

UMOJA: A BROTHERHOOD TO EMPOWER YOUNG MEN OF COLOR

BY

KIMBERLY Y. MELGAR

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Approved by

Dr. Beth Rubin, Chair

Dr. Dan Battey, Committee

Dr. Wilfred H., Committee

New Brunswick, New Jersey

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Abstract

One of the prominent questions educational research has focused on has been, and continues to be, inequities in education as it pertains to the disparities in academic performance among different groups of students. Specific attention has been paid to male students of color and addressing the disparity in high school graduation rates because it can have long term economic and personal consequences that range from joblessness to incarceration. This paper explores the experiences of young men of color in the Bronx, NY, and the academic outcomes of participation in the Umoja leadership program. The Umoja program is an all-male Brotherhood that focuses on leadership development and communication throughout the summer and during the school year for 22 students in grades nine through twelve. Findings from this mixed methods case study document the many tensions and conflicting expectations students face as members of their community such as being targeted members within their community who are expected to “fail” while also being expected to carry the torch and meet high expectations. Other findings suggest that the program’s focus on leadership helps refine the leadership and communication skills many young Brothers already possessed. Additional quantitative findings show that Brothers in the program saw an average increase in grade point average (GPA) and credit accumulation (CA) every year that they were involved in the program, and highlights that the program has a 98% graduation rate. Through these findings the researcher makes recommendations for program revisions and further study.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to all the **Umoja Brothers**, past, present, and future. May your light continue to shine bright always, for you are true Kings and we look to you for examples of strength, resilience, endless love and laughter.

This dissertation is also dedicated to the memory of **Joseph Jimenez**. Our fallen King who reminded us to live in the moment and continues to drive the work that we do every day.

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CHAPTER 1: Problem Statement and Research Questions

Problem Statement

One of the prominent questions educational research has focused on has been and continues to be inequities in education. The 1984, A Nation at Risk report, jump started this work as schools across the country grappled with the headline “America's position in the world may once have been reasonably secure with only a few exceptionally well-trained men and women. It is no longer” (A Nation at Risk, 1984). Research has framed inequities as “achievement” gaps or more recently “opportunity” gaps, and tried to get to the core for why there are disparities in academic performance between different groups of students (The Schott Foundation, 2018). This disparities range from access to specific coursework, discipline and teacher quality. Examples of these disparities include statistics such as only 57% of black students having access to grade level and rigorous math and science coursework compared to 81 percent of Asian American students and 71% of white students, and even when access is granted Black and Hispanic students are underrepresented in these classes (Byrant, 2014). While being underrepresented in advanced coursework, black students are overrepresented in classes for students with disabilities and in grade retention. In fact “twelve percent (12%) of black students are retained in grade 9 — about double the rate that all students are retained (6%)” (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014). Another disparity that exists for black students in teacher quality and experience. According to the United States Department of Educations “four percent of African American students attend a school where more than 20 percent of teachers are in their first teaching year, as compared to only one percent of white students” (United States Department of Education, 2014b).

While the Black and white achievement gaps have been widely studied there has also been a focus on the achievement gaps between black and Hispanic male students and their peer counter parts and the data is alarming (Bohrnstedt, Kitmitto, Ogut, Sherman, and Chan, 2015). It is no secret that young men of color are in crisis in the United States as they continue to be “overrepresented on most indicators associated with risk and academic failure” (Fergus, Noguera, & Martin, 2014) while being underrepresented in the labor market (Wilmer & Bloom, 2014). Wilmer & Bloom (2014) note that the employment rates for Hispanic male teens stands at 24 percent while the employment rates for black male teens stands at 14 percent, and these rates do not get much better in early adulthood. In addition, high school graduation rates for young male students of color are lower than those of their White/Asian counterparts, and their incarceration rates are startlingly high, significantly higher than girls from the same ethnic and socio-economic groups. High school graduation is the number one indicator of success for young adults according to the Center for Child and Family Policy at Duke University, and yet only 68% of Black students who entered high school in 2011 graduated with a diploma four years later (Gifford, Evans, Berlin, & Bai, 2011), meaning that one third of this cohort had not earned a diploma, and were at a higher risk for dropping out.

It comes as no surprise, therefore, that there continues to be concern over the disparities in academic achievement and high school graduation of young men of color as compared to their white counterparts. According to the College Board, 12% of black male students and 22% of Latino male students in the United States drop out of high school compared to 7% of white male students. In NYC only 57.4% of black males and 57.2 of Latino males graduated from high school compared with white males, who graduated at a rate of 84.8 % in 2013 (Schott Foundation for Public Education). These numbers have consequences. Young men of color who

do not graduate from high school are four times more likely than college graduates to be jobless, 32% compared to 6%, and are 47 times more likely to be incarcerated. There are additional long term economic consequences as well. In a report by Cengage Learning, they find that adults who do not complete high school or obtain a GED “are more likely to be unemployed, have poor health, live in poverty, be on public assistance, and be single parents” (2014, p. 1). Additionally, high school graduates earned an average of \$9,245 more per year than students who did not hold a high school diploma (Employment Policy Foundation, 2002), and job growth for jobs requiring a college degree are expected to grow by 25% while job growth for non-diploma requiring jobs is expected to be 9% (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2003e). Wilmer and Bloom (2014) argue that this is especially true for young men of color, “who are less likely than young white men or older men to enroll in and complete post-secondary education” (p. 2) a statistic that has ballooned when you consider that the number of employment opportunities that once provided middle-class wages to young men without any post-secondary education continue to decline in this new knowledge- based economy and era. High school graduation seems to be the gateway to stability, whether it be employment or continued education. All of this highlights why there is such a focus on ensuring all students are graduating from high school.

Ensuring that students are obtaining a high school diploma is at the center of educational reform because it impacts the students, the communities they live in, and other government programs. A number of new educational reforms have changed how classrooms and schools across the country function, and many have tried to address the crisis impacting young men of color. In the last twenty years we have seen The No Child Left Behind Act, Race to the Top, the charter school movement, data-driven instruction, new teacher evaluations and accountability, a focus on culturally relevant teaching (CRT) and the implementation of the National Common

Core Standards proclaimed as the new “it” reform to address academic disparities in schools. Specific programs addressing academic disparities include targeted approaches for struggling young students of color such as the AVID program, Upward Bound, the Expanded Success Initiative (ESI) in NYC and external programs like the Scholars for Educational Opportunity Program (SEO), among others. These programs target students of color from impoverished neighborhoods and aim to “even the playing field”. Other program, like the Job Corps Program, aim to give students alternative routes to finishing their secondary education and get job training simultaneously. Most of these programs focus on academics and mentoring, but what about a program that focuses on leadership development and empowerment? This paper highlights the Umoja Leadership program, a program that like many others has the goal of helping young men graduate high school and enroll in a post-secondary program but instead of focusing on academics, i.e. tutoring, extra coursework, it places the focus on leadership development, communication training, and brotherhood.

For almost 10 years I worked at the Urban Assembly School for Applied Math and Science (AMS), a non-screen, public school in the NYC Department of Education serving over 600 students in grades six through twelve in the Bronx, New York. As an eighth grade middle school teacher, I had the privilege of teaching an average of 50 students per year and see seven different classes of young students continue onto the graduation stage before taking their first step onto college campuses across the country. But not all of my 350 students made it that far, I had also seen students not reach the graduation stage, and when I paid close attention to who those students were, most of them were black and Hispanic males. As a colleague and I reflected on this issue during the 2013 school year, we found that many of the students who were struggling to get across the graduation stage were students who, at one point, were in the eighth

grade Algebra 1 Honors class and had passed the required Regents Exam attached to that class, earning high school credit while still in middle school. This was an accomplishment, considering that only 58% of high school students passed the Algebra 1 regents exam in 2012 (NYC Department of Education, 2012). These were students who were capable of academic success, had proven academic success, and were on the track towards AP calculus and other honor's coursework. With such promise and academic success evident in eighth grade, what was happening to these young male students that "derailed" them from achieving a high school diploma? Why were students who were on track to graduate in middle school failing classes, struggling to acquire credits, and becoming truant in their first two years of high school?

AMS serves a heterogeneous and representative population of the school's neighborhood, in U.S. Congressional District Nine, which has the lowest per capita income in the United States. Graduation and dropout data across the across the country state that one should expect approximately five boys in our school to drop out each year (compared to the girls) and in district 9, that number is even higher, as the dropout rate sits at 11% (US Department of Education, 2017). The overall data and our own experiences served to inform my colleague Miss C and me that what we were seeing was "typical" across the nation and schools in our neighborhood. To try and address this problem, Miss C started a small mentoring group in 2013 that aimed to help a group of five 12th grade boys to graduate on time, with their cohort. These young men were in their fourth year of high school and were over a year behind in credit accumulation, putting them at risk to not graduate with their cohort and dropping out. Miss C met with the young men after school and on Saturdays and helped mediate conversations between the boys and their teachers to help them along with their classwork and provided 1:1 guidance to get them caught up with missed coursework or failed classes. Miss C was also

adamant that in order to keep working with her, the young men needed to be in school every day, as attendance is a key indicator of success (Balfanz & Byrne, 2012). By the end of August, four of the five young men had high school diplomas, and the last young man would earn his diploma a few years later. I watched Miss C work with these young men over the year and wanted to help, so together we came up with two key questions. The first was “could we take what she had done by herself and five young men and make it into a structured program?” and secondly “could we create something that served to empower our young male students and help them make sense of what was happening in their communities?”. That was the birth of *Umoja*, a boy’s leadership and brotherhood program whose goal was to replicate what Miss C was able to do with her “pilot” group and to go beyond graduation, to help these young men make meaning of their experiences and grow as whole individuals.

Umoja, Swahili for unity, is a targeted, research-based leadership and empowerment program designed to drastically change the narrative for a subset of underserved students. It is a brotherhood composed of young men from grades 9-12, who seem to share similar qualities. All of the young men have shown leadership skills, and have had previous academic success, but were currently underperforming (low credit accumulation or truant), and were willing to be a part of the program.

The purpose of this case study was to understand how Umoja, a leadership support program, assisted academically proficient but disengaged male students at the Urban Assembly School for Applied Math and Science to graduate high school with their cohort. Throughout this paper, academically proficient but disengaged students will be generally defined as high school students who showed academic achievement in middle school, including earning high school

credits in middle school, but who do not have enough credits to be considered “on grade,” or who have a high school absence rate.

In its first year, Umoja invited 20 young men and had 13 participants: five 12th grade, six 10th grade, and two 9th grade students. The overall attendance rates for the group improved from 89.6 % to 95.7% and for one specific senior from 77.6% to 100%. This is important, as Balfanz & Byrnes (2012) noted that there seems to be a strong relationship “between sixth-grade attendance and the percentage of students graduating on time or within a year of their expected high school graduation.” (p. 4) Absences of over 10% of schools days increases achievement gaps at all school levels, therefore getting these young men to school every day was the first step on the long road to a high school diploma (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). As this study uncovered, attendance was not the only indicator on which the Umoja program would have an impact. Specifically, this paper discusses the relationship between the length of time students were in the program and schools outcomes such as attendance, grade point average, and credit accumulation. Additionally, this study documented students’ thoughts and feelings about being young men of color in their communities, and in the program, and their journeys to becoming leaders while navigating conflicting expectations in order to gain a better understanding of their experience as members of their school and community.

Research Questions

The research questions this study aimed to answer were:

1. How do the boys taking part in the Umoja Leadership program describe their experiences as young men of color in their community?
2. According to participants, what supports are most effective in helping them to complete high school with their class?

3. What are the outcomes of participating in the Umoja Program for students and staff?
 - a. Is there a relationship between the participation in the program and attendance, including lateness, overall yearly grade point average (GPA), and credits accumulated (CA)?

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

To get a better understanding of what is happening to these young men when they leave middle school and enter high school, this literature review focuses on the disengagement of male students of color and on efforts being made to reengage these students. The review describes what we know about young male students in schools, and why young men of color in particular become disenfranchised with the school system and the interventions, pedagogies, and programs that schools have used to address these issues. While researchers have examined male student disengagement through various lenses, this literature review is organized around factors that lead to student disengagement, interventions at the classroom level (pedagogies), external intervention programs (outside of school supports) that target this population, and a look at programs that promote leadership such as sports teams. It concludes with a discussion of the strengths and limitations of the research base and a description of the after school and in school interventions that informed the creation of the Umoja program.

Why Do Students Disengage?

The research points to a variety of reasons for why young men of color disengage from their school communities. School culture, teacher perceptions of students along with the racial disparity between teachers and students, and family involvement in the school community can all have an impact on how students of colors, particularly male students of color interact with the school community.

School Culture

Some of the research on student disengagement focuses on the school culture, which speaks to the policies in place and the relationships students have within a school setting. As such, much of the research on school culture and its relationship to disengagement focuses on

school policies, perceptions students have of their teachers, perceived teacher perceptions, and feelings of belonging through self-reported surveys.

All schools are governed by a strict set of guidelines that students need to adhere to, and clear discipline policies to correct student behavior. Many of these policies target specific populations, and employ a one size fits all philosophy, and disproportionately impacts students of color (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Nichols, 2004; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). Reports from U.S. Department of Education and other research on school discipline policies state that zero tolerance policies are more likely to be implemented in predominantly African-American and Latino school districts (Harvard Civil Rights Project). In a 2012 study, Hoffman found that zero tolerance policies increased the number of expulsion rates and that this had the biggest impact on Black students over other students of any other race or ethnicity (Hoffman, 2012). Schollenberger (2015) notes in their study that 30% of black male students are suspended each year and according to a 2016 publication by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the disparities in suspension rates in 2012 for male students of color was quoted as follows, “percentage of Black male students who had ever been suspended from school (48.3 percent) was more than twice the percentage of Hispanic (22.6 percent), White (21.4 percent), and Asian/ Pacific Islander (11.2 percent) male students who had ever been suspended” (NCES, 2016).

These zero-tolerance policies lead to high suspension and expulsion rates (Gonsoulin, Zablocki, & Leone, 2012; Teasley, 2014) of young male students of color and keep young black men out of schools and out of classrooms which often leaves them unsupervised and without constructive activities in place of school (American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on School Health). This can lead to academic struggles due to inadequate schooling alternatives for

suspended students and missed instructional time which contributes to their academic struggles and continues to alienate them from the school community. This alienation can lead to students becoming disengaged and distrusting of their school community and developing negative feelings towards school culture (Shollenberger, 2015). These negative feelings towards school culture are a result of being pushed out of school for minor infractions, not being a part of the school community and “becoming disconnected from the positive systems, institutions, and pathways designed to help people achieve success” (Wilmer & Bloom, 2014, p. iii). This lack of belonging to a school community forces young men to find belonging elsewhere, and takes these young men out of the school community altogether. “If you are kicking me out then you must not want me” can be something these students feel as they interact with their school culture, and other cultures within their communities. The school policies that were meant to protect students and create safe spaces, criminalize small school infractions, pushes kids out, and created spaces where students do not feel safe or wanted. Noguera (2004) argues that without an education many of these young men struggle and end up in the juvenile detention system, contributing to the school to prison pipeline crisis.

In addition to discipline policies, there are other aspects of school culture that are important to the student experience. Students, like teachers and administrators, want to belong to a strong school culture that fosters belonging and academics, in an environment that engages and interests them. A Gates Foundation (2006) survey found that students favored increasing supervision and classroom discipline, and felt their schools did not do enough to help students feel safe from violence, make school interesting, or help them feel included. Similarly, Fergus, Noguera, & Martin, (2014) found that students rarely felt like there was someone who cared about whether or not they were even coming to school. Being a part of a positive school

community and learning about topics that students can relate to seem to be a predictor of school engagement and success. The Gates Foundation research study involving 500 students who had dropped out of school reported the following: 47% thought their classes were not interesting; 33% reported not having at least one teacher or school employee who cared about their success; 43% reported not having someone in school to discuss academic or school problems with, and 57% reported not having someone in school to discuss personal problems with (Bridgeland et al, 2006). This report highlights a few key ideas; firstly students have a need to relate to what they are learning, and have classes that interest them. More importantly was the value of forming relationships in schools between students and the school community to help students deal with academic and personal problems so that they feel connected to the school community and want to stay in school.

Teacher Perception and Racial Disparity

Within a school community, teachers play a huge role in not only educating their students, but in contributing to the school's culture. It is no secret that the majority of teachers in schools across the US are white females, despite the diversity that exists amongst the student populations across the country, and that this has implications for students and teachers who teach across many lines of difference. According to the Center for Progress (2014) "students of color made up more than 40 percent of the school-age population. In contrast, teachers of color were only 17 percent of the teaching force" (Boser, 2014). What roles does the racial disparity between teachers and students play in student outcomes and how does it impact feeling about school culture?

Cultural differences and perceived notions about other cultures can have a deep impact on how teachers perceive their students and their students' backgrounds, when you consider the

implicit biases teachers are bringing into the classroom. In a Kirwan Institute report states that the “cultural mismatch between teachers and students can activate teachers’ implicit racial biases in ways that contribute to discipline disparities and that these pervasive societal implicit associations surrounding Blackness (e.g., being dangerous, criminal, or aggressive) can impact perceptions of Black students in ways that affect the discipline they receive” (p. 2). Implicit bias is one way that teacher perception is impacted, and color blindness is another. In a multisite case study, McCoy, Winkle-Wagner, & Luedeke (2014) “revealed that White faculty members often engage with students from a “colorblind perspective,” allowing faculty members to use race-neutral, colorblind language and describing their students as academically inferior, less prepared, and less interested in pursuing research and graduate studies while potentially ignoring structural causes” (p. 225). Based on race, the faculty at these institutions made generalizations about the students’ academic abilities and work ethic that impacted how they treated these students and which can have lasting effects on student confidence, self-efficacy and even the perceptions of their ability to succeed (McCoy, Winkle, Wagner, & Luedeke, 2014). Many male students of color lack confidence in the classroom or lack what Whiting (2009) calls “the scholar identity.” Whiting describes the “scholar identity as one in which individuals view themselves as academicians, as studious competent and intelligent” (p. 55). Whiting argues that educators are responsible for helping young men develop this part of their identity in order to help these young men feel competent and successful in the classroom. In order to do this, educators must see their students as competent and address these implicit biases.

Along with a lack of scholarly identity, students of color face lower expectations and a lowering of standards that can come from preconceived notions of ability based on student demographics. This is evidenced in the overrepresentation of students of color in special

education classes and cases of exclusionary discipline (Fenning and Rose, 2007; Artiles et al, 2002) in addition to student perceived differential treatment based on race (Brittian & Gray, 2014). Lunenberg (2000) argues that there is differential treatment, as perceived by students in classrooms, that can be harmful for students, can lower expectations and disengage the learner. These behaviors include fewer opportunities to speak in class or learn new content as well as less praise and feedback, all which serve to keep students engaged in the classroom.

Differential treatment does not just have an immediate impact on students, there is evidence of long term effects. In their longitudinal study of 32 middle schools on the east coast, Brittian & Gray (2014) were examining the impact of perceived differences in treatment by teachers on students' self-concept. Brittian & Gray (2014) found that African American students who reported higher levels of differential treatment also reported lower academic self-concept in 8th grade and upon further study, these experiences were predictors of lower academic self-concept four years later in 11th grade. These outcomes are supported by a study conducted by Tyler & Boelter (2008) who measured teacher practices, student engagement and academic efficacy of 262 Black students from randomly selected middle schools in the Southeastern United States. The authors in this study noted that much of the research focuses on whether teacher perceptions have an impact on student outcomes but few have studied how these perceptions impact students. Tyler & Boelter (2008) focused on engagement and efficacy found that "perceived teacher expectations emerged as a significant predictor of students' academic efficacy and academic engagement" (p. 27).

Together, the research in this area would suggest that teachers can change the way young men of color see themselves in the classroom and impact the young men's ability to see themselves as successful members of a school community by ensuring that they hold all students,

including young men of color, to high standards and expectations. This means teachers have to be reflective and transparent about differences in expectations that they have for different groups of students, monitor their implicit biases towards specific groups of students, understand the cultural backgrounds of their students, and continue to understand the impact of teaching across lines of difference.

Family Disengagement

While the previous research has focused on what is happening in schools, it is important to discuss the important role that family plays on student engagement in school. Parental involvement, defined as being an active member of a school community by engaging in school activities, child advocacy, and communication with teachers and school officials, in a child's school community has been associated with high levels of student achievement and continued engagement in the school community (Ouimette, Feldman, & Tung, 2004). Qualitative research on parent involvement has used parent interviews and observations to document not only levels of parent involvement and potential impact, but reasons for lack of involvement in a child's school community, while quantitative research focused on parental involvements impact on grade point averages and standardized test scores. In a meta-analysis of 26 studies Jeynes (2003) found statistically significant data to support that parental involvement had a positive impact on overall GPA and standardized test scores. In a subsequent meta-analysis of 56 studies, Jeynes (2007) further supported previous findings that parental involvement in a significant contributor to academic success. Jeynes (2007) also noted that the impact of parent involvement for "minority" students was more significant than their white counterparts. Despite the positive association parent engagement can have, in many communities with high populations of students of color and low-income students, schools report having difficulties with getting parents

involved in the school community. The research cites many reasons for this lack of parent involvement such as not feeling welcomed in the school community, conflicting work schedules with school events, misunderstandings about what parents feel is appropriate participation in the school community, and their own negative feelings or experiences with a school community (Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Sheely-Moore & Bratton, 2010; Moles, 1993; Hoover-Demsey and O'Connor, 2002). In some communities, parents lack the proper education to understand “which parental behaviors lend themselves to providing true academic support as well as how to be an effective advocate for their child in an educational setting that does not seem welcoming” (Bradbury & Bradbury-Bailey 2010). Negative parental feelings or attitudes towards a school community can impact how a child feels about their school community in addition to lacking parental advocacy when it comes to discipline and curricular decision schools make for students.

Interventions

Schools, as a whole, play an important role in the success of all students, but any educator will tell you that where one can make the most impact is in the classroom. Here is where students are learning and this is where they begin disengaging from the content they are learning and the school community as a whole by skipping class or school altogether, failing to complete schoolwork, or engaging in activities outside of the rules within the school. But what makes students reengage in the school community, stay engaged, and succeed? There have been a number of attempts at addressing the disengagement of young men of color in schools. Schools have started to work on building strong teacher and student relationships, implemented culturally relevant teaching practices and employed mentoring programs. Outside of the school, organizations have implemented comprehensive programs that address academic and social needs of students underserved in their current school communities.

Building Student and Teacher Relationships

It has become evident that addressing how students are seen in the classroom is an important step towards strengthening student connections with teachers, and the school community. Addressing how teachers see students will help foster relationships because when students believe their teachers care about them as people they tend to work harder and perform better (Lunenber, 2000; Howard, 2001; Whiting, 2009; Bridgeland et al, 2006). Much of the research on student and teacher relationships is qualitative in nature and aims to define what positive relationships are and how these relationships change a student's school experience.

Reichert and Hawley (2013) state, "positive relationships should come first in efforts to improve boys' learning and engagement with schools" (p. 49). In their study of narrative submitted by over 1200 boys and 1100 teachers from 35 schools across six countries, Reichart & Hawley (2013) found that positive and successful relationships not only helped students feel more confident about their abilities when anxious about poor performance but also had the power to "dissolve" considerable levels of resistance from male students. Examples of positive interactions included responding to and sharing in student's personal interests, interacting outside of the classroom, holding students to high standards, and having conversations that let students feel adults in their schools cared about their wellbeing. Positive interactions in schools help students to feel better about school, sustaining engagement in their schooling thus addressing many of the issues found in Bridgeland's (2006) study. Based on a review of the literature, Lunenberg (2000) outlines three key ways in which teachers can foster relationships with their students: by establishing a mentoring relationship, creating small communities of support within the classroom, and by making a commitment to all students in their classroom. This outline aligns with Reichart & Hawley (2013) examples of positive interactions, where teachers make a

commitment to all students by holding all students to high expectations and create small communities of support through interactions outside of the classroom. In addition, teachers who showed concern for student's personal lives created an environment where students felt compelled to increase their efforts in schools, and a lack of these relationships can lead to the disenfranchisement we see in schools today.

Culturally Relevant Teaching

Culturally relevant teaching (CRT) is a very complex idea that is not only difficult to define but also difficult to implement in classrooms today despite the increased diversity found in schools. In her book, Ladson-Billings (1994) defined culturally relevant education as “a framework that recognizes the importance of including students’ cultural references in all aspects of learning” (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Ladson-Billings highlighted 8 principles for effective CRT: communication of high expectations for all students, active teaching methods, practitioner as facilitator such that the teacher is facilitator of knowledge produced by the students, inclusion of culturally and linguistically diverse students through the use of different texts and inclusion of examples specific to different cultures, cultural sensitivity, reshaping the curriculum or delivery of services to better serve diverse student needs and acknowledge cultural differences when it comes to obtaining new knowledge, student-controlled discourse where students are a part creating the knowledge base in the classroom, and small group instruction (Ladson-Billings, 2004). In line with Ladson-Billings definition of culturally relevant education (CRE) and CRT, the National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems (NCCRESt) described CRT as an educational experience that helps students have a sense of belonging while empowering students to be “free” thinkers and have fun while learning (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011). In connecting classroom content to a student’s culture and experiences, CRT aims to help students

want to learn and want to stay in school, thus increasing school engagement. As such, qualitative inquiry on CRT has focused primarily on why CRT is important and student and teachers' perceptions of CRT (Phutong, 2008; Howard, 2001a; Howard, 2011; Young 2010)

CRT affirms what students already know about a specific topic while allowing students to integrate new knowledge into this prior knowledge. This allows students to navigate learning in a way that gives way for a diversity of thought, and helps students connect their cultural knowledge and prior experiences to academic knowledge helping students apply what they are learning to their own experiences and communities (Gay, 2000). CRT also makes learning attainable for all students because it uses what they already know therefore validating student thinking. For example, English teachers are tasked with teaching students critical writing and reading skills and often do so through the use of classic texts, which for a student in the South Bronx can be foreign and uninteresting. A teacher might choose to replace such texts with *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* by Junot Diaz or *The Short and Tragic Life of Robert Peace: A Brilliant Young Man Who Left Newark for the Ivy League* by Jeff Hobbs which offer the same level of rigor as other commonly used texts, but help students feel validated through the use of texts that they can identify with.

Research on the impact of culturally relevant teaching is limited but qualitative research on teacher perceptions of CRT seems to favor the use of the practice in classrooms and qualitative research on students' perceptions of CRT revealed that culturally relevant teaching strategies had a positive effect on student effort and engagement in the classroom. Phuntsog's (2010) mixed-methods study of 33 teachers found that over 96% of participants not only considered CRT important in teaching, but especially important when working in culturally diverse communities. Howard's (2001) study of 19 students across four elementary schools

examined how the students perceived and reacted to instructional practice used by four teachers at their respective schools. The qualitative data from Howard's (2001) study revealed three key findings that students perceived to be as a result of CRT and made their learning environments more suitable to success. These included: "1) teachers who displayed caring bonds and attitudes toward them, (2) teachers who established community- and family-type classroom environments, and (3) teachers who made learning an entertaining and fun process" (Howard, 2001, p. 1) Using CRT practices teachers created an environment primed for academic success and cultural competency. In addition, incorporating CRT in the classroom helps students engage in classwork while also increasing student effort (Howard, 2001).

A facet of being a teacher in any school that cannot be ignored is that of a teacher's identity. Teachers, like students, bring with them life experiences, implicit biases, and knowledge that they use to navigate through their teaching experiences. The question here is how do these identities impact a teacher's ability to implement CRT practices effectively? In her case study of one White teacher in a primarily African American community, Hyland (2009) found that although the teacher was able to impact her students positively in her day to day activities, she struggled to understand the black communities the students and families were coming from, thus not enabling her to become the culturally relevant teacher she wanted to be. The teacher in Hyland's study had different experiences and beliefs than that of her students and their families and struggled to build connections with the community. In contrast, Powell's (2005) case study follows the career path of a teacher who not only finds a way to connect with her students in the classroom, but in the community as well. In both cases the teachers took it upon themselves to change the curriculum in order to establish high academic standards and promote social

awareness and were able to create a classroom experience for their students were they were academically successful.

Further research is needed on the impact of implementing CRT and how teachers can examine how race, culture, and social class shape students' thinking, learning, and various understandings of the world and how this may be similar or different from their own understandings.

Mentoring

Mentoring programs have been used and continue to be implemented in school communities across the US as a way to help students build strong relationships with someone inside or outside the school that can serve as a role model (Rhodes, 2008). In fact it is estimated that over three million youth are in formal mentoring relationship (one to one setting) through programs such as the Big Brother, Big Sister program, career mentoring, and student-to-student mentoring programs (Rhodes & Dubois, 2008). The goal of these programs is to help students, particularly young men of color, build positive relationships with others in order to increase grit or their strength of character and help with social emotional development (Rhodes, 1994). Research on mentoring programs is qualitative and quantitative in nature and focuses on the impact these programs have on attendance and grade as well as how students perceive the programs helped them.

In their study of 959 youths enrolled in the Big Brother Big Sister (BBBS) program, Rhodes, Grossman, & Resch (2000) found positive outcomes for youth in the program in school performance and school attendance. The study found that mentoring can improve parent relationships as well and that “mentors can influence both the cognitive and behavioral dimensions of adolescents' approach to school” (p. 1668). A second study looked into the impact

of the BBBS program on over 850 youths by Dewit, et al (2016) and focused on outcomes such as self-reported behavioral problems, mental health, perceived social support and self-esteem through follow-up assessments over an 18 month period. The study found statistically weak to moderate positive relationships between mentoring and youth mental health and social interactions.

Despite having over three million students in mentoring programs, research suggests that their effectiveness is questionable. In a review of 55 program evaluations of mentoring programs, Dubois, Holloway, Valentine & Cooper (2002) suggest that although youth from disadvantaged communities are more likely to benefit from mentoring, the outcomes vary greatly. Mentoring practices vary depending on the program, and without guidelines, there are no rules for what mentoring should look like. In fact, Dubois, Holloway, Valentine & Cooper (2002) note that some mentoring programs can have an adverse effect on young students and suggest theory-based practice be used when creating mentoring programs in order to maximize the effect and positive outcomes. In a two-year experimental study of the Brothers program in Kentucky, young male students between the ages of 14 to 17 were assigned to one of two groups, one group who would serve as the control, and another group where the young men were assigned mentors. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale was used to determine impacts the Brothers Project had on self-esteem along with data on school performance and behavior was analyzed. The study found no statistically significant quantitative evidence to the benefits of mentoring programs, though the authors cited the length of mentoring time as a factor for lack of evidence.

Despite the lack of evidence, mentoring programs continue to be at the forefront of the movement to address the needs of young men of color. These mentoring programs are seen as a way to provide positive role models for young men and “point young people in the direction of a

more positive future. It is an approach that can be sensitive to culture, context, and prior experiences” (Jarjoura, 2013). The research base on mentoring programs is currently focusing on establishing guidelines for effective mentoring programs and further research is needed to assess impact.

External Intervention Programs

While some advocates for change in schools focus on the classroom, others focus on programs that can help outside the classroom. There are a variety of organizations trying to address the many issues facing young men of color with the goal of keeping them in school and on-track towards a college education through additional supports that happen outside of school community. Programs such as AVID, FUTURES and the NYC Men’s Initiative focus on college readiness and supporting students, particularly young men of color through high school, while other programs like Job Corps focus on vocational training. Much of the research on these programs focuses on program descriptions of goals and methodology and evaluations of the programs.

AVID. One large-scale program is the Advancement Via Individual Determination program, or AVID. The AVID program, established in 1980, is a college-ready program that begins when the students are in fourth grade. AVID currently serves over 400,000 students in cities across the country and supports students by providing academic and social skills, exposure to a rigorous curriculum and a team that includes teachers, mentors, and their families. Through interviews for their qualitative study of 9 young men of color in the AVID program in southern North Carolina Parker, Eliot, and Tart (2013) found that within the program, students built “family like” relationships at school, African American young men strived to do better, and the program positively impacted students’ attitudes toward education. In a field report that describes

the AVID program, program goals, and strategies used to engage student and parents, Bernhardt (2013) explains that the program exposed students “to the types of experiences, knowledge, and language useful for navigating complex school bureaucracies’ and learning how schools function” (p. 213). With these skills, students change how they view schooling and their role within the school community.

FUTURES. The FUTURES Program was the Baltimore City’s implementation of the state wide Maryland’s Tomorrow Program. Students in the program must meet one of the required criteria which includes failing an elementary level class, more than 20 absences in a school year and below grade level state test scores. The program starts before students even enter high school, with a 4-week transition to high school summer program aimed at helping students become acquainted with their new school and teachers, and ends a year after students graduate from high school. Students in the FUTURES program attend smaller classes, have counselors, receive incentives for positive achievement, and engage in character development activities (Lever et al, 2004). One aspect of the program that distinguishes it from others is the “advocate.” All FUTURES participants have an advocate assigned to them in ninth grade who monitors attendance, helps students learn to communicate and negotiate with teachers and peers during times of conflict, and helps with the college awareness and application process (Lever et al, 2004). In the 1999-2000 academic year, 85.2% of FUTURES program graduates from Baltimore City Schools were in some sort of postsecondary education and the program has a dropout rate of 5.12% compared to the city’s 8.14% rate (Lever et al, 2004, p. 519).

Young Men’s Initiative. The NYC Men’s Initiative (YMI) was launched in NYC in 2011 to better support young men of color in reaching their educational, professional, and personal goals. Their mission was to transform lives by connecting young men of color with the

tools they need to succeed and helping young men view themselves and each other as a valuable asset to their family and community. YMI included three different programs addressing education, employment, health, and justice. The education programs included the Expanded Success Initiative, Impact, and the Young Adult Literacy Program (YALP). All three programs focused on college readiness and high school completion through the traditional and GED route offering schools and students' financial assistance and academic support in order to succeed. In a review of the ESI program, Harper (2014) found that students enrolled at ESI schools stayed later at school, felt supported by teachers, and participated in after-school activities. Specific program outcome data is still being collected.

Employment Based Programs. Two programs, Career Academies and Job Corps used job training as a way to re-engage students in schools. Career Academies work in partnerships with community employers to offer low-income students with “instruction in small learning communities and offer youth both academics and explore to a particular occupation or sector” (Kemple, 2008). In a way it was marrying vocation and schooling to keep students engaged in school and give students work experience through their partnerships with local employers. In a review of the Career Academies program Kemple (2008) found that the program seemed to have a significant impact on young male students of color, in fact graduates of the program were employed for longer periods of time and earned more over the eight years following graduation compared to a control group. Wilmer & Bloom (2014) noted other positive impacts from the program that included a higher likelihood that these students lived independently, married, and lived with their biological children. Another employment based intervention program is the Job Corps Program, which aims to provide students with job training to young people between the ages of 16 and 24. A study of the program showed increases in GED completion rates as well as

vocational certification (Schochet, Burghardt, and McConnell, 2008). Both of these programs combined real life experience in the work field with school coursework to enable students to gain job skills that they would be able to use to enter the workforce upon graduation.

Leadership Development in School-based Extracurricular Activities

The Umoja program was founded on the idea that one way to close achievement gaps for male students of color is to think of it from the opportunity gap perspective and focus on providing students with opportunities to develop leadership skills and flex these skills in a variety of ways to help them connect to the school community, become leaders within that community and thus impact academic outcomes. There are no programs like the Umoja program that have been studied, but there is a substantial amount of literature that focuses on leadership within school based extracurricular activities. But why leadership? Kuhn and Wienberger (2005) make the case that students who demonstrate concrete levels of leadership skills and are given opportunities to expand this skill set, earn more income as adults. Kuhn and Wienberger (2005) emphasize that as such universities and employers across the country have started to place a strong emphasis on these set of skills in admissions and hiring processes. Focusing on leadership development is clearly something we should do to help prepare students to be college and career ready.

A review of the literature has found that positive experiences with extracurricular activities predicted more positive general self-worth, academic self-concept, school engagement, and academic achievement (Fredericks and Eccles, 2006; Linver, Roth, & Brooks-Gunn, 2009; Hancock, Dyke, Jones, 2012), and participation in extracurricular like sports teams is linked to other longer term goals. For example, according to Child Trends (2019), twelfth grade students who plan to graduate from a four year college are more likely to participate in school athletics

than those who did not have those plans, 58% to 39%. Being a part of an extracurricular seemed to be connected to the types of plans students would have after high school.

In one longitudinal study Fredericks and Eccles (2006) used data from the Maryland Adolescent Development Context Study to examine the impact of being engaged in multiple extracurricular activities. The study's sample was 51% female and 49% male and it was 67% African American and 33% European America. Their findings indicated that involvement in high school sports and school clubs impacted academic achievement where students had higher grades and educational expectations, and more interestingly, predicted increased civic engagement two years later. In a University of Kansas study of 139,349 students enrolled in grades 9-12 more than 97% of student athletes graduated high school, 10% higher than those students who had never participated in sports and students involved in one or more sports had higher GPAs than students not involved in sports (Lumpkin and Favor, 2009).

In addition to impacting academics, being a part of sports teams impacted leadership development of athletes. In a study by Hancock, Dyke, Jones (2012), the researchers focused on how the different roles students take with in extracurricular impact their self-perceptions of leadership skills, and the roles that the adult supports plays in this development. This study included survey given to a predominantly white (93%) sample of 697 participants from three public high schools in both urban and suburban areas of northern Kentucky. Two key findings from this study were that firstly, students benefit from opportunities to develop their leadership capacity by getting involved in community projects where they needed to embrace youth adult partnerships across different contexts and secondly, "parent support was a significant predictor of adolescent perception towards their leaderships skills in sport and school" (p. 96). This makes

the argument that not only should extracurricular and sports help develop student's individual leadership skills but provide them opportunities to flex these skills in new and different contexts.

One last area impacted by involvement in extracurricular, specifically sports teams is the impact on self-esteem. Various studies have aimed at determining the relationship between sports participation and adolescent happiness and self-esteem (Hines and Grove, 1989; West and Crompton 2001; Collins et al 2018; Taylor and Turek, 2010) and all agree that participation in sports teams has an impact on socio-emotional wellbeing and self-esteem. Collins et al (2018) study went further and tried to define what specifically about being on a sports team resulted in higher levels of self-esteem. They found that the relationships created amongst teammates lead to increased social competence and that these positive interpersonal interactions enhanced self-esteem. Extracurricular seem to impact relationships, academic achievement, and leadership development, which could serve to address the gaps that lead to student disengagement from schools.

Conclusion

Limitations

Young men of color face a variety of issues both inside and outside of the school community that programs discussed in this review try to address. The literature speaks to some of the strengths and weaknesses of the interventions that involve teachers, mentoring, and outside of the classroom interventions, such as the AVID and Job Corps program. There have been many attempts at addressing the disengagement of young men of color from schools but the research on the success of these interventions has been limited. Much of the research is qualitative in nature and speaks to the experiences and perceived benefits young men have with these interventions but not how the interventions impact student engagement and high school

completion. More research is needed to document how mentoring programs using theory-based guidelines impact young men of color and how CRT helps to engage young men of color specifically in the classroom and the impact these interventions have on high school graduation rates. Furthermore comprehensive evaluations of programs like the NYC Men's Initiative are needed to assess if programs like it are working, and what aspects of the programs have the biggest impacts.

As noted in the review of the literature most of the research on interventions for young male students of color has focused on teaching strategies and outside programs coming into the school community. Many of these programs also focus on student academics. This study aims to add to the research by looking at a program within the school community that does not focus on academics but rather focuses on leadership development and advocacy and document what participants say about their school experience and program. Additionally this study will add to the literature on programs that measure academic outcomes, such as attendance, GPA, and credit

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the experiences of young men of color in school and, it is embedded in a critical race theory approach to investigating issues of school persistence among this group. This theory speaks to the embedded institutional racism that exists in schools and how this shapes the student experience. "Critical race theory holds that their situation is actually a manifestation of the racial politics that are intrinsic, even vital, to the day-to-day functions of U.S. society and social institutions such as schools" (Duncan, 2002). According to Ladson-Billings critical race theory is based on three specific principals: "1. that race continues to be a significant factor in determine inequity in the United States. 2. U.S. society is based on property rights, and 3. The intersection of race and property creates an analytic tool through which we can

understand socials and school inequity” (Ladson-Billings and Tate IV, 1995). In schools, this plays out in a variety of ways which include teacher perceptions and implicit biases, and instructional strategies that assume that African American children are deficient and in need of remediation (Ladson-Billings, 1998). This in turn leads educators on a hunt for strategies to help teachers “control” young students of color in the classroom instead of teaching and empowering their students. This is evidenced by the disciplinary codes used in schools large proportions of underrepresented students of color which include strict guidelines for dress, hair, and behavior. This is further evidenced by the disciplinary gaps you see amongst races groups for infractions of the codes that most often aim to reemphasize white dominant cultural norms.

Many of the interventions in this literature review have race at the center when we consider the role race plays into teacher identity and perceptions, culturally relevant teaching, and the many programs that target specific populations. Whether conscious or not, all of these interventions are centered around race, but not necessarily for the purpose of empowering students of color, because none of these interventions directly name the impact race has on the students experience in schooling, in their community, and in the US.

The Umoja program aimed to challenge these ideas through its programming that directly names and dispels these notions. The program takes the approach that all students bring assets with them to school, and that is the role of the school to nurture these assets. Umoja Brothers read about and discuss how racism impacts them and their communities and empowers them to not be “controlled” but to use their experiences and voice to advocate for themselves and their communities. The Umoja program drew upon research in its design and as such aimed to engage students by combining relationship building, leadership development, identity development, and mentoring.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The goal of this study was to document the experiences and supports of the Umoja program, explore the challenges faced by academically proficient but disengaged male students at the Urban Assembly School for Applied Math and Science, and to analyze what impact, if any, the Umoja program had on participating students. I used a mixed-methods evaluation case study approach to develop a full picture of the impact of the program on students, with both qualitative and quantitative statistical analysis. A mixed methods approach created a comprehensive account of student experiences and outcomes with the students in the program at AMS and might provide the information necessary to assist other schools in initiating similar programs (Bryman, 2006). As described by Creswell (2009), a qualitative approach is used as a means for gaining a better understanding of individuals or a group problem within the context of the participants' setting which aligned with two of the research questions in this study aimed at documenting how students describe their experiences as young men of color in their community and the supports they found useful within the Umoja program. The quantitative aspect of this study allowed the AMS community, administration, Umoja Leaders, and the researcher, to get a clearer understanding of any relationships that might exist between attending the program and academic indicators such as attendance and grades of the young men in the program. This case study allowed me to take an in-depth look at the program within the school community over a sustained period of time (Creswell, 2009). This account can be used to evaluate the program, which can also be used for replication purposes or improvements to the current program in the future.

Context and Participants

Community Context. The Bronx, where the Urban Assembly School for Applied Math & Science resides, is a borough of New York City with an approximate population of 1.47 million residents and is considered to be “the most diverse area in the country” (US Census Bureau). The Bronx is made up of approximately 56% Hispanic or Latino residents, 44% Black or African American residents, 9% White residents, 4% Asian residents and a small percentage of Native Hawaiian and mixed race residents. 71.5% of Bronx residents hold at least a high school diploma, while 19.4% of residents hold at least a bachelor's degree. The median household income is \$36,593, with 28% of residents living in poverty.

As a district school, AMS serves students specifically in the 15th congressional district of the South Bronx. With a population of 781,000 residents, a median income of 28,000, and 36% of residents living below the poverty line, this district is one of the poorest in the country.

School Context. The Urban Assembly School for Applied Math and Science was founded in 2004, at the height of New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg’s small school movement. AMS has 620 students in grades 6-12 with a student-teacher ratio of 12 to 1. 94% of students at AMS receive free or reduced lunch, the highest percentage in NYC School District 9 (National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Dept of Education). According to NY state test scores, 31% of students are at least proficient in math and 24% in reading compared to 46% and 35% city-wide. AMS has an average graduation rate of 85%, in line with the city-wide average, and higher than the 63% average for Bronx County. (Graduation rates for young men in the Bronx is approximately 59%). AMS’s student body is composed of 33% Black or African American students, 66% Hispanic or Latino students, and 1% White/Other students. Daily

attendance averaged at 87%, in line with the city average, but 39% of the student body had 18 or more absences in a school year, compared to 31% city-wide.

As a 6-12 school, students in 8th grade undergo the high school application process, with over 85% of students choosing to stay at AMS. This is not surprising as Quality Review survey data from the school shows that 88% of families feel the school has strong family community ties, and have trust in the leadership and teachers at the school. While 84% of students reported feeling safe in public school spaces only 55% of students say that their teachers support them when they are upset.

Umoja Context. Umoja begins in August with a week-long trip to the mountains in upstate New York where the young men engage in community building activities, work on their communication and conflict resolution skills, talk about race, current events, and the inequalities that impact them, and interact with successful men of color in a technology-free setting. Students are broken up into smaller groups called Crews, whom they spend time every day with cooking, cleaning, and engaging in small group reflections at some point during the day. Once the school year begins, the young men check in with Umoja staff daily, attend Umoja meetings on Tuesdays, and academic support hours on Saturdays. In addition to these mandatory events, the young men take part in brotherhood activities including conferences, baseball and basketball games, family dinners, and other community-based opportunities. The Umoja program currently has 20 Brothers, and 5 staff leaders. The Umoja program uses “community nomination” as a way to target the young men in our school community who would benefit the most from the Umoja program. This is a yearly process but all students share specific demographics. The students in the program range in age from 14 to 19, in grade 9-12, and all identify as Black or Latino.

Table 1

Umoja Brotherhood Participant Information

Brother	Cohort Year	Year in Umoja	Race/Ethnicity
1	2020	1	Black/African American
2	2020	1	Black/African American
3	2019	1	Black/African American
4	2019	1	Black/African American
5	2019	1	Latino
6	2018	1	Latino
7	2018	2	Black/African American
8	2018	1	Black/African American
9	2018	3	Black/African American
10	2018	1	Black/African American
11	2018	2	Black/African American
12	2017	3	Black/African American
13	2017	3	Black/African American
14	2017	2	Latino
15	2017	3	Black/African American
16	2017	2	Black/African American

17	2017	2	Black/African American
18	2017	2	Black/African American
19	2017	3	Black/African American
20	2017	3	Black/African American
21	Male Staff	1	Black/African American
22	Male Staff	2	Black/African American
23	Male Staff	3	Black/African American
24	Male Staff	2	Black/African American
25	Miss C.	3	Asian American

Participants. All of the 18 study participants were students at the Urban Assembly School for Applied Math & Science since 6th grade and remained at the school through high school. Because Umoja used a cohort model, the age ranges from participants varied between 14-19 and Brothers had been in the program for a range of 13 years. For all participants, quantitative data, including attendance rates, credit accumulation, and grade point averages were collected for analysis. Qualitative data collection focused on a subset of participants, specifically on young men in their second and third year in the program. This allowed the inclusion of more data for each participant over consecutive academic years and three summer camps sessions.

Demographic information about the eighteen study participants can be found in table 1.

Data Collection

In this study I collected a variety of data and used both qualitative and quantitative methods to understand the experiences of students in the Umoja program and the impact of the program on student achievement and other benchmarks. Attendance rates, credit accumulation, and grade point average data was collected for each of the 18 participants over the course of their time in the program. For the purpose of comparison, data for each participant was collected for the year prior to their joining the program. Qualitative methods used to get a better understanding of the experiences of participants in the Umoja program included observations and two focus group sessions, one for veteran members in their second and third year in the program, and one with new program members. Additionally, a subset of participants were selected to participate in interviews.

Observations. Observations give the researchers a firsthand account of the phenomenon of interest and provides a clearer understanding of what happens within a given context (Merriam, 2009). Observations of Brothers during meetings gave the researcher a look at what students did within the after school and Saturday sessions to document aspects of the program and gain a 'richer picture' of activities, trips, the types of interactions Brothers were having with staff and each other, and to document any pivotal moments that arise during meetings. These observations occurred during one Tuesday session and one Saturday session a month from April 2017 to June 2017 for a total of six observations that ranged in duration from 20 minutes to an hour each. During observations, the researcher played a passive observer role and did not take part in the meeting. In addition, the researcher was invited to attend a Memorial Day Weekend trip to the African American Museum in Boston, Massachusetts. Field notes were taken during the meetings and trip to document all activities, interactions, and reflections during this time.

Focus Groups. Focus groups were used in conjunction with interviews to collect and examine group and individual thoughts about the Umoja program. Focus groups gave the researcher access to participants' views, experiences, and attitudes and allowed flexibility within a social setting to gain insights into group norms and feelings (Levers, 2006; Morgan & Krueger, 1993; Morgan, Krueger, & King, 1998). All participants participated in the focus groups held in August of 2017 during the Umoja camp. There were two distinct groups of Umoja participants present at camp, veteran Brothers who had been in the program for at least a year, and new Brothers. One focus group included the 12 returning Umoja members for the purpose of understanding these students' feelings and thoughts about the program. A second focus group was held for the 6 first year Umoja members for the purposes of comparison and understanding. Each focus group was 45 minutes in duration, was held in an outdoor space on the summer camp site, and included discussions about what challenges the students faced as young men of color, aspects of the program students liked the most, found helpful, and what characteristics of the program they did not think were helpful (see Appendix A). All focus group sessions were audio recorded and transcribed in order to allow for follow-up during interviews (see Appendix A) and for the purposes of analysis.

Interviews. According to Patton (1990), interviewing allows the researcher to understand the perspective of the participant, illuminating information that is not externally observable. Therefore, as I was interested in eliciting the perceptions of the veteran young men in the Umoja program about their perception of the program and its impact on them as students, four participants were chosen for one semi-structured interview. These students were chosen for interviews based on responses to focus group questions that warranted further discussion or interest to the research questions. The interviews probed the young men on any moments of

interest from observations and statements shared during the focus group session. Semi-structured interviews consisted of a list of open-ended questions (see Appendix B) based on the topic areas the researcher intended to study that focus on their personal experience in the program and their growth in the program over the last two years (Merriam, 2009). The open-ended nature of the questions provide opportunities for both the interviewer and interviewee to discuss topics such as the perceived impact of the program has had on their academic career, attendance, and motivation to graduate high school. The interviews were conducted in a classroom at the participants' school, was carried out in a conversational style, and took between 30 minutes to an hour. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed and took place in the fall of 2017 during the start of the school year.

Quantitative Data. Student attendance and academic data were collected for all 18 Umoja participants for every year they were an active participant in the Umoja Brotherhood, as well as for the year prior to their joining the program. This data was analyzed as a part of a correlational research attempt to determine the extent of a relationship between attendance in the Umoja program to attendance and grades. In a correlational research study relationships between and among variables are interpreted to identify the existence of patterns in data, but it does not go so far in its analysis to establish cause and effect for them. Data, relationships, and distributions of variables are observed only and are not manipulated (Creswell, 2009)

Researcher Positionality

In addition to my role as researcher, I am also a former member of the school community and one of the founding facilitators of Umoja program. As such, there may be biases that I bring into this study that pertain to perceptions on the effectiveness of the program's model, prior knowledge of students, or what should be happening in meetings. As one of the program

facilitators, I played a hands-on role in creating the program's objectives and activities, and I have very close ties to all members within the Umoja community, including teachers and student participants. In order to minimize this researcher effect, during the duration of the study, I pulled back from the role of facilitator, and played the role of "passive observer" during observations of meetings and other Umoja related activities. As a passive observer, I observed the meetings without doing anything to disturb the situation, or participating in any way (Cresswell, 2000). In order to ensure reliability, I cross checked and triangulated the information from observations, interviews, and focus groups in order to understand the whole picture (Cresswell, 2000). During observations, pivotal moments were flagged and used to probe participants about their significance, if any during follow up focus groups and interviews. In addition, I returned to participants who were interviewed and checked whether what had been recorded is what they had intended to share in the interview. For observations, I checked in with each member during interviews and asked them whether what was recorded about their behavior was accurate and typical of their meetings.

My new role as a passive observer was presented to the Umoja Brothers during one of the Tuesday meetings. After my new role was explained, Umoja Brothers were given the opportunity to ask questions about what this new role would look like. Upon hearing about my new role my Crew communicated during the meetings that it was a bit of a shock and a letdown that I would not be participating in Crew conversation throughout the duration of the study. It is important to note that being a former teacher at the school and former teacher of many of the young men in the program has eased my ability to conduct data collection at this site. Having built rapport over several years as a teacher, and then as an Umoja staff leader had an impact on the quality of answers and data collected in this research study, as students did not feel the need

to present a specific picture of the program. Additionally, Umoja Brothers felt comfortable being themselves in both focus groups and interviews, as can be evidenced from the many jokes that can be heard on the audio recordings.

Data Analysis

Once the qualitative and quantitative data collection was complete, analysis of these data sets was conducted.

Qualitative Data. The first step in the qualitative data analysis process was to transcribe all interviews and focus group conversations conducted noting interviewee, time, and place of interview or focus group. During observations, field notes were taken and later transcribed for analysis. Interview responses for each participant were organized and combined into a single Word document and grouped by interview question. All qualitative data was uploaded to the Dedoose program for analysis. The most important aspect of qualitative data analysis is the coding of participants responses, which involves “grouping evidence and labeling ideas so that they reflect increasingly broader perspectives” (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007, p. 132). In keeping with methodological theory, memos were written about the data and themes across the data were identified. Initial readings of the data led to the creation of an initial set of codes and data was coded according to these initial codes: “Impact”, “Brotherhood”, “Leader”, “Legacy”, “Supports”, and “Staff”. Upon further analysis sub codes were created in the leader code to align with the leadership skills outlined by Spears (2010) which included listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community.

Observations. In keeping with effective observation protocol according to Merriam (2009), field notes were taken during observations, as observations were not recorded and

included verbal descriptions of meeting settings, attendance, activities, and participant quotes. Observer comments were made during observations in order to document initial feelings, reactions and thoughts to what was being observed (Merriam, 2009).

Interview and focus group transcripts. Interview and focus group transcripts were reviewed and checked twice by the researcher for accuracy.

Researcher Journal. Throughout the duration of the study, I maintained a journal to document feelings and thoughts as they emerged. I created a new entry after every observation and interview to document my own reflections and thoughts about future meetings. This was an opportunity to be subjective about what I saw and what I may want to share with program facilitators and participants. Additionally these reflections allowed me to search for biases in the field notes data during data analysis. Biases occurred when events or statements made during meetings resonated with me, or came from specific participants that were in my crew or whom I had a close relationship with. When they would share thoughts and ideas I would think this was a group wide trend when in fact, most of the time it was isolated to a small group of students. Writing these down and then reading this as a whole allowed me to see that these “trends” I had highlighted were not group wide. Additionally, as with any group there are ups and downs, and in some cases events would occur that would seem very big at the moment, but in retrospect did not have much of an impact on the group or the overall year. My researcher journal helped me understand what was happening at those moments after some time had passed and allowed me to see if there was any long term significance.

Quantitative Data. Quantitative data was analyzed to see if there were any changes in student attendance, grade point average, and credit accumulation over the course of their tenure in the program. A number of paired sample t-tests were done in order to compare data from

before and after the program to see if there was any impact on attendance rates, grades, and credit accumulation. In addition, a comparison was made between students within the program for one year, two years, and three years. Analysis included searching for significant correlations at the .05 level.

Validity

Validity in qualitative research means that “the researcher checks for accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures” (Creswell, 2009, p. 190). To ensure validity in this study triangulation of the data and member checking were used as a way to confirm findings and minimize researcher bias.

Triangulation. Methods triangulation refers to the “checking of consistency of finding generated by different data collection methods” (Patton, 2002, p. 556). Methods triangulation was used to compare and cross check data collected from multiple data sources including comparing observations, focus groups, and interview data (Merriam, 2009).

Member Checking. Member checks are used to “determine the accuracy of the qualitative findings through taking the final report and themes back to participants to determine accuracy” (Creswell, 2009, p. 191) Member checks were used to receive feedback on the findings as data was being analyzed (Merriam, 2009). During interviews, quotes and field note data was shared with participant to ascertain accuracy. At the conclusion of data analysis, final themes were shared with participants during an Umoja meeting in order to check for accuracy and to “comment on the findings” (Creswell, 2009, p. 191). Participants were given the opportunity to read through the findings and encouraged to ask questions to clarify if necessary.

Conclusion

In order to answer the research questions in this study a mix of qualitative and quantitative data was needed. Through qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis, the researcher obtained a clearer picture of the perceptions of the young men in the program and how the Umoja program helped students achieve high school graduation. The next chapter highlights the quantitative data results for study participants.

CHAPTER 4: QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

One of the central research questions this study aimed to address was whether there were any relationships between the participation in the program and attendance, including lateness, overall yearly grade point average (GPA), and credits accumulated (CA). The program to date, from 2015-2018, had a 98% graduation rate with only one young man in the program failing to graduate from high school. This data point is 12% points higher when compared to the school graduation rate of 86%. This analysis focused on a few predictors of graduation to determine what factors may be contributing to the increase in graduation rates such as attendance, grade point average, and credit accumulation. A series of analyses were run to find significant data and look for relationships between the program and these academic outcomes. To accomplish this school records were collected for 18 members of the Umoja program. These records included their grade point averages (GPA), attendance, lateness, and credits accumulated for each year that they were in the program, as well as before they joined the program, labeled Year 0. For students who entered the program as freshmen (N=2), there is no Year 0 data. Of note, there is a decrease in N each year because of the cohort approach not all participants were in the program for 3 years before graduation but were included for comparison purposes. This chapter highlights findings within each of these indicators.

Grade Point Average (GPA). The main focus of the Umoja program is high school graduation, and overall improvement in academic achievement. As such GPA was analyzed for each of the Umoja participants. There was a large range in data for the young men in the program, both before they joined and while in the program (Table 1). Before participants joined the program their GPAs ranged from 60 to 84, with an average GPA of 68.24. After Year 1, the mean was 69.75, after Year 2, 71.26, and at the conclusion of year 3 (graduation), a mean GPA

of 77.56. This mean data shows an average increase in GPA for program participants that continued to increase for every year they were enrolled in the program.

Table 2					
<i>Grade Point Average Descriptive Statistics</i>					
<u>GPA Year</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Minimum</u>	<u>Maximum</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
0	18	60.19	84.77	68.2389	5.93343
1	18	60.25	88.74	69.7583	6.11870
2	11	65.80	83.00	71.2555	4.83129
3	6	69.82	87.92	77.5550	7.73299

The mean average increases were analyzed further using comparisons of GPA data. Paired sample t-tests were used to determine if there were any significant changes from year to year for participants in the program. Table 2 summarizes sample pair data and significance for participants in each year of the program.

Table 3						
<i>Paired Sample GPA Mean, SD, and T-tests results</i>						
<u>Pair</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>SDM</u>	<u>t</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>Sig</u>
Year 0-1	-1.51944	3.26755	.77017	-1.973	17	.065
Year 0-2	-3.99636	4.54099	1.36916	-2.919	10	.015
Year 0-3	-10.56333	7.24297	2.95693	-3.572	5	.016
Year 1-2	-2.9318	3.75016	-5.45121	-2.593	10	.027
Year 2-3	-5.875002	6.42720	-12.61994	-2.239	5	.075

The t-tests were used to compare the mean GPA for students before they entered the program, Year 0, after having completed one, two, and three years of the program (if applicable). The mean GPA for students who entered the Umoja program (Year 0) was 68.24 (SD=5.93), and

the mean GPA after having completed year 1 of the program was 69.71(SD=6.64), with an average difference of 1.5 GPA points. No significant differences were found from year 0 to year 1 ($t(17) = -1.973, p > .05$). The mean GPA for students who entered the Umoja program (Year 0) was 68.89 (SD=6.33), and the mean GPA after having completed year 2 of the program was 71.23(SD=5.09). A significant GPA increase of 3.9 GPA points was found from year 0 to year 2 ($t(10) = -2.919, p < .05$). The mean of GPA for students who entered the Umoja program (Year 0) was 68.89 (SD=6.33), and the mean GPA after having completed year 2 of the program was 71.23(SD=5.09). A significant GPA increase of 10.56 GPA points from year 0 to year 3 was found ($t(5) = -3.572, p < .05$).

Further analysis of GPA data was conducted to determine any significant differences in GPA data from year to year in the program. Between Year 1 and Year 2 in the program there was a significant increase in GPA of 2.9 points ($t(10) = -2.593, p < .05$). No significant differences were found in GPA between Year 2 and Year 3 of the program with an average increase of 5.86 GPA points ($t(5) = -2.239, p > .05$).

These data points are interesting because there seems to be a relationship between participation in the program and an increase in GPA overall but these relationships seem to be more prominent within specific year. This data seems to point to the need for students to be in the program for at least two years in order to have an increase in GPA as there was no significant increase in GPA before then. The lack of significant impact after Year 1 could mean that incoming twelfth graders would not benefit from the program as much as incoming eleventh graders, or younger. Likewise the data points towards not needing to be in the program for the entirety of high school. Some programs target ninth graders because you want to “catch them while they’re young” but this data shows that students entering in the ninth or tenth grade, see

similar GPA increases as those entering eleventh grade. The mixed grade cohort model that Umoja uses seems to be working, with the caveat of potentially limiting the number of incoming twelfth graders invited to the program in order to see impacts on GPA. Of note here is that for two participants these GPA changes were more pronounced than for the other students in the program, and these students had an average GPA increase of 22 percentage points.

Attendance. A second variable analyzed was attendance data. As seen in Table 4, attendance records for the Umoja program participants showed that there was a wide range in days absent for participants from one day, all the way to 41 days, with a few participants accounting for a larger average of absences and considered “truant” from school. Truant is defined as being absent more than 18 days in a single school year. Of the 18 participants two were considered truant. Data is summarized in table 3 below.

<u>Year</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Minimum</u>	<u>Maximum</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
0	18	1	28	11.3889	8.58959
1	18	1	34	9.6111	8.98455
2	12	4	41	13.8333	10.65861
3	6	3	19	11.1667	6.58534

Before joining the Umoja program, participants were absent on average 11.4 days, with a range between 1 and 28 days. After the first year in the program, participants were absent an average of 9.6 days, a decrease of 1.8 days, with a range between 1 and 34 days. After the second year in the program participants were absent an average of 13.83 days, an increase of 4.2 days from the previous year, and 2.4 days from year 0. After three years in the program, participants

were absent an average of 11.1 days, similar to the number of days they were absent before joining the program.

A paired sample t-test was calculated to compare the mean attendance for students before they entered the program, Year 0, to after having completed one, two, and three years of the program.

<u>Pair</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>SDM</u>	<u>t</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>Sig</u>
Year 0-1	1.77778	8.32823	1.96298	.906	17	.378
Year 0-2	-1.83333	9.68441	2.79565	-.656	11	.525
Year 0-3	-1.50000	5.75326	2.34876	-.639	5	.551
Year 1-2	-4.16667	7.00433	2.02198	-2.061	11	.064
Year 2-3	-2.00000	4.81664	1.96638	-1.017	5	.356

No significant differences ($p < .05$) in attendance were found between Year 0 (before joining the program) and any year after joining the program. Of note here is the smaller range in data in year 3, with absences ranging from 3 to 19 days, which means fewer students were considered “truant”. Two additional data analysis were run, one with only truant students (18 absences or more), and one data with all students not considered truant (less than 18 absences) and no significant differences were found. This indicates an impact on students who were absent for a considerable amount of time, but little to no impact on all other participants. This finding is surprising as one of the goals of the program was to increase attendance, and make sure students were not missing instructional time, and much time was spent calling students, and making sure they were in school.

Tardiness. In addition to days absent, lateness was a variable of interest, as it amounted to missed instructional and seat time. Lateness records for the Umoja program participants showed that there was a wide range in days late for participants before and after joining the program from zero days late, all the way to 117 days tardy. Similar to attendance, a few participants accounted for a large average of tardy days. Brothers in their senior year of high school accounted for a higher portion of tardy days in this data set. Table 5 summarizes this data below.

Table 6					
<i>Lateness Average Descriptive Statistics</i>					
<u>Year</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Minimum</u>	<u>Maximum</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
0	18	0	92	29.8182	28.32602
1	18	0	103	32.6667	31.43621
2	12	1	117	39.0000	32.11060
3	6	3	110	41.5000	48.46751

On average, before joining the program, participants were late 29.8 times, with a range between 0 and 92 days. After the first year in the program, participants were late an average of 32.67 days, an increase of 2.8 days, with a range between 0 and 103 days. After the second year in the program participants were late by an average of 39 days, an increase of 7 days from the previous year, and 9.1 days from year 0. After three years in the program, participants were late by an average of 41.5 days, an increase of 5.5 days from the previous year, and 11.7 days from year 0.

A paired sample t-test was calculated to compare the mean lateness for students before they entered the program, Year 0, to after completing one, two, and three years of the program.

<u>Pair</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>SDM</u>	<u>t</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>Sig</u>
Year 0-1	-4.45455	24.80872	7.48011	-.596	10	.565
Year 0-2	-16.60000	36.61011	16.37254	-1.014	4	.368
Year 0-3	-12.00000	33.68234	15.06320	-.797	4	.470
Year 1-2	-15.50000	24.67424	7.12284	-2.176	11	.052
Year 2-3	.16667	14.40023	5.87887	.028	5	.978

The mean of number of late days for students entering the Umoja program (Year 0) was 29.18 (SD=28.32), and the mean lateness after completing on year 1 of the program was 34.27(SD=34.77). No significant difference from year 0 to year 1 was found ($t(10) = -.596$, $p > .05$). The mean of number of late days for students entering the Umoja program (Year 0) was 18.4 (SD=17.55), and the mean lateness after completing year 2 of the program was 35.00(SD=46.92). No significant difference from year 0 to year 2 was found ($t(4) = -1.014$, $p > .05$). The mean of number of late days for students entering the Umoja program (Year 0) was 18.4 (SD=17.55), and the mean lateness after completing year 2 of the program was 30.40(SD=44.86). No significant difference from year 0 to year 2 was found ($t(4) = -.797$, $p > .05$). Overall no significant was found between the number of years participants were in the program and tardiness in school, although the increase in lateness across the three years is alarming as this does amount to loss of instructional time and can have GPA and credit accumulation effects if students are missing and failing their first period course. .

Credits Accumulated. Credit accumulation refers to the number of credits students earn per year. To graduate from NYC public school students must earn 44 credits, for an average of 11 credits per year. When students enter the program many are under credited, meaning they

have earned less than 11 credits per year they have attended high school, putting them at risk to not graduate with their cohort. As a result, these students must take extra classes to make up these differences, attend summer school, or come back for a 5th year of high school, which can be a stressful situation, and oftentimes demoralizing. A summary of descriptive data for credits accumulated can be found in Table 7 below.

Table 8					
<i>Credits Accumulated (CA) Descriptive Statistics</i>					
<u>Year</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Minimum</u>	<u>Maximum</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
0	18	7	16	12.35	2.55922
1	18	9	15	12.47	1.89347
2	12	10.16	16	13.04	1.89217
3	6	14	16.5	14.667	1.0812

Before joining the program Umoja participants earned an average of 12.35 credits with a range between 7 and 16 credits, and includes credit earned in summer school, indicating that some Brothers were earning below the required 11 credits per year to stay on track. After the first year in the program, the average number of credits earned per year was slightly higher at 12.47 credits, with a range between 9 and 15. After two years in the program, participants were earning an average of 13.04 credits per year, with a range of 10.16 to 16.5 credits. After three years in the program participants were earning an average of 14.667 credits per year with a range between 14 and 16.5 credits. This data point is the most exciting as this means that all Umoja Brothers were earning more than the necessary 11 credits per year to be on track to graduate on time despite there still being a 2.5 range gap between them. Earning at least 14 credits also means that they

are on track to obtain missing credits from previous school years, and is helping them get on track to graduate with their cohort.

A paired sample t-test was calculated to compare the mean CA for students before they entered the program, Year 0, to after having completed one, two, and three years of the program. Data is summarized in table 8.

Table 9							
<i>Paired Sample CA Mean, SD, and T-tests results</i>							
<u>Pair</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>SDM</u>	<u>t</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>Sig</u>	
Year 0-1	-.14667	2.11150	.54519	-.269	14	.792	
Year 0-2	-1.26800	3.25667	1.02985	-1.231	9	.249	
Year 0-3	-1.95600	1.25987	.56343	-3.472	4	.026	
Year 1-2	-.52909	2.12731	.64141	-.825	10	.429	
Year2-3	-1.4333	2.85975	1.16749	-1.228	5	.274	

The mean difference in CA between year 0 and year 1 was .14 credits and was not statistically significant ($t(14) = -.269, p > .05$). The average difference in CA between year 0 and year 2 was 1.2 CA and was also not statistically significant ($t(9) = -1.231, p > .05$). There is a significant difference in CA for Umoja students between years 0 and 3 of the program. The average difference in credits accumulated between year 0 and 3 is 1.95 credits ($t(4) = -3.472, p < .05$).

The data points to an increase in credit accumulation between years zero and three that does not exist between years zero and 2 of the program which for many participants equates to being in the eleventh or twelfth grade, and thus there has been cumulative increases in credit accumulation . This makes sense for two reasons, firstly participants are in the final push to ensure they graduate on time and therefore must pass all of their classes and earn those credits,

and there is more motivation to get things done. Secondly, participants are given the opportunity to earn more credits via credit recovery and summer school before their senior year. Although these opportunities always exist for students who do not earn credit, not all students take advantage of these opportunities, or are unsuccessful in completing the requirements to earn credits. Based on the data and the fact that most students are generally only enrolled in 12 credits per year, it is clear that Umoja Brothers earned some credits via these two avenues in the last year of the program and that they were successful in passing these courses and earning the required number of credits. Of note is that due to the timing of this coursework, summer camp dates were moved in order to accommodate summer programming that included international travel for some participants and summer school opportunities for others.

Conclusion. The quantitative analysis in this study aimed to see if there were any improvements to attendance, GPA, and credit accumulation data for participants in the Umoja study. Analysis of the academic records for 18 participants who have been in the program for one to three years shows that there is no change in attendance data for the participants including tardiness. There were significant changes in participants GPA and credit accumulation data with continuous increases each year members are in the program. Although the averages increased from year to year the lack of significant increase in the first year of program enrollment has some implications for program acceptance. Based on the analysis of the data it seems as though students who are in the program for only one year did not see significant gains in GPA or CA but participants who were in the program for longer periods of time, at least two years, seem to have better outcomes which means participants need to be in the program for at least that amount of time, thus eliminating acceptances of participants entering the 12th grade. On the other hand data also points to a lack of significant increases after year 3, therefore students do not need to enter

the program in the 9th grade. These are important findings to be shared with the school community.

CHAPTER 5: QUALITATIVE RESULTS

“It made me see that I had a cause, I had a reason to be, I could be a leader, I could change things”
-Umoja Leader

Introduction

Walking through the halls of AMS it is clear who the Umoja Brothers are. They can be seen wearing their uniform-acceptable blue and purple Umoja cardigans, and blue striped Umoja ties. They are proud as they walk in clusters through the hallways, high fiving both each other and their teachers as they make their way to class, although not always on time. It is clear to any observer that there is a connection between the Brothers and an air of confidence, bordering on arrogance that they exude as they roam the halls. They make being a part of the school community and the day to day life of an AMS student look easy.

That ease quickly disappeared when they were asked to describe the hardest part about being a young male of color in NYC. There was a tension that was felt by the Umoja participants when they tried to express verbally the answer to this question in their focus groups and in follow up interviews, and two themes emerged very quickly. The first theme was that one of the hardest parts about being a young man of color in their community was being a “target” and an unaccepted member by the community at large. They described a fear of authority and gangs, as well as perceptions that authorities were afraid of them as well. A second theme that emerged in the research was that students felt the weight of a metaphorical “torch” which a few Brothers described as the burden they carry for all black men, an expectation that they had to be better than the stereotype assigned to them. These two sets of expectations were at odds. On the one hand, the young men were told that they had to be better than the young men that came before them, and on the other hand, they felt targeted and weighed down by the assumption that they

would “fail” like the many young men who came before them. This tension became a barrier to establishing a school culture where they felt accepted and a place where they could feel successful. This is exactly what Umoja did: established a positive school culture and an environment in which students felt powerful, empowered, and successful. This chapter explores these themes as they relate to the young men’s experiences in school, in their community, and their identity as emerging leaders.

Targets in Their Community

As young men of color these students were no strangers to being targets, whether that meant being followed in stores by employees, stared at on the train in Manhattan, or being targets of the police or gangs in their neighborhood. In focus groups, several students described being afraid to walk home at night not only because of the violence on their “blocks” but because they were also targeted by neighborhood policeman. Jackson stated:

One of the hardest parts about being a young man of color is I feel like I have to be afraid all the time because of what you see happening all over the country on social media, people of color are, I don’t want to say targeted by cops, but that’s exactly what it looks like. I feel like when I see a cop I have to have my guard up, when they are supposed to protect you, ya know. I don’t know.

Jackson acknowledged the confusion he felt at knowing that these authority figures were meant to protect but experience has taught him to not be trusting. This fear of authority in the community has led to a lack of cooperation between the young men and not just police, but any authoritative figure, such as deans and teachers in the school building. This “target” on their backs makes some of the young men feel like they cannot trust people who are meant to serve and protect them, and this feeling transferred into their school lives as well. Walk into any NYC

public school and you are greeted with an SSA, a school security agent, whose job is to ensure the safety of students, but is a direct line to the police stations in the area, and thus an extension of the police these students often fear. School deans also have direct lines to the precincts in the area and can be seen socializing with the cops assigned to the school. If you do not trust cops, how do you trust people who do, like your deans and SSAs? The Umoja facilitators felt and acknowledged this tension and used it to fuel dialogue amongst the students as they discussed the police and their relationship with authority figures during barber shop hour and in Crew group discussions.

One of the ways in which Umoja tried to help students process through the tensions is through a workshop focused on the relationship between the police and their community. During this time Brothers had to reflect on and embrace the feelings they had towards authority figures and came to terms with how this impacted the way they acted in their day to day interactions with adults and other authority figures. They tackled questions of worth, and racism, and processed how hearing and reading about young men like Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, and Tamir Rice impacted them and their community. During observations of these activities students were seen reflecting on the way in which young men of color such as Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown were portrayed in the media, how they saw the role of the police in their killings, and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement. Brothers expressed a fear of cops, and fear of being a victim, and a fear of being remembered for the mistakes they may have made instead of the positive programs they were a part of. From researcher journal entries, there was a somber feeling after this workshop, one that would not be shaken for a number of days as Brothers processed their own thoughts and feelings about how this would impact them moving forward, and how they could trust people who they were afraid of. After these conversations Brothers

engaged in watching Dr. Martin Luther King's "I've Been to the Mountaintop" speech. When Brothers left this workshop they did not return to their normal games in the living area or to run around outside, instead many stayed in their rooms, or sought to continue having conversations with adult staff members. In the end the young men left this workshop without a resolution but with a better understanding of themselves, their role, and how they wanted to approach these tough conversations which had an impact on at least one member, John who described the following:

When we was watching the speech, Dr. Martin Luther King's speech, and it spoke out to me because it was like 56 years ago, everything was way worse than it is now, but time has changed and we have made an improvement, slight, but I see that there's a lot more to improve on. There's a lot more people to change and...because the people who are ignorant in the past they teach their kids to be ignorant and it just keeps going on and on and on again. So, I feel the only way we're stopping that is if we, the older generation teach our younger kids or our younger siblings the wrongs and the rights of humans and what should be done and what should be done and how to treat another person and not separate them just because they're a different skin color or from a different part of the country or the world.

John's reflections speak to a renewed purpose and a value to engaging in these conversations to better their own understandings of race and equality in America but also in the need to engage others in these conversations, something John in particular has done by attending and speaking on panels at places such as the Coalition of Schools Educating Boys of Color's annual gathering and other platforms with the ESI community.

It was not just figures of authority who made these young men feel targeted. They felt the same way about people they saw on the subway, people they encountered in other boroughs, and even some members within their community. Tony stated, “I believe the hardest thing about being a young black man in New York City is not being accepted in certain areas because if you go downtown a lot of people like well, the white people will look at us strange like we don’t belong there”. Jordan added, “I was going to say constantly being seen as a target due to being black or Hispanic. I think since we’re colored, people look at us different. They expect that we’re going to do something dumb because we’re colored”. In many ways the Brothers were alluding to race and the role this played in how they were perceived by the White individuals they encountered in different aspects of their everyday life, but this was not limited to being only across lines of difference. In a focus group Justin stated, “something that is hard like being a young male of color in the city is not being accepted by the different ethnicities that’s also in the city because there’s other races that are in the same category as you and they don’t acknowledge you even though you are all together, they still treat you below them”. There is a sense that not only are they assumed to be “guilty” but that they will continue to make poor choices, are not intelligent or educated, and that people assume the worst about them as individuals. Other Brothers agreed. When asked why he felt targeted Jason stated, “Because people perceive us as criminals or uneducated.” This perceived lack of intelligence has implications as Tony alluded to when he stated:

I think the hardest part of being a colored male in the city is the opportunities that you’re limited to I guess. I feel like based on the way people see you from the outside they assume that you can’t be able to...the expectations that they have, and because of that it kind of makes it hard to seek out jobs or join teams and stuff like that. They have a whole

bunch of stereotypes behind us and that's what holds us back from achieving different goals and things that we set for ourselves.

The Umoja Brothers thought that these perceptions meant that they were denied opportunities and made them react defensively anytime they were confronted about a mistake they made. Feeling targeted made the Brothers carry a burden that weighed them down even as they were trying to improve and do better for themselves, their family and their community.

Carrying the Torch

The second theme that emerged in relation to what students found difficult about being a young black male was the idea that students felt like they were carrying a torch, not just for themselves but for their families and community. The word torch did not start out as a “negative” burden, but rather a positive symbol for the passing of leadership from one group of graduating seniors to the next. At the King’s ceremony in 2016, one Brother exclaimed that the “young men were rising” and a torch became a part of the closing ceremonies at camp in that year. But this torch later became a symbol for pressure Brothers felt to do well and be an example in their communities, to be better than what they saw in the media, and to meet their Brother’s expectations. Tony described it as a “pressure to make it out” a need to “try to beat the obstacles, go to college, and beat the statistics.” Many of the young men nodded when Tony made these statements and agreed. Elijah added, “We gotta be better than our fathers, than the other black students before us”. This need to succeed was not about the individual student and what was necessary for them to thrive but rather a larger need for the community to be proud of its young members. This was evident in the focus group with veteran members. I probed members about how they felt about this pressure in their school communities. Brothers were quick to point out that all of a sudden they were all expected to be perfect, that they could not

make any mistakes. Jason described it as, “If I breathe too loud, all of a sudden I am an embarrassment to the program”. There was a need to live up to the program’s name and not their own leadership potential. The young men stated that this pressure often came from multiple sources, from their homes, school, and mentors, and that it often felt like a burden as much as it was a source of motivation.

Carrying the torch meant different things to different members. In an interview, Jackson described it as “being expected to be a leader because not everybody can lead and everything and there's not that many young black leaders so you're expected to just lead”. Jackson was speaking to the responsibility of being a leader and role model for younger members of their community and even siblings. This was particularly noticeable from their families during the King’s Ceremony. The King’s Ceremony occurred at the end of the summer camp, when families were invited to visit the young men and where the participants made commitments to those in attendance to graduate within a specific time frame and support their Brothers. At no time were the Brother committing to anything more than finding success for themselves and helping their Brothers do the same, but the families spoke a different truth. Murmurings from the families included the pride they felt at how their son was an example for the other young men in their building, or in their families, or how this program meant they had to do “big things”. Even teachers that attended added they were going to be able to call on these young men to establish cultural norms in the school and lean on these young men to take leadership roles in their classes to help ensure all students were working towards academic success. One can argue that even, we, as the program facilitators at times expected them to take charge and become a beacon of sorts for what success could look like for young men in their communities. It is not surprising then that these young men see this as pressure coming from all angles and struggle with how these

expectations fit into their schema while dealing with people who expect them to fail. Despite the many opportunities afforded to the Umoja Brothers, Tony had this to say:

I think the hardest part of being a colored male in the city is the opportunities that you're limited to I guess. I feel like based on the way people see you from the outside they assume that you can't be able to meet the expectations that they have, and because of that it kind of makes it hard to seek out jobs or join teams and stuff like that.

The Umoja Brothers heard the high expectations from family members, teachers, and others in their community while simultaneously internalizing the assumptions of failure these same people had for them, and they had to grapple with what this meant for them on a day to day basis.

Navigating Opposing Expectations

How do you deal with the weight of expectations of success, “the torch”, and the weight of expectations of failure, “being targeted”, while navigating the complexities of growing up as a young man of color? In our focus group Jackson summarized it as follows:

You have to go to school and teachers kind of tell you, “you are a young black man of color and I expect you to do this,” you're supposed to get out of the stereotype, you're supposed to grow up and be something good and not be like all the other black men”.

In this statement what stands out is the phrasing “you are supposed to.” I asked Jackson about this in a follow up interview, and he stated that he felt the need to say “supposed to” because people did not expect it to be a reality. According to Jackson, “People say they want you to do this and that but they don't really believe you can do it. They just say it to make you feel some type of way about yourself.” Jackson was describing the need to be a better version of himself, to be a young man of color who did not fit the stereotype applied to him, but that he did not believe

others thought he could do it. He was trying to navigate the pressure of carrying the torch while feeling targeted by his community.

Jackson was not alone in this feeling. His Umoja Brother, Jordan, shared that:

The disadvantages that you face and then the fact that not only do we have disadvantage but they also put like the weight of the world on our shoulders while being scared to walk home at night, being scared of cops because you think something might happen, and actual gang violence going on.

Jordan was speaking to the complexities of navigating his changing identity, managing expectations, and living up to these expectations. Jordan refers to the “weight of the world” he felt on his shoulders to be able to do right for his family and make them proud, while steering clear of the violence he knew all too well lurked in his neighborhood, all while knowing that cops he encountered in these areas might have assumed he was up to no good, and this assumption could have deadly consequences. This is very hard for anyone, but especially for young students who were still learning who they were and developing their identity as young men.

Umoja Brothers expressed their feelings and frustrations about these ideas in a number of ways. One example was during Crew (small group meetings) where students were asked to reflect on what they were nervous about. In the Crew I observed, many described being nervous about succeeding during the year and being given a “fair shot” while dealing with people’s perceptions of who they are based on previous experiences or assumptions. Tony stated, “I know in the past I have been a clown, but I am going to be different. I am going to live up to my agreement, but I don’t think it will change anyone’s mind.”

The tension between these two ideas does not just come from the school community either. Elijah stated, “In the Bronx, if I step out, people expect you to dress a certain way and act a certain way, and talk a certain way.” Elijah is speaking to the outside pressure of being a member of the Bronx community and how this comes with a whole other set of expectations which can be in contrast with school, Umoja, and their own expectations for themselves. Young men of color are continuously dealing with this dichotomous tension, and it is something they will continue to face in other spaces and contexts throughout their life.

The Umoja program offered students spaces to cope with and learn to process the many different emotions that are elicited by these conflicting expectations. Elijah said that, “In Umoja, I feel like I could just be me and do what I want. I can be myself.” Umoja seemed to offer a space where the tension between these ideas is acknowledged, accepted, and processed. Jackson added, “There’s been times when we just spent hours at the school working out and talking about life, and high school, and family, and all the pressure and talking to Medina and hearing his story it makes me think.” This was an example of an unstructured way Umoja created a space for processing, but there are various structured ways Umoja aimed to equip the young men with skills and the sharing of stories to help them cope with the pressure they feel. One way was by naming it through activities such as Crew, barbershop hour, and panels. The ability to find a safe space to share their thoughts and feelings was one of the strengths of the program as described by the Brothers, and it was not just Brothers sharing stories. During their summer retreat, Umoja Brothers heard stories from a panel of black men who grew up in the Bronx, in neighborhoods similar to their own, who were lawyers, educators, philanthropists, and doctors, who shared their own stories of managing expectations from different groups of people while staying true to who they were.

Developing Identities as Emerging Leaders

Building Leadership Skills. If you look up the word leader in the Merriam-Webster dictionary, one of the definitions is “a person who has commanding authority or influence”. According to a study by the Spears Centers there are “ten skills of critical importance for leaders: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community” (Spears, 2010). Using these definitions, it is safe to say that all of the Umoja Brothers were leaders in their school, amongst their friends, and in their families before joining the program. During the community nomination process (by which new members are selected), Umoja Brothers pointed out how their nominees possess skills such as the “ability to express themselves, having other kids listen to them, and they are the leader of their group”, which align to the many skills that make great leaders such as persuasion, stewardship, and empathy. It was evident that the Umoja Brothers already possessed many of the skills needed to be a leader, they just were not aware that they had them or how to use them. In a sense their leadership skills were hiding in plain sight. In an interview Elijah stated, “I think I always had the skills, but Umoja did bring it out more because of the activities that we do, and how the staff pushes me.” Elijah is referring to the community building exercises and communication drills that were a part of the Umoja camp experience and also occurred during some Tuesday sessions. In his interview, Jordan further described an activity called step in step out, “it impacted me, because when I first got there, I didn't really know anybody, but Jason, since some of the questions were tough, and I seen a lot of people step in. When I stepped in, I felt like a little bit closer to people”. This activity helped Brothers build community through the acknowledgement of shared experiences. In his interview John also mentioned the impact these community builders had on his experience when he described yet another activity, “Oh,

when we were blindfolded and we had to walk up the hill. The goal was to eventually get back to the main point where we started. Then, go back into the cabins. When we were in the middle of the woods, everybody started trying to go their way. We'd get into an argument. It showed us that everybody had our own ideas, but then we stopped in the middle of the woods to actually talk about it and decide to go one route". The Umoja program was able to harness and develop leadership skills in the young men and help them apply them to different contexts.

How did the program accomplish this? Throughout the program, Umoja participants engaged in various activities that focused on communication and community building such as blind trust walks through the wooded areas at the campsite, as described by John earlier, where Brothers practiced trusting each other, and clear communication and crossing the river where students had to "cross shark infested" waters using small mats with the curveball of having some Brothers be "blinded" or handicapped in some way. During these activities Brothers often resorted to their instincts of feeling frustrated and angry, but as they engaged in more and more of these activities there was a clear shift in approach. By design these activities were meant to push students and frustrated them so that they could practice how to approach problems when they felt this way in the future and it worked. At camp during a second attempt at yet another activity where Brothers had to flip the rug they were all standing on without having a Brother touch the floor they stopped mid-way and had a strategy meeting. During this strategy meeting Brothers discussed the different ideas they had, chose one and assigned roles in order to complete the activity. After over an hour of trying, they successfully completed the activity and there was a debrief where they shared their reflections. Brothers shared ideas like, "I felt like no one was listening to me until I shared why I thought my idea would work," "I was a quiet leader meaning that sometimes you just have to follow and leader by knowing that sometimes your

ideas is not the best,” and “nothing gets done by shouting out and not listening. We were successful after the strategy meeting because we had a plan and we listened to each other.” These reflections show a growth in specific leadership skills mentioned before such as listening, persuasion, stewardship and conceptualization. It is clear that Brothers are also learning the different ways you can be a leader, that leadership can take many forms, and that being a leader might mean stepping back as much as it means stepping up. Many of the young men had the skills to be leaders, they just did not see them as leadership skills.

We Are Leaders. Being chosen for a “leadership” program and being called “Umoja Leaders” changed how the young men saw themselves and also how they saw the others in the Umoja program too. This is best showcased by what Malcolm had to say, “I am around mature people and people are proud of me. I can showcase my leadership skills and it’s made me feel like a better person.” Malcolm described Umoja as a space in which he and his peers could grow and learn to become leaders. There was a connection between how Brothers saw each other and self-perception. Specifically the idea that “well if I am in a program of leaders, and you’re all leaders, then I must be a leader too.” In becoming better leaders, Brothers described that seeing each other they learned how to be better leaders. When asked to describe one thing that Umoja did to help you, Jackson stated,

One thing that Umoja really helped me out with, I was really criticized for being immature, people just say I was smart and not funny and whatnot but I was just too immature and I didn't know when to stop, how to stop, where, those kind of things. And I came to Umoja and I meet these three seniors, Stefan, Joel and JJ. And basically through watching JJ and Joel, I learned how to be more mature and Stefan always called me out whenever I did something wrong.

Jackson learned from his peers how to be more mature, act mature in classes, and make better choices. Learning from his peers was not the only thing Jackson got from his Brothers, but he pointed to how Umoja Brothers held each other accountable for showing leadership in classrooms and other spaces. Jordan added:

These guys have always been there to push me to the highest limits like when they see me doing bad, they'd tell me get up and do my work. They always want to see me be better than what I showed myself to be. They always had a higher standard for me, they push me to the higher expectations.

Being in the program changed how the young men saw each other, which in turn changed how they saw themselves. The idea that if Jackson was a leader because he was in this program, than I must be one too spread quickly. Adam stated, "I saw how he (Umoja Brother) started to look out for me more and he started to make sure we were making the right decisions, like going to class on time, and going to Saturday study group". Malcolm, Anthony, and Adam were no longer the class clowns to each other, they could help each other make better choices such as getting to class on time, wearing their appropriate uniform, setting an example in their classes, push each other, hold each other accountable and be leaders, together. What is of notice here is that nothing had really changed for many of these young men at the start of the program or even after camp. They had some of the same troubles, still struggled in many ways, and made mistakes but the Brothers felt accountable to someone in their development as leaders and as Brothers, and this was powerful. It was not that they had never been accountable to anyone before, there are hours of meetings, conversations between teachers, advisors, parents, deans, and administrators, as proof of that, but for most of these young men things just did not stick as it did when they had Brothers pushing them.

Leaders in the School Community. Being in the program helped students become leaders in the school community. Imagine going to a place, every day, where you don't feel accepted, or feel targeted. It was no surprise that these young men did not want to go to school, to specific classes, and acted out in specific ways as a way to cope with being in that environment, but Umoja helped change that. Jonathan states:

It somewhat gave me a little motivational boost, because a lot of people was telling me that I can't give up, and that they had my back. That they would be there to help me for homework, classwork, everything. So it kind of boosted me, and made me a little more excited to go to school.

In a sense, the program helped these young men develop strong relationships with members of their school community, and this changed how they felt about school and their school culture.

In addition to changing how these young men felt about school, the communication skills Brothers practiced and learned gave them alternate ways to interact with school leaders and to school situations. One example of this was family meetings. I was first introduced to "family meetings" at the summer camp. After three failed attempts at successfully completing an activity, one of the young men yelled "family meeting", at which point all the young men huddled together for what would be a "family meeting" to strategize a plan of action. But family meetings did not just take place at camp, anytime someone in the brotherhood though it was necessary to have a whole group discussion they called a "family meeting". In the months after summer camp, family meetings were called after progress reports, before and after breaks, after a Brother was involved in a fight or other incident, when there was a disagreement with a school teacher or leader, and in the aftermath of the murder of one their own Umoja Brothers. Family meetings became a place during school where Brothers could "strategize" or come up with a sound plan of

action that could help them with the situation at hand. The impact was profound, Brothers learned how to communicate effectively by being able to check and understand their emotions before deciding on a course of action. All of these are examples of leadership skills mentioned earlier in this chapter and align with healing, awareness, foresight, commitment to the growth of people, and building community (Spears, 2010).

Another way Umoja helped students was by giving them opportunities to have serious dialogue with school leaders in a setting where they felt empowered and where they were seen as leaders. The ability to communicate more effectively allowed these young men to build relationships with other school community members, but Umoja went further. Umoja invited deans, and school administrators to the program to be a part of the experience. In the last three years, the principal, an assistant principal (or two), multiple deans, and teachers had all been facilitators in the program and it changed how these young men saw these community members, and vice versa. Ian states:

I got closer with a lot of people I had thought I would never be able to have a conversation with ever, including the principal of my school, which is weird. From kid stance, the principal's supposed to be stuck up and mean, but our principal is a cool, calm Guy. He listens to what we have to say.

“A cool and calm guy” is not the way many students would describe their school leader, but that is what students can see when they are experiencing school leaders in a different setting and are feeling seen and heard by school leaders as the change makers they could be.

Impact on Educational Experiences. By impacting young men’s feeling about and actions in school, as well as how they interacted with school leaders Umoja had an overall impact on these students’ educational experiences. It is not just the Brothers who noticed the

maturity and leadership of their Brothers, teachers also started to recognize these skills in these young men as well and as result the program opened up new opportunities to students. This opened many doors for Umoja Brothers, they were nominated for programs such as Global Glimpse, Summer Search, and Student Diplomacy Corps, where they would learn about and travel to countries all over the world. Student Diplomacy Corps in particular had only accepted members from the Umoja program, even though other students from the school had applied, because Umoja Brothers seems to already possess skills such as an awareness of themselves and an openness to understand others by engaging in dialogue and learning about other people's experiences. In fact it has become a goal of Umoja to make sure all of its members are a part of some program where they can travel and see the world. To date, Umoja Brothers have travelled to Belize, The Panda Institute in China, Spain, Italy, and gone on hiking trips in Colorado and North Carolina. In these programs Brothers were taking initiatives in leading conversations about race, equity and inclusion, questioning stereotypes, and sharing their experiences with people who have different educational and cultural backgrounds than they did. Brothers shared these experiences by participating on panels, presenting at conferences, and with young members in the community through middle school workshops the Umoja Brothers had initiated with middle schoolers in the school. Sharing what they had learned became paramount for the young men. In addition to travel programs the Umoja Brothers participated in some of the Expanded Success Initiative activities such as conferences and trips. For some of the young men these trips have been some of the best experiences within the program. When asked what was one of the most impactful activities in Umoja Anthony stated:

I feel like the ESI trips, because during the ESI trips, you get to travel, and experience new things. Help people out, and get an idea of what the world is doing, depending on the

activity, or the event. So I feel like the ESI trips stand out to me. I like it a lot.

For some Brothers it goes beyond just experiencing something with their Brothers. These trips have impacted how they see and view their own history. During an interview Jackson stated:

An event in Umoja that I experienced was when I went to Kentucky with a few of my Brothers, and the conference it was really...I was emotional because it was just amazing seeing black people together celebrating achievements because we don't usually come together to celebrate really. We're fighting against each other, cutting each other off. So, that made me emotional seeing the young people come together and talk about achievements.

These experiences have all impacted each Brother in a different way, and forever changed their school experience. Umoja helped others see that these young men deserved these experiences, and continues to open doors for these young men to continue to showcase their talents, and make them see that they can be so much more than a label or an expectation.

When asked in a focus group, "How would you describe Umoja?", Jackson stated:

I would say immeasurable because I think our goals are pretty much immeasurable, we can accomplish anything together. Especially since we're spreading throughout the school, we're spreading to other schools, we're pretty much immeasurable, can nobody measure the type of success that we can have individually and especially together.

Conclusion. Navigating expectations from parents, teachers, peers, the block you live on, is a very complex process for many of the young men in the Umoja program, particularly when these expectations are at odds with each other, or create barriers to your ability to feel like you can succeed. For the Umoja Brothers they have to hear about what they are "supposed to do" and handle the pressure of "being perfect" or "better" in their everyday decision making. This is

something that all Brothers agreed was a burden they have not yet figured out how to deal with and one the Umoja program tries to address, and a tension they will continue to have to work to figure out as it will impact them in other contexts, spaces, and within other institutions. Further research on what works is needed, but what is clear from this data is that through it all students can emerge as leaders within their schools and community, and that many of these students already possess the skills necessary to be great leaders. Students just need the right experiences to flex these skills and fine tune them in order to use them in different contexts.

Chapter 6: Overview of Study, Implications, Recommendations, Limitations, Conclusion

“Through the program we have become family, with a shared history, purpose, and future.”

- Kimberly Melgar

Overview of Study

Numerous studies have documented the disparity in schooling for students in schools across racial and gender lines, and many have focused on young male students of color (The Schott Foundation, 2018; Bohrnstedt, Kitmitto, Ogut, Sherman, and Chan, 2015; Fergus, Noguera, & Martin, 20145. These educational disparities have real consequences that impact individuals, families, and communities in the present and the future. The focus on the disengagement of male students of color and efforts being made to re-engage these students through pedagogies, mentoring, and external programs has been the focus of much of the literature discussed in this study. As highlighted, there are various reasons for disengagement from schooling such as school culture, feeling connected to the school community, teacher identity and perceptions, and family disengagement. To address these potential reasons, school districts have tried out and implemented a number of interventions aimed at keeping these young men active in schools, or to bring them back into the school community. Interventions have focused on classroom practices such as culturally relevant teaching and tutoring, school focused mentoring programs, and external intervention programs that took a comprehensive approach that included academic support, mentoring, and at times job opportunities. This mixed methods study aimed to look at an “in house” program, The Umoja Leadership Program which focused primarily on leadership development through a cohort based Brotherhood, to better understand these students’ experiences, what they thought was impactful about the program, and if there were any positive academic outcomes for its members.

In order to ensure a rich and robust picture of the program a mixed methods approach was used that included observations, interviews, focus groups, and analysis of academic records for members of the program. Quantitative findings showed that members in the program saw an average increase in GPA and credit accumulation every year in the program. These findings also suggest that there is a relationship between the length of time a student is in the program and an increase in student grade point average and credit accumulation particularly there was significant increases after being enrolled at least two years in the program. This is a powerful metric as credit accumulation is directly linked to on time graduation and GPA is related to post-secondary options and opportunities. Students within the program not only earned more credits every year they were in the program, but often made up missing credits in order to graduate on time with their cohort. This quantitative data is of interest because the Umoja leadership program did not have any formal academic component in its programming, as the program focuses on leadership development and socio-emotional health. There was no tutoring, no extra coursework or a focus on classwork during meetings, but instead a focus on accountability, communication, and perseverance, all leadership qualities. These findings are in line with research on the positive impact leadership development through school based extracurricular programming can have on academic achievement (Fredericks and Eccles, 2006; Hancock, Dyke, Jones, 2012; Linver, Roth, & Brooks-Gunn, 2009), and as such offers a new frame for what students who are not excelling in school may need, perhaps it is not another math class, but instead opportunities to expand their leadership skills.

Qualitative data from this study, yielded two other themes that to some degree shed some light on the quantitative data. The first theme was the tension these students deal with as they grapple with the pressures of carrying the torch for their communities and meeting high

expectations placed on them by these communities, while feeling targeted by their community. Students felt confused by the opposing expectations they were getting from school, family, and their community, and struggled to make sense of the opposing ideals. Students often felt weighed down, and as if no matter how hard they tried, failure seemed inevitable. This tension was evident in students who were in their first year in the program, and students who were in year four, and was present across grade levels. Of note here is that this pressure was present before students joined the program, but they seemed to become more aware of it as they engaged in dialogue around these pressures in group discussion, and that this tension exists for young men of color in contexts outside of school.

The second theme focused on leadership specifically that through this program students' leadership skills emerged. I use the word emerged deliberately because many of the Umoja Brothers possessed skills such as perseverance and investment building, but the Umoja program offered students a place where they could expand on these skills. Additionally, the program allowed the young men to interact with members in their community with a shared history, purpose, and future, it created a space for belonging that allowed these skills to flourish in a space where they would not be judged or penalized for mistakes. Creating a feeling of belonging was one of the biggest commonalities across participants and this is in line with the research on school culture by (Bridgeland et al, 2006) that underscores how important school culture and feelings of belonging is to students. It also helped students build strong relationships with teachers and staff members, which has potential positive outcomes. Firstly, it allows students to be seen and heard in the school community, and two, it shifted how teachers saw these students, two important ideas that the literature pointed to earlier were reasons for why students

disengaged from the school community and as such the Umoja program could prevent disengagement (Bridgeland et al, 2006; Fergus, Noguera, & Martin, 2014).

The program helped highlight the leadership skills students already had, and helped hone new ones which they then used to mentor younger members, interact with peers, and engage with other school and out of school activities and leadership opportunities. These leadership skills helped students build on their self-efficacy, as evidenced by quotes like “It made me see that I had a cause, I had a reason to be, I could be a leader, I could change things” and “I was called a leader, I had never been called a leader before, so I had to step up, for my bros”. Self-efficacy research has highlighted the power of self-efficacy on student achievement (Klassen and Usher, 2010; Talsma, Schüz, Schwarzer, and Norris, 2018). The idea that if “I believe then I can do” seems to be living here, if I believe I can be a leader, then I will act as a leader. The program itself changed the ways students spoke about themselves and saw each other, and as such had the potential to impact their self-efficacy as students. Based on the expanded opportunities Umoja Brothers had to engage in other external programs one can argue that it also impacts how teachers saw these students, and thus changed teacher perceptions. To what degree, this study did not explore.

Implications

One of the most surprising and important findings of this study is evidence of the impact on student grade point average and credit accumulation. Umoja was not designed as an academic program, it was designed as a leadership program but it seems to have a positive effect on student outcomes. This study implies that we should re-evaluate how we approach supporting students who are not doing well academically. In many programs there is a focus on developing skills related to academic achievement such as learning study habits, extra remedial coursework,

test prep, but this data suggests that developing students other “nonacademic” skills may actually yield better outcomes for students. For example, instead of requiring students to attend tutoring or extra content supports, requiring workshops in leadership development, effective communication, and even conflict management might be more effective in helping students achieve academically. At its inception, we knew that the words we used to describe the program, the young men, our activities, all mattered, that they had the power to change their narrative. Being chosen for a “leadership” program and being called “Umoja Leaders” changed how the young men saw themselves and also how they saw the others in the Umoja program too. Having a focus on leadership seemed to have an impact on how the young men in the study saw themselves and their peers, as such, this study suggests that how schools decide to label students and the ways in which specific groups of students are described has an impact on how students see themselves, and their connection to the school community.

Another implication related to GPA and CA data is who is accepted into the Umoja program. Currently any high school male students between 9th and 12th grade can become an Umoja Brother, and there has been some thought to the need to increase the number of 9th grade students in the program. The rationale being that the earlier the better, but the data in this study points to the magic number of years being two. This means that students need to be in the program for at least two years to see significant gains in GPA and CA, but that they don’t need to be in the program for 4 years as there are no significant gains in year three. This implies that the program should not accept incoming seniors but that there is no need to increase the enrollment of incoming 9th graders.

One other implication related to the mentoring aspect of the Umoja program. Umoja Brothers received some mentoring from staff but more importantly became mentors to each

other. Again this challenges traditional notions that students who are struggling need mentors, perhaps they need to feel like they need to be their best in order to mentor and be examples to others in their communities? This is all tied to the developing identities of these students. Young male students of color are developing in their identities, as most youth their age, but have to manage expectations from various different groups that at many times come into conflict with each other. The data narrative in this study points to a need for students to find ways to grapple with these expectations in a way that will allow them to flourish and not become beaten down by expectations they oftentimes have no control over. Additionally there is a need for students to develop their scholarly identity as well as their leadership identity through opportunities like the Umoja program. Specifically, the program allowed students to develop skills and use these skills across contexts, in line with Hancock, Dyke, Jones (2012) findings on how flexing their leadership muscles in new spaces allowed students to transfer skills and continue to build on them in places like travel programs, on panels, and to share them with other community members

The last implication left to discuss is related to the 98% graduation rate. Compared to the school graduation rate of 86%, this data point shows the impact that the Umoja program has on the young men it serves within the school community. The city wide graduation rate was 75% and the district graduation rate was 64%. When compared to the school, district, and city, the Umoja Brothers are graduating at the highest rates, and this matters, because of the economic and post-secondary doors this opens for them.

Recommendations

Based on the data analysis of this study, I propose the following recommendations for the facilitators of the Umoja Program, and any other school that implements a similar program.

1. All participants should be in the program for at least 2 academic years as this is the minimum number of years that yields significant academic growth.
2. Focus of the program should be on honing specific leadership and communication skills as these skills help students navigate school based relationships, help them to advocate for themselves, and to navigate within the school community.
3. Opportunities to engage and use leadership skills in other contexts should be offered.
4. Special attention should be paid to helping students navigate conflicting expectations because this is a tension they will continue to face in other spaces and contexts. This should include panels where alumni from the school community share their own experiences for how they navigate these differing expectations, and how to set one's own expectations.
5. In addition to helping students navigate these expectations within the school setting, the Umoja program should equip students with the skills to seek out support systems within other contexts, such as post-secondary institutions.
6. Use asset based approaches to describing students and student groups so that students are not labeled as at risk, but in ways that describe their strengths.

Limitations of Study

While this study identified positive academic outcomes for participants and brought to light the hardships of conflicting expectations students have to navigate, there were several limitations that should be addressed to improve reliability and expand findings. First, the motivation for this study was the researcher's knowledge of participants' history as it pertained to school attendance and high school graduation. As such there was a focus on attendance, GPA, and credit accumulation. A quantitative analysis of other metrics such as discipline records, test

scores, and college readiness would expand findings. Additionally the scope of this study was just high school and graduation, a longitudinal study would help to understand the impact the program has long term such as college graduation or post-secondary job placement.

Second, this study focused on the participants in the program but some data suggested implications for staff as well. Staff members stated how grateful they were to be a part of this program and how it had made them eager to take on other leadership opportunities in order to become a more important part of student's daily life. Additionally, staff members stated that their time with these students helped them feel more connected to the school community. This is important to note as the staff consists mainly of male educators of color who have higher attrition rates across schools all over the country. Further study of impact on staff would highlight implications for teacher turnover, leadership development, and impact on school culture.

Third, staying with staff, there was no research done on who the staff members were and what qualities made them effective facilitators. Being a leader involves being a part of social processes and thus there are interactions amongst group members. In extracurricular, leadership development is linked to the interactions between the adults and students, and these interactions are important and influence the attitudes and behaviors that students see and mimic (Bandura, 1977). As such, there is a need to learn and understand what makes an Umoja facilitator effective and will ensure Umoja Brothers are getting the most out of the program experience.

Fourth, the study speaks to a shift in how students saw themselves, and a potential shift to teacher perception. The implications of teacher bias and perceptions is clearly stated in the literature but this study does not explore how participation in the program impact teacher perception and bias as they interact with Umoja students in their classes.

Lastly, this study focused on the boys Umoja program. There is a girls program available at the school as well called NIA. Future research should need conducted which documents the experiences of girls in the AMS community and in the NIA program, and even the school community at large.

Conclusion

Cracking the code of helping young male students of color stay in school has been widely discussed and researched topic. As highlighted in the literature review, there are numerous programs aimed at addressing the disengagement of young men of color, and engaging them in school or alternative programs to ensure positive outcomes for students that include high school graduation, and employment. This study aimed to document the first hand experiences of students within the AMS community and the support they received through a school based leadership program. The findings of this study highlight potential new approaches to engaging this population of students in the school community and a need to rethink about a one size fits all solution to the gaps in academic achievement. There is a need for alternative programming for meeting their unique needs that focuses on developing the whole student through mentoring, socio-emotional support, and through a brotherhood as a way to keep students engaged in the school community, impact academic achievement, and help prepare young men to understand and make sense of expectations set upon them as they engage with different groups of people in various contexts after graduation.

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Appendix A: Focus Group Guide

Welcome

Welcome to our focus group and thank you for volunteering to participate. Our topic for discussion today is the Umoja program you are currently a part of. The results of this focus group will be used to document how, you, members of the program feel about the program and what parts of the program you like or dislike. You were selected because you are members of the program.

Guidelines

There are some guidelines I'd like for you to follow during our time today. For starters there are no right or wrong answers, only differing points of view. You don't need to agree with others, but you must listen respectfully as others share their views. You've probably noticed my phone is recording. We're recording the session because we don't want to miss any of your comments. People often say very helpful things in these discussions and we can't write fast enough to get them all down. We will be on a first name basis today, and we won't use any names in our reports. You may be assured of complete confidentiality from me, that being said please note that anything said during this meeting should remain within this group and not be discussed with anyone outside the group. Lastly, I ask that you turn off your phones. If you cannot and if you must respond to a call please do so as quietly as possible and rejoin us as quickly as you can. My role as moderator will be to guide the discussion but please talk to each other.

Questions

Ok, let's begin.

1. What do you think is the hardest part of being a young male of color in NYC?
2. Describe one activity or event that has really impacted you in the program.

- a. How did this event impact you?
3. Tell me about a time when Umoja helped you with a difficult subject?
 - a. Did anyone else have a similar experience?
4. Tell me about one person in Umoja who has supported you and how did they support you?
5. Why did you decide to participate in the program?
6. Why have you continued to remain in the program?
7. Does your family support your role in the program?
 - a. How?
8. When you think about “Umoja” what is the first word that comes to mind?
 - a. Why?

Appendix B: Interview Guide

Welcome

Thank you for agreeing to this interview. Ur topic for discussion today is the Umoja program you are currently a part of. The results of this interview will be used to document how, you, a member of the program feel about the program, and what parts of the program you like or dislike. You were select because you are members of the program and you had some interesting things to say during our focus groups and observations.

I just want to remind you that at any moment if you feel uncomfortable you can ask to skip a questions or end the interview at any time without worry or consequence. Please just let me know. Is it ok if I record this conversation?

Questions?

Ok, let's begin.

1. How did being chosen for the Umoja program make you feel?
 - a. Why?
2. How would you describe Umoja to an "outsider"? Why?
3. Describe one activity or event that has really impacted you in the program.
 - a. How did this even impact you?
4. During camp, the Friday night bon fire has become an emotional event.
 - a. Could you tell me more about it?
 - b. How do you feel about it?
 - c. What do you think makes it so powerful?
5. In the focus group you mentioned crew time?
 - a. Could you explain or add more detail to this?

- b. Why is it important?
 - c. How does crew time make you feel?
 - d. Did it change how you felt about the program or school? How?
6. During an observation you stated the following_____.
- a. Could you explain or add more detail to this?
 - b. How did it make you feel?
 - c. Did it change how you felt about the program or school? How?
7. There are a variety of supports through Umoja, there is Crew, Umoja Saturdays, Tuesday meetings, camp, and ESI trips.
- a. Which activity is your favorite and why?
 - b. Which activity is your least favorite and why?
8. Would you recommend the Umoja program?
- a. Why or why not?
9. Do you think the Umoja program would work in another school?
- a. What parts do you think would help it work?
 - b. What parts do you think can be left out?

Is there anything else you would like me to know about the program?