single-sex public education for low-income youth of color.
along with a number of concerns. The concerns state that these types of institutions have the potential to further marginalize low-income youth of color by reinforcing racialized stereotypes of hyper sexuality, reproducing narrow and restrictive definitions of gender, invalidating the experiences and identities of GLBTQ youth, and diverting attention from the need to address poverty and racism. Professor of education and urban sociologist Pedro Noguera (2012) suggests that,

Given the proliferation of single-sex schools and the wide gulf between practice and evidence-based theory, there’s a pressing need for an applied research agenda that can shed some light on whether single-sex schools are indeed the best way to improve the educational attainment and social mobility of black and Latino males. (Research is Needed, para. 4)

Single-sex studies (Garcia, 1998; Marsh, 1989; Riordan, 1994, 1990) were part of a meta-analysis conducted by the U.S. Department of Education to compare academic outcomes in single-sex and coeducational classrooms, concluding that no positive benefits could be discerned (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). The following data from this meta-analysis supports the inconclusive findings of benefits of single-sex schooling. One study did find support for coeducational schooling; however the advantages are for White females and not for Black or Asian females. In this study males are found to be under-represented in this area of research. Two studies examine the relationship between ethnicity (African American, Asian, or White) and single sex schooling versus coeducational and find differences favoring coeducation for all three groups (Garcia, 1998; Riordan, 1994).

In the domain of ‘long-term, quantifiable academic accomplishment’ the studies indicate some protracted effects of attending a single-sex (SS) high school. Advocates of single-sex schooling argue that this type of schooling leads to higher college graduation rates, postsecondary test scores, and graduate school attendance because the single-sex experience provides an environment that breeds an academic subculture focused on achievement and studying; in one part due to the lack of distraction of
the opposite sex. In this environment it was instilled in students to focus and work hard so that success could be maintained even when they leave the environment. Unfortunately there are only four studies total, that came from two scholars (Riordan, 1990; Marsh, 1989) meeting all criteria to be included in the review. These findings reflect the lack of data on long-term outcomes of single-sex schooling due to the lack of high-quality research on those criteria. Within those studies it is found that any positive effects of SS schooling are not readily apparent. No differences are found for postsecondary test scores, college graduation rates, or graduate school attendance rates. All of which are supposed to be long-term measures of success for students. The review on studies is imperative to keep in mind for my case study because Urban Prep is not only a charter school, but a single-sex school as well. It should also be noted that while Urban Prep Charter Academies is well known as a single sex school because of their high percentage of male students, and their lack of female students, Urban Prep is not able to discriminate in any way in regards to their enrollment of students. Because Urban Prep utilizes a lottery system, all students in the Chicago-land area are eligible to apply to the school. During the lottery process if any student application number is called then that student is eligible for enrollment; despite their race/ethnicity, or gender.

Review on the literature exploring the effectiveness- or non-effectiveness, the weaknesses and strengths of charter schools has become even more crucial with the rising numbers of states who hold charters and the increasing demand for seats in charter schools. As of 2009, more than 4,900 charter schools enroll over 1.6 million children in 40 states and the District of Columbia; at the time there are over 420,000 names placed on charter school wait list (The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2006-2013). The most recent data (FY 2011-2012) indicates a significant growth in each of these areas. There are approximately 5,618 charter schools (approximately 5.8 percent of charter schools to all public schools; this is up from five percent in the 2009-2010 school year) active. By the 2012-2013
academic years this number is estimated to be at 6,002. Enrolling in these charter schools as of the 2011-2012 academic year are over two million students, with waitlisted names staggering at 610,000 (The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2006-2013). When broken down by race/ethnicity in the 2010-2011 academic year White students still dominate enrollment in charter schools holding over 651,000 spots; but Black and Latino students follow respectively with over 527,000 and 489,000 enrolled students (The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2006-2013). The significance of this data for my case study lies in the numbers that displayed a pattern of more charter schools being established and increasing enrollments by students of color. This in and of itself provides a rationale for researching the effects of charter school programming on students achievements, specifically Black male students.

The first charter school was created in Minnesota in 1992 after a passing of the first charter law in their states legislature in 1991. The reason behind this was that a group of policy makers and educators saw that traditional public schools were not being held accountable for their student’s achievements–or lack thereof–and this was necessary; this is what charters are modeled to accomplish. Accountability is the foundation for charter schools, and the bonus is that their school leaders have the autonomy to run the schools how they see fit. Charter school leaders are given the power to do what they feel is best in order to help their student’s achieve. Like the model that was created in 1992, charter schools continue to follow the established principles of being public and tuition-free. Charter schools are also mandated to use a random lottery drawing if the amount of applicants exceeds the amount of available seats. They are also required to meet both state and federal academic requirements (The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2006-2013).

On the back of the knowledge of what charter schools are supposed to do theoretically, there continues to be passionate discussions at the community level as well as the academic level on the
efficacy of charter schools in regards to improving student achievement; among other concerns such as motive. Based on the reasons for creating charter schools, improving student achievement should be held as the most important factor of charters efficacy. Since many charter schools have only been established and enrolling students for the past 21 years (a very small number in comparison with traditional public schools that have been established for over two centuries) research proving them better or worse in improving student academic achievement has been inconclusive. Two examples of inconclusive findings for charter schools effectiveness were produced in 2009 and 2013 by Stanford University’s Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO).

CREDO (2009) conducts a national assessment of charter schools impact on student achievement. This longitudinal, student-led analysis looks at student achievement growth on state achievement test in both reading and math. They control for student demographics and eligibility for program support (free/reduced priced lunch, special education); the report includes student achievement data from 15 states and the District of Columbia, and gauges whether students who attended charter schools fare better than if they would have attended a traditional public school. The findings of this study are both positive and negative. CREDO’s findings reveal that in general the average charter school performance nationwide paints a slightly negative picture in where these students can expect their academic growth to be slightly lower than traditional public school (TPS) peers. The positive findings include that charter schools have a larger and more positive effect on low-income students and English-language learner students compared to similar students in traditional public schools. The study also finds that overtime charter school students experience positive gains academically; this was seen in second and third year students; first year students did see a decline in their learning in comparison to similar students in traditional public schools. What the study finds that achievement results vary by states that gave individual data reports; nonetheless significant reading and math gains were reported for charter
school students in comparison with traditional public school students in five states—amongst those being Illinois (Chicago). The other 10 states that reported reading and math achievement scores are either mixed or no different than their traditional school peers, or fell significantly below their peers in traditional public schools.

The limitations found with this study were that the standard for evaluation of charter schools were measured purely on the student’s academic growth in reading and math scores; which fails to recognize other avenues to “success” of charters including being able to lower dropout rates or increase graduation rates and attendance rates to name a few. Additionally a study such as this does not distinguish the effectiveness of charter schools based on race or gender. This is increasingly becoming problematic as charter schools are strategically being positioned in urban and low-income neighborhoods that are disproportionately populated by Black and Latinos.

CREDO (2013) expanded their 2009 study assessing the national efficacy of charter schools and focuses in on those charter schools that have been open for five or more years and were replicated (i.e. KIPP schools, and those like these). The 2013 study entitled Charter School Growth and Replication is a two-volume report; Volume one, Growth (Peltason & Raymond, 2013), follow thousands of charter schools from their inceptions through five years of operations. It details the performance trajectories in their early years and concludes with the transition of some of the charter schools as their organizations grow to multiple charter schools. Volume two, Replication (Woodworth & Raymond, 2013), analyze 167 charter management organizations (CMO), non-profits that operate multiple charter schools as well as launch new ones such as KIPP, Uncommon Schools and Achievement First, and their 1,372 schools. CREDO uses the Virtual Control Record, also known as “virtual twin”, to investigate these CMO’s performances; including their impact on student learning and the impact of further growth and replication of these CMO’s. In addition, 38 different Educational Management Organizations (EMO),
for-profits that operate multiple charter schools as well as launch new ones, with 410 schools were analyzed for the impact on student learning in affiliated charter schools. The overall finding is that charter schools, as they age or replicate into networks, are likely to continue the patterns and performance set by their early years of operation, and that for most charter schools their ultimate success or failure can be predicted by year three of a school's life. This two-volume report adds to the support for charter schools in which building larger and more sophisticated organizations will help support student learning. Specific findings displayed that as a whole CMO’s perform about the same as traditional public schools, but this mask the distribution of performance around the average findings for EMO’s that were similar. Also CMO’s are shown to have stronger learning gains for many student groups as compared with their TPS and slightly better than what occurs in independent charter schools; with the overall impact for minority students in poverty being especially significant. The newly created schools from CMO’s also are found to perform at the same level as their existing schools. Finally, on average EMO’s appear to outperform the TPS local markets consistently for students of color and for students in poverty, needing Special Education, or classified as English Language Learners; suggesting that EMO’s can and do provide positive education options for students.

One of these CMO’s that have been highly visible in the charter school debates is the Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP). Currently KIPP is a national network of 125 schools in 20 states and the District of Columbia enrolling 41,000 students. 85 percent of those students are from low-income families and are eligible for free/reduced priced meals; the student population is 95 percent African American or Latino (KIPP Foundation, 2013). The creation of the KIPP foundation began in the mid 1990s when two Teach for America graduates, Mike Feinberg and Dave Levin, launched a fifth grade program in Houston, TX. In 2000 after the success of their individual KIPP Academy Middle School projects in Houston and the South Bronx they teamed up with the founders of The Gap, Doris and Don
Fisher, to establish the KIPP Foundation in order to continue the replication of the success of the original KIPP Academies (KIPP Foundation, 2013).

KIPP currently has 70 middle schools (grades 5-8), 37 elementary school (grades PreK-4) and 18 high schools (grades 9-12). KIPP network of schools in general has been touted as an exemplary and specifically their middle schools (Nisbett, 2009) although significant research has not been conducted to support these claims. For example Woodworth, David, Guha, Lopez-Torkos, & Wang (2008) conducted a study on five KIPP middle schools in the San Francisco Bay area and find that their impact on student achievement allows these students to make above average progress in most grades and cohorts compared with national norms. The researchers also find that unlike most beliefs that “student choice” will lead higher scoring students to choose KIPP, the opposite is found to be true when viewing students from the same neighborhoods. However, variation in test scores is a key finding (across grades, cohorts, subjects, and schools) with greater gains in the fifth grade. Among these findings that are important to my case study is the fact that at KIPP schools the researchers find it “plausible that the big boost they receive in their first year at KIPP puts them on track to continue progressing at grade level- a significant accomplishment for many students who begin KIPP far below grade level.” This is relevant because like KIPP, Urban Prep Charter Academies are working with many young men who are far below grade level at the time of admission. Other similarities that Urban Prep has to KIPP, which are found to be positive and impactful findings of the Woodworth et al. (2008) study are the high expectations for student academic performance and behavior, extensive time and support for student learning, focus on tracking student progress, and a philosophy of continuous improvement (Angrist, Dynarski, Kane, Pathak, &Walters, 2012; Tuttle, The, Nichols-Barrer, Gill, & Gleason, 2010). An additional school that has been recognized as an exemplary charter network with similar findings to KIPP is Geoffrey Canada’s Harlem Childrens Zone (Dobbie & Fryer, 2009; Hanson, 2013). Payne and Knowles (2009) find in their essay
focused on charter schools in the Obama administration that KIPP schools are facing issues similar to many charter schools in that “schools having valuable academic and social impacts for a select subgroup of very vulnerable children but not reaching some of the toughest kids and perhaps not creating sufficiently supportive environments to hold on to staff” (The Peril, para.2). Payne and Knowles also find that the strengths of charter schools as a whole are their flexibility in staffing, time, budgetary autonomy, governance, and protection from district policies.

Eckes and Trotter (2007) conduct a study that explores the aspect of flexibility that Payne and Knowles (2009) highlight in charter schools. This study investigates the admissions and recruitment practices of eight high-achieving charter schools and considers whether charter school leaders negotiate state statutes to create a diverse student body. The study finds that, dependent on the state statutory language, charter schools may be permitted some flexibility in recruiting and admitting students, drawing students from across traditional school district boundary lines. This literature shows that not only are charters legally able to select specific populations of students, but that such flexibility is one of their strengths. This study connects to my case study because it supports the belief that flexibility is a strength that charters have, in not only the recruitment of their students but the ability to hire and fire staff members, and more crucially, to easily dismiss students who do not fall in line with their standards; being able to send those students back to home schools, a privilege that traditional public schools do not have. This flexibility or autonomy can skew statistics of a school making data appear better than what it actually is.

Zimmerman (2007) examines how student achievement varies with school operational features. Zimmerman uses data from charter and public schools to categorize operational features as school organizational features, school-level control, teacher quality issues, curriculum allocations, and principal background. The findings show that these operational features are not consistently related with
student achievement. Furthermore, findings show that there is little evidence that greater autonomy of charter schools leads to improved student achievement.

As mentioned previously, motive is another concern in the passionate discussions displayed amongst those who are opposed to charter schools. As my case study specifically focuses on a charter school in Chicago, Illinois, the following discussion will also focus in this location. Lynch (2013) reports on a protest held in Chicago recently by the Chicago Teachers Union, and supporters of Chicago Public Schools. This protest is due to an announcement of the closings of 53 more Chicago Public Schools (Lynch, 2013). Chicago Teachers Union President remarks that the Chicago School Plan was racist. “Let’s not pretend when you close schools primarily on the south and west sides (of Chicago) that the children who would be affected are black. Let’s not pretend that’s not racist.” The Chicago School Plan that Karen Lewis, head of Chicago Teachers Union, is referring to is Chicago’s Renaissance 2010 plan in which 100 new schools are to be opened by closing 60 schools labeled as underutilized or underperforming in order to increase the number of high-quality educational options (see also Lipman, 2009 for further reading on Renaissance 2010). Lynch further reports that educational advocates believe that the high number of school closings and high number of charter conversion and start-ups are a part of a larger national push to privatize and capitalize public education; that while many school districts are experiencing a number of school closings, Chicago (CPS district) has set a precedent amount of closings; closing 105 schools since 2002 (Ahmed-Ullah, 2013; Vevea, Lutton, & Karp, 2013). The push to privatize education is becoming increasingly evident in Chicago due to the majority of the closed schools being replaced or reopened as charter schools (Vevea, Lutton, & Karp, 2013).

The significance of noting the amount of schools being placed on the decision table to close, and the effects this is having on communities and school districts can be supported by Dr. Horace Hall’s assessment of the geographic location of these closings. Dr. Horace Hall, associate professor of
education policy studies and research at DePaul University, notes that 90 percent of schools slated to close are in Black low-income neighborhoods. Referring back to the data drawn by the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, they find that both nationally and at the state level-in Illinois- that charter schools are predominately in cities. Nationally there are over two thousand charter schools in cities, as compared with suburbs, towns, and rural areas as of 2010-2011. In Illinois these statistics mirror national statistics with 29 charter schools having locations in cities out of the current 52 charter schools statewide (The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2006-2013). The map designed by Vevea, Lutton, and Karp (2013) displays exact locations of these charters and the schools that have closed; further supporting the allegation of Chicago Teachers Union President, Karen Lewis, that geographically these proposed schools to close are located in predominately Black and Latino neighborhoods.

Providing evidence to show that there is a national push for privatization of education in the amount of school closings, showing that Chicago-the city of my case study- is raising the bar in the quantity of school closings, and continues to be held as a model for school reform is necessary to further support my rationale for research on the effects of charter programming on Black male student achievement; specifically the effects of Urban Prep Charter Academies For Young Men’s programming on Black male student achievement. Although Urban Prep is categorized as a freestanding start-up organization, their campuses are strategically located in neighborhoods highly populated with African Americans. They are also a charter school that continues to expand its campuses and receive national and international press positioning it as a “model” for educating “urban” Black male students. Based on the previous literature reviewed, Urban Prep should be researched for its efficacy on student achievement-based on the foundational reasons for charter schools- and specifically with these Black male students who also are categorized as students in poverty- being eligible for free/reduced price
lunch- and/or needing special education assistance because the literature finds that these students fair better academically in charter schools. In addition, after a charter schools third year one would be able to predict the continued success or failure according to the CREDO (2013) report. Based on the validity of this report then the “success” rates provided for Urban Prep should display that they will continue to have high percentages of success in areas like high school graduation and college enrollment, but may not have high percentage rates of success in areas such as standardized test scores.

I also want to note that the need to study charter schools in general and Urban Prep specifically is not only necessary because nationally there has been increased attention given to the move to privatize education, but because there has been a high demand for these types of schools from parents as well (May, 2006). Every year since Urban Prep’s inception they have had to place a large number of families on a waitlist, mirroring the other small number of selective elementary and high schools of Chicago (Schmidt, 2011; Vevea, 2013) this has been one contentious way that reporters have attempted to monitor the demand for charter schools.

**Literature Review Wrap-Up**

Situating the literature review in the historical fight for both access and equal access to education allows me to display how the current fight for equal access to education is not a 21st century phenomenon. In fact the literature shows that academic success has always been a priority of the Black community. This section of the literature review connects back to my research question(s) because it provides me with a historical link to Urban Prep’s rationale for wanting to create an academic environment specifically for this demographic of students. Similar to the rationale for the creation of HBCU’s, whose creation was based loosely on access to a (quality) college education in which Black students would be in an academic environment that will be structured to cater to the whole student; an environment that will open doors for their admitted students to prosper in their career choices. This
literature helps me to answer my research question on the significance of an all Black male school. While the historical connection is needed, I also needed to present literature that will discuss the type of school Urban Prep is.

The next section presents literature that positions African American males as failures in academic settings. In this section it is necessary to discuss literature that focuses on the “school-to-prison” pipeline, the effects of teacher perception on students, graduation rates, dropout rates, and test scores of Black male students. These studies and text allow me to further demonstrate not only how Black males are situated in the society, but the adverse effects of being Black and male in the U.S. traditional public education system. This discussion also supports that the mistreatment of Black male students and the failure of Black male students are not isolated events, but systemic. Thus this literature displays the narrative that Urban Prep is attempting to counter in admitting Black males and creating a goal of high school graduation and college enrollment. This literature allows me to gather data to answer my research question about success, uncovering and interrogating attributes of success. If data has been collected stating that Black males hold high percentage rates in dropouts, suspensions, and expulsions, while holding low percentage rates in testing and graduating then a way of measuring success will be to counter these statistics by proving that it is the educational environment that these students are in that is not allowing them to have high rates of graduation and academic scores.

The literature discussing scholars who fight to disrupt the above mentioned narratives of Black male academic failure highlight and examine environments and strategies that are able to aid in addressing the needs of the whole student. The literature also emphasizes the need for more Black males in teaching and leadership roles, implementing culturally relevant pedagogies, and using caring and nurturing theories to work with Black males. This section lends itself to helping me address my inquiry into the programming of an all Black male centered school, as well as how some of the instituted
programs align with what has been shown to work and the effects they have on the graduates and the faculty; such as mentor programs, Black teachers being more than role models, theories of caring/nurturing, and “cultural synchronization”. This section also discusses school expenditure and its effect on academic achievement, among other things. The review of those studies helps me to answer the research aims pertaining to financial allocation.

The final section focuses on literature that discusses the charter school movement, along with some information on single-sex schools. This section discusses how the charter school movement continues the push for equal access to education for underrepresented and underserved students in traditional public schools. This section highlights a highly visible and touted “successful” charter school, KIPP Academies; and connects back to the research questions because it provides a background for the type of school and privileges that Urban Prep has in being a charter school. This section allows for me to begin answering the research questions pertaining to allocation of resources as well as admission processes.

My research adds to the historical literature reviewed by displaying that the fight for equal access to education is a continued effort in the African American community, but it also presents how this fight further integrates into a national effort; not just an effort fought by an ethnic group and a few allies. My research adds to the literature on charter schools, and disrupting narratives of Black male failure by providing counter narrative data through experiences of alumni, current and former faculty, and administration from a highly visible and touted successful charter school that has been the only reporter of their success. My research provides an inside look into the school and interrogates this charter schools “success” based on factors that are not just defined by test scores. What my research does that was not found in the literature is provide a dissenting narrative challenging the purported graduation rates of Urban Prep Charter Academy and the efficacy of their programming.
"What this 100 percent proves beyond a doubt is that it need not be the exception but it should be the expectation for every child in the city of Chicago," (Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel, NBC 5 Chicago).

The study at hand focuses on the phenomenon presented at Urban Prep Charter Academy for Young Men, also known as Urban Prep, situated in Chicago, Illinois. To understand the procedures taken to conduct the case study this chapter will begin with a context of Chicago Public Schools (CPS) in the City of Chicago in general, and specifically the three neighborhoods where the Urban Prep campuses are located. This will be followed by a discussion of the phenomenon that is reported from Urban Prep—high graduation rates, enrollment in colleges and universities, and advancing standardized test scores. I will then explain my role as the researcher and why I choose to use counter stories as my methodological approach. Information about the participants, materials used, the design, and procedures will succeed; and the chapter will close with a discussion of the limitations that appear and the delimitations set. I would like to reiterate that I examined UPCA as a potential model program to inform current and future “models” of education for Black males. I explore the ways this program is understood by multiple stakeholders affiliated with the school, including faculty, administration and alumni, and how its impacts them, so that others who are interested in integrating parts of this program, or replicating the entire program, have an understanding of why this school works. My research focus is counter narratives (stories). My research questions are as follows: What makes Urban Prep a success? How does Urban Prep’s programming allow for Black male academic achievement? How is achievement measured?
This will be completed through (A) interrogating the secondary experiences of the alumni, (B) identifying the support structures, operation of the school, admission process, and allocation of financial/support resources, (C) discovering the significance of an all Black/male school, along with the positive and negatives of a gender and race specific school, and (D) uncovering and interrogating attributes of success (achievement).

Context of City of Chicago

Chicago Public Schools

Chicago has been an epicenter of school reform since the 1980s (see Chapter One). This is especially important as Chicago is home to Chicago Public Schools (CPS), the third largest school district in the United States. The 2011-2012 fiscal years (FY) document 404,151 students; the racial breakdown of the students is one strand of evidence that displays why researchers who are interested in the academic achievement and advancement of students of color would choose CPS as a study site.

There are 41.6 percent of students who identify as African-American, 44.1 percent as Latino, 8.8 percent as White, 3.4 percent as Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.4 percent who identify as Native American. Of these students 87 percent are from low-income families according to the FY 2011-2012. Situated inside of CPS as of the 2012-2013 school year are a total of 681 schools; of those are 472 elementary schools, 106 high schools, seven contract schools, and 96 campuses that are categorized as charter schools. These schools are governed by Local School Councils (LSC) that generally have representatives that include six parents, two community members, two teachers, one non-teaching staff, one principal, and, if the school is a high school, one student. With the diversity represented in the student population, CPS lacks similar diversity in their teaching staff. Of the 23,290 teachers, 49.3 percent of these teachers are White; while 25.1 percent are African American, 18.3 percent are Hispanic, 3.4 percent are Asian, 0.1 percent are Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 0.4 percent are Native American, 1.8 percent are Multi-Racial, and 1.7
percent are Unknown. Although the percentage of non-White teachers appears to be very low, there is an abundant number of African American and Latino administrators serving as principals; 48.2 percent are African American, 16.7 percent are Hispanic, 1 percent is Asian, 1.7 percent are Multi-Racial, 1.4 percent are Unknown, as compared to 30.8 percent that are White (Chicago Public Schools, 2013).

The final general statistic of Chicago Public Schools is the operating expense per pupil. The operating expense per pupil for CPS happens to be $13,078 as of FY 2010. This is important to note as one point that is continuously brought up in discussion of public schools versus private schools is the amount of money that is allocated to spend per child; with the largely held notion that the more money you spend per pupil the greater their school experience (social, academic, etc.) will be. However, researcher’s find that this is not a valid measurement of greater school experience, higher test scores, or student performance (De Peña, 2012; Lips et al., 2008).

**Youth Homicides in Chicago Communities**

In recent years Chicago has been in the news for its education politics surrounding the former CEO of Chicago Public Schools Arne Duncan, who is now the nation’s Education Secretary, and his Race to The Top (RTTT) competition driven initiative. Also making headlines was the 2012 Chicago Teachers Strike; the first in 25 years that shut down the entire CPS system keeping approximately 350,000 students out of school for over a week due to long held contentions dealing with teacher contracts and feelings of under-appreciation (Kumashiro, 2012). In addition to politics and teacher strikes Chicago communities have experienced a wave of homicides amongst their youth at alarming numbers. Judy Keenan of *USA Today* reported,

> The bloodshed in President Obama’s adopted hometown has resulted in a body count that exceeds the 312 murders this year in New York and 212 in Los Angles, cities with populations
dwarfing that of the Windy City...the toll is up 25% from 2011: 391 through September 23, 2012 (October, 4, 2012).

The roots of these deaths are reported nationwide as consequences of gang violence, drugs, and guns. This epidemic is being coined a youth homicide epidemic-young people both killing and dying. Alden K. Loury of The Chicago Reporter stated,

From 2008 through 2012, nearly half of Chicago’s 2,389 homicide victims were killed before their 25th birthdays. In 2011, the most recent year for which the data were available, more than 56 percent of individuals who committed murder were also under 25. One-third of Chicago residents are under 25, according to 2011 Census estimates (January 30, 2013).

From this statement comes concern for the amount of homicides that are not only effecting youth, but a large proportion of these homicides are occurring in the city’s South, Southwest and West side communities that happen to be home to the most disadvantaged communities that are disproportionately Black and Latino. Although these communities (the city’s 21 leading communities for youth homicide) only account for 32 percent of the city’s residents, these communities have alarmingly high percentages of social ills (poverty, unemployment, low education attainment held by adults) that mirror the disproportionately high percentages of Black male suspensions and incarceration rates. Loury (2013) notes further statistics for these South, Southwest, and West side communities,

• More than 73 percent of the city’s 1,118 homicide victims were under the age of 25 from 2008 through 2012,

• Almost 70 percent of Chicago’s population loss between 2000 and 2010. Those 21 communities collectively lost 140,000 residents during that time. The city as a whole lost 200,000 residents,

• More than 53 percent of the locations of Chicago Public School closings announced since 2001,
• Nearly 43 percent of Chicago’s 109,000 foreclosure filings from January 2007 through June 2012,

• More than 71 percent of the city’s 138 public elementary schools that were low-performing in math [“Low-performing” is defined as schools where fewer than 10 percent of students’ standardized test scores exceeded state standards during the 2011-2012 school year],

• Nearly 68 percent of the 221 Chicago public elementary schools that were low-performing in reading,

• Nearly 59 percent of the 46 public high schools whose average 11th grade ACT composite scores were below 16, and

• More than 56 percent of the city’s 72,296 teen births from 1999 through 2009.

These statistics are reported in a local newspaper, The Red Eye, displaying the number of deaths of youth under 25 killed between January 2008 and December 2012; see Map 1, between these dates, there are 335 homicides of youth between the ages of 15-18. These statistics are crucial in order to understand the external environment that the students who attend CPS and Urban Prep Charter Academies for Young Men are forced to live in.
Map 1: Youth Homicide

Context of School

Urban Prep Charter Academies for Young Men is a not-for-profit organization that currently holds three charter contracts in the City of Chicago. Their contracts are held in the neighborhoods of Englewood, West (1326 West 14th Place), and Bronzeville. Each of these neighborhoods according to the Urban Prep website is high-need communities.

Englewood

Englewood, located on Chicago’s Southwest side, is described by Urban Prep’s website as a community “on track to shine again with opportunity...being an early beacon of hope for African Americans escaping slavery as a stop on the Underground Railroad” (2013). While viewing the data
from Map 1 that was collected from the Cook County Medical Examiner’s Office, Englewood is one of the 21 leading communities described in the previously mentioned statistics. Between January 1, 2008 and December 31, 2012 the Englewood and West Englewood communities have a combined 101 deaths less than 25 years of age; of those 101 deaths, 36 were between the ages of 15-18 years old. Englewood is located on the city’s Southwest side. Within the same zip code of Urban Prep-Englewood campus (60621) there are four additional high schools one small school, one charter school, and two neighborhood schools. CPS defines a small school as one that accepts students who live in the boundary area or by application if they are out of the boundary area; these schools strive to provide a more intimate and personalized learning experience by capping their student population at 600 students.

**Bronzeville**

The Bronzeville community is recognized as “once being called the ‘Black Metropolis’ for its extensive historical value to African American art and culture...a community continuing to revitalize itself” (Urban Prep, 2013). The Bronzeville community border is between 26th street and 51st street to the north and south, and South Lakeshore Drive and La Salle St. to the west and east, respectively. Like other communities in urban centers that went through years of white-flight, Bronzeville is experiencing the effects of gentrification that is taking place throughout the city’s southern and southwestern communities. In the Urban Prep-Bronzeville campus zip code (60616) are six additional high schools; three charter schools, one special education school, one contract school, and one career academy. CPS defines a special education school as one that accepts students based on their Individualized Education Plan (IEP), and that educates students with disabilities who live in a specified geographic area. A career academy is one that accepts students only on their test scores, promoting a college-preparatory curriculum and a career-focused education in different fields at each school.
The West campus is located in the East Garfield Park community, acknowledged for their ethnic diversity and ties with being home to Jane Addams in the nineteenth century. Like its Bronzeville neighbor, the path of gentrification has continued in the East Garfield Park community since the early 21st century. In the same zip code of the West campus of Urban Prep (60608) are five high schools, one neighborhood school, one contract school, and three charter schools. According to Chicago Public Schools a contract school is one that accepts students based on a random lottery drawing or application, and is operated by private entities under contract with CPS. A neighborhood school is one that accepts students based on residence within the boundary area established by CPS or application if out of boundary; in general all students who live in the boundary area can attend that school. A charter school is one that accepts students based on application and random lottery. Charter schools are open to all children residing in Chicago, but they operate independent of the CPS Board of Education and other charter.
Externship and Limitations

My research began at the Urban Prep International Head Quarters (IHQ), located downtown Chicago at 420 N. Wabash, Suite 300. In this suite is where my site contact and I further discussed my research purpose and goals, as well as the amount of involvement needed from the organization in regards to my research. It is at this location that I was introduced to the head of Alumni Affairs that was designated as my contact for alumni participation. The head of Alumni Affairs stated that my flyer would be distributed to all alumni on my behalf through their email and a posting on Urban Prep’s social media alumni page.

After a week I received no response for interview participation from the alumni so I emailed the head of Alumni Affairs and questioned if the flyer had been distributed to the alumni list serve and posted on the social media alumni page. By the next week I had received three alumni contacts from the head of Alumni Affairs. I was appreciative of the contacts, but was caught off guard because it was discussed both verbally and in writing that those who wanted to participate in interviewing were to contact me directly. This is a precaution to protect privacy and draw a wider pool of participants who may not want their participation disclosed to the organization. After sending an inquiring email about the procedure taken to distribute the flyer and the information to participate in the research, I received an email from the head of Alumni Affairs stating that “they were asked to let me (or someone else in my department) know that they were interested in participating; in the interest of time I sent you the three guys who had reached out to say they were interested as of yesterday” (head of Alumni Affairs, personal communication, 7/2012). This presented me with a problem. If my potential participants were being sent information about my research and were being instructed to contact the Alumni Department or the head of Alumni Affairs then that action could have deterred some participants from participating. In addition
to only receiving the three given alumni participants I was contacted personally by one of the alumni to participate in an interview.

Minutes after speaking with one of Urban Preps vice principals I received a message from my contact indicating an urgent needed to speak in order to clarify the parameters of the research. I was told that he received a phone call from one of the campuses inquiring about my credentials and the research I was conducting. I explained that my rationale for calling the campuses was to recruit more participants. The conversation ended by my site contact explaining to me that even though I was given permission to work with the school for the research, and that I had done nothing wrong, he would need to end the research prematurely. His reasoning was that he did not initially understand how much manpower I was requiring for the research and they just did not have the needed amount of people to monitor the research. He had called the campuses and cancelled the scheduled appointment, stating that the administrators already had a lot on their plates and they did not want to bother them with participation in this project. A letter was written to my advisor notifying her that I was not at fault, but the research needed to be ended.

I immediately spoke to my externship advisor. A formal letter was sent to the IHQ contact and an in-person meeting was held. In this meeting the site contact was willing to finish helping me recruit some faculty members. From this meeting the site contact was willing to attempt to recruit some faculty members he knew personally at the teacher’s retreat discussed previously. Upon my return to Syracuse, I had also made contact with my current advisor and discussed the externship and the problems that had arisen. From this conversation my advisor put me in contact with two of her colleagues, one who happened to be a former faculty member of Urban Prep, who by word of mouth made contact with colleagues who were former employees of Urban Prep or knew an employee of Urban Prep. Through the
use of snowball sampling, I was able to obtain participants representing the former faculty interview group.

**Role as the Researcher**

Throughout this research my role has balanced between being both emic and etic. Working as an insider because of my ethnicity, my educational background, the location I grew up in, and my role as a mother. However, I am very much an outsider and have at times taken on a role as an objective viewer due to my age (as compared to the high school graduates), my low affiliation with the organization and the campuses, as well as my gender.

I identify as a Black woman, as contrasted with the term African-American because I recognize through familial oral histories that my ethnicity is entangled with not only African descent, but Cuban and Native American as well; the term Black encompasses my affiliation with the Pan African community. Given this I have no firsthand experience with the psychological or physical aspects of growing up as a Black male in America, and more specifically going through the US education system as a Black male. I come to this research with oral stories passed on through the men in my family, overhearing conversations of the many good days that were scattered with tales of unequal treatment based on simplistic and irrational fears because of the tone of voice used, the height and stature acquired, or other nonsensical ideologies that had been held onto throughout our racialized history. I also come with the literature of scholars who have paved the way before me in the fields of education, psychology, and sociology with a focus on males, education, and race.

Attending primary and secondary schools in Evanston, IL (north of Chicago) I had some opportunity to witness the differences in schools and the resources available when traveling with the sports teams to games in North Chicago. These differences were made clearer was when a teammate shared with me that she actually lived in Chicago and chose to move in with her grandmother who
stayed in Evanston so that she could have more educational opportunities than would be provided at the Chicago Public School she previously attended. Although I had never personally attended a Chicago Public School, I had the opportunity to have two close friends who did. Both of these young ladies said that their families decided that the education system was not rigorous enough and/or that the communities were not safe. For one of my friends this meant that she and her family moved into the suburb of Evanston for better educational and life opportunities; for the other friend her family chose to remain in Chicago, while she would live during the week with her grandmother in Evanston to take advantage of the educational opportunities. For both of these young ladies this was the change that allowed them admittance into the colleges of their choice. They are both excelling in their goals now. I believe the only familiarity that allowed me the little bit of access to Urban Prep was my initiative, persistence, and genuine interest in the organization. I was also very clear and forthright with what my intentions were for embarking on this type of research.

My concern with the successful growth of the Black child, specifically males, stems from my concern as an educator and mother of a Black son. I have witnessed firsthand the differences in treatment of children who do not fit the standard behavior expected in most classes; for example the robotic characteristics in which the child is expected to sit in one place for extended time periods, not communicate with his/her peers unless the worksheet dictates it, so not speaking without raising your hand, or even attempting to extend a class conversation with your home knowledge or independent thought. It is evident to me that this is not the practice in some classrooms, but it is the standard practice in many classrooms. Like many parents I have realized that you are left with two choices: help your child to conform to the classroom environment they are currently in or attempt to find another environment where your child has a better chance of thriving. The latter choice is for the most part not an option for many families.
So when I began to research alternative education institutions (for me this included private schools and independent schools) I came across charter schools that specifically catered to Black and Latino students. I became intrigued and intertwined with the debates and discourse surrounding the “success” and necessity of charter schools. In my literature review the research has shown that charter schools have not been established long enough to make any conclusive statements on the “success” or “failure” of these schools (CREDO, 2009, 2013; Zimmerman, 2007). For the many successful charters such as KIPP Academy Houston, The Arts and Technology Academy Public Charter School, BASIS School, Inc., Community of Peace Academy, Oglethrope Charter School, Ralph A. Gates Elementary School, Roxbury Preparatory Charter school, and The School of Arts and Sciences (U.S. Department of Education, 2004); there have been many failing charters. Beyond this inconclusiveness is a hope for many, including myself, that schools such as these can do what some public schools have not been able to do: educate our children in a manner that will prepare them for success in the next leg of their career and/or education journey and educate the whole child.

Although there have been many charter schools in Chicago established prior to Urban Prep Charter Academies for Young Men, none of these schools have dared to declare a focus specifically on Black males and establish a school in where the student demographic would be reflected in its teaching staff. Urban Prep also caught my attention when statistics from the school were cast out to the public that posited a huge gain in reading scores on the Explore test for their entering freshman, in less than one academic year. When the school reported 100 percent graduation rates and enrollment into colleges/universities for three years in a row, I knew I had to explore the inner workings of this school. If the experiences and statistics reported by the school were valid, then I felt as though the programming should be replicated in order to give Black males in Chicago the same opportunity.
**Design of Research**

I employed a qualitative case study design because of my urgency to bring forth the voices of the alumni, faculty and administrators who have firsthand experience with the programming and structure of Urban Prep. The intent of qualitative research is to understand a social situation (Babbie, 2010; Mertens, 1998) by contrasting, comparing, replicating, cataloging, and classifying the object of study (Huberman & Miles, 1984). This qualitative case study design observes the aspects of school culture and environments that are invisible in quantitative data such as the student’s voice. In this case study, emergent design flexibility was used so that as the understanding of the research and data continued I would have the freedom to pursue new paths that appeared in the research. Patton (2002) suggests that the naturalistic inquiry that is inherent in qualitative work impels it to have flexibility in all facets of the research process (i.e., interview questions, etc.). So as the interviews were conducted I followed the lead of the participants to guide me in how to ask the questions and if they were open to expounding on given responses. A new path that appeared in my research was voices of dissent. My research focus has always been the counter narratives that the school would present that would show how the narrative they were creating was in opposition of the dominant narrative of Black males in education. As the interviews continued a third discourse began to form whose voices dissented from the self reported media narratives given by Urban Prep. So these counter narratives of voices of dissent were pursued in this research as well.

**Theoretical Framework**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is the framework used to inform this case study. Critical Race Theory was first linked with scholars who while agreeing with the efforts of those involved in civil rights movements, wanted to push the boundaries because they saw a problem in the implications of
civil rights laws. The key problem that was highlighted was the issue that the inequalities that were being faced in the United States could not be fully solved with civil rights laws because those spoke directly to human rights; while critical race theorists believed that one needed to theorize race and its intersections with property rights. Understanding how rights are handed out in the United States based on property rights and thus the intersections this has with racial inequalities helps me to understand how CRT can further explain the educational inequalities of African Americans (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995).

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) noted that critical race theorist acknowledged the efforts of the many lawyers and citizens who fought for the positive ruling of Brown v. Board of Education 1954 that lead to school integration, however these theorists are also able to posit how this ruling led to white-flight which impacted the property rights and cemented de-facto segregation, and thus equal access to education because those whose owned property took the finances with them and refused to distribute money to non-white school districts. The forced integration led to many Black teachers and administrators losing their jobs (Ethridge, 1979; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Tillman, 2007), an impact the nation is still feeling.

CRT is a crucial theory to understanding the role of race in researching a single sex Black male charter school in the United States. In addition to CRT allowing me how to understand the role of race in this school, CRT also provided the methodological tool of counter narratives (Bell, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Zamudio, Russell, Rios, & Bridgeman 2010) that allows for voices of African American teachers, administrators, and alumni to share through experiential knowledge how to educate a marginalized community (Delpit, 1988). The use of storytelling is entrenched in the African American oral tradition used as a tool of agency to never be silenced or forgotten individually, or collectively. Howard (2008) notes the historical linkage of storytelling in the African American community as a
means to pass down histories, traditions, and struggles based on lived experience. By privileging the voices of participants through highlighting their experiences my case study makes room for the acknowledgment of their experiential knowledge in this charter space to be recognized and affirmed.

My case study supports the work of CRT which entrenches its work in themes of “naming one’s own reality” in order to present dichotomies in dominant societal ideologies, such as the legal system and education. CRT allows me to reveal dissenting voices that challenge the 100 percent graduation rates reported by Urban Prep, but also challenge what I call a medium discourse that is being presented as charter schools being the save all for Black male student achievement; specifically Urban Prep. While at the same time allowing Urban Preps counter story to highlight how they are challenging the large discourse, societies dominate narrative of Black male failure.

Critical Race Theory allows me to work through my analysis with a particular lens that will seek out narratives, stories that tell one narrative and those that present a counter narrative, and how to interpret meaning from these narratives. One of the key tenants of CRT that will guide my analysis is to be mindful that “critical race theory in education is a radical critique of both status quo and the supported reforms” (p.62, Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995).

**Participants**

For this case study three sampling strategies were used to identify participants: purposive, convenience, and snowball (Adamchak, 2000). This case study made use of interviews with the African American youth in the graduated classes of 2010, 2011, and 2012 because of the phenomenal rate of one hundred percent acceptance to four-year institutions and high school graduation rates. These sampling strategies were used during interviews with faculty, administrators, and alumni. I also asked the participants for referrals to other alumni and/or faculty and staff that would be of benefit to this study.
Recruitment

The criteria for participation was simplistic; an alumnus needed to be 18 years of age or older, male, a graduate from Urban Prep Charter Academies, and was admitted and enrolled in college/university; the faculty/staff needed to be current or former employees of Urban Prep Charter Academies. It was proposed to gain at least ten alumni from each graduating class in order to have an even representation, but a large enough pool to draw significant data from. There were approximately ten interviews conducted for the study: three alumni, one administrator, and six faculty members (former and current). Due to FERPA laws I was already knowledgeable that contact information of the faculty and alumni would not be able to be given readily. Given the amount of time allotted for my fieldwork (six weeks) the ten participants that were gathered over time gave rich detail in their interviews that more than sufficed for the study.

Recruitment of Faculty

During my six-week externship in Chicago to meet in-person with my contact at Urban Prep and begin interviews, I was unable to enter the Urban Prep campuses let alone meet with the administrators in each campus. Because of the time of my visit, I was told that many of the teachers were on summer vacation; thus making contact with them may be harder then what was to be expected. However I was assured by my contact that all efforts would be made to get in contact with faculty and administration via distribution of the flyer over email.

However by this point, mid July, I had still not heard any feedback from my contact on potential faculty and administrators who were interested in interviewing. In fact when I met with my contact to discuss this I asked if he felt it was more of a problem that it was the timing or lack of interest. I was told that he believed it was quite possibly a lack of interest because of the workload of the faculty and administration, but that he would continue to try. I was not willing to just give up knowing that the
experiences of current and former faculty members were needed to give my research more depth. During the next few weeks I continued to push for different strategies to recruit faculty and administrators; by attempting to set up an appointment with CEO Tim King, I was told that he had a very busy schedule and that there would be no way for him to meet with me, and even requesting to make a brief statement about my research at an upcoming faculty retreat that is held before each school year. I was told that would also not be possible. Throughout this entire ordeal I kept consistent contact with my externship advisor updating her on all events and conversations that were taking place. I was wisely told to not give up, and if necessary a meeting would need to be set up between my contact, advisor and myself to discuss the importance of my externship and its role in my successful completion of my thesis and graduate program. I was instructed to write a formal letter stating this, and did so but with no response.

I then took the initiative to attempt to recruit faculty and administrators to participate that may still be in Chicago. Instead of showing up at the campuses unannounced I determined it was best for me to call each campus to speak briefly with a principal or vice principal in order to schedule a visit to personally give them a flyer and go over my research and what I was looking for. My hopes were to make contact with the heads of the campuses and meet them so they could connect a face with the pre-distributed research flyer and so that they could speak to their teachers on my behalf-or allow me to come in and speak with their teachers about my research. I called all three campuses and spoke with the secretary first. With each phone call I came to realize that the secretaries were unaware of any research study going on, and thus wanted to verify my credentials with my contact at Urban Preps International Head Quarters (IHQ). I was able to leave messages with two of the campuses principals, whom I was expecting to contact me later that day, and I was even able to speak personally with one of the vice principals. The secretaries and vice principals stated that they had not received any research flyer. Although the last vice principal was unaware after a five-minute conversation discussing my research he
was very interested and scheduled for me to meet with him at his office the following day for further discussion.

**Participant Information**

In this section I provide some details of the ten participants, I also give some detail in Chapter Four which discusses the interviews and the interview analysis. All participants are current or former residents of Chicago, IL and all identified as African American. As previously stated there are three alumni participants who are all male. These three males each graduated from Urban Prep Charter Academy for Young Men respectively in 2010, 2011, and 2012. The alumni who graduated in 2011 and 2012 were admitted to Urban Prep as freshman and remained at Urban Prep through senior year. The alumni who graduated in 2010 was also admitted to Urban Prep as a freshman, but decided to leave during his sophomore year of high school and returned to Urban Prep his junior year with a new perspective on education and life. The alumni, like all participants, will be addressed with a pseudonym respectively Alumnus A, Alumnus B, and Alumnus C.

There are two current faculty members and one administrator who volunteered to participate in the interviews. There is one male faculty member who is addressed as Mr. M and there is one female faculty member who is addressed as Mrs. L, and one administrator who is addressed as Mr. K. All participants are college degree recipients in fields such as Biology, Spanish, Curriculum and Instruction Marketing. Mr. M and Mrs. L are active in the extracurricular roles of the school and have worked at Urban Prep for two years or more. Mr. K as an administrator is not able to participate directly with students but helps to manage the operation of the school from fundraisers to marketing communications, external relations, and student recruitment.

There are also four former faculty participants. These participants are addressed respectively as Mr. W, Mrs. S, Mr. C, and Mr. J. This group is comprised of one female and three male participants. I
would like to be clear that these participants are all apart of Urban Prep teaching faculty at one point in time. All participants except for one are certified in education. Like the current faculty these former faculty members are very much involved in the extracurricular activities involving the students serving in spaces for choir, reading clubs, after school tutoring, intramural sports, computer clubs, and Students Willing to Assist in Technology (SWAT).

**Procedure**

In early January 2012, I made contact with Urban Prep through email to inquire about the possibilities of conducting a case study with a focus on Urban Prep Charter Academies, and specifically the experiences of their alumni and faculty/administrators. Within the discussion included the purpose of the proposed case study involving the academy, the importance of the case study, the time commitment necessary to collect data, and the level of participation I was expecting from the school, the faculty, and students. Communication continued throughout the spring semester and culminated with approval given from Urban Prep IHQ and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Syracuse University. After approval was given the prepared recruitment flyers were emailed to the IHQ contact of Urban Prep.

The time allotted to the collection of this data was six weeks in where I was physically available to be in the Chicago-land area. Due to the low attainment of participants during those six weeks, through snowball sampling I was able to conduct further interviews during the months between September and November of 2012. While in Chicago, in-person interviews began one week after July 4th. The contact information for the four alumni who were interviewed was sent to me through email from the head of Alumni Affairs. I contacted each alumnus and gave an overview statement detailing whom I had received their information from, who I was and the institution I was affiliated with, what I was researching, the purpose, and the requirements of participation. After the initial verbal consents, consent forms were emailed to each participant and an interview date was set.
Each alumnus was met at a local Starbucks where the signed consent form was collected and any additional questions were answered prior to the start of the interview. The participant and I read over the consent form and were clear of the following categories: a) consent to have name added in final research b) consent to view unofficial transcripts. Participants were told that interviews would take between one and two hours and that after the interview they would be compensated with a gift card. Each in-person interview lasted between 30 and 40 minutes. Interviews were also conducted via telephone because of the geographical distances between the participants and me. One of the former faculty members was actually interviewed at a BBQ because this was the most convenient place for the participant due to personal travel and time restrictions; that interview lasted approximately 30 minutes. The interview with the administrator was conducted in his office located within Urban Prep’s IHQ; it lasted approximately 40 minutes. The interviews that were conducted after my summer externship were completed through a phone interview or via email. Those who participated in a phone interview were recorded on my personal Olympus digital audio recorder and those interviews lasted between 35 to 45 minutes. The few participants who chose to participate through email were emailed the interview questions along with a set of directions. After they answered the questions the participants emailed me their responses.

During each of the interviews I followed pre-scripted questions, one set for alumni and one set for faculty and administrators that were organized in a way to best understand the experiences of the participants and to answer my research questions. Some questions were also asked outside of the scripted text to allow for a less formal interaction; providing more comfort for the interview to flow without hesitation. All interviews were recorded using a personal digital recording device. All files were secured on my personal computer.
Interview Analysis

Once all the interviews were collected and stored I began the process of transcribing those interviews that were not conducted via email. When transcribing the audio-recorded interviews I made every attempt to capture the voice of the participant. The voice of the participant includes the tone, the pauses, the dialect, and the vernacular verbiage used. It was important to me to include all of these elements instead of attempting to write the experiences in a more academic form because I strived for the written experiences to be authentic to the participant. This is a strategy that I have learned from fictional writers such as Toni Morrison, Zora Neale Hurston, and Edwidge Danticat; who all have acknowledged the original voices of the peoples they have centered their writing around.

Along with consideration of the voice I made every attempt to include the complete context. However, for some of the phone interviews this proved to be harder than some as background environmental noise and/or cell phone static interfered. In these cases I inserted a question mark in between ellipses to indicate interruptions in the conversation that were incomprehensible.

Once the transcription was completed for all interviews I first grouped all interviews into three categories: Current Faculty and Administration, Former Faculty Members, and Alumni. In each category I color-coded the responses so that I could more easily use the responses in the narrative and juxtapose them against the other participants in that group. The response categories included overall experience, background information, success, aspects of Urban Prep that have added to success of students, advantages and disadvantages of single sex high school and mono-ethnic schools, significance of Black male schools, support structures provided by Urban Prep for students, role of gender and race in the hiring process, Urban Prep producing students ready for college, Prides, College Prep classifications, replication of Urban Prep programming, Urban Prep specifics (streamlined, class size, positive school culture, curriculum, admission process, and lottery), and final words.
Each group of interviews has the same two subheadings: interview, and analysis; except the alumni group has a participant subheading that detail some information collected on their past schools, and family information. I feel the best way to share the experiences of these participants is to begin with their overall experience at Urban Prep. I then proceed to the interview section where the interviews are written in a narrative form that integrate the question(s) asked and the participants’ responses. In each group, the participants response is placed one after another so that it is easily discernable to the reader, those response that share commonalities and those responses that offer a counter narrative. Each group was analyzed in and of itself. In the analysis I display the commonalities in the responses, but focus heavily on those responses that present counter narratives. In the analysis I highlight the counter narratives and deconstruct the meaning from these using a Critical Race Theoretical lens.

As Carter G. Woodson noted in 1933 “the Negro, so far as he is able, should develop and carry out a program on his own” (p.4); the founders of Urban Prep can be viewed as a twenty-first century approach to the fulfillment of this decree. During the organizations operation of three campuses, and three graduations with 100 percent of their students, the past six years the charter schools effectiveness and graduation rates have been called into question by community members, Chicago Teachers Union, and researchers (Lewis, 2012). As Urban Prep Charter Academy continues to expand and receive support from politicians, both locally and at the federal level; community members who seek a private affordable education; and educational entrepreneurs interested in adopting the practices used to address the academic needs of their Black males; the need is presented to discuss and analyze the tensions that can be found within these types of institutions. The need is increasingly crucial when the data that is submitted to those outside of the school, only come from the institution itself. My interests in addressing these tensions do not come from an accusatory standpoint. Rather from concern that as the school is in the position of perhaps implementing a program that has seen success with graduating black males and
getting them accepted to college, data was needed to not only support what is supposedly working well, but to present tensions that have been experienced from persons on the inside.

The following chapters are structured to provide insights into the interviews conducted, through description of major themes and my analysis of the content received. Although most participants gave permission to have their identities revealed, as a researcher I made the conscious and critical decision not to disclose any of the identities of the persons involved with this study. This decision was made based on several factors that I considered; such as power relationships that could affect the participants as it concerns their employment, support, and/or personal and work relationships that have been built. The interviewee’s are identified under such headings as current faculty and administration, former faculty, and alumni. At times it was necessary for me to distinguish between genders. Beyond the given identifiers the only dates that are used are those pertaining to the graduating class of the alumni. Each section will provide some detail about the participants, major themes, and the analysis of the themes.
Chapter 4: Voices

“Each of Urban Prep’s graduating classes has achieved a 100 percent college acceptance rate. We’ve never stated that all of our students enroll in college (for the record, 96 percent of our graduates do enroll in college — the highest rate in the city among public schools — and they persist in college at rates twice the national average for black males). Our network’s average composite ACT score is on par with the CPS average and higher than the average for African-American males in the city. More important in our view, is the growth of our students from year to year (which outpaces CPS and Chicago charter school averages)” (Tim King 2012)

Current Faculty

Interview

It was very important for me to gain a general sense of the participants overall experience as employees of Urban Prep; terms such as ‘positive’ and ‘awesome’ were used to describe the experiences of the two faculty members. Mr. K has been with the organization for a few years now and describes his experience as rewarding,

As a product of an all male historically black college I’m completely in tune and aligned with helping the mission. I understand the need for the mission, and so it’s very easy for me to come in and do my work on a day-to-day basis. Understanding what the ultimate goal is. (personal communication, July 2012)

Mrs. L admits that, “It was difficult adjusting to the longer day and addressing the needs of the young men...but it has been immensely rewarding on a personal level” (personal communication, October 2012). Mr. M said,

Of course with any school there are some issues...a lot of our kids come with issues and really I feel like more than a teacher, sometimes a father or a mentor...it’s been an enjoyable
experience...I’m going into my third year now...so, I haven’t left! (personal communication, October 2012)

The reward of these employees has been through the daily interactions with the students, wearing multiple hats such as friend, father, mother, psychologist, teacher, and mentor. Watching them walk the stage for graduation and being able to believe that they have helped these students become successful.

However, this term ‘success’ is so subjective that it was necessary to discuss what does student “success” mean to you as a faculty member, What are the attributes of “success”? As a Black man or Black woman what does “success” mean to you? Common threads of student success amongst this group were seen as students persistently moving from year to year, Mrs. L was sure that “mastery of skills and characteristic traits necessary to be successful through College,” (personal communication, October 2012) was a clear definition of success. The ultimate goal of the faculty was student graduation from college. Mr. K said,

So, success...to me, and for us is seeing a young man graduate from college. That’s, that’s the ultimate measure of success for us. At this point ya know we don’t have a class that has graduated...just yet, but they are persisting or moving from year to year. And...that data shows that our student’s are moving at um, higher than bench mark averages for their populations as well as CPS students. So, that right there is success on the road to college graduation...So, if your measuring by kind of the ultimate goal, which is college completion...um, success is obviously college admission and college persistence from year to year. (personal communication, July 2012)

Mr. M discussed the eight core values as being apart of the attributes of success,

We have our eight core values. We use that as teachers to ask them did you go that far? As far as relentlessness, integrity, solidarity, {?}, selflessness...those are the things that we go over with our kids in classes, outside of classes, in our prides, our division groups....{?} at the end of the day
they can come in and focus on their academics and use it as a study hall or some people come in and we have conversations about their lives, their issues...they come in and talk and support each other. So, yeah I would say that. (personal communication, October 2012)

Success was also seen in the ability to make the students believe that they are successful. Mr. M reflected on Paul Lawrence Dunbar’s “We Wear the Mask”, in which success becomes removing the ‘mask’ that dictates Black males are,

In the poem it kind of says that as Black men we wear the mask, that we feel like we have to do certain things...{inaudible}...I really believe that if we stop wearing that mask and be who we are, which is successful, you know stop falling for the hype. That we are not supposed to be successful we are not supposed to have certain jobs, that we are not supposed to be a certain way. But, when African Americans remove that mask and we see that we are successful, we can be academics, we can do things that most people think we aren’t supposed to do. So you know that’s what is successful. (personal communication, October 2012)

Knowing that Urban Prep Academies are working predominately with Black males, the next questions asked what are the advantages and disadvantages of attending a single sex school? What are the advantages and disadvantages of attending a mono-ethnic school? Each of these participants, in one way or another stated that less distraction was the advantage that their young men had over similar young men in co-educational facilities. Mrs. L said, “The young men can focus more on self-improvement, academic success and have fewer distractions…I believe that students feel a sense of comfort and are more relaxed in a mono-ethnic school” (personal communication, October 2012). Mr. M felt as if,

As a teacher I would say yes; the boys would probably say no. As a teacher though...this is not about the boys at all, I taught at a coed school before and there are a lot of issues to deal with. As a
Black male I would say that…it’s not that I wasn’t able to, but I was not equipped. I was not equipped to deal with some issues that girls may have. But, with our boys we’ve created a space where we can come together, because the girls are not there, in our groups and have conversations about them or with them; and there in a space where they can do that and not be afraid about how their gonna look...But, with the kids I think so because they not necessarily have to try to impress the opposite sex. So their dealing more with their things...we are trying to foster an atmosphere where we say, you know that stuff comes later on. Right now you working on getting yourself better; and when that time comes you’ll be fit for that person. (personal communication, October 2012)

As far as the advantages of attending a mono-ethnic high school Mr. M felt it was more focused,

When it comes to academic studies we, at a mono-ethnic school, you can kind of teach classes at a more focused cause...{inaudible}...so, and we can focus on that group. We have situations where we can like pull out of the things about our ethnic background and no one feels uncomfortable because you’re talking about just that one group. We have opportunities to talk about specific topics that wouldn’t be touched on in a multi-ethnic school. We can address the needs that need to be addressed in that ethnic group. So those are the advantages I find to be a success over multi-ethnic schools. (personal communication, October 2012)

While Mr. K said

I can only speak from my experiences at a single sex college. And...I would say yes, only from the standpoint that there were less distractions. I think that’s what most people would say. Ya know, you’re not worried about the opposite sex on a regular basis. Ya know obviously these kids are in high school, their adolescents, their going through puberty, they’re experiencing all these bodily and hormonal changes. So, there are going to be some aspects of that…that can kind of overwhelm
them if you will. But, I think that overall the, the fewer distractions um...kind of make it a benefit in terms of educating; especially Black boys. (personal communication July 2012)

In reference to the advantages of a mono-ethnic high school Mr. K claimed that,

The only advantage I see, again back to the Historically Black College comparison, is the fact that there is this , the door is open for cultural awareness, um often times, ya know, as minorities in the U.S. Our complaint is that we don’t see enough images of ourselves in textbooks, in teaching, lessons, etc... And so I think that in a mono-ethnic environment you open the door to those possibilities. Now at Urban Prep, we do not have an Afrocentric curriculum. Ya know we teach, all of our classes and coursework is based on the ACT College Readiness Benchmarks. So, there is nothing necessarily Afrocentric if you will about our curriculum. Now teachers are free to choose text, and books, and supplementary text, and that type of thing, um that may feature prominent African Americans etc... But it’s not because it’s mandated if you will, in most instances. (personal communication, July 12)

When asked about what are the disadvantages in attending a single sex school? What are the disadvantages in attending a mono-ethnic school? Mr. K, Mr. M and Mrs. L seemed to have a difficult time coming up with a solid disadvantage and opted instead to discuss issues that could be viewed as a disadvantage. Mr. M discussed a potential problem with women in single sex schools,

Well yes...there are times when if it’s not fostered correctly then the boys may not...they may not have many interactions with women there, you know as teachers. They may sometimes may not listen to directions...you know it may be issue of respect, not understanding how women speak or to speak to them...but we try to make sure we develop women...we offer books that are by women or have a women’s perspective...I don’t think it’s a disadvantage but it can definitely go that way. (personal communication, October 2012)
Mr. M’s disadvantages of mono-ethnic schools claimed,

Because some of our kids go to multi-ethnic school programming to an all Black...so we strived for that but now we are trying to take them to a higher level of thinking and we want them to think outside the box. Thinking outside the box can also mean thinking on a cultural level or multi-cultural level; where what might another group believe when it comes to their morals and values...things like that. So, there’s issue because we can’t do that, so a lot of it is hypothetical, fictional, comes in reading through books. We don’t have that person experience of other cultural groups. So that may be a disadvantage. (personal communication, October 2012)

Mrs. L did not provide an answer for the disadvantages of single sex schools, but she did believe that “being at a mono-ethnic school does not necessarily prepare students for a culturally diverse society” (personal communication, October 2012). Mr. K felt his disadvantage of a single sex school was kind of weak,

The only thing that I would say, and this is very kind of weak in my mind is that ya know, you don’t have the experience of a co-ed environment. Ya know the real world is co-ed; and so I think that ya know the old, the historically Black adage, the real world is not an Historically Black College. So therefore, why would you want to go to a Historically Black College if that’s not the real world? Ya know, so that would be my only take away so to speak. (personal communication, July 2012)

The same sentiment of a weak rationale was felt when asked about the disadvantages of attending a mono-ethnic school,

Is it the real world? Ya know, you come back to that. Are there any disadvantages? Ya know the real world is not one hundred percent African American. Ya know, so...are the students...ya know...learning how to assimilate…if you will, um, and learn from other cultures...and other
beliefs and that type of things in those mono-ethnic environments. So, that would be the only disadvantage that I would see. (personal communication, July 2013)

One of these specific needs that Urban Prep is addressing on a societal and financial level is serving an underserved population, with a focus on closing the graduation gap for Black males. I asked the participants to share what is the significance of an all Black male school? Mr. K shared that,

We are the nation’s first network of public charter high schools. We’ve seen in the past, private schools that are devoted to single-sex models with predominately African American populations. However, the significance of our model is that we are providing the same type of experience in a tuition free environment. (personal communication, July 2012)

This tuition free environment was stressed as crucial to the urban areas they are serving; where the affordability for these private institutions becomes the ‘barbed-wire gate’ for the families that are seeking a private education. Mrs. L stated that, “UPCA strives to prepare an underserved (and often over-looked) portion of society for higher education and beyond. Girls are more often intrinsically motivated and other ethnic groups stress the importance of education to their youth” (personal communication, October 2012). While Mr. M said,

Well if you look at the history...I first had that conflict in my mind. But, when you look at the data around serving this group there is a lack. There is a certain...you know they need certain things that are...when you serve this population you need to focus on these things but at the same time fill that gap...especially the graduation rate...{inaudible}…so we try to focus on that. Because we want to give them a way and give them that support...I think it kind of pressures back some time when you look at other schools that don’t focus on them or a school that not strictly consisting of them. (personal communication, October 2012)
Urban Prep credits previous research that has found that the educator that is placed over the students will have a major impact on the student and his abilities in the classroom. This being stated, I questioned what role does gender and race play in Urban Prep amongst the faculty? Particularly looking at the hiring process. When Urban Prep first admitted freshman’s in 2006, these students were presented with a 99% African American male teaching staff; since the opening this demographic has been altered, as Mr. M notes “we have more non-Black males teaching...just thinking back there were more Black males” (personal communication October 2012). A new program was actually established wherein the current teachers are involved with the hiring of future teachers. Urban Prep states clearly in all documents that they are an equal opportunity employer and Mrs. L responded by making it clear that, “As far as I know, UPCA is an equal opportunity employer. We have people from all backgrounds, genders and nationalities working here” (personal communication, October 2012). But Mr. K did admit that,

We do make a conservative effort to seek out African American males, especially in leadership and teaching roles. We do that because we believe that...‘You can’t be what you don’t see’...So we truly believe that our young men need to be able to see positive examples of Black men...working, teaching...on a daily basis so that they can strive to and aspire to be what they see. (personal communication, July 2012)

A dilemma was presented in the interview when discussing the changing demographics of teachers in the school. Mr. M admitted that apart from previous African American male teachers leaving Urban Prep because it not being a ‘good fit, “Enough Black men are not college educated. So, this makes it difficult” (personal communication, October 2012). This participant however, supported Mr. K’s position that it is a priority for the school to find and hire Black men for teaching and leadership positions but,
From what I know and what I have heard from hearing from other teachers and our founder is that the reasons of the change in demographics it’s been kind of varied...but what I know for sure is that with some of the teachers it just wasn’t the right fit for them, in a sense...assuming that it was different aspects...one of them being that it was a single sex school, it’s not a thing a lot of people can handle. So they move on. What research say’s is that our young Black men do well when they have role models who look like them. So we really want to fit that if we can. But in this...[?]...enough of Black men are not college educated as well. So ...this makes it difficult...so that’s kind of like a priority for us to do that. But what’s a higher priority that we put our kids among teacher who really believe that can be successful and [...]...who are trainable, and understand that we are not a traditional school and that our kids have needs that some other schools may not have. So let’s see who can kind of fulfill those roles. And if they do, we put them through a pretty intensive training process...it makes sense because our teachers are put up against this teacher interest panel that knows the culture, to understand ...lay the standard during the interview to see if this teacher would actually you know... fit into what we see at Urban Prep as being the best teacher needed. So gender at this point really doesn’t play too much of a role. In the application process we really try to stress the teaching certificate and what has worked so far. If we can find a Black male who can fit the criteria, and is willing to learn our culture, and really believes that our kids can be successful regardless of where they come from, and their socio-economic status, and all those other issues...we definitely will hire them. (personal communication, October 2012)

A large focus of this thesis is to give voice to the tensions that are present, but have not been given recognition. The beginning of some of these tensions came forth when the participants were asked do you believe that Urban Prep is producing students who are ready for college/university;
academically, socially, and personally? This question is crucial because of the schools claim to be a ‘college prep’ school, and that 2014 will mark Urban Prep’s fourth graduating class; that will be aspiring to live up to the schools touted 100% graduation rate and acceptance into College. The magnitude of this is not unlike other private or traditional schools with a focus on College prep, whom graduate a number of students each year; questioning: ‘Did we prepare them to be successful in College?’ while Mrs. L believed that “students that have brought in 100 percent and are hardworking are more than prepared for the rigors of higher education” (personal communication, October 2012). Mr. M straddled the fence, answering both yes and no,

Here is the issue...I feel like grade level prep, NO! But we have some kids coming in who have familial and academic issues...we try to combat that with counseling...so we are dealing with this in our academic setting and doing our best. Then they go home, and it seems like it gets erased. So, then they come back...we have to do it all over again...all of our kids are teachable; we just have to have teachers who are willing to teach them. (personal communication, October 2012)

While Mr. K provided an assured yes. Supporting the comments by Mr. M that the students do have challenges, specifically major academic challenges “a lot of students on average enter a couple of years behind...a good percentage of our students may be reading at the sixth or seventh grade level. What we are able to do with a student in three years is remarkable” (personal communication, July 2012) Mr. K reassured me that the students are prepared because what they lack in academics they make up in “intrinsic personal characteristics” (personal communication, July 2012) such as resilience and perseverance that are learned at Urban Prep.

The final questions that are analyzed are threefold; do you believe the programming at Urban Prep can be replicated in other schools? Do you believe the programming can be replicated as an all female school? Do you believe the programming can be replicated as a coeducational or a multiethnic
school? Each of these participants agreed that the programming could generally be replicated because the curriculum is not different from a traditional school’s curriculum. Urban Prep structures their curriculum around the ACT College Readiness Benchmarks which are scores on the ACT subject-area tests that represent the level of achievement required for students to have a 50 percent chance of obtaining a B or higher or about a 75 percent chance of obtaining a C or higher in corresponding credit-bearing first-year college courses. These college courses include English composition, college algebra, introductory social science courses, and biology. Mr. K reiterated that,

We do not have an Afrocentric curriculum. We teach all of our classes and coursework based on the ACT College Readiness Benchmarks...teachers are free to choose text and supplementary material that may feature prominent African Americans, but its not because its mandated. (personal communication, July 2012)

But did believe in the replication of the school,

Absolutely, because there’s nothing...I mean that...When people ask “What is the secret sauce?” the secret sauce is that...the culture. There’s nothing necessarily that, um different or unique about our curriculum. Again, we are teaching to the ACT college readiness benchmarks. You can find what those are for the most part online...um...actually what may answer your question [laughter] about the curriculum [laughter] and so, um, so there’s nothing necessarily that unique about the curriculum. Um I think that what really sets us apart is the culture and being able to build a robust, a robust cultural model and get the students to really adopt and accept that model; And allow that to be kind of their driving force to get them from point A to point B. So yes, I absolutely believe that you can replicate this model in other schools and ya know...as an indicator of that we have seen several “Urban Prep” like schools pop up all over the U.S. You know we are seeing that happen on a regular basis. You have people who have come, they’ve visited us, they’ve talked
with us, ya know through our various events...and then they’ve went back to their cities or whatever and replicated ya know. I mean in some instances they have completely stolen ya know [laughter] and I used the word “stolen” nicely...they have stolen a lot of aspects of what we do. Ya know, um, all the way down to perhaps the color of our uniforms, the color of our ties. So you know they say that’s a form of flattery, but ya know...So, yes I think it can be replicated and people have done it. (personal communication, July 2012)

However, precautions were provided by both Mr. M and Mrs. L stating that any school that would like to replicate the programming must first lean on the research focusing on the particular demographic of students. Mr. M said that,

The answer is twofold. So yes it definitely can be replicated but it ...the one thing that is really efficient about Urban Prep is that you have to forget about the deficiencies that the students are bringing in or what you think they are going to be like. And the other thing is that you go to the research, because I can say for one, I didn’t do this at first. So if a school is willing to understand those things and work with those things it can work. So yes, but it won’t happen unless you have a staff that is willing to do the work. (personal communication, October 2012)

Mr. M did not believe it could be replicated as an all female or coeducational program, “I don’t think our school...what we have done is strictly towards Black males. Our benchmarks program can definitely be replicated… that wouldn’t be Urban Prep...I would have to...I don’t see any school like that, it’s not Urban Prep. This is strictly designed for the African American male in mind” (personal communication, October 2012). But Mr. M did feel that it could work for males of other ethnicities, “Yes, if its fashioned around men...Yes, but it has to be that the school is coming to an understanding of the neighborhood dynamics, what the issues are with the community and the residents, and what can work” (personal communication, October 2012).
Mrs. S stated,

I believe that some aspects of our programming can be facilitated in other institutions, but definitely not all… I think Hispanic males especially could benefit from our programming. Many Hispanic males fall into the same cycles as African American males. For example, the emphasis in many Hispanic households is working/earning money for the family good… I don’t think our programming would necessary for co-ed or all female schools. As stated before, I think females are intrinsically motivated and usually are on the right path. I think there are some parts that would be beneficial (like college planning, etc.) but females and those from other cultures place more emphasis on education. (personal communication, October 2012)

With a willing staff, added that “I mean it could be an all Caucasian model or predominately Caucasian model …but I don’t know if they have experienced some of the kind of systemic things that historically African American and Latino boys have” (personal communication, July 2012).

I also asked the participants what aspects of Urban Prep Charter Academy do you believe have added to the “success” of your students? Mrs. L believed that it was simply, “our core values are: RELENTLESSNESS, INTEGRITY, SELFLESSNESS, EXCEPTIONALITY, SOLIDARITY, FAITH, ACCOUNTABILITY AND RESILIENCE” (personal communication, October 2012). Mr. K stated that, So, it’s the cultural model which is based on what we call the 4 R’s…um, and that’s Respect, Relationships, Responsibility, and Rituals. Um, and there is a host of things that I can give it to you in pamphlet form. It talks about what each of those R’s mean. But, it’s the notion that our student’s are buying in and accepting the culture and using all the principles of our cultural model to…ya know propel him to that college acceptance and college enrollment date. (personal communication, July 2012)

While Mr. M stated that,
With the alumni they actually have completed the fulfillment of our goal, which is 100% acceptance to college; there…they have gone beyond that goal. I think that…I tell my current students that goals been reached already so you’re going to be successful in that. You need to begin to think like that’s not a first anymore so why don’t you guys create a new goal. I think at Urban Prep we should hype goals as an expectation. I think we help students set their goals for what they have and once they realize that they can, they’ll actually achieve those goals. (personal communication, October 2012)

The cultural model is built upon the schools enforcement and reinforcement of the mission, the eight core values, and the commitment of being a family, reinforced through the ‘Prides’; there are eight Prides based on Urban Prep’s eight core values. Each Pride consists of about 25 students, seen as ‘families’ within the larger Urban Prep ‘family.’ As a member, the students will stay with their same pride throughout high school in order for strong relationships to be formed. Each Pride is lead by pride leaders who are wither faculty members or recent college graduates that have taken on a yearlong fellowship at Urban Prep as an Urban Prep Fellow. The purposes of Prides are to be a place in where a nurturing of the student beyond academics takes place; although tutoring is offered at this time. The pride leaders facilitate lessons based on the eight core values, or on issues presented by the students. Beyond being a mentor and facilitator, the pride leader acts as an advocate on behalf of the assigned students; and the daily ‘Community’ gatherings that are conducted in the morning before classes. Community is a time set aside to provide school wide announcements that include recognition of peers for the accomplishments in their academics and extracurricular activities. During this time the Urban Prep Creed is also repeated as an affirmation. See Chapter One: Introduction for Creed.
Each interview is concluded with ‘final words’. This is the time for the participants to voice their last thoughts that they would like to leave with the public to remember. Mrs. L ended the interview discussing the key to success being research “Research is key. We have learned that girls and boys do learn differently and for different reasons. UPCA works hard to address these differences and make lessons and learning impactful. All of our curriculums reflect this research and our ever present efforts to bridge the gaps” (personal communication, October 2012). Mr. M ended his interview emphasizing the need to believe in students,

Believing in students is what is really going to cause a change. So we keep launching the idea that these kids are college bound not college worthy. If we can believe in them and believe that they are capable. When I write a lesson plan I don’t believe that they are incapable, because if I did that I would write a lesson plan that was incapable of teaching. So when I write my lesson plans I expect for them to rise to the occasion... When we expect you to behave a certain way, speak a certain way, or associate with people...it’s because we believe you can and that you’re not any different than any other human being who has dreams. I would hope people can remember that, and take that away. (personal communication, October 2012)

Mr. K’s final words were situated around the cost of operating a school like Urban Prep,

I mean the only thing that I would add, and I am being a little selfish when I add this, is that it’s not cheap to do what we do. I mean we are a public school, but what we provide our students is above and beyond what we get in terms of per pupil revenue. So, if for example someone is trying to replicate they need to be aware of the costs of doing business, so to speak; and that is it’s not cheap to make sure that this type of student, these young men, these urban men who’ve kind of always gotten the short stick in life. It’s not cheap to give them what they need in order to achieve. So, that’s my soap box. (personal communication, July 2012)
Analysis

These participants all display a cognizant stand of the trials and tribulations of working with students who bring with them truck loads of baggage that educators are expected, by society, to unload and in four years time be able to ‘pop-out’ academicians. These participants, however, did not allowing these situations to deter them from the ultimate goal of Urban Prep which is to graduate Black males who are not only prepared for college course work, but who are accepted to colleges and universities. Urban Prep’s mission statement “is to provide a comprehensive, high-quality college preparatory education to young men that result in our graduates succeeding in college” (Urban Prep Academies, 2012). Mr. K, Mrs. L, and Mr. M display through their research their loyalty to the work they are doing by embracing the motto of Urban Prep “We Believe” (Urban Prep Academies, 2012) that is again reinforced through their creed (found in chapter one) which is recited daily in order to hold Urban Prep males accountable to the academies standards. It appears through these interviews that it is the repeated and carried idea that these students can and will succeed by any means necessary.

When these participants were questioned what aspects of Urban Prep Charter Academy do you believe have added to the “success” of your students? Mr. K and Mrs. L maintained that it is the eight core values of “Accountability, Exceptionality, Faith, Integrity, Relentlessness, Resilience, Selflessness, and Solidarity” (Mrs. L, personal communication, October 2012) and the four R’s “Respect, Relationships, Responsibility, and Rituals” (Mr. K, personal communication, July 2012) that are the aspects that have added to the “success” of their students; in addition to the students “buying in” to the programming. It was only Mr. M who discussed the need to challenge the students more. To make them reach new goals, because the academies goals had already been reached- 100 percent graduation. So Mr. M asks, “What’s next?” let’s push the students to set goals beyond graduation from high school, acceptance to college and enrollment. In my research I attempt to uncover and interrogate aspects of
“success” (achievement) in order to answer my research questions that ask what makes Urban Prep a success? How does Urban Prep’s programming allow for Black male academic achievement? How is achievement (success) measured?

At the beginning of the interview I asked all participants to discuss their overall experiences at Urban Prep. Mrs. L admitted that it was hard adjusting to the new and earlier schedule as well as working with the young men. Like Mr. K and Mr. M, Mrs. L expressed that it was an immensely rewarding experience. Mr. K shared that he attended one of the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) so coming to work at Urban Prep he was well aware of the mission and was “in tune and aligned with helping out with the mission” (7/2012). Mr. M’s claimed that although many of their boys come in with baggage, it makes him play multiple roles of teacher, father, and mentor. Mr. M’s feeling of being a father like figure to these young men is supported in my literature review that found Black male teachers to historically be surrogate “other-mothers” who show affection; listen to their students, and are problem solvers for their students (Collins, 1990; Henry, 1992; King, 1991).

Mr. K, Mr. M, and Mrs. L also discuss “success” as student persistence from year to year, the teachers ability to make the students believe they are successful-as exemplified through Dunbar’s poem “We Wear the Mask”, and ultimately having a long term success goal of college graduation. Using these responses to discuss “success” allows me to look at it as a “buying in” process; in which through daily recitation of the eight core values, faith in the four R’s – and a positive self-confidence that makes them believe that they possess said characteristics. While these eight core values and the four R’s are characteristics that a student, a person, may need to achieve their goals, I did not hear mention of the academics/curriculum being an aspect of the school that had added to their student success. This was an answer or response that I was waiting for since “providing a high-quality college preparatory education to young men” (Urban Prep Academies, 2012) is in their mission statement.
I am urged by the comment of student “buy-in” to interrogate this term. On one hand Mr. K is suggesting that because student’s buy-in to the practices and ideologies of Urban Prep, than this is one “slice of the pie” that allows them to succeed within their programming, and in general with the proposed goals they set. However, this statement seems to go against CRT because it is essentially asking the students to go along with the status quo set by the school; which is to come in believe what we are telling you is true and that we have you recite daily, and you will meet our goal of graduation and enrollment. Critical race theorists in education consistently critique the status quo and the purported reforms. I believe that Mr. M presents a counter dialogue to the “buy-in” ideology that instead pushes the current students to seek their own goals. This counter dialogue suggests that the students should be questioning themselves “Why am I at Urban Prep? What do I want to get from this school? How can Urban Prep help me achieve personal goals by using the tenants presented?

Even when asked what are the advantages of attending a single sex school? The common thread of answers centered on fewer distractions from the opposite sex, and less distractions period. Mr. K had added that less distraction was especially important for African American males. Because of less distraction Mr. M and Mr. K both suggested that this provided a space for the young men to have the space to not to worry about what they are saying; not having to impress anyone. While Mrs. L felt the same sentiments as her colleagues that it was more space to focus on academics and self-improvement. However, my literature on single sex schools and separating students in order to achieve better academic performance has not shown any positive benefits of students being separated by sex (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). In fact among the limited amount of studies available there were two conducted that actually took in consideration ethnicity and single sex schooling versus coeducational, those studies favored coeducation for African-American, Asian and White groups (Garcia, 1998; Riordan, 1994).
However, studies focusing on Black males and the impacts of being in a single sex environment on their academic achievement are not available.

Less distraction and more focus on academic achievement are views that the participants have painted as advantages. This can help me to further understand the significance of a Black male charter school; especially since it is the belief of Mr. K and the faculty members, that this group of students needs as few distractions as possible. Thus creating a space where academics is the priority provides a rationale for this setting. When I specifically asked, what is the significance of an all Black male charter school? This group of participants began supporting narrative that Urban Prep has purported to the media of them stepping in and serving a community, a segment of a community that is often “overlooked” as Mrs. L suggested. That as Mr. K and Mr. M suggested that the needs of this group are not primarily getting met, specifically when it comes to graduation rates and access to quality education. Mr. K noted that Urban Prep is similar to many of the private educational institutions that are trying to serve the African American, low-income, “urban” market; however they have an advantage because Urban Prep is able to offer this same coveted private education at a public school costs to families. This connects to my historical findings for spaces that were needed so the African American students could have an equal opportunity to access types of educational institutions that were not made available, or were not welcoming to them. They have also persistently showed that they are filling the gap, as Mr. M stated, in Black male graduation and college enrollment rates. The literature reviewed would suggest Urban Prep is following the initial needs of charter schools, to fill the gap where traditional schools were lacking with groups of students, and accountability. In addition because of the graduation rates they have had CREDO (2013) would suggest that based on the first three years performance Urban Prep would continue with the same positive statistics for their students.
The next question provoked a counter narrative that Urban Prep presents while presenting a counter narrative to the response given. When I asked the participants to discuss if any of their programming was back by research that supports strategies in educating Black males, Mr. K and Mr. M both agree that the main reason for wanting to have an abundance of Black males in teaching and leadership was because research had shown that the educator that is placed in front of their students will have a huge impact on the students ability and achievement. Mr. K mentioned this is why at Urban Prep they instill in the students that “you can’ be what you don’t see” (personal communication, July 2012). So Urban Prep in it’s first couple of years did have over 90 percent of their teaching staff as Black males, which serves as a counter narrative because the percentage of Black teachers is small, but Black male teachers is even smaller; so they were able to show a visual representation of a Black male teaching staff that was having advancements with their students’ academic achievements; displaying the positive effects of having a educator who resembles the student body (Meier et al., 1989).

However a counter story and dissention was uncovered when the participants were asked to discuss changing demographics of the teaching staff and the role of race and gender in the hiring process of Urban Prep? While Mr. K stated that Urban Prep does make conservative efforts to hire Black males in leadership and teaching positions the demographic of the teaching staff has changed significantly; from being over 90 percent teaching staff to having less Black males and more diversity in the ethnicity of the teachers. Mr. M adds that the problem could be multifaceted in where there are a low number of Black males going to college for a career in teaching, thus making the pool of Black male certified teachers very small. It was also noted that some of the previous black male teachers may have left because Urban Prep was not a good fit for them. The counter story that has arisen is that Urban Prep according to Mr. K, believes that one cannot be, what one cannot see so they made an effort to hire Black males in teaching and leadership roles to serve as catalysts so the Black male youth can have an
alternative visual image of what Black males can do outside of the stereotypical images. However, when
the demographic of teachers changed so that now the Black male teaching population has decreased, and
the population of white males and females and males of other ethnicities has increased what is the belief
that they are passing on to the students? This story or message that has physically been sent to the
students and staff tells a narrative that may be seen as an all Black male teaching staff was needed as an
attention grabber, but because the school is further established that the priority to seek out this
demographic of teachers is not there.

This counter story could not be reflective of a larger societal issue in where enough Black males
are not attending college and graduating from it, nor are they receiving teaching degrees or certificates.
Research has shown that many African American students have positive gains in their academic
achievements, school performance, and self-esteem when they are put with African American teachers
who present a counter image of what society defines them as. However, because of the tensions in our
education system in where Black students, specifically Black male students, do not have high gains
academically therefore are limited to their secondary and post-secondary educational goals. This could
explain why Mr. M stated that there are not enough college educated Black men. Because of this
circumstance Urban Prep and other schools are forced to pick from the pool of college credentialed
applicants, that data from my literature review shows has a higher population of White females,
followed by White males.

The final interview question that I would like to analyze is when the participants were asked, do
you believe that Urban Prep is producing students who are ready for college/university; academically,
socially, and personally? This question is key to my research questions that explore what makes Urban
Prep a “success”. Thus far the running narrative of Urban Prep’s success is their ability to graduate
students and get them accepted to college; but part of this process of being accepted into college is based
on your academic performance. Mrs. L’s belief that the students who brought 100 percent and were hard working were the ones ready for college rigor, suggest that all of the students are not doing this. But if this is the case than how are all of the students graduating? So then I analyzed the responses from Mr. K in which he stated the many challenges that the students come to the school with, and that beyond these challenges Urban Prep is able to do amazing things with the students academically in three years. It is quite true that from the data that the school reports many of the students are below grade level, this is evident by the entering freshman class of 2006 having about only four percent of their students at grade level reading (Urban Prep Academies, 2012). Considering the responses of the participants that many of their students enter below grade level, I am still left without an answer that can explain how the students who entered Urban Prep below grade level are ready within three years academically for college. Mr. M gave a very direct statement that as far as grade level preparation he did not feel that the students were prepared academically. The conversation on the preparation for college mirrored the conversations that these participants had when asked about the attributes of success, in which it was more about the positive school culture, instilling positive virtues through the four R’s and the eight core values that help to build self-esteem and confidence in the student; but lacks the necessary conversation of how these students are going to continue their “success” in college.

While some of my research questions were answered directly, many of them were left unanswered. So bringing in the experiences of former faculty members helped me to further delve into my interrogations to answer my research questions and to be able to highlight the voices of dissent, counter stories, and supporting stores that arose from the upcoming interviews.
Voice of Former Faculty

Valuable are the opinions and experiences of those employees who currently work at Urban Prep for they bring a living, breathing knowledge and understanding of the daily activities presently being performed in the academy. However, those employees who no longer work at Urban Prep Charter Academies are just as important, if not more. With their experiences comes a consciousness of the strengths and shortcomings of the school that they are in a position to freely discuss without fear of employee reproach.

Interview

When discussing the participants overall experience while working at Urban Prep three of the four responses concluded that it was positive but definitely had flaws. Mr. C, a first year teacher, simply stated that it was “different” (personal communication, July 2012); while Mrs. S was very straightforward in her discontent, “Outside of the office staff I was the only female there. I was the only female teacher…I left in March” (personal communication, December 2012). Mr. J explained,

It was 50/50. When I first started you know I was down for the mission. But once I started working there I began to see some things that kind of turned me the other way. So it was more like a top down model…(personal communication, December 2012).

Mr. W described his overall experience as positive,

I really enjoyed the opportunity to teach in a single gendered school. I was given a tremendous amount of autonomy in how I organized and structured. I was able to try new things out and be sort of a risk taker in terms of what opportunities and experiences I was able to deliver to my students. Some things that were not so positive had to do with some of the overall organization and administration of the school and how things and policies were implemented and what things were left out. As far as what I identified to be problems and how they addressed those problems,
I found to be in and of itself problematic…As I walk away and am looking back it was positive…positive relationships with the young men…It was great to be a part of something that was so grassroots and innovative at the time (personal communication, November 2012).

Perceived problems at Urban Prep and how these problems manifested and/or can affect the students were intertwined in each of the participant’s interviews; bouncing back and forth with the expressed appreciation for autonomy, freedom in curriculum, and the willingness of the school to allow their teachers to attempt new academic strategies. When questioned, what do you think student success meant as a faculty member of Urban Prep? Three of the participants’ responses were very similar to the current faculty members in that progression and getting the students to believe in themselves academically were the key determinants of success. Mr. J assessed his students on their progression of increasing scores on the Explore test,

I would say increasing the amount of students who were below grade level at the beginning of the school year to the end based on the Explore test results…the increase may have been about fifteen or thirty percent for reading and language arts. Also seeing some of the young men change their mind state and become more goal oriented (personal communication, December 2012).

Changing the students’ mindset was also a strategy used by Mr. W when he made it his mission to get the students to believe they could be academically excellent in his content area,

Even if they didn’t get the best grades it was my goal to try to get them to change the way they saw themselves in relationship to the content and their own academic performance; so it was a continuum. You have students who are well prepared, or better prepared than some of the other students and or who are academically curious whom you are able to push a little harder… My thing was to get them to do their very best work and put forth their very best effort…allowing
them to explore the different aspects of success and what it means to them as far as underlying their performances…[it was about] their willingness to take risk and to be open, to really delve off into their work and the content (personal communication, November 2012).

Mr. C supported these responses about student success being a progressive action and not necessarily being able to measure student success solely based on grades,

Success doesn’t necessarily mean ‘A’ in the classroom, but if a student is showing growth. If the student shows growth and he was a ‘D’ student and remedial reader, and his grade increased by two to three grades that’s success to me; I gauge him from where the student started and where I left the student…if he improved then that’s success (personal communication, July 2012).

When Mrs. S was asked what student success meant to her as a faculty member of Urban Prep, her response was quite simply that the school probably meant ‘how can we get the boys into school?’

That was part of the thing, nobody knew [at the time]. They were always using this term “Man Up”…I remember a colleague of mine bringing this to the staffs attention and the fact that we never define this term for them. What exactly does it mean? I still don’t know, and I don’t think they know either (personal communication, December 2012).

Mrs. S continued the discussion on student success and referenced the news articles between Chicago Teacher Union President Karen Lewis and Urban Prep Founder and CEO Tim King (King, 2012; Lewis, 2012). In this article Karen Lewis discusses the “effectiveness” of charter schools on student’s academic success in general; a section of this article was also dedicated to calling out Urban Prep on their questionable 100% graduation and college acceptance rates. Mrs. S agreed with Karen Lewis and questioned the message that was being sent from Tim King’s response to the families and students attending Urban Prep,
[At the time] a 15 ACT score was the average at Urban Prep campus, that’s not success…that is not success…in the Sun Times between Tim King and the new president of the Union, Karen Lewis, she wrote an article where she basically for a lack of a better phrase, pounded, Urban Prep saying that basically these boys average ACT score of 15…what colleges are they going to? Why are you out here saying that all of these boys are being accepted to college? Where are they going? Tim King’s response was we never said that they went; we said they were accepted. This is what happens when you have an attorney at the helm (personal communication, December 2012).

The divergent conversations continued when questioned about the attributes of success, according to Urban Prep and what success means to them as Black men and women. “Hard work, dedication, and being committed to academic excellence” (Mr. J, personal communication, December, 2012) were attributes that Mr. J attributed to the success of the students and alumni. Mr. W noted that the attributes could have been the performance of the students based on the school wide interim assessments that were taken every six weeks,

[This] was a way that we were able to chart or track growth…we had the students take the Explore test that is supposed to be a predictor of, or instrument, for how well they will perform on the ACT. There was no instructional theory of action…there wasn’t one then…there was, “We need to see these kids being successful!” and, “We need to see gains on these assessments” (personal communication, November 2012).

Mr. W also noted that positive reinforcement was intentionally used school wide to measure success,

Making the students see plenty of examples of Black males who you know have gone to college, have college degrees, and are working to get things together. Also building positive relationships with the students and students responding positively to the various initiatives they may have not
been used to, like having to read for thirty minutes every day in school. I think the less push back they received from initiatives…may have been one way they were trying to monitor or test them to see whether or not what they were doing was working (personal communication, November 2012).

Mr. C and Mrs. S both had a differing perspective on the attributes of success with the attributes being unclear and superficial in their opinion; based on external looks and non-classroom participation. Mr. C states frankly that,

Some of the attributes to me were kind of silly…neat shirt and tie, all your buttons on your blazer…some of their attributes were participating in everything they wanted you to participate in like showing up for T.V. time, being a media darling. Participating in ‘Men do Read’ and getting accepted to college; any college (personal communication, November 2012).

Mrs. S added, “Wearing a blazer…getting new J5’s because Nike commissioned a shoe for you, walking around with Apple everything; because success is very superficial. ‘Style and Cologne’ that’s what I call it, because they’re not changing those boys in anyway” (personal communication, December 2012) Mrs. S continues by claiming,

There are boys who went to Urban Prep who are extremely intelligent and would have succeeded no matter where they went. It is one thing I will say for that small segment of Urban Prep: doors will probably be open for them just through coming through there [Urban Prep] that they made…where coming from somewhere else they may have had to push it open. There were a small fraction of boys who were very bright. Whose moms and dads wanted a private education for them but they couldn’t afford one. They thought that’s what they would get at Urban Prep. Which basically was a free private school at best…if this child went to Harvard; he would have

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2 Upon the May 2010 graduates of Urban Prep, Nike commissioned a shoe specifically for these graduates as a gift that displays Urban Prep’s crest, creed, and school colors. See The Update, May 2010
went to Harvard anyway; Because if he wasn’t at Urban Prep, he would have been at a Whitney Young High School or a North Side Prep (personal communication, December 2012).

Nonetheless, Mr. C does credit Urban Prep with,

Breaking stereotypes that Black men are not smart. I mean the media makes the Black man look so bad…but here it is that these kids are coming out the hood and they just like any kid who came out of Evanston Township High School, New Trier…they had problems just like them, but the media just bears down on all the negatives that the kids do. But these kids are just kids (personal communication, July 2012).

As a Black woman Mrs. S expressed that success is about were one comes from and where one started,

Because if your born with a silver spoon in your mouth, and mom and dad go to Harvard, and you go to Harvard that is not success to me; that’s a fulfillment of an expectation…an expectation that you are well within your means to fulfill. But, if you start off…[quoting Romney] in the ‘47%’ and you make it to college, that’s success to me. You have overcome something. When someone hands me a sandwich I eat, I didn’t feed myself. Those are two different things (personal communication, December 2012).

Mr. J, Mr. C, and Mr. W all described success, respectively, as being able to provide for one’s family. Mr. J stated, “Being able to provide the basic needs for myself and my family. Such as food, clothing, and shelter. As well as being able to converse and have friendships with those of all walks of life” (personal communication, December 2012). While Mr. C said it was about being confident about one’s decisions, “Not looking over my shoulder, being confident in whatever decision I make, whatever I contribute to the community. Success to me is being able to do what I want to do when I want to do it” (personal communication, July 2012). Mr. W thought that it was about realizing your full potential,
Realizing your full potential and then pursuing what you’re passionate about. Figuring out what you’re passionate about, and then pursuing that. Developing your ability in each talent gets to be a success. Choosing to be happy and fulfilled with every decision you make; in every season of life you are in. The successful person is one who realizes that what they have to offer the world is not for them. They are in their lane doing what it is they were created to do…being able to overcome all those obstacles to pursue what it is that they really believe they were put here to do (personal communication, November 2012).

When questioned what are the advantages and disadvantages of attending a single sex high school? The responses seemed to mirror those of the current employees attesting to less distraction being an advantage, and the young men being able to form a brotherhood where they were made to feel comfortable being around those who share like experiences. Mr. J felt there were advantages for some students, but as a teacher, “the advantages were being able to focus on the different learning styles of male students” (personal communication, December 2012). As far as the disadvantages Mr. J noted it would probably deal more with a student’s personal preference, “For some of the students who just didn’t fit…or felt like they didn’t fit into an all male environment. Some of the students didn’t feel comfortable being in an all male environment” (personal communication, December 2012). Mr. W was adamant that there were definite advantages because,

All young men and women long for brotherhood and sisterhood... So being in a space like that allows the student the needed focus without the distraction of having women in the environment. Urban Prep has done a great job of creating camaraderie and brotherhood and really a culture that directly caters to and responded to the genius of the Black males who attended. The culture of the school, what people believed the ethos of the school, really spoke to helping these young men have a development and understanding of masculinity and manhood. For many of these
gentlemen, this is the first time they had spent so much time in the presence of really positive role models. I think that in and of itself it is really positive. It helped assist and reason their schema about what a Black man is and can be; that alone was an important feature of the school (personal communication, November 2012).

However Mr. W clearly voiced that there was a problem with how Urban Prep helped the students to develop some of these identities,

There wasn’t a linear or uniform understanding amongst the faculty on masculinity or manhood. So everyone just projects their own ideas on the students, and I don’t think that’s fair to help them to become critical and to construct knowledge on their own. So when you have a school like this, you have to be intentional and explicit about addressing specifically what is masculinity, what is manhood and how will we construct a uniformed understanding. So that when we are having these conversations or when we are modeling these principles of masculine identities for our young men, that we are all sending the same message and we didn’t have that. Each teacher was their own island in their own way.

So that can be very problematic for students, because they find an identity...they are adolescents, young adults. They are trying to identify who they are and who they are becoming, and I think we sent them a lot of mixed messages. So issues having to do with Blackness, maleness, manhood and all of that...we didn’t have conversations as a faculty about what that meant. We didn’t have a handbook...it was nothing on paper so people did their own thing. Some of that can be attributed to it being a new school, but.... I don’t know how long they waited...I’m limited in my observation over time and how conversations may have developed over time; but I felt it was problematic (personal communication, November 2012).
As far as disadvantages Mr. W could only think that some would see a problem with the lack of female presence in the staffing, especially the teaching staff. He linked this small presence into the conversation about his concerns in how identity was being perceived and developed, the sensitive issues that could vary understandings of ourselves,

I think it’s easy in a school, as teachers, as people of influence and power in the school in relation to our students, to really put onto them our own beliefs; as opposed to allowing students to arrive at their own beliefs. This may have occurred because as faculty that were so passionate, and in many ways saw themselves as saviors; we want to save these Black boys. I think that was my draw as well, to be a part of something that would change the way we do school in relation to African American males.

But not having the leadership around these other issues on how we communicate our beliefs and/or what we consider rigor versus the stuff that...in the peripheral to the intellectual enterprise and knowledge acquisition...we need to have those conversations and people kind of brought them into the work. Which is a good thing, you need to bring yourself into the work, but at the same time it’s a school; its not an after school program, it’s not the YMCA. So transmitting all of these personal beliefs I think in a lot of ways is problematic. We should have our perspectives, but we should really be pushing the kids to develop their own perspectives and to become critical and to answer important questions... I don’t think we did that very well. I think we did the relational stuff very well, almost to a fault. We weren’t their fathers, but a lot of us took on that fatherly role and I think that it could go both ways (personal communication, November 2012).

Mrs. S found it problematic to respond to the question of advantages of attending a single sex school due to the fact that it was housed inside a CPS building that was a coed school,
I don’t [believe there are advantages] because when you are dealing with a charter school situation where you are passing girls to get to your school...are you really dealing with a single sex situation? It’s hard to answer that question when you are talking about charters that don’t have their own space. So it’s not truly single sex. The school is 100 percent male, but the building is not (personal communication, December 2012).

Like the other ex-faculty members Mrs. S’ disadvantages of single sex high schools boiled down to her not holding much weight to them,

If you pull the data on most of the successful high schools in any state, none of them are single sex. I know that it tends to make parents feel better; I know this is an era of accountability. You have to try everything you can try to attempt to shift achievement. So it looks good and you can say, ‘well we sectioned off this’...you will try anything to make these kids not seem as low performing as they are. So, I don’t put too much stock in it (personal communication, December 2012).

Mr. J did not feel like there are any disadvantages to attending a mono-ethnic school and expressed that the advantages would be, “Feeling more comfortable being around people who look like you and may have shared some of the same experiences as you would” (personal communication, December 2012).

However, the three other participants felt very torn when asked what are the advantages and disadvantages of attending a mono-ethnic high school? I explained to the participants that this question is relevant as Urban Prep is a charter academy that situates itself in locations that naturally draw a large African American male population; and at one point in time they were also employing a high percentage of African American teachers; making the campuses as a whole a mono-ethnic educational environment.

Mr. W began by discussing his gut reaction to be in support of a mono-ethnic high school,
I’m just thinking about this in terms of my understanding of the Black education and how important it was prior to Brown v. Board of education for Black kids to be taught by Black teachers who responded to the whole child. Even the African Centered pedagogy that caters not only to the intellect of the child but the moral character of the child…trying to shape a whole person, a whole citizen, and not just catering to the mind. I think that a mono-ethnic high school does that well. But at the same time, there is a lot of richness in diversity; it’s important. Not only diversity in groups but diversity between groups. It is really important that students have access to people who don’t look like them and don’t talk like them, in a safe space. I would probably advise for a more diverse high school…putting structures in place to support every person so that they feel safe in that academic environment. When that is not an option, I’m also not against a mono-ethnic high school. There’s always cost and benefits associated with either one…I think there are some things that we do well, but can learn from both (personal communication, November 2012).

Unlike Mr. W who believed that a mono-ethnic high school tries to shape the whole person, Mrs. S states that while she believes in mono-ethnic education she is not in favor of it at the high school level,

When you are small and you are trying to figure out who you are, and you’re trying to build your ethnic salvation, I believe a mono-ethnic education can be helpful to you to create a solid base and a solid identity. However, I also feel that when you start to get to high school you should try to sprinkle in a little difference so that you don’t get such culture shock when you leave the confounds of high school and go off to college…I think at that point you should be trying to hone in on skills of maneuvering and manipulating multi-ethnic situations (personal communication, December 2012).
Mr. C agreed with Mrs. S in the sense that a mono-ethnic high school does not provide advantages because it is not reflective society,

In the ‘real world’ you not gonna be around 100 percent African Americans. It’s all types of races, ethnicities, and religions. To be shunned for four years with hard core African Americans it’s kind of hard…it’s kind of like doing the kids a disservice. You already live in the community where it’s all Black, and now you have to go to an all Black school. But the flip side, the irony to that, is the teachers were white! How can you try to beat success into a young Black man’s head when administration shows that they don’t believe in successful Black men? So they try to get rid of the young successful Black men, and they would rather have a Chinese or white lady teaching a young Black male. I felt that was always a problem. Just like the police in our community. In our community…it might be an all Black community, but the cops are white (personal communication, July 2012).

Mr. C continued the discussion of the disadvantages of attending a mono-ethnic school by providing an example of when the school had a Puerto Rican student attend,

If you teaching a Black male to be successful outside of his community, then outside of his community there are going to be other people, so why not show them by having a diversified pool [of students]. I mean we had one Puerto Rican kid in that school, and he couldn’t handle it, because they just made the environment so hostile for him that he wound up just transferring out…[it was] kids being kids. I feel kids are going to be kids, but as adults and an administration they should have nipped all of that in the bud and made that kid feel just as welcome because you allowed him to come into that school. So you bred the environment, which that Puerto Rican kid was in there. They fostered that environment to make the kid feel threatened or unwelcome (personal communication, July 2012).
The following question asked what is the significance of an all Black male school? While Mr. J simply stated that, “It was the only public school devoted to all males” (personal communication, December 2012). Mr. C felt, “It is so they can prove that it can be done…this is not really a new concept…it’s just repackaged. I’m sure in five or ten years it’ll be elementary schools doing the same thing” (personal communication, July 2012). Both Mr. W and Mrs. S expressed the hope that a school like this could bring in allowing people to view that Black males can excel. Mrs. S claims, “I guess what they want the significance to be is ‘See, Black boys are excelling…See Black boys are going to College” (personal communication, December 2012). Mr. W mentioned,

I’m reading a new book by Lisa Delpit, *Multiplication is for White People: Raising expectations for other peoples children*, and she mentions Urban Prep in that book. Over the last seven years, the school has had so much press and so many outlets, and I think that is absolutely important and great. The school is giving hope and it is providing a model and a beacon of light, if you will, for others who are engaged in the work for really improving the academic outcomes for African American males; and who are not attempting to place the blame of their underachievement on them or on their communities. I think that is a very powerful thing. Overall I think it’s absolutely great and positive. We do need examples, and I think there is much to learn from what Tim King or from what Urban Prep faculty and administration are doing (personal communication, November 2012).

In their responses Mr. W and Mrs. S, respectively, discussed problems with a school like Urban Prep. What is problematic in terms of the school is the failure to really account for the good, the bad and the ugly in some ways. Really a part of this is…I won’t even place the blame itself on the school. Reporters and people report what they want to report and its true that schools and stakeholders, those who are having to raise money for the schools have to tell specific stories to get
funders to give money. But it makes me nervous when people look at one data point and excuse
data points, and then it sort of becomes something else. The schools don’t always have
something to do with that, and I’ve seen how this happens…we just need to be careful not to take
an idealistic model and try to replicate it without understanding the inherent tensions in that
model. That’s important to pay attention to as well (personal communication, November 2012).

In order for the model they are trying to forge successfully, they have to get those boys earlier.
High school is too late. They are coming there with bad habits that four years won’t break.
They’re coming there with academic deficits that four years can’t fix. If you are going to cater to
[students] in high school, it needs to begin in kindergarten so you can grow those boys…they
come in there at 16 years old through a lottery, because many of them have been socially
promoted. You can’t undo fifteen years of bad teaching whether it was at home or at school, in
four and still move them forward. That’s just not possible…you can’t build all of that in a school
day, and it isn’t fair to the kids who don’t need it. They were focusing on the low performing
kids, but there was nothing in place for the high performing kids. When I was there it was no
honors classes (personal communication, December 2012).

Concerning possible internal difficulties in Urban Prep the ex-faculty members were queried about the
role that gender and race played in the hiring process. All participants noted the blatant intentionality
that was put forth in hiring Black males as teachers. Mr. W remembered that,

I think they were really intentional about hiring Black males, yes. I want to say they hired the
best people they could hire…they did hire several of their colleagues from prior teaching
situations. I was one of the few people on the faculty who they did not know prior to hiring me.
Like maybe three to four of us they did not know…the laws were shifting during that time and
you didn’t need a teaching certificate to be hired there. You didn’t even have to pass the Basic skills Test. Over the course of the year regulations changed and in order to keep your job, you had to have passed the Basic Skills Test. At the time half of your staff had to have a certificate and the other half did not…everyone didn’t have to have a certificate, and they didn’t (personal communication, November 2012).

Mr. J stated, “The entire staff was all male, there was one Caucasian male and two Black females. [The purpose of this] was mentioned to serve as role models…so we can serve as role models. But it was never stated that they wanted to get all males” (personal communication, December 2012). Mr. C expressed his excitement that turned into bewilderment,

> When I got hired, I was like ‘Yes, this is great’ you know I was working with young Black men, I’m a successful Black man…I came from the same streets that they come from. I’ve been hungry…single parent; my mom worked three jobs while she was going back to school. So I lived the same life that they lived, but when you look at the faculty and staff you know out of like forty teachers, maybe, not even half were Black. The one’s who were Black weren’t really fostered to stay there (personal communication, July 2012).

Mrs. S’ teaching experience was quite different from her male counterparts,

> Except for the secretary in the office, the bookkeeper, and the other lady in the office, there were no other women. It’s my understanding that they got a little more open as far as hiring. So there are white women and white men now (personal communication, December 2012).

Mrs. S expressed that the lack of female colleagues was one of the reasons that fumed her reasons for leaving,

> When I started it was not a very female friendly organization. The school day went from like 7:30am to 4pm…then they wanted you to take up an extra club, and they wanted you there early.
It was basically like they wanted you to work a twelve-hour day every day…and I had a small child. They couldn’t understand that; and you couple that with the unethical stuff they were doing, and it wasn’t for me…I think it’s unethical to open a school in Englewood when your trying to propel kids forward and you don’t even have a counselor…you have someone to do your PR but you don’t have a counselor. [When I was there] it was no counselor, and I had a serious problem with that. I told them on several occasions that you are setting the wrong priorities. Your making sure these boys have all this news coverage, making sure they are being seen, but your not helping them fro real…I understand finance and I understand media coverage is what brings in the dollars. I get that…I am saying to help them for real as well…you know what type of homes these children come from. I just thought that was very unethical (personal communication, December 2012).

Exploring how Urban Prep is aiding their students was the next set of questions; each participant was asked do you believe Urban Prep is producing students who are prepared for College/University academically, socially, or personally? The response was a resounding No as far as academics were concerned. Mr. C emphatically stated,

No, no, no. Maybe socially, but not academically, no…they don’t teach the kids to be self advocates, which is really important in college…You have to be able to get up and do for yourself, if you have a discrepancy with a professor you have to be able to go and talk to that professor; these kids are not taught that. I think Urban Prep carries them by the hand…which is a downfall within itself because they have already been beat down and oppressed. The last thing they need in lieu is to be carried by hand, now maybe patted on the back and words of encouragement, but not carried by the hand (personal communication, July 2012).
When Mr. C was asked to elaborate when he claimed the school ‘carried the students by the hand’ he said,

I didn’t have the pleasure of meeting the student, but this was one of Urban Prep’s darling students…[He] went to college and he couldn’t handle it. First semester he was gone. He was a 4.0 student at Urban Prep, went to college and he couldn’t advocate for himself, and this was coming from one of my former colleagues who worked there. He’s no longer there as well. A lot of them don’t know how to cope because they are not taught…everything was always given to them. They [Urban Prep] had all these resiliency policies where if a kid fails you give them another chance. You take it the next semester or you leave. But, here you give the kids chance after chance, after chance which leads to [thinking] I can sleep in on my physics 101 class, but you can’t. In real life it doesn’t work like that. Nobody’s going to hold your hand and tell you to go to class and do your homework, and give you another chance. It doesn’t work in college like that (personal communication, July 2012).

Mrs. S believed that,

Urban Prep is producing students who are prepared for college that were prepared when they got there. Are they taking some kids from the hood with no support system and making them a Rhode Scholar? No. Are they taking boys that are possibly from the hood that have no support system, that wants to be helpful but may not know exactly how to help their child and guiding them in the right direction so that boy can be successful? Absolutely (personal communication, December 2012).

Mr. W concurred with Mr. C in discussing how many of the students have a hard time their first year and end up leaving,
They are not prepared because the curriculum was just not rigorous and we were not challenging; from my perspective, we were not challenging and rigorous. When I raised questions I was met with conflict and descent. So that was one of my major issues with the school. Socially they were socialized at the school to meet people, shake hands, look people in the eye, and really kind of come out of their shell. So I don’t think social was a problem. But academically I am still concerned with their preparation. When I reach out to students…there are a number of students who do not actually enroll or enroll but they do not persist past the first semester or first year. That’s for a number of reasons…money being one of them (personal communication, November 2012).

Mr. J agreed with Mr. W in that the students were well prepared both socially and personally through college tours, internships and field experience; academically was another story,

Because of the low number of students when they come there [Urban Prep]…I can’t remember right on top, but I think maybe about 10% of the students were at grade level. Then at the end we ended up with 36% of students being at grade level in Reading and Language Arts. Based on the ACT score I’m not sure if it’s a 17 or something like that (personal communication, December 2012).

As an organization that makes claims to be college prep it surprised me that so many current and ex-teachers did not feel confident that their students were academically prepared for college. What programs were implemented to classify the school as college prep? “College visits. Double periods in literacy…would be my guess. Some academic support programs that picked up later in the year like after school programs with volunteers who would tutor.” Mr. W also questioned the schools attempt to identify themselves as a college prep,
The curriculum doesn’t reflect that of a college prep curriculum…and the school was small so it was hard to offer honors classes and all that stuff; but when these teachers were creating their own scope and sequence and the leadership…there is very little instructional leadership creating a trajectory…I was asking questions about, ‘What does our academic program in this particular content area look like in four years?’ and I was told that we would cross that bridge when we came to it. I was trying to figure out how we would cross that bridge when school has started...So you were telling me that every year we were going to sit down and try to figure out what we gonna offer the kids this year? That makes no sense! It was stuff like that...like this is not right (personal communication, November 2012).

Mr. J remembered working with college liaisons and as community engagement representatives,
“Besides exposure to college tours, taking part in saying the creed everyday. Some parts of it focus on being successful, committed, and dedicated. Sub-consciously reinforcing the mission of the school, it was well known” (personal communication, December 2012). Mr. C and Mrs. S both declared that it wasn’t really a college prep program.

Do you believe the programming at Urban Prep can be replicated in other schools? All of the participants believed that it could be replicated, in fact had been replicated. But the real question of should the program be replicated was posed by the participants. Mr. C referred to the fact that, Their program is replicated from other schools that have successful models; such as Providence St. Mel, and KIP schools…Urban Prep is not the first school to do this. You know Providence St. Mel has a 98% graduation rate and a 100% college acceptance rate, its nothing new and it’s a coed school. I had some family members who graduated from that school, so it’s not a new concept. The only concept that is new about it is that it s an all male school. The concept of getting 100% accepted to college is not new. When they get 100% accepted to college and 100%
graduated from college…then you can call and let me know (personal communication, July 2012).

Mr. J agreed that it could be replicated, “I think what they did have, was a double period of reading and writing. Everything else was the same as a traditional school” (personal communication, December 2012). Mrs. S shares the same sentiments as Mr. C in that, “It’s already been replicated so it can be. They already have three campuses in the US and a campus in England, and maybe even something in Rockford too…the way its setup now, absolutely not. Absolutely not…there getting them too old” (personal communication, December 2012). Although Mr. W urged,

People need to study really close…we need studies that interrogate specific aspects of the programming to identify where the tensions are. It’s very easy to take what they do and interpret it in your own way and reproduce that program. You will safeguard against those things happening or being repeated…the program can be replicated, it should be replicated. I just think we need to pay attention to what they have done well and what they have done not so well. Then figure out what that community is and also that context matters and that particular group of kids has needs that will be different from the region and the context for which you want to replicate that particular model. Some things will not work in other places. You have to recognize what the nuances are (personal communication, November 2012).

When asked specifics of replication such as, do you believe the programming can be replicated as an all female school, coeducational or multi-ethnic school? Or would males of other ethnicities benefit from this type of programming? Mr. W believed that everyone could benefit from this type of program,

The problem is that traditional schools tend to respond most positively to euro-centric norms for teaching and learning. And I think what this school and schools like it have done while creating
African centered cultural norms and while building and responding directly to what has been identified as needs in the community of this particular constituency. They have created a school that responds directly to them; instead of doing school and school has already been done. Reproducing the same outcomes. When you put people of color in spaces that are dominated by euro-centric perspectives and ideologies about teaching and learning… white kids do well in the suburbs because those schools cater directly to their cultural norms. Put a Black kid in that same situation and they will experience school much differently than those white kids will (personal communication, November 2012).

Yet when asked if the programming could be replicated for a different gender or ethnicities Mr. W was frank in that,

It can’t be the same as Urban Prep…that creed was created for those boys in mind. Other schools can replicate that and create a creed. It has to be related to the population of kids who are coming. This means that those who are creating these structures really have to understand the social, cultural and historical context, which that school is situated. So I think we can create whatever we want to in any school, anywhere, and model it after Urban Prep, but we have to adopt it and switch it around in a way that it is useful for the population being served in that school. So it’s not going to look exactly the same (personal communication, November 2012).

Mrs. S was very straightforward in her feelings that males of other ethnicities would not benefit from the programming because, “It’s very Black male oriented” (personal communication, December 2012) and that this kind of programming should not be replicated for all female schools, multi-ethnic or coeducational schools. Mr. C commented on a sister school of Urban Prep, The Young Women’s Leadership Academy, “They have the same super high standards, all the kids go to college…except its on a female level…it’s just becoming a noble hustle” (personal communication, July 2012). Mr. C also
felt that, “The school could be better overall for these boys…I mean I’ve seen better programming than
this. So, I mean to say would it benefit another race? Not so much another race, but maybe the social
economic status” (personal communication, July 2012). Mr. J thought that,

Males as well as females could benefit from being in an environment where it is constantly being
reinforced to be dedicated and committed with the end results being to attend college and
graduate…That message goes beyond ethnicity. It can work as a coeducational school if you
have the situation where you are telling the students what the goal is from day one, and it’s
constantly being reinforced through repetition then it crosses gender and racial lines (personal
communication, December 2012).

The programming of this school is stated by some of the participants to be beneficial to all
students. As stated with the previous interviews positive school culture is one aspect of the programming
that many see as a positive. The participants discussed the ways they saw positive school culture being
manifested. Mr. J reminisced on how there was a huge focus on this in the school,

It was being reinforced everyday through things like shaking hands…shaking our Pride
member’s hands or other students as we greeted them. Teaching them different rules or social
skills. Like we would have a banquet to the effect of having different utensils and how to use
them, learning how to tie a tie, and the proper way to wear your clothes (personal
communication, December 2012).

Mr. C spent time giving Urban Prep credit on the positive school culture they cultivated,

They don’t tolerate disrespect, the fights, which are all gonna happen at any high school;
especially with boys. They try to keep al the boys level headed, don’t let them talk down to about
each other. They believe in doing things, sort of like being my brothers keepers. So we never
fail, we never give up (personal communication, July 2012).
Mr. W boasted on how much the kids wanted to be there,

They wanted to be in school. I mean not all of them wanted to be there all the time, but by large those kids are invested. If you ask anyone of them who graduated…the school is family to them. I think that is the most positive thing you can take away. I think they really like their teachers…they are really motivated to get in school (personal communication, November 2012).

One of the final questions focused on the curriculum specifically did you know if any of the curriculum was based on research that supposed male/female-learning differences? Mrs. S recalled that, “There was no curriculum [at the time]…the spin on that was there was no curriculum because we are a team and we want to create it together” (personal communication, December 2012). Mr. J discussed his teaching style and how it was influenced by scholarship on Black male learning styles,

Before I started working there I did attend Dr. Jwanda Kunjufu’s training on teaching Black males. I read a lot of his books along with some others and I gained insights on learning styles of Black males. I incorporated these into my classroom and it made me more cognizant of some of the different aspects of how Black males learn and perform in the classroom (personal communication, December 2012).

The final words that these participants wanted the public to know about their experience at Urban Prep included final tensions, but their opinions that Urban Prep was a great experience. Mr. J exclaimed that,

One of the things that rubbed me the wrong way was that the mission of the school was just having Black males going to school and achieve and go to college and get a degree. But the way that it was gone about, when they talk about this 100% college rate, to me that’s not really being accurate. Because if you start off with a class of 160 students, then four years later you only have 83 students left, because charter schools have the ability to dismiss students who are not living
up to there expectations or who are showing low academic achievement they can cancel them out. So what that actually leaves are students that would have been good in almost any school, but they couldn’t test high enough to attend a Whitney Young or North Side Prep school or something like that. So to me the students who really needed that help were the ones who were put out. The one’s who are still there are the ones who had the real support and could have succeeded at any school.

They let them know the expectations at the interview after the lottery process was pulled. As it went on any students with any type of behaviors would be cancelled out and shipped back to their home schools… If you were failing if you were not passing the assessments taken every six weeks, or if you were having any type of behavioral issues...that’s what makes it different than a traditional public school; because if the student was having academic or behavioral problems they can’t kick them out or transfer them some where else. But a charter school can do that and say ‘Hey it’s time to go, your not fitting in our program’ then they can claim this 100% graduation rate (personal communication, December 2012).

Mr. W voiced how great of a school it is, “We have so much to learn from this school. It’s an important relic in the African American community and it’s a sign of progress. Like anything anyone does there is maturity and growth, and it needs to happen” (personal communication, November 2012). Mr. C focused his final thoughts on his concerns of hiring ‘fresh’ teachers,

That’s Urban Prep’s biggest downfall to me, taking teachers fresh out of college and not seeing where they are really. I understand your trying to save some pennies, but it’s at the expense of the kids. Also I think…it should be more Black teachers. Your trying to show these young men
how to be successful Black men then put successful Black people in front of them…they need to show more professional successful Black men (personal communication, July 2012).

Mrs. S shared that it wasn’t the most positive experience, but it wasn’t the most negative either,

I just wish, personally, as a Black woman… as a mother, that they were truly preparing these kids to deal with the real world. They are not. When you create even grade book wise…they don’t get ‘D’s. If you got a ‘D’ or an ‘F’ in a class you had the opportunity to take an exam and if you pass the exam you were able to get a grade in the class of no higher than a ‘C’. I’m not sure how I feel about that, because what message does that send to the child who worked really hard and got that ‘C’? That all he could make was a ‘C’. How does that prepare them for the real world? Where in the world does that happen? So, a lot of my issues with Urban Prep were surrounding things like that. They are taking these kids that don’t have a good real world view anyway because of where they come from, and your doing things for them that isn’t really fostering a worldview that is any more realistic than the ones they already have (personal communication, December 2012).

Analysis

The male faculty member mentioned during his interview that there were some faculty members who left because they may have not fit in with the school. Some of these former faculty members display how an alternate possibility could be that the school did not fit them as individual teachers. Mr. J explained in the beginning of his interview that once he was employed with Urban Prep he began to experience first hand the reality of a faculty member. There were clear practices that turned him off from the school such as the top down policies being implemented. Sentiments such as these were voiced and
in agreement with the experiences of former faculty members; ultimately leading to the separation from the organization.

In these sets of interviews positive features of Urban Prep were highlighted discussing autonomy, relationships with students, school culture, and Urban Prep’s ability to break stereotypes. A need for more autonomy is a hot topic conversation across educators in the public school sector, especially in recent years when mandated curriculums are being enforced at the state and district level. This lack of autonomy has led to many teachers feeling stifled in their ability to be creative with the information that they need to teach to the students. But, these former faculty members mirror the current faculty in their appreciation for autonomy that Urban Prep provides for them. Mr. W expressed that he was able to freely organize and structure the design of his curriculum; a strategy that allowed him to be a ‘risk taker’ when it came to his students. A strategy that one could stipulate has led to the students increasing grasp of the academic material, shown through the testament to rising test scores given by Mr. J and the other interviewed faculty members.

Among the similarities of discussion was of student success. These former faculty members mirrored the current faculty and administration with the success of the students being measured by the student’s progression; rather then simply focusing on the letter grades. The school culture was also revisited in these interviews as a positive and important aspect of the schooling experience of the faculty, students, and graduates of Urban Prep. The positive school culture reflected in their daily morning practices of Community, and homeroom like atmospheres of Prides allowed for the teachers to build positive relationships with the young men. These positive relationships that were built allowed the faculty to further embody aspects of what a successful Black man is, one who can have meaningful relationships with his peers, be comfortable in who he is as a person, and ultimately be reassured in his
ability of being a successful student. One of the final positive aspects of this program that was discussed is the effort that Urban Prep has put forth to break down the stereotype that Black men are not smart.

Nonetheless tensions in the programming were a main focus of discussion for each of the former faculty members. When I began to analyze the tensions that these participants presented I saw an underlying question being presented through these tensions, that asks what are we telling the students and what are we telling society. The first tension that stood out was when Mrs. S brought up the fact that the phrase ‘Man Up’ was habitually being voiced to the student’s without any explanation of what this means and/or looks like. The topic of identity had risen as a problem in Urban Prep, according to the participants, because there was a lack of leadership around how to communicate and best address the issue. In addition this becomes problematic when you have a number of people voicing personal opinions on manhood and Black masculinity, instead of discussing the matter in a way where the students would be able to think critically and reflectively about what these topics mean to them.

How the participant presented the term “Man-Up” being used appears to be antithetical to the literature that I reviewed that found that when you build up a Black male youths self-perception and self-confidence positively than this can increase their academic achievement (Rascoe, Atwater, 2005; Gordon, 1995; Green, Nelson, Marton, and Marsh, 2006). However, the way that this participant was claiming it to be used runs the lines of embracing some of the literature that I reviewed on masculinities in education (Allen, 2012; Gosse, 2012; Noguera, 2012; Plummer, 2007). If this is the message that is being sent to the young men at Urban Prep when they are told to ‘Man Up’ then this could easily be an example of why there is protest of all male academies. As shown in the literature review, there are organizations and individuals who believe that single sex programming geared toward males are potential breeding grounds for the uplifting of males through the belittling of females. Faculty members expressed
this as a disadvantage of single sex schools; because of the lack of females in leadership or teaching positions it could lead to disrespectful behavior towards women.

A subsequent theme was of the type of students that were being served at Urban Prep. With an overwhelming consensus by the former faculty members that Urban Prep was not academically preparing their students for college, two of the former faculty members addressed specifically the faulty graduation rates, which reflected feelings about the actual students being served at Urban Prep. It was the belief by some of the faculty that students who already had good support systems and would have succeeded at any high school were the main population of students being served. With Urban Prep’s contract discussed with the students that makes clear that it is possible for the student to be removed from the school because of low test scores, grades, or behavior issues one can presume that this provides Urban Prep with a leverage that traditional public schools do not have; thus leading to the possible fraudulence of “100%” graduation rates. Mr. J speaks of this with his experience of witnessing 160 freshman enter Urban Prep and only having 83 students remain by senior year. What happened to these 77 students? Also discussed was the fact that many of the students who make it to graduation could have graduated from any school because of their intelligence and the support they had in the home. In fact it was even posited that of these students there were some who were at Urban Prep because they didn’t test high enough to qualify for entrance into a Whitney Young Magnet High School or North side College Prep. According to the Whitney Young website (n.d.) Whitney M. Young Magnet High School is a coed, multi-ethnic college preparatory magnet high school located in the heart of Chicago, IL. A typical graduating class will have more than 95 percent of students admitted to four-year institutions. This school has a focus on developing the whole student. Freshman admission is based on the Selective Enrollment High Schools selection process, which uses a point system with a maximum of 900 points. The points are taken from The entrance exam (33 1/3% or 300 points); 7th grade reading and math test
results (33 1/3% or 300 points); and 7th grade reading, math, science and social studies grades (33 1/3% or 300 points). According to Chicago Public Schools (2013) website North side College Prep is a high school located in Chicago, IL that also uses the Selective Enrollment High school selection process, which uses a point system with a maximum of 900 points. The points are taken from The entrance exam (33 1/3% or 300 points); 7th grade reading and math test results (33 1/3% or 300 points); and 7th grade reading, math, science and social studies grades (33 1/3% or 300 points). They have earned state, national, and international recognition by achieving the highest percentage of students exceeding standards on the Illinois Prairie State Achievement exam form 2001-2010. Whatever the reason for attending Urban Prep, the graduated students will have doors opened to them just from being affiliated with this institution.

Mr. W felt that Urban Prep had an issue with accounting for the good, the bad, and the ugly in some ways. It was recognized by each faculty member that it is well understood that as a charter you are privy to personal donors who like to see growth in order to continue financially funding the programming. In addition the handling of grades was brought up and the lack of rigor in the curriculum, which added to the belief that the alumni were not academically being prepared for college/university. If students are failing a course with a ‘D’ or below, but are not allowed to have that grade of ‘D’ and instead are given the opportunity to in essence test out of the class for a grade of ‘C’, what message is being sent? Mr. C remarked in his interview that this is not reflective of college specifically or life in general. I would like to push that idea and say that this has the possibility of actually doing more harm to the student in the long term.

For one this practice is very much reminiscent of the primary and secondary educational practice of ‘aging-out’; this is when a student is passed along to the next grade because the student has failed the course, or has not met the requirements of the current grade for so long that they have grown to old to
remain in that grade so they are shuffled along for the next grade teacher to deal with. I claim that this testing practice is close to the aging out practice and just as damaging, because the student is not prepared and it does not get at the root of the problem; it simply places a Band-Aid over the issue. The student was failing the course for a reason, the very simplest reason being because he/she did not understand the material at a level that they have shown they will be successful in the next course level. By requiring the student to take a test to receive no higher than a ‘C’ in the course is an unfair practice to the student who actually worked very hard for the ‘C’ or higher, and places the newly passed student at a disadvantage in the next course where he/she will be expected to have mastered the previously taught material. I have to propose that if this is the option left for students who fail courses, then why not just have an option at the start of class to simply test out of the course?

A final tension in the same sphere of not academically preparing the students for college or university is the lack of information/discussion on those students who do not actually enroll into college. Mr. W noted that through his relationships with his former colleagues and students that many do not enroll, even though accepted, because of a lack of funding; financial issues. This was addressed briefly in the interview with Mrs. S and the mentioned article from Tim King that said the organization never made claims that they made sure the students went to college; rather their claim is that they get them accepted to college. I ask again, what message is being sent? That it is good enough to get accepted? This should not be good enough; it should not be good enough to simply stop at getting your students accepted and not academically preparing them enough to where financial backing is a part of their acceptance. This tension will be reflected in the next section focused on the alumni experience.
Voices of Alumni

Participants

This final group of participants is the cornerstone of this research. These are the alumni of Urban Prep Charter Academy for Young Men who have inspired many to view and gain hope that the future for Black males education is not lost; that they are opening doors to futures in the collegiate arena that will hopefully lead to a road of personal success. I was privy to be allowed a peak inside the experiences of three alumni. All alumni participants will be addressed as follows, Alumnus A, Alumnus B, and Alumnus C. In this section I will focus on each alumnus giving current and past information about grade point averages, current schools attending, family background information, how they learned about Urban Prep and the steps they took to apply, and their overall experiences.

Alumnus A is the most recent graduate from Urban Prep, graduating in the class of 2012. Upon graduating from Urban Prep he earned a 3.89 G.P.A. He is currently a freshman at a college in Upstate New York. He describes his overall experience at Urban Prep as preparation, “For the college experience I am encountering now” (personal communication, July 2012). While attending Urban Prep, Alumnus A resided in the Bronzeville community of Chicago, IL in a single parent household composed of his Father and one sibling. His father’s highest educational attainment is a bachelor’s degree, and the alumnus considers his family to be middle income. When asked how involved was your parent/family in your education? Alumnus A proudly stated, “My parents provided the support system I needed through my education” (personal communication, July 2012).

Alumnus A and his parents became aware of Urban Prep through reading a story in the Chicago Tribune; Alumnus A claims that it was his decision to attend the charter school. He discussed how he went through the interviews and a freshman orientation after he was selected. From his recollection, there was no memory of him participating in a lottery for admittance or if there were any contracts to
sign during the admission process. Prior to attending Urban Prep, Alumnus A attended a local co-ed middle school; where he attests that there were no similarities between the schools.

Alumnus B was a member of the second graduating class from Urban Prep, the graduating class of 2011. Upon graduating from Urban Prep he earned a 4.2 G.P.A. He is currently a sophomore at a college in Greencastle, IN maintaining a 2.9 G.P.A. Currently Alumnus B is a Bonner Scholar and he commits to ten hours of community service per week. Alumnus B’s overall experience can be viewed,

More so of a maturing experience more than anything. Especially when it first started. You know being all males, all male teachers around you, all African American male teachers just pushing you to be your best as a young man and growing. So that was the biggest thing (personal communication, July 2012).

While attending Urban Prep Alumnus B resided in the North Kenwood community of Chicago, IL with his uncle, due to the untimely passing of his mother. All siblings live in other households. His Uncles highest educational attainment is a bachelor degree; the alumnus considers his family to be middle income.

When asked how involved was your uncle in your education? The alumnus stated, “He was pretty involved. Checking when I got home if I needed help with homework. Insisting that I go above and beyond to find articles to read outside of class and stuff like that.” (personal communication, July 2012). Alumnus B then discussed how his family became aware of Urban Prep, “My uncle’s friend is on the Board of Urban Prep, so he told us about the school…it was my uncle’s decision ultimately” (personal communication, July 2012). When detailing the steps taken to gain admittance he described,

Just attending informational sessions, and one interview from a current staff member from the school just to see where my head was at, what I was interested in; what Urban Prep could offer me, and then it was the lottery…I never knew what a lottery was coming from eighth grade…I
didn’t know much…I just knew that I would get in. I was at a good percentage. (personal communication, July 2012)

Alumnus B did remember signing a contract, “Stating that I would abide by the rules and things like that…I never remembered the contract after that” (personal communication, July 2012). Prior to entering Urban Prep Alumnus B attended a private school in Hyde Park,

The difference was the ethnic diversity. Urban Prep all Black, my grammar school white, Black, Asian, everything. That was the biggest difference. Also the teaching style was more lenient at the Montessori school…it was much more strict when I went into Urban Prep…they both had the seriousness of mind elevation; just growing a student. (personal communication, July 2012)

Alumnus C is a graduate from the first graduating class of Urban Prep, 2010. Upon graduating from Urban Prep he earned a 2.8 G.P.A. He is currently a junior at a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) maintaining a 2.9 G.P.A. His overall experience at Urban Prep was described using two words, “Really mind blowing…and life changing. You know I was asked to leave Urban Prep once upon a time, and I came back in the beginning of my junior year and have been successful ever since that” (personal communication, July 2012). Alumnus C was born and raised in the Englewood community of Chicago, IL. Raised in a single parent household consisting of his mother and brother. His mother’s highest educational attainment is the eleventh grade; according to Alumnus C this is because of his birth. Alumnus C considered his family low income.

When asked how involved was your mother or family in your education? He emphatically responded, “They were deeply involved. Got me to school everyday, made sure I made some of the right choices that she had an opinion on…She helped me make some right decisions that I needed help with” (personal communication, July 2012). He stated that the difference between his middle school and
Urban Prep was that he didn’t have someone in the school that cared where he ended up; besides one teacher who had actually taught his mother and uncles,

Most teachers I was seeing everyday didn’t know my name. Most teachers didn’t even care if I came to school or not. At Urban Prep everyone knows me by my last name Mr. Branch. They actually care, from the CEO to the janitors. I am in school and I’m doing better…just to see that I want to come to school, basically that someone cared that I came to school, that I was at school.

(personal communication, July 2012)

Alumnus C recollected how he became aware of Urban Prep his eighth grade year,

I would say the scout, Mr. Lewis, was recruiting. He came to the school and he was talking about Urban Prep and he was talking about laptops. That’s what really grabbed my attention…just being told that we would be working with Apple laptop’s throughout our academic years…I never had a laptop before so, that’s what really drew me to the school. (personal communication, July 2012)

Alumnus C shared his initial feelings about attending Urban Prep,

In the beginning it was my decision. But, after I learned what Urban Prep was really about, and some of the criteria that was needed to attend Urban Prep…I wanted out…it was my mother and aunt [who pushed me to attend]…I wasn’t really into the all boys school thing. I wanted to be around most of my homies; and none of my homies really attended Urban Prep. That was the thing that I wasn’t really down for. I wanted to be around people I knew. (personal communication, July 2012)

Alumnus C remembered going home to tell his mother about the laptops, and then attending an open house. Here is were he learned about the dress code and the eight hour school days, “That’s what really
turned me off about it” (personal communication, July 2012) admitted Alumnus C. He doesn’t recall any contracts with the school.

**Interview**

**Are there advantages or disadvantages in attending a single sex school?**

All the alumni agreed that the advantage was more focus on their work and less distraction from females in the classroom. Alumnus C further attested to the freedom of not, “Trying to impress anyone, trying to care what anyone thinks about you…[it was about] having someone there that wanted to help you instead of them just getting their paycheck and leaving…someone if I’m having a problem, I can fall back on” (personal communication, July 2012). There was also consistency in their responses to the disadvantages of attending a single sex school, being none; except that you may not be used to a co-ed school when you leave.

**Are there any advantages or disadvantages in attending a mono-ethnic high school?**

Alumnus A felt that, “Going through high school and developing a bond that will be beneficial for peers and yourself” (personal communication, July 2012) was an advantage, while the lack of diversity may be seen as a disadvantage, “In life you don’t only deal with people of your same ethnicity. A mono-ethnic high school can affect some students in that matter” (personal communication, July 2012). Alumnus C added that, “One disadvantage is learning about different cultures, learning other peoples ethnicities and backgrounds and what they do everyday…you want to hear about some things that are happening with other ethnicities” (personal communication, July 2012).

Alumnus B and Alumnus C both expressed how one advantage was that there were differences in life stories, but many of them struggled through similar situations. Alumnus C said, “With that comes [variety] from having a single parent home, with no father in the home, and some people not even
knowing their father…We really felt as one because [we went through] the same struggles” (personal communication, July 2012). While Alumnus B added, “Even though it was a mono-ethnic high school everyone had their own stories…it was a diversity in that background experience, it really opens your eyes” (personal communication, July 2012). But a disadvantage was, “The social norms and local colloquialisms that are used in that environment, it’s hard to transition to another environment and get use to the norms” (personal communication, July 2012).

To get to know what kind of effect Urban Prep had on the alums I asked, Did the school have an effect on your social behavior inside or outside of school? Did it have an effect on your academic or personal growth? Alumnus B said that Urban Prep did have an effect in a positive way,

Helped me become more confident with speaking in front of audiences and people in general. I was kind of one of the poster boys for the school so I was always in front of a crowd or in front of donors talking about my experiences. (personal communication, July 2012)

When questioned if Urban Prep affected his academic growth, there was some hesitancy, “For me it was more…after freshman year it was intrinsic. I became competitive and I just wanted to be the best after I saw my potential…it was pretty much me working hard, because that’s how I was raised at home” (personal communication, July 2012). As far as his personal growth, Alumnus B felt that this was the area were Urban Prep had the biggest affect, “Because even though I have the academic thing down, I would say my confidence level coming in wasn’t too high coming from grade school. So putting me in front of people to talk was really good for me” (personal communication, July 2012).

Alumnus B did feel that Urban Prep affected his social behavior inside and outside of school and his academic growth by, “UPCA brought me out of my shell personally. The courses boosted my academic growth” (personal communication, July 2012). As a young man who did not venture out of the city of Chicago often, Alumnus C thanked Urban Prep for showing him that he needed to develop his
speaking skills. He reiterated that at Urban Prep there were always those who stressed how much they cared for him as a student and person,

[Urban Prep] Pushed me to finish my work and do better in classes…[where in] a regular high school they just told me to ‘sit down’ and ‘don’t talk’, they really didn’t care if I finished my work…I grew academically…without some of the things they taught me and some of the situations I was in while there, I probably wouldn’t be the person I am today…Even though I didn’t like the suit and tie, it gave me a feeling that some street clothes wouldn’t give you. The look that some professional people understand…it just gave me a better look…a better outlook on life. (personal communication, July 2012)

Where there any classes or programming that had an impact on your decision to pursue higher education? Alumnus C and Alumnus B both stated that it was not so much the classes, but the teachers and school in general that had an impact on their decision to pursue higher education,

I can say the people around me really influenced me to go into higher education…All of the teachers at Urban Prep graduated from college, so you know that pushed me…seeing some of them as role models in my life, they impacted my life very heavily. Pushed me to go to college even more than some of the classes that I took. (Alumnus C, personal communication, July 2012)

The school in general it really talks about college from the first day you walk in the door freshman year. There like ‘College, College, College.’ So you know with the visits to like Northwestern and other great schools, we were just like, ‘Oh this must be a really good thing to do’; Just the school overall with its morals and ethics. (Alumnus B, personal communication, July 2012)
While Alumnus A credited, “My AP English class and my African American History Class” (personal communication, July 2012) with impacting his decision for higher education.

With the culture of the school, the invested leaders in the school and some of the classes being mentioned as impacting the alums decision to pursue higher education, I was able to get the alums to tell me their stories of when they decided they wanted to go to college, how they decided on their current university, and if they felt prepared for college once leaving Urban Prep. Below are their stories beginning with Alumnus C, then followed respectively by Alumnus B, and Alumnus A:

They always told us it was the mindset that we had coming into Urban Prep, but coming to Urban Prep I really just had the mindset of getting out of high school, because [in] Englewood that wasn’t a normal thing. I was just trying to make it out of high school; that was going to be my goal. College wasn’t really in my eyes until I got to Urban Prep. I really made it a decision of mine when I left and went to Harlan [high school] and I seen that, after I lost my friend, he was finna graduate from Julian high school and he died…going through that and just seeing some of my guys hanging on the streets, with a normal education, and just seeing how life was ending up…that was just something I didn’t want to put myself through. So I decided to go to college instead [of] hanging outside on the streets of Chicago all my life.

With me graduating form Urban Prep, a part of the first class and me being the SGA President, I can say that I had an advantage [over] some of my classmates in what college I wanted to go to. So what it came down to in the end, was I just wanted to get out of Chicago!...It is a guy that works in the [UPCA] headquarters and he went to Fisk University. Once he found out I was filling out my applications he told me, ‘You know, you remind me a lot of myself and a great place for you would be Fisk.’ Our senior year we had a lot of media attention on us seeing where we were going for college, and I really didn’t know where I wanted to go, I didn’t have a set plan
yet, I really wanted to get out of Chicago. With my GPA not being so high and with my ACT score being kind of low, a lot of people didn’t offer me a lot of money. So when it came down to someone asking me where I wanted to go to school I just said different schools to different people. [When] I told people I wanted to go to Fisk it put smiles on peoples face…random people. Some news people came to the school, I had just received my acceptance letter from Fisk, and I had also received some from other schools. When I brought it in the guy asked me, ‘Where are you going to school?’ and I just said ‘Fisk University’. Ever since then I never changed it…Academically [prepared for college] I wasn’t actually sure. That was something I was going to have to take a chance with, because our creed is ‘We believe in ourselves’ so at the time I wasn’t really good at academics. That was something I was really scared of…you know getting there and failing. But emotionally I wasn’t prepared because I had been in Chicago my whole life. I never had to be without my mother for that long. (Alumnus C, personal communication, July 2012)

Freshman year second semester, after having some classes on college and the importance of it, seeing my mentors at the school go to college and have similar backgrounds to me just made it all possible; tangible. [I decided through a] Posse Scholarship, which is a full tuition scholarship nationwide; it’s in mostly large cities. I would say eighty students are selected a year to get the scholarship. So I was accepted through that and I chose my school through that. So for Chicago there are nine locations…you pick three and then you pick your favorite one, then you tell them why you picked the three that you chose and then they go from there. They tell you what they think is best for you.
[Upon graduating] I felt fairly prepared…I definitely did. I was more just getting used to the atmosphere. I didn’t do as well as I liked because I was…you know, just trying to get used to college, the whole idea. So I was going out and stuff like that too much. You know, sophomore year is going too much better (Alumnus B, personal communication, July 2012).

“I always wanted to pursue higher education since birth…I felt very prepared for my next journey in life” (Alumnus A, personal communication, July 2012).

All of the alumni attested to applying to a number of colleges and universities totaling between fifteen and thirty universities. Some of these universities including local state schools such as Illinois State University and Northern Illinois University, as well as out of state schools such as Syracuse University, Browns College, Tuskegee University, University of South Carolina, Tugaloo, Emory, and DePauw. The results were common across the board with them being accepted to many of the colleges and universities they applied to, but not receiving significant funds due to low test scores. Alumnus A claims to have been accepted to twenty-five of the thirty universities he applied to, and Alumnus C experience is the same, “I got accepted to a lot of schools, but they really weren’t trying to give me any money to come…I even applied to some others and got denied because of my ACT [score] and GPA” (personal communication, July 2012). Alumnus B declined enrollment at, “Emory. I withdrew my application because I got Posse” (personal communication, July 2012) because of the substantial funding from the Posse Scholarship.

The transition from this all male predominately Black high school was fairly smooth for the three alums. Each speaks of being able to adapt to the new situation of being in a co-ed environment because of the normalcy of being with females outside of classes. Alumnus B and Alumnus C both spoke of the potential difficulties with this that some of their other classmates had experienced. Alumnus B stated, “I know for lots of students it was difficult, but for me it wasn’t that much. There were girls outside of
school, so it’s not like there ‘super beings’ so I was kind of used to it” (personal communication, July 2012). While Alumnus C says,

My transition was a lot easier than for some of my classmates. I had a chance to experience what it was like going to school with females in high school and seeing the distraction they brought upon me when it came to my academics. So it was a lot easier to deal with because I knew in what ways they could distract me, and how to avoid those distractions. (personal communication, July 2012)

The alumni also spoke of the support provided to them through the college counselor office and the Alumni network that is provided to them as graduates. The skills that they have transferred with them to their current universities from Urban Prep are networking skills, positive work ethic, a motivation to complete task, and going above and beyond expectations; such as outside readings and listening to news broadcasts like NPR. Community continued to be a running thread in these interviews, like they were in the current and ex-faculty interviews, so I asked the students was there a sense of community at Urban Prep? And how did you know it? As well as if there is a similar sense of community at their universities.

Alumnus A observed that, “the sense of community at UPCA was in the morning where we would have these gatherings, which was updates and celebration for another day of school” (personal communication, July 2012). Alumnus C added to this description of community agreeing that, “Every morning we came together and celebrated some of our brothers on the great accomplishments they did in their academics and even athletics. It felt like a big family…thirty-two prides that brought us all together as one community” (personal communication, July 2012). Whilst Alumnus B spoke of the community much, “A fraternity or brotherhood…being accountable for one another, responsible for corporal punishment. Just living kind of as one. Like if one person does bad, we all have to try to figure out how
to help him get back on track” (personal communication, July 2012). As far as the sense of community at the current universities, the responses varied. In the case of the HBCU attended by Alumnus C, he stated that he definitely feels a similar sense of community because of the small population of students. While Alumnus B reported that his college is rather large and the only way to feel that community is by joining an organization; his community currently consists of his POSSEE; nine other students who were accepted into college at the same time, acting as a graduate cohort.

Still wanting to explore there experience at Urban Prep and the kinds of identity development that may have happened the alumni were asked to discuss any programming with a focus on African American history or Pan African Diaspora studies? how these programming affected them. In addition if there was any programing with a focus of ‘building up of a Black man’ or anything like that? Alumnus B reminisced on one class, “Well African American history was a history course I took my senior year…it was a good program, [but] it wasn’t really my interest. I didn’t really care too much for it. I did well in the class, but just to get the good grade” (personal communication, July 2012). Alumnus B also remembers a course that the principle offered,

The principle taught a class on Manning Up, maturing…we got a coupe of classes provided as electives on that specifically, beyond the everyday interactions…I didn’t take the class, but they [students] presented at the end of the year what they learned…building a family, and stuff like that. Becoming a more curious person in education and responsibilities. (personal communication, July 2012)

Alumnus A felt that, “Every course that I encountered really focused on the importance of African American history which really motivated [me] to succeed in life…the building up of Black men was expressed in classes by teachers and every visitor that came to UPCA” (personal communication, July 2012). Alumnus C felt opposite then his fellow alums,
I wouldn’t say it was a specific study or class that helped us with history, except most of our history classes that were African American history, U. S. history, or American Government…but not one specific study or class that really based on our history in the world…[Building up of a Black man] was not actually a program set for that, it was more of a life learn. We were surrounded by nothing but successful Black men in our eyesight. That was something I seen everyday. It came from my Pride leader, the CEO of the school; from the vice principal to the principles…it was just something that we were surrounded by. (personal communication, July 2012)

As I discussed how race and gender played a role in the hiring process with the faculty and administration, I wanted to know what was the gender makeup of the teachers? And how did this affect them as students? These questions became especially important as the alums represent three ‘generations’ of Urban Prep graduates, and thus the history via students of the charter school. Alumnus C noted that,

We had a mixed gender, males and females. We had Black and white men, Irish, Chinese, Cuban, and someone from Colombia. It helped us a lot because it showed us how can talk to different ethnic groups… We had so called ‘the white man’ in class teaching us. You know he cared about our future as well; instead of just coming in and working, getting his check and going home. He actually stayed overtime helping us with our homework…even came in on Saturdays helping us with extra papers and projects that we needed help with…when it came to females, especially for a white female to come in and work with all Black males because I don’t know if she felt comfortable? [but] just to see that the different ethnicities of females felt comfortable around us…without having to be worried about if things got stolen or things like
that. It just felt comfortable. I was glad to know that they felt comfortable as well. (personal communication, July 2012)

Alumnus A felt that it was, “More male teachers than female teachers. This was inspiring to see male teachers of my color doing something positive with their lives” (personal communication, July 2012). Alumnus B added,

At first it was pretty much all Black males and then later in my school years it was white male and women, Asian males and women. It was much more diverse…freshman and sophomore year it was really good to have all Black males. It was more ‘homey’, for a lack of better words. Junior and senior year I was pretty much ready to go. So, it didn’t really affect me having white and Asian…its not like it was bad or anything. I was kind of on track and all…I didn’t really think too much of it; because they have their own stories…their diverse…they’ve gone through struggles and things like that. I connected with ones that I naturally connected with and the others I didn’t. Like with the Black teachers…I didn’t connect with all of them. It was the same thing. (personal communication, July 2012)

The possibility of replicating the programming of Urban Prep continued to be of interest to me, especially from the perspective of the students, who were the sole beneficiaries of the program; for better or worse. When asked do you believe the programming at Urban Prep can be replicated at other schools? If males of other ethnicities would benefit from the programming, or if the programming could be replicated as a coed school, all girls school, or multi-ethnic school? Alumnus A stated,

Yes it can because other schools can see the benefit of producing successful males for the society we live in…[Males of other ethnicities] can see that you can become successful in life and all it takes is a strong support system from a school just like UPCA…Yes, I believe [it can be
replicated] because females can use some of the same knowledge just like males. (personal communication, July 2012)

Alumnus B agreed,

Yes I think there’s a secret sauce that can be used by a lot of other schools in other settings. Like, there’s an all women’s school that’s doing similar things that’s actually our sister school. Schools in the Hispanic community are doing similar things, and a lot of charter schools have adopted a lot of what we’re doing or we have adopted a lot of what they were doing as well. So I think it’s happening right now… Yeah I think they [males of other ethnicities] would. All it is just giving those students who are at a disadvantage a lot of what the advantage students have. So it can be used for anyone, I think. People who are high class, middle class, low class… I think it can be [replicated for coed and multiethnic schools] because then you’re just telling everyone to be accountable for each other. You’re just creating another family. So I think it’s just about creating a family where everyone looks out for each other and help each other to succeed. (personal communication, July 2012)

While Alumnus C felt that the programming could be replicated for an all female population, but that it wouldn’t work or be successful as a coeducational or multiethnic school, or for males of other ethnicities,

It can be replicated…I just don’t think it would have the same affect on all white students as it did on all Black students. Because, of some of the struggles that we have growing up in a Black neighborhood then some white students growing up in an all white neighborhood… I think it can be copied in an all female…but different ethnic groups…I don’t think it would have the same affect on them as it does on us…honestly I don’t really see it being copied or being successful or being as big an accomplishment. I’m used to seeing successful white women and men; not being
in jail or dead early or even [not] making it through high school. For a Black male it’s different because they say only four out of sixteen of us will graduate from high school…Urban Prep graduating 100 percent these last couple of years that’s a big deal…I don’t see that being a big deal in an all white male school. (personal communication, July 2012)

Continuing with my exploration of the young men and what they felt about their experiences with Urban Prep, we next discussed if they saw any advantages or disadvantages from attending Urban Prep? And how many of you’re childhood friends attended Urban Prep? Do you feel they are at a disadvantage? Why? Alumnus A found it hard to point out just one advantage of attending Urban Prep and had none of his friends attend Urban Prep, “There are so many advantages from attending UPCA it’s hard to point one out exactly. There are no disadvantages” (personal communication, July 2012). Alumnus C also had none of his friends attend Urban Prep, but complemented his fellow alum confessing the many advantages of attending Urban Prep over a traditional high school,

Having that father figure at school, the person who actually cared about what you was doing inside of school and outside of school…having that person who gives you the drive to complete your work. The person who just believes in you regardless; even though some may not even know your past or what you been through, but still puts forth effort to give help to a brotha that might not even want it…I really wouldn’t say there are any disadvantages…[My friends who didn’t attend Urban Prep are at a disadvantage] Yeah and no at the same time. Maybe this Urban Prep experience may not have done the same thing that it did for me for others. I can say that I have a big advantage over some of my friends because they didn’t have that person they could call on, that was at a school with the as well, but someone you can call on for support and help. (personal communication, July 2012)

Alumnus B also had no friends attend Urban Prep; he was not concerned for them because,
A lot of my friends were at private schools; so they were fine…[The advantages of attending Urban Prep] yeah because I was a big fish in a small pond so that helped in terms of college selection. You know…selected amongst 500 students, one of the top students…so that was always a good thing. [The disadvantage] well my college is also pretty small too, I guess trying to maneuver in a larger setting, not really being a big fish because everyone is a small fish.

(personal communication, July 2012)

The final two questions I wanted the young men to share dealt with their identity in general and if they distinguish themselves based on their experiences, how do you understand your identity as a Black man and the role if any that Urban Prep has played in shaping it? And do you see a distinguishing factor between yourself and other Black men in your community, based on your educational opportunities? Alumnus C mentioned that,

Before Urban Prep my idea of a Black man was just making it by, or providing for his family by any means possible. Through successful black men, even if you don’t go to college. Urban Prep helped me realize going to college, helped me see things a lot brighter, and helped me see things I didn’t even think I wanted to see…it showed me a lot coming from where a lot of Black men weren’t wearing suits and ties in Englewood…Seeing a lot of two parent homes, that was something at Urban Prep I seen a lot. My Pride leader, he had a wife and three daughters, so that was my image of a successful Black man and something I really looked up to. [Distinguishing factors] coming from the way I dress to even the way I carry myself. Even in some ways that I’ll handle situations that have been placed into, I stick out a lot more now than I did before. Even with going to college I stuck out a lot. I see a big change. (personal communication, July 2012)

Alumnus B said,
I think my role as a Black man is the same role a Hispanic man has. It’s just to do as best I can and bring people with me…[The role Urban Prep played in shaping my identity] with our creed and instilling pride in us and like I said responsibility over and over in us…and family. They really instilled that in us. So, I will need to fulfill that after and instill that in others.

[Distincting factors] yeah in my community I would say so. A lot of them just attend the local public schools and it’s half and half; some of them attend really good schools and given opportunities similar to mine…others weren’t fortunate. It’s a split community. I guess if they were given the opportunity they would do well as well. There’s nothing in particular besides I went to a school that they didn’t get a chance to go to or they just didn’t get to go to a school that was serious about education. (personal communication, July 2012)

While Alumnus A said, “I understand that I have to take advantage of every opportunity and be the best to my ability…I really don’t see any distinguishers between myself and other Black males” (personal communication, July 2012).

As in the other interviews I asked the alumni if they wanted to leave any final statements about their experiences at Urban Prep or about their experiences in higher education. Alumnus A left me with one word, “Incredible!” (personal communication, July 2012). Alumnus C shared his experience dealing with his removal from Urban Prep and his re-admittance,

Once my mother forced me to go there I pushed myself to do anything it took to get kicked out. Because that was a place I didn’t want to be. So I left, or I was asked to leave my sophomore year. Before I got to the point when I could have gone to the board and potentially get expelled, I was asked to leave Urban Prep my sophomore year… Through the times when I said I wanted to leave, I was doing little silly things. Like fighting, starting fights, disrespecting administration,
stuff like that; anything to get kicked out. So after my freshman year I learned that they were not going to kick me out.

Coming into my sophomore year with the rough path I had in my freshman year I was put on this probation, academic and behavior probation. So to stay in school I had to abide by certain rules and prove myself...prove to them that I still wanted to be there and I still wanted to attend. In my heart I still didn’t want to attend, but it started to open my eyes a little bit. So uh...during that probation process I got into another altercation with a former student at urban prep. Once I got into that altercation, it violated my probation so it was other things that was...me either being expelled or me asking to leave the school. So I took the chance to leave instead of being expelled; because if you get expelled it is hard to finish your education in the city of Chicago.

I went to John Marshall Harlan on 97th and Michigan. I attended there for a semester. It wasn’t really what I thought it would be. You know going through that it helped me to see a lot of other things in life, such as street wise, a loss of friends during that time. You know it really just opened my eyes to see that if college was not my next step, then where would I be? I came back at the beginning of my junior year. Something that really brought me back was seeing the things that were happening in the streets. Seeing where my life was going myself, and seeing the steps that I was taking that if I continued doing what I was doing I dint have a bright future; or I would be just a regular person on the streets, doing what a normal...or what statistics say a normal Black man was doing. That was something I didn’t want for myself, and I wanted a better future for my family, better than what we had had. So you know my mother...I wouldn’t say it was too late, but I know she has other responsibilities that she cant really have the tie to better her education or herself. You know for the bettering of my family, someone had to step up. So I took the initiative by myself and made a better start ... to have a better restart in life and uh, go back to Urban Prep
and have try this college run that I really didn’t know about.

My readmission process is kind of different. With the past that I had at Urban Prep, it was kind of hard to believe that I wanted to come back. With that I had to somewhat prove myself to administration, and to the school itself. People [?] with the past that I had knew that I wanted a better future and deep down that I could do better than what I was doing. So my readmission process was very difficult. I had to complete some papers, write some papers explaining why I felt that Urban Prep was the best place for me. I had to write some papers on what I would do better at Urban Prep, why did I want to come back to Urban Prep in general. So that process was a lot different then my first admission process. (personal communication, July 2012)

Alumnus C also stated that,

Without Urban Prep, and making the change to come back to Urban Prep, I honestly don’t know where I would be right now. I thank Urban Prep for the future that I have right now, because without them I don’t know if it would be the same. It was just a great experience and it took a big toll, but it had a big impact on my life as well; with me growing up and seeing where I had come from to where I am now I am actually proud of myself...and my family is too. So that’s really all that matters. (personal communication, July 2012)

**Analysis**

The representation in the interviews and experiences of these three alumni displays the growth and maturity of this ‘newborn’ charter program, as compared to longer established educational institutions. From Alumnus C, graduate of 2010, to Alumnus B, graduate of 2011, and Alumnus A, recent graduate of 2012. Displayed in the interviews are the realizations of how the programming at Urban Prep had changed their lives. With examples of being an academic minded student, but Urban Prep helping with your social and public speaking skills; or through finding out through dismissal that
life is what you make it, based on taking hold of what is going to ultimately give you the opportunity to be the person you want to be.

With the conversations presented previously with the former and current faculty and administration, we see through the students that it is not an experience that they regretted. In fact, it was a life changing experience for them all that gave them the possibility of changing the course of their life. Nonetheless, I was able to understand from the alumni that although their experiences were life changing, it was not a consensus that this type of programming would benefit all Black males, or if it would even have the same affect on all Black males. Given the experience of Alumnus C, he was very reluctant to be in an all males program so much that this was displayed through his intentional behavioral outbursts in the academy. This idea was voiced through some of the former and current faculty that a program like this is not for everybody.

However, it was a consensus that the lack of distraction from the opposite sex was a huge advantage. Each alumnus conveyed that they appreciated how there was no need to worry about trying to impress a girl, everyone wore the same outfits, and that it was a comfortable atmosphere to be in the comfortableness of this atmosphere was an added advantage of attending a single sex high school, along with the familial environment that was being cultivated in the classrooms, Prides, and daily Community sessions. A streamlined theme laced in each of the interviews (including faculty) was the desire for diversity, the understanding of why it was mono-ethnic, but also an acknowledgment that the schools are not representative of the ‘real-world’.

These alumni even shared similar experiences with how they felt about their preparedness for college. Even though the alumni were not one hundred percent sure they were academically prepared, they all shared the drive to trust that they could thrive, survive, and excel in the collegiate environment. Drive was exemplified even though both of the alumni, whom are in their second and third year of
college, reveal low grade point averages of 2.9 but still strongly, believe that next year will be better. At first glance this may not seem problematic, however when one of the students graduates high school with a 2.8 G.P.A and the other student graduated with a 4.2 G.P.A. this gives further evidence to the belief held by the current and former faculty that the students are not being academically prepared for college, and that the curriculum is not rigorous enough to train students for college. The alumni even discussed the multitude of colleges they applied to and how even though they were all accepted to many of the schools they applied to, the issue remained how would they fund their future education? Alumnus C shared that his lack of funding and even rejection from some of the schools was based in part by his low-test scores.

Another theme that the students shared was on the effects of the teachers, specifically the race and gender of the teachers, on their time at Urban Prep. It has previously been discussed that the intention of Urban Prep was to maintain a population of successful teachers, in particular Black males, because research has shown that this type of figure has a large impact on the academic success of Black male students (Brockenbrough, 2011, 2008; Howard, 2008). As expressed by the current male faculty member, Urban Prep just wants to make sure they hire a staff that believes their students can be successful. It appears as if this strategy has been working for their students.

As the alumni stated, the Black males at the school displayed to them in a plethora of ways what it meant to be a successful Black males through the ways they lead their lives; through opening up their home life and experiences to the students. This was even displayed, according to Alumnus A, in each of their courses that emphasized the importance of African American history; including the masculinity courses offered as electives. It can also be seen in the experiences of the alumni that the ethnicity of the teacher was not as important as the actions of the teachers. Staying after hours and/or coming in on weekends to help with homework or tutoring displayed that the teacher cared for them, sharing your
personal struggles and triumphs with students displayed this as well. This led me to understand from the
students perspective, from the young Black male perspective, it is about simply recognizing their
humanity and potential. This is ultimately what a person wants, what a student needs to succeed.

A final theme I find pertinent to discuss is how the students view themselves as Black men, and
in comparison to peers who did not attend Urban Prep. What I have found was that these alumni have
not separated themselves from their peers in terms of a hierarchy. They recognize that there is a
difference in the way that they present themselves as well as in the way that they handle certain
situations. These alumni even realize that the only difference between them and some of their peers is
that they were given the opportunity to attend a school that positioned education as a priority. This is at
the bottom line of their shared experiences is that this was an opportunity and they took advantage of it.
The perceptions of themselves as Black males were shaped around an ideology that has taught them to
essentially ‘pay it forward’. Each of these alums attested to the fact that it is their responsibility to open
doors for other Black males and their families. This is what they are attempting to do.
Chapter 5: Discussion Across Findings and Implications

This chapter will provide a brief summary of the study, relate the findings to prior research, and suggest possible directions for future studies.

Summary

My research focus is counter narratives (stories). My research questions are as follows: What makes Urban Prep a “success”? How does Urban Prep’s programming allow for Black male academic achievement? How is achievement (success) measured?

To answer these questions I (A) interrogated the secondary experiences of the alumni, (B) identified the support structures, operation of the school, admission process, and allocation of financial/support resources, (C) discovered the significance of an all Black/male school, along with the positive and negatives of a gender and race specific school, and (D) uncovered and interrogating attributes of “success” (achievement). A-D were accomplished through conducting a qualitative case study in which ten participants-two current faculty members, one administrator, four former faculty members, and three alumni- volunteered to share their experiences through audiotaped interviews lasting between 30 to 45 minutes. These participants were brought together through the use of snowball and convenience sampling.

My case study supports the work of CRT which entrenches its work in themes of “naming one’s own reality” in order to present dichotomies in dominant societal ideologies, such as the legal system and education. CRT allowed me to reveal dissenting voices that challenge the 100 percent graduation rates reported by Urban Prep, but also challenge what I call a medium discourse that is being presented as charter schools being the save all for Black male student achievement; specifically Urban Prep. While
at the same time allowing Urban Preps counter story to highlight how they are challenging the large discourse, societies dominate narrative of Black male failure.

Critical Race Theory allowed me to work through my analysis with a particular lens that sought out narratives, stories that tell one narrative and those that present a counter narrative, and how to interpret meaning from these narratives. One of the key tenants of CRT that has guided my analysis is to be mindful that “critical race theory in education is a radical critique of both status quo and the supported reforms” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 62).

**Discussion of Findings and implications**

Across the interviews there was an underlying question that asked what messages were being sent to the students specifically and the public at large from Urban Prep and society. The counter stories gathered from the participants will subhead the discussions that follow involving the messages. The messages are in the following topics: the measurement of success, academic preparedness, teacher demographic and its affect on Black male students, and that there is less distraction by women/girls and identity development.

**Passing off Students**

Measuring success has proven to be a very subjective and contentious task in the field of education. Currently we are in a system that is continuing to push forward with measuring teacher and student success through high stakes testing\(^3\) even though it is known that this type of success measurement is not fruitful or valid. Arguments ranging from standardized test being skewed initially because of inadequacies in instructional material and content available to students. In other words not all

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\(^3\) See Nichols & Berliner (2007); Kumashiro (2012); Au (2008); Ravitch (2010) for further reading on high stakes testing and the affects on students, teachers, community, and society.
of our students are learning the same material nor given access to the same information. In addition the environment one grows up in produces different experiences, which build a variety of schemas; those schemas which many times do not match up to the male, heterosexual, westernized, Eurocentric material that students nationwide are being tested on to measure their academic success (Popham, 1999).

Charter schools are not left out of the initiative to push high stakes testing, specifically Urban Prep which according to the participants included student assessments every six weeks to measure the student’s academic competencies. This was to also get them prepared for the state and district instituted exams. When asked specifically how Urban Prep measured success the majority of participants agreed that this was measured by student progression; by measuring where a student was when they arrived—whether that be in the school or the specific class— and where they were at the culmination of that class, and/or graduation. The importance of how success is measured is in the fact that it presents both positive implications and negative implications for choosing to measure “success” only using student progression.

The positives of measuring “success” only using student progression is that through Urban Prep allowing its teachers the flexibility to measure the success of the students based on how far they have progressed, instead of just by letter grade, it gives accountability not only to the student but the teacher. This allows the teacher to reflect on how much they have helped the student and in what ways they have helped the student—or not helped the student. The teacher will be able to be accountable for their role in where the student is at as far as their understanding of the given material and the strategies they implemented to accommodate the students needs; therefore when and if the student is passed on to the next level the following teacher will have a clear understanding of how much or how little the student has displayed that they understand. The new teacher will then be able to make a conscious decision on whether or not the student is going to be able to handle the new/higher level of material. The students
will also be able to be held accountable through the monitoring of their own academic comprehension, being able to view the material and concepts that they should know in order to move on and have a greater chance of being successful in the next class.

On a broader scale having this type of accountability and measurement of success in all schools would be able to assist in lowering the “blaming” for student’s lack of academic preparedness in higher grades. What I am discussing is an ongoing “blame-game” that goes on in the education field in regards to whose fault it is for students being ill-prepared for the following grade level (Bernstein, 2013). As stated before, this type of accountability will help in both students and teachers being real with the abilities of their students, and the students own abilities. In this way it seems to me that as a society we would be able to move away form socially promoting students based on age, moving away from this obsession that because you are a certain age then you must be in a certain grade; and move more towards the known realities that we are individuals who learn and comprehend a variety of topics at different rates and levels that can not be based on our age.

**Academically Prepared?**

The academic preparedness of students who graduate from Urban Prep was a site of contention as well. Expressed with an emphatic No, to the question do you believe Urban Prep is preparing students who are academically prepared for college or university, from a large sum of the participants in each group. The rigor of the curriculum was called into question as well as the “success” of the school that has been reported because of reported high rates of graduation and acceptance to college. As attested to by the participants and the academy itself, the curriculum is not rigorous or enough to prepare for college prep, beyond the extra reading period and a few Advanced Placement (AP) courses. The curriculum is very much standard as it sticks strictly to the ACT College Readiness Benchmarks that
simply focus on the subjects of Reading, Math, Science, and Language Arts. Compared to other schools in the City of Chicago, like Whitney Young and North Side Prep which participants continued to compare Urban Prep with academically, this curriculum actually comes up short and is not as rigorous as these stated college prep high schools. Nonetheless Urban Prep has managed to gain equal amounts of graduation rates as these schools, and better than most of the traditional public high schools in the City of Chicago. This is even more so with the graduation rates of Black males nationwide and in Chicago.

The importance of this major discussion falls more in the statistics not being publicly reported, as discussed by Mr. J and the implications of this. Mr. J brought into question in his final remarks that his tension with Urban Prep practices where not about them graduating Black males and getting them accepted to college, but it was how the data was being reported. Mr. J noted that the mathematical calculations of Urban Prep’s 100 percent graduation is inaccurate in the sense that if you start freshman year with 166 students and then you graduate 83 seniors, this does not accurately depict 100 percent (Illinois Report Card; Mr. J, personal communication, December 2012).

On a micro level Urban Prep is purporting itself, with the backing of local and federal politicians and financial groups, as being a model for Black male academic achievement. These reported graduation rates may seemingly distort the picture of Black male achievement, along with possible distorting the academic achievement rates of the students of Urban Prep. So within this presented tension an underlying question is proposed, what message could this send to the public? The narrative in this message could suggest that with the flexibility of this charter school and their accountability to both the Black community and as an educational institution, can lead them to be in the midst of a double consciousness. What I mean by double consciousness is that on one hand Urban Prep must be accountable to their stakeholders, private donors, and the U.S. Department of Education and thus must prove every year what the funding and the suggested “hype” is going towards. In essence they have to
consistently measure up to the bar they established upon opening; they must live up to their charter contract. On the other hand it is because of the stated accountability that may be working against charters like Urban Prep and Urban Prep themselves because there is no room for failure. As Urban Prep continues in their efforts to disrupt the negative dominant narrative that voices to young Black males that you are not good enough and you don’t belong in schools, let alone colleges. They will quite possible have to keep up these reports in order to not be viewed as just another school with Black kids who are barely meeting the academic benchmarks.

This dissenting voice is valid in the sense that by not discussing publicly the adversities the school has faced with students who may not have been able to “buy in” to the Urban Prep school culture, or adversities with behavioral or academic setbacks, this can lead to painting a false picture of the situation, and possibly even romanticizing the state of Black male youth. I am under full understanding that there is a need for a counter story and Urban Prep has stepped in to play their role in fulfilling that need. However, it would seem that it does not do anyone justice to in a sense “cry wolf” on the successes that an institution is making with a demographic of students who have been overlooked, and underserved. Some of the participants have already claimed that Urban Prep will be a relic in African American history, so it seems that even if more accurate data was publicly provided and acknowledged that Urban Prep would still be a potential model for those who are interested in working with this demographic. However, as Urban Prep is a charter school that does feel the effects of high-stakes reform, this tension, counter story of only reporting gains and successes has macro-level impacts.

The system of high-stakes reform naturally compels schools and organizations to cheat, either through standardized test scores like what we have seen in the Atlanta cheating scandal (Copeland, 2013; Winerip, 2013) in which the superintendent had school teachers change students wrong tests answers to correct one, in order to secure higher standardized scores; standardized scores that come with
a public notoriety and at times more funding. There is a suggested linkage between the potential to falsify test scores and the potential to falsify other rates of success. The linkage is the pressure placed on educational institutions, and specifically for charter schools who are being heavily posited to be the “new” cure all against the traditional public school system. For Urban Prep they have a pressure to churn out graduates of Black males and to get them accepted to college.

A tension that another participant had voiced dealt with Urban Prep’s measurement of success through their graduation rates and getting students accepted to college. The tension was found first in a comment from CEO Tim King, in which he stated that Urban Prep has met their goal of getting the students accepted, they did not state that their priority was getting them to enroll (King, 2013). Secondly a counter story was presented in the alumni groups in where they discussed the amount of college and universities that they applied to and got accepted to, but how many of the acceptance letter lacked funding; a key factor for many people being able to determine if college is an option. The both of these tensions and counter stories can be aligned to see the importance of this discussion, and to also dissect the undergirding message that may be suggested from these interview responses.

When the alumni shared that they have probably filled out at least 25 applications to colleges I was taken aback, immediately thinking about the cost of application fees associated with many of the post-secondary institutions in the U.S. When the students then shared that even though they were unsure of their academic preparedness for college, they had been accepted to over half of the schools that they applied to. While this is an accomplishment that should be celebrated, the celebration is postponed for many because of the lack of financial assistance provided. As many of us are aware of an acceptance to any group or program is exciting, especially if the end results open avenues to achieve your goals. But what is the use of an acceptance letter if you cannot pay for it. I believe this is where the voice of dissent enters with some of my participants when Urban Prep reports to have the best interest of the students in
mind, but mistakenly make a public statement that suggest that by graduating these students and getting them accepted to college, their part of the job is done. As Mr. M had suggested in his interview when asked about the attributes of Urban Prep that have added to the “success” of the students, a higher expectation may be needed; a new goal must be initiated and obtained to add to the previously set goal which has been “achieved”.

On a broader level as attested to earlier it is within comprehension why organizations such as Urban Prep, and school districts such as in Atlanta, inflate and cheat to skew the numbers. We live in a capitalist society where unfortunately the old adage reigns true, “money makes the world go round.” Mr. K stated in his final words that it takes a lot of money to give these demographic students what they need; to run a program and organization like this. With this statement and the given facts, one can see that even those with great intentions, even those who set out to counter a negative image of a people, those who attempt to “be there brother’s keeper” and “open a door for the next generation” can be placed in a position that has the potential to “watering down” the expectations of passing course by offering one shot exam. The concern of some of the participants appears to be that these tactics have the potential to place at a disadvantage the very group who you intended to be in service to. The potential risk could include graduating students who by chance have received funding, but may face great difficulty academically because they were not thoroughly prepared. I am suggesting this because according to Urban Prep’s data that many students come increasingly below grade level, it is suggested that there is only so much that can be done within three years, to potentially turn around fifteen years of inadequate schooling. An adverse of this all are the students like Alumnus C who were asked to leave Urban Prep for whatever reason, but are not as lucky as he was to return to Urban Prep.

These students, as reported by participants, must return to their neighborhood schools and quite possibly endure the constant cycling of students from school to school. It appears that these are the
students whom need the most help, but for a variety of reasons do not receive it. These students risk continued educational disservice and the possibility of eventually just being aged out of the education system, if they do not remove themselves prior to this.

It's about Caring and Availability, not race

The demographics of teachers were addressed in interviews with both alumni and faculty members. Urban Prep was noted when it first opened to having a high percentage rate of Black males as educators and leaders in the school. In the interviews it was attested that the research on educating Black males found that their achievement rates would be positively affected by having persons of African American descent as their teachers; to serve as role models and mentors for these young Black males. The literature I reviewed in the second chapter supports this strategy. However what I found most interesting was that when this topic was discussed with the faculty, many of them reported that the demographic of teachers had changed, and in many way’s mirrored the teaching demographics of traditional public schools that have a high percentage of White teachers and in comparison low percentages of African American teachers, especially males. Mr. K stated that one of the reasons why they intentionally hired Black males is because Urban Prep instills the belief that, “You can’t be what you can’t see” (personal communication, July 2012), message that is passed along to their students and is regarded as a rationale to bring successful Black males onto the campuses in teaching and leadership positions.

Mr. M discussed that the lack of Black male teachers currently is not intentional, but because of a number of reasons including that some of the Black male teachers were not a good fit for Urban Prep, to there being a shortage of college educated Black male certified teachers to choose from. The tension from the faculty members is apparently triggered by an underlying question that ask, how can the
students be expected to be, what they are currently not seeing? Or better yet, if the students experienced a teaching staff that was over 90 percent African American males and they are able to view over a few years this demographic change, then in what way is Urban Prep displaying in a tangible way their belief? An additional voice of dissent arose from some of the alumni when they were questioned how the demographic of their teachers effects them, in addition to the changing demographics.

The alumni verbally told a counter story that showed that the race of the teacher was not as much of concern as the actions displayed by the teachers. Alumnus C and Alumnus B were able to experience the school when it was a predominately African American male teaching staff. Both reported that they did appreciate visually seeing this and said that it did have a positive affect on them because it was not something they were accustomed to; having supportive, college educated Black men around you daily, caring for you as a person, not just a student.

However, the alumni honored more those teachers who cared about them; those are the ones who had the greatest impact. Those teachers who set high expectations for them, who came in extra days to assist them with further understanding of course material, those teachers who they were able to reach out to when in a bind or needing someone to listen to them even when the school day was complete. Those teachers who treated them like a human being, and not just a Black boy. Alumnus B addressed the fact that he bonded with teachers from different ethnicities, not simply the Black ones. In this statement and the responses from the alumni of the importance of teacher actions and perceptions of them versus the teachers ethnic and gender makeup, it leads me to see that perhaps as adults we are enforcing our beliefs on what helps students based on research that is very much valid for some, but at times generalized to be right for all. It may prove more beneficial to utilize student experiential knowledge, to possibly lead to a more personalized style of instruction.
The story that will be discussed is not a counter story, but a running story that I found through the interviews of just about each participant when asked the advantages of attending a single-sex school. The running answer, sometimes among other response, was that there was less distraction from the opposite sex; otherwise known as girls or women. This is one of the leading themes that you may hear when looking at schools or classrooms that separate students by gender, heard in both all girls’ settings and all male settings.

Although distraction is not something that anyone would like to deal with during important matters such as attending classes, it is the subversive message that an explanation like this one purports to both male and female students. Claiming that the need for males, Black males, to attend a single sex school because they will have less distraction from girls in this environment may send the messages that when women/girls are in a males presence, in their school environment, they are inevitably a distraction. Thus as a male you may find yourself having little self control and a heightened inability to focus on your studies. Therefore you must be removed from the “distraction”.

This type of statement or rationale has the potential to send a negative message that girls and women are not coming to the education environment to learn, that girls and women cannot be in the same environment as boys and men because they are distractions, their physical being in that space is a distraction; an intentional disruption of the academic comprehension of males. What could be worst is that the alumni and even some of the faculty-current and former of Urban Prep may pass on the suggested sexist ideology that can disable young boys from asserting any responsibility in regards of their participation or initiation of distraction. The responsibility in addition to being removed from males, is also removed from the education system, and placed as the sole responsibility of the “other person.”
If you follow me take this hypothetical situation into consideration: when young men are told that by attending single sex classes and schools they will be able to achieve more academically because they will not be distracted by girls, they are also being told that it is the girls fault for them not being able to focus; this can also be applied in reverse when girls are told that it is an advantage in attending a single sex school/class because there is less distraction from boys. In a broader sense this rationale is damaging to both young men and young women because the blame for their distraction gets placed on someone else. The conversation is thus fruitless because the root of the problem is still not addressed. In my interviews it was the alumni who stated that there was not a huge difference between them and the males they knew, besides that they were given the opportunity to attend a school that placed education as a priority. I bring this response into this conversation, because that is inevitably one of the roots of the problems facing our students and their academic achievement, specifically students of color, and African American males.

Not enough of our students are attending schools that place education first. I do not simply mean being educated to pass a test, or to pass a course, but being educated so that you are able to question everything. To look critically at the world, at what the world say’s you are, and what you say you are; to challenge ideas pertaining to gender, sexuality, and ability because of this acquired skill. The implications of continuing a rationale such as one is less distracted by the other sex when one is separated from each other, will quite possibly lend to the continuation of the belittlement of women, potential conversations where young men are told to “Man up”, and quite possibly the practice of blaming others for our own short-comings; for our suggested systemic short-comings.
The Limitations

One of the primary limitations of my case study is that the participant pool is small, although these ten interviews were rich with experiences and tensions I am under full understanding that the information can not be used to generalize about charter schools or single sex schools at large; nor can they be used to generalize the experiences of all faculty members or alumni of Urban Prep Charter Academy for Young Men.

As an African American woman, a mother, a resident of the Chicago land area, a graduate student, and a researcher one of the limitations of this study has been being both an insider and an outsider. I believe I was able to make contact and secure a research connection with Urban Prep because of my graduate status in a Pan African Studies program, my sincere interest in finding out more about these all Black male academies as a Black mother of a son, and the fact that I was familiar with Chicago Public Schools and Urban Prep because of my resident status; in addition to me attending some of their events/fundraisers. However, I was a female researcher coming into a male dominated organization that had no previous record of allowing anyone to research his or her programming. To my knowledge I was told I was the first person not affiliated with the organization or campuses allowed to conduct research at Urban Prep. With this knowledge I knew that it would be a great responsibility on my part to be a woman of my word. I gave my word from the first phone call that my intention in conducting this case study was not to start a “witch hunt” for Urban Prep. My intentions were to receive the experiences of their alumni through my goals to, (A) interrogate the post-secondary experiences of the alumni, (B) identify the support structures, operation of the school, admission process, and allocation of financial support resources, (C) discover the significance of an all Black male school, along with the positive and negatives of gender and race specific schools, and (D) uncover and interrogate attributes of “success”
(achievement). Even though I followed my protocol as stated and was very open and honest with all of my intentions I faced limitations, due to the organization wanting to “control” the study.

One of the limitations I faced was in regard to not having full access to the alumni and current faculty population. As stated in my methods, my access to alumni was limited due to the organization placing an intermediary in between my research and the anonymity of the potential participants. I was thus given handpicked alumni to interview. However, this worked out in my favor as these alumni had rich, varied, experiences from Urban Prep and were willing to be honest with me- a stranger, an outsider. My access to the faculty was also “controlled” and in fact, my contacting the faculty played a role in the temporary ending of my case study.

Those who are interested in conducting further studies with Urban Prep, or schools like this one, should be aware that representation and expectations will play a huge role in the limits that you will come up against. If charter schools, and schools like Urban Prep continue to be placed on this imaginary throne and charged with the duty to magically change the academic outcomes-years of improper or bad teaching-of low-income, underserved, underrepresented populations of students they will become more hesitant to allow anyone to report information about them. Even if this information will allow the specified school and schools interested in adopting their programming to avoid some of the present tensions. How a school is represented coincides with the prestige and funding it will receive. Urban Prep for example, markets itself as a charter school that serves Black males; legally through it’s charter they are not allowed to discriminate, therefore you will always find on their website or their handouts the equal opportunity statement.

Therefore anyone can apply regardless of gender or ethnicity; but because of how they have strategically marketed themselves and placed their campuses in predominately Black neighborhoods, they will receive the type of students they are marketing for. Given this marketing example, it would not
be conducive to a school such as Urban Prep to have a researcher, or reporters for that matter, misrepresent their school in a way that would raise any negative flags. This could potentially negatively affect their private funding, enrollment, and even more force them to accept and recognize the fallacies they have purported.

Along with proper representation, this school has expectations that they are attempting to live up to. These expectations are not necessarily only affecting the individual students who attend Urban Prep, or the faculty and affiliated with Urban Prep. These expectations are embedded in a larger conversation in which their is a macro level battle to restore the humanity of Black peoples, to restore the ability of the Black mind, to re-establish in the greater society that Black people in general, that Black males specifically, are not failures in life. That we are not criminals, deadbeat parents, juvenile delinquents, only good for entertainment or service positions, that we are not a waste. Even though this may seem preachy or overdramatic it is schools such as Urban Prep, KIPP, Harlem Children’s Zone, and the Historically Black Colleges and Universities who have taken the charge to counter these negative and devastating stereotypes that are still pinned on Black youth today. These organizations and institutions have an expectation not to fail, but to graduate; and not only to graduate but also to exceed sate and national levels of achievement and graduation. These organizations and institutions hold on their back the legacies of a strong intelligent history where Black people took charge of their education and showed the world how successful and capable they were. So I understand the need for these places to want to protect what they have created. But the problem will fall on the fact that there are always issues and stumbling blocks, and that by silencing these voices of dissent and only reporting what is perceived as positive statistics is not going to help the larger problem.

In addition to the addressed expectation that these schools have, there is a limitation to charter schools such as Urban Prep who continue to follow the traditional curriculum of U.S. public schools. It
has been noted in my literature review that one of the rationale around why Black males are not achieving in traditional public schools is that the curriculum and educational environment does not take care of the whole student. Now while Urban Prep attempts to address this by providing a positive school culture that is similar to a family, it does not instill a solid curriculum that differs from the traditional public schools. Public school curriculum in the U.S. follows a very heterosexual male Eurocentric dominant lens; one of the only advances is the newly infused multicultural curriculum, which is still in its early years of attempting to integrate other ethnic lenses and perspectives. Urban Prep caters to a 99 percent African American student population in which it offers only one African American course during the junior or senior year, and does not mandate its teachers to focus on African American histories, peoples, or cultures. I am positioning this as a limitation because this organization has the potential to instill a strong curriculum that positions these young black men in history and the present society; not from a skewed view that simply paints the majority of us as simple slaves who did not fight back, but paints the reality of who we were and are as a people and the role that we played and continue to play in the development of this country. In this way along with stressing high academic expectations, graduating high school and attending college, there could be a generation of young men who are secure in who they are, can position themselves in our history, that can challenge the ideas that society has set up against them. These individuals could have a larger impact on changing the society. But by Urban Prep continuing the status quo curriculum they are adding to an unchanging system that attempts to preach equality in schools and reserves inequality in the world.

Concluding Remarks

Through this qualitative case study came forth ten rich experiences that were shared from current and former faculty, and alumni. Through these rich experiences I was able to use Critical Race Theory
to analyze my data and use the tenants of critical race theory that purport naming one’s own reality as a radical action; especially when it comes from those teachers, students, and administrators that can give experiential knowledge on how best to educate that community of students. In addition, CRT helped me to challenging the purported romanticism that falls over Urban Prep as being a “success” with Black male achievement.

These interviews showed that there is another story that needs further research to uncover the potentially silenced individuals of this charter school, and the silenced voices of the U.S. Education system. In a time where privatized education is being pushed as the cure-all for our education problems, and especially the achievement issues of non-White inner city youth, the monitoring of the flexibility of these types of schools should be initiated. This is due to the flexibility and accountability charter schools are given in regards to the ability to remove students at their own will from their schools, and essentially give them back to their neighborhood school; which they probably were not excelling in initially.

The interviews and collected data also revealed that what is happening at Urban Prep is not happening within a vacuum, but is a situation that is created by a society who has become complacent. A society who continues to push individualism and quick fixes to deeply rooted systemic issues. A society who seemingly remains still when arguments in education center around adults-good intentioned or not-and what is beneficial for them, instead of what is best practice for students and their future success.

This research adds to the literature that advances the fight to counter narratives of failure of any group’s potential and ability, specifically the ability and potential of Black males. In addition, this research adds to literature that provides counter stories from voices that are at times overlooked, or unacknowledged.

By highlighting what is working and giving voice to those who can speak to what’s not working, my research will assist those organizations and people who are interested in creating programing for Black male youth to understand some of the tensions present in this “model” program. I believe Urban
Prep should be recognized for its achievements, because as one of the participants proclaimed it will be seen as a relic in African American history. However, like many events and people in history-Black history is no exception- the legacies are at times one sided and skewed, black and white, painting a picture of romanticized costiveness or negativity. Rarely in U.S. history do we collectively and publicly account for the good, the bad, and the ugly; I hope to continue to highlight voices of dissent in the education arena in order to push further accountability on all levels-including holding society accountable for the role they have played in the demonizing of a people based on race, and the privatization of education that continues to further perpetuate the “blame game.”
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Brandi N. Williams  
Syracuse, Ny 13206  
Mobile: 315-506-2567  
Email: bnwill01@syr.edu

Personal Summary

Certified K-9 teacher, experienced university teaching assistant, teaching mentor, and current graduate of the Pan African Studies program in the Department of African American Studies at Syracuse University. Experience with leading and facilitating discussion and seminar literature sections at the collegiate level, and teaching at the elementary level. Able to provide students of all ages with a safe environment to engage with the material and develop critical thinking skills; in addition to establishing clear learning objectives, and setting high expectations for individual students and the class as a whole. Possessing the required drive, enthusiasm and adaptability to work in an intensive academic and leadership program.

Education

Ph.D. Candidate Literacy Ed. Syracuse University Commence 08/2013  
M.A. Pan African Studies Syracuse University May 2013  
1) A. Elementary Education (K-9) Northeastern Illinois University 2010

Relevant Graduate Coursework

Research Methods: African American/Pan African Studies Fall 2011  
Seminar in Pan Africanism: Research and Reading Fall 2011  
Arts, Literature, and Cultures of the PanAfrican World Fall 2011  
Histories, Societies, and Political Economies of the Pan African World Spring 2012  
Race, Power & Politics Spring 2012  
Research on Urban Literacies Fall 2012

Teaching Experience

Syracuse University  
Black Women Writers, Fall 2011; 2012  
African American Drama, Fall 2011  
African American Lit: 20th & 21st Centuries, Spring 2012; 2013

Duties:  
Hired teaching assistant in the Department of African American Studies to facilitate discussion sections and seminars covering literature by African American authors, playwrights, essayist, and poets. As the teaching assistant my responsibilities included leading class discussions, lecturing, creating assessments (quizzes, exams, weekly assignments, essays) to monitor if students were reading the text and participating in “close” reading, as well as acting as a writing tutor; as these courses were classified as reading and writing intensive. For the African American Lit. Course 2013 I am the lead teacher for the discussion sections and created the course syllabus, along with all assignments and assessments.
**Murphy Elementary**  Chicago Public School: sixth grade; Student Teaching  Fall 2010

**Duties:**
As a fulfillment of the Elementary Education B.A. program I worked as a student teacher full time for one semester (September-December 2010). For three of the four months I acted as co-teacher adding on a new content area to my responsibilities (math for the entire sixth grade, language arts, and history) creating daily lesson plans and assessments for a class that was 95% ELL students. As a co-teacher I worked in tandem with the middle school special education teacher. In addition my duties included, daily attendance, before and after school tutoring, lunch money collection, supervising field trips, and participating in face-to-face conferences with parents and guardians.

**Relevant Work Experience**

*Syracuse University Teaching Mentor*  *Syracuse, NY*  *Aug. 2012 and Aug. 2013*

**Duties:**
As a Teaching Mentor in the Teaching Assistant Orientation Program my responsibilities included work in a group to perform concurrent sessions that discussed in a skit style rules, regulations, and scenarios that a graduate student may occur in the TA position. Worked with a partner as facilitator to a small group of 5 international graduate student TA’s and 3 U.S. TA’s. As small group leaders we took the TA’s to lunch and outings, around campus and the community, discussed our experience as TA’s, what they can expect in the classroom, working with professors, and recording prepared micro-teaching lessons that would be evaluated by the group. I was also asked to step in as a representative of my department (AAS) to interview an incoming AAS TA on her English language skills with a team from the university at large.

**Recent Workshops and Conferences**

*Dark Girls: Celebration of Black Girlhood*  *March 2013*

*34th Annual Ethnography in Education Forum: “Disrupting Discourses of Failure: Counter narratives of Black male academic achievement”*  *Feb. 2013*

*Writing Our Lives: Danforth Middle School “By Any Means Necessary: Using persuasive speech writing as a tool of resistance and empowerment to counteract hostile learning environments”*  *Feb. 2013 & May 4, 2013*

*Future Professoriate Program (FPP) 2012/2013*

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