CHALLENGING STEREOTYPES OF BLACK MALE STUDENTS WHO ARE HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETES: A MULTICASE STUDY ACROSS NEIGHBORHOODS

by

ADEOYE O. ADEYEMO

(Under the Direction of JEROME E. MORRIS)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to better understand how neighborhood and schooling experiences contributed to the perceptions, aspirations and identity development of Black male high school student athletes. Drawing from research that examines the neighborhood influences on social and educational outcomes, this study used a multiple case study methodology, including interviews, observations, and school data, to examine how the neighborhoods where eight Black male high school student athletes lived, influenced their experiences in an urban Midwestern city. Research participants resided in three economically distinct and predominantly Black neighborhoods.

Research participants were classified into three categories: 1) academically motivated, 2) athletically motivated and 3) academically and athletically motivated. Findings indicate that although place influenced the experiences of all participants, support from family members and participation in recreational activities and programs beyond sports contributed to the identity, perceptions and aspirations of Black male high
school student athletes.

INDEX WORDS: Black males, Black male athletes, Place, Neighborhood, Academic/Athletic Paradox, Black Male achievement, Black male identity
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DEDICATION

This is dedicated to all Black male students who participated, participate and will participate in sports. You are more than just a jersey with a number on your back.
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First, I would like to thank God, Mommy, Daddy, Derin, Bola, my extended family and individuals who I am not related to, but call my family. They have been the core of my foundation and experiences. Through their teachings, directly and indirectly, I have learned a lot about life. I am so thankful for the experiences I have had thus far. These experiences have helped me develop patience, responsibility, and accountability to others and myself. I would like to also thank my friends, family and people I have met along the way. You have all had an influence on me in some way. I appreciate how you have challenged me to think and reflect and become a better person. I would like to give a special thank you to Greg Wilson. Without you I would not have had the chance to work with Dr. Jerome Morris. The dissertation process was very challenging and I appreciate the moments that you challenged me to expand my thinking.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The documentary, *Hoop Dreams*, captured the life of two Black adolescents (Arthur Agee and William Gates) who once lived in Cabrini Green, Cabrini Green was a public housing project on the near north side of Chicago- the housing project has since been demolished. These young men, who also happened to be Black male student athletes, witnessed violence, the selling of illegal drugs, and the use of crack-cocaine. They also endured the financial hardships of their families as their parents struggled with unemployment, underemployment, and poverty. In spite of their experiences, the documentary’s leading Black males continued to believe that their athletic talents would propel them out of “the ‘hood.” *Hoop Dreams* took the viewer on Arthur Agee and William Gates’ journeys to escape an environment filled with poverty, crime and limited opportunities.

Arthur Agee and William Gates loved basketball. Both worked diligently to improve their basketball skills prior to attending high school. William received a full scholarship to attend St. Joe’s Catholic High School, playing as a starter on the varsity basketball team during his freshman year. He developed into a talented basketball player, established himself as the next basketball star at St. Joe’s High School, eventually garnered nationwide attention for his basketball skills, and became one of the top high school players in the country.

Unlike William, Arthur was not formally recruited. He received his opportunity to play at St. Joe’s High School when a talent scout saw him playing at a Cabrini Green basketball court. However, because of financial difficulties, Arthur transferred to Marshall High School. By his
senior year, Arthur had become the starting point guard, and the scoring and emotional leader of
the Marshall High School basketball team, which won the city championship and finished third
were successful high school basketball athletes. Both athletes later played at the collegiate level.

The athletic success of Arthur Agee and William Gates inspired many but, can the same
success story be told for the thousands, and perhaps millions, of other Black male high school
student athletes across the country? More specifically, how were Arthur and William’s
experiences representative of or different from the experiences of Black male high school student
athletes growing up in predominantly Black neighborhoods, particularly in a major urban area
like Chicago, Illinois? This study attempted to answer these questions by examining the
neighborhood and school experiences of eight Black male high school student athletes.

Black Male High School Student Athlete Participants

This research study focuses on the neighborhood and school experiences of eight Black
male high school student athletes who reside in the third largest city, Chicago. The Black male
athletes, the neighborhoods they live in, and the schools that they attend are introduced below:
Joseph Stanley and Nick Bradley attended Jacobs High School and lived in Hill West. Joseph
was an only child and he lived with his mother and father. At the time of the study Joseph was a
junior. He participated in a number of other activities that developed his passion for technology.
He was also a very talented basketball player. Joseph stood at 6’4” tall and was skinny with long
arms.

Nick Bradley never ever met his biological father. At the time of the study, Nick lived
with his stepfather, his stepfather’s wife, and his half brother. Nick was a sophomore student and
a member of the football team at Jacobs High School at the time of the study. He played
cornerback, was 5’7” and had a small frame. He also participated in chess and in the theatre program.

Similar to Joseph but unlike Nick, Chase Barron was very social. Chase lived in the Pace Mark neighborhood with his mother and stepdad. His biological father and mother separated when Chase was a young child. At Parker Mitch High School, he was enrolled in the International Baccalaureate program and was a member of the football team. He played fullback and he stood at about 5’9”. Chase was a thicker football player with large legs and arms and had a wide body frame.

While Chase lived on top of the hill in Pace Mark, Delvin lived in another section near the edge of the neighborhood. Delvin had been living in this neighborhood since the fourth grade with his mother and stepfather. He did not know his biological father, so for twelve years of Delvin’s life, he was without a father figure. He was the only child his mother had. Delvin started playing basketball at the age of four. At the time of the study, he was a senior. He was about 5’6” and was a bit stocky for his small stature.

Similar to Delvin, Terry Smart had spent a long time in the Pace Mark neighborhood. He was born and raised there. At the time of the study, Terry was a senior and lived in the same home that he was born in with his mother and father. He had four brothers. Terry participated in many sports and earned a college athletic scholarship. He stood at 6’1” and was athletically built with strong athletic features in his arms and legs. Terry also performed well in school. He rarely received a grade lower than a B throughout his academic career.

Though Jerry and Terry were friends in school, they lived in opposite sections of the Pace Mark neighborhood. Jerry was the only child of his mother and father. Unfortunately, Jerry’s father passed away eight years prior to the study. At Parker Mitch High School, Jerry became
one of the premier basketball players in the city of Chicago. He was 6’7” tall with long arms and big hands. He received a full basketball scholarship to attend a mid-sized university.

Unlike the other young Black males whose stories have been briefly told, Corey Mitchell grew up on the edge of the Lemont Nance neighborhood with his father and mother, until he moved to another neighborhood with his father eight years prior to the study. Corey had three brothers. He began playing basketball at a young age and became a good student and a star player with college potential. He stood at 6’6” with long arms. He was wide-bodied, and had thick legs and a broad upper body.

Michael Wilson, like Corey Mitchell, attended Calumet High School. He was born in Chicago and grew up in various neighborhoods around the city. He had one sister and three brothers. Michael lived with his brother and his mother, who was single. However, his brother later became his guardian and he went to live with him in the Lamont Nance neighborhood. Michael was about 5’5” with small arms and legs and skinny frame. Following this initial glimpse into the lives of these young black male high school student athletes who participated in this dissertation study, this examination will construct a methodological understanding of their lived experiences, identities perceptions and aspirations.

Problem Statement

In this dissertation, I analyzed the social and educational experiences of eight Black male high school student athletes across three economically diverse neighborhoods in Chicago, Illinois and how these experiences contributed to their identity, perceptions, and aspirations. The findings from this study hope to provide a more holistic understanding of how these experiences impacted the participants’ lives before, within, and beyond college.
Methodology

This investigation employed a multiple case study methodology. According to Yin (1984), a multiple case study methodology is useful when investigating the Black male participants in this study interact within the neighborhoods they live in and the schools that they attend. Neighborhood demographic, neighborhood census, Black male high school athlete interview, and Black male high school athlete observation data were gathered from three distinct neighborhoods in Chicago. One neighborhood was classified as a middle-income and predominately Black neighborhood, with a median household income of $55,050.67 and a percentage unemployment rate of 14.57%; a second neighborhood was considered to be a working-class Black neighborhood with a median household income of $42,789 and a percentage unemployment rate of 23.7%; and the third was an under-resourced Black neighborhood with a median household income of $25,452.31 and a percentage unemployment rate of 23.5%.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this investigation:
1) How have social and economic factors contributed to the neighborhood/community context of Black male high school student athletes in a major Midwestern city?
2) What were the neighborhood, social, and schooling experiences of Black male high school student athletes?
3) What were the perceptions, identity, and goals of Black male high school student athletes?

---

1 It is important to note that in the middle class neighborhood that the median income and unemployment rate for Black residents and White residents are vastly different. The overall median household income and unemployment rate is bolstered by the median household income and the low unemployment rate of White residents. This information shows that there are two middle class experiences: the one that White people have and the one that Black people have.
Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework uses the race place nexus, research on Black males and research on Black male athletes to illuminate how the experiences of Black male high school student athletes influence their identity, perceptions and aspirations. The nexus between race and place, the connection between the color of someone’s skin and where they live, foregrounded the experiences of the eight Black male high school student athletes included in this study. Scholars have acknowledged the influence of where one lives, also know as “place,” has on social and educational development (Acevedo-Garcia, Osypuk, McArdle, & Williams, 2008; Francois, Overstreet, & Cunningham, 2011; Morris & Monroe, 2009; Tate, 2008; Wilkes & Iceland, 2004). More specifically, the studies referenced above illustrated that Black people disproportionately live in poorly resourced and less economically developed areas, when compared to their White counterparts, which is important to note considering the effect it could have on social and educational development.

Black students who live in these dismal conditions often underperform academically (Garibaldi, 2007; Haynes, Comer & Lee, 1988) and exhibit social and behavioral problems (Bennett & Harris, 1982; Taylor & Foster, 1986). In comparison to their peers from other racial and gender groups in the 2008-09 school year, less than half of the Black males enrolled in school graduated from high school (Holzman, 2010). Moreover, Black males were significantly overrepresented in special education and underrepresented in gifted education (Grantham, 2004). Black males also comprised a disproportionate number of children in the juvenile court system and were more likely to drop out of high school and commit or become the victims of violent crimes (Chapman, Laird, Ifill, & Kewal Ramani, 2011; Cooper & Smith, 2011; Ford, 1998; Rainville & Smith, 2003). Though many Black male high school student athletes had
experienced some form of athletic success, many of them were also a part of the Black youth who faced the aforementioned issues.

As a result, Black youth, some parents, peer groups, and predominantly Black communities have prioritized participation in sports over academic achievement (Dawkins, Braddock II, & Celaya 2009; Edwards, 2000; Lomax, 2000). In addition to the large majority of Black males who play professional and intercollegiate athletics, the strong emphasis on sports encourages Black male athletes to primarily focus on developing their athletic skills. This results in personal, cultural and academic underdevelopment (Dawkins, Braddock II, & Celaya 2009), and perpetuates the notion that Black males are great athletes but poor students. Subsequently, Black male athletes are valued for their physical and athletic abilities and not their intellectual capabilities (Beamon & Bell, 2006).

Although sports participation seems to be a meritocratic process, Dubrow and Adams (2010) found that Black male student athletes who were raised in middle class households had greater resources because their parents or guardians were more likely to be able to pay for training. These athletes also had greater access to transportation, which gave them the opportunity to maximize their athletic ability, unlike Black male student athletes that came from underserved households, which are households with limited access to resources. According to Morris and Adeyemo (2012), this had been described as an athletic-academic paradox, which is rooted in the belief that Black males can either be athletic or intelligent, but not both. In this study, I further theorize about “place”, Black male experiences and identities, social class, and the athletic-academic paradox (Morris & Adeyemo, 2012).
Significance of Study

The notion that “place,” where a person lives, has a strong affect on the outcomes of education and social development has been widely researched (Byrd & Chavous, 2009; Chung, Mulvey & Steinberg, 2011; Duncan, 1994; Francois, Overstreet, & Cunningham, 2011). Black children in the United States were more than three times as likely to be reared in under-resourced neighborhoods when compared to White children (Acevedo-Garcia, Osypuk, McArdle, & Williams, 2008). Researchers have documented how the under-resourced socioeconomic conditions in which Black people live have had a negative impact on their children’s educational and social development (Acevedo-Garcia, Osypuk, McArdle & Williams, 2008; Wilkes & Iceland, 2004).

An examination of the aforementioned should go beyond investigations that have previously mostly focused on the experiences of Black male athletes on the intercollegiate level. Unlike in major college sports, where most Black males who participate in sports tend to be the top players from high school, high school sports include players that range in skill level. In addition to investigating elite Black male athletes in high school, this study sought to understand the experiences of high school athletes who were not good enough athletes to play at the university level. Widening the scope of experiences of Black male high school student athletes to include those that participate in sports recreationally leads to a more comprehensive understanding of the “Black male student athlete.”

Additionally, this study goes beyond the schooling context and examines the various neighborhoods where participating Black male high school student athletes lived, thereby providing extensive insights into understanding the intersection between race, place, social class, and participants’ social and educational development. This study is centered in Chicago – a city
with the second largest Black population in the United States, a city with historically established neighborhoods that have changed economically and socially over time, and a city where social and educational policies have been viewed as a model for other cities in the United States (Drake & Clayton, 1945; Lipman, 2002; Rastogi, Johnson, Hoeffel & Drewery Jr., 2011).

The city of Chicago boasts vibrant sporting environments, including the Chicago Bulls, Chicago Bears, Chicago White Sox, Chicago Cubs, and Chicago Blackhawks. These sports teams have won multiple championships within the last 25 years, and Black people, during the Michael Jordan era, fervently embraced Chicago basketball (Pattillo-McCoy, 1999). Thus, Chicago is an ideal setting for investigating the intersection of place, race, and the Black male student athlete’s identity, perceptions, aspirations and educational and social outcomes.

Research studies on Black adolescents have typically focused on low-income neighborhoods in urban environments (Byrd & Chavous, 2009; Cunningham, Hurley, Foney, and Hayes, 2002; Francois, Overstreet, & Cunningham, 2012). The majority of these research studies used predetermined quantitative measures to classify “good” or “bad” neighborhoods. Such methodological use of fixed measures may omit other neighborhood factors that impact Black adolescents’ experiences (Ellen & Turner, 1997). Therefore, a focus on Black male high school student athletes’ academic and social development is critical for a number of reasons.

Academically, Black males who were on football and basketball teams at top-tier universities had and continue to have the lowest graduation rate among their peers (Benson, 2000; Harper, 2016; Pearson & LeNoir, 1997). Socially, Black males were repeatedly the subjects of news stories that described Black males as financially inept, morally irresponsible, and violent (Gibbs, 1988; Garibaldi, 2007).

More specifically, research that focused on how the experiences of Black male athletes
may have impacted their identity, perceptions, and aspirations was primarily conducted on the college level, which varied between positive experiences of college athletes (Cooper & Hawkins, 2012; Harrison, 2010; Henry & Closson, 2012), negative college experiences of these student athletes (Benson, 2000; Melendez, 2008), and the experiences of former college student athletes (Beamon, 2008; Singer, 2008).

Research about Black male high school athletes predominantly focuses on the differences and similarities between athletes and non-athletes (Hanks, 1979; Parmer, 1993; Whitley, 1999). Furthermore, there is scant research that is focused on how the experiences of Black male high school student athletes may have influenced their identity, perceptions, and aspirations. Researching the Black male matriculation through high school is especially important when attempting to understand how Black male student athletes’ experiences in high school may have influenced their identity, perceptions and aspirations at various stages of their lives after high school. Consequently, research on Black males who play high school sports can play an important role in helping researchers, and non-researchers alike, better understand the life outcomes of Black male student athletes. Additionally, given that this investigation is situated in neighborhoods where Black male high school student athletes lived, this study has the potential to shape a broader epistemological framework for understanding issues related to the influence of race and place on the lives of Black male high school athletes.

Research studies that investigated how neighborhoods influence the experiences of Black males who play high school sports were scarce. The research studies that have been conducted highlight the experiences of Black males who lived in violent, under-resourced or working-class neighborhoods (James, 2003; May, 2008; Singer & May, 2011). These studies overwhelmingly relied upon a single case study or interview method to capture these experiences. Rarely were
observations of multiple case study methods used. Additionally, quantitative research studies on
Black males who played high school sports focused on academic disparities between athletes and
non-athletes (Anderson, 1990; Parmer, 1993; Thirer & Wieczorek, 1984; Whitely, 1999). While
these studies were insightful and highlighted the academic disparities experienced by Black
males, they failed to capture their educational and social experiences beyond a school setting.

Other researchers have discussed the notion that Black males and Black families who live
in under-resourced neighborhoods view sports as an opportunity to escape poverty, largely due to
the perception of limited opportunities for Black males to succeed in other occupations
(Harrison, Harrison & Moore, 2002). Consequently, the lack of visible Black people in other
occupations beyond sports has resulted in Black male adolescents spending more time involved
in athletic pursuits and less time focusing on homework and academic success (Edwards, 2000).
As a result, Black males develop an athletic identity, which encourages them to cultivate their
athleticism but not to live up to their academic potential. Subsequently, teachers and peer groups
view these Black males as physically strong but intellectually weak (Hoberman, 2000; Lomax,
2000).

Football coaches highly value Black male athletes, because of their agility and speed
needed to run away from defenders, and the girth and strength needed to block and overpower
opponents. Due to a highly publicized debate, it is a well-known fact that top-tier universities
and television networks generate billions of dollars of revenue from television, bowl games, and
apparel contracts, but restrict student athletes from receiving a share of the revenues (Hawkins,
2010; Wiggans, 1989). This profitable system maintained by Black male bodies echoes the
injustice of America’s former system of slavery, in which enslaved Black people were not
compensated for their work.
After top student athletes graduate high school and enter college to play sports, they enter a space that has been compared to slavery—where strength, stamina and the ability to perform the more laborious tasks on the plantation were valued – the biggest and strongest Black bodies are coveted by collegiate and professional football teams (Hawkins, 2010; Rhoden, 2007). However, although intercollegiate football and basketball may be similar to slavery in some aspects, many Black males who would have not attended college have used sports as a way to attend college, graduate, and enter into a successful career (Hawkins, 2010). These contradictory viewpoints on the advantages and disadvantages of financing college sports result in multiple, and varied, understandings of how Black male student athletes may or may not benefit from receiving athletic scholarships.

Aside from the problematic similarities to slavery, researchers have often discussed participation in collegiate basketball and football through two lenses. On one hand, research studies have examined the experiences of student athletes currently in college. On the other, research studies have highlighted the experiences of former college student athletes. Although these studies illustrated how the experiences of Black male athletes impacted their identity, perceptions, and aspirations, these experiences were altogether limited to the student athletes’ time spent in college. These studies rarely considered how student athletes were influenced before they arrived on a college campus.

Conclusion

I was inspired to conduct this investigation into the lives of Black male high school student athletes because of my personal curiosity about the similarities and differences that my former teammates and I shared as college athletes. I also wanted to understand perceptions of Black male high school student athletes, which have generally been comprised of the assumption
that they are superior athletically but lack the intellectual aptitude to succeed in other areas of society.

Based on my personal experiences, when Black male athletes arrived on a university campus, they had to prove that they were competent enough to compete academically on the collegiate level. Some Black male student athletes I attended school with did well academically, some received average grades, and others performed below average. I became interested in trying to understand the differences in these athletes. The literature on Black male student athletes notably tends to document the experiences of Black male student athletes at the intercollegiate level, which provides strong insights to understanding Black male experiences. However, I felt that examining the experiences of Black male high school student athletes in the neighborhoods they grew up in could provide more contextual data and help the scholarly and educational communities to better understand potential identities, aspirations, and perceptions of Black male athletes who performed at a high level academically and/or athletically.

Therefore, an examination of the experiences of Black male athletes in their high school years is important because it may provide deeper insights into the development of Black male athletes’ identities, perceptions, and aspirations. Moreover, in response to the serious social and educational challenges facing Black males in American society, this study offers research, policy, and practice-related insights into Black male high school student athletes’ neighborhood and school experiences.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this literature review, I focus on neighborhood influences and the experiences of Black male athletes. In the first section, I review research that highlights the impact neighborhoods have had on the educational attainment, employment, health, and the criminal experiences of Black male adolescents. In the second section, I concentrate on Black male athletes; the experiences of Black males who played sports; and the impact these experiences have had on their identity, perceptions, and aspirations. Combined, this literature review provides a comprehensive review of the impact of neighborhoods and schooling on the experiences of Black males who play sports.

Neighborhood Influence

This literature review begins with an overview of research conducted on neighborhoods with large Black populations. It includes historical studies on Black neighborhoods and more recent socioeconomic data on Black neighborhoods, including a wide range of topics such as education, employment, health, and crime. Furthermore, this review uses a chronological approach to examine the literature on Black neighborhoods. The literature on the impact of neighborhoods on Black adolescents dates back to social science research studies conducted by Du Bois and Eaton (1967). In this work, Du Bois examined the experiences of Black people who lived in the predominantly Black seventh ward of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The social study lasted 15 months and included investigations of Black residents’ daily lives. Detailed demographic data were collected from residents throughout the ward and in-depth population,
marriage, social class and criminal information was documented as well. His study found that, in 1864, Black people accounted for 3,114 arrests or 9.1% of people arrested; but, in 1895 that number increased to 5,302 arrests while remaining at 9.1% of the total arrested population. Among the Black people arrested in 1895, 24.56% of them or 70 Black males were in prison.

In the 1930s, Frazier’s study (1932/1937) demonstrated that the delinquency rate of young Black boys was higher than that of White boys, White girls, and Black girls in two major northern cities (Frazier, 1932/1937). In one of these major northern cities, juvenile delinquency was highest in the largest Black neighborhood, where there were eight male arrests per 100 males over the age of 17 (Frazier, 1937). Frazier’s findings were supported by researchers’ analysis of the social conditions that lead to crime and delinquency (Blanchard, 1942; Diggs, 1940). These findings suggested that the neighborhoods in which Black male adolescents lived in were not properly planned for or controlled and have gotten worse (Moses, 1936).

By 1940, a sizeable portion of Black adolescents migrated north with their families (Drake & Clayton, 1945). Most Black families lived in poor and segregated communities. In this Midwestern city, more than 50 percent of the families that lived in Black segregated communities received state or federal aid (Drake & Clayton, 1945). During this time, northern cities experienced increased delinquency rates in Black neighborhoods. Some believed that this increase was a result of the large migration of uneducated Black people from the South, pervasive unemployment, and the inequalities and poverty that Black people encountered.

More recent scholarship on how neighborhoods impacted adolescents note that during those years, children spent less time with their parents and more time with their peers; and adolescents also engaged and became familiar with the bureaucracy of social structures (Connell & Happern-Felsher, 1997). Connell and Happern-Felsher’s study further examined the need to
develop a way to gauge how adolescents are influenced, but would also provide a more complete picture of the relationship between adolescents and adults in their neighborhood. Other research studies attempted to understand how neighborhood resources influenced educational attainment, employment, health, and crime in adolescents (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, & Aber, 1997; Ellen & Turner 2010; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Leventhal, Dupree & Brooks-Gunn, 2009).

**Educational Attainment**

According to Francois, Overstreet, & Cunningham, (2011), the neighborhoods where Black adolescents lived, and the agency that they asserted in participating in structured programs affected their academic performance. This study used quantitative measures to examine the level of exposure to violence, structural recreational access (e.g. Boys and Girls club in the community), actual participation in recreational programs, and self-reported grades of 206 Black males and females who lived in low-income communities. The authors found that Black adolescent students who were exposed to neighborhood violence and participated in structured recreational programs, even when opportunities for involvement were nominal, had high levels of academic achievement.

Pathways to Desistance, a study that focused on Black, Latino, and White juvenile offenders, reported that adolescents who lived in more affluent neighborhoods had greater access to educational and employment opportunities and a greater trajectory towards better grades in school (Chung, Mulvey, & Steinberg, 2011). These factors were also indirectly linked to better grades six months later. These findings remained consistent after controlling for grades, school orientation, IQ, and other demographic and court-related factors. Additionally, the psychological belief that success was possible resulted in positive school outcomes. Overall, juvenile offenders who lived in more affluent neighborhoods and practiced positive thinking were more likely to
have better academic outcomes. These students were compared to juvenile offenders who came from low-income neighborhoods and who did not practice positive thinking. However, it is important to note that although they had been incarcerated, White juvenile offenders lived in the most affluent areas, followed by Hispanic juveniles, then Black juveniles (Chung, Mulvey, Steinberg, 2011).

According to Byrd and Chavous (2009), Black youth attributed their lack of opportunities to structural level issues of discrimination or individual level issues such as work ethic, ability, and skills. On the other hand, positive neighborhood characteristics, such as the availability of after school programs and a strong racial identity, positively correlated with positive academic outcomes. The authors used multi-level quantitative analyses to understand how neighborhood characteristics and racial identity influenced academic achievement. In neighborhoods that had more institutional educational resources, the students had higher GPAs. In addition, the visibility of college graduates and individuals with professional occupations correlated with fewer reported absences and classes skipped by students. The effects of neighborhood, racial identity, socioeconomic status, and neighborhood differences contributed to Black youths’ behavior and achievement. In contrast to the Francois, Overstreet, & Cunningham, (2011) study that concentrated on low-income neighborhoods, Cunningham, Hurley, Foney, and Hayes (2002) focused on understanding factors that influenced academic success among high-achieving Black students. These students were exposed to traumatic violent events that were tightly linked to life in urban neighborhoods. This study used a phenomenological framework, which found patterns of resilience among the students (Cunningham, Hurley, Foney, & Hayes, 2002). Their high achievement was related to parental monitoring and having high self-esteem in school. Although students felt hassled by their parents, they listened to what their parents asked them to do. The
adolescents listened to their parents because parents were aware of the dangers in their
eighborhoods and understood how to avoid dangerous situations.

Using quantitative methods on the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) longitudinal
data set, 3,429 Black and White males and females were examined. The students ranged in age
from 16-22 and came from various economic backgrounds. The Panel Study of Income
Dynamics is a longitudinal survey comprised of individuals and families in the U.S. and has been
active since the late 1960s. Duncan’s (1994) research sought to understand the extent to which
neighborhood experiences affected the school completion of adolescents.

This study revealed that adolescents growing up in affluent neighborhoods tended to
complete school at a higher rate than adolescents who came from low-income neighborhoods.
However, for Black males who lived in affluent neighborhoods, school completion remained
low. Black males who grew up in predominantly Black neighborhoods completed school at a
lower rate, meaning that Black students who lived in mostly Black neighborhoods were less
likely to complete school than Black students who lived in neighborhoods that were not
predominately Black. These results persisted despite the adjustment of economic and
demographic differences between Black and White neighborhoods.

Additionally, neighborhoods with greater concentrations of low-income families were
negatively correlated with the college going decisions of Black males when compared with
neighborhoods concentrated with middle-income families. Although affluent neighborhoods
benefited Black females, White males, and White females, they did not benefit Black males.
Affluent neighborhoods only benefited Black males if their neighbors were also Black, which
highlighted the need of Black role models that engage with Black males on a frequent basis,
which could help Black males increase their social and academic achievement.
Moreover, Crane’s (1991) research study examined the relationship between neighborhoods in the largest U.S. cities, dropout rates, and pregnancy for adolescents who lived in urban settings. Data were retrieved from the neighborhood characteristic file from the Public Use Micro-Data Samples (PUMS), which is a publicly available geographical data set on neighborhoods. Demographic and socioeconomic status were not used to define the data. The study included 92,512 teenagers, who were examined to explore the relationship between neighborhoods and dropout rates. Then, 44,466 females were used to examine the relationship between neighborhoods and childbearing. There were large jumps in the probability of dropouts among Black and White male and female adolescents living in large cities with high rates of crime and poverty. This context also exposed a high probability for pregnancy among White and Black females.

Crime and Behavior

The following studies highlighted how violent and impoverished neighborhoods facilitated criminal and behavior concerns. In his qualitative ethnographic study, Anderson (1990) discussed how the changing geographical space in urban neighborhoods influenced poor Black people. Many residents were unemployed, and some of the residents were forced to move because they could no longer afford the rent. Anderson observed that older Black males who believed in hard work were a staple in these neighborhoods. However, when many older Black males lost their jobs, they could no longer pay rent and were forced to leave their neighborhoods. Then younger black males who were gang affiliated started to move into the neighborhood (Anderson, 1990). These Black males sold drugs as a means of earning income. These actions lead to prison or death for many of the Black males involved in this type of lifestyle. This study illustrated changes to a neighborhood’s business and employment structures influenced the
increase in crime and behavior concerns of the neighborhoods’ residents.

While Anderson focused on how change in neighborhoods influenced Black males, Roache, Ensminger, and Cherelin (2007) sought to understand variations of behavior between Black and Latino adolescents. These adolescents lived in low-income neighborhoods and dealt with racial, parenting, and gender issues. Black adolescents were more likely to experience behavioral problems if they lived in neighborhoods that were thought of as dangerous or socially isolated, and had parents who were not actively engaged in their lives. Furthermore, for adolescents who lived in under-resourced neighborhoods, low levels of school attendance and participation were directly correlated to the delinquency of Black adolescents, school behavioral problems, and depression. Additionally, place of residence, resident behavior, and neighborhood crime impacted the adolescents’ ability to find quality employment.

Employment

The following research studies highlight how employment opportunities within multiple neighborhoods influenced social and educational outcomes. MacLeod (1987) illustrated how class inequality was reproduced through the experiences of a group of males known as the Hallway Hangers and the Brothers. These males lived in the same neighborhood, but presented two different worldviews. The Hallway Hangers were a group of White males that rejected notions that hard work paid off. On the other hand, the Brothers were a group of Black male adolescents who believed that hard work paid off. Despite their positive outlook on life, the majority of the Brothers failed to reach what they believed to be success. Many of them worked as minimum wage employees. Some attended community college, and one graduated from college. Similarly, many of the members of the Hallway Hangers did not find employment and most of them dropped out of school. This study illustrated the various identities, perceptions and
aspirations of the Brothers and the Hallway Hangers. Their experiences, which were shaped in their neighborhood, had an influence on their employment and life prospects.

Likewise, using the 1989 National Bureau on Economic Research (NBER) survey, which tracked adolescents who lived in a low-income Boston neighborhood, Case and Katz (1991) surveyed 1200 adolescents between the ages of 17 and 24. This study evaluated the effects of familial and peer pressure on individuals in a tight labor market. The study assessed how behaviors of Black and White male and female inner-city youth were affected. Findings suggested that the behavior of family members and the influence of neighborhood peers shaped the outcomes of youth who lived in these neighborhoods. Family and peer influences had implications on the socioeconomic opportunities of these adolescents.

Health

The following research studies, which highlighted how neighborhoods influence health, focus on physical and psychological outcomes. Chen & Patterson (2006) examined the roles of neighborhood, family, and the individual’s perception of their socioeconomic status (SES) when evaluating adolescent physical health and psychological characteristics. Three hundred fifteen adolescents completed assessments of blood pressure, cortisol, and body mass index (BMI). Findings suggested that adolescents who lived in neighborhoods with lower socioeconomic status had higher BMI and lower basal cortisol levels. These outcomes persisted even after controlling for family economic status. Furthermore, adolescents who lived in under-resourced neighborhoods tended to exhibit hostility and experience discrimination.

Moreover, Cubbin, Santelli, Brindis and Braveman (2005) examined the extent to which neighborhoods shaped the sexual behavior of adolescents. This analysis was important because of the health risks of contracting STDs, HIV, and AIDS and the effect that contracting an STD
could have on the identity of adolescents. These diseases are also associated with sexual behavior and unprotected sex and identities of hyper masculine males. Four neighborhoods were investigated to determine the rate of contraception use and initiation of intercourse. This study used a multi-level logistic regression analysis from 14,151 adolescents in grades 7–12 in a National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. The four neighborhood dimensions were characterized by socioeconomic characteristics, social norms, opportunity structure, social disorganization, and racial and ethnic composition. Findings suggested that females who lived in neighborhoods with a large population of adolescents who lack a sense of purpose or Black were more likely to be involved in sexual initiation.

Furthermore, higher sexual initiations among males were associated with a high concentration of poverty or idle adolescents, which is caused by unemployment and dropping out of school. Lower sexual initiation was found among affluent families and women in the workforce. Women who lived in neighborhoods where youth had a low sense of purpose were less likely to use contraception. The aforementioned research studies highlighted the impact of neighborhoods on the experiences of young Black adolescents. The second part of this literature review begins by highlighting the few research studies that have examined the impact of neighborhoods on the experiences of Black male high school student athletes.

Black Male Student Athletes in High School

The research on Black male high school student athlete experiences highlight the fact that student athletes believe that they are skilled enough to play sports at the college or professional level, but are often faced with the reality of not fulfilling this idea. Using ethnographic research methods, May (2008) provided an in-depth analysis of the experiences of Black male basketball players in high school. These Black males, who lived in a southern city, used basketball to shield
their exposure to violence in their neighborhoods. However, when their athletic careers ended, they were slowly drawn back to life on the streets. This research study showed how adolescent Black males struggled to escape poverty, and how, despite good intentions, they were slowly consumed by violence and poverty.

Similarly, James (2003) examined the aspirations of five Black male high school athletes who played basketball in a working class suburb in Canada. These Black males discussed the support of coaches, parents, and how they aspired to receive an athletic scholarship to play college basketball at a university in the United States. When they discovered that their coaches were not supportive of their goals, these students transferred to other schools in search of the opportunity to play. Although none of the students had scholarship offers, they remained optimistic about their chances to play basketball at the collegiate level. Additionally, they named their desire to support their family as one of the main reasons to continue to remain optimistic about the pursuit of an athletic scholarship. On the other hand, Harris (1994) investigated the extent to which Black male high school student athletes were encouraged to play sports by parents, coaches, teachers, and friends. While coaches, teachers, and friends strongly encouraged Black males to play sports, findings showed that parents did not strongly encourage Black male athletes to participate in sports.

Singer and May (2011) further investigated Black male student athlete experiences using a single case study approach. They examined the life of a Black male basketball student athlete living in a low-income neighborhood. He attended a school that had a history of violence and a poor academic reputation that led him to believe that he had limited employment and academic potential. As a result, he did not perceive education to be a viable pathway toward success. Instead, he idolized Black basketball athletes, and he believed that basketball could provide him
with an opportunity to become successful. In pursuit of his dream, he spent an abundant amount of his time attempting to improve his basketball skills. His time spent sharpening his skills outweighed the time he dedicated to his schoolwork or relationships with friends; therefore, he was slow to develop his social and academic skills. Although he dedicated his time to playing basketball, his need for money forced him to quit the team. He attempted to go to the Navy after he completed high school, but was rejected because he did not meet the Navy’s academic requirements. He settled on performing odd jobs, and working part time at a local Boys and Girls Club.

Comparable in context, yet focusing on a different social class, Dawkins, Braddock, and Celaya (2009) used a single case study methodology to document the life of a Black male high school student athlete who was raised in a Midwestern city suburb. The research study captured his early athletic engagement throughout college and graduate school. The young Black male became a talented football player in his neighborhood and at his high school. When he began college, he worked to make sure he remained eligible to play football. He believed that he would play professional football and did not take school seriously because of this belief. However, his attitude toward academics changed when he was injured. After his injury, he left school to enroll in a junior college, where he earned a 3.2. GPA. Then, he enrolled in a smaller division one school but was not eligible to play for one year. While sitting out, he started to take school more seriously. He eventually chose to attend an HBCU (Historically Black College or University) to play football and finish school. After graduating, he enrolled in an MBA program. These two studies illuminate how class differences have impacted the experiences of Black male high school athletes. After his athletic careers was over, the student athlete in the Singer and May (2011) study had to work odd jobs, because he did not qualify academically for the military. On
the other hand, the student athlete in the Dawkins, Braddock, and Celaya (2009) study graduated from college and took advantage of an opportunity to pursue his master’s degree.

Nasir & Hand (2006) examined the experiences of Black male basketball players in a math class and at basketball practice. The study centered on understanding the social factors that influenced athletic and academic engagement of Black males in the aforementioned settings. In practice, these players were able to make sense of their roles and were held accountable for their actions on the court. These students felt that they could express themselves athletically. On the other hand, they felt that the classroom structure was disorganized. Consequently, the players were uncomfortable and unsure about their roles in the classroom. Findings suggested that these Black males were much more engaged in basketball practice than in math class because they were held accountable for mistakes in practice and understood their purpose on the basketball court. Another relevant area of literature on Black males who played high school sports centers on the differences between Black males who participated in sports and Black males who did not.

Black Male Athletes and Non-Athletes

There are several research studies that investigated the educational and social differences and similarities of Black male athletes and non-athletes. Anderson (1990) focused on understanding the extent to which athletic participation hindered the academic success of Black males. His/her examination of athletes and non-athletes found that athletes spent three times as much time in sporting activities than non-athletes. However, athletes also spent the same amount of time on homework as non-athletes. The final conclusion was that there was no evidence that athletic performance hindered the academic success of Black males who participated in sports. However, contextual factors such as school attended, academic performance, neighborhood, and family background were not considered.
Comparably, Parmer (1993) used questionnaires to explore the career dreams of 455 Black male and female 11th and 12th graders, who were athletes and non-athletes, in an urban neighborhood. Students in this study attended three different types of schools. The results were examined across gender, types of high school attended (i.e. vocational, neighborhood, technical), grade level, and athletic participation. Findings revealed that a majority of students believed they would be successful in the United States. Students who believed that they would be successful in ten years likely participated in sports. Additionally, the dream of participating in sports was a career dream for those that played. These Black male and female adolescents believed that sports could serve as an avenue toward social mobility in a society that they perceived to be racist. In other words, some students felt that racism was a barrier between them and occupational opportunities and playing sports professionally had the potential to improve their social status. These feelings were attributed to a belief that sports provided a fair system where the best athletes were rewarded with success.

Further research studies have highlighted the differences in achievement between Black and White male athletes and non-athletes. Thirer and Wieczorek’s (1984) research study included 53 Black and 64 White male varsity high school athletes. These students completed a questionnaire that assessed their attitudes toward their engagement with males of the opposite race. Both White and Black males expressed a preference toward desegregated schools and a desire for more friends from various races. However, about a third of both groups stated that they did not have any interactions with players from other races in practice or games. Additionally, 62.5% of White adolescents reported no interaction with Black adolescents outside of sports and 49% of Black adolescents had no interactions with White adolescents except for within sports.
Overall, findings state that interracial social interaction habits were firmly established at the high school level or earlier.

Moreover, Whitley’s (1999) research study examined the educational achievement of Black and White male and female athletes and non-athletes. Findings indicated that athletes perform at higher academic levels than non-athletes. Many measures were taken, such as GPA, attendance, dropout rate, discipline referrals, and graduation rates. Likewise, Hanks’ (1979) study examined Black and White male and female high school students in an attempt to understand the extent to which athletic involvement affected academic achievement. The study's major finding was that for Black and White males and females, athletic participation positively impacted students’ educational orientation and aspirations toward college. Aspiration toward college was also influenced by encouragement to attend from parents and adolescent association with college-oriented peers. Furthermore, participation in sports was more important for Black and White male adolescents than for Black and White female adolescents. Athletics was also more important where social class status and academic aptitude were low.

Although insightful, studies that examined high school Black male athletes primarily used questionnaires as a research method. These studies tended to concentrate on the differences between non-athletes and athletes. They seldom probed the experiences of Black males who played high school sports. On the other hand, a large portion of research studies conducted on the intercollegiate level focused on the experiences of Black male student athletes, and how those experiences influenced their identity, perceptions, and aspirations.

Experiences of Black Male College Student Athletes’

Research on Black male college athletes highlighted the positive and negative experiences they had while they were in college. Other studies that documented the experiences
of former college student athletes highlighted their dissatisfaction with their college experience. Hawkins’ (2010) research synthesized the experiences of Black males participating in intercollegiate athletics. He noted that research that documented the experiences of present and former Black males in intercollegiate athletics was divided into two schools of thought: (a) college athletics as an economic exploitative system similar to slavery; and (b) the benefits of college athletics in students’ overall social and educational development. According to the first line of thinking, basketball and football student athletes—who are disproportionately Black males—did not share in the revenues that were generated through athletic events, while athletic conferences, the NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association), and universities received multimillion dollar payouts.

On the other hand, some asserted that an athletic scholarship provided Black males who would not have otherwise experienced college, an opportunity to graduate with a degree and to learn about opportunities outside of sports (Hawkins, 2010). According to Hawkins, governing agencies such as the NCAA need to do a better job of forming equitable partnerships with student athletes in revenue generating sports. Due to the perceptions of Black males and the institution of intercollegiate athletics, research studies that documented their experiences focused on the academic, athletic, and social experiences of Black male athletes at the university level. As illustrated below, some of this research captured the negative experiences of Black male college student athletes.

Negative Experiences of Current College Black Male Student Athletes

Black male college student athletes that had negative experiences did not feel supported at their schools, experienced racism on campus and in the city where their colleges were located, and felt isolated from teammates. Benson (2000) focused on the experiences of Black male
intercollegiate athletes who performed poorly academically. This research study attempted to understand the social factors that caused poor academic outcomes for Black male student athletes. Findings revealed that coaches, teachers, advisors, and peers all colluded to construct an environment that facilitated academic failure. Advisors, coaches, peers, and teachers had low academic expectations, and these messages were reinforced throughout college. Also, the Black male student athlete succumbed to failure by conforming to these messages that were expressed in action or by speech; they became detached from school. As a result, they did not take school seriously, which some students later regretted.

Similarly, Melendez (2008) examined how a small group of Black male student athletes adjusted to a predominately White university (PWI). He/she found that Black players felt isolated and rejected, distrustful of their Black and White classmates and teammates. They also felt mistreated by their coaches and people on campus. They believed that they were held to a higher athletic standard by their coaches; other athletes who they perceived to have less talent had a better opportunity to play. They thought they were stigmatized as Black athletes on a predominately White campus. They also felt that the city where the school was situated was racist. These negative experiences resulted in negative perceptions of the school and the city.

Research has also considered the aspirations of Black male college athletes. Seller and Kupermic (1997) attempted to understand goal discrepancies of Black male student athletes in college. Goal discrepancy was present when an athlete believed they could play professionally, despite not starting or serving as a second string backup on their team. Black male student athletes, who attended schools that highly valued athletics, were likely candidates of goal discrepancy. Institutions that prioritized football had more students that played professionally after college than schools where football was not perceived to be as valuable. Also, there was a
high percentage of goal discrepancy for Black male athletes who played for Historically Black Colleges or Universities (HBCUs). One could suggest that the role of sports at HBCUs has changed. Many HBCUs previously had a talent pool of future professional athletes. However, the student athletes that now attend HBCUs are not often considered the best athletes, as many do not have the combination of speed, agility and power that professional sports teams covet. While these studies highlighted some of the problems that Black males experienced in college, other studies investigated the positive experiences of Black male college athletes.

Positive Experiences of Current Black Male College Athletes

Black male college student athletes that had positive experiences had a high sense of self, excelled academically and athletically, and participated in activities beyond athletics. In Cooper and Hawkins’s (2012) research study, a mixed method approach was used to understand the factors that influenced academic achievement and the positive college experiences at an HBCU. Many of the participants in this study came from low-income households. These students aspired to play football or basketball professionally and excelled academically. These student athletes attended an HBCU because they felt that they would have the opportunity to stand out athletically and develop holistically as a student athlete. Furthermore, these student athletes felt valued at an HBCU and reported positive experiences with professors and support services. Additional factors for high achievement included the student athletes’ ability to balance taking classes and participating in their sport simultaneously.

Bimper, Harrison, and Clark (2013) attempted to understand the factors that influenced the academic and athletic success of Black male student athletes who attended a PWI. According to their findings, Black males who participated in the study did not limit how they perceived themselves. They believed that they were athletes, but also adopted other identities that were
salient to their success. They were involved in a supportive academic community that helped student athletes develop academically. They also used their cultural capital to forge relationships with people who did not play sports.

Harrison (2010) sought to understand the academic experiences of 27 high-achieving Black male student athletes at Predominately White Institutions (PWIs). These student athletes attended four prestigious Pac-Ten universities. Four major themes emerged from the participants’ experiences with academic achievement: (1) Students felt that because of their skin color they had to prove to teachers and professors that they could be high achievers; (2) They believed that their success in school exceeded the expectation that U.S. society believed Black males could attain, therefore, they believed that their success was a threat to society; (3) Time management was a critical factor for success. In order to be successful, these Black male athletes felt that they had to be good time managers; and (4) these students understood that their hard work was a key factor to their academic success.

Continuing with the experiences of Black males at PWIs, Henry and Closson’s (2012) study sought to understand how racial identity developed at a PWI when the majority of the football players were Black and White football players were the minority. Findings suggest that Black players felt a sense of solidarity because a majority of the football team was Black. The White players on the team were somewhat uncomfortable at first, but eventually adapted to the fact that the football team was majority Black.

Moreover, the Black players had positive perceptions of who they were. Cross’ (1978) racial identity model, known as nigrescence, outlined the process for how Black people reshaped their identities. According to Harrison, Harrison and Moore, (2002), who used Cross’ model as a framework, the first stage of the process was called ‘the Pre-Encounter,’ during which Black
people exhibited race neutral or anti-Black characteristics. The second stage was called ‘the Encounter;’ and occurred when certain situations or actions changed a Black person’s worldview. The third stage, which was called ‘Immersion,’ was the destruction of an old identity and emergence of a new one. The fourth and fifth stages, which were called ‘Internalization’ and ‘Internalization-Commitment,’ explained the individual’s contentment with their new identity and the implementation of it in everyday life.

According to Henry and Closson (2012), White students had reached the last stage of racial identity development in Cross’s identity model, which is ‘Internalization-Commitment.’ White students exhibited positive racial identity. Although White players’ identities were slow to fully develop, the differences in identity development were small; most of the White players had positive experiences on campus. While research studies that examined the experiences of student athletes who were still in college focused on positive experiences, research studies that investigated the experiences of former student athletes was often negative.

Experiences of Former Black Male College Student Athletes

Former Black male college student athletes often discussed feeling that the college they attended exploited their talents. They also felt that their college experiences were limited when compared to college students who did not play sports. Beamon (2008) used interview data in her research study to highlight the experiences of twenty Black male student athletes who attended Division I universities. A majority of the respondents did not believe that universities valued academics as much as athletics. Many discussed how the university they attended exploited them for their talent, and by the time they were no longer eligible to play, many were not pleased with the level of education they received. Although most acquired degrees, they believed that their majors and/or degrees would not allow them to be competitive for good jobs.
In a subsequent study, Beamon (2010) again focused on the experiences of former Division I student athletes. This study sought to understand if Black male student athletes believed that sports participation was overemphasized. Participants who were former student athletes explained that family members, the athletes that they idolized, and their neighborhoods all had a role in shaping their athletic aspirations. They believed that extended family members placed a strong emphasis on sports. Many of the respondents also noted that their role models were often athletes. Many of these former students attended schools and grew up in neighborhoods where Black male athletes often went to college on athletic merits. Even more, they explained how Black culture had reinforced the importance of sports in U.S. society (Gaston, 1986).

Singer (2008) discussed the experiences of four former Black male college athletes. This study explored their experiences as student athletes. Although these males received athletic scholarships to attend college, they believed that the constraints of playing college sports did not leave time for them to get involved in other activities on their college campuses. However, they were considered to be “success stories.” These athletes had opportunities to play professional sports and/or found employment in other areas. Although former Black male college athletes often highlighted their negative experiences in college, they were able to navigate through the systemic structures that have often hindered the progress of Black males.

Although this research study focused on the experiences of Black male high school student athletes, a majority of the literature discussed in this study focuses on the experiences of Black male collegiate athletes. This was done for two reasons: 1) a majority of the literature on high school athletes compares athlete and non-athlete academic achievement and 2) a majority of these research studies used quantitative methods, specifically surveys to collect data, which did
not uncover the “how” or the “why,” which is often done using qualitative research. Therefore, including literature on Black male collegiate athletes’ experiences is necessary to better understand the experiences of Black male student athletes in general.

Conclusion

The literature discussed above, which focused on neighborhood influence, helped to facilitate the understanding of the impact of neighborhoods, or place, on the experiences of Black adolescents, in addition to previous research that centered the experiences of Black males who play sports. Due to the scarcity of neighborhood studies that examine the experiences of Black males who play high school sports, the dearth of literature exploring the experiences of Black males who play high schools sports, and the limited perspectives of research studies that examine how experiences in college impact the identity, perceptions, and aspirations of Black male athletes, my research study aimed to fill this gap by focusing on the neighborhood and schooling experiences of Black male high school student athletes.

This research study relies upon an interdisciplinary framework, which takes into consideration how demographics such as race, socioeconomic status, and class contribute to the neighborhood structures of Black male high school athletes. Furthermore, it explores how such neighborhoods impact the experiences of these Black males and how those experiences may shape their identity, perceptions, and aspirations.
CHAPTER 3
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study utilizes an interdisciplinary conceptual framework to offer a more comprehensive understanding of Black male high school student athletes. This approach provides a broader understanding of various social and economic factors that shape neighborhoods where Black male high school student athletes live; the neighborhood experiences of Black male high school student athletes; and how their experiences influence their identity, perceptions and aspirations. Together, an examination of the nexus of race and place, literature on the experiences of Black males, and findings from studies of Black male student athletes provide a holistic view of the relationship among the neighborhoods in which Black male athletes reside, their experiences in these neighborhoods, and how these experiences shape their beliefs.

The Race Place Nexus

The nexus between race and place uniquely foregrounds the experiences of Black male high school student athletes within their neighborhoods. In other words, knowing the type of neighborhoods that Black males live in allows for a focused understanding of their experiences. Research on neighborhood influences enhances understanding and deepens insight into the development of Black male high school student athletes. Historically, Du Bois and Eaton (1967), through an analysis in Philadelphia, and Drake and Clayton (1945), through their examination in Chicago, reported the dismal living conditions that Black people often faced in their neighborhoods. Other researchers who examined the lives of Black people in other cities
reported similar circumstances for Black people. High rates of delinquency were observed in Black males in urban centers (Frazier, 1932/1937), which researchers believed was a symptom of unemployment, underemployment and poverty (Blanchard, 1942; Diggs, 1940).

Contemporary scholars have acknowledged the influence of place on social and educational development (Briggs, 2005; Chung, Mulvey, & Steinberg, 2011; Francois, Overstreet, & Cunningham, 2011), stating that where Black people live can limit their access to resources that support social and educational development. Similar research has addressed the effects that place had on education, crime, behavior, employment and health (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, & Aber, 1997; Ellen & Turner 2010; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000), and offered insight on place’s impact on Black people in particular (Byrd and Chavous, 2009; Cubbin, Santelli, Brindis & Braveman, 2005; MacLeod, 1987; Roache, Ensminger, Cherelin, 2007).

Previous research used the “Geography of Opportunity” as a lens to understand the nexus between race and place. The “Geography of Opportunity” is a neighborhood, community or place that provides access to resources that puts people in position to more likely to have positive life outcomes. According to Galster and Killen (1995), the “Geography of Opportunity” operated within two dimensions, the first being how an individual or group interacted with the “Geography of Opportunity,” and the influence it had on their identity, and the second being the socioeconomic outcomes of the “Geography of Opportunity.”

Other researchers examined the differences between White and Black neighborhoods (Squires & Kirbin, 2005; Tate, 1994/2008). They discussed the disproportionate substandard living conditions that Black people experienced and Black people’s limited access to resources (Acevedo-Garcia, Osypuk, McArdle, & Williams, 2008; U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1997; Massey & Denton, 1989; Wilkes & Iceland, 2004). Researchers have also
examined notions that predominately White, middle class or affluent neighborhoods provided better resources for Black children (Briggs, 1998; DeLuca & Dayton, 2009; Rosenbaum, Reynolds & Deluca, 2001). Furthermore, the words “urban” and “suburban” have come to signify Black and White, respectively. In this research study, a majority of the economic centers and resources were established in the suburban centers rather than the urban areas (Buendia, 2011; Pastor Jr., 2001). Moreover, whenever White people relocated, economic centers and resources followed (Wells et al., 2012). These examinations strengthened the notion that place had a strong influence on social and educational development, and that Black people disproportionately lived in lower resourced and less economically developed areas when compared to their White counterparts.

Research on Black Males

Research on Black males adds a significant layer to which is used to understand the social and educational experiences of the Black male high school student athletes in this research investigation. Research on Black males highlighted their educational and social failures (Gibbs, 1988; Hare & Castenell, 1985; McLeod, 1987), which included academic underachievement (Garibaldi, 2007; Haynes, Comer & Lee, 1988), and the detrimental effects Black males faced for what was considered “poor behavior” (Taylor & Foster, 1986; Bennett & Harris, 1982). Outside of the school context, Black males continued to struggle in U.S. society. Black males were disproportionally unemployed when compared to their peers (Fairline & Sundstrom, 1999; McCreary, England, & Farkas, 1989; Shulman, 1991). Consequently, Black males were more likely to be convicted of or be reported as victims of violent crimes (Hawkins & Hardy, 1989; Sampson, 1987; Gibbs, 1988).

Due to the social and educational challenges that Black males continued to face, school
districts empowered task forces in an effort to understand these issues (Garibaldi, 2007; Milwaukee public schools task force, 1990; Ohio Office of Black Affairs, 1990). However, some scholars believed that hyper masculine characteristics such as enforcing power through violence and insensitive sexual attitudes towards women, was a large contributor to the social and educational challenges that Black males faced (Anderson 1990; Franklin, 1984/1984; Majors & Billson, 1993; Staples, 1990).

Despite the perception that hyper masculine identity had done to undermine the societal and educational prospects of Black males, researchers believed that African-centered schools, which were schools that taught the principles of the African rights of passage, could uplift the self-esteem and identity of Black males (Ascher, 1992; Irvine, 1990; Lomotey, 1992; Shujaa, 1994). By employing the principles of interdependence, cooperation, respect, reciprocity, and unconditional love, Black males could improve their school performance and their societal prospects.

By the 1990s, African-centered schools in U.S. cities, such as Milwaukee, had launched programs that helped to turn around the academic achievement of Black males (Leake & Leake, 1992). Most African-centered institutions received support from Black communities and independent school programs. For example, the Council of Independent Black Schools, an umbrella organization for independent African-centered schools, had not only been a foundation in the community, but had also helped African-centered schools create academically, socially, and culturally fruitful environments for the students and teachers of these schools (Lee, 2005; Lomotey & Brookins, 1988; Lomotey, 1992; Warfield-Coppock, 1992).

Some scholars focused on the psychological outcomes of discrimination and oppression (Franklin, 1999; Franklin & Boyd-Franklin, 2000; Parham, 1999; Spencer, 1995). The
invisibility syndrome was a result of discrimination and oppression that Black males faced. The invisibility syndrome is a form of social disengagement that results in a feeling of isolation and alienation. This sense of not belonging created a hostile atmosphere for Black males, thus affecting their social and educational well being (Franklin, 1997).

Other researchers posited that Black males underachieved because they were disengaged. This notion reasoned that due to the peer pressure Black males encountered in school, they did not trust school or school authority (Ogbu, 2003). Additionally, by underachieving in schools, Black males reinforced characteristics that they felt aligned with their identity as Black males (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986), rather than performing at a high level academically and running the risk of being perceived as “acting White” (Osborne, 1999). Poor performance in school was also attributed to anxiety and concern about affirming negative stereotypes about their academic abilities (Steele & Aronson, 1995). On the other hand, Black males who were successful students adopted a race-less identity (Fordham, 1988).

A different body of literature, rather than blame Black males for their underachievement, blamed teachers for their failure to understand and relate to their Black male students (Ferguson, 2001; Irvine, 1990; Mahari, 1991; Murrell, 1994). They believed that if teachers understood concepts of Black male identity, they could understand that general approaches to schooling, wherein the teacher was the authority figure and the student was the subordinate, tended to undermine the identity of Black males (Ferguson, 2001). Finally, social environment (Noguera, 2003), geographical space (Tate, 2008; Tate & Hogrebe, 2011) and the school environment (Davis & Jordan, 1994; Mickelson & Greene, 2006) all had implications for Black male underachievement. Although many Black men had achieved success in society in spite of experiences of discrimination and oppression (Cunningham & Spencer, 2003; Howard, 2008;
Stinson, 2008; Swanson), for the most part, Black males continued to face many social and educational issues and barriers.

In comparison to their peers from other racial and gender groups, less than half of Black males were graduating from high school (Holzman, 2010). Moreover, Black males were significantly overrepresented in special education and underrepresented in gifted education. They comprised a disproportionate number of children in the juvenile court system, were more likely to drop out of high school and more likely to be convicted of or be reported as victims of violent crimes (Chapman, Laird, Ifill, & KewalRamani, 2011; Cooper & Smith, 2011; Ford, 1998; Grantham, 2004; Rainville & Smith, 2003).

Research on Black Male Student Athletes

Research on Black male student athletes encompasses research studies that historically examined the social climate of sports. Additionally, research on Black male athletes investigates the lives of college and high school student athletes. More specific to Black male student athletes, researchers have documented that by the 1970s, southern and predominately White institutions had integrated their football and basketball teams (Marcello, 1987; Martin, 1996; Paul, McGhee & Fant, 1984) and sports participation appeared to provide an avenue of opportunity at a time when Black males were restricted from other areas of society (Edwards, 1979). However, Black male athletes still faced barriers of oppression in college-level (Evans, 1979; Green, Gunnings & McMillan, 1974) and professional sports (Eitzen & Yetman, 1977).

Today, the number of Black participants at the professional level of basketball and football largely outweigh the limited number of Black doctors and attorneys. In revenue generating sports, such as football and basketball, Black athletes overwhelmingly represented the majority of the players. In the National Football League (NFL), Black male athletes comprise
67% of the players. In the National Basketball Association (NBA), Black male athletes comprise 77% of the players (Lapchick, Clark, Frazier & Sarpy, 2011; Lapchick et al., 2011). However, in professional careers such as medicine and law, Black males comprise 3% and 2% of individuals in their respective fields (U.S. Department of Labor, 2010). These realities strongly influence some Black males and Black neighborhoods to prioritize athletic development, which has caused some athletes to undermine their academic and social development (Dawkins, Braddock II, & Celaya 2009; Hoberman, 2000; Lomax, 2000).

Conclusion

The experiences of Black people in their neighborhoods and schools provides context for understanding their social and educational outcomes. Research on Black males and Black male student athletes presented a platform to understand their social and educational experiences and the consequent outcomes. Although multiple positive and negative social and educational experiences were examined, these research studies did not offer a complete examination into the neighborhoods and the lives of Black male student athletes. Rather, the race-place nexus and research on Black males and Black male student athletes provided a foundation to further discuss and investigate the impact that place has on social and economic opportunities and resources for Black people. Furthermore, this literature situates the experiences, identity, perceptions and aspirations and the consequent social and educational outcomes of Black male high school student athletes.
CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

In this study, I explored the relationship between the social and economic factors that impacted the neighborhoods where eight Black male high school student athletes lived; the experiences of the Black male high school student athletes who lived in these neighborhoods; and how these experiences shaped their identity, perceptions, and aspirations. The three research questions guiding this study were:

(1) How have the larger social and economic factors shaped the neighborhood context of Black male student athletes in a major Midwestern city?

(2) What are the neighborhood, social, and schooling experiences of Black male high school student athletes?

(3) What are the perceptions, identity, and goals of Black male high school student athletes?

Research conducted on the experiences of Black male athletes is almost exclusively focused on the college level. As a result, little is known about the neighborhoods where Black male athletes reside, their cultural experiences in these neighborhoods, or how their experiences have shaped their identity, perceptions, and aspirations. In order to obtain data used in this study, a variety of research methodologies were employed. This chapter details the study design, my role as researcher, the impact of the pilot study on this research study, and the site selection and description of neighborhoods. The chapter also includes discussions on data collection and
analysis methods, reliability and validity of the study, limitations, ethical considerations, and the anonymity of the participants.

Design of Study

I used a multiple case study methodology for this study. This methodology is useful for investigating phenomena in cases where the boundaries between the context and phenomenon are not clearly distinguishable (Yin, 1984). Used in various fields, the case study method is appropriate when seeking to discover the “how” or “why” of a phenomenon. Using a multiple case study methodology is beneficial because its focus offers clarity and explanations about the phenomena being studied (Yin, 2011). Moreover, because multiple case studies have been considered more compelling than single study case studies, the results are more robust.

According to the principle of *Empirical Interpolation and Extrapolation*, “We generalize most confidently when we can specify the range of persons, settings, treatments, outcomes and times over which the finding holds more strongly, less strongly, or not at all” (Patton, 2002 pp. 581-582). I used this method to explore three racially and economically diverse neighborhoods.

My use of a qualitative methodology was driven by the aforementioned research questions and the interpretative and critical research orientations (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Merriam, 1998). In this study, the nature and dynamics of neighborhoods were important to understanding the possible experiences of adolescents and subsequent implications on their identity, perceptions, and aspirations. As a result of understanding the synthesis between the social context and the phenomena, qualitative research can “reveal how all the parts work together to form a whole” (Merriam, 1998 p. 6). Furthermore, “qualitative research implies a direct concern with experience as it is ‘lived’ or ‘felt’ or undergone” (Sherman & Webb, 1988 p.
The interpretive orientation of qualitative research is important when attempting to understand the nature of a context, and participant’ experiences within this context.

As a result, I constructed a full picture of the study’s participants through an exploration of their multiple realities. Using a critical research perspective, I explored social and economic factors that influenced the neighborhoods where Black male athletes lived and how the experiences of Black male high school athletes in their neighborhoods influenced their identity, perceptions, and aspirations. For this study, interpretive and critical ways of seeing or assessing were essential to drawing a holistic picture of the social context and the phenomenon.

Role of the Researcher

In this qualitative case study, I gathered, organized, and analyzed the data (Merriam, 1998). The data provided multiple perspectives of and understandings between the nature of neighborhoods, the experiences of Black male high school student athletes, and how their experiences have shaped their identity, perceptions, and aspirations. There were no predisposed truths prior to the beginning of this project (Patton, 2002). As Patton (2002) stresses, the “commitment was to understand the world as it unfolded, be true to complexities and multiple perspectives as they emerged, and be balanced in reporting both confirmatory and disconfirming evidence with regard to any conclusions offered” (p. 51). However, the impact of my identity as a Black male was not minimized in this study. Instead, I relied on my identity and role as a social scientist in an effort to understand how variations in neighborhoods influenced the experiences of Black males who participated in high school sports.

I acknowledge that there cannot be absolute objectivity in research; the acknowledgement that a research study is completely objective ignores the nature of the researcher as an instrument. On the other hand, I also acknowledge that subjectivity could bring the credibility of
one’s research into question. Therefore, several measures were taken to endeavor toward trustworthiness and authenticity in this research study (Patton, 2002). Attaining trustworthiness and authenticity in this research study was not simple. It required the use of reflexivity to check perceptions, personal biases, and theoretical beliefs. I drew on my personal life experiences to enhance understanding of the relationship between neighborhoods, the experiences of Black male high school students, and their perceptions, aspirations, and identities. Taken together, personal experiences, the use of reflexivity, and a critical research perspective offered me more insight and a heightened sense of understanding.

Interview and Observation Critical Reflection

As I reflected on my experiences collecting data for this research study, I thought about how I would’ve felt if someone wanted to interview me about my life. I would have been overjoyed. I believe that being interviewed and observed is a truly extraordinary experience for these young Black males. Yet, the process to observe and interview them was difficult and required perseverance and patience. In August 2013, one of the first times entering into Jacobs High School, I was repeatedly told to meet with the assistant principal. After multiple calls and visits to Jacobs High School, I eventually met with him, albeit four months later. While we were meeting, he expressed that I should meet with the athletic director. Contacting and setting a date to meet with the athletic director was easier. At our meeting, I discussed my study and the criteria for the participants in this study. He was able to direct me to Black males who played sports, who fit my criteria. However, I did not find the six Black male student athletes per school that I sought after in this study.

At Jacobs High School, I initially had three students who were set to participate in this study. However, one of the students was disqualified. I later discovered that he lived outside of
the Hill West neighborhood. I was left with two students from Jacobs High School. During my observations of and interviews with these students, I thought about my experience as a high school student who played sports. I contemplated how it would have felt to have someone follow me in the classroom and interview me at home. The Black males who played sports at Jacob’s high school seemed to enjoy the interview and observation process. I was also happy that they were able to witness a Black male researcher, who formerly played high school and college football, conduct a research study.

My experiences collecting data in the Pace Mark and Lemont Nance neighborhoods were similar to my experience in the Hill West neighborhood. I met with the assistant principals and athletic directors and they helped me to choose the students who participated in the study. I interviewed these students at home and observed them in the classroom. Throughout my experiences observing and interviewing these Black male high school student athletes, I felt that I had an obligation to make sure that their voices were heard. Throughout this process, I thought about how I would share my story. I also continued to think about the potential influence I had on the lives of these Black males.

I am a Black male, who is a PhD candidate. Some of the students were curious and asked questions about completing a PhD. They asked, “What will you do once you get your PhD? How long have you been working toward your PhD?” These questions made me feel that I could be an instrument of influence in the lives of these Black males. I reflected on the fact that these Black males did not normally encounter people who were PhD students, especially not a PhD student who is a Black male. The time I spent with these students taught me that my role in this research study was important, not only for me but also for them. Seeing a Black male collecting data and coming to their classrooms to observe them was significant. My presence in their lives showed
that Black males are not just athletes, but they can be researchers too. Although some of the
students may have perceived themselves as just athletes, they could one day say that they were
involved in a research study that highlighted their lives, not only as an athlete but as a human
being—something Black males rarely get to experience in U.S. society.

Impact of Pilot Study

Prior to this research study, I conducted a pilot study that examined the experiences of
athletically and academically talented Black males that lived in working-class and low-income
communities. The participants in this pilot study were Black males who maintained 3.0 grade
point averages and were offered athletic scholarships, or who were star athletes on their teams.
The parents of the student athletes were also interviewed. Despite living in under-resourced and
working-class neighborhoods, participants were highly successful academically and athletically.
I found that parental awareness of their community assisted students in navigating their
neighborhood and helped to limit their exposure to violence in their neighborhood. Additional
factors that contributed to Black male adolescent success were involvement at a community
center, or park district, during childhood and participation in multiple educational activities.
Such activities provided a broad range of experiences, which cultivated these Black male
adolescents’ interests in both athletics and academics.

I also examined the context of the neighborhoods that participants lived in. However, the
pilot study did not include detailed economic, social, and policy information, which could have
presented a deeper understanding of their neighborhoods. Additionally, perspectives from
community members and business owners could have enhanced the information in the
neighborhood context. Furthermore, to better understand the experiences of participants, I could
have made observations while they were at school, at home, and in their neighborhood. To fully
understand what underpinned the success of these Black males, I felt that a study that captured a deeper understanding of their experiences was necessary. However, the intent of the pilot study was to be exploratory in nature. Consequently, I decided that a more exhaustive way to conduct this research was to understand how the experiences of Black males who played high school sports across neighborhood type and achievement levels impacted their identity, perceptions, and aspirations.

Site Selection and Description of Neighborhoods

To understand how neighborhoods influenced the experiences of Black male high school students who played high school sports, I investigated their experiences in-depth. Therefore, purposeful sampling was necessary. According to Patton (2002), “the logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information rich cases for study in depth” (p. 230). Therefore, this research was conducted in one under-resourced, one working class, and one middle class neighborhood that each had significant Black populations. The working class and middle-income neighborhoods were adjacent to one another, while the under-resourced neighborhood was disconnected from the other neighborhoods.

The Pace Mark neighborhood was a middle-class and predominately Black neighborhood, and Hill West was a working-class Black neighborhood. The Lemont Nance neighborhood was a predominately Black, under-resourced neighborhood. Pace Mark, Hill West, and Lemont Nance are 3 of 77 individual Chicago neighborhoods (City of Chicago Community Areas, 2010). Pace Mark and Hill West are adjacent and divided by railroad tracks. Lemont Nance is near a major expressway just outside the city center. According to Census data, the median household incomes for Pace Mark, Hill West, and Lemont Nance were $55,050.67, $42,789, and $25,452.31 respectively (U.S. Census, 2013). Each neighborhood had a relatively
large Black population: Pace Mark had a Black population of 59%; Hill West had a Black population of 97%; and Lemont Nance’s Black population was 81%. Pace Mark was the only neighborhood that had a significant White population of 38%.

Data Collection

Before any data was collected for this dissertation study, I obtained permission from the University of Georgia’s Institutional Review Board. Permission from the respective school districts and school administrators was also obtained before research in the schools was conducted. Data sources included the following: (1) observations in the neighborhoods (which included homes and schools), and (2) formal observations and interviews with Black male adolescents.

I collected data in Pace Mark, Hill West, and Lemont Nance took place over the span of nine months, from August 2013 until May 2014. I conducted formal interviews with young Black male adolescents focused on their experiences in their neighborhoods and schools, and how their experiences influenced their perceptions, aspirations, and identity. I also observed each Black male focused on their school experiences and after-school activity experiences, which included athletic practice, games, and other non-sports extra-curricular activities. Observations in the neighborhoods focused on the neighborhood climate. Prior to observations, I visited the high schools in the participants’ neighborhoods. Meetings were held with principals and approval was given to conduct observations within the school (See Appendix A: Principal Observation Form). These meetings took place in May and September of 2013. I used census data, school data, newspaper documents, and field notes to better understand the neighborhood context (which includes the schools). At the end of each day and at the end of each formal and informal meeting
and interview, I took field notes in notebooks and transferred and saved them onto a computer.

Black Male Adolescent Interviews

Using a semi-structured method of inquiry, I interviewed three juniors, four seniors, and one sophomore Black male student athlete. I asked then questions that elicited descriptions of their experiences in school, their neighborhoods, at-home and in-school activities (see Appendix D: Adolescent Black Male Interview Protocol). I provided the participants a letter and consent form that explained the purpose of the research to their parent/guardians. The purpose of these letters was for participants to consent to participate in the study and to receive approval from a parent or guardian (See Appendix B and Appendix C respectively for Parent/Guardian and Adolescent Consent Forms). Once the students agreed and were approved by a parent/guardian to participate, I called the parent/guardian to schedule an interview with their son or brother. I conducted interviews at the parents/guardians’ and participants’ convenience and at a location that was most suitable for them.

I utilized purposeful sampling when selecting Black male student athletes (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973). In the initial study design, I planned for six high achieving students, six average achieving students, and six students who were low achievers, with six students from each school; however, some high schools did not have six Black male student athletes that were high achievers. There were also students that said that they would participate but did not, which decreased the number of participants. The schools that these males attended were the respective schools in each neighborhood. However, there were some students who attended the school in their neighborhood, but would later move to another neighborhood. However, all students had lived or currently resided in the neighborhood that their neighborhood school was located.
Although the number of participants was lower than expected, this study still allowed for the investigation of Black male athletes across variations in academic achievement levels, which offered a more in-depth understanding of their experiences within their neighborhoods, and how their identities, perceptions, and aspirations were shaped. All of the students selected participated in either football or basketball. The selection of high school football and basketball players was driven by the fact that Black males disproportionately participate in these sports. Furthermore, basketball and football are generally viewed as paths towards upward mobility. High achievers were defined as students who maintained a 3.0+ grade point average and/or received any academic awards or scholarships. An average achiever was defined as a student who maintained a 2.5-2.9 grade point average. A below average student was defined as one who maintained less than a 2.5 grade point average. Grade point averages were confirmed through school personnel.

Data Analysis

In this study, I used the Constant Comparative Method for data analysis. This method of analyzing research has its foundations in Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The evolution of Grounded Theory was developed in a research climate that validated the use of hypothesis testing in research. Rather than subscribe to this hypothesis-driven methodology, Glaser and Strauss believed that research theories must be grounded in the data. Also, rather than advocating for the practice of first coding and then analyzing the data, the Constant Comparative Method encouraged researchers to code and analyze simultaneously (Boeije, 2002).

I coded and analyzed data on a continuous basis. After all data were gathered and initially coded and analyzed, I employed two stages of analysis for multiple case studies: within-case analysis and cross-case analysis (Merriam, 1998). Analysis of data collection took place daily with attention to the overarching research questions. Data analysis included taking notes on the
data and writing a separate memo that captured reflections, themes, and ideas. The process was repeated during the second day of data collection. Once the data were analyzed on consecutive days, I compared data against one another. This process continued until data collection was completed. Once data collection was completed, tentative categories and themes were drafted, until enough data were collected.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), enough data have been collected when: (1) there is an exhaustion of sources, (2) participants have been frequently interviewed or observed, (3) there is an extensive number of documents examined, (4) there is an emergence of regularities with the data collected, (5) there is a saturation of the categories, (6) continuing data collection produces small increments of new information in comparison to the effort expended to collect more data, and (7) overextension—the belief that new information that is revealed is far removed from any of the core categories.

After this phase of data analysis was completed, I conducted a within-case analysis and cross-case analysis (Merriam, 1998). A within-case analysis included the data collected from all three neighborhoods, the experiences of Black males in their neighborhoods, and the identity, perceptions, and aspirations of each Black male in each neighborhood. Next, I conducted a cross case-analysis between neighborhoods, the experiences of Black males who played high school football and basketball in these contexts and how their identities, perceptions, and aspirations, were shaped. The intent of within-case and cross-case analyses was to produce rich data.

According to Yin (1994), in within-case and cross-case analyses, the researcher attempts “to build a general explanation that fits each of the individual cases, even though the cases will vary in their details” (p. 112). Additionally, the researcher attempts to see “processes and outcomes that occur across many cases, to understand how they are qualified by local conditions,
and thus develop more sophisticated descriptions and more powerful explanations” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 172). The large amounts of data collected was organized and properly managed. According to Yin (1994), a case study database can be helpful in organizing data. Using a case study database helped organize collected data so that they were easy to keep track of and retrieve.

Internal Validity

Internal validity centers on the extent to which research findings within a research study match with reality (Merriman, 1998). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), reality is, “a multiple set of mental constructions… made by humans; their constructions are in their minds and they are, in the main, accessible to the humans who make them” (p. 295). Consequently, because researchers are the main instruments within a qualitative study, “interpretations of reality are accessed directly through their observations and interviews” (Merriman, 1998, p. 203). Therefore, the internal validity of this research study was strengthened with the use of interview and observation research methods. Additionally, other factors that lead to high internal validity for this research study were triangulation, member checking, repeated observation, and peer examination.

Triangulation is relatively new to the field of social science. In 1959, Campbell and Fiske introduced the concept of triangulation to the academic world (Mathison, 1988). When conducting qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1981) described strategies that qualitative researchers should use when seeking triangulation. They described triangulation as the use of multiple research methods that validate research findings. Additionally, triangulation is a research method that uses multiple sources of data and multiple investigators to confirm findings,
established through high levels of internal validity. For this research study, I used multiple research methods from multiple sources to collect data.

Member checking is a research methodology that takes data and initial interpretations back to the participants and confirms that the information gathered matches what the participants intended to articulate. Throughout the duration of this research study, I gave participants the opportunity to view initial findings so they could verify if the findings in the study were accurate. Repeated observation of the same phenomenon resulted in an increase in internal validity of the findings. In this research study, I repeatedly observed the neighborhoods and interviewed multiple participants who worked and lived in these neighborhoods. Moreover, I interviewed and observed multiple Black male high school student athletes.

Peer and advisor evaluations request that colleagues review and comment on the findings of the research study. For this study, multiple members of a school-sponsored research group, who came from different ethnic (White male) and gender groups (Black female) than the researcher, reviewed and commented on the findings from the study. Additionally, my advisor who oversaw this research study reviewed and commented on the findings.

External Validity/Transferability

External validity focuses on understanding the extent to which a research study can be generalized. However, before assessing external validation, a research study must first be internally valid (Lincoln & Guba, 1981 pg. 115). Gaining an understanding of internal validity is important because if the research study is found not to be internally valid, seeking external validity on the data collected in a research study is irrelevant. There are questions of the feasibility for generalizations to occur in qualitative research. This occurs because generalizations in qualitative research are compared to how generalizations occur in
experimental or correlational designs in quantitative research. Even more, research has found that using large random samples to formulate generalizations is problematic.

Rich, Thick Description

To enhance the ability to generalize this research study, rich, thick description provided “enough description so that readers were able to determine how closely their situations match the research situation and hence whether findings can be transferred” (Merriam, 1998, p. 211). Thick description is the contextualization of the lived experiences in the environment (Denzin, 2001). The use of strong thick description engages the reader, making them believe that they are sharing in the experiences of what they are reading. Thick description not only introduces the facts, but also thoroughly describes the context within the text. Additionally, providing thick description in this study explicitly acknowledges the role and relevance of the setting (i.e. environment, context) within this study.

Multisite Designs

To enhance generalization, “using several sites, cases, and situations, especially those that maximize diversity in the phenomenon of interest allow the results to be applied by readers to a greater range of other situations. This variation is achieved through purposeful or random sampling” (Merriman, 1998, p. 212). In this study, I used a multiple case study methodology and conducted a cross-case analysis. In addition to purposeful sampling of the neighborhoods and the Black males who participated in this study, there were predetermined questions and similar data analysis methods used for all cases involved within the research study (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 1994).
Limitations of the Study

This research study did not generalize by stating that all neighborhoods that Black male high school student athletes lived in fit a particular description. Additionally, this study did not state that schools situated within these neighborhoods provide a general understanding of schools that Black male high school student athletes attend. Instead, this study provided an in-depth understanding of the relationship between particular kinds of neighborhoods and Black male high school student athletes in these contexts.

Furthermore, this study provided a descriptive understanding of how social and economic factors impacted neighborhoods and the experiences of Black male high school student athletes in their neighborhoods, across social class and academic achievement levels. Looking more deeply, this study attempted to foster a greater understanding of how identity, perceptions, and aspirations of Black male high school student athletes were formed, across variations in neighborhood factors and achievement level. A consequence of this study resulted in a nuanced understanding of Black male high school student athletes, but also in having a broader understanding of the academic and social outcomes of Black males.

Ethical Considerations and Protection of Participants

This research study did not harm any of the participants in any way. This study did not pose any risks or any discomforts towards participants. None of the information obtained was gathered through practices of deceit or deception. Full disclosure of the research study and purpose was given to all participants who were involved with the research study. Moreover, participants were informed of individuals and groups who viewed this research study. This research study was voluntary and participants were not obligated to participate in the study. Participants had the option to withdraw from the study at any point in the duration of the study.
without any penalty or obligation. The research study provided confidentiality of data and participants through the use of pseudonyms of participants, neighborhoods, schools and other locations throughout the research study. Additionally, data collected was also held in confidence when discussing findings with the researcher’s dissertation committee. After the study was completed, participants had the opportunity to obtain a copy of the results of the research study. Lastly, data from this research was stored on a password-protected computer.

Conclusion

This study sought to explore the lives of Black male high school student athletes through their experiences in the schools they attended and in the neighborhoods they lived in. Using a multiple case study methodology provided a unique and robust way to conduct this examination of Black male high school student athletes. This research contributes to the literature by providing a multiple case study analysis, a departure from previous research studies that primarily relied upon single case study methods and a limited perspective. Furthermore, most of the research on Black male athletes has been conducted on the college level. As a result, the experiences of Black male high school athletes were neglected. However, this research expands research on the Black male athletes’ experiences in their neighborhoods and schools.
CHAPTER 5
NEIGHBORHOODS

This chapter describes the neighborhood context for Black males who participated in high school sports and lived in a major Midwestern city and addresses the following research question: “What were the social and cultural contexts of the neighborhoods where Black males resided?” This examination begins with the historical origins of the neighborhoods. Followed by neighborhood observations and descriptive statistic data. Next, this chapter offers a brief history of the participants’ schools, followed by a discussion of school factors that were used to measure school success. The questions raised in this investigation focus on how larger social and historical factors have shaped the neighborhood contexts of the Pace Mark, Hill West, and Lemont Nance neighborhoods and other schools that were located in these areas. Observation data, demographic information and school data provide an understanding of the social and economic state of these neighborhoods. These components set the stage for the historical and social factors that have shaped these neighborhoods.

Pace Mark Neighborhood

A Native American Indian tribe originally settled the land that is now called Pace Mark (The Chicago Fact Book Consortium, 1990). What was historically called the “Regal District” was the location of the highest points of the city of Chicago. In 1833, after years of land wars, Native American Indians were forced to surrender their land rights to the United States government. Soon after, White settlers had arrived and claimed their share of the territory now called Pace Mark. Not long after settlers arrived to the area, an Englishman and son of a banker
used his father’s fortune to buy out the land from most of the residents. After his death, the heirs of the Englishman obtained the land and sold it to Bing trading company who further developed the land (The Chicago Fact Book Consortium, 1990).

Pace Mark earned its reputation as a learning community due to these establishments. In addition to these spheres of learning, the relocation of a revered religious facility further boosted the status of Pace Mark. Despite the development and its reputation as a learning community, the bid to have one of the preeminent universities in Illinois located in Pace Mark failed. This prompted many changes within the educational community in the neighborhood. By 1892, the previously revered religious facility had left Pace Mark.

Despite these setbacks, the White religious community had a strong presence in Pace Mark. Protestant, Methodist, Episcopal, and Congressional churches were all constructed within a three-year span. Similarly, the growing Black population in Pace Mark constructed a well-known church in 1891 (Grossman, Keating, Reiff & Cozen, 2004), which was one of many churches constructed for Black worship in the community. White churches and White people resided on the west side of Walton Avenue and Black Churches and Black people lived east of Vance Avenue. Despite the neighborhood segregation, the high school and the library in the neighborhood remained integrated. The fact was that all Black people lived east of Vance Avenue and White people lived to the west remained until the 1960s.

During the 1960s, organizations such as the Pace Mark Area Association (PMAA) were instrumental in keeping the Pace Mark neighborhood integrated (Grossman, Keating, Reiff & Cozen, 2004). PMAA fought to keep Pace Mark integrated by marketing its homes to Black and White people. They also sought to keep the schools integrated and the businesses that serviced Pace Mark diverse. Recently, Pace Mark renovated its library and implemented an International
Baccalaureate (IB) program at Parker Mitch High School, which now requires students to test into the area high school. The IB program is an international program that seeks to equip students with the social and educational skills to thrive in a more connected world (See International Education). The goal of this program is to attract a more diverse student population. The nearby arts center, built in the early 2000s, had spurned further development for the benefit of the majority Black community.

Neighborhood Observation

I left home and drove south on the expressway headed towards Pace Mark in the late morning. It was a hot and humid day with blue skies, clear of clouds. The sun shined brightly. The windows in the car were down, allowing the wind from outside to blow in. Approaching was a sign to exit to go to Pace Mark. The residences in this area ranged in color and style. The color combinations seen in the neighborhood ranged from brown with dark brown trim to white with pink trim. The houses were primarily constructed of stucco and brick exteriors, while other homes had frame exteriors. In the most eastern part of Pace Mark, which had a large population of Black residents, the smaller one-story style homes in the area had rusted awnings and torn paint from the exterior surface of the home. The trimmed grass and driveways remained free of garbage and debris. Up ahead, the streets were paved but the cracked cement on parts of the road caused unevenness on the street. Railroad tracks were up ahead. To the right and the left, the homes stood small, but with limited variations of color and exterior. The businesses in this area consisted of small businesses: gyro restaurants and corner stores that sold candy, chips, and soda. Driving west, on the western side of the railroad tracks, stood Parker Mitch High School, which was one of the larger buildings in the neighborhood. In front of the school, there was a large grass field divided by steel gates. I opened the door to the car and got out and walked towards the
metal gates that surrounded the grass football field. As I walked by, there were men and women in their 40s and 50s walking and jogging on the track. Looking at the field, I noticed it had grass on it that had not been evenly cut; the grass grew wildly, had yellow burnt patches, and had dirt in areas where grass once grew. On the north and south sides of the field stood yellow goal posts. A black surface encircled the grass field, which looked old and torn.

I was driving up towards the top of the hill, and on the left stood a building that housed three businesses. One in particular, the PMAA, was located in a yellow brick building with its insignia written on the glass of the door. I parked and entered the PMAA offices. Once inside, I spoke with the executive director of PMAA and he explained to me the organization’s role with integrating Pace Mark. He stated that PMAA held events and invited Black and White residents to talk about buying a home in Pace Mark. He also discussed that PMAA representatives went door to door to persuade White residents to remain in their homes despite the influx of Black residents in the area. PMAA had also focused on bringing economic growth to the Pace Mark neighborhood by fighting for policy friendly laws that benefited businesses in the Pace Mark area. At the end of our conversation, I thanked him and left.

Once outside the PMAA offices, I noticed two plazas on the street named Woodlawn to my left. On the near left side, one brick building housed two businesses. Further left, a sign read “Woodlawn Foods” in White letters with a red background. At the top of the hill, more modern and larger homes existed. The homes sat on large lots. Their grass yards were visibly trimmed, and garbage was nonexistent. Ahead on the left stood a large brown brick building with a White roof and large window panels. Signs draped by the building read “A Center (AC)”. I walked into the AC and spoke with an individual at the door. I learned that the AC was home to arts
programs and events in the neighborhood. On the wall were advertisements for upcoming plays and musicals. As I left, I said, “Goodbye,” to the lady at the front desk.

Table 5.1: Pace Mark Neighborhood Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social and Economical Indicators</th>
<th>Pace Nance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>23,568</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Black</td>
<td>58.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% White</td>
<td>38.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Hispanic</td>
<td>2.27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Household Income</td>
<td>$55,050.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Home Value</td>
<td>$143,139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage Unemployment Rate</td>
<td>14.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage Under Poverty Line</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earned High School Diploma</td>
<td>91.68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earned Bachelors degree or higher</td>
<td>32.25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2013 U.S. Census American Community Survey

The Pace Mark neighborhood, which was comprised of six census tracts\textsuperscript{1}, had a total population of 23,568 as of 2013 (U.S. Census, 2013). Of this population, 58.8% of the residents were Black/African American, 38.23% of the residents were White, 2.27% were Hispanic and .7% other. The total median household income for residents in Pace Mark was $55,050.67. The

\textsuperscript{1}The Pace Mark neighborhood census tracks include census tracts 7501, 7502, 7503, 7504, 7505 and 7506.

\textsuperscript{2}The median household incomes for White and Hispanic residents were not reported in census tract 7501 (Both), 7504 (Hispanic), 7505 (Hispanic), and 7506 (Both).
total median household income for Black/African Americans residents was $59,912.17; for White residents it was $81,931 and for Hispanic residents it was $115,521\textsuperscript{22}. In the census tracts where the Black population was at its largest, the median household income for Black residents in these areas was at its lowest, averaging $44,265. On the other hand, in the census tracts where White residents held the largest population, the median household income for Black/African Americans who lived in the same area increased significantly: median household income for Black families was $76,553 and $81,250 respectively.

Simultaneously, in census tracts where Black people were the majority, the home values were lower. In census tracts where White residents were the majority, the home values were at their highest. The average value of a home in Pace Mark was $143,139. There were sharp differences in home value between majority Black and majority White census tracts. In census tracts where the White resident population was the majority, the median home value achieved a high of $253,100 and $221,000 respectively. In census tracts where Black residents were the majority, median home values were significantly lower at $142,000, $146,700 and $167,800 respectively.

Additionally, census tracts in which income and home values were lower in majority Black communities and higher in majority White communities, had a strong influence on the rate of unemployment in the Pace Mark neighborhood. The total unemployment rate in Pace Mark was 14.57\% (U.S. Census, 2013). The Black/African American unemployment rate, at 18.7\%, was more than triple the unemployment rate of 5.6\% for White residents in Pace Mark. Delving deeper into the differences in the neighborhood, the census tract that had the largest median
household income at $93,000, had a large White residential population at 70% and had the lowest unemployment rate for Black/African American residents at 9.2%. On the other hand, the census tract that had the largest Black/African American population at 96.8% had the highest unemployment rate for Black/African American residents at 27.6%.

The percentage of the population under the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) in Pace Mark was 14.2%. The Black percentage of the population under the Federal Policy Level was 18.2% while the percentage of White residents under the FPL was 5.86%, and the percentage of Hispanics under the FPL was 11.3%. In the two census tracts that had the largest White population, the total percentages of the residents under the FPL were 1.2% and 4.4%. The percentages of White residents under the FPL were 1.4% and 4.1% and the percentages of Black residents under the FPL were under 1% and 5.8%. In the two census tracts where Black residents were the majority of the population, the percentage of residents under the FPL, at 29.4% and 29.9%, were more than five times the percentage of residents under the FPL in census tracts where White residents were the majority. Education attainment was strongly aligned with the extent of poverty (Census, 2013). In Pace Mark, census tracts that had residents with a higher percentage of bachelor’s degrees had a lower percentage of poverty.

Furthermore, the percentage of residents who had earned a high school diploma or higher was 91.68%, while the percentage of residents in Pace Mark who attained a bachelor’s degree or higher was 32.25% (U.S. Census, 2013). The percentage of high school graduates per census tract was at its highest at 96.3% and at its lowest at 83.4% respectively. Per census tract, the percentage of residents who graduated with a bachelor’s degree or higher was 48%. These residents lived in a census tract that had large concentrations of White residents. The census tract that had the lowest percentage of residents with a bachelor’s degree had a majority Black
population, in which 15.9% of the residents received bachelor degrees or higher. This
information shows that the residents of mostly Black areas were less likely to go to college and
graduate with a bachelor’s degree or higher when compared to residents who lived in areas that
had a larger White population.

Parker Mitch High School

Park Mitch High School opened in 1916. Since then, a number of school renovations
were completed to keep up with the growing school population. The school originally started
with 283 students and by 1975 there were more than 3,300 students. The renovations in 1925
added a school gymnasium, auditorium and swimming pool. Additional renovations were done
in 1965 to further develop the school. By 1985, the school was improved and tennis courts, a
football field, a running track, a baseball field and faculty parking were added. Although Parker
Mitch highlighted its diversity, it had experienced its share of racial controversy.

In the mid 1930s, there was a student strike protesting against overcrowding and having
Black students in class. Parents of White students fought for segregated schools, but with the
help of PMAA and other organizations that sought to keep Pace Mark and the school integrated,
the push by some parents to segregate failed. The issue of segregation would resurface in the
1940s when a petition was circulated calling for a separate building to be built for Black students
at the high school. Students eventually returned and the school remained integrated. Community
organizations had been instrumental with supporting programs and funding activities for
students.

The Local School Council and the Parent Teacher Student Association were very active,
along with the high school community council, which allowed businesses and organizations to
support Parker Mitch High School. Parent booster clubs were also very active in supporting
sports teams and other activities at the high school. Outside of the foundational support from the community, Parker Mitch High School provided a dynamic curriculum for its students.

Students were allowed to take classes that prepared them for college, vocational courses and a broad range of international language courses. Additionally, advanced students who went to Parker Mitch in seventh or eighth grade took advanced courses that counted towards high school credit and graduation. The high school also had an International Baccalaureate program that was implemented school wide as of the 2014-2015 school year. Parker Mitch boasted a robust curriculum that sought to enhance a program that had once been a source for citywide academic success.

Table 5.2: Parker Mitch High School Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School indicators</th>
<th>Parker Mitch High School</th>
<th>School District</th>
<th>State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>1,467</td>
<td>395,079</td>
<td>2,046,857</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Black</td>
<td>94.5%</td>
<td>39.9%</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% White</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
<td>49.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Hispanic</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>45.6%</td>
<td>24.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage free or reduced lunch</td>
<td>79.6%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Met or exceeded testing standards</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Achieved at least 21 on ACT</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduated 4yrs</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entered 2 or 4yr institution in 12mo.</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


As of 2014, there were 1,467 students enrolled at Parker Mitch High School. This number also included students in seventh and eighth grades. Of this population, 94.5% of the
students were Black/African American, 2.6% were White, 1.8% were Hispanic and .1% were Asian. The majority of students, at 79.6%, were eligible for free or reduced priced lunches. When exploring classroom dynamics, the average class size was larger than the District (24) and State (21) with 26 students. In the 2013-14 school year, students took the Prairie State Achievement Exam (PSAE), and 31% of the students met or exceeded PSAE standards. However, in the State of Illinois, 54% of students met or exceeded PSAE standards. The students also took the Illinois State Achievement Test (ISAT), which showed that 92% of the students who took the test at Parker Mitch met or exceeded the standards on the test. This was above the state average of 59% of students who met or exceeded state testing standards.

Consequently, when students took the ACT, some students were more prepared than others. At Parker Mitch, 31% of students achieved at least a 21 on the ACT, which was higher than the district average. In the district and state, 27% and 46% of the students who took the ACT test achieved at least a 21 on the test, respectively. After the completion of course work, the percentage of students who graduated and matriculated into post-secondary institutions was important when determining achievement and life success.

At Parker Mitch, 89% of students graduated in four years and 91% of students graduated after five years. At the district level, 81% graduated after four years and 85% graduated after five years. At the state level, 86% of students graduated after four years and 88% graduated after five years. After high school, 74% of students who graduated from Parker Mitch entered into a two- or four-year institution within 12 months of graduating high school, and 77% entered into a two- or four-year institution within 16 months of graduating high school. Similarly, 62% of students district wide and 69% of students statewide entered into a two- to four-year institution within 12
months of graduating high school; 67% of the students’ district wide and 73% of the students statewide entered into a two- to four-year institution within 16 months of graduating high school.

Hill West Neighborhood

From 1830 to 1860, farmers primarily occupied what was considered Hill West (The Chicago Fact Book Consortium, 1990). Farmers who lived in the area sold acres to individuals and companies for development. A Land and Building Company bought a portion of Hill West and subdivided the area between 56th and 64th street. By 1874, Hill West had enough residents to incorporate and, by 1885, there were 185 homes in one of the subdivisions of Hill West. This subdivision would eventually be sectioned off for higher income residents.

By 1930, Hill West grew to nearly 18,000 residents (The Chicago Fact Book Consortium, 1990; Grossman, Keating, Reiff & Cozen 2004). At this time, the Hill West community was comprised of German, Swedish, and mostly Irish residents who moved from nearby neighborhoods. After World War II, Black people started to migrate to the Hill West neighborhood, and by 1960, the Black population was 12% of the overall population. However, a tactic called blockbusting was used to create anxiety among White residents. Consequently, White residents moved because they were led to believe that Black residents would move into the neighborhood. Although White residents left their homes, the home values remained steady. The White population dwindled and, by 1970, the Black population in Hill West grew to 75% of the total neighborhood population. Between 1970 and 1980, the population had decreased from 36,540 to 29,843. Despite this decrease, the percentage of the Black population had grown and, by 1980, the neighborhood was comprised of over 95% Black residents.

Neighborhood Observation
Raised in a neighborhood near Hill West, I often frequented the neighborhood as a young adult. Memories of going to the library or passing through on the way to see a friend made this neighborhood seem very familiar. However, until embarking on this study, I had been absent from this community for many years. As I was on the way to Hill West for the first time in years, on this day there were blue skies and the sun shined brightly. I approached the epicenter of the business community in Hill West. On the left stood a brown brick building with tinted windows. On the front of the building was the name of a library inscribed in yellow. Next to the library was a parking lot. I parked the car in the lot and started walking toward the entrance of the library, and eventually went inside and upstairs. While upstairs, I began to talk to a woman who had lived in Hill West for longer than ten years. She told me about an issue that she had dealt with at her son’s school. Her son’s school was on the city’s list to be closed; however, instead of letting her son’s school close, she and members in the community organized and protested to keep it open. She was proud of what she and the community members had done and the outcomes of their protests. However, she said that community members had to remain politically involved to maintain what they wanted in their neighborhood. After the conversation, I thanked her and went back to the car. I started to drive again, and found a large grassy area farther down the road. Despite the humidity and the beaming sun, I saw young Black children playing in the grass field. Next to the grass field there was a rectangular concrete area, with poles holding up backboards that had a circular opening with a net attached. There were four sets of these poles, backboard, and circular opening combinations on the concrete, two on each end of the rectangle. There, a small group of young Black girls and boys played on one side of the concrete, shooting a ball toward the circular opening.

Nearby, younger Black children slid down a yellow slide and sat on a small black
rectangular structure that was connected to chains. The chains were connected to the top of a pole. In the distance, there was a tan dirt diamond. Located on the right of the baseball field stood a brick rectangular building with a parking lot with two cars parked. Heading south on a main street, the homes looked similar in shape and size, and varied in color when compared to the aforementioned homes. However, on some homes, the paint was visibly peeling on the surface of their exteriors. Closed doors with steel brown rusted gates signified that some houses had been abandoned. Inscribed on the windows were faded logos and names of restaurants and barbershops that indicated these abandoned buildings once existed as businesses. Farther down the block, on another main street, people could be heard talking and laughing; the chatter came from a square building with the door open. People walked in and out of this building. There were signs on the windows that suggested that the space had a barbershop in it. I parked the car and walked into the barbershop and greeted the people inside. There were four barbers cutting hair and three patrons in the chairs waiting to get their haircut. The barbers were all Black men, and the people sitting in the chairs were Black men ranging anywhere from 20 to 60 years of age. I sparked a conversation with one of the barbers in the back who was not cutting hair. He told me that he went to Jacobs High School and that he had lived in the neighborhood for most of his life. He had seen people leave because they could not find a job, and witnessed the crime increase near a famous park where professional basketball players often played. After our conversation, I briefly spoke with the other barbers, then left. After traveling a short distance, a variety of differences emerged in the way the homes and roads appeared. These variations indicated that there were various types of homes, businesses, and structures within the Hill West neighborhood.

Table 5.3: Hill West Neighborhood Demographics
Hill West included seven census tracts\(^3\) and had a total population of 26,241 residents as of 2013 (U.S. Census, 2013). In Hill West, 97.1% of the residents were Black, .81% of the residents were White and .93% of the residents were Hispanic. The total median household income for residents in Hill West was $42,789, which was slightly lower than the median household income for Black people in Hill West, which was $43,139\(^4\). The median household incomes per census tract for Black people in Hill West ranged from $35,972 to $53,345.

\(^3\) The Hill West neighborhood includes seven census tracts 7301, 7302.1, 7302.2, 7303, 7304, 7305, 7306, and 7307.

\(^4\) The median household incomes for White and Hispanic residents were not reported as each race accounted for less than 1% of the census tract population.
Furthermore, the total median home value in Hill West was $146,550, which was identical to the total median home value for Pace Mark. The lowest median home value was $139,100, while the highest median home value was $158,900. Residents who lived in the census tracts with the highest median home values also had the higher median household incomes in Hill West. One area in Hill West had a total household income of $35,972, yet a total median home value of $152,100.

In addition to the impact of median household income and median home value, the percentage of residents who were unemployed was another factor that impacted the Hill West neighborhood. The total percentage of resident unemployment was 23.7%. Additionally, 24% of the Black residents and 24.92% of the Hispanic residents made up the total percentage of unemployed residents. The Black unemployment rate per census tract ranged from 15% to 29.3%.

Moreover, the percentage of the population under the Federal Poverty Limit (FPL) in Hill West was 19.4%. The Black percentage of the population under the FPL was 19.21%; the percentage of White residents under the FPL was 30.06%; and the percentage of Hispanics under the FPL was 40.7%. The census tract that had the lowest median home value was also the census tract that had the highest percentage of Black people under the FPL at 25%. On the contrary, the census tract that was in the top half of median home values had the lowest percentage of Black residents under the FPL. Although White and Hispanic residents in Hill West were few, they had a high percentage of residents who were under the FPL. There were 39.1% and 40.7% respectively of White and Hispanic residents living beneath the FPL.

Furthermore, the percentage of residents in Hill West who had earned a high school diploma or higher was 87.96%, while the percentage of residents who received a bachelor’s
degree or higher was 18% (U.S. Census, 2013). In Hill West, the percentage of high school graduates per census tract at its highest was 92% and at its lowest at 84.3%. Per census tract, the highest percentage of residents who graduated with a bachelor’s degree or higher was 23.2%, which was also the census tract with the highest percentage of high school graduates. The census tract that had the highest median home value in the Hill West neighborhood had the lowest percentage of residents with a bachelor’s degree or higher at 11.8%. Being housed in a stable community, Jacobs High School was built to teach students skills that would serve the Hill West community.

Jacobs High School

Jacobs High School opened its doors in 1975. The school was created to be a vocational high school that developed students to work in the Hill West community. In the first 60 years of Jacob’s existence, multiple career programs were developed. In recent years, Jacobs has offered skill development in Business Finance, Health Sciences and Broadcast Technology to name a few programs. Students at Jacobs also had the opportunity to enroll in various types of study through the Advanced Placement and Dual Enrollment Courses and Advancement via Individual Determination. Students came from every part of the city’s south side and enrolled into Jacobs to take part in the specialized programs that were offered.

Recently, Jacobs was awarded a grant. The school used this grant to improve the academic achievement of students at Jacobs and to set up parameters for the community and parents to support the school’s efforts. Despite persistent poverty, various programs were implemented to improve college and career readiness, which has improved over time.

Table 5.4: Jacobs High School Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School indicators</th>
<th>Jacobs High School</th>
<th>School District</th>
<th>State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>1,075</td>
<td>395,079</td>
<td>2,046,857</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Black</td>
<td>98.5%</td>
<td>39.9%</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% White</td>
<td>.1%</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
<td>49.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Hispanic</td>
<td>.9%</td>
<td>45.6%</td>
<td>24.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage free or reduced lunch</td>
<td>95.6%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Met or exceeded testing standards</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Achieved at least 21 on ACT</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduated 4yrs</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entered 2 or 4yr institution in 12mo.</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Illinois Report Card 2013-2014*

As of 2014, there were 1,075 students enrolled at Jacobs High School. Of this population, 98.5% of the students were Black, .1% was White, .9% was Hispanic and .1% was American Indian. The majority of the students, at 95.6%, were eligible for free or reduced priced lunches.

Moreover, the average class size at Jacobs was smaller than the District (24) and State (21) with 19 students. The students at Jacobs took the Prairie State Achievement Exam (PSAE), and 13% of the students at Jacobs met or exceeded PSAE standards. While in the State of Illinois, 54% of students met or exceed PSAE standards. Consequently, when students took the ACT, few were prepared to enter college. At Jacobs, only 4% of the students achieved at least a 21 on the ACT test. In the district and state, 27% and 46% of the students who took the ACT test achieved at least a 21 on the test, respectively.

Additionally, 84% of the students graduated in four years and 90% of the students graduated after five years. At the district level, 81% graduated after four years and 85%
graduated after five years. At the state level, 86% of the students graduated after four years and 88% graduated after five years. After high school, 65% of students who graduated from Jacobs entered into a two- or four-year institution within 12 months of graduating high school and 70% entered into a two- to four-year institution within 16 months of graduating high school. Similarly, 62% of students district wide and 69% of students statewide entered into a two- to four-year institution within 12 months of graduating high school. Furthermore, 67% of students district wide entered into a two- or four-year institution within 16 months of graduation, as compared to 73% of the students statewide.

Lemont Nance Neighborhood

In the mid-19th century, the area known as Lemont Nance was well known amongst Eastern European farmers. The establishment of a well-known railroad company triggered residential development in the area (The Chicago Fact Book Consortium, 1990). A Real Estate Firm made further developments when a Midwestern city acquired land in this area. The neighborhood also became a safe haven for individuals and businesses that were adversely affected by the Chicago Fire in 1871. Residents and businesses were attracted to new fireproof brick buildings.

The Lemont Nance neighborhood housed a large percentage of the city’s Jewish population (Grossman, Keating, Reiff & Cozen, 2004). Russian Jews were the largest residential group in Lemont Nance by the 1920s. The neighborhood also attracted many industrial workers and companies to the area. Well-known corporations built their headquarters in the area. By the mid-1940s there were about 65,000 Jewish residents in the area. To support this neighborhood, hospitals, colleges, a commercial strip and multiple bathhouses were established.
By the 1960s, 91% of the neighborhood’s 124,937 residents were Black (Grossman, Keating, Reiff & Cozen, 2004). The area had become overcrowded, which discouraged new development. As a result, the aesthetic makeup of the neighborhood began to deteriorate. The ethnic White population moved to other neighborhoods, while industrial companies remained. Unlike White residents, Black people who lived in Lemont Nance were unable to secure employment with companies in the Lemont Nance neighborhood. This resulted in increased rates of poverty among Black people in the area. Instead of employing the local Black residents, local companies employed White workers that commuted from outside neighborhoods. Because corporations primarily employed White workers, tension mounted between Black residents and White workers.

By 1966, due to the under-resourced conditions in the neighborhood and the number of people living in Lemont Nance, many well-known Black activists spoke out against the conditions of the neighborhood (Grossman, Keating, Reiff & Cozen, 2004). Despite the attention that Lemont Nance received, little was done to improve the social, economic, and educational conditions faced daily by its residents, most of whom were black. After the assassination of a well-known Black leader, Black people retaliated in Chicago and in this neighborhood by burning down buildings and looting the White sections of Lemont Nance. Although their frustration was aimed at White businesses, the retaliatory actions also destroyed homes in Black residential areas. These actions left Black residential and White commercial buildings dilapidated.

Immediately after these events, the major industrial companies left Lemont Nance for other “more stable and safe” locations; the companies feared that such actions by residents could negatively impact company production and profits (Grossman, Keating, Reiff & Cozen, 2004).
However, for Black residents, these grassroots actions represented an effort to cope with the loss of hope the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. symbolized. When businesses left, the economic prospects of Lemont Nance, already dim for the residents in the neighborhood, dropped considerably for everyone who lived there. Neighborhood organizations tried to recruit other companies to Lemont Nance, but failed. The persistence of poverty in the area forced many residents to seek opportunity elsewhere. The once burgeoning population of over 120,000 residents in the 1960s deteriorated to a meager 41,000 by 2000.

Neighborhood Observation

As I drove into Lemont Nance, the neighborhood appeared to be far from the bustling place that I had read about and saw in pictures. Heading west on the expressway, the skies looked gray, but nonetheless, it was still a warm summer afternoon. Up ahead, a green raised sign read the name of a western state. As I slowed down to exit while other cars sped by, congestion stopped the cars on the ramp. While waiting behind the other cars, a man walked by with a white cup with dirt spread around it. He wore a shirt that could have possibly been white, but accumulated dirt stains made it appear brown. His pants, the color black, were made even darker because of the buildup of dirt and grime. His face wrinkled at the top of his forehead and on the left and right side of his cheek. Once the light turned, the cars began to move forward.

As I turned left and drove over the expressway, painted on the right on the side of a two flat building, a picturesque mural inscribed with the words “R.I.P Lil Johnny” was visible. The airbrushed drawing had the face of a young boy who had fallen victim to crime on Chicago streets. Beyond the mural, paper laid visibly scattered on the grass and concrete paved lots, where homes once had grass growing wildly in that space. Near the lot, young Black men and women stood outside congregating by a square building that had the name of a local liquor store.
Some of the young men were very thin, with white, red, and black t-shirts on. A few of the Black males wore red hats with a bull on the front, and black hats with the image of a white sock inscribed on the front. As I drove further into the neighborhood, on a particular street, there was a man who looked to be in his thirties, sitting on his porch. The home that he sat in front of was a two-story brick house that had some rusting on the surface. With the car parked, I approached him and asked him about the community. He said he had witnessed shooting on the block to his left. There were drive-by shootings in the area when he was growing up. He even discussed how individuals, when walking by headed to the nearby liquor store, had robbed him. Although he faced tense situations, he largely stayed away from trouble due to his involvement in mentorship and community groups. After we talked, I thanked him and proceeded to leave.

Up ahead, I came upon a large park. Looking to the right, the park spanned two or three blocks. Straight ahead, there were no noticeable remains of paper on the grass or cracked concrete. However, there were people in the park who had on shirts that looked torn at the collar. The shirts were also dingy and stained. Some of these individuals had shoes covered in dried mud. Other individuals in the park did not have on shirts; their veins and bones could be seen through their fragile bodies. Two individuals were pushing rectangular shaped metal carts. The metal carts had black rubber wheels and plastic handles. White bags with white paper, glass bottles and aluminum cans were in the metal carts. The white bags remained tightly tied closed with a string, but glass bottles and aluminum cans peered out of the bag. Turning and driving left, away from the park, I spotted a large white building that had a grocery store logo hanging at the top of the large rectangular structure. Driving out of the plaza, the street that led to the main street had numerous multilevel buildings. Further down the road, and on my right, a newer building stood discernible in the distance. Approaching the square, five-story building, I saw the
words of a neighborhood health center, which existed on the side exterior of the brick surface. Inside, there were clearly noticeable signs informing onlookers that this center had facilities for family and dental health, women’s health, a fitness center, a café and a conference space. Despite new development, most areas in the Lemont Nance community were still deplorable and in need of reconstruction. Poor social and economical indicators remained the norm, notwithstanding social conditions that warranted improvement.

Table 5.5: *Lemont Nance Neighborhood Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social and Economical Indicators</th>
<th>Lemont Nance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>41,809</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Black</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% White</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Hispanic</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Household Income</td>
<td>$25,452.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Home Value</td>
<td>$163,412.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage Unemployment Rate</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage Under Poverty Line</td>
<td>37.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earned High School Diploma or Higher</td>
<td>69.87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earned Bachelors Degree or Higher</td>
<td>8.95%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2013 U.S. Census American Community Survey
The Lemont Nance neighborhood was comprised of 16 census tracts\(^5\), and, as of the 2013 census, had a total population of 41,809 people (U.S. Census, 2013). Of this population, 81% of the residents were Black, 3% of the residents were White and 15% were Hispanic and 1% other. The total median household income for residents in Lemont Nance was $25,452.31. The total median household income for Black residents was $23,528.13; for White residents it was $51,363 and for Hispanic residents it was $38,167.71. Although Black people were the majority in Lemont Nance, they maintained a lower median household income when compared to White and Hispanic residents. Additionally, within two census tracts, there were large disparities in median household incomes between White and Black residents. Black residents’ median incomes in these census tracts were $21,637 and $31,429, respectively, while the household median incomes for White residents were $100,139 and $106,613, respectively.

Despite the disparities of median household incomes among Black, White and Hispanic residents, median home values in Lemont Nance did not differ greatly. The total median income for Lemont Nance was $163,412.50. The lowest median home value in a census tract was $117,100 and the highest median home value in a census tract was $228,000. The census tract where White residents had the highest household median income was the same census tract where White residents had one of the highest median home values in Lemont Nance. However, the census tract where Black people had the lowest household median income was the same census tract where residents had the highest median home values in Lemont Nance. Furthermore, the census tract where Black residents had the highest median household incomes, also had one of the lowest home values in the Lemont Nance community.

Furthermore, the total percentage for the unemployment rate in Lemont Nance was

\(^5\) Lemont Nance census tracts include 2909, 2912, 2916, 2922, 2925, 8386, 8387, 8412, 2924, 8414, 8415, 8416, 8430, 8431, 8433, 8434.
23.5% (U.S. Census, 2013). The Black unemployment rate of 26.21% was higher than the total unemployment rate of Lemont Nance and almost double the unemployment percentage of White residents. The total percentage of White unemployed residents in Lemont Nance was 14.02%. However, in certain census tracts White residents had a higher percentage unemployment rate of 80%, 50% and 58.8% than any Black resident in those areas of Lemont Nance. The percentage of Hispanics that were unemployed in Lemont Nance was 18.5%.

In the census tract where one of the higher median home values existed, the unemployment rate was 13.1% for Black residents, 0% for White residents and 22% for Hispanic residents. On the other hand, in the census tract where the lowest median home value existed, the unemployment rate for Black people increased to 25.1%, the White unemployment remained the same at 0% and the Hispanic unemployment rate increased to 33%. Moreover, the census tract that had the highest median home value at $228,000, had an unemployment rate of 21.1% for Black residents, 33% for White residents, and 0% for Hispanic residents. A result of unemployment, the likelihood of living in poverty was greater.

The percentage of the population living under the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) in Lemont Nance was 37.4%. The Black percentage of the population under the FPL was almost half at 47.5%. Similarly, the percentage of White residents under the FPL was nearly half at 44.2%, and the percentage of Hispanics under the FPL was lower than Black and White residents at 29.5%.

In the two census tracts where White residents had the highest median household incomes, one tract had no White or Hispanic residents under FPL, but in the other census tract 38.8% of the White residents were under the FPL. Additionally, the median home values in these two census tracts were the highest median home values in Lemont Nance.
The two census tracts that had the highest median home values in Lemont Nance, had no Hispanics under the FPL. Understanding the percentage of residents under the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) was an effective tool, which helped to determine the state of a neighborhood and the economic characteristics of the people who lived there. Likewise, the level of education an individual attained helped determine the potential for social achievement in the Lemont Nance neighborhood.

In Lemont Nance, 70% of the residents had earned a high school diploma or higher, while 9% of the residents in Lemont Nance had received a bachelor’s degree or higher (U.S. Census, 2013). The percentage of high school graduates per census tract was at its highest at 85.1%. However, despite the large percentage of high school graduates, more than half of the residents in this census tract were below the poverty line (Census, 2013). The percentage of high school graduates was at its lowest with a rate of 39.8%.

The highest percentage of residents who graduated with a bachelor’s degree or higher was 14.2%. In spite of a low percentage of residents with a bachelor’s degree or higher, these census tracts had two of the higher median home values in Lemont Nance. Furthermore, these census tracts had some of the lower rates of residential unemployment. However, the percentage of residents below the FPL for Black and White residents still remained over 25%.

One area of Lemont Nance had the lowest percentage of residents with a bachelor’s degree or higher. In this census tract, 5.6% of the residents received bachelor’s degrees or higher. Despite the low number of college graduates, this census tract had the highest median home value in the Lemont Nance neighborhood. Additionally, the percentage of residents who were unemployed was lower than a large majority of the other census tracts in Lemont Nance. Although Lemont Nance suffered economically and socially, the creation of a neighborhood
public school was believed to spur change in the community.

Calumet High School

Calumet High School opened in 1976. Community members in Lemont Nance wanted a school in their community, so with the leadership of a neighborhood organization, Calumet High School was formed and opened at a nearby park. From 1976 until 2010, Calumet operated as a public school under the management of the Chicago Public Schools (CPS). However, due to the failure to maintain achievement standards, Calumet High School was selected by CPS to close. By 2003, CPS announced that the school would be closing and would no longer accept freshman students. However, due to the overwhelming protests of community members against the closing of the only neighborhood school in Lemont Nance at the time, the decision to close the school was withdrawn.

Nevertheless, in 2006, as part of the Renaissance 2010 plan by Mayor Daley, Calumet High School would restart the school closing process. Renaissance 2010 was a plan by CPS to close underperforming schools and reopen those same schools under the direction of private charter schools or school management companies (Lipman & Hursh, 2007). The announcement of Renaissance 2010 sparked community outrage. However, leaders at Chicago Public Schools, the mayor, and the institution that funded the Renaissance 2010 initiative promoted this form of school reform.

When it was announced that Calumet High School would be closing, the community attempted to impede the school closing, but failed to do so. Once Calumet was closed it was rebranded and opened the following year under the management of the Academy for Urban School Leadership (AUSL). Calumet began as a training academy for teachers under AUSL. AUSL turned schools into academies. In these academies teachers were trained to teach youth in
an urban environment (Calumet High School website). Although changes were made, persistent poverty, low test scores, lack of college or career readiness, and lack of academic advancement stifled hopes for a strong academic program.

*Table 5.6: Calumet High School Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School indicators</th>
<th>Calumet High School</th>
<th>School District</th>
<th>State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>395,079</td>
<td>2,046,857</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Black</td>
<td>98.7%</td>
<td>39.9%</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% White</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
<td>49.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Hispanic</td>
<td>.8%</td>
<td>45.6%</td>
<td>24.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage free or reduced lunch</td>
<td>97.3%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Met or exceeded testing standards</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Achieved at least 21 on ACT</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduated 4yrs</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entered 2 or 4yr institution in 12mo.</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


At the time of data collection, Calumet High School was open and managed by AUSL. In 2014, the school had 371 students enrolled. Of this population, 98.7% of the students were Black/African American, 0% were White, .8% were Hispanic, .3% were Asian and 0% were Pacific Islander. At 97.3%, the majority of the students lived at or below the Federal Poverty Level, which was signified by eligibility of free or reduced-priced lunches.

The average class size at Calumet High School was smaller than averages at District (24) and State (21) levels with 19 students. The students at Calumet took the Prairie State Achievement Exam (PSAE) and only 6% of the students at Calumet met or exceeded PSAE
standards, while in the State of Illinois, 54% of students met or exceeded PSAE standards. Consequently, when students took the ACT, few were prepared to enter college. At Calumet High School, 1% of the students achieved at least a 21 on the ACT test. In the district and state, 27% and 46% of the students who took the ACT test achieved at least a 21 on the test. After the completion of course work, the percentage of students who graduated and matriculated into post-secondary institutions was instrumental in assessing achievement and life success.

At Calumet High School, 80% of students graduated in four years and 89% of the students graduated after five years. At the district level, 81% of the students graduated after four years and 85% of students graduated after five years. At the state level, 86% of the students graduated after four years and 88% graduated after five years. After high school, 63% of students who graduated from Calumet entered into a two- or four-year institution within 12 months of graduating high school and 70% enrolled at a two- to four-year institution within 16 months of graduating high school. Similarly, 62% of the students district wide and 69% of students statewide entered into a two- to four-year institution within 12 months of leaving high school and 67% of students’ district wide and 73% statewide entered into a two- to four-year institution within 16 months of graduating high school. This demonstrated that Calumet was on par with district and state levels concerning students matriculating into post-secondary education beyond Calumet High School.

Conclusion

Initially, White farmers settled the Pace Mark, Hill West, and Lemont Nance neighborhoods. However, as a result of the influx of Black people relocating to the north during the Great Migration, the cultural and ethnic makeup of these neighborhoods changed. By the 1960s, these neighborhoods transitioned from predominately White to predominately Black.
Only Pace Mark, which had assistance from PMAA, maintained a significant number of White residents in its neighborhood. The stories of these communities convey the history of these neighborhoods, which set the groundwork for their present state.

Among the three neighborhoods, Pace Mark remains the most integrated, while Hill West has the largest percentage of Black people. Despite having the highest percentage of residents in poverty, the home value was highest in the Lemont Nance Neighborhood. For these neighborhoods, median household income increased incrementally in line with percentage of residents who attained a high school diploma or higher and residents who attained a bachelor’s degree or higher. Pace Mark had the highest percentages of median household incomes and residents who attained high school diplomas and bachelor’s degrees, while Lemont Nance had the lowest.

The neighborhood schools in the area varied in size, with Calumet High School in Lemont Nance being the smallest. Although Calumet High School was under the CPS school district, it was managed by a separate entity. All schools had at least 70% of their students qualify for free or reduced fee lunch. Even though only a small percentage of students met or exceeded standards on standardized tests and college readiness exams, a majority of the students went on to graduate in four years and matriculated into two- and four-year institutions. Although brief, this analysis laid the groundwork for understanding the experiences of Black males who lived in these neighborhoods and attended these schools.
CHAPTER 6

NEIGHBORHOOD AND SCHOOL EXPERIENCES (PART 1)

In this chapter, I focus on the neighborhood and schooling experiences of the Black male high school student athletes who participated in this study. The table provides a description of the participants and their family background. Table 6.1 provides information about the individuals who took part in the study, including their names, neighborhoods, high schools attended, sports played, family structures, activities participated in and grade point averages (GPA). Next, I examined the experiences of the participants in their respective neighborhoods and schools within the context of athletic and academic motivation. Finally, I highlight the aspirations, perceptions, and goals of these Black male high school student athletes.

Table 6.1: Summary Description of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>School Yr.</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Sport(s)</th>
<th>Family Structure</th>
<th>Activities/ G.P.A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chase Barron</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Pace Mark</td>
<td>Parker Mitch H.S.</td>
<td>Football</td>
<td>Mother stepfather two siblings</td>
<td>IB Program/ 3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nick Bradly</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Hill West</td>
<td>Jacobs H.S.</td>
<td>Football</td>
<td>Stepfather Mother brother</td>
<td>Chess/ Theatre/ 3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael Wilson</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Lemont Nance</td>
<td>Calumet H.S.</td>
<td>Basketball</td>
<td>Brother/ has sister she lives with mother</td>
<td>Sports/ 2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delvin Wright</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Pace Mark</td>
<td>Parker Mitch H.S.</td>
<td>Basketball</td>
<td>Mother Stepfather only child</td>
<td>Volunteering/ 2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Stanley</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Hill West</td>
<td>Jacobs H.S.</td>
<td>Basketball</td>
<td>Mother and Father only child</td>
<td>Mentoring Youth/ 2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terry Smart</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Pace Mark</td>
<td>Parker Mitch H.S.</td>
<td>Football/ Track</td>
<td>Mother and Father four siblings</td>
<td>Church/ 4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jerry Cash</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Pace Mark</td>
<td>Parker Mitch H.S.</td>
<td>Basketball</td>
<td>Mother (Father deceased) only child</td>
<td>Volunteering Food Kitchen/ 2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corey Mitchell</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Lemont Nance</td>
<td>Calumet H.S.</td>
<td>Basketball</td>
<td>Father (visits mother on weekends)</td>
<td>Sports/ 2.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Participants who were motivated athletically wanted to play sports professionally, and did not have any tangible goals beyond playing sports. Students in this motivation category also did not have GPAs above 2.5 and were not held accountable by their parents for performing poorly academically.

On the other hand, participants who were academically motivated were enrolled in advanced curriculum and participated in athletics. They used sports as a way to make friends and become more social. The parents of these student athletes moved to their respective neighborhoods seeking better educational opportunities for their sons, all of whom had GPAs of 3.0 or above.

Participants who were both academically and athletically motivated were the most talented athletes, which is defined as having received an athletic scholarship or by being a top college athletic prospect. Additionally, the GPAs of these student athletes ranged from 2.7 to 3.0 and above. They also had clearly defined goals they wanted to attain beyond sports. These three identifiable characteristics helped to classify these high school student athletes into specific categories: 1) academically motivated, 2) athletically motivated and 3) academically and athletically motivated.

Academically Motivated Black Male High School Student Athletes

Chase Barron moved to Pace Mark when he was in elementary school. Prior to living in Pace Mark, he lived on the southeast side of Chicago with his mother and stepdad. According to teachers and school administrators where he attended school on the southeast side, Chase was considered to be very smart at an early age. However, there were few schooling options in his childhood neighborhood, which prompted Chase’s parents to consider alternatives. “We moved over here mainly because, at the time, Chase was too young. He was in preschool because he
started out so young. So they felt like he was too advanced to do another year of preschool,” said his mother.

As a result of the lack of school options, Chase’s parents enrolled him in a Catholic school in the area. However, they pulled him out of the school for unknown reasons. After he was pulled out of Catholic school, Chase’s parents were not able to find a suitable school for him to attend due to the aforementioned limited schooling options in their area. As a result, instead of settling, Chase’s family chose to move to a more affluent area with greater educational opportunity. According to Chung, Mulvey and Seinberg (2011), moving to a more affluent neighborhood became essential for Chase to have greater access to quality education.

Additionally, Byrd and Chavous (2009) discussed that affluent neighborhoods had more educational resources, and thus, had a higher probability of achievement for adolescents who lived in them—a characteristic Chase’s parents noted. They felt that moving to Pace Mark would provide a better opportunity for Chase to excel academically and socially. Chase’s mom, Denise White, said, “Some people liked the schools that would take him, but I was like no. So we moved over here. And just to give him a better opportunity.” Moving to Pace Mark offered Denise greater access to the resources and educational opportunity she desired for Chase. He enrolled in the IB program and excelled academically. Chase was one of only two Black male high school student athletes that were either enrolled in an honors or IB program or took Advanced Placement (AP) courses.
Figure 6.1: *Type of Curriculum Taken*

Though Chase was involved in the IB program at school, it was his participation in football that helped to develop many of the relationships he gained beyond his academic program. While Chase played football, he did not participate in any other extracurricular activities at his high school. Chase described participating in other activities as a young adolescent. “The only other sport I really played was football. But, when I was in like fifth or fourth grade I played volleyball. (Mom: whispers basketball). Second grade basketball. And seven and eighth grade I loved kung Fu.” However, for Chase, none of these sports and activities compared to playing football.

Playing football was very important to Chase’s development as a young man. He devoted much of his time to sports, but unlike the examinations of other Black male athletes who played sports with the goal of attaining a college scholarship (Dawkins, Braddock, & Celaya, 2009; James, 2003) or escaping violence in their neighborhood (May, 2008), or playing sports because of the belief of limited options to succeed in other areas (Singer & May, 2011), Chase played sports to develop friendships with students that he would not have met otherwise. Football became more than just a sport for him. He made friends and considered them to be brothers.
When discussing his relationship with his teammates, Chase explained, “‘Brotherhood,’ I guess you could say. I just like chilling with my guys, on and off the field. Football definitely got me connects inside the school.” Playing football was also another opportunity for Chase to have experiences in life that he would not have had if he did not play football. He stated, “I was cool with the upperclassman. Being on the football team, I did experience hazing, but not to the extent that other people did.” He continued to explain how football was beneficial to his life:

CB: just met people that I probably wouldn’t meet being in Pace Mark and being a IB student you don’t do a lot of things or you’re even sort of excluded from all of the other kids in the sense. So, football, if I didn’t have football I probably wouldn’t know a lot of people that I know now and that helped me.

Offering an alternative to commonly perceived notions of Black males who play sports, Chase Barron played sports to develop his social skills, rather than attempting to pursue an athletic career. Additionally, although Chase was an athlete, he was not considered to be athletic. As a member of the football team, he played fullback and stood at about 5’9”. He was a big football player with large legs and arms and had a wide body frame. Chase’s teammates teased him about his lack of athletic ability and a past incident when he could not control his bowel movements and subsequently defecated in his pants.

Figure 6.2: Reason for Playing Sports
Physically, Chase did not have the body that most coaches of football programs would find desirable. College football coaches desired the biggest, fastest, and strongest athletes (Hawkins, 2010), and Chase did not fit that prototype. Therefore, even if Chase wanted to play professionally, he would not have had the athletic ability or the prototypical body. Thus, he may have been forced to focus on performing well academically and playing sports for social development.

Nick Bradley

Prior to living with the family of his father figure, Chance, Nick Bradley lived with his mother on the Southside of Chicago. That neighborhood was quiet but at times violent. Residents loitered on different blocks and in front of storefronts. At night, residents in the neighborhood could be heard talking and arguing outside of nearby apartments. Despite living in this community, Nick participated in many activities. He swam at the park district field house and played basketball on the nearby park courts. According to Francois, Overstreet, and Cunningham (2011), the activities that Nick participated in at the field house became protective factors for him.

Through involvement in recreational activities, Nick limited his exposure to the potentially negative influences in his neighborhood. This gave Nick a better chance to perform well academically when compared to other individuals who did not participate in recreational activities. Eventually, Nick moved in with Chance, Chance’s wife, and his brother into a new development complex in Hill West. Chance is the father of Nick’s little brother, Jalen, but did not father Nick. Chance is college-educated and the only parent of all the student athletes that finished college and was enrolled in an advanced degree seeking program.
Chance’s pursuit of education was instrumental in Nick’s development beyond football. At his school, Nick found great satisfaction in playing chess. A teacher who participated in a University of Chicago mentoring math program started a chess program during school hours. Nick discussed how he was able to play chess despite attending a full day of classes:

NB: We are trying to get a chess team at school because I like to play chess. In school [we play] on my lunch break, which is fourth. I go down to the library, either after or before I eat lunch because, I barely eat.

Nick also participated in theatre, but had a stressful time preparing for his performance. He felt that the production was unorganized and there was a lot of fighting between the teachers and students. Nick described what happened. He stated, “People—you got to remember the lines, you got to get the dresses together. People don't do what they got to do…people just arguing. It’s just really stressful.” Nick believed that the students and teachers were not serious about making the performance a successful one.

In addition to participating in school activities, Nick was a member of the football team at his high school. He played cornerback, and stood at 5’7” tall with a slender frame. He played well, but his father told him he needed to be more aggressive on the football field. During my
visit at his school I witnessed, in the weight room, Nick performing pull-up exercises and joking around with some of his teammates. His coach eventually told the student athletes to get back to work and make sure they were staying active in the weight room. Although Nick and his teammates stopped talking and joking around, they did not lift any weights. After about fifteen minutes from the time I entered the weight room, the coaches gathered the student athletes and walked them to the gym to take part in a workout. After the gym workout, the student athletes went outside. Once the students were outside they started playing catch with a football. Nick walked off by himself to the sideline. A teammate went near Nick and they started talking and laughing. The coach instructed the students to start running. While running, Nick remained in the middle of the pack.

Although Nick was not the greatest competitor on the football field, he competed fiercely in the classroom. He understood that to be successful, there must be a certain level of work ethic. Therefore, he was a very focused student. He grew to be very meticulous about the time he devoted to learning in school and working on homework at home. As a result, he spent little time socializing with others, and instead focused on being a better student. Nick discussed what it takes to be successful in America, “In America… I’m trying to get to the top and I can’t really be bothered… I can talk to you, say “Hi”. We can eat lunch together, but as far as that I don’t really see any need to be interacting.”
Beyond sports, Nick did not socialize with many people. He valued academic success. His experiences in school challenged the notion that Black male student athletes who grew up in similar neighborhood environments primarily engaged and overvalued sports participation because they viewed participating in sports as a way to improve living conditions (Singer & May, 2011; May, 2008; James, 2003).

Athletically Motivated Black Male High School Student Athletes

Michael Wilson—about 5’7”—was born and grew up on the south and west sides of Chicago. He moved from Lemont Nance to live with his brother in order to be close to Calumet High School. Michael lived in Lemont Nance for two years and compared the poverty, people struggling to survive, and low-wage jobs in the Lemont Nance neighborhood to the neighborhood he lived in prior to moving to Lemont Nance. He witnessed people fighting and arguing, and would hear gunshots outside his home. He explained that this violence was normal, “if someone saw something, they would ignore it and continue with what they were doing.”
Figure 6.5: Neighborhoods of Black Male High School Student Athletes

Michael moved from one under-resourced neighborhood to another. As far as friends were concerned, Michael did not have many, and he did not participate in many other activities outside of basketball. If he was not playing basketball, he was playing video games or listening to music. He discussed with me his love for the game of basketball:

MW: I’ll watch anything. If it’s a ball in that I’ll watch you. Girl’s basketball, anything. If it’s a ball in that I’ll watch you.

Although Michael did not socialize with many people, he had a close relationship with his brother, Tonker. Although his mother was his parent, he did not visit her often. Michael considered his brother to be his guardian. He stated, “Financially I would say my momma, but everything else I would say—like—Tonker.” His Brother’s name is Sammy “Tonker” Kelly. Michael talked about the strained relationship he had with his mother and why he did not live or talk with her often. According to Michael, his mother did not provide for him emotionally; his brother, Tonker, filled that role:

MW: Nah, I really don’t talk to my momma. She one of those sensitive types. She takes everything to the heart. Like when you tell her something and if its wrong she just like, she freaking out. But like if you just talk to Tonker he understands, like its a part of life. He one of them people that just understand anything. He looks at stuff like from different aspects you know. Or like if you have talk about him about something that’s not wrong
or something you did wrong he able to understand it from your point of view instead of you know, just like my momma she just going at you with “you should’ve did this” or…where he actually will sit down and talk to you.

Michael lived a reclusive life. The lack of participation in recreational activities had a negative impact on Michael’s academic achievement. Despite living in Lemont Nance and not engaging in many other activities, his relationship with his brother and playing basketball served as protective factors for Michael, and kept him away from violence and gang activity in the neighborhood (Swanson, Cunningham, & Spencer, 2003).

Not unlike the experiences of many Black males who lived in under-resourced conditions in the city of Chicago, basketball was an escape for Michael and a way for him to get as far away from a hard life as possible. He stated, “Like some people have something that they good at and you just got to use that to, you know, to get you as far as possible. And that’s what I feel like is going to help me get there.”

One day after school while I sat in the bleachers in the gym, Michael and his basketball team held a short practice. Michael and his teammates practiced in a small gym at the same time that the girls’ basketball team practiced. There was a game coming up, but Michael would not start since he had missed practice that Monday because he was absent from school. The coach arrived and the players started performing a basketball drill to warm up. In the stands, I started talking to Michael’s brother, Tonker. We talked about how and why he took Michael out of his previous school to come to Calumet, highlighting that Calumet High School played more competitive basketball competition. While talking, he also expressed the dismal failure of the public school system when compared to suburban schools. Tonker said that he only liked one Chicago Public School–Willie Wright High School – and said that he had tried, unsuccessfully, to get Michael into the school.
Tonker also explained that out of the 1000 or so public league basketball players, only six qualified to go to a division one college. Five of those players attended a high school known for producing college basketball players. He explained that his brother “put on a show” and scored about 30 points per game. He planned to get him outside of Chicago and enroll him in former professional basketball player Mike Bibby’s Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) camp in Arizona for the summer. I stayed at the school to watch the game later that evening. Michael didn’t start in the basketball game, but he came off the bench and shot the ball well. Michael played good defense and he did a good job of energizing his team.

While Michael strived to do well athletically, he struggled to succeed academically. Michael understood what he needed to do academically, however, he was unable to follow through in the process to become academically successful. He told me that teachers and students created an environment that was not advantageous to his learning and he struggled because of it:

AA: In your current situation academically, what do you think is impacting where you feel that you could be?

MW: I feel like I can be definitely way better then where I’m at. Its just the part of…when you at a school and you just…around a bunch of kids that don’t want to do nothing it just…cause your teacher to just be like “these kids don’t want to do nothing so why should I bother.” So they kind of take a toll on everybody.

Michael tried to work through what he noticed. He felt that teachers did not care about educating the students in the classroom. He also felt that teachers did not help him understand the material. Additionally, Michael thought that students talked a lot in class and prevented other people from learning. After some time, Michael explained to me that he stopped trying and got to a point where he could no longer function in that type of environment. He grew weary and his feelings negatively affected his academic progress, which caused Michael to become frustrated, and give up on ever succeeding academically:
MW: Like I could say all day what I want to do or what needs to be done but if you get around a teacher that you feel is not helping you or you got students around you who aren’t doing they work that’s forcing your teacher not to want to help other people. Now you just stuck in this position and you get to the point where you are tired, you don’t want to do it either. Like you know, you’ve tried you just like forget it. The teacher doesn’t want to teach; the kids don’t want to do the work. So you are just, you stuck in this position.

Instead, Michael believed that playing basketball would provide him and his family with a way out of Chicago (Edwards, 2000; Harrison, Harrison, & Moore, 2002). By playing basketball, he was able to avoid violence (May, 2008), but his involvement in basketball was a deterrent to his academic, social and cultural development (Dawkins, Braddock II, & Celaya 2009). He did not take part in other activities outside of playing basketball, which would, according to Francois, Overstreet, and Cunningham (2011), greatly affect his academic success. While he thrived athletically, he failed to succeed academically (Morris & Adeyemo, 2012). Rather than taking ownership for his academic status, Michael blamed others for his experiences.

Delvin Wright

Delvin Wright had been living in the Pace Mark neighborhood since the fourth grade. He lived with his mother and stepfather. He never met his biological father and, for twelve years, Delvin lived without a father figure. Delvin did not spend much time in his neighborhood. When he did spend time in his neighborhood, he played basketball and football with his friends mostly. He had known many of the same friends that he played football and basketball with since elementary school. From elementary school to high school, all of Delvin’s activities in his neighborhood centered on sports.

Outside of playing basketball in his neighborhood and being in the gym, Delvin played with an Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) basketball team. The AAU is an amateur sports organization that is dedicated to the promotion and development of amateur sports and physical
fitness. The team that he played with had many talented basketball players. His team was comprised of players that were students who attended different high schools throughout the city. Since his AAU basketball games took place across the United States, Delvin’s team sometimes flew by plane to games. However, most of the time they traveled by bus for six- or seven-hour trips, which sometimes annoyed Delvin.

![NEIGHBORHOOD EXPERIENCES](image)

**Figure 6.6: Neighborhood Experiences (Primary Activities)**

Throughout elementary school, Delvin earned As, Bs, Cs, and Ds, but he was still able to play basketball. His mother stated:

TW: He’s been playing since fourth grade so it’s always been basketball, but like I said, I always stress for him to stay focused. Now, in grammar school he didn't really have to keep a certain grade point average to play ball so his grades were up-and-down.

Delvin’s continued participation in basketball in elementary school, despite the failure to maintain certain academic standards, is the consequence of what Harris (1994) described as the unwavering support of sports participation by athletic coaches, school teachers and friends. Although Delvin performed well academically and athletically when he initially arrived at Pace Mark, his academic success diminished when his high school team started winning, and he began to put more time and effort into his athletic pursuits during his junior and senior years. His mother explained:
TW: When he got to Pace Mark, of course you had to stay focused and he did, he kept his grades up and all of that. As soon as they made the state champions, I don't know if you knew that but they won the state championship. When all of that was over it's like he’s not focused he’s just mmm...

Delvin started playing basketball at the age of four. He often went to the gym and worked to improve his basketball game. Delvin played the point guard position in high school. His coaches considered him a defensive point guard. He stood at 5’6” and was a bit stocky for his small stature. His high school team had won back-to-back state championships. In his final season, Delvin mostly came off of the bench; however, the success of winning a state championship gave him the exposure he needed, which resulted in a few athletic basketball scholarship offers. Unfortunately, his lack of focus on academics would prevent him from being eligible to play basketball at the collegiate level. According to researchers, Delvin’s pursuit of athletic success, but lack of academic focus had negative ramifications on his academic, social, and cultural development (Edwards, 2000; May, 2008; Dawkins, Braddock II, & Celaya 2009). This severely impeded his goal of playing college basketball.

One day while observing Delvin, he and I walked to his academic counselor’s office. He wanted to check on the status of his eligibility to play college basketball. Once he arrived at the counselor’s office, he sat down in the chair and asked questions pertaining to his eligibility to play college basketball. I hesitated to come in but the counselor invited me to sit. The counselor informed Delvin that with a 2.48 GPA and a 16 on the ACT, he fell short of the GPA and ACT requirements necessary to be considered eligible to play basketball at the collegiate level. With his ACT score, he needed a 2.6 GPA to meet college basketball eligibility requirements and to accomplish this goal he needed three As in the current semester, Delvin took the ACT twice; however, he later explained to me that he had basketball games the day before both test days and he forgot that he had to take the exam the following day.
After speaking with the counselor, Delvin seemed dejected and did not speak after he received the information about his ACT score and GPA. After leaving the counselor’s office, Delvin stopped to talk to his coach who sat in a chair in the hallway. Delvin explained to his high school coach that his GPA and ACT fell short of the requirements to play college basketball, and that he needed three As in the current semester to qualify.

![Figure 6.7: Black Male High School Student Athlete GPA](image)

The coach said with a stern and deep voice, “I told you about playing with your grades, it is the bottom of the 9th, you cannot play with your grades.” The coach also said, “You are going to junior college.” The coach’s phone rang and he answered the phone call while Delvin stood quietly. The basketball coach said to the other person on the phone, “I’m trying to get a player in school, you know any junior colleges?” Soon after, he said, “He is a defensive point guard who helped us win a championship.” Though Delvin performed poorly on his ACT, his GPA was similar to at least half of the Black male high school student athletes in this study. The GPAs of these Black male high school student athletes ranged from 2.0 to 3.0 and above.

Academically and Athletically Motivated Black Male High School Student Athletes

Joseph Stanley, his mother and father’s only child, lived in the same house in the Hill West neighborhood all of his life. Joseph grew up in a two-parent household. His mother
protected him from violence in the neighborhood, while his father provided an income and a model for him to emulate. Because of the potential violence in and around his neighborhood, Joseph’s mother told him that he could not leave their block. If he wanted to play, he had to do it near their house. His mother feared that if he went off to play away from their home that he could be hurt. Although he was told not to, Joseph told me the story of when he left the block to play basketball at the park one day:

JS: So like over here me and my mom she keeps me on the block, she never let me go around the corner until I probably was like 14... So like, cause if I would’ve hung out over there I probably would’ve never liked, I probably would’ve been a different person. Because when I went over there one time, we were playing on the court and then some guy had got mad because me and my brother—cause see he lives across the street—he was upset because we was winning. He tried to take our ball so we like “naw you can’t take our ball.” He was like “alright well watch this” he had a gun so I took the ball, I threw it at his face and me and Brandon just took off all the way home. We haven’t been to the park since.

Residents often experienced traumatic incidents of violence and gang activity in Joseph’s neighborhood. Although it seemed that restricting Joseph’s movements to his block would limit his ability to explore his neighborhood, the instructions from his mother to stay on the block served to protect Joseph from experiencing violence or encounters with gang members in his neighborhood (Swanson, Cunningham, & Spencer, 2003). In addition to restricting where Joseph could go, participating in other recreational activities also helped limit the exposure to violent incidents in Hill West (Francois, Overstreet, & Cunningham, 2011). Joseph started playing sports as a young boy. He stated, “I started off literally playing baseball and tee ball. My dad kind of switched it over and that's where I met my AAU coach. Me and Coach T we go way back because he started with baseball.” While playing sports, Joseph also met a gentleman by the name of Barry Perry.
Barry was the founder of an organization that worked with youth through sports. The organization sponsored a youth athletic training program. Barry introduced Joseph to the game of basketball and also taught him the importance of doing well academically. Joseph explained, “Then when I met this man named Barry Perry he showed me that basketball is not just everything, you just got to work on your studies too. So you got to be a student athlete not [just an] athlete student. So since that day I’ve been going as hard I can in the classroom as I go on the court.” Contrary to the perception that Black male athletes focused entirely on sports participation to the detriment of developing in other areas (Edwards, 2000), Joseph’s development countered the notion of the athletic-academic paradox described by Morris and Adeyemo (2012). Joseph deeply valued academic and athletic success.

Joseph had not only made it a goal to work as hard academically as he did athletically, he also sought to set an example for younger Black male athletes. Joseph illustrated how he took time to encourage youth that needed his guidance: “Well Barry Perry, he runs the organization where I train kids at so he said, ‘You got to set an example. You got to be an example.’” With the encouragement of Barry Perry, Joseph worked as a mentor in a training program for youth. Joseph described how he interacted with the adolescents: “So as I bring my grades in, I show the kids, like cause what if you go to college and something happen? You got to have a backup plan. So my backup plan is going to be broadcasting.”

Joseph participated in a number of activities outside of basketball that developed his interest in technology and broadcasting, which is contrary to the experiences of other Black male high school athletes (Dawkins, Braddock, Celaya, 2009; Singer & May, 2011). While participating in these activities, he learned about himself and how to reach his goals. Joseph stated, “I’m part of the Tech Crew and Success Team. [In Tech Crew]…we’re mostly in
charge...like any type of assembly. We’ll be up in the control room working the lights, audio—all that stuff.” He continued to explain that The Success Team was a group of students that, “just explain what our goals and our future is…and then, after we achieve those goals, we have a celebration. And they'll take us to college trips and tours and all of that stuff.”

I arrived at one of Joseph’s practices, and I saw that Joseph was a very talented young athlete. He was tall, standing at 6’4”, and skinny with long arms. This practice was against junior college basketball players. At practice, Joseph played inconsistently. Early on in one game he played good defense and had a couple of steals. Then, he missed a layup, but made up for the missed score by executing an alley hoop. He also hit a three-pointer and proved to be a good passer in the first game. Joseph’s team won the first two games but lost their third game. The coach said that they let the other team get in their heads and started to relax after they had won the first two games. Joseph seemed to take losing and coaching well; he seemed upbeat and ready to compete again on the basketball court. Joseph was a talented basketball player and for the most part understood and knew his role as a scorer on the team and was very instinctive on the basketball court.

However, his coach informed me that he struggled to earn the score on the ACT that would allow him to qualify to play college basketball, a hurdle similar to what Nasir and Hand (2006) discussed while examining the experiences of Black athletes in a math class and on the basketball court at practice. His coach said, “No one is going to sign him. He’s going to have to take it again.”
Terry Smart

Terry Smart lived in the Pace Mark neighborhood, which was considered to be a Black middle-class neighborhood. However, he lived in one of the more violent and under-resourced sections of Pace Mark. Gang violence and activity permeated his area. Despite living in this area, Terry and his family avoided violent circumstances. While in elementary school, Terry interacted with many of the students that perpetrated violence in his neighborhood. Although he knew them, his relationship with them changed when he transferred schools and started attending Pace Mark’s seventh and eighth grade school program. Terry talked with me about violence that he experienced and the relationship with other adolescents in his neighborhood:

AA: And how would you describe the neighborhood?

TS: (**laughs**) **laughs I've been living here so long my momma used to work at a public school. Like all the local—I guess you could say—the gang bangers, she have seen them all grow up. They've been knowing her since they were little. So—I mean—I had an easier path than most, and not following that path. But, yea, its killings, shooters around here. Somebody got almost shot dead right next to my daddy’s car. Its shootings, fighting, gangs all that. It’s all in the area and just luckily, just know most of them. And I guess that’s what’s keeping safe and staying away from them.

AA: So what’s your interaction—I guess—with some of the gang bangers? Like how is that?

CB: I guess, I used I used to go to school with them but then—like—I left grammar school at the school that they all went in seventh grade and went to Pace Mark. So I—like—started drifting away from friends with them. Then that’s when they start—like—taking they path and ones I do mess, I don’t really mess with no gang bangers at all. Just people like who live in the same area, we live here.
Because people in the neighborhood knew Terry and his mother, he was able to develop his athletic talents without being perceived as a threat to gang members or people who perpetuated violence (May, 2008; Swanson, Cunningham, & Spencer, 2003). Terry grew up playing sports: “Since I’ve been little, sports have been everything, I’ve been playing sports all day, everyday.” Playing sports prevented Terry from being involved with violence and hanging around people who committed crimes in his neighborhood, which is similar to the experiences described in previous research of Black male experiences in a southern city (May, 2008). In his study, May (2008) found that Black male high school student athletes sometimes used basketball as a tool to stay away from violence.

However, unlike Terry who earned an athletic scholarship to play football, the aforementioned Black males’ athletic careers ended in high school. As a result, these athletes went back to the once violent lifestyles they had previously escaped by playing basketball. Terry, however, consciously stayed away from people who instigated violence. During our discussion, he talked about his focus on his faith: “I ain’t really into, I don’t really hang with people on the streets, that ain’t my path. I come from a Christian background.” Growing up, Terry played baseball, basketball, football and track. Once he reached high school, he stopped participating in one sport to concentrate on another. Describing his process, he said, “When I got to high school,
I just played basketball and football. After my sophomore year, I decided to stop playing basketball so I could focus on a scholarship for football. And that's when I started running track.”

Before the end of Terry’s senior year, he had earned a 70% athletic scholarship to play football at a midsized university in the Midwest.

Terry explained how he developed his athletic talents and work ethic: “I get out of school, it’s track practice during track season, then it’s football practice during football season. Then, when it’s none of them seasons—like—off-season training so you in the weight room, or running, or conditioning, something.” During track season, Terry showed his leadership skills. Terry stood at 6’1” and displayed defined, muscular features in his arms and legs. During the football season, he started as the team’s quarterback. During track season he ran the 100-meter, 200-meter and 400-meter dashes.

On a warm spring sunny day at practice, I saw Timothy display a glimpse of his leadership skills. Terry walked out onto the track before any of his teammates. Twenty to 30 other male athletes came out of the building soon after Terry. They started to warm up and Terry led the group. The rest of the team took his lead. One of the track coaches came out shortly after. One of the coaches played football at Pace Mark in the late 1990’s. When asked how the track team performed this year, he said their 4x4 relay team had been doing very well. When asked about individual athletes, he mentioned that Terry was a standout athlete and leader of his track team.

After Terry led the team in warming up, they ran one 250-meter and two 100-meter sprints. Terry was a strong runner with good speed. He did not run the fastest but he stayed among the top of the running group. After working out, Terry often arrived home late. He stated, “So you just be busy. And when you do get home, just be falling asleep and eating.” In high
school, Terry remained active athletically, however, his active athletic life did not hinder his ability to excel academically. Beginning in elementary school, Terry had always done well in school. While growing up, he did not enroll in a magnet or any advanced education curriculum. While I interviewed Terry, his mother explained that school “came easy to Terry,” and when he arrived at Pace Mark in the seventh and eighth grade program, he continued to flourish academically. Timothy explained, “I mean I guess grammar school, middle school was always easy to me—I mean. So it wasn’t, when I got there—I mean—it was different but it wasn’t—like—nothing that was a challenge.” When Terry entered high school he stayed consistent academically. He rarely received a grade lower than a B throughout his academic career. Terry continued to explain, “I only had—like— one D ever…GPA always like a 3.4, lately 4.0 so As and Bs; that’s been me since like kindergarten.”

While Terry appeared to be a naturally motivated student, he later revealed that he competed with a fellow classmate. Terry described, “Since I was little…one of my friends was smart so I guess we just wanted to be smart. We didn’t want to let anyone be as smart.” They challenged each other in school about who could get the best grades. Terry strived to be smart. The school that he attended at an early age helped him foster the mindset that intelligence was a positive attribute to have. His mother said, “And they competed in kindergarten, I mean like they were the top two. They were so smart in kindergarten they were going to the first grade rooms to do reading and math. But they competed all the way.”

Terry would ultimately leave the school that he attended with his friend, but they still kept in touch. His mother continued to explain, “Terry left there but his friend stayed there…they still talked like, “oh what’s your grade, oh I’m better than you. It was always a competition with him.” Terry also had an older brother who competed with him academically. Terry’s mother
shared, “he has a brother a year older than him and they were always, ‘Whose grades is better? Whose grades is better?’ So he’s always been competitive… to make sure he stayed on top of him and get good grades.”

Terry became competitive academically and athletically at an early age, which challenges two popular notions put forth in previous literature. The first being that Black male athletes focus primarily on sports participation because of perceived lack of opportunity in other areas, particularly in the academic space (Singer & May, 2011) and the second being the idea that because Black males in professional sports have become so successful athletically, younger Black male athletes’ focus shifts towards their athletic pursuits (Dawkins, Braddock, & Celaya, 2009).

Jerry Cash

At the time of this investigation, Jerry Cash had recently moved to Pace Mark, but prior to this move, he lived in Rich City, a suburb near Chicago. Jerry started playing organized basketball at a young age. He explained, “Really all I did was [play] basketball…because most of the time I was at basketball practice [or] baseball practice. I really didn't get a chance to do as much as normal children did.” Jerry’s explanation of his early experiences playing basketball were what researchers describe as an overemphasis of sports participation by Black male athletes and the Black community, which could have been a deterrent to Jerry’s social, academic, and cultural development (Edwards, 2000; Lomax, 2000; Dawkins, Braddock II, & Celaya, 2009). However, for Jerry, not only did he become one of the top basketball players in the city of Chicago and earn a college athletic scholarship, he also performed well academically and frequently performed volunteer duties.
Jerry and his mother moved to the Pace Mark neighborhood about eight months before the time of the interview. They left Rich City because living there had become uncomfortable for them. When they initially moved to Rich City, the neighborhood was quiet, but as Jerry grew older, the neighborhood changed. Mrs. Cunningham said, “Our house had gotten broken into three times and no one seemed to see anything, hear anything. You know, so the last time Jerry was like, ‘Oh, it's time to go.’” Jerry’s experience with his home being robbed was his only experience of violence.

![Figure 6.9: Violence Experienced](image)

The previous neighborhood experiences that Jerry and his mother had before they moved to Pace Mark were comparable to the neighborhood changes that Anderson (1990) documented in his research study in one U.S. city. In his research study, Anderson discussed the negative impact of unemployment and how economic underdevelopment had stifled the community and changed a once stable community into one riddled with violence, gangs, and drugs.

Shortly after Jerry and his mom moved from Rich City to Pace Mark, he started high school and developed into one of the premier basketball players in the city of Chicago. Jerry stood at 6’7” tall with long arms and big hands. He was a skinny, fluid and skilled basketball player. Jerry was a star player on Pace Mark’s basketball team that won back-to-back state
champions. Jerry was also an iconic figure at school. At school I saw female students blush over him and male students pay him respect by saying hello. One day after school, I saw him being interviewed by a sports magazine that covered prep sports.

Jerry also understood that if he wanted a chance to play basketball at the collegiate level, he would need to perform well academically. He learned how to manage his social, academic, and basketball life. During basketball season, due to practice, he did not get home until later in the evening. After practice Jerry usually felt tired, which made it difficult for him to do homework. Therefore, to avoid feeling tired while doing homework or choosing not doing homework at all, Jerry often completed his homework before practice. He explained that he and his teammates were able to be successful academically because they were offered “study table”:

AA: And [what time do you get home from practice] during basketball season?
JC: During basketball season probably 8 o'clock since I'm so close probably 8 o'clock 9.
AA: About nine okay. How does that affect your engagement academically?
JC: it really doesn't because I have good time management. So I do my homework before practice so I won't have to come home and worry about doing it after practice. Because I know I'll be tired and I wouldn't feel like doing it so I try to get it all out the way if I can before practice.
AA: Do coaches give you time and the opportunity?
JC: Yes, they give us a study hall to do our homework. That's why I believe our team GPA [3.5] is so high because they stress academics just like our mother's would or any of our parents.

Additionally, Jerry credited his academic and athletic success and that of his team to the support of his high school basketball coach and his teammates. While Jerry’s success on the basketball court exemplified how support by coaches and peer groups can help lead to athletic success, the academic support that his peer groups and athletic coach provided showed that academic development was also emphasized, which was a departure from previous research that
had documented the overemphasis of sport participation by coaches and peer groups (Edwards, 2000; Harris, 1994; Lomax, 2000).

In addition to being an iconic basketball figure and high achieving student, Jerry was often in the neighborhood giving his time to organizations. He stated, “I do community service when I get the chance to. I like to really help and give back to people that are less fortunate.” He worked at a soup kitchen and worked with food drives. He enjoyed spending time giving and learned from the time that he spent in those types of environments. When asked how serving in those environments made him feel, he responded by saying, “It's pretty good and it also shows me that I just want to stay in school and strive to do my best so I won't be in that situation.”

Corey Mitchell

Corey lived on the edge of the Lemont Nance neighborhood with his mother and father until he moved to the district with his father about eight years prior to the time of his interview. In Lemont Nance, Corey spent most of his time at the park. While at the park, he witnessed a lot of violence. He saw people being attacked and assaulted, selling drugs, and fighting over drugs, which escalated into even more violence.

Despite the violence, Corey’s father kept him very active. His father said, “I kept Corey in sports at Clemson Park as well as Carey Park over there. Let them swim, they love to swim.” Corey participated in swimming, and other social and sport activities. His father continued, “They participate in a lot of programs throughout there. I try to keep their time focused into activities and sports, and what’s not more than negative on the streets.” Recreational activities served what Francois, Overstreet, and Cunningham (2011) classify as protective factors.

Although Cory lived in this neighborhood, participating in other sporting activities created an environment that allowed him focus on his academic pursuits. Similar to most of the participants,
a family member was very influential in the development of these Black male student athletes. In this case, Corey’s father had been instrumental in his social development, specifically by encouraging him to participate in activities at nearby parks.

![WHO INFLUENCED BLACK MALE ATHLETES?](image)

Figure 7.1: Who influenced Black Male Athletes?

Corey lived in a single parent household with his father. During our first conversation, he was very forthright with where he was born, where he moved to, his age and his plans for the next year after he graduated from high school. He stated, “My name is Corey. I grew up in the Lemont Nance neighborhood; well, I was born in the Lemont Nance neighborhood. Moved down here to Paul Park. I’m about to be 19. I’m going to a Community College next year in the Pacific Northwest.” While growing up, Corey participated in multiple activities and sports. He mentioned, “Sports wise too? (Yea, just all, everything) Okay, football, volleyball, drama club and the debate club.”

Corey enjoyed his time participating in many different types of activities and multiple sports. Although he enjoyed multiple sports and activities, he spoke more passionately when it came to playing basketball. Corey began playing basketball at a young age. Corey indicated, “To me, it’s a passion…I didn’t even like basketball at first but I started playing in like fourth grade
so that’s what made me want to play it more. And my uncle play it too.” Corey believed that playing basketball would be able to help him and his family. Corey expounded on his belief, “Basketball is like, it can get me out of certain situations. Like it can get me and my family out of Chicago to a bigger and better place.” Despite being exposed to other activities, his early success as a basketball player led Corey to believe that basketball could lead to providing a better life for him and his family. Edwards (2000), and Harrison, Harrison, and Moore (2002) attributed this perception to individuals and families who lived in under-resourced neighborhoods.

For Corey, playing basketball turned into a gateway out of the streets of Chicago. He was one of the star players who demonstrated college potential on the team at his high school. He was Michael’s teammate. Every game that I saw Michael play, I also saw Cory on the court. He stood at 6’6” with long arms. He was wide bodied and had thick legs and a filled out upper body. He was a good rebounder and decent shooter. On the court, he spent most of his time near the rim. In this area he grabbed rebounds, blocked shots, and stood in the way of incoming penetrators. However, in the games that his team lost, Corey grabbed rebounds, blocked shots and got in the way of players who attacked the basket. Although Corey had talent and athleticism, he had an inconsistent basketball skill set that needed further development.

In addition to developing a passion and a focus in basketball, Corey also understood the importance of education in his life. Throughout his schooling, he worked and received positive feedback about his academic potential. He saw the consequences of not getting an education. He recounted what others had said about his academic potential saying, “Yea, they say I’m smart and I can be something in life.” These insights helped him understand that if he wanted to be successful, he had to take his education seriously. He explained further, “I take that real, very serious. You don’t want to be one of these people that end up on the streets.”
Furthermore, Corey had aspirations beyond becoming a professional basketball player. Corey believed that he could be successful in his academic pursuits. According to Francois, Overstreet, and Cunningham (2011), Corey’s involvement in recreational activities protected him from violence and from being involved in gang activity, which in turn would help him excel academically.

Summary

These young Black male high school student athletes fit into three different classifications, a) academically motivated Black male high school student athletes, b) athletically motivated Black male high school athletes and c) athletically and academically motivated Black male high school athletes. Academically motivated Black male student athletes engaged in other educational, recreational, and artistic activities at an early age. Their parents moved to better neighborhoods to improve the opportunity for them to learn in better schools and to develop strong academic skills. These students played sports primarily to improve their social skills and status. The participation in various activities, according to Francois, Overstreet, and Cunningham (2011), supported academic success for young adolescents, which these Black male high school student athletes exhibited. These characteristics were in contrast to the notion that parents overemphasized athletic participation to the detriment of academic and social development (Dawkins, Braddock II, & Celaya, 2009), and the belief that Black male adolescents viewed sports as the primary way towards upward mobility (Edwards, 2000; Harrison, Harrison, & Moore, 2002).

Athletically motivated Black male high school student athletes started playing sports at an early age, but did not engage in academic or educational programs that held them accountable academically. They also did not participate in recreational activities beyond the sport they
played. According to Francois, Overstreet, and Cunningham (2011), the lack of participation in recreational activities had the potential to have a negative impact on academic success of these Black male adolescents. Additionally, the participation in their sport, but the lack of an academic accountability structure and negative academic consequences supports beliefs that these Black males overemphasized sports to the detriment of their academic and social development (Dawkins, Braddock II, & Celaya 2009; Edwards, 2000). This notion specifically held true for Michael, who lived in an under-resourced neighborhood and viewed sports as the primary means of upward mobility (Harrison, Harrison, & Moore, 2002).

Athletically and academically motivated student athletes often participated in their sport at an early age, participated in other recreational or sporting activities, and developed their educational and academic skills within a competitive, organized, and supportive accountability structure. These experiences, according to researchers, contributed to academic success and were contrary to notions that Black males and Black male communities overemphasized athletic participation and that athletes who lived in poor neighborhoods primarily viewed sports participation as a way towards upward mobility (Francois, Overstreet, & Cunningham, 2011; Harrison, Harrison, & Moore, 2002; Edwards, 2000; Lomax, 2000).

These experiences of Black male high school student athletes help to better understand the various experiences of Black males that play high school sports. Additionally, these characteristics set the foundation for better understanding how the identities, perceptions and aspirations in these groups were shaped.

Identities Perceptions and Aspirations (Part 2)

In this section, I explain the identity, perceptions and aspirations of Black male high school student athletes that were motivated 1) academically, 2) athletically and 3) academically
and athletically. The aspirations, identities and perceptions were the results of the experiences that these Black male adolescents had in their neighborhoods, among their peer groups, in their schools, in their particular sport, and through involvement in activities.

![Figure 7.2: Black Male High School Student Athlete Identity](image)

Jerry, Terry, Joseph, and Corey socialized with other students and athletes. These participants were also the students who identified as athletic and friendly, and they felt that they developed good relationships with people. Nick and Michael, who identified as introspective and were aware of their surroundings, either did not socialize with other people or socialized primarily with other athletes. Delvin identified as a regular person; he wanted to do what everyone else did. His objective in life was to have fun. Barron made friends with both athletes and students who did not participate in any sporting activities.

Academically Motivated Black Male High School Student Athletes

Chase believed that he could get along with anyone that he met. He had friends that were considered “nerds” and he had friends that were considered “gangbangers” and “thugs.” Either way, he felt comfortable interacting with either group of individuals and he felt that he was perceived as an overall good person. More specifically, he felt that people perceived him as a smart person who cracked jokes. Although he had a strong sense of identity and felt that his
classmates liked him, Chase explained, much like the other high school students athletes, that a Black male’s journey to success was a much harder road, particularly when compared to a White male’s journey to success:

AA: Can you talk with me about how you understand what it means to be a black male in America?

CB: Me and my mom talk about this a lot but, it’s harder obviously than most, for a white male at least. We have to, as a black male you just have more stress and more attention is focused on you than a white male, to succeed and not be another statistic.

Furthermore, he felt that there was more pressure and attention placed on Black males to not fit into the perception that American society had of them. Yet, instead of being discouraged, he explained how he was challenged by this social obstacle that many Black males face:

AA: And in understanding this, how does that make you feel? What are your thoughts on it?

CB: In the simplest form, a challenge I guess you could say, to just be better than what they think you are or what they think you should be and to prove them wrong.

Chase also communicated that although there were some fields that very few Black people were represented in, Black men could achieve success in any field. However, Chase discussed that there was a level of work ethic that must be achieved and maintained to gain success in these areas. Additionally, Chase talked about how he believed that Black males did not pursue certain fields because they did not see representatives from their race and, as a result, they never envisioned themselves working in that field:

AA: Can you talk with me about occupations where you believe black males could be successful in the U.S. society?

CB: I think they could be successful in anything but I know there are some fields where you don’t see a lot a black people in. But I think anybody can do anything if they just put their mind to it.

AA: Where you see few black males within a certain population, how do you feel about those areas? What are your thoughts on that?
CB: I would think that there’s not that many black males in that field based off its just not seen or it’s not a norm I guess you would say, it’s not a regular. So they don’t see the reason why they should even try to do it because it’s not that many black males in that field, so why even try to do it to begin with.

AA: How would you feel? Like do you feel the same, do you have the same beliefs towards it? What are your thoughts?

CB: I guess you could say I have a similar belief because I couldn’t see myself as a black male doing like, nuclear science or something off the wall or irregular jobs. I would just, not saying that I couldn’t, but I just couldn’t see myself doing it I guess. But, you know, everyday jobs engineering, business, financial I think we can do it all.

The hard work that Chase endured to reach his goals was very personal to him. Chase wanted to be able to give back to his family. His goals were to excel academically and represent himself and his parents well socially. Moreover, to be held accountable, Chase and his friends challenged each other academically. After high school, Chase talked about wanting to attend college. He said he would also find a way to support his family, if necessary. Chase pursued these goals by working hard, doing extra research and reading often. Chase discussed wanting to be successful and knew he had to work hard to accomplish this goal:

AA: And what are some of the educational, social goals that you have?

CB: Education wise, me and my guy friends, we have this kind of pact or deal that we got to all be at least in the top 50 rank in our class for high school. College wise I guess just succeeding through college getting my bachelors, hopefully my masters also and just being able to say I did. And social wise I haven’t really thought socially my goals, but I know whatever I want to do I want to know my family is okay.

AA: And what are your thoughts on how you work towards these goals and expectations?

CB: Just simply putting in the work to do it. So If I want, for example, if I want to be in the top 15 of my class I know I can’t just do my homework and just sit down. I’ll put it in the extra work and maybe research some stuff that I’m not a hundred percent understanding. Or even me and my friends doing a little homework together just bouncing back off ideas or whatever on our creative papers or you know anything that we might get in IB.

Nick Brown

Nick identified himself as a quiet person. He was very conscious of who he associated
himself with, the people he talked to, and his surroundings. He paid attention to who was nice and polite and who caused trouble and instigated violence. However, there were moments when he still got into trouble, such as talking while class was in session. He believed that he had a lot to improve upon to become the person that he wanted to grow into. Also, Nick did not care about how he was viewed by students, but cared how teachers perceived him. He sought validation from his teachers. Nick, who lived in the Hill West neighborhood and attended Jacobs High School, felt that teachers viewed him as a smart young boy who, although he got in trouble. When I observed him in class, he frequently asked questions and remained attentive in class.

Furthermore, as a Black male who wanted to do well in life, Nick understood that he had to work harder than individuals from other racial groups in order to attain the same goals. Although he felt that Black men were at a disadvantage and had to work harder to accomplish the same goals, he explained how he was not deterred, but was willing to do what was necessary to be successful:

AA: Can you talk to me about how you understand what it means to be a black male in America?

NB: Well I’ve grown up knowing that being a black man in America is not easy, its not going to be the easiest thing in the world. I know that you’re going to have to work harder. Study and work, you got to do everything harder than most people would. So it’s just in America for a African American man you just have to, you got to put in work. You got to do what you got to do and get it done to the tee. Do it perfectly, dot your I’s and cross your T’s in everything that you do—don’t slack on anything. So I know that I have a long strong road ahead of me and I’m prepared to get it done and make sure I do what I got to do.

Additionally, contrary to common media portrayals, Nick believed that Black men had the ability to accomplish all goals. However, he thought that any success was contingent on the amount of work put toward that goal. Nick expected to succeed and, in addition to hard work, he understood the value of teamwork amongst people. Therefore, he believed that developing his social skills would lend credence to his ability to conduct quality work with a group of people.
He believed that if a group of people focused on the task at hand and everyone did their job, a group could be successful. Nick expressed his desire to finish college. He also described wanting to have a big home with multiple vehicles. He wanted to have the responsibility of paying bills and a mortgage and having food in his home. He also discussed being competent in his job and a punctual individual:

AA: And what do you intend to do after high school?

NB: I intend to finish college if I can’t then I’ll probably be here studying for whatever college I attend for.

AA: How about five to ten years from now, lets say 10 years from now?

NB: What I plan ten years from now. Ten years from now I plan to be in a huge house with at least two cars. Being able to pay the mortgage, have food in the house. I know how to do my job to the T without any questions or struggling. I just want to be an on time person where nothing is hindering me with my work.

Summary

The experiences of academically motivated Black male high school student athletes ranged from being quiet and reflective to adaptable. Chase and Nick held contrasting perceptions of themselves and how people viewed them. While they understood how much harder the path to success was for Black males in U.S. society, they believed that Black males could do anything they wanted in U.S. society, which is contrary to the perception that Black male athletes see sports participation as the only way to become successful (Harrison, Harrison, & Moore, 2002). Though, Chase did acknowledge that he would more likely engage within a space where more people that looked liked him participated. Additionally, Nick and Chase moved from lower-resourced neighborhoods to more affluent neighborhoods with access to better schools and opportunity (Chung, Mulvey, & Steinberg, 2011).
Additionally, both Nick and Chase wanted to go to college and graduate with at least a bachelor’s and master’s degree. Their participation in sports helped them develop confidence and friendships that they would not have developed otherwise. Their goals and accomplishments were contrary to the perception that Black males overemphasized sports to the detriment of social and academic development (Hoberman, 2000; Lomax, 2000; Dawkins, Braddock II, & Celaya 2009).

Athletically Motivated Black Male High School Student Athletes

Michael, a basketball player like Delvin, considered himself to be an open-minded person. He was willing to listen to people about anything because he felt that he could relate to anything that anyone was going through in life. However, he did not have an initial opinion about how he was viewed by other individuals. He eventually expressed that he was a quiet person who stayed to himself.

Furthermore, Michael talked about how he viewed the plight of Black males through a perspective of struggle. He thought that if Black men failed to fight everyday towards success
they would not make it. Michael explained that Black males had to be warriors to be successful in U.S. society:

AA: Can you talk to me about you know, what it means to be black...be a black male in America? Or just your thoughts on that?

MW: Being a black man you are going to struggle regardless... Yea if you aren’t a fighter, you aren’t a warrior, you aren’t gone to make it. It’s just how it goes.

AA: Why do you think that?

MW: It’s just harder on African American males. You got to be a warrior. You got to be or you won’t make it. That’s just how the world designed. That’s how society is set up for African American males.

As an alternative to professional occupations, where Black people were few, Michael felt that seriously playing sports provided an opening to prosperity. Michael had not seen many Black males working in other occupations outside of sports. He tried to comprehend what occupations Black males worked in outside of sports, but could only think of the President of the United States. According to Michael, there were many barriers in other occupations for Black men, but many more perceived opportunities for athletes:

AA: What about in sports? Black males in sports?

MW: We at the top... That’s something we do. Sports we at the top of that. That’s our craft. That’s, that’s our scapegoat. You talk about sports, each sport you gone know about African American males you know, being the top you know, or being the elite person at that sport.

Due to his feeling that Black males had limited opportunity to succeed in society, Michael believed that because he was good at basketball, playing the game professionally could put him in a position to be successful in life. Therefore, Michael’s goal was to first graduate from high school. Michael explained that Black males have struggled to graduate high school, so for him graduating high school and going to college would be an even greater one:

MW: Everything I try to like academically at least get everything over a C average. And just my thing is making it out of high school. That's a big struggle for African American
men this day in society. A lot of them don’t make it out of high school. So kind of graduating high school is a real big thing.

AA: What about socially, I mean okay so you say graduate, academically graduate high school. What about socially? Like after high school like what are your thoughts?

MW: After high school, going to college you know, that’s an even bigger thing you know. You know, that’s one of my goals, after high school be able to go to college.

He vowed to work hard in the classroom, in the gym and on himself. He believed that success would take some time but that he would be able to reach the goals that he set for himself. Michael had also planned to take the ACT. At the time of the interview, he had been taking ACT prep courses to help him prepare for the next time that he took the test. At the end of the school year, Michael planned on transferring from Calumet High School to attend another school the following year. He had not spoken to any of the teachers at the school he wanted to transfer to, but he had been in touch with the athletic coaches. After graduation, he discussed his plan of buying a mansion within the next five years. He expressed that playing basketball would provide him with the money to get his mansion and to earn the millions he desired:

AA: Okay. So where do you see yourself five years from now. Like what do you see yourself doing?

MW: Somewhere in a mansion. A millionaire. Something like that, yea. Five years from now, yea that’s me. That’s me.

AA: How do you earn those millions?

MW: Basketball.

Delvin Wright

Delvin viewed himself as a regular teenage boy who played basketball and enjoyed having a good time. He believed that people viewed him positively and as a happy person who wanted to put a smile on someone’s face. He also acknowledged that people knew him from various social media platforms as a basketball player. Unlike the other participants, Delvin believed that American society was not that difficult for a Black man. He thought that everyone had the ability
to construct their own experiences and be successful in society while being Black in America, and that each experience affected them differently. He expounded on the notion that he did not let people’s perception of him as a Black male affect his outlook on life:

AA: And can you talk to me about how you understand what it means to be black, a black male in America?

DW: Its kind of, I mean it’s not difficult but it’s just your own perception of it. I just think of it as being a regular black, African American as you say. I can go to other places and they’re probably looking me up and down, saying “why is he here” and stuff like that, but I just don’t pay attention to it.

Throughout his life, Delvin had always paid little attention to negative actions, ideas or words. While he believed that Black males could accomplish any goal, he admitted that most Black males he encountered in this Midwestern city played and enjoyed sports. And, because most Black males enjoyed sports, played sports, and saw many Black males play sports at the professional level, Delvin felt that it was natural for Black males to aspire to play professional sports.

![Figure 7.4: Black Male High School Student Athlete Aspirations](image)

Watching Black males play sports influenced Delvin. However, Delvin still intended to graduate high school and go to college. In college, Delvin wanted to play basketball and double major in communication and a sports-related field. Delvin also had social goals, which were tied
directly to his goal to be a college athlete. He planned to work hard toward these goals. After high school, he intended to find a job in Chicago or leave for school over the summer. At the time of the interview, Delvin did not know what school he was going to attend. When asked about his short and long-term plans he said:

DW: Well actually I was gone probably think about getting a summer job now? Time before school ends by that time I plan to have my school, so I will probably leave early (ok). Get out Chicago.

AA: What about five years from now?

DW: Five years from now, hopefully be on the next stage of professional basketball, or anywhere overseas here or wherever I play. If it can lead me to just basketball, but if I can’t play no more I would still be around the sport. Coaching, try to come back to the high school or something like that and try to find coaching, studying the game of basketball just to still have something to do with it.

Summary

Delvin and Michael dreamed of going to college and playing basketball. The difference between the Delvin and Michael’s goals could be examined through the lens of understanding the neighborhoods they grew up in. Delvin grew up in a middle-class neighborhood, while Michael grew up in an under-resourced neighborhood in which, according to Harris (1994) and Byrd and Chavous (2009), academic achievement and school completion was harder to attain, particularly when compared with more affluent communities that may have had more access to educational resources.

Although Delvin and Michael came from different types of neighborhoods, they witnessed a large number of Black players who were professional athletes (Lapchick, Clark, Frazier & Sarpy, 2011; Lapchick et al., 2011). On the other hand, they did not interact with or get to witness Black people who worked in other professional occupations, such as law or medicine because there were so few (U.S. Department of Labor, 2010). Witnessing a large
number of Black athletes but few Black people in professional occupations may have limited their perspectives on life and career opportunities for Black males in U.S. society, which in turn may have caused them to view sports participation as one of few avenues to success.

Academically and Athletically Motivated Black Male High School Student Athletes

Joseph considered himself to be an athletic, outgoing, and friendly person. Generally speaking, he believed that he was a good, mild mannered person. He didn’t get angry, due to some of his recent experiences. However, he believed that people had a different perception of who he was. He felt that people viewed him as a passive person who avoided conflict. He was very nonchalant and, instead of fighting other students, Joseph walked away from what he considered to be bad situations. Joseph was focused on his destination in life and did not want anyone or situation to interfere with his goals.

Although Joseph thought of himself as a nice person who mostly got along with everyone, he was aware of the obstacles that he believed he would still face as a young Black man. Joseph described that there were many negative perceptions that Black males had to overcome before they were able to reach their goals, but with hard work he believed those goals could be accomplished:

AA: Can you talk to me about how you understand what it means to be a Black male in America?

JS: It's tough because we got so many statistics going towards us. That like—we can't make it, we're supposed to be here, we're supposed to be in jail. We're not supposed to get where we’re from. But like, we got to work harder, twice as hard as anyone else so we can get to—like—bring ourselves up in our community and all our people around us. So that we can get to where we’re going.

Despite his perceptions of challenges that Black males face, Joseph had high aspirations for himself academically and socially. He vividly discussed how he wanted to pursue a career in
the National Basketball Association, but mentioned broadcasting as a potential backup plan if a
career in the NBA did not work out:

JS: My education will take me towards broadcasting which I’ll know what to do in future in basketball. If the NBA comes. I'm really not hoping for it but if it comes I'll do it, but it's not promised. So I'm just going to have a backup plan just in case.

Additionally, he highlighted how he wanted to attain as much as he could and learn as much as he could by expanding his vocabulary and learning from other people. Although he did not have a defined path to get there, he was determined to succeed. He also talked about how he wanted to prove to those who do not believe a Black male could be successful that they were wrong:

AA: What are some educational and social goals that you have?

JS: Social goals and educational—probably just to, just get as far as I can as like a human being, person being black. Because you have so many things going against you. Just probably to show people there’s something different—so. Educational I would probably want to—like— just show people like I can do this. I’m smarter than what you think I am. And socially, just like use the things that used and—like— learned in school. Like words and stuff, like start using that and my vocabulary as I go along.

Terry Smart

Terry, who went to the same school as Chase and was a classmate of Jerry’s, considered himself to be a great person in all areas of life. On the other hand, he knew that his friends perceived him as an arrogant person. He talked about how great he thought he was and how his friends believed he thought too highly of himself:

AA: And how do you identify yourself?

TS: Identify myself, I think I’m, well I consider myself great. I consider myself great in all aspects of life. Naw but to others I’m just cool, laid back, don’t cause no trouble and all my friends they just consider me as conceded as they—someone—call me. They tell me I’m, I think too highly of myself (mom: tell him your nickname), my nickname, well I call myself “Swag-dad.” I don’t know where I got it from. Just playing one day and stuck with it (what is it?) Swag-dad. **all laugh** I just stuck with it—but yea.
In addition to what people thought about his personality, he claimed that people felt that he was a smart person, athletic, and had strong Christian beliefs. Before games, he often led the team in prayer. He discussed how he would argue with people about God quite often due to his strong religious beliefs:

AA: So when you say they ask you to pray, they see you as more Christian, can you talk about that a little bit more?

TS: Yea like—I mean—just like if we—before every football practice and end of it, we always pray and I'll lead the prayer. Or track meets, I'll just get them together like “lets pray before this race” and pray before the meet. Then like if somebody say “they don’t believe in God”, I'll always argue about it, or something like that.

AA: Why is that?

TS: I don’t know; I just feel strongly. I just feel strongly about it or whatever. It’s just a subject that aggravates me I guess.

Like the other academically and athletically motivated participants, Terry perceived that Black males were unfairly targeted in the streets of Chicago. He expanded his thought on the subject by conceding that these experiences were a way of life and believing that U.S. society thought Black people were substandard human beings:

AA: Can you talk to me about how you understand what it means to be a black male in America?

TS: I mean living in Chicago, stereotype everything. Anytime a police see you I guarantee you, nine times out of ten a black man a get pulled over or searched before a white man, who could be doing way worse, or whatever. It’s just, its just how it is.

AA: And how does that, well not necessarily how does that make you feel, but what are your thoughts on that?

TS: Man of course I think it’s wrong but then again I think it’s just, it’s just life. So you already know you considered below standard to the world still—after. And so—just, and I don’t really say that—like—“I got to prove them wrong so I’mma do this”, naw its just regular life. I don’t take it into consideration—it’s just—it don’t really affect me. I mean if it happen to me yea I’d be like “man they just picking on me.” But I don’t really take it into deep thought because its just life. Ain’t really nothing you can do about it except do you, and hopefully it’ll change for the next generation.
Though Terry felt that Black males faced many issues in U.S. society, he believed that, with hard work, Black males could do anything they desired. Terry cited President Barack Obama as an example of Black success in U.S. society. On the other hand, he acknowledged that other people perceived that Black people were limited in their possibilities. However, he still believed that Black males could be successful at anything if they believe that they could be successful:

TS: I think we can be successful in every one. I mean we just got—had a black president for what, about to be eight years. So I mean that’s, what, considered the highest job in America. So I guess every job that’s possible, that’s how I see it. But others don’t think they way—I mean. Yea it’s a bunch of white people who run the world but I mean—Diddy don’t have no high job in society, but he successful and he understand every aspect of business. To be successful you just got to believe you can do it. And we got a black president so I don’t see what job you shouldn’t be able to get if you got black president.

As far as his own goals, Terry expected to be successful for the foreseeable future in his academic life and believed that he would graduate college, go out into the workforce and excel. Terry intended on majoring in marketing and earning at least a bachelor’s degree. In addition, he revealed that he was also very interested in working on his Ph.D.:

AA: And what do you intend to do after school?

TS: After high school, I intend—plan on going to Western Illinois for four and a half years to play football and further my education, four maybe five, however long it take. But right now I’m planning on getting a doctorate or nothing other than a bachelors. But yea, just planning on doing that if needed. The way society is I most likely would do it. But yea that’s all I plan on doing is attending college for four or five years.

AA: What do you mean the way society is?

TS: I mean like—at first, back then, I guess degrees wasn’t that important. Now degrees are getting more important—salaries and a getting jobs (yea). So now that everybody getting a bachelors or associates—I mean—bachelors and associates in the future probably don’t mean nothing. Everybody will probably be trying to get doctorates or master or something like that. So if I get a good job with what I got then I’ll just stay there—I mean—if I feel comfortable with it. But if not then I guess I’ll be in school for another couple years.
Jerry Cash

Jerry viewed himself as a young “African American” man who belonged outside of Chicago. He pointed to the violence in Chicago as the main reason for wanting to flee the city. He also discussed the apparent negative perception that people outside of Chicago have of the city and how the violence in Chicago and the perceptions of the city made him feel:

AA: How do you identify yourself?
JC: A young black African American just trying to make it out of Chicago.
AA: And what does that mean to you?
JC: It means a lot because it's a lot of stuff going on in Chicago and when we go out of town the people we play ask questions like is Chicago really how they say it is on TV and stuff. And I just think to myself like is Chicago really that bad? When I think about it it really isn't that bad just certain parts of Chicago, but everybody thinks it's everywhere. Like if you outside you got a chance of being shot as soon as you walk outside and that's what people really think about Chicago. And I don't think it's really like that.
AA: And how do you respond to the people who have the perception and talk with you so candidly, like the guy that asked you if Chicago is really that bad? Like what are some of the things that you say?
JC: I just tell them no it's not really like that, it depends on where you are you just have to be careful of the neighborhood that you go into, the people that you are with.

Furthermore, Jerry believed that a person’s first thought of him was that he was a Black male basketball player who was a nice person and attended Pace Mark High School. He felt good that people perceived him in this way. He especially felt good about being called nice because he felt that people from Chicago were often considered mean individuals:

AA: How might others identify you?
JC: Tall basketball player that goes to Morgan Park, African American, and a nice person.
AA: How do you feel about that?
JC: I feel pretty good because I believe being a nice person it means a lot because you don't meet too many nice people in Chicago or just around the world.
However, Jerry also shared that there were times when he did not think it was fair that people thought of him as a basketball player first (Hawkins, 2010). He felt good about playing basketball, but he sometimes felt marginalized:

AA: How do you feel about being identified as a basketball player?
JC: It's pretty good in some ways, like it's good in basketball gym or something but outside it's also good. Outside of basketball but then people just think that's all you good at just basketball. They don't think you're good at school. They probably just think you're all basketball no books.

AA: And what's your response to that?
JC: Just to try to prove them wrong to go to school, go to college and finish our college.

Moreover, as a Black male in American culture, Jerry understood that Black males were often perceived negatively. He thought that if something happened and a Black male was nearby, he would be blamed. So, to combat these negative perceptions, Jerry, at the advice of his mother, chose to embody a clean physical presence by not having tattoos below his elbow and not having braided hair. He felt that if he had visible tattoos, braided hair or locks, he would be perceived as a gang member. Despite the obstacles that Jerry believed Black males faced, he also believed that with hard work Black males could accomplish any goal they set their minds on. He believed that to reach a goal, Black males must be focused on the task at hand, and when adversity comes they must understand how to push forward. Jerry used his own words for motivation towards accomplishing his goals:

JC: Everywhere, anything, just work hard and put your mind to it. Just like I said just work hard and keep pushing and don't let anybody steer you wrong or tell you that you can't do it. Just push through adversity at all times.

Therefore, despite understanding the various obstacles that hindered Black male progress, he continued to work toward his goals. Jerry wanted to become a pediatrician. He understood that his journey would require a lot of work. Although he believed there would be times when he
would struggle, he was prepared to fight toward accomplishing this goal nonetheless. He talked about his goal and what was required to accomplish it. He further discussed his motivation for wanting to become a doctor:

AA: Can you describe your academic goals and social expectations?

JC: I want to be a pediatrician so I know it's a lot of work. It's going to be a lot of school so I believe that I can do it if I just stay focused on my goals and don't let anybody step in the way.

Before becoming a doctor, the first step would be to complete high school. After high school, he wanted to attend college and get his bachelor’s before heading to medical school. In addition to his goals of becoming a pediatrician, Jerry reluctantly talked about his desires to become a player in the NBA:

JC: The NBA it is my goal. At first it was the MLB because, I think from the age of 5 to 13, I was always playing baseball and I had a love for the game of baseball and I wanted to be in MLB. But once I got into high school I figured out that baseball just wasn't my love anymore and I found a new love for basketball. Ever since then I just really wanted to play in the NBA.

AA: So when you think about your goal, as being a pediatrician and your goal of participating in the NBA, how do you work towards both of these goals simultaneously?

JC: So if I'm fortunate enough to get drafted in any of the four years of my college career I could get to my degree so I can go to grad school. Have a pediatrician to fall back on if anything ever happened to me.

Corey Mitchell

Corey believed that he was a smart, athletic individual and a very motivated person. He believed in his abilities and that he would be successful. He had people who supported him and wanted him to succeed. Corey also thought that other people viewed him as smart and athletic as well. Additionally, he thought that people perceived him to be well organized and a good basketball player. Though admirable, his identity as a person did not supersede his desire to become successful. In addition to having a positive sense of self, Corey felt that, in U.S. society,
Black men should understand that the only people that will help them are themselves and their families:

CM: You got to depend on certain people. You got to, because you ain’t gone make it by depending on somebody else, so you got to try and do it by yourself and other people like your family and stuff to help you (ok).

AA: And what actions have you taken to put these beliefs or thoughts into motion?

CM: Seeing people not, seeing people—black people—black men not being successful. Some people got talent end up on the streets and stuff because they don’t got no father figure up in their life and stuff like that. They depending on other people (ok).

Corey’s idea of success was to get his family out of Chicago because there was so much going on in the city. He expressed that the violence in Chicago, some of which he experienced, was the primary concern for wanting his family to move away. To get out of Chicago, he set his goals to finish high school then go to college, get his bachelor’s degree, and earn a graduate degree in athletic training:

AA: And can you talk to me about some of the educational, social goals that you have?
CM: What you mean (that you set for yourself, that you want to achieve)? I want to (where do you want to be five years from now) out of Chicago in a big house.

AA: Why is it important to get out of Chicago?
CM: Because, I can’t, this violence isn’t what it is no more. What they’re doing now, its stupid.

To attain these goals, Corey focused on being a student athlete. His two main areas of focus were on sports and education. After high school, Corey planned on attending and playing basketball at a community college in the Pacific Northwest before going to a four-year college. He then hoped to find success on a professional basketball team. If this plan didn’t work out, his hope was to work with an NBA basketball team as an athletic trainer within the next five years:

AA: And what do you intend to do after high school?
CM: Go to college and I’m going to go to this community college first so it can help me get ready for the D1 level.

AA: How about where do you see yourself five years from now?

CM: Five years, working or playing for the NBA.

Summary

The experiences of athletically and academically motivated Black male high school student athletes influenced the identities of these student athletes in unique ways. These adolescents all believed they were athletic, smart, and friendly. Additionally, they believed people perceived them favorably, which according to Cunningham, Hurley, Foney, and Hayes (2002), had a strong impact on their academic success. Despite the poverty and violence in the neighborhoods that Corey and Terry lived in, they still participated in multiple recreational activities, and sports (Francois, Overstreet, & Cunningham, 2011). In addition to participating in recreational activities and sports, these students had strong parental support and guidance (Cunningham, Hurley, Foney, & Hayes, 2002), which had positive impacts on their identities, perceptions and aspirations. Overall, these students planned to play sports in college and to pursue their respective career goals, which is in opposition to previous findings that Black male athletes viewed playing sports as the only way toward success, overemphasized sports to the detriment of social and academic development, and only did the minimum school work necessary to still play their sport (Dawkins, Braddock, and Celaya, 2009; Edwards, 2000; Harrison, Harrison, & Moore, 2002).
CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I offer a general discussion of the participants in this study. Then, I discuss the contributions that this dissertation has made to educational research and theory and provide implications for research on Black male student athletes. I conclude by presenting recommendations for future research. The experiences, identities, perceptions and aspirations of these Black male high school student athletes are very important to the scholarly investigation of Black male athletes. It is my hope that this research examination offers insight into a largely neglected area of research—research on the experiences of Black male high school student athletes. In addition to investigating the experiences of Black males as high school student athletes, this research situates their experiences, identities, perceptions, and aspirations within the context of their neighborhoods; thereby, neighborhood and racial experiences became a central lens through which these Black male student athletes were examined.

Discussion

The four athletically and academically motivated Black male high school student athletes grew up within three different neighborhood types: low-income, working class, and middle-class. Regardless of neighborhood, they all experienced some form of violence, including seeing a person get shot, gang encounters, and fighting. However, they were all involved in activities or had a mentor throughout their life, which was a very important factor in helping to limit their exposure to violence and gang activity (Francois, Overstreet, & Cunningham, 2011; Cunningham, Hurley, Foney, & Hayes, 2002).
Although Terry lived in a violent section in a middle class neighborhood, he avoided violence in his neighborhood because he was born, grew up, and knew everyone in his neighborhood. At the same time, Terry learned from a mentor in his neighborhood how to play sports. He also learned in a schooling environment that was located in his neighborhood and nurtured his curiosity for education, which resulted in Terry and another student competing for the best grades in class.

Corey experienced much of the same violence that Terry experienced, but lived in an under-resourced neighborhood. He also had a very supportive family. Although his father and his mother separated, they both remained instrumental in his life. He spent time with his father during the week and spent time with his mother on weekends. Because Corey was exposed to life outside of basketball, Corey gained a strong understanding of both his athletic and academic potential. In school, teachers and other students revered and praised him for athletic performances on the basketball court, and despite societal perceptions of Black male athletes, he also received similar praise concerning his academic potential.

Unlike Terry and Corey, Jerry’s experience in his neighborhood was a pleasant one. Jerry felt welcome when his family moved to Pace Mark. Jerry was often greeted by his neighbors. He felt that they were nice people and was thrilled to live close to individuals he felt comfortable around. Having this experience showed Jerry that not all neighborhoods were violent in Chicago. With the help of this observation, he sought to use his status as a star basketball player to help people. Violence in Chicago motivated him to treat people kindly and encourage others to treat people kindly as well. On the other hand, he also cited the violence in Chicago as a reason that he wanted to leave the city. However, despite criticisms that people had about the violence in Chicago, Jerry always attempted to defend the city.
Unlike Jerry, Joseph grew up on a quiet block in a working-class neighborhood. Joseph developed strong relationships with the boys and girls who he met on the block. He also met older men who mentored him. They were very instrumental in his development (Francois, Overstreet, & Cunningham, 2011; Cunningham, Hurley, Foney, & Hayes, 2002). They considered themselves to be brothers and sisters and vowed to look after each other. Joseph’s friends and mentors helped him avoid trouble in his neighborhood and also protected him from harm.

The two Black male high school student athletes that exhibited motivation to be successful academically exhibited very different identities. While living in Hill West, Nick rarely socialized with other young males in his neighborhood and, for the most part, kept to himself. When he did socialize with other adolescents in his neighborhood, they played basketball outside or played video games indoors. He did, in fact, spend time bike riding with his stepfather’s wife. He also enjoyed moments when family came over to his house for holidays and social events. He carried the same mentality into school. Nick only actively fostered relationships with teachers because he felt that those were the only relationships that mattered.

Growing up in Pace Mark was pleasant for Chase. He and his friends played in the park, went to each other’s homes for parties and gatherings, and used public transpiration to go to the mall downtown. Although Chase socialized with everyone, he only spent time outside of school with his friends in the same IB classes. Chase also experienced little to no instances of violence.

Though Delvin and Michael were motivated to play professional basketball, their love for basketball developed in different ways. Michael grew up in an unstable neighborhood and household where violence and poverty were prevalent. He grew up with his mother and sister. Michael’s father was not present. His mother did not raise Michael in a structured environment
and he was often left unmonitored growing up. He eventually moved in with his brother who became his emotional rock. However, he never gained the social and academic foundation necessary to succeed academically.

Delvin grew up in a quiet, middle-class neighborhood with few incidents of violence. However, he rarely spent any time in his neighborhood. He recalled always being at the gym, playing basketball, or practicing for his AAU and high school basketball teams. When he was in his neighborhood he spent time playing pick-up football or basketball outside with his friends. He also spent some of his time in his neighborhood playing basketball at a nearby neighborhood facility.

Contributions to Theory and Implications for Black Males

Where someone lives impacts individual and group social and educational experiences (Briggs, 2005; Drake & Clayton, 1945; Dubois & Eaton, 1967; Morris & Monroe, 2009). Although four black male high school student athletes lived in a middle-class neighborhood, they had varying experiences. While Jerry and Terry were academically and athletically motivated, Chase was motivated academically and Delvin was motivated athletically. This revealed that living in a neighborhood that is perceived as more affluent may not always produce similar positive outcomes. In addition to having access to opportunity and resources, such opportunities and resources must also be taken advantage of by the residents who live in the neighborhoods. For example, academic study programs in one school was instrumental to one student, but was not utilized by another student who had access to the same resources. As a result, the student who did not take advantage of the resource did not excel academically.

On the contrary, although a neighborhood may be perceived as under-resourced, there is still a possibility for positive outcomes, which was demonstrated through the experiences and
identity development, perceptions, and aspirations of Corey. However, the GPAs from students indicated that participants who lived in the more affluent neighborhood performed better academically.

Furthermore, although the place a person lives influences their access to opportunities and certain resources, place alone was not enough to dictate how these Black male high school student athletes’ identities, perceptions and aspirations were developed. Additional factors, such as parental guidance and participation in activities and programs, also played a significant role. According to Jeynes (2007), parental involvement is defined as parental participation in the educational developments and experiences of a parent’s child or children. Participants who had parental guidance or participated in activities and programs did better academically than those who did not. Additionally, the Black male high school student athletes who excelled academically also performed better athletically than participants who had average or below average academic performances.

Although most of the Black male high school student athletes were exposed to activities and programs that developed their identities beyond athletics, general exposure to activities and programs did not yield interests in similar areas. More research is needed to better understand how activities and programs facilitate certain interests.

Overall, findings from this study demonstrate that Black male high school student athletes stand to benefit from being supported within their neighborhoods, receiving parental guidance, and participating in recreational activities and other developmental programs. Access and utilization in these areas may provide a space for them to succeed in whichever field they choose. To further promote academic and educational success among Black male high school student athletes: 1) parents, peers, coaches, and teachers should encourage and show young
Black male adolescents how to put as much energy into achieving academic and educational success as they do athletic success, and 2) society must value education with the same passion that it values athletic achievement, if society seeks to develop well-rounded individuals. In recent years, U.S. society has begun to understand the obstacles that Black males face. Policy initiatives such as My Brothers Keeper and the Young Men’s Initiative, along with many funding institutions such as the Knight Foundation, have implemented and continue to implement and fund programs that seek to improve life opportunities for Black males. These national and city initiatives and developmental programs within foundations have goals that are focused on supporting the educational and social development and success of Black males in U.S. society.

To further explain the process of understanding the social and educational development of these individuals, the “Black Males Who Play High School Sports” typology explores the neighborhoods these Black males grew up in and how their experiences in these neighborhoods influenced their identity and aspirations. Additionally, not only does this typology serve to provide an understanding of how neighborhood factors impact identities and goals, but how these identities and goals may shape college and life outcomes.

Below, the typology shows how their neighborhood experiences influenced their identities and goals. These students grew up in underserved, working class, and middle class neighborhoods; received parental guidance and participated in programs and activities; or received infrequent parental guidance and did not participate in programs and activities. Furthermore, each Black male student either participated in sports early (before high school) or late (during high school). Consequently, Black males formed academically and athletically motivated, academically motivated or athletically motivated identities. Corresponding with these identities, were aspirations that ranged from playing professional sports and having a career
beyond athletics to playing sports to develop friendships and having limited career interests beyond sports.

Figure 7.5: Black Males Who Play High School Sports Typology

As seen in the typology, Terry and Jerry, who lived in what was considered the middle class neighborhood, were the most successful athletically and academically. Success, in their cases, was defined as having the highest GPAs and also receiving athletic scholarships. However, the neighborhood that they lived in shaped but did not determine who they were, in this context. When Terry was very young, his mother placed him in an intellectually competitive environment where intelligence was expected and nurtured. Although Terry lived in a violent section of Pace Mark, he was able to avoid direct violent experiences because his mother knew most of the young people that perpetrated the violence. He was also mentored by a coach that helped him develop his athletic skills at a young age. Jerry, similar to Terry, played sports early. He participated in organized basketball and was always away at practice. Despite spending a lot of his time playing basketball, his mother required that he maintained his grades. Jerry was also exposed to a magnet school curriculum prior to going to high school. Additionally, he spent time volunteering, regularly visiting and serving at a food pantry.
Joseph, a basketball player who lived in what was considered the working class neighborhood, received strong parental guidance. While growing up, his mother made sure that he stayed away from dangerous situations, often by making sure he stayed on the block that he lived on. His mother was very protective. Similar to Jerry and Terry, he started playing sports at an early age. He also mentored youth, he would often tell them the importance of performing well academically. Despite his athletic involvement, he wanted a career in broadcasting and was involved in a number of broadcasting and technological organizations at Jacobs High School. He did not have as high of a GPA as Jerry and Terry, but according to his coaches, he had the skills that top basketball schools coveted.

Similar to Jerry, Terry and Joseph, Corey also participated in sports at an early age. Corey, who grew up in the undeserved neighborhood of Lemont Nance, had experienced violence in his neighborhood, but often avoided it because of the diligence of his father. His father made sure he was heavily involved in recreational activities. Corey swam and participated in other recreation sports, programs and activities. He started playing basketball at a young age and had interest from junior colleges. In the classroom, teachers believed he was smart and that he had the potential to be successful academically. These were the students who were classified as academically and athletically motivated Black males who played high school sports. These Black males also had goals of playing professional sports and having a career beyond athletics.

In the typology, Chase and Nick were academically motivated. These two students had parents who were very influential in their lives, and they participated in recreational activities and programs beyond athletics. Chase’s mother moved to the Pace Mark neighborhood so that Chase would have better access to quality schools. Nick’s father, the only parent in this study to receive an undergraduate and advanced degree from college, instilled in Nick the importance of
hard work. While Chase participated in Kung Fu, Nick participated in theatre, played chess and was involved in other activities and programs. However, unlike the Black males who were academically and athletically motivated, Chase and Nick did not participate in sports until high school. Due to their focus academically and developing athletically at a later point in life, they were classified as academically motivated Black male high school student athletes. Chase and Nick competed academically, but used sport participation to develop their social skills and friendships. These students did not plan to play their sport after high school. Instead, they had plans that focused on academic success, which included going to college, graduating from undergraduate school, and earning advanced degrees and jobs.

On the other side of the typology were Black male student athletes who received infrequent guidance from their parents and did not participate in activities or programs beyond sports. This study showed that whether these Black males participated in sports at an early age or at a later time in their lives, it did not affect their identity. These Black males were classified as athletically motivated. These student athletes wanted to play professional sports and did not have any goals beyond athletic participation.

Prior to living with both parents, Delvin lived with his mother for twelve years. His mother believed that the absence of a father figure negatively impacted his development. In early adolescence, Delvin played AAU basketball, and despite low grades, he was still able to play on his team. Similarly, in high school, despite low grades, he continued to play basketball and rarely participated in activities. While those who were academically motivated and athletically and academically motivated desired careers beyond athletics, Delvin, an athletically motivated Black male, did not desire a career beyond professional basketball. Likewise, Michael who was also an athletically motivated Black male who played sports, had no clear goals beyond athletics.
Michael wanted to play professional sports and believed that because he was good at basketball, he should focus his entire development on playing professionally. Michael lived with his mother early in his life, but eventually moved in with his brother due to the strained relationship he had with his mother. While living with his mother, Michael had little home structure. He spent a lot of time loitering in the streets. When he moved with his brother, he had more structure and lived two blocks from school. Outside of basketball, he did not participate in any activities. He did not play sports early in his life like Delvin. Michael started playing in high school.

These Black male high school students who played sports were either motivated academically, athletically or academically and athletically. Parental guidance, participation in activities and programs beyond sports, and the time they started playing sports were key indicators to understanding these Black male high school student athlete’s identities, perceptions and aspirations. Additionally, these indicators help to solidify that Black males who play sports have identities that extend beyond the monolithic view that Black males are intellectually inferior but athletically superior.

Furthermore, this notion that Black males should place much of their energy on playing sports is a limited perspective that has been highlighted within the literature of Black male athletes. This view is pervasive in U.S. society, within segments of the Black community, particularly those who are poor and view athletics as the primary way to social mobility, and among some parents of Black male athletes, some coaches, and among some high school and collegiate institutions. This perception of Black males who play sports has caused much damage to how those who play sports are viewed and how they view themselves. Black males who play sports are viewed as intellectually inferior, but athletically superior. They are seen as athletically developed individuals who are underdeveloped socially, culturally and academically.
Furthermore, they are thought to believe that sports participation is the only way to recognition and success in U.S. society. These beliefs about Black males who play sports are being held during a time when there are disproportionate numbers of Black males who play professional football and basketball and a large majority of top football conferences, which are mostly white, have mostly Black players on their football and basketball teams. Furthermore, the media depict, through film and literature, that Black males are athletes that are meant to entertain. Rarely are they seen as doctors, attorneys, professors, or other respected professions. These perceptions and realities of the Black male identity have been damaging and have shaped the view of Black males that has contributed to the idea that they are valued when their bodies are being used to run, jump, and tackle. Consequently, some Black males have adopted these identities by focusing on developing athletic skills, which has had a detrimental effect on their social and educational development.

Confronting these perceptions of how Black males and Black male athletes are perceived, this research study shows that Black males who play sports have identities and aspirations that challenge the stereotypical beliefs held for Black males who play sports. The Black males who were motivated 1) academically or 2) academically and athletically enjoyed participating in sports to make friends and wanted to use their athletic talent to pay for college and earn a degree. They wanted to become medical doctors and doctors of philosophy. These Black males also discussed the importance of giving back to their families, which some students had discussed as important because of the support their family had for their development.

Chase’s mother, with the feedback of school officials, wanted Chase to experience a more advanced classroom curriculum. In order to provide this opportunity, his mother moved to the Pace Mark neighborhood because she felt that Chase would have better access to quality
schooling. Similarly, Nykel, who was motivated academically, repeatedly discussed with his father that hard work is necessary to be successful in American society. As a result, he believed that talking to his classmates was a waste of time and a distraction that could stand in the way of his academic goals. Terry and Joseph, two academically and athletically motivated black males who played sports, experienced forms of violence in their neighborhood. However, they were able to avoid multiple violent circumstances because their mothers made sure they were safe. In Joseph’s case, his mother restricted him from leaving his block, which he said “kept him from being a different person.” In Terry’s case, because his mother knew many of the gang members and people who committed violent acts since they were children, he was not met with violence. While Corey’s father made sure that Corey was heavily involved in recreational activities, Jerry’s mother demanded particular GPA standards in order for Jerry to play sports. Academically and academically and athletically motivated Black male athletes’ experiences with parental guidance helped them confront the societal perceptions of Black males, which included the fact that they were superior athletes but intellectually inferior.

However, for Black males who were athletically motivated, their experience with parental guidance did not prove to be as strong a force against these perceptions. The Black males who were motivated athletically had parents who were not involved in their educational and social development and did not have particular academic standards. This led to Black male students who were underdeveloped academically due to their focus on athletic development. Twice, after basketball games, Delvin forgot that he had to take the ACT. As a result, he scored a 16 on the test, which was below the state and district averages. Combined with his 2.48 GPA, his test results caused him to be deemed academically ineligible to play college basketball. In Michael’s case, because his mother was not his legal guardian, she was not instrumental in his
educational and social development. Michael’s brother, Tonker, filled that role as his legal guardian. Tonker primarily provided emotional support which Michael really needed. Michael also needed academic support, but his academic struggles often left him blaming other students for not wanting to learn and his teachers for not teaching due to students being disruptive. This resulted in below standard grades for Michael and, as a result, he felt he could escape by focusing on playing good basketball. Although this study highlights the role of parental guidance for Black males who play sports, further investigation is needed to develop a better understanding of the role of parental guidance for Black males who play sports.

Furthermore, despite the notion that Black males should place much of their energy on playing sports, students who were motivated to do well academically and athletically in this study were as engaged and active in the classroom as they were engaged and active on the football field. Their academic and athletic achievements were indicated by their strong GPAs and potential as Division one athletes with scholarship offers. These findings indicate the varied spaces and identities that Black males were capable of engaging. However, for those that attend PWIs, others’ perceptions of their capabilities and the spaces that they can occupy may be limited, due to future their status as Black male collegiate athletes.

Access to resources influenced the experiences and, consequently, the outcomes of these high school student athletes. While Jerry had access to a structured study program for athletes at his school, Michael often experienced a negative learning environment, which negatively influenced his academic experiences in school. This juxtaposition highlights how social class differences may influence access to resources and, as a result, influence the lives of Black males in positive and negative ways.

Additionally, most of the Black athletes were aware of the structural obstacles they faced
as Black men. However, similar to the Brothers, they believed that success was dependent on hard work and the ability to properly navigate social structures in U.S. society (MacLeod, 1987). Participants who felt this way were the individuals who were academically motivated and academically and athletically motivated. The individuals who were athletically motivated believed that Black males did not have any real obstacles and that there were very few pathways for Black people to be successful in U.S. society. The perceptions of athletically motivated student athletes may have been due to the limited exposure to Black male participation in other areas beyond sports, which was a result of not participating in programs and activities outside the realm of athletics. It is also interesting to note that student athletes are taught to push forward in the face of adversity. Thus, the belief held by academically motivated student athletes and academically and athletically motivated student athletes that hard work can overcome any obstacles may have been cultivated.

Recommendations for Future Research

This analysis of Black male high school student athletes provides another way to investigate the lives of Black male high school student athletes by specifically situating their experiences, identities, perceptions and aspirations within a neighborhood and schooling context. This model for research could be used in multiple regions to uncover the similarities and differences within the experiences of Black male athletes and their identities, perceptions, and aspirations, which could be critiqued through a cross-regional analysis promoting a better understanding of the nuanced variations that Black males exhibit in various regional spaces.

Additionally, after identifying three classifications of Black male high school student athletes and the characteristics that are aligned with each category, this research study can be extended by using quantitative research methods to better determine social and educational
behaviors that may cause a child to overemphasize sports or academics to the detriment of academic or social development. This method can also be used with earlier age groups regionally to assess differences and similarities across and between regions.

Conclusion

The lived experiences of Arthur Agee and William Gates started out as a dream to get away from the streets of their Chicago neighborhoods by one day playing in the NBA. Their dedication to basketball led William Gates, who was once proclaimed to be the next Isaiah Thomas, to earn an athletic scholarship to play at Marquette University. Though Arthur Agee had more high school team success than William Gates, he did not garner as much individual interest from major basketball programs, and instead attended a junior college for two years. Like so many talented Black male high school basketball players before them, Arthur and William never made it to the NBA. Although their journeys led them to play basketball at the collegiate level, they did not develop the skills necessary to compete in the ever-changing U.S. economy. Instead, after their playing days were over, either because of injury, skill, or age, Arthur Agee and William Gates were forced to take on odd jobs and seek ways to capitalize on the success of the movie Hoop Dreams, while the writers of the iconic film benefited more from the athletic abilities of William Gates and Arthur Agee more than the athletes themselves.

Now, instead of a story of triumph, Hoop Dreams can be used as an illustration of the exploitation of the Black body and some of the symptoms of living in a society that overemphasizes sports. In spite of this disheartening narrative, this research has shown that the experiences of Black male high school student athletes go beyond those depicted in Hoop Dreams. The identities, perceptions, and aspirations examined in this study were nurtured and developed over time. Therefore, educators of Black males must value their intellectual potential
in the same way that society values their Black bodies and athletic ability if we are to see a change in the way that Black males pursue success in U.S. society.
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Appendix A
Principal Permission to Conduct Observations in Schools

Dear Principal,

My name is Adeoye Adeyemo and I am a PhD. student with the Social Foundations of Education, at the University of Georgia. I would like to conduct observations in your school for my research study titled, “Black male experiences: The influence of neighborhoods on Black males who participate in high school sports”. This project is conducted under the direction of Dr. Jerome Morris in the school of Education.

For this study, I would like to observe the experiences of six Black male student athletes in your school. The purpose of these observations is to examine the experiences of Black males who play high school sports in their schools. I would like to come to your school in the morning and stay until the school day has commenced. I would also like to observe after school activities that these Black males participate in.

This study may benefit society by helping individuals understand the experiences of Black males in their schools. Information from this study can also show how Black males who play sports navigate their school settings. Participation in this study is voluntary. The research is not intended to cause any harm or get in the way of schooling activities. However, if I am a distraction, please let me know.

I will take notes while observing the participants of the study. The notes that are taken from the observation will be saved on a computer that is only accessible to me by password. Anything that can directly identify the participants, teachers, and school administrators will be kept confidential. This study will be used for a dissertation, but all identifiers will be kept confidential to provide protection to the participants involved in the study. If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact me at (217) 390-0956. Thank you very much for your help.

Sincerely,

Adeoye Adeyemo

I understand the study procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to take part in this study and to allow my son to take part as well. I have been given a copy of this form to keep.

Name of Researcher ___________________ Signature ___________________ Date ______________

Email ______________________________

Name of Principal ___________________ Signature ___________________ Date ______________

Please sign both copies, keep one copy and return one to the researcher.

Additional questions or problems regarding you and your child’s rights as a research participant should be addressed to The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 629 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-0001; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu
Appendix B
Parental Permission and Consent Form

Dear parent(s)/guardian,

My name is Adeoye Adeyemo and I am a PhD. student with Social Foundations of Education, at the University of Georgia. I would like to invite your son to participate in my research project titled, “Black male experiences: The influence of neighborhoods on Black males who participate in high school sports”. This project is conducted under the direction of Dr. Jerome Morris in school Education.

For this study, I would like to interview your son. I am willing to conduct these interviews after school at your home or somewhere else that is convenient. The purposes of these interviews are to examine your son about his experiences in his community and how it may have shaped his perceptions and aspirations. The interview should last one and a half hours. You can attend your son’s interview if you and/or your son wish/es.

Additionally, this study may benefit society by helping individuals understand the role that neighborhood shave in impacting the experiences of Black males, and how the experiences of Black males may shape their perceptions aspirations and identity. Participation in this study is voluntary. The research is not intended to cause any harm, but if you or your son feel uncomfortable because of any questions, particularly those related to race and poverty, you are free to skip the question or withdraw from the study at any time. If your son withdraw/s or refuse/s to participate in the study, there will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which your son are otherwise entitled. If, during the interview process your son withdraw/s from the study, all markers that identify you or your son as a participant will be removed, regardless of when you withdraw.

I will audio record our interviews. After the recording, the interview will be uploaded on a computer that is only accessible to me by password. I will erase the interview from the audio recorder after the upload is complete. The interview will be deleted from the computer one year after the interview. Prior to the end of the first year, I may follow-up with you, by calling you directly. Anything that can identify your son as a participant or your individual responses during the interview will be kept confidential unless otherwise required by law. An example of when the interview cannot be kept confidential is in the case of child abuse. If any child abuse is discovered, I will have to report to the appropriate law enforcement authorities. This study will be used for a pilot study and dissertation, but all identifiers will be kept confidential to provide protection to the participants involved in the study. If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact me at (217) 390-0956. Hope you will enjoy this opportunity to share your experiences and viewpoints with me. Thank you very much for your help.

Sincerely,

Adeoye Adeyemo

I understand the study procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to take part in this study and to allow my son to take part as well. I have been given a copy of this form to keep.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Researcher</th>
<th>Signature</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Parent(s)/guardian</th>
<th>Signature</th>
<th>Name of son</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Please sign both copies, keep one copy and return one to the researcher.

Additional questions or problems regarding you and your child’s rights as a research participant should be addressed to The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 629 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-0001; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu
Appendix C
Assent and Consent Form

Dear Participant,

My name is Adeoye Adeyemo and I am a PhD. student with Social Foundations of Education, at the University of Georgia. I would like to invite you to participate in my research project titled, “Black male experiences: The influence of neighborhoods on Black males who participate in high school sports”. This project is conducted under the direction of Dr. Jerome Morris in school Education.

For this study, I would like to interview you separately. I am willing to conduct these interviews after school at your home or somewhere else that is convenient. The purposes of these interviews are to examine your experiences in this neighborhood and how it may have shaped your perceptions and aspirations. The interview should last one and a half hours. You parent/guardian can attend your interview if you wish.

Additionally, this study may benefit society by helping individuals understand how the experiences of Black males may shape their perceptions aspirations and identity. Participation in this study is voluntary. The research is not intended to cause any harm, but if you feel uncomfortable because of any questions, particularly those related to race and poverty, you are free to skip the question or withdraw from the study at any time. If you withdraw or refuse to participate in the study, there will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you or your son are otherwise entitled. If, during the interview process you withdraw from the study, all markers that identify you or your son as a participant will be removed, regardless of when you withdraw.

I will audio record our interviews. After the recording, the interview will be uploaded on a computer that is only accessible to me by password. I will erase the interview from the audio recorder after the upload is complete. The interview will be deleted from the computer one year after the interview. Prior to the end of the first year, I may follow-up with you, by calling you directly if you are, at the beginning of our interview, at least 18, or I will contact your parent(s)/guardian if you are under the age of 18.

Anything that can identify you or your parent(s)/guardian as participants or your individual responses during the interview will be kept confidential unless otherwise required by law. An example of when the interview cannot be kept confidential is in the case of child abuse. If any child abuse is discovered, I will have to report to the appropriate law enforcement authorities. This study will be used for a pilot study and dissertation, but all identifiers will be kept confidential to provide protection to the participants involved in the study. If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact me at (217) 390-0956. Hope you will enjoy this opportunity to share your experiences and viewpoints with me. Thank you very much for your help.

Sincerely,
Adeoye Adeyemo

Social Foundations of Education & PhD. Student
adeyemo@uga.edu

I understand the project described above. My questions have been answered and I agree to participate in this project. I have received a copy of this form.

____________________  ______________________
Signature of the Participant/Date       Name of Participant

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 629 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu
Appendix D
Sample Interview Protocol for Black Males

Building Rapport
Tell me a little about yourself.
How many siblings do you have?
Do you live with both parents?
Do you work?

Neighborhood experiences
How long have you lived in this neighborhood?
How would you describe your neighborhood?
Tell me about your experiences in this neighborhood.
Have you lived anywhere else before you moved here? If yes can you talk to me about it?
How long have you lived here?
Can you talk about how this neighborhood may or may not have changed as you have grown up?
Can you talk with me about your experiences in the neighborhood?
Do you have friends who live in this neighborhood? If yes what do you all do in your free time?
Can you talk to me about the negative experiences in this neighborhood?
Can you talk to me about the positive experiences in this neighborhood?

Family experiences in neighborhood
Can you talk to me about your experiences with your family in this neighborhood?
Do you have interactions with other families?
School experiences in neighborhood

How do you get to school? How has this method of transportation affected your experiences before you get to school?

Can you talk to me about your experiences at school in your neighborhood?

Do you participate in any other activities outside of sports?

Can you talk to me about your interaction with other students in your school?

Have you had any issues in school around race, gender, status as an athlete?

Can you talk about your positive and/or negative experiences in school?

What time do you get home from school?

How may your neighborhood factor into your decision to take certain routes home? Or what time to come home?

Ethnic and racial identity

How do you identify yourself?

How might others identify you?

What is your idea of success?

Can you talk to me about how your beliefs on the topic of race?

Can you talk to me about how you understand what it means to be a Black male in America?

Are there situations that you have encountered in the neighborhood, school, or at home that resulted in race being an issue?

Can you talk to me about what occupations where you believe Black males could be successful in U.S. society?

ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL GOALS

Describe your academic and social expectations?

What are some of the educational and social goals you have?

How do you work towards these goals and expectations?

What do you intend to do after high school? Five years from now?