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“WHY DO I HAVE TO LEARN THIS ANYWAY?”: A QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATIVE ACTION RESEARCH STUDY INTO THE TENSION BETWEEN THE RURAL, WORKING-CLASS MASCULINE STUDENT AND THE FORMAL EDUCATIVE STRUCTURE

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my father, Richard Glenn Bowers (1947-2017).
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the hard work of Dr. Rhonda Jeffries, Dr. David Roberts, Dr. Linda Silvernail, and Dr. Suha Tamim in seeing this through to its end. I would also very much like to acknowledge the great patience practiced by my wife, Katie Bowers, and my daughter, Lily Bowers, throughout the three years I completed this work. Finally, I would like to acknowledge my mother, Tanya Bowers, for being the best mother for me.
ABSTRACT

The specific problem of practice on which this study was focused is the tension experienced between the rural (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016), working-class (Draut, 2018) masculine (Connell, 1995) student and the formal educative structure. The purpose of this investigative action research study was to identify and clarify in my context the unique tension experienced between the rural, working-class masculine student and the formal educative structure. This tension I refer to as tension, as tension is a variant of tension (Oxford English Dictionary, 1994, p. 789), and the rural, working-class masculine student is, at his unique nexus of intersectionality, a variant of counter-school culture. This unique tension is assembled from of a series tensions between the rural, working-class masculine student and the formal educative structure: between masculine expressions, between work, between knowledge, and between success. As the problem of practice on which this study is focused is the unique tension experienced between the rural, working-class masculine student and the formal educative structure, critical theory is utilized as the study’s theoretical framework, as the critical orientation is one of conscious opposition and critique, not merely of comprehension. Because there is great overlap between the aim of action research and the aim of critical theory, as both aim to improve practice and learning and society respectively, an action research design was utilized during this study.
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication ............................................................................................................................. iii  
Acknowledgements ................................................................................................................. iv  
Abstract ................................................................................................................................. v  
List of Tables ............................................................................................................................ vii  
Chapter One: Introduction ...................................................................................................... 1  
Chapter Two: Literature Review ............................................................................................ 29  
Chapter Three: Research Design and Methods ...................................................................... 65  
Chapter Four: Presentation and Analysis of Data ................................................................. 87  
Chapter Five: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations ........................................... 146  
References ............................................................................................................................... 173  
Appendix A: Student Focus Group Protocol ....................................................................... 189  
Appendix B: Teacher and Administrator Electronic Interview Protocol ......................... 191
LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1 Male Family Members ......................................................... 96
Table 4.2 Work .................................................................................. 97
Table 4.3 Knowledge .......................................................................... 100
Table 4.4 Success ................................................................................ 105
Table 4.5 Rurality ................................................................................ 117
Table 4.6 Working-Classness ............................................................... 122
Table 4.7 Masculinity .......................................................................... 124
Table 4.8 The Formal Educative Space .................................................. 127
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Ray’s running late again. It’s his truck. Again.

When he got to welding, it was running fine. In fact, pulling into the Career Center over in Jackson, the county seat, he thought about just how well it was running. It turned over with no trouble, which was surprising considering the cold. It warmed up fast—heat before he had even gotten out of his little community, Rich Springs, which was nice, and the whole drive felt more like gliding than driving—no knocking coming through town and no hesitation between gears, which was rare. Now, though, the thing won’t even start.

Try as he might, he can’t help but be frustrated. Why’s he gotta drive his dad’s old truck anyway? Why’s he gotta drive all the way from Rich Springs to Jackson every day to take welding? Why can’t welding just be offered at Calhoun High like all those other classes? A guy can take Piano II at Calhoun but not welding? What kind of sense does that make? Why’s he gotta have to be late to English IV again because his truck won’t start, made to feel dumb walking in with the late pass, interrupting things to hand it to Mr. Joy? Why? It don’t make no difference, that’s why. Just gotta get the truck running. Turns out it was a dead battery. That’s all. Sometimes the headlights don’t turn off—bad relay his dad tells him. His buddy Wayne had noticed coming into welding and meant to tell him, but he forgot. He didn’t remember until after class when he was
coming out of Leigh-Anne’s after grabbing a burger for the drive back to Calhoun. He cursed himself and headed back to the Career Center, where he found Ray under his hood, peering and poking around, cursing himself and now, under his breath, cursing Wayne for not remembering to say something.

Truck running, Ray’s glad to be heading back to school but not glad to be running late. He could go for a burger, but he’ll just have to go hungry. On a good day, he’s got a twenty minute drive from the Career Center to Calhoun; today, he’s got eighteen minutes to get there before English IV begins. It won’t happen, Ray thinks, but there’s no harm in trying.

*** *** *** *** ***

There are still stragglers pulling into the student lot making their way into school. The bell for classes to change has rung, Ray knows that, but the late bell hasn’t. It will in less than a minute, though. He sees Wayne hurrying into the main building. He knows this is not Wayne’s fault. Once more for posterity, though, he curses Wayne under his breath.

The late bell rings as he passes the Arts Focus building. Everyone else has made it at least inside the main building if not inside classrooms. It’s just him outside. He can already hear the piano students warming up. Piano II, but no welding.... As he walks up the steps to the patio, a student leaving school comes out the doors by the main office. Ray yells for him to hold the door for him, and he does. A break.
Walking by the main office, the attendance clerk is tied up with another student, so she doesn’t see him. Another break. As he is working his way down the middle hall toward English, he notices the door to Mr. Joy’s classroom is still open. Another break. Maybe all this will turn out okay.

Ray slips in unnoticed. Mr. Joy is still standing at his desk on the far side of the room, bent over his laptop. Ray’s classmates are still roaming about the room, talking to one another, allowing Ray to squeeze through the aisle to the far back corner and have a seat at his desk before Mr. Joy notices his absence. The desk beside him, which should be occupied by his one buddy in the class, Hunter, is vacant. Hunter’s not late. He’s just stopped coming. At first it was trouble with his truck. Then it was trouble with work: He was being scheduled too many hours. Then it was trouble caring. What does any of this matter to me? Hunter asked Ray the last time he saw him in class. How is any of this doing me any good?

Mr. Joy is behind his lectern and calling for the class to have a seat and quiet down. He begins to shuffle some papers and explain the plan for the day, which is to begin with grammar work concerning pronouns, differentiating between the subjective and the objective. Hearing this, Ray begins to panic. Yesterday, they had begun this work with pronouns, and he didn’t understand any of it. Mr. Joy had called on him numerous times while explaining that most of the time proper English grammar is not what many of “you kids” hear at home. He asked Ray to tell him which sentences sounded grammatically correct, and Ray had, and Ray had been incorrect every time. Mr. Joy used this to illustrate that if your family doesn’t speak properly, improper grammar will sound right because it sounds “normal” (He had used air-quotes when saying normal). Mr. Joy
explained that what is normal around Jackson County is “just wrong.” To avoid having to
go through this again, Ray had planned to study his pronoun packet while he was eating
in the parking lot before heading in for class. When his truck wouldn’t crank, though, he
had forgotten all about it. His pronoun packet hadn’t left his backpack since class
yesterday.

Mr. Joy instructs the class to get their pronouns packets out and turn to Exercise B. He explains that the students are to choose which pronoun best completes the sentence
and then explain in the space provided why the pronoun they have chosen is the correct
pronoun (And “Because it sounds right” will not cut it, as, Mr. Joy reiterates, “much of
what many of you hear at home and sounds right to you is very wrong”). The students
have ten minutes.

Reading through number one, Ray is lost. Ray knows what seems right to him, but Mr. Joy sai
that if it seems right to Ray, it is probably wrong. Ray knows what
seems wrong to him and assumes this then must be the answer Mr. Joy is looking for.
How does he explain it, though? This is right because it sounds nothing like the way me
or anyone I know talks? This is wrong because it sounds like the way me and everyone I
know talks? It’s useless. Either way, he’s wrong.

Ray puts his pencil down and just stares at the sentences. Mr. Joy asks him why
he isn’t working, and Ray says he’s “thinking.”

Ray thinks about his morning: Welding was great, but the rushed drive to Calhoun
wasn’t. If he didn’t have to drive all the way over to Jackson for welding, none of this
would be a problem. None of this would be happening. Not getting busted coming into
class late was good, but not having time to study wasn’t. Being called out by Mr. Joy yesterday certainly wasn’t any good, and undoubtedly being called out by Mr. Joy again today won’t be any good. Ray wishes Hunter was still in the class with him and wonders, “What’s Hunter doin’ right now? It’s gotta be better than this.”

Ray puts his head down on his desk. Mr. Joy asks him what he thinks he’s doing, and Ray says he’s “still just thinking.”

**Problem of Practice**

The specific problem of practice on which this study is focused is the tension experienced between the rural (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016), working-class (Draut, 2018) masculine (Connell, 1995) student and the formal educative structure. The underlying causes of tension between this localized masculinity (Messerschmidt, 2016) and the formal educative structure in my particular context are myriad and varied and are produced both structurally by the formal educative structure and culturally by the rural, working-class masculine student himself (Morton, 2019; Weis, 1996) through a “counter-school culture” (Willis, 1981)—a culture in which ideas, knowledge, and ideals are produced that run counter to those produced through formal schooling, specifically pertaining to formal educative space, formal education, formal educational achievement, and formal educational attainment (Willis, 1981).

To date, there is essentially no scholarship existing concerning the student at the nexus of the identity constituents that are rural, working-class, and masculine. While scholarship concerning these identity constituents as individual markers of difference exists (Carlson & Apple, 1998), it is slim (Teiken, 2014; Jaeger, 2018; McShane &
Smarick, 2018a; McLaren, P. L., & Giroux, H. A., 1990; Tyre, 2008). The available scholarship, however, does tend to point in one particular direction—the need for closer, more critical attention to all three unique students: the rural student, the working-class student, and the masculine student (Teiken, 2014; Jaeger, 2018; McShane & Smarick, 2018a; McLaren, P. L., & Giroux, H. A., 1990; Tyre, 2008). If each identity constituent, as a distinct marker of difference, calls for closer, more critical attention, the intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) of masculinity with rurality and working-classness, one can deduce, must be appreciated further (Messerschmidt, 2016).

To begin to understand the tension experienced between the formal educative structure and the student at the intersection (Crenshaw, 1989) of rurality, working-classness, and masculinity, one must first understand in isolation each of these identity constituents. Only once these identity constituents are understood in isolation can they begin to be understood in intersection.

**The Rural Students’ Struggles**

Every rural community is unique, as every rural community has been shaped by its unique history, unique geography, unique politics, and unique economy (Blackwell, 2014). As such, every rural population and the individuals comprising every rural population are equally unique, certainly including the students who are part of these populations (Ardoin, 2018).

Despite the unique nature of rural communities, rural students do—collectively—suffer from shared academic struggles. They begin school with lower reading achievement than suburban peers and demonstrate lower literacy in elementary school
than suburban peers (Lavalle, 2018). They have limited access to advanced courses in middle and high school and attend college at low rates, despite being more advantaged in community social resources than nonrural students (Byun et al., 2012). Furthermore, rural students are less likely to attain bachelor’s degrees in comparison to nonrural students who experience higher high school graduation rates (McShane & Smarick, 2018b), which is aligned with an increased attainment of bachelor’s degrees (Byun et al., 2012). While lower reading achievement entering school, lower literacy in elementary school, and limited access to advanced courses in middle and high school inevitably play a role in rural students being less likely to pursue educational advancement and achievement, the issue is not that simple.

The rural student is caught between modern aspirations and rural commitments to family, community, and local roots—a commitment to place, the lens through which young people first begin to make sense of their world and themselves in it (McInerney, et al., 2011). This commitment to place is the enemy of contemporary understanding of educational aspiration, and according to the contemporary cultural ethos, living well in a particular place is not a condition of the culturally approved good life (Howley, et al., 1996). Rural students are forced to choose between staying in their place or leaving and pursuing higher education elsewhere. They are told by society at large that staying is a mark of their failure (Howley, et al., 1996), but leaving comes with a unique set of ethical costs in relation to family, community, and roots (Morton, 2019).
The Working-Class Student’s Struggle

While both occupation and income contribute to social class, neither are enough to define it alone (Anyon, 1980). As social class is a construct and identity constituent best understood as a series of relationships—being the relationship between oneself and the system of ownership, oneself and other people, and oneself and the process of one’s own production (Anyon)—working-classness is a very complicated category of being. Acknowledging such complication, social class is often conflated with socioeconomic status (Rubin et al., 2014), as will be done here, not to further muddy the water, but to clear it up with an admission up front that the water is not exactly clear, that the boundaries are not exactly solid. Understood as such, one’s class, when used synonymously with one’s socioeconomic status, includes concrete, objective attributes such as income and educational attainment as well as abstract, subjective attributes such as perception of social status, relationships, opportunities, and privileges (American Psychological Association, 2017).

Despite the abstract and complex nature of class, and consequently socioeconomic status, studies concretely show students from the working-class struggle in school in unique ways. Low socioeconomic status in childhood is related to poor socioemotional processing, poor memory, poor language, and poor cognitive development (American Psychological Association, 2017 July). A child’s mother’s socioeconomic status has been shown to be related to her child’s lack of attention, interest, and cooperation in school (Morgan et al., 2009). A child from a household of lower socioeconomic status is approximately twice as likely as a child from a household of high socioeconomic status to exhibit behavior problems related to learning (Morgan et
al., 2009). A low-income student enters high school with literacy skills averaging five years behind those of high-income students (Reardon, Valentino, Kalogrides, Shores, & Greenberg, 2013). In 2014, the high school dropout rate among persons sixteen to twenty-four years old ranged from 11.6% in low socioeconomic status families to 2.8% in high socioeconomic status families (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). Combined with evidence that educational struggles in childhood related to class lead to low income and poor health in adulthood (American Psychological Association, 2017 July), the struggle of working-class students becomes an issue of generational injustice, an issue demanding immediate attention.

The Masculine Student’s Struggle

Current thinking and research recognizes plural masculinities, not a singular masculinity (Schrock and Schwalbe, 2009). For nearly four decades, in fact, the plurality of masculinities and the complexity of the nature of the construction of masculinities has been recognized (Roberts, 2013). Due to masculinity’s plurality and complexity, there is both further need for educational thinking about masculinities and the nature of their construction as well as educational thinking about the numerous possibilities for further educational work in the field (Connell, 1996).

While masculinities—in their plurality—are not synonymous with maleness, it is males—men and boys—who are the predominant constructors and enactors of masculinities, be them hegemonic, marginalized, or subordinated (Connell, 1997; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; McPherson, 2019; Roberts, 2013; Schrock and Schwalbe, 2009). Therefore, in researching constructed and enacted masculinities, most
commonly males and boys are the subjects of the research, and very often, despite having acknowledged that masculinities do not map cleanly or exclusively onto maleness, the terms *boys* and *men* are used to categorize those who enact masculinities, specifically when it is the enactment of the masculinity and its mapping onto maleness, no matter how haphazardly, that is being studied. More concretely, within the formal educative structure boys are studied as enactors of masculinities, specifically when those enactments are overwhelmingly boy-centered, such as the construction of a counter-school culture (Willis, 1981) or the signification of the possession of “the capacities to make things happen and to resist being dominated by others” (Schrock and Schwalbe, 2009, p. 280), the attribute most commonly associated with masculinity across masculinities.

Despite the research and attention paid to masculinities and the research and attention paid to men and boys as enactors of masculinities, there is a disconnect between and consequential underappreciation of the enactment of masculinities and its connection to the underperformance of boys in school, and as a result, this underperformance is being ignored by schools, communities, and elected leaders (Tyre, 2008). Boys from all circumstances are not thriving in schools (Tyre, 2008), and the struggles begin early. In preschool, boys are expelled at almost five times the rate of girls; in elementary school, boys are diagnosed with attention problems or learning disorders at four times the rate of girls and are twice as likely to be held back a grade (Tyre, 2008). In reading and writing, boys in elementary school are behind girls, and as the boys and girls move from elementary school to middle school to high school, the gap in reading and writing abilities grows larger (Farrell & Gray, 2018; Tyre, 2008). By the time they are in high
school, girls take more challenging classes, perform better in challenging classes and excel in all extracurricular activities with the exception of sports (Tyre, 2008). Girls graduate from high school in higher numbers than boys (United States Census Bureau, 2017); and because of a lack of highly-qualified boys, certain “selective and well-known” colleges have even begun to feel the need to favor boys over girls, and some colleges have even had to quietly resort to experimenting with “affirmative action-type programs to bring more boys to campus” (Tyre, 2008, p. 6). From pre-school to college, boys are struggling in school. There is a tension, a dissonance, a dualism between the formal educative structure as a social structure and the boys within it, and this distancing, separation, and resistance is related to specific forms of masculine construction and enactment (Messerschmidt, 2016).

To accept rural, working-class masculinity as a unique and distinct enactment is not to practice any sort of categorical essentialism and ignore the general similarities in the gender enactments of all masculinities; it is simply to acknowledge—while accepting the general similarities—the unique positions of all students at all intersectionalities (Crenshaw, 1989), including the unique position of those at the intersection of rurality, working-classness, and masculinity. “It is essential,” argued Messerschmidt (2016), “that gender scholars appreciate further the intersectionality of masculinities with other social dynamics” (p. 183). In a school setting, the rural, working-class masculine student is not prepared to enact—as he is at odds with—the “locally prevailing hegemonic ideal” (Schrock and Schwalbe, 2009, p. 286). Anecdotally, this is perfectly understood, but hard evidence is lacking because the investigative research has yet to be thoroughly conducted.
Theoretical Framework

Critical theory is a loosely unified set of doctrines that grew out of Marxian theory, but as a set of doctrines, it is one that emphasizes issues and problems only rarely explored by orthodox Marxian theory (Held, 1980). Critical theory calls for a degree of self-examination not called for by orthodox Marxism—a self-examination that calls for the rethinking and re-examination of Marxism in relation to contemporary circumstances, circumstances aside from the purely economic (Held, 1980). Critical theory is theory concerned not with issues solely as put forward by Marx, but issues unique to the time in which the theory is being applied.

Critical theory is critical in contrast to traditional theory, aiming to critique and alter society at large, not to simply explain it (Levinson, 2011). In “Introduction: Exploring Critical Social Theories and Education” (2011), Levinson presented the following list to articulate the common values and goals of the critical orientation:

- Participatory democracy and self-determination
- Social justice, equity, and respect for human dignity across lines of cultural differences such as class, nation, race, gender, sexual orientation, age, and the like
- A redistributive, sustainable, and community-oriented economy
- Equality of economic and educational opportunity and an abatement of severe income inequalities
- Environmental awareness and responsibility
Critical awareness of power and social interdependence (p. 10)

Not listed by Levinson (2011), but evident through the shared values and goals listed above, is that the researcher’s ideology and values are expected to enter into his or her methods, interpretations, and epistemology when conducting critical research (Carspecken, 1996).

According to critical theory, there is no theory without political motivations, and the truth of these theories must be decided not in reflection, but in action, making critical theory an ideal framework for action research. For theory to be critical, it must be at once both theory and revolutionary practice—praxis rooted in concrete situations and guided by practical interests (Freire, 1992)—with the purpose of locating, analyzing, and exposing the contradictions, or tensions, between that which is and that which could be (Held, 1980)—between the present and the possibilities of the future—a theory positioning itself in conscious opposition (Horkheimer, 1992). Theory that is critical understands contemporary social conditions in their historical context as well as in ways to promote both present and future action through the articulation of a tentative vision of justice that will continuously require revision (Hanks, 2011).

Critical theory is never content with the status quo. Critical theorists are all concerned with social inequalities—concerned with social structure, power, and agency—and work for positive social change, as critical theorists find “contemporary society to be unfair, unequal, and both subtly and overtly oppressive for many people” (Carspecken, 1996, p. 7). Human culture, being produced by the work of humans, means the work of the critical theorist is the “construction of the social present” in a fashion to
reduce the tension between his or her theorizing and the people for whom he or she theorizes (Horkheimer, 1992, p. 211). The work of critical theorists is to reflect upon all the ways contemporary society is presently oppressive and unjust and to present their visions of the work that can be done to create a less oppressive and more just society.

The critical orientation of qualitative research is interested in structure and mechanisms that produce problematic patterns of response, leads to investigation and analysis of the underlying causes of the problematic patterns, and aims to result in action directly addressing the problem (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To be critical while conducting research is to be focused on critiquing and changing society or more specifically to clarifying societal problems and equalizing society through the research process (Levinson et al., 2011).

As the problem of practice on which this study was focused is the tension experienced between the rural (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016), working-class (Draut, 2018) masculine (Connell, 1995) student and the formal educative structure, a critical orientation is most appropriate, as the orientation is one of conscious opposition and critique, not merely one of comprehension. The purpose of this investigation is to uncover, clarify, and comprehend the tension between the rural, working-class masculine student and the formal educative structure, producing not merely understanding of the present situation, but potential for action aiming to create a more equitable and just future for these students.
Research Questions

The purpose of this investigative action research study is to identify and clarify in my context the tension experienced between the rural (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016), working-class (Draut, 2018) masculine (Connell, 1995) student and the formal educative structure. The causes for this tension are numerous and varied and are produced both structurally by the formal educative structure and culturally by the rural, working-class masculine students themselves (Morton, 2019; Weis, 1996) through a “counter-school culture” (Willis, 1981). Developing a more thorough understanding of the tension existing between the rural, working-class masculine student and the formal educative structure through this investigative action research study has the potential to enable future interventions to be developed in order to resolve these tensions and bring the rural, working-class masculine student more fully into the formal educative structure.

In order to develop a more thorough understanding of the tension existing between rural, working-class masculinities and the formal educative structure, the following research questions guide my study:

(1) What is the tension occurring between rural, working-class masculinity and the formal educative structure?

(2) Why is the tension occurring between rural, working-class masculinity and the formal educative structure?
(3) How can this tension between rural, working-class masculinity and the formal educative structure be resolved in a way beneficial to the rural, working-class masculine student?

Utilizing these research questions, I aim to contribute to the understanding of the tension between rural, working-class masculine students and the formal educative structure in my context, and ideally produce through investigation a transferable foundation for future interventions in the cause of these students.

**Researcher Positionality**

Before conducting an action research study, it is the researcher’s responsibility to locate and understand his positionality—his social position, his stance in relation to the participants—and how this social position and stance informs his choice of study and his reaction to participants in his study (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2020; Herr & Anderson, 2015). Acknowledging and coming to grips with one’s positionality is acknowledging and coming to grips with one’s perspectives and how these perspectives have been shaped by history, by culture, and by society (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2020). Positionality is the understanding that our perspectives are heavily influenced by our place in society in relation to others (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). In traditional research, much like in traditional theory, the impact of the researcher and his accompanying positionality is to be minimized or eliminated; however, while conducting action research, much like while conducting critical theory, these aspects of the researcher are to be acknowledged and embraced (Herr & Anderson, 2015).
Outsider Within

Researcher positionality is not best understood in terms of a binary pair, that of insider and outsider, but in terms of a continuum ranging from the most inside of insiders to that of the most outside of outsiders (University of South Carolina Curriculum Studies Faculty, 2020). This understanding of positionality is well illustrated by Collins (1986). Collins (1986) explores positionality, those inside the outsider within positionality, and more specifically the outsider within positionality as it applies to African-American women. This positionality, according to Collins (1986), allows for a unique standpoint from which to conduct research for African-American women.

Collins (1986) explored this positionality in the specific context of the Black feminist, pointing out that the Black feminist, as an outsider within, can produce distinctive analyses from this position with a unique outsider standpoint. The Black feminist, due to her distinct position as an outsider within, Collins (1986) argued, is able to more diligently call attention to “the interlocking nature of oppression”—the interlocking nature of oppression the Black feminist is firmly positioned underneath—and consequently “shift the entire focus of investigation from one aimed at explicating elements of race or gender or class oppression to one whose goal is to determine what the links are among these systems” (p. S20).

The embracing of this positionality, though, is not without a cost, as outsider within positionality is bound to generate tension (Collins, 1986). This tension, this cost, comes with the reward of a unique place and a sensitivity to patterns that may be more challenging for others to recognize (Collins, 1986), and despite this reward, some
outsiders within will attempt to resolve the tension in one of two ways: remaining
outsiders by removing themselves from academic work or attempting to become insiders
(Collins, 1986). An alternative to leaving and thinking as usual does exist, however, and
it is in this alternative that the real power of the position lies. This alternative is to

conservethecreative tension of outsider within status by encouraging and
institutionalizing outsider within ways of seeing. This alternative has merit not
only for actual outsiders within, but also for other sociologists as well. The
approach suggested by the experiences of outsiders within is one where
intellectuals learn to trust their own personal and cultural biographies as
significant sources of knowledge. (Collins, 1986, p. S29)

It is in this alternative to leaving or becoming bonafide that Collins—and I—find the
greatest import.

**Insider-Without**

Precisely as Collins (1986) located herself and others on the spectrum of
positionality between that of insider and that of outsider, I also locate my own
positionality on that spectrum. I do not, however, locate my positionality as outsider
within. This is not because I do not believe the label is appropriately applied to those at
other intersections of positionality; I certainly do. This is because in my current context,
that of researcher of rural, working-class masculinity, I consider a more appropriate title
to be that of *insider-without.*
The setting in which I will be studying these rural, working-class masculine students is the setting in which I attended high school and grew up, and this is also the setting in which I currently teach and live. My being concurrently *from* and *of* this place positions me as an insider.

However, the setting in which I will be studying these rural, working-class masculine students is the setting in which, growing up and now, I always felt and feel myself to be an outsider while within. Growing up, I did not comfortably conform to the prevailing cultural norms, and I still do not. My concurrently having functioned and currently functioning as an outsider while within positions me as *without*: without much of the experiences, beliefs, or knowledge prevalent in the local hegemonic culture and due to this, without cultural capital and accompanying status despite my technically having been and still being an insider—furthering my status as *without*, despite my having been and currently being within.

During this study, I studied students at largely the same intersection of identity that I myself was at as a student—in the same community and at the same high school. It is due to this that I will be positioned as an “insider.” Yet, despite being concurrently *from* and *of* the study’s setting, I will, due to a lack in cultural capital and accompanying status, be *without*. It is for these reasons I adopt and modify Collins’s positionality marker of outsider within (1986) to the positionality marker of *insider-without*.

**Research Design**

The purpose of this study is to identify and clarify in my context the tension experienced between the rural, working-class masculine student and the formal educative
structure, better understand why this tension is occurring, and better understand how this tension between rural, working-class masculinity and the formal educative structure can be resolved in a way beneficial to the rural, working-class masculine student. As the intention of the design of this study is to generate knowledge concerning practice and learning in my particular context, an action research approach has been selected (Efron & Ravid, 2013).

The action in action research is precisely what differentiates it from traditional research, as the action is action taken by educators in the form of research conducted in their own setting in order to improve their practice and student learning, not research conducted in another’s setting in order to merely understand students’ learning (Efron & Ravid, 2013; Herr & Anderson, 2015). There is great overlap between the aim of action research and the aim of critical theory, as both aim to improve practice and learning and society, respectively.

Qualitative research incorporates numerous philosophical orientations and refers to numerous—and at times contrasting—research models, methodologies, practices, and methods, and consequently can carry myriad meanings (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008). However, there are certain shared, defining qualities: Researchers engaged in qualitative research are interested in the ways people interpret their own experiences, build their own worlds, and make meaning from their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). When engaged in qualitative study, researchers conduct inductive, emergent, flexible (yet purposeful), and richly descriptive research in their participants’ natural settings, themselves as researchers functioning as the primary data collection and data analysis
instruments, focusing on process, understanding, and meaning with the goals of discovery and the generation of hypotheses (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2020).

Specifically, this study uses an investigative action research approach utilizing teacher inquiry. Dana and Yendol-Hoppey (2020) described teacher inquiry as a way that teachers can disentangle some professional complexities, elevate teachers’ voices, and transform opinions concerning teaching. Teacher inquiry differs from daily teacher reflection during and concerning practice in that inquiry is less happenstance, calls for planned reflection to bring more attention to the posing of problems, and is more visible (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2020). As teacher inquirers engage in this intentional, focused reflection, they purposefully ask questions about teaching and learning, organize and collect information, focus on a specific area of inquiry, and benefit from ongoing collaboration and support of critical friends. Accordingly, utilizing inquiry has the potential to lead to more equitable classrooms (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2020).

Qualitative action research demands quality in the forms of both sophistication and rigor (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008); however, because a qualitative action research approach differs from that of traditional research, different criteria are used in assessing the quality of qualitative action research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this study, internal validity was addressed through the clarification of my biases and assumptions, triangulation of data, member checking interviews, and peer review of emergent findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Silverman & Marvasti, 2008). Reliability was increased due to my explanations concerning the assumptions and theoretical framework upon which the study was constructed, my triangulation of data, and my statements concerning the conducting of the study and the deriving of findings from the data (Merriam & Tisdell,
2016). As a researcher, I clearly illustrated the procedures I utilized to ensure the reliability of my methods and the validity of my conclusions (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008).

This study was conducted in a public high school (grades 9-12) in the Piedmont region of South Carolina classified by the National Center for Educational Statistics as a Rural: Distant school (2016). This study was conducted partly through an English IV College Prep classroom composed of seventeen students. Of these seventeen students, twelve are male students and five are female students. Under the current circumstances due to Covid-19, the class is conducted simultaneously in person and online, with thirteen students in person and four students online. The students who participated in this study were rural, working-class masculine students. They ranged in grade level from grade 11, junior year, to grade 12, senior year. I identified them as rural, working-class masculine students based on the work they completed in my English IV College Prep class and conversations I had with them before, during, and after class. The study was also conducted outside of the English IV College Prep classroom through a focus group and when electronic interviews were conducted with teacher and administrator participants.

The study began with research interviews being conducted through the focus group held with student participants. A research interview is a structured and purposeful conversation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The research interview can be categorized into three types of interview: highly structured, semistructured, and unstructured (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For this study, I used semistructured interviews as explorations (Seidman, 2013) in order to collect data. First, I used the semistructured interview as a data collection tool during the in-person focus group involving four students, my “informants”
(Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 129). Next, electronic semistructured interviews were utilized when interviewing and member checking the teacher and administrator participants in this study in order to gain a greater teacher and administrator perspective on this problem of practice. Finally, electronic semistructured interviews were utilized with my Critical Friends Group (CFG) while conducting peer review of my data and interpretation (Efron & Ravid, 2013).

In order to organize data, I adapted a word processing program. With my data set consisting of only interviews, an adapted word processing program sufficed as well as kept me from unnecessarily overcomplicating matters. When analyzing my data, I collaborated with colleagues in order to more fully support and understand the outcomes of my inquiry (Dana & Yendel-Hoppey, 2020).

While I maintain full ownership of the inquiry project, two of the teacher participants interviewed as part of the data collection process supported this study as critical friends to aid in the analysis of data (Dana & Yendel-Hoppey, 2020). Utilizing CFGs in collaborative inquiry is illustrative of the belief that teachers can impactfully support one another, one another’s professional inquiry, and one another’s professional growth (Franzak, 2002). While CFGs can be utilized in multiple collaborative structures, my CFG was utilized for inquiry support (Dana & Yendel-Hoppey, 2020). I first collected and organized the data. Following and preceding any analysis of the data, I presented the data to my CFG, conducted protocol-driven discussions concerning the data with them (C. Bogiages, personal communication, March 22, 2021), and using structured protocols analyzed the data with their support (Franzak, 2002).
In order to develop common themes, patterns, and categories across data, I analyzed my data inductively, comparatively, and as I conducted my fieldwork (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To analyze my data as I went along, I personally and as immediately as possible transcribed the interviews. Following, while keeping in mind my biases, my purpose, and my epistemological framework, I began my analysis process with my CFG by open coding as expansively as I felt fruitful and notating data that struck me as potentially relevant to my research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Next, I conducted analytical coding, grouping, or sorting, based upon my own and my CFG’s interpretation of the meaning of the data (Richards, 2015). Once I moved into my next data set, I conducted the same process as above, looking for groupings I previously extracted from the first data set. When the overlap in coding between the two data sets emerged, I recorded this material. From this material, I constructed my categories (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Out of these early categories, I looked to create subcategories for emerging, encompassing, comprehensive categories. This process continued throughout the research process and was accompanied by the appropriate self-reflection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

**Study Significance**

Due to numerous and varied causes produced both structurally by the formal educative structure and culturally by the rural, working-class masculine student himself (Morton, 2019; Weis, 1996) through a counter-school culture (Willis, 1981), there is a tension experienced between the rural (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016), working-class (Draut, 2018) masculine (Connell, 1995) student and the formal educative structure.
The key findings from this study have the potential for significance when utilized in recognizing the specific tension occurring between rural, working-class masculinity, as a variant of counter-school culture, and the formal educative structure: tension—a variant of tension experienced in intention, contention, and attention (Oxford English Dictionary, 1994); when utilized in understanding why this tension is occurring: a series of tensions between the students’ and the structure’s expression, work, knowledge, and success; and when utilized to continue to work toward understanding how this tension can be resolved: through further critical investigation of the series of tensions occurring between the rural, working-class masculine student and the formal educative structure coalescing into this tension.

**Study Limitations**

While JCCHS is a rural (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016) school with a large neo-indigenous population (Emdin, 2016) of rural, working-class (Draut, 2018) students, to find students in my classes who were available to participate in the study and who fit the specific conditions of rural, working-class and masculine was challenging. Next, to find a time to conduct a focus group with the student participants was challenging. Finally, circumstances due to Covid-19 limited student availability.

Despite the undeniable generosity the teacher participants demonstrated with their time, teacher availability was also a limitation that potentially had an impact on this study. Due to my understanding that in this profession time is a very limited resource, and due to my understanding that by participating at all in this study these teachers were sharing with me more of this resource than I deserve, on certain occasions I held back
follow-up questions I wished to ask, sticking only with my initial research questions or only with limited follow-up questions that I felt would not require too much of their time.

The final limitation that potentially had an impact on this study was inadequate time. Time constraints played a part in the limitation of student availability, time was a factor in limiting teacher availability, and limited time for me to conduct this study potentially had an impact on this study. This limitation is evidenced in my answer to this study’s third research question: How can this tension between rural, working-class masculinity and the formal educative structure be resolved in a way beneficial to the rural, working-class masculine student? The answer to this question, as concluded through this study, is that further critical investigation needs to be conducted. While the data gathered does point the investigation in specific and focused directions, given enough time, that investigation could be conducted, and how this tension can be resolved could be answered more concretely.

Chapter Summary and Organization of Dissertation

There is a tension between the rural (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016), working-class (Draut, 2018) masculine (Connell, 1995) student and the formal educative structure. The causes of tension between this localized masculinity (Messerschmidt, 2016) and the formal educative structure are produced both structurally by the formal educative structure and culturally by the rural, working-class masculine student himself (Morton, 2019; Weis, 1996) through a counter-school culture (Willis, 1981). Increasing understanding of the tension existing between the rural (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016), working-class (Draut, 2018) masculine (Connell,
1995) student and the formal educative structure through this study will potentially enable future interventions to be developed in order to resolve these tensions.

In Chapter 2, relevant literature regarding critical theory, rurality, working-classness, masculinity, and intersectionality is presented. Chapter 3 introduces the methodology used for this study, including a historical review of action research and a rationale for the use of qualitative investigative action research as teacher inquiry, as well as details the research procedures utilized in this study. In Chapter 4, vignettes of the study’s participants, relevant data from the study, and analysis of the relevant data are presented. Extending out of the information presented in Chapter 4, Chapter 5 presents the study’s implications, a reflection on the utilized methodology, the study’s limitations, and recommendations for future research based on the study’s findings.

**Glossary of Terms**

The following terms are used throughout the current study:

*Rural*: Locally prevailing understanding of rural as “country.” Similar to the United States Census Bureau defining rural as anything not in an urban area (2016), students with a home address outside of town limits will be considered rural.

*Working-class*: Parental participation in the work force and education level less than a bachelor’s degree (Draut, 2018).

*Masculine*: Identification as male for legal sex or man for gender identity.
*Formal Educative Structure:* School. Referring to school as “formal educative structure” allows for a clear distinction between school as the formal educative structure in these students’ lives and the various informal educative structures—community, home, work, etc.—in these students’ lives.

*Tention:* Shortened form of *intention, contention, and attention.* Variant of *tension* agreeing with *attention, contention, and intention* (Oxford English Dictionary, 1994).
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The problem of practice on which this study was focused is the tension experienced between the rural (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016), working-class (Draut, 2018) masculine (Connell, 1995) student and the formal educative structure. The purpose of this study is to identify and clarify in my educative setting the tension between the rural (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016), working-class (Draut, 2018) masculine (Connell, 1995) student and the formal educative structure. This tension is produced both structurally by the formal educative structure and culturally by the rural, working-class masculine student himself (Morton, 2019; Weis, 1996) through a “counterschool culture” (Willis, 1981).

The contemporary American public education system neglects all available means of intergenerational transmission of education and culture other than itself, despite how outside of the school, in diverse communities, homes, and families, various kinds of educated people are being culturally produced and are culturally producing (Levinson & Holland, 1996). Students may partake in practices and enact identities compatible with the local culture’s educated person; however, this educated person may contradict the educated person the school aims to produce and will be, consequently, marginalized and neglected (Levinson & Holland, 1996). In the case of rural, working-class masculine students, these culturally educated people and their cultural education are not merely
marginalized and neglected but are entirely othered (Howley & Howley, 2010). They are viewed as backward and deficient within an urban-normative, globalized educational system (Biddle & Azano, 2016), developing within the students reflexive impotence (Fisher, 2009) instead of critical consciousness (Freire, 1992). Despite the permanence of unequal power relations (Johnston, 1999), though, it must remain in mind that the formal educative structure is not a wholly determined site of action (Carlson & Apple, 1998).

Formal education, the formal educative structure, and the culture produced by both are the nexus at which multiple and varied voices, powers, interests, and identities interconnect and compete (McLaren, P. L., & Giroux, H. A., 1990).

Educative structures, both formal and informal, are not appropriately understood through too reductive or deterministic a lens: a lens through which all empowered agents within the structures are “agents of cultural domination” and “unwitting participants in reproducing cultural inequalities of class, gender, and race,” who, even unknowingly, “reproduce a hegemonic culture,” as this discourages efforts made toward change (Carlson & Apple, 1998, pp. 24-25). While the formally educated person is produced in defined formal educative structures, and the informally educated person is produced in defined informal educative structures, both the formally educated person and the informally educated person are also producing cultural forms of education in both defined formal educative structures and defined informal educative structures (Levinson & Holland, 1996).

As the enactment of agency requires a social structure as reference (Weis, 1996), rural, working-class masculine students produce their own practices and culture in antagonistic relation to the prevailing practices and culture found in the formal educative
structure (Willis, 1981). In their defiance of authority, credentialism, school knowledge, middle-class expressions of masculinity, and bourgeois markers of success, rural, working-class masculine students marginalize and other themselves; devalue the formal educative space, formal education, formal educational achievement, and formal educational attainment; and consequently disqualify themselves from receiving the accolades awarded by the formal education system, disqualify themselves from entering the middle class, and instead reproduce themselves as “rebellious, ‘uneducated’ workers whose single choice is the unskilled and semi-skilled occupations found in manual labor” (Willis, 1981, p. xii).

Developing a more thorough understanding of the tension existing between rural, working-class masculinity and the formal educative structure through this investigative action research study will, it is hoped, enable future interventions to be developed in order to resolve this tension and bring the rural, working-class masculine student more fully into the formal educative structure.

In order to develop a more thorough understanding of the tension existing between rural, working-class masculinity and the formal educative structure, the following research questions guided my study:

(1) What is the tension occurring between rural, working-class masculinity and the formal educative structure?

(2) Why is the tension occurring between rural, working-class masculinity and the formal educative structure?
(3) How can this tension between rural, working-class masculinity and the formal educative structure be resolved in a way beneficial to the rural, working-class masculine student?

Utilizing these research questions, I aim to contribute to the understanding of the tension between the rural, working-class masculine student and the formal educative structure in my context and ideally produce through investigation a transferable foundation for future interventions in the cause of rural, working-class masculine students.

The literature review contained in this chapter begins with an explanation of critical theory and why critical theory is the most appropriate of theories to use in order to frame this study of rural, working-class masculine students. Following, rurality is explored: what it is and why study it specifically through a critical lens. Next, working-classness is explored: what it is and why study it specifically through a critical lens. After working-classness, masculinity is explored: what it is and why study it specifically through a critical lens. Finally, the intersectionality of rurality, working-classness, and masculinity is explored: what intersectionality is and why apply it to rural, working-class masculinity will be explained.

Although the necessity of a literature review for qualitative research is at times questioned, this questioning is largely perceived as unorthodox and radical (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008). The literature review, by and large, is a crucial step in the research process, as it is a logically documented argument in the form of prior research as current knowledge used as credible evidence to support a particular thesis as an answer to the study’s research questions (Machi & McEvoy, 2009). The literature review, understood
succinctly, is both summary and synthesis of prior research that is applicable to the current investigation of the researcher (Efron & Ravid, 2013)—a device to frame the study’s research question or questions and direct the gathering and analysis of data (Herr & Anderson, 2015). Ultimately, the function of the literature review is to connect the researcher’s specific work to the work of the broader research community and its accumulated knowledge base—to integrate and situate the researcher’s problem, purpose, and questions into previously developed theory and research (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008) in order to advance through refinement or revision that which is already known (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

In order to understand the nexus that is rural, working-class masculinity; how such an intersectionality can produce a distinct tension between itself and the formal educative structure; and how such a tension can produce negative perceptions of the formal educative space, formal education, formal educational achievement, and formal educational attainment, it is important to first understand each identity constituent (i.e., rurality, working-classness, and masculinity) in and of itself. Specifically, it is important to understand each identity constituent in and of itself as examined through a critical lens. It was the critical lens (critical theory) and each of these characteristics that initially guided the development of this study. It was only following that, to the extent that such was available, the study’s guiding inquiry became the particular intersectionality of the rural, working-class masculine student. The keywords that were used to search EBSCOhost and ERIC databases for pertinent literature included the following: rurality, rural, rural education, rural student, rural male, rural masculinity; working-classness, working-class, working-class education, working-class student, working-class male,
Based on information found through the above searches, additional books and articles were located.

**Critical Theory**

Critical theory—or as some refer to it, Western Marxism—is a loosely unified set of doctrines that emphasizes issues and problems only rarely explored by orthodox Marxian theory (Held, 1980). Orthodox Marxian theory laid as its foundation dialectical materialism, and it did so concretely enough that it is argued that Marxism and dialectical materialism are equivalent terms (Bramfield, 2008). The term *dialectical* in Hegel’s philosophy, the philosophy from which Marx appropriated the term for *dialectical materialism*, refers to an idealistic ontological fact of restless spirituality (Bramfield, 2008). Marx, when appropriating the term for *dialectical materialism*, rejected the idealistic ontology of Hegel, which argued that the world is to be understood in terms of mind or spirit, and instead substituted for it an ontology of matter or material: hence, dialectic materialism (Bramfield, 2008). Dialectical materialism posits that the entirety of nature is engaged in a process of conflict and resolution of that conflict—a tension—and the class system is one aspect of nature that is engaged in this process of conflict and resolution (Bramfield, 2008). Critical theory, however, as a theory which has grown out of Marxism, calls for a degree of self-examination not called for by orthodox Marxism, a self-examination that calls for the rethinking and re-examination of Marxism in relation to contemporary circumstances, circumstances aside from the purely economic (Held, 1980).
“I was naïve,” posited Paulo Freire (1992), “and when I started to find out how naïve I was, I started to get critical” (p. 20). For theory to be critical, naïve realism—a belief in our ability to see the world objectively—must be abandoned (Spradley, 1980). In traditional, conservative theory, “the genesis of particular objective facts, the practical application of the conceptual systems by which it grasps the facts, and the role of such systems in action, are all taken to be external to the theoretical thinking itself”; in contrast, for the critical theorist, “the facts, as they emerge from the work of society, are not extrinsic, but are internal” (Horkheimer, 1992, pp. 208-209). Conservative researchers, as perpetrators of the status quo—assuming themselves to be finding what is actually there and not merely what is interpreted there—will interpret in a direction that harms the already harmed: the oppressed (Carspecken, 1996, p. 16). Critical researchers aim to work against this.

Critical theory is critical in contrast to traditional theory in that critical theory aims to critique and alter society at large, not to simply explain it (Levinson, 2011). Levinson (2011) presented the following list to articulate the critical orientation “in terms of common values and common goals”:

- Participatory democracy and self-determination
- Social justice, equity, and respect for human dignity across lines of cultural differences such as class, nation, race, gender, sexual orientation, age, and the like
- A redistributive, sustainable, and community-oriented economy
- Equality of economic and educational opportunity and an abatement of severe income inequalities
- Environmental awareness and responsibility
- Critical awareness of power and social interdependence (p. 10)

As is evident in the above list, “[t]he ideology of the researcher, including her values, is supposed to enter intrinsically and inseparably into the methods, interpretations, and epistemology of critical research” (Carspecken, 1996, p. 5), and while the researcher’s value orientations do not determine research findings, the researcher’s value orientations do provide the motivation for conducting the study (Carspecken, 1996). Critical work is unabashedly directed toward positive social change.

According to critical theory, there is no theory without political motivations, and the truth of these theories must be decided not in reflection, but in action. According to Horkheimer (1992), the aim of critical theory is:

- not simply to eliminate one or other abuse, for it regards such abuses as necessarily connected with the way in which the social structure is organized.
- Although it itself emerges from the social structure, its purpose is not, either in its conscious intention or in its objective significance, the better functioning of any element in the structure. On the contrary, it is suspicious of the very category of better, useful, appropriate, productive, and valuable, as these are understood in the present order.… [T]he critical attitude of which we are speaking is wholly distrustful of the rules of conduct with which society as presently constituted provides each of its members. (p. 207)
For theory to be critical, then, it must be at once both theory and revolutionary practice—praxis rooted in concrete situations and guided by practical interests (Freire, 1992)—with the purpose of locating, analyzing, and exposing the contradictions between that which is and that which could be—between the present and the possibilities of the future (Held, 1980). Theory that is critical understands contemporary social conditions in their historical context and in ways to promote both present and future action through the articulation of a tentative vision of justice that will continuously require revision (Hanks, 2011). Human culture, being the “product of human work,” means the work of the critical theorist is the “construction of the social present” in a fashion to reduce the tension between his or her theorizing and the people for whom he or she theorizes (Horkheimer, 1992, p. 207, 211).

While critical theory is, at times, highly abstract, this is no reason for it to be avoided. It is not abstraction in theory that is the “enemy of lived experience”; it is abstraction in theory weaponized to “dominate others” that is such an enemy and should be avoided (Dillabough, 2002), and critical theory aims to do the opposite of dominate. Critical theory aims to liberate. Although at times abstract, and as such potentially alienating, critical theory contains concrete, practical relevance for our lived experiences in our living society and our research into such experiences. “There are spaces and potentials for changing the balances of uncertainty which reproduce the living society” (Willis, 1981, p. 186). Critical theory is one of those potentials, and the formal educative space is one of those spaces.
Critical Theory as Applied to Education

Just as there is no theory that is neutral—no theory without political motivations—there is no educational process that is neutral (Freire, 1992). Fisher (2009) posited that “nothing is inherently political; politicization requires a political agent which can transform the taken-for-granted into the up-for-grabs” (p. 79). According to the critical theorist, however, all social processes, certainly including the process of education, are informed by values and decisions that are politically consequential (Levinson, 2011), that are transforming “the taken-for-granted into the up-for-grabs” (Fisher, 2009, p. 79). Because the act of teaching and the act of learning shape consciousness, both are political phenomena (Levinson, 2011), and, according to critical theorists, both are political phenomena that, as currently enacted, perpetuate social inequalities (Gross, 2011). Critical theory, though, when applied to the educational process, offers not only a penetrating questioning and incisive critique; it offers—or more aptly, necessitates—concrete enactments of change with a faith in the classroom teacher’s potential transformative power (Johnston, 1999).

Democratic schooling means opening up and expanding democratic possibilities for all parties involved (McLaren, P. L., & Giroux, H. A., 1990). However, as it is currently enacted, the system of education is society’s vehicle for the uneven distribution of knowledge, power, and, consequently, life chances (Levinson, 2011). As such, an examination of education and its uneven distributions reveals much of the workings of general society (Levinson, 2011). Yet, the critical shift in education theory does not come with the acknowledgement that education is not neutral or even the revealing of the same state of affairs in general society. The shift does not come with the acceptance that
education is a political phenomenon. The shift does not come with the recognition that education is a process that perpetuates social inequalities through the uneven distribution of knowledge, power, and, consequently, life chances. The critical shift in education theory does not come solely with the problematizing of the practices of teaching and learning, but with the active contesting of these practices (Vicars, 2017). “At best, daily life, like art, is revolutionary. At worst it is a prison house,” argued Willis (1977), “At worst, reflection, like criticism, is reactionary. At best it creates plans for escape” (p. 194).

The more evolved the organism, the more the organism is a product not of its genetics but of its social experiences (Bowles & Gintis, 1977). As such, it is social experiences that require critical reflection and reorganizing. Human beings, with such a variety of social interactions both past and present, are a testament to the importance of learned components of behavior (Bowles & Gintis, 1977). This is not, though, a surrendering of agency by the human being in relation to his or her social interactions broadly and educationally. Human beings have the capacity to choose paths of personal development conducive to personal needs; however, institutions framing social experiences (e.g., formal educative structures) first must be reorganized toward forms supporting of such development and needs (Bowles & Gintis, 1977). “The humanity of a nation, it is said, can be gauged by the character of its prisons,” reminded Bowles & Gintis (1977), “No less can its humanity be inferred from the quality of its educational processes” (p. 102).

Examined through a critical lens, the issues within the education system are not found only in the system’s relationship to rural, working-class masculine students. These
issues are systemic; they are part of the reality of schooling (Bowles & Gintis, 1977). Many students at many intersectionalities (Crenshaw, 1989) suffer due to the uneven distribution mechanism built into the education system, and many students suffer greater losses than those suffered by rural, working-class masculine students. This, however, does not discount the need to address the issue at the intersection of rurality, working-classness, and masculinity. Critically examining the tension experienced between rural, working-class masculinity and the formal educative structure is just necessary examination at one more intersectionality in an attempt to address educational inequity and promote social justice everywhere.

*Critical Theory as Applied to Rural, Working-Class Masculine Students*

In order for the tension experienced between rural, working-class masculinity and the formal educative structure to be identified and clarified, a critical lens need be applied: first to the rural student, second to the working-class student, third to the masculine student, and finally to the rural, working-class masculine student. While the identity of the rural, working-class masculine student is not experienced as the amassing of a discrete rurality, a discrete working-classness, and a discrete masculinity, but as, instead, a set of subjective and fragmented dynamics between rurality, working-classness, and masculinity (Levin-Rasky, 2009), each construct must first be understood in terms of what it is in isolation and why it is a critical identity constituent before it can be understood as a critical set of subjective and fragmented dynamics.
Rurality as Identity Constituent

Rural Education Research

There is an asymmetry of attention paid to urban and rural educative spaces in education research—rural education but an afterthought of education advocates and a footnote for researchers (McShane & Smarick, 2018a; Teiken, 2014; Dahill-Brown & Jochim, 2018). This isn’t surprising, as urban actors are who set priorities and the terms of debate, which largely ignore rural schools (Dahill-Brown & Jochim, 2018). As a consequence, even those both well-educated and well-intentioned often know little of the nearly fifty million people living in rural areas in the U.S. (Jaeger, 2018). Despite the size of the U.S. rural population, the rural student is largely invisible (Jaeger, 2018), and the rural student has specifically rural experiences that are “real, varied, and valid” (Ardoin, 2018, p. 93). As such, the rural student deserves reasonable, unbiased learning opportunities and learning strategies tailored specifically to his particular reality in all formal educative structures (Blackwell, 2014).

To most education researchers, including even many working with rural schools, the study of schooling in rural places is a practical and conceptual problem worth little serious attention or engagement (Howley, 2004). The view that the rural setting should not be taken too seriously by the education profession is a view tolerated by most education researchers and many rural practitioners (Howley, 2004). Throughout the development of education research, agreement on whether or not rurality is even a lens worth viewing educational issues through at all has fluctuated (Biddle & Azano, 2016). Education, good teaching, and good curriculum are viewed as generalizable sciences that
should be implementable the same everywhere, and differences associated with place are irrelevant, dismissible details (Howley, 2004).

While U.S. rural schools and rural student populations have historically been underrepresented and marginalized in educational research (McShane & Smarick, 2018a), throughout this century there have emerged educational researchers and reformers doing important work in rural places by aiming to make sense of rural communities’ unique educational needs and advocating for the marginalized students there within (Lavalley, 2018), but these researchers and reformers are a miniscule minority in the field (Biddle & Azano, 2016), and these researchers’ work is only rarely finding publication in the journals of major academic associations (Azano, 2015). The study of rural schooling is not perceived within academia as a prestigious field, so much so that the education researcher notably interested in rural education research is within the academy marked as an intellectual nonconformist (Howley, 2004). Simply put, rural education literature is notably lacking (Howley, 2004), as evidenced by the fact that article titles in major education journals feature the term “urban” approximately sixteen times more often than the term “rural,” despite approximately fifty percent of school districts being in rural areas (Lavalley, 2018).

The weakness in scholarship stems from a reluctance to acknowledge, let alone deal with, rural places and their specific problems (Howley, 2004). Doctoral programs in education have largely failed rural communities, schools, and students by not preparing scholars to grapple with issues unique to rurality (Howley, 2004). Across the board, there has largely been a willful ignorance of the fact that “context matters” (Azano, 2015, p. 267), that rural places carry particular place-centric dynamics (Gahman, 2017), that rural
places “have their own qualities, and shared qualities with one another, that make them recognizably ‘rural’” (Howley, 2004, p. 270).

**Who Is the Rural Student?**

While there is no single, agreed-upon definition of rurality (McShane & Smarick, 2018a)—and what is deemed rural varies between contexts (Malkus, 2018)—the rural community is, at its most simply understood, a community that is nonmetropolitan, or outside of places deemed urban (Lavalley, 2018). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2016), there are three sub-classifications within the classification that is rural:

1) Fringe—Census-defined rural territory that is less than or equal to 5 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an urban cluster.

2) Distant—Census-defined rural territory that is more than 5 miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is more than 2.5 miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from an urban cluster.

3) Remote—Census-defined rural territory that is more than 25 miles from an urbanized area and is also more than 10 miles from an urban cluster.

Approximately 20% of U.S. students, 33% of U.S. schools, and 50% of U.S. school districts are located in rural areas (NCES, 2016). In South Carolina, approximately 16% of students are attending public schools in rural areas (Lavalley, 2018). Rural
communities also share certain characteristics beyond geography and share in certain trials not shared with their urban counterparts (UWA, 2019).

**Poverty**

Poverty is at higher rates, deeper levels, and greater persistence through generational poverty in rural communities than in metropolitan communities (McShane & Smarick, 2018b). Longstanding economic patterns have been disrupted by economic restructuring in a global economy (Howley, et al., 1996)—from goods-producing industries to low-paying service jobs (McShane & Smarick, 2018b)—and due to such, “[t]imes are hard in much of rural America” (Duncan, 2014, p. xxii). Approximately 64% of rural counties have high rates of child poverty, and as education is closely linked to economic outcomes, in communities with low educational attainment, poverty rates can be as much as 8% higher than in similar communities with higher levels of education (United States Department of Agriculture, 2017; Showalter, et al., 2017). In rural areas, approximately 13% of children under six experience deep poverty, 85.3% of counties in persistent poverty are rural counties, and approximately 84% of counties in persistent poverty are in the American South (Farrigan, 2017). In rural communities in the South—a rural that is “unique” (Malkus, 2018, p. 26)—the poverty rate is approximately 6% higher than in Southern urban areas (Farrigan, 2017). According to Pew Research, 42% of residents of rural communities say that a major concern of theirs is simply finding a job (UWA, 2017).


**Academics**

Rural students suffer from particular academic hurdles: beginning school with lower reading achievement than suburban peers, demonstrating lower literacy in elementary school than suburban peers, having limited access to advanced courses in middle and high school, attending college at low rates (Lavalley, 2018), and, despite being more advantaged in community social resources than nonrural students, which is a trait associated with an increase in the likelihood of attaining a bachelor’s degree, rural students are less likely to attain bachelor’s degrees (Byun et al., 2012), despite encouraging high school graduation rates (Malkus, 2018). Between 2000 and 2015, urban adults having at least a bachelor’s degree increased from 26% to 33% (United States Department of Agriculture, 2017). During the same time period, rural adults having at least a bachelor’s degree increased only from 15% to 19%: The increase for rural adults was smaller than that of their urban counterparts, and the urban-rural gap in the share of adults with at least a bachelor’s degree increased from eleven percentage points to fourteen percentage points (United States Department of Agriculture, 2017). While educational attainment is low across rural regions, educational attainment is the lowest in the Rural South (United States Department of Agriculture, 2017). It cannot be ignored that in 2015, median earnings for those with every level of education were less for rural earners than for urban earners, and as the levels of education got higher the disparities in earnings increased from less than $100.00 annually for those with less than a high school diploma to over $18,000.00 annually for those with a graduate or professional degree (United States Department of Agriculture, 2017).
Poverty and Academics. Deep persistent poverty must be considered a factor in the perpetuation of academic hurdles, which began before formal education even began. Families with financial constraints often struggle to access learning materials and opportunities and struggle to provide their children with high-quality preschool or even a home environment conducive to educational experiences outside of the classroom (UWA, 2019). When socioeconomic status is held constant, the achievement gap in reading scores between the rural and suburban student is no longer even distinguishable (Graham & Teague, 2011). Children from impoverished families not only have lower test scores than children from families with higher incomes; children from impoverished families have a higher likelihood of not completing high school than do children from families with higher incomes (United States Department of Agriculture, 2017). Because lower educational attainment contributes to poverty, and poverty contributes to lower educational achievement and attainment, poverty is both a cause and a consequence of lower educational attainment (United States Department of Agriculture, 2017).

Social Processes or Relationships

In order to uncover a rural meaning, though, one must recognize the construct rural as more than setting and the accompanying economic status and education level (Howley, 2004), but as fully cultural (McShane & Smarick, 2018a). Instead of thinking about rural as a fixed, static setting or quality—defined only in opposition to urban and suburban as fixed, static settings or qualities—rural should be understood as social processes (Kreitlow, 1954), the ways in which people “live, work, play, desire, and, hopefully, cooperate,” and relate to the land (John & Ford, 2017, p. 13). To be rural, according to Tieken (2014), is:
a matter of the commonplace interactions and events that constitute the rural “lifeworld,” a value mostly overlooked by the media and academia, and a significance impossible to quantify…. It constitutes one’s identity; it shapes one’s perspectives and understandings; and it gives meaning to one’s daily experiences. This identity, this shared and place-dependent sense or rural belonging, gives rural its significance. (p. 5)

Much of the rural schooling rural students experience disregards these social processes, miseducating rural students by either overlooking or disparaging the rural lifeworld (Howley, 2004).

Education has been and is understood as a primary method through which the needs of rural people and communities are met, but very often in the urban-oriented formal educative process within an urban-oriented society rural people and rural communities are viewed as deficient (Schafft, 2010). Rural—as setting, as community, as school, as student, as lifeworld—is, consequently, regularly understood from a deficit perspective from which “rural” is viewed and consequently portrayed as not a distinct, complete lifeworld and source of meaning in and of itself (Howley, 2004), but as merely the absence of that which is urban (Biddle & Azano, 2016).

The rural student, unlike the suburban or urban student, grows up in a familial context of “aspirations to place,” a context and aspiration that minimizes formal, extra-local educational and economic opportunities, while maximizing informal, local educational and familial opportunities (Howley, 2006). Rural youth are recruited into mobility by “schools, the military, and the media” and are encouraged to “develop
aspirations that lead them away not only from where, but from who, they are” (Howley, et al., 1996, pp. 151, 159). This aspiration is qualitatively different from aspirations typically studied by academic researchers (Howley, et al., 1996), and as such is easily ignored or misunderstood. According to Pew Research, in rural communities, only 39% of adults under 30 years of age would like to move, and 40% of those who say they would like to move say they would like to move to the same type of community (UWA, 2019).

**Why the Critical Lens on the Rural Student?**

Little writing exists that deals critically with the rural school, classroom, and community (McLaren & Giroux, 1990). Despite critical pedagogy growing out of the work of Paulo Freire and his work in rural Brazil, critical attention has shifted to be directed almost exclusively toward urban populations in major metropolitan centers (McLaren & Giroux, 1990). Through willful ignorance of complex cultural and class politics or a “master form of discrimination,” those living outside of metropolitan areas have been marginalized and othered as “hillbillies,” “rebels,” or “hicks” (McLaren & Giroux, 1990, pp. 157, 161).

The state of research, critical research included, is one of urban-normativity (Agostinone-Wilson, 2017). To call attention to the lack of critical research on rural education is not to argue that a focus on education in urban settings is not absolutely critical. It certainly is, but critical research in rural education is also of critical importance (Azano, 2015). Azano (2015) asked, “How does the rural context fit into discussions of justice and education inequities” (p. 267). A critical lens on rurality aims to examine
explicitly the specific nexus that is the rural lifeworld and challenge all participants in
and of such a lifeworld to question continually what of this lifeworld needs to be
conserved and what needs to be transformed (Gruenwald, 2003). A critical lens on
rurality challenges students—along with teachers, parents, etc.—to understand how their
rurality contextualizes the choices they are making for their lives (Freire, 1992).

A critical dilemma for the rural school and community is how local identities and
realities are to coexist against the backdrop of social, cultural, political, and economic
change on a global scale (Schafft, 2010). As state and national education policies
increasingly determine the agenda for local public education, a tension has continued to
grow between schools, local communities, and the specific students within those schools
(McInerney, et al., 2011), who now see the schools as outsider influence (Dahill-Brown
& Jochim, 2018). The local community and the global society represent two critical,
identity-shaping contexts, as human beings in our contemporary world are nearly all
participants in both: a concrete, localized community and an abstract, globalized society
(Howley & Howley, 2010). Rural schools, recognizing these two contexts, have created a
false dichotomy between preparing students for their local reality or preparing students
for an “ever-distant, ever-abstract, conceptual, global, urban society,” befuddling the real
issue and ignoring the real question:

How do we prepare students to live lives that are local and global, to understand
local phenomena as connected to larger regional-, national-, and global-level
processes—and simultaneously to understand how the ways in which lives that
are lived locally have precisely global social, political, economic, and
environmental implications? (Schafft, 2010, p. 286)
Because of such dichotomizing and turning away from the rural and local toward the urban and global, to identify oneself as even being “rural” is for many Americans problematic (Howley & Howley, 2010). Rural people have been taught that to be rural is to be sub-par, that to live in a rural community creates various deficiencies—deficiencies in education in particular—and for these deficiencies they have largely been exclusively blamed (Theobald & Wood, 2010), being asked by their urban counterparts why they cannot just be smarter and better (Howley, 2004).

The globalizing, integrating world economy has had complex, key implications for rural communities in the United States (Biddle & Azano, 2016). The American education system has extended its reach beyond urban to grasp global both culturally and economically as education’s purpose has drifted to being ever more aligned with global market priorities and ever less aligned with the wants, needs, and realities of rural communities, ignoring the plight of students and families there within (Schafft, 2010; Reynolds, 2017). In the United States, rural schools previously served important roles as centers of social activity and social meaning-making, maintaining local traditions and identities of rural communities; these services, though, once the responsibility of schools, have been outsourced in the 21st century (Reynolds, 2017).

**Working-Classness as Identity Constituent**

**What is Working-Classness?**

Just as rurality is best understood in terms of social processes and relationships, working-classness is best understood in terms of social processes and relationships, specifically the processes and relationships involving work, physical capital, and other
people (Anyon, 1980). Classes are not “a priori formulations of class analysis” or merely categories kept by the Bureau of Labor Statistics but are situated “in the everyday ideological practices of the schools, in the factories and offices, and in the working-class neighborhoods” (Willis, 1981, p. xii). One’s class has an inescapable influence on the ways in which one works, thinks, and lives (Zweig, 2000). A discussion of class is a discussion of power and authority—at work and in society at large (Zweig, 2000). The work of the working-class is mechanical, routine, typically out of the worker’s control, and is an isolated part of a much larger working process which is to the worker largely unknown (Anyon, 1980). In production, working-class people have very little control over their work or anyone else’s (Zweig, 2000). The working-class person does not typically own physical capital, but instead works wage or salary labor to produce profit and physical capital for other, higher-class people (Anyon, 1980). This series of relationships inhabited by the working-class in their adulthood and workplace only further perpetuates this system of relationships in society at large, including the relationship between the working-class in their youth and their school (Anyon, 1980).

**Who are Working-Class Students?**

Because schools tend to be “the purveyors of dominant culture, working-class students tend to resist the attempts of the school to educate them” (Finn, 2009, p. 256). The tension, though, is not only directed at the school from the working-class student; it is also directed at the working-class student from the school: Students from different classes receive rewards based on differing behaviors in the classroom—obedience and docility for working-class students and personal assertiveness and initiative for upper-class students, behaviors corresponding to traits rewarded in corresponding occupational
divisions (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). Working-class boys tend to express themselves externally, through physicality and strength, in a counter-school fashion, while middle-class boys express themselves internally, through the display of specialized knowledge and skills which, while in school, align themselves with the school’s values (Keddie, 2007; Willis, 1981). It is this counter-school culture developed and perpetuated by working-class boys that in contradictory fashion achieves for education one of education’s dominant, hidden objectives: the directing of “volunteering” working-class boys away from middle-class vocations and into working-class jobs (Willis, 1981). “The difficult thing to explain about how middle class kids get middle class jobs is why others let them,” explained Willis (1981), “The difficult thing to explain about how working class kids get working class jobs is why they let themselves” (Willis, 1981).

**Why the Critical Lens on the Working-Class?**

In the past, educational discourse has marginalized class (Carlson & Apple, 1998). In the present, class is not so much marginalized as it is drowned out in the noisy, pluralistic din where it is treated as any other educational impairment (Banfield, 2003), despite class being a central theme in the construction of individual identity (Stough-Hunter, 2015)—the capacity to learn being radically affected by the class environment of learners, and education being arguably the most important single criterion for predicting social mobility (Bramfield, 2008).

Over time, the education system has been co-opted. The progressive force of education—the force securing wealth, ensuring democracy, and promoting tolerance—has been taken over by a regressive force intent on perpetuating economic dependence
through a preservation of a class system (Bowles & Gintis, 1977). Schools are being used in order to legitimate inequality and integrate each new generation into unequal economic positions through seemingly objective, rational, and meritocratic methods—reproducing worker consciousness, behavior, and relations most efficient for economic life (Bowles & Gintis, 1977).

The U.S. economy rapidly shifted from an industrial to a postindustrial society, and with this shift the nature of work changed dramatically (Fine, Weis, Addelston, & Marusza, 1997). Work that once secured and defined the livelihoods and identities of working-class people is gone (Fine, Weis, Addelston, & Marusza, 1997). Once, for young working-class men, the shift to adulthood was the shift from working-class student to skilled manual laborer, but since the 1970s due to global industrial changes, working-class students are increasingly no longer able to find skilled manual labor after school, but instead enter into newer industries in which middle-class performances conflict with working-class performances and the young working-class men are expected to, with difficulty, unlearn generations of social and cultural lessons and attitudes associated with work and employment (Ward, 2018). From these disadvantaged positions within interconnected, economically embedded power relations, working-class young men’s further participation is simply unfeasible and their marginalization unavoidable, constraining those who wish to further participate (Archer, et al., 2001).
Masculinity as Identity Constituent

Who is Masculine?

It is not uncommon to recognize the existence of not one form of masculinity, but multiple forms of masculinity (Connell, 1995), even “a thousand and one’ variations of masculinity” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 845). There is no, and has never been any, universal or ahistorical masculinity to which all cultures subscribe and aspire, but have always been, instead, contextually, historically dependent ideals of masculinity, and a varied plethora of those (Weaver-Hightower, 2003). Characteristics constituting the masculine have varied historically and vary culturally, depending on characteristics of the enactor, the audience for the enactment, and the situation in which the enactor enacts the masculine enactment (Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009). Multiple masculinities, as a notion, suggests that masculinities form among myriad points or centers, around innumerable individuals and groups, and are adopted and adapted for the most advantageous use within the specific cultural and micro-cultural contexts of those individuals or groups: There are localized and hyper-localized masculinities—no single masculinity, but masculinities; no rural masculinity, but rural masculinities; no working-class masculinity, but working-class masculinities, etc. (Weaver-Hightower, 2003; Messerschmidt, 2016; Connell, 1995).

Questioning the notion of a cohesive definition of masculinity challenges the notion of there being a single way “to do” masculinity (Young, 2000). Masculinities are structured action, patterns of practice and enactment inside a system within and between genders, not a system itself (Messerschmidt, 2016; Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009; Connell,
Recognizing masculinities, plural, and not masculinity, singular, allows space for consideration of the relational nature of masculine practices to geography, class, race, sexual orientation, and social contexts (Young, 2000). Recognizing diverse masculinities allows for the recognition of disparities and inequities among different groups of men, allows for a recognition of the relations existing between different manners of masculinity—relations of alliance, relations of dominance, relations of subordination—and it, ultimately, allows for recognition that there is a gender politics within masculinity (Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009).

Why the Critical Lens on Masculinities?

Boys in School

There is a call for further research exploring the role masculinities play in negotiating schooling and attaining education to understand how different masculinities are emplaced and how boys experience themselves as masculine beings (Epstein, 1998)—a call to begin being honest about boys and school (Tyre, 2008). In most parts of the world, boys perform well in schools relative to girls; however, in the United States this is not the case (Jackson et al., 2010). Based on standardized test scores, disciplinary rates, special education enrollment, dropout rates, and college enrollment, relative to girls, boys are not doing well at all in school (Jackson et al., 2010). The question, “Is there something going on broadly across the population that is affecting the performance of young men in school,” something leading to this “national disgrace,” is a question worth asking (Tyre, 2008, pp. 5, 280). Attempting to address the underachievement of boys in school is not part of an antifeminist agenda; to attempt to address the
underachievement of boys in school is to attempt to address the underachievement of all children (Tyre, 2008).

**Masculinities in Schools**

Boys are not a homogenous bloc; consequently, masculinities as expressed by boys vary within cultural settings and alter over time (Connell, 1996). With this varying of masculine expression—these differing ways of doing masculinity (Connell, 1996)—comes differing experiences of societal relations of power, and there are boys who suffer oppressions because of the dynamic between these relations of power and the boys’ particular nonhegemonic subjectivities (Weaver-Hightower, 2003). While all boys are not disadvantaged simply because some are, unquestionably, all boys are not advantaged simply because some are (Weaver-Hightower, 2003).

Certain aspects of schooling shape masculinities—producing masculinities while simultaneously underscoring differences and creating structural conflict between masculinities (Connell, 1996). The meaning of masculinity in working-class life differs from the meaning of masculinity in middle-class life, and schools give emphasis to this difference: Middle-class masculinity and schools organize themselves in a copacetic fashion, while working-class masculinity and schools organize themselves in a conflicting fashion (Connell, 1996). The resulting positions taken by the school and the working-class masculinities quickly convert to the cause of further conflict between the school and the working-class masculinities, creating a cycle of conflict that endlessly creates power and resistance, resistance and power, and so on (Demetriou, 2001).
**Hegemony and Agency**

Hegemony is always in reference to particular historical circumstances through which power is won and held (Carrigan, Connell, & Lee, 1985). Hegemony suggests cultural authority and leadership (Connell, 1996), and hegemonic masculinity is not a singular, unaltering, universal, dominating masculine character, but is instead a masculinity that unites practices from diverse masculinities and occupies the hegemonic position in a set of gender relations between men and women, between men and men, as well as between masculine and feminine (Connell, 1995; Demetriou, 2001; Messerschmidt, 2016). A hegemonic masculinity is a masculinity that is more socially central, and as such more authoritative and powerful (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

A fixed, transhistorical hegemonic masculinity does not exist (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Hegemonic masculinity is a cultural idea (Demetriou, 2001), a theoretical formulation open to historical change and mutating as need be to move in different directions in differing environments (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). As masculinity is in a perpetually unstable, redefining state, it is impossible to fully embody hegemonic masculinity (Gahman, 2017). When embodied to any extent, hegemonic masculinity may only be embodied by a small minority of men (Carrigan et al., 1985), as it is not normal in the statistical sense but normative, embodying the currently and circumstantially most honored and exemplary ways of embodying manhood and requiring all other men and women to position themselves in relation to it (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Hegemonic masculinity may not, in reality, be embodied by any actual boys or men at all, and may only exist in figures, symbols, and representations that boys and men cannot even actually live up to (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).
Hegemonic masculinities, to be understood, must be analyzed at the local, regional, and global levels, recognizing that regional and local constructions of hegemonic masculinity are formed in relation to the global, but are formed hierarchically out of relations among the local cultures of masculinity—cultures specific to a particular place (Messerschmidt, 2016; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Hegemonic masculinity, as a concept, presumes nonhegemonic masculinities and only finds meaning in relation to them, yet nonhegemonic masculinities are also defined and understood in relation to hegemonic masculinities (Messerschmidt, 2016). Like hegemonic masculinities, subordinated masculinities and marginalized masculinities are not fixed masculinities but are situational patterns of practice in an ever-changing assemblage of relations (Connell, 1995). Subordination refers to “relations internal to the gender order,” and marginalization describes “the relationships that result from the interplay of gender with other structures, such as class and ethnicity” (Demetriou, 2001, p. 342). Despite hegemonic masculinity subordinating and marginalizing these masculinities, hegemony does not entail automatic, total control: It may be disordered (Connell, 1995).

Although Connell (1996) argued that masculinities are societal interpretations and employments of male bodies, masculinities are the product of agency, even if limited (Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009). Societal structures offer boys a position in the social order (Martino, 2000), and boys choose from available and achievable social identities and accompanying social practices (Cahill, 1986) in order to, ideally, accomplish two things: position themselves to claim their highest possible social value and resist exploitation (Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009). This is the enacted—however restricted—agency of
hegemonic masculinity as well as marginalized and subordinated masculinities (Messerschmidt, 2016).

In the low-status positions of subordinated masculinities, boys will compensate for their general lack of control through an over-resistance or unwillingness to be controlled by others (Keddie, 2007). In schools, this over-resistance is directed toward the intersection of power and masculinity, namely at those in positions of formal authority and the educative structure at large, leading young men of subordinated masculinities to engage in compensatory manhood acts and to disengage from intellectual work, which they conventionally associate with the feminine, and to fully embrace physical work, which they associate with the masculine, forfeiting their opportunities for upward mobility through success in school (Keddie, 2007; Willis, 1981; Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009; Fine et al., 1997).

**Intersectionality of the Rural, Working-Class Masculine Student**

**Intersectionality**

The appropriation in academic writing of elements of gender theory and gender research has recently come under scholarly scrutiny (Messerschmidt, 2016). One element of gender theory and gender research often academically appropriated is “intersectionality” (Crenshaw, 1989; Messerschmidt, 2016). According to Bernstein (2019), “The basic idea of intersectionality is that forms of oppression stemming from membership in multiple social categories…intersect and thereby create new forms of oppression that are causally, modally, and relationally different from the constituent forms of oppression merely added together” (p. 322). When understood broadly, all
identities are intersectional, as all identities are composed of varying facets, all of which interact in distinctive ways depending on the specific intersection of identity constituents occupied (Bernstein, 2019; Sawyer & Shenvi, 2019).

Scholarly scrutiny of intersectionality, however, does not find that the appropriation of intersectionality leads to the death of intersectionality by “unceasing ambiguity” and “open-endedness”—what one would expect through appropriation and the resulting appropriation of appropriation; quite the opposite is occurring (Messerschmidt, 2016): It is the unceasing ambiguity and open-endedness of the very concept of intersectionality that allows for such appropriation, and it is such appropriation that has led to its chronicled success (Messerschmidt, 2016).

Crenshaw (1989) coined the term *intersectionality* in reference to, very specifically, the experience of Black women as a way of critiquing the treatment of race and gender as categories of experience and analysis that are mutually exclusive, limiting understanding of such through the single-axis framework of mainstream feminism, distorting as unidimensional the multidimensional experience of, specifically, the Black woman. Crenshaw wants her reader to consider how “dominant conceptions of discrimination condition us to think about subordination as disadvantage occurring along a single categorical axis,” which, in turn, erases Black women from the conceptualization by limiting inquiry, due to the single categorical axis of “women,” to “otherwise privileged members of the group [White women],” marginalizing multiply-burdened Black women (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 140).
While the assumption could be that the claim of discrimination (sexism) is made more inclusive in the absence of a racial referent, it simply is not, as without a racial referent the claim defaults to the racially dominant voice (that of White women), assumes voicing participants exist on this single axis, and excludes the uniqueness of the experience of Black women, an experience specifically unique from that of White women and Black men (Crenshaw, 1989). Considered summatively, the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of its experiential parts, and intersectional explanations are more revealing than explanations of individual experiential parts (Bernstein, 2019). It is not the axes of, in this case, Black or woman that must be taken into account in consideration of the subordination of the Black woman, as this is still an example of the very single-issue analyses Crenshaw is critiquing; it is the intersection not of Black and woman but the nexus as a result of the intersection that is Black woman which must be analyzed as a unique experience of simultaneously both Blackness and womanness.

While Crenshaw (1989) theorized the concept of intersectionality as a tool of analysis to better understand the lived-experience of Black women, the concept has since been effectively appropriated for the analysis of the lived-experience enacted at any number of sexed, gendered, raced, or classed axes’ intersection (Bernstein, 2019; Messerschmidt, 2016). Intersectionality is a neutral tool that acknowledges identity constituents do not exist in isolation from one another but in dynamic interaction with one another (Sawyer & Shenvi, 2019). Who one “is” is a dynamic process of co-construction between the individual, others, structures, and culture at large, and no matter how it is specifically constructed, due to the co-construction process, all selves are
always occupying multiple subject positions (Levine-Rasky, 2009; Stough-Hunter, 2015; Carlson & Apple, 1998).

**Intersection of Rural, Working-Class, and Masculinity**

The concept of intersectionality is evolving as an important tool for understanding men and masculinities, as it is becoming more and more broadly understood through intersectionality that while one’s status in a particular axis may provide privilege, the status obtained through other axes may have one occupying a less privileged position (Stough-Hunter, 2015). It is in this extension and appropriation that I find the greatest utility in regard to understanding the participant subjects of my study: rural, working-class masculine students. Undoubtedly, there is rurality and its corresponding researchable axis; there is working-classness and its corresponding researchable axis; and there is masculinity and its corresponding researchable axis; however, there are also the three concurrent axes of rurality, working-classness, and masculinity, and more importantly there is the unique nexus at which these three axes meet to create the rural, working-class masculine student.

Rural, working-class masculinities have not been part of the diversity conversation (Azano, 2015) despite the wide acceptance that through varied identity constituents, oppression coexists along with domination (Levine-Rasky, 2009), and investigation needs to be conducted into “the differing ways individuals construct masculinities and how congruence and incongruence—as well as hybridity—are related to those particular constructions” (Messerschmidt, 2016, p. 183). In fact, working-class masculinities are often understood as static and problematic (Roberts, 2013). As social
identities are experienced within the geographic and material contexts of lived experiences, men and boys enact masculinities in differing ways dependent not only on their own social characteristics, but also dependent on the dynamics of the social spaces in which their enactments take place (Roberts, 2013).

**Conclusion**

According to Paulo Freire (1992), the only valid educational transformation is transformation with the oppressed as subjects, not for the oppressed as objects. This investigative action research study aims to identify and clarify the tension experienced between rural (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016), working-class (Draut, 2018) masculine (Connell, 1995) students and the formal educative structure. This tension between rural, working-class masculinity and the formal educative structure produces masculinities that are simultaneously marginalized in relation to the hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995) of the particular educative structure (Demetriou, 2001) and culturally counter-school (Willis, 1981), producing negative perceptions of the formal educative space, formal education, formal educational achievement, and formal educational attainment.

Despite communities, homes, and families—local cultures—producing educating and educated people, the contemporary formal educative structure is one that devalues all transmissions of intergenerational education and culture that does not run through itself (Levinson & Holland, 1996). Due to such, students may partake in practices and enact identities compatible with the local culture’s “educated person” that contradict the educated person the school aims to produce (Levinson & Holland, 1996). This
contradiction leads to locally educated students being marginalized, neglected, and othered (Levinson & Holland, 1996; Howley & Howley, 2010). This marginalization, neglect, and othering is enacted upon rural, working-class masculine students and furthered through developed tension between the students and the educative structure. An intervention can only be properly mediated following an investigation of the student as rural, as working-class, as masculine and then as the student at the specific nexus of intersectionality that is rural, working-class masculinity.
CHAPTER THREE
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

The purpose of this investigative action research study was to identify and clarify in my context the tension experienced between the rural (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016), working-class (Draut, 2018) masculine (Connell, 1995) student and the formal educative structure. The underlying causes of tension between this localized masculinity (Messerschmidt, 2016) and the educative structure in my context are numerous and are produced both structurally by the formal educative structure and culturally by the rural, working-class masculine students themselves (Morton, 2019; Weis, 1996) through a “counter-school culture” (Willis, 1981).

Over the course of the decade that I have taught rural, working-class masculine students in my current context, the existence of a tension between these students and the formal educative structure has been evident and has over time only grown more evident and, from my perspective, more injurious. While in the past there has been informal discussion of reform to resolve the existing tension, these reforms have never gotten beyond mere discussion. Even then, the discussions were not developing out of research investigating the problem for the sake of better understanding. Developing a fuller understanding of the tension existing between the rural, working-class masculine student and the formal educative structure through this investigative action research study will enable future interventions to be developed in order to resolve this tension; bring the
rural, working-class masculine student more fully into the formal educative structure; and restructure rural, working-class masculine perceptions of a restructured formal educative space, restructured formal education, formal educational achievement, and formal educational attainment.

For this study, the specific problem of practice is the tension experienced between rural (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016), working-class (Draut, 2018) masculine (Connell, 1995) students and the formal educative structure. This tension between rural, working-class masculine students and the formal educative structure produce student attitudes and behaviors that are counter-school (Willis, 1981), producing negative perceptions of formal education, formal educational achievement, and formal educational attainment. Viewing the problem through my experiences working with these students positions me to potentially positively impact the situation.

My planning of this study drew on the critical theory framework (Horkheimer, 1992). Critical theory was chosen as my framework for this study because, according to the critical theorist, the process of education is informed by values and decisions that are politically consequential (Levinson, 2011), as they are transforming “the taken-for-granted into the up-for-grabs” (Fisher, 2009, p. 79). Because the act of teaching and the act of learning shape consciousness, both are, unavoidably, political phenomena, and, according to critical theorists, both are political phenomena (Levinson, 2011) that, as currently enacted, perpetuate social inequalities (Gross, 2011). From this framework regarding the problem of practice, the following questions will guide this study: (1) What is the tension occurring between rural, working-class masculinity and the formal educative structure? (2) Why is this tension occurring between rural, working-class
masculinity and the formal educative structure? (3) How can this tension between rural, working-class masculinity and the formal educative structure be resolved in a way beneficial to all students?

This chapter first presents a rich description of the context of the study, the participants in the study, the process by which the participants for the study were selected, and my positionality as a practitioner researcher. Following, this chapter presents a detailed discussion of the research design and research procedures that were followed to collect and analyze the data generated throughout the study. This discussion provides detailed description concerning the interviews used for data collection concerning the tension experienced between rural, working-class masculine students and the formal educative structure. This chapter concludes with a description of the methods of data analysis used for this phase of the study.

Study Context

This study was conducted in a public high school (grades 9-12) in the Piedmont region of South Carolina classified by the National Center for Educational Statistics as a Rural: Distant school (2016). This high school, while public, is the Arts Focus high school for the school district in which it is situated. It serves, according to data on the 2018-2019 school year, 619 students total, with approximately 51% of those students being male and approximately 66% of those students being free lunch eligible, reduced-price lunch eligible, or directly certified (children who are living in households receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (SNAP) or some other form of assistance) (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2016).
This study was conducted predominantly in one English IV College Prep class composed of seventeen students. Of these seventeen students, twelve were male students and five were female students. Under circumstances due to Covid-19, the class was conducted simultaneously in person and online, with thirteen students in person and four students online. The study was also conducted outside of the English IV College Prep classroom when electronic interviews were conducted with teacher and administrator participants.

**Study Participants**

The students participating in this study were selected using a non-probabilistic, typical purposive sampling strategy (or criterion-based selection) (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I am aware of these students being rural, working-class masculine students based on the work they have completed in my English IV College Prep class and conversations I have had with them before, during, and after class. Participation was solicited through personal conversation with the students and letters of invitation sent to the students and their parents or guardians. Before any element of the study was conducted, a letter of invitation was read, signed, and dated by all participants. Any questions participants had concerning the letter or invitation was addressed prior to their signing and dating the form.

I chose to use non-probabilistic sampling for my study because probabilistic sampling would be unnecessary as statistical generalization was not used (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Typical purposive sampling, sampling in which the investigator desires to highlight what is “typical, normal, or average” and is “based on the assumption that the
investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Patton, 2015, p. 268) was used in order to garner information-rich cases (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

**Researcher Positionality**

Before conducting an action research study, it is the researcher’s responsibility to locate and understand his positionality—his social position, his stance in relation to the participants (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2020)—and how this social position and stance inform his choice of study and his reaction to participants in his study (Herr & Anderson, 2015). Coming to grips with and acknowledging one’s positionality is coming to grips with and acknowledging one’s perspectives and how these perspectives have been shaped by history, by culture, and by society (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2020). Positionality is the understanding that our perspectives are heavily influenced by our place in society in relation to others (Sensoy & DiaAngelo, 2017). In traditional research, much like in traditional theory, the impact of the researcher and his accompanying positionality is to be minimized or eliminated; however, while conducting action research, much like while conducting critical theory (Horkheimer, 1992), these aspects of the researcher are to be acknowledged and embraced (Herr & Anderson, 2015).

**Outsider Within**

Researcher positionality is not best understood in terms of a binary pair, that of *insider* and *outsider*, but in terms of a continuum ranging from the most inside of insiders to that of the most outside of outsiders (University of South Carolina Curriculum Studies Faculty, 2020). This understanding of positionality is well illustrated by Collins who
explored positionality—specifically the positionality of those who remain outsiders despite their involvement, those inside the outsider within positionality, and more specifically the outsider within positionality as it applies to African-American women. This positionality, according to Collins (1986), allows for a unique standpoint from which to conduct research for African-American women.

Collins explored this positionality in the specific context of the Black feminist, pointing out that the Black feminist, as an outsider within, can produce distinctive analyses from this position with a unique outsider standpoint (1986). The Black feminist, due to her distinct position as an outsider within, Collins argued, is able to more diligently call attention to “the interlocking nature of oppression”—the interlocking nature of oppression the Black feminist is firmly positioned underneath—and consequently “shift the entire focus of investigation from one aimed at explicating elements of race or gender or class oppression to one whose goal is to determine what the links are among these systems” (1986, p. S20).

The embracing of this positionality, though, is not without a cost, as outsider within positionality is bound to generate tension (Collins, 1986). This cost—this tension—though, comes with the reward of a unique place and a sensitivity to patterns that may be more challenging for others to recognize (Collins, 1986). And, despite this reward, some outsiders within will attempt to resolve the tension in one of two ways: remaining outsiders by removing themselves from academic work or attempting to become insiders (Collins, 1986). An alternative to leaving and thinking as usual does exist, however, and it is in this alternative that the real power of the position lies. This alternative is to:
conserve the creative tension of outsider within status by encouraging and institutionalizing outsider within ways of seeing. This alternative has merit not only for actual outsiders within, but also for other sociologists as well. The approach suggested by the experiences of outsiders within is one where intellectuals learn to trust their own personal and cultural biographies as significant sources of knowledge. (Collins, 1986, p. S29)

It is in this alternative to leaving or becoming bonafide that Collins, and I, find the greatest import.

**Insider-Without**

Precisely as Collins (1986), with the positionality of outsider within, locates herself and others on the spectrum of positionality between that of insider and that of outsider, I also locate my own positionality on that spectrum. I do not, however, locate my positionality as outsider within. This is not because I do not believe the label is appropriately applied to those at other intersections of positionality; I certainly do. This is because in my current context, that of researcher of rural, working-class masculinity, I consider a more appropriate title to be that of insider-without.

The setting in which I studied these rural, working-class masculine students is the setting in which I attended high school and grew up, and this is also the setting in which I currently teach and live. My being concurrently *from* and *of* this place positions me as an insider.
However, the setting in which I studied these rural, working-class masculine students is the setting in which, growing up and now, I always felt and feel myself to be an outsider while within. Growing up, I did not comfortably conform to the prevailing cultural norms, and I still do not. Having concurrently functioned and functioning as an outsider within positions me as *without*: without much of the experiences, beliefs, or knowledge prevalent in the local hegemonic culture and, due to this, without cultural capital and accompanying status despite my technically having been and still being an insider, furthering my status as “without,” despite my having been and being within.

During this study, I explored students at, largely, the same intersection of identity that I myself was at as a student—in the same community and at the same high school. It is due to this that I will be positioned as an insider. Yet, despite being concurrently *from* and *of* the study’s setting, I will, due to a lack in cultural capital and accompanying status, be *without*. It is for these reasons I adopt and modify Collins’s positionality marker of outsider within (1986) to the positionality marker of insider-without.

**Research Design and Strategy**

This study’s purpose was to identify and clarify in my context the tension experienced between the rural (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016), working-class (Draut, 2018) masculine (Connell, 1995) student and the formal educative structure. As the intention of the design of this study was to generate knowledge concerning practice and learning in my particular context, an action research approach has been selected (Efron & Ravid, 2013).
The action in action research is precisely what differentiates it from traditional research, as the action is action taken by educators in the form of research conducted in their own setting in order to improve their practice and improve student learning (Efron & Ravid, 2013), not research conducted in another’s setting in order to merely understand students’ learning (Herr & Anderson, 2015). There is great overlap between the aim of action research and the aim of critical theory, as both aim to improve practice and learning and society respectively. This form of research is growing, as more practitioners have come to embrace action research as a viable research design for altering and improving the process of teaching and learning—growing professionally, taking responsibility, and becoming more self-evaluative (Efron & Ravid, 2013).

The qualitative research paradigm must first be understood at the ground level: that of research. While there are many definitions of research, according to Merriam and Tisdell (2016) what all the definitions have in common is “the notion of inquiring into, or investigating something in a systematic matter” (p. 3). Most broadly understood, “research is a systematic process by which we know more about something than we did before engaging in the process” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 5).

Just as there is more than a single definition of research, and there are many ways of understanding action research specifically, there are three paradigms that have traditionally shaped educational research—one paradigm being qualitative (Efron & Ravid, 2013). While qualitative research incorporates numerous philosophical orientations and refers to numerous—and at times contrasting—research models, methodologies, practices, and methods, and consequently can carry myriad meanings (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008), there are certain shared, defining qualities: Researchers
engaged in qualitative research are interested in the ways people interpret their own experiences, build their own worlds, make meaning from their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), and when engaged in qualitative study, researchers conduct inductive, emergent, flexible (yet purposeful), and richly descriptive research in their participants’ natural settings, themselves as researchers functioning as the primary data collection and data analysis instruments, focusing on process, understanding, and meaning with the goals of discovery and the generation of hypotheses (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2020).

Dana and Yendol-Hoppey (2020) described teacher inquiry as a way that teachers can disentangle some professional complexities, elevate teachers’ voices, and transform opinions concerning teaching. They further outlined teacher inquiry:

The teacher inquiry movement focuses on the concerns of teachers (not outside researchers) and engages teachers in the design, data collection, and interpretation of data around a question….The purpose of engagement in inquiry by classroom teachers is to improve classroom practice. The point of doing inquiry is for implementation and change, not for academic impact (although this can happen too)….Teacher inquirers make decisions about what is important to study and how to go about studying it based on a careful and critical analysis of what is happening at a local level in their own classrooms, schools, and districts. (2020, p. 7)

Teacher inquiry, as described above, differs from daily teacher reflection during and concerning practice in that inquiry is less happenstance, calls for planned reflection to bring more attention to the posing of problems, and is more visible (Dana & Yendol-
Hoppey, 2020). As teacher inquirers engage in this intentional, focused reflection, they inquire about teaching and learning, collect and organize information, and collaborate with critical friends (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2020). In addressing the question “Why inquire?” Dana and Yendol-Hoppey (2020) pointed out that “understanding and correcting the inequalities that exist in schools and society is of critical importance to all educators. Engagement in inquiry can be a powerful pathway to the creation of more equitable classrooms” (p. 16).

Developing a more complete understanding of the tension between the rural, working-class masculine student and the formal educative structure through this qualitative investigative action research study could enable either future investigations to be developed in order to further understand the tension or future interventions to be developed in order to resolve this tension and bring the rural, working-class masculine student more fully into the formal educative structure.

**Historical Review of the Methodology**

Action research has endured, at least conceptually, for decades, as it can be traced back through the work of Stephen Corey in the 1950s, back through the work of Kurt Lewin in the 1940s, and back to the work of John Dewey in the 1930s (Krell & Dana, 2012). Practitioner inquiry has endured alongside. Since their inception, both, as frameworks for educational research, have been seeking to figure out, simply put, what works best (Anderson & Herr, 1999).

These frameworks explore methodologies and actively seek answers to questions posed presently in both time and space. Action research has developed as a research
method with its own set of norms, which often conflict with the prevailing set of epistemological norms built into traditional research (Anderson & Herr, 1999). The narrative mode, subjectivity, and localization brought forth by action research reflects a change in the understanding of knowledge and, as such, demands action taken by education research (Noffke, 2008). These narratives of practice, these demands for action, often criticized as “not quite research,” have evolved to demand a status above that of mere “opinion or thought pieces” (Anderson, 2002, p. 25).

As it is growing more and more evident that the outsiders making the decisions for schools are not equipped to do so, practitioner inquiry is becoming better understood as a viable methodology for conducting research (Metz & Page, 2002). Practitioner inquiry has come to be defined as the systematic study of “one’s classroom practice in order to take action that leads to improvement in practice and ultimately student outcomes” (Macdonald & Weller, 2017, p. 137). Practitioner inquiry is the first step toward creating professionally relevant knowledge: “Instead of teachers being receivers of knowledge, job-embedded professional learning through continuous cycles of practitioner inquiry allows teachers to become the creators of knowledge” (Macdonald & Weller, 2017, p. 146). The teacher, the practitioner, independent of outside researchers, makes inquiries concerning his own complex problem of practice and investigates and deepens his understanding of that problem. Practitioner inquiry begins with a question, leads to research into daily practice, and develops into significant change in schooling, which leads to further questions (Lytle, 2008). Practitioner inquiry begins in inquiry and ends in action, but only to begin again in inquiry, to end again in action.
This framework—hyper-localized to begin—at its roots as practitioner inquiry and action research, expands as public knowledge “with epistemic claims beyond the practice setting” (Metz & Page, 2002, p. 14). It is only problem solving from within messy realities, be them small or large, that any agenda, be it simple or grand, can move forward (Metz & Page, 2002).

**Study Design**

The framework of this investigative action research study was designed around the tension experienced between the rural (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016), working-class (Draut, 2018) masculine (Connell, 1995) student and the formal educative structure. Participants were chosen based upon the following criteria: rurality, working-classness, and masculinity.

To determine rurality, the categorization as “Rural: Distant” (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007b) of the high school these students attend was first considered, as, due to this categorization all are technically rural students. However, more importantly, locally prevailing understanding of *rural as country* will ultimately decide which students constitute rural students. Similar to the United States Census Bureau defining rural as anything not in an urban area (2007b.), locally *rural* is defined as *country*, which is anywhere *not in town*. As an illustration of this dichotomy, a regularly occurring announcement made in my context is the following: “If you ride bus 62 and live in town, ride bus 68. If you ride bus 62 and live in the country, ride bus 65.” For this study, students with a home address *in the country* (not in town) were considered rural students.
Although difficult due to the complexity of the term, three methods are commonly employed to define working-classness: occupation, income, and education, and there is no agreed upon correct way to define it (Draut, 2018). Defining working-classness based upon parental occupation is too abstract for this study, as a definition based upon occupation entails understanding the employee’s “power,” “authority,” and “control” (Zweig, 2004). Defining working-classness based upon parental income raises complications due to the variety of cost of living across the United States (Draut, 2018). Due to the abstraction of defining working-classness based upon occupation and the complications in defining working-classness based upon income, for this study, working-classness was defined by parental education level.

Education level is strongly associated with both job quality and earning power (Draut, 2018), and as such, in this study the working-class student was defined as a student with a parent or parents in the work force who do not have a bachelor’s degree (Draut, 2018). To gather this data, students completed a practice college application as part of their English IV College Prep curriculum. On this application, they were asked to list colleges attended (if any) and degrees earned (if any) by their parent(s)—mimicking typical questions asked on college applications.

To determine masculinity, students identifying as male for legal sex or man for gender identity were considered masculine students. While maleness, man-ness, and masculinity are not synonymous (Connell, 1995), the literature uses these terms overwhelmingly as if they are. This, I am going to assume, is due to the strong correlation between those identifying as male, as a man, and as masculine, as well as the awkward nature of structures such as enactors of masculine identities compared to structures such
as *males, men,* and *boys.* To gather this data, students completed a practice college application as part of their English IV College Prep curriculum. On this application, they were asked to provide their legal sex as male or female and given the option to provide their gender identity as man, woman, or self-identify—mimicking information typically requested on college applications.

To determine who is a rural, working-class masculine student, using the above criteria, rurality was established for the student, working-classness was established for the student, and masculinity was established for the student. Data related to the tension between rural, working-class masculine students and the formal educative structure was collected by means of an in-person focus group involving four student participants and interviews conducted through email with teacher and administrator participants.

In all research, quality is a major concern (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative action research necessitates quality in the forms of both sophistication and rigor (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008), and the qualitative action research approach uses unique criteria to assess the quality of methodology (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016): Validity can be understood to mean truth (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008). In this study, internal validity was addressed through the clarification of my biases and assumptions, triangulation of data, member checking interviews, and peer review of emergent findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Silverman & Marvasti, 2008). *Reliability* refers to the consistency of the researcher’s data-gathering tools and procedures—whether similar results would be found utilizing comparable data-gathering tools and procedures (Efron & Ravid, 2013). Reliability was increased due to my explanations concerning the assumptions and theoretical framework upon which the study was constructed, my triangulation of data,
and my statements concerning the conducting of the study and the deriving of findings from the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As a researcher, I clearly illustrate the procedures I utilized to ensure the reliability of my methods and the validity of my conclusions (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008).

According to Silverman and Marvasti (2008), rigorous qualitative research must meet the following criteria:

- It thinks theoretically through and with data.
- It develops empirically sound, reliable, and valid findings.
- It uses methods that are demonstrably appropriate to the research problem.
- Where possible, it contributes to practice and policy. (p. 295)

As a researcher conducting qualitative investigative action research, I assured that my research met all of the above criteria of quality research.

**Data Collection, Instruments, and Tools**

Qualitative data was collected using in-person interviews and electronic interviews. In-person interviews were conducted with student participants in the focus group. Electronic interviews were conducted with teacher participants and administrator participants.

A research interview is a structured and purposeful conversation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The research interview can be categorized into three types of interview: highly structured, semistructured, and unstructured (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). During
this study, I used semistructured interviews as explorations (Seidman, 2013) in order to collect data. I first used the semistructured interview as a data collection tool during the in-person focus group involving four students, my informants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Next, electronic semistructured interviews were utilized when interviewing the teacher participants in this study and administrator participants in this study in order to gain a greater teacher and administrator perspective on this problem of practice. Electronic semistructured interviews were also utilized with these teachers and administrators while conducting peer review of my data and interpretation. Peer review helped to assure the credibility and accuracy of my data and interpretation (Efron & Ravid, 2013).

**Research Procedure**

Approval from the Institutional Review Board was procured before initiating any of the following research procedures. Prior to any of the following research procedures, student participants were asked in person of their willingness to participate in this study, were provided with study details, and were provided letters of invitation to be signed by both themselves and their parents/guardians. Before the collecting of the letters of invitation, the students and their parents/guardians were given the opportunity to have any questions addressed concerning the informed consent form. Teacher and administrator participants were asked through email of their willingness to participate in this study and were provided study details and a letter of invitation to be signed. Before the collecting of the letters of invitation, the teacher and administrator participants were given the opportunity to have any questions addressed concerning the informed consent form. The date of the focus group was then planned with the student participants.
The in-person focus group was held in my classroom after school with four rural, working-class masculine students to provide an opportunity to collect data on the tension between these students and the formal educative structure from the perspective of these students. The focus group was an initial attempt at gathering data concerning the tension these students experience between themselves and the formal educative structure. While qualitative research utilizes numerous methods for the collection of data (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012), for the sake of understanding these students’ stories as they relate to their experiences in school, the semistructured interviews conducted through this focus group were the most beneficial position from which to begin.

The focus group interview utilized an interview protocol, beginning with me sharing with the participants important details concerning what I am studying and why I am studying it (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Following, I shared with the participants information concerning myself, specifically information relating to my positionality (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2020; Herr & Anderson, 2015) and information to build a rapport with these student participants (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). The interviews then moved to basic, open-ended “Tell me” questions to warm up the participants and build trust while still collecting background data (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Following these scripted questions and questions developed out of the interview script’s prompts, the questioning moved to the bigger and more expansive questions more directly addressing my study’s research questions but still allowing enough latitude for unexpected data to develop (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). The interview protocol was utilized when necessary to keep the conversation moving in the direction necessary to gather my data.
This focus group was recorded in audio form using two audio recorders placed in different locations in the room. This assured a higher audio quality for the sake of transcription as well as better safeguard against the possibility of losing the recording due to recorder malfunction.

Following the focus group, interviews were conducted through email with teacher and administrator participants. These interviews were utilized to gather data on the tension between the rural, working-class masculine student and the formal educative structure from a perspective other than that of the student and specifically from that of the teacher and administrator. While the purpose of the interviews was known and the protocols for the interviews were structured similar to the protocols for the interviews conducted during the focus group, the prompts for the interviews were generated largely based upon the data gathered during the focus group.

Data Analysis

My data set consists of transcribed and recorded semistructured interviews. In order to manage and organize my data, I adapted a word processing program. As my data set consists of only interviews, an adapted word processing program sufficed as well as kept me from unnecessarily overcomplicating matters.

To analyze my gathered data, I collaborated with colleagues in order to more fully support and understand the outcomes of my inquiry (Dana & Yendel-Hoppey, 2020). I maintain full ownership of the inquiry project, but two of the teacher participants interviewed as part of the data collection process supported this study as critical friends to aid in the analysis of data (Dana & Yendel-Hoppey, 2020). Utilizing Critical Friends
Groups (CFG) in collaborative inquiry is illustrative of the belief that teachers can impactfully support one another, one another’s professional inquiry, and one another’s professional growth (Franzak, 2002). While CFGs can be utilized in multiple collaborative structures, my CFG was utilized for inquiry support (Dana & Yendel-Hoppey, 2020). I first collected and organized the data. Following, and preceding any analysis of the data, I presented the data to my CFG, conducted protocol-driven discussions concerning the data with them (C. Bogiages, personal communication, March 22, 2021), and using structured protocols analyzed the data with their support (Franzak, 2002).

In order to develop common patterns, themes, and categories across data, my CFG and I analyzed my data inductively, comparatively, and as I conducted my fieldwork (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Such ongoing analysis of my data allowed patterns, themes, and categories to emerge that are encompassing enough to house data emerging later during collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

In order to analyze my data as I went along, using an adapted word processing program, I—as closely following the gathered interviews, observations, and reflections as possible—personally transcribed the interviews, structured the observations, and with my CFG close-read the reflections. While keeping in mind my biases, my purpose, and my epistemological framework, I next began my analysis process with my CFG by open coding as expansively as I felt fruitful, notating data that struck us as potentially relevant to my research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Next, with the assistance of my CFG, I conducted analytical coding and grouping of my open coding based upon interpretation of the meaning of the data (Richards, 2015).
Once I moved into my next data set, I conducted the same process as above, looking for groupings I previously extracted from the first data set. During this step, I again reminded myself of my biases, my purpose, and my epistemological framework. When the overlap in coding between the two data sets emerged, I recorded this material. From this material, I constructed my categories (themes): “conceptual elements that ‘cover’ or span many individual examples (or bits or units of the data [I] previously identified) of the category” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 207). In the constructing of my categories, I kept in mind my research questions and my purpose (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Out of these early categories, I looked to create subcategories (patterns) for emerging, more encompassing, comprehensive categories. This process continued throughout the research process with earlier categories and was accompanied by the appropriate self-reflection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Summary

This investigative action research study’s purpose was to identify and clarify in my context the tension experienced between the rural, working-class masculine (Connell, 1995) student and the formal educative structure. My planning of this study draws on the critical theory framework (Horkheimer, 1992). Critical theory was chosen as my framework for this study because, according to the critical theorist, the process of education is informed by values and decisions that are politically consequential (Levinson, 2011), as they are transforming “the taken-for-granted into the up-for-grabs” (Fisher, 2009, p. 79). Because the act of teaching and the act of learning shape
consciousness, both are, unavoidably, political phenomena (Levinson, 2011), and, according to critical theorists, both are political phenomena that, as currently enacted, perpetuate social inequalities (Gross, 2011). From this framework regarding the problem of practice, the following questions guided this study: (1) What is the tension occurring between rural, working-class masculinity and the formal educative structure? (2) Why is this tension occurring between rural, working-class masculinity and the formal educative structure? (3) How can this tension between rural, working-class masculinity and the formal educative structure be resolved in a way beneficial to all students?

This investigative action research study was conducted in a public high school (grades 9-12) in the Piedmont region of South Carolina classified by the National Center for Educational Statistics as a Rural: Distant school (2016). The participants in this study were students, teachers, and administrators. The student participants were rural, working-class masculine students, and the teacher and administrator participants were teachers and administrators knowledgeable concerning this intersection of student identity.

During this study, qualitative data was collected using in-person interviews, and electronic interviews. In-person interviews were conducted with student participants in the focus group. Electronic interviews were conducted with teacher participants and administrator participants. Data gathered through these procedures consisted of transcribed and recorded semistructured interviews. In order to develop common themes and patterns across data, I analyzed my data inductively, comparatively, and as I conducted my fieldwork (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Such ongoing analysis of my data allowed themes and patterns to emerge that are encompassing enough to house data that emerged later during collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).
CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

The purpose of this investigative action research study was to identify and clarify the tension experienced between the rural (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016), working-class (Draut, 2018) masculine (Connell, 1995) student and the formal educative structure. Developing a better understanding of the tension existing between the rural (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016), working-class (Draut, 2018) masculine (Connell, 1995) student and the formal educative structure through this study could enable future interventions to be developed in order to resolve this tension and bring the rural, working-class masculine student more fully into the formal educative structure. The research questions driving this investigative action research study are as follows: (1) What is the tension occurring between rural, working-class masculinity and the formal educative structure? (2) Why is the tension occurring between rural, working-class masculinity and the formal educative structure? (3) How can this tension between rural, working-class masculinity and the formal educative structure be resolved in a way beneficial to the rural, working-class masculine student?

The problem of practice on which this study was focused is the tension between the rural (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016), working-class (Draut, 2018) masculine (Connell, 1995) student and the formal educative structure. The underlying causes of this tension between this localized masculinity (Messerschmidt, 2016) and the
formal educative structure are various and are produced both structurally by the formal educative structure and culturally by the rural, working-class masculine students themselves (Morton, 2019; Weis, 1996) through a “counter-school culture” (Willis, 1981)—a culture in which ideas, knowledge, and ideals are produced that run counter to those produced through formal schooling (Willis, 1981). To date, there is nearly no scholarship concerning the student at the nexus of the identity constituents that are rural, working-class, and masculine. While scholarship concerning these identity constituents as individual markers of difference exists (Carlson & Apple, 1998), it is limited (Teiken, 2014; Jaeger, 2018; McShane & Smarick, 2018a; McLaren, P. L., & Giroux, H. A., 1990; Tyre, 2008). The available scholarship, however, does tend to point in one particular direction—the need for closer, more critical attention to all three unique students: the rural student, the working-class student, and the masculine student (Teiken, 2014; Jaeger, 2018; McShane & Smarick, 2018a; McLaren, P. L., & Giroux, H. A., 1990; Tyre, 2008). If each identity constituent, as a distinct marker of difference, calls for closer, more critical attention, the intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) of masculinity with rurality and working-classness, one can deduce, must be appreciated further (Messerschmidt, 2016).

This study used an investigative action research approach utilizing practitioner inquiry. Dana and Yendol-Hoppey (2020) described teacher inquiry as a way that teachers can disentangle some professional complexities, elevate teachers’ voices, and transform opinions concerning teaching. Teacher inquiry differs from daily teacher reflection during and concerning practice in that inquiry is less happenstance, calls for planned reflection to bring more attention to the posing of problems, and is more visible (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2020). As teacher inquirers engage in this intentional, focused
reflection, they purposefully ask questions about teaching and learning, organize and collect information, focus on a specific area of inquiry, and benefit from ongoing collaboration and support of critical friends. Accordingly, utilizing inquiry has the potential to lead to more equitable classrooms (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2020).

The participants in this study were students at John C. Calhoun High School (pseudonym) (JCCHS) and teachers, former teachers, and administrators in Jackson County School District (pseudonym). The students who participated in this study were rural, working-class masculine students. They ranged in grade level from grade 11, junior year, to grade 12, senior year. I identified these students as rural, working-class masculine students based on the work they completed in my English IV College Prep class, specifically a practice college application as part of a semester-long assignment entitled “Senior Portfolio.” On this practice college application, the students were asked to provide their home address, their parents’ education level, and their legal sex and gender identity. The teachers who participated in this study were an agriculture teacher, an automotive teacher, and a history teacher in Jackson County School District, and two former Jackson County School District English teachers. The administrator participants were the principal at JCCHS and Jackson County School District’s secondary math specialist and data analyst.

Numerous data sources were utilized as a means of triangulation to increase credibility of the study results. The study began with semistructured in-person research interviews being conducted through a focus group held after school in my classroom. The focus group was designed to provide a data-gathering opportunity situated in the formal educative space, but a data gathering opportunity more relaxed, less structured. These
semistructured, in-person interviews through this focus group were used as explorations (Seidman, 2013) of the tension between the rural, working-class masculine student and the formal educative structure. These rural, working-class masculine students functioned in this regard as my informants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Next, structured electronic interviews were utilized through email to interview the teacher and administrator participants in this study in order to gain a greater teacher and administrator perspective on this problem of practice. Following the emailed interviews, I used electronic structured interviews through email if follow-up interviews were necessary for member checking. Electronic structured interviews through email were also utilized with my Critical Friends Group (CFG) while conducting peer review of my data (Efron & Ravid, 2013).

As the problem of practice on which this study was concentrated is the tension experienced between the rural (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016), working-class (Draut, 2018) masculine (Connell, 1995) student and the formal educative structure, a critical orientation is most appropriate, as the orientation is one of conscious opposition (Horkheimer, 1992) and one of critique and not merely comprehension. The purpose of this investigation is to discover, clarify, and understand the tension between the rural, working-class masculine student and the formal educative structure, producing not merely understanding of the present situation, but potential for action aiming to create a more equitable and just future for these students.

First, this chapter introduces the student participants through thick, rich description in the form of student participant vignettes. Second, the data gathered from the student participants is presented thematically in the form of tables and then in the
form of paragraphs. Third, teacher and administrator participants are introduced through thick, rich description in the form of participant vignettes. Fourth, the data gathered from the teacher and administrator participants is presented thematically in the form of a table and then in the form of paragraphs. Fifth, a cross-case analysis of the data gathered from all participants and organized around the study’s research questions is presented in paragraph form. Sixth, a summary of the chapter is presented.

The data herein were analyzed using an adapted word processing program. With my data set consisting solely of interviews, an adapted word processing program sufficed as well as keep me from unnecessarily overcomplicating matters. When analyzing my data, I collaborated with colleagues in order to more fully support and understand the outcomes of my inquiry (Dana & Yendel-Hoppey, 2020). While I maintain full ownership of the inquiry project, two of the teacher participants interviewed—Mr. Hoven and Mr. Eaton—as part of the data collection process supported this study as critical friends to aid in the analysis of data (Dana & Yendel-Hoppey, 2020). I first collected and organized the data. Following, and preceding any analysis of the data, I presented the data to my CFG, conducted protocol-driven discussions concerning the data with them (C. Bogiages, personal communication, March 22, 2021), and using structured protocols analyzed the data with their support (Franzak, 2002).

To analyze my data as I went along, I personally transcribed the interviews as immediately as possible. Next, while keeping in mind my biases, my purpose, and my epistemological framework, I began the analysis process with my CFG by open coding as expansively as I felt fruitful, notating data that struck me as potentially relevant to my research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Next, I conducted analytical coding,
grouping, or sorting, based upon my interpretation and my CFG’s interpretation of the meaning of the data (Richards, 2015). Once I moved into my next data set, I conducted the same process as above, looking for themes and patterns I previously extracted from the first data set. When the overlap in coding between the two data sets emerged, I recorded this material. From this material, I constructed my themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Out of these early themes, I looked to create patterns for emerging, encompassing, comprehensive categories. This process continued throughout the research process and was accompanied by the appropriate self-reflection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

**Student Participant Vignettes**

I knew all student participants in this study, as all student participants were my classroom students. Pseudonyms are used for student participants and locations to protect participants’ confidentiality as guaranteed in the research protocol.

This section first introduces the student participants through thick, rich description in the form of participant vignettes. Second, the data gathered from the student participants is presented thematically in the form of a table and then in the form of paragraphs.

**Student Participant 1: Casey**

Casey is a high school junior who lives in and is from the local farming community of Rich Springs (pseudonym). He and his family live on fifty-two acres of land. He has been in the same place, living in the same home, since the day he was born.
His whole life, Casey and his family have had hunting dogs “and stuff—goats, sheep, cows.” Casey and his father, a maintenance man, after school and work respectively, are often found “doctoring on the dogs.” Their dogs participate in competition hunting, “which is a bunch of wear and tear on them. It’s like a vet at the house.”

Other than doctoring on the dogs, Casey and his dad will pick up “little welding jobs and stuff,” building, for example, a dog box for a side-by-side—“little side welding jobs.” Other than doctoring on dogs and picking up little welding jobs, Casey cuts his family’s acre and a half of lawn, cuts his grandma’s lawn, and does “stuff like that.”

**Student Participant 2: Randall**

Randall is a high school senior who lives with his family down a dirt road on an open plot of exactly one acre. The left, right, and backside of his family’s home is horse pasture—acres of horse pasture—and the front side is just woods. Only four families live on his road. It’s in the “middle of nowhere.”

Randall and his family moved into this house when Randall was in the second grade. He and his family lived in the Straight Creek (pseudonym) community for the first seven or eight years of his life: “Mama and Daddy wanted to move, so we moved.” At that time, a local gold mine was buying people’s properties out in this community, so his family sold their property to the gold mine. They looked around and found the house in which they currently live. It was perfect: “Daddy wanted a place in the country so we could shoot guns.”
When Randall’s not in school, he’s working a part-time job at the fire department, working a part-time job as a busboy at a local restaurant, cutting grass, and doing some plumbing jobs with his father, a professional firefighter. Before becoming a firefighter, though, his father was a plumber, so “he knows all about it. He’s teaching me. He wants me to learn the trade so when I get my full-time job I can have a side job plumbing making money.”

**Student Participant 3: Dale**

Dale is a high school senior who lives in the local farming community of Rich Springs. He lives down a road on which, other than his family’s, “a couple houses, about five or six” can be found. At home, he and his family raise goats and, until recently, had hunting dogs.

When Dale’s not in school, he likes to “just mess around, really”: “Most of the time if I’m out of school, I’m working or messing around, like riding around—ride four-wheelers a lot. That’s it.” For work, Dale cuts grass and has his own little business.

**Student Participant 4: J.R.**

J.R. is a high school senior who also lives in the local farming community of Rich Springs. The road he lives down, most of his family lives down, taking up “about half the road.” He’s lived there all his life.

J.R. and his family live on an acre plot “with a double-wide trailer on it”; his “pawpaw lives right across the road.” Growing up there, his family have “added porches and all that on it.” Directly beside his home is his family’s shop.
In the afternoons and at night, J.R. and his grandfather work on cars in the shop—
“we race and work right out that shop.” J.R. and his grandfather drag race about every
weekend. Other than working on their own cars, they also “take on some jobs. Welding
jobs. Whatever someone needs.” Outside of working on his own cars and others’ cars out
of his family’s shop, J.R. also works at another local shop selling new and used racecar
parts on eBay, “anywhere from motors, inside motors. Just about whatever you need.
Then we work on cars in the afternoons.”

Data Presentation

To develop shared themes and patterns across data, I analyzed my data
inductively, comparatively, and as I conducted my fieldwork (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).
To analyze my data, I personally transcribed the interviews as immediately as possible.
Following, I began my analysis process with my CFG by open coding as expansively as I
felt fruitful, notating data that struck me as potentially relevant to my research questions
(Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Next, I conducted analytical coding, grouping, or sorting,
based upon my interpretation and my CFG’s interpretation of the meaning of the data
(Richards, 2015). Once I moved into my next data set, I conducted the same process as
above, looking for groupings I previously extracted from the first data set. When the
overlap in coding between the two data sets emerged, I recorded this material. From this
material, I constructed my themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Out of these early themes,
I found patterns.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Relevant Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male Family</td>
<td>“My pawpaw lives right across the road. At night, me and Pawpaw work on cars in the shop and stuff like that, and we race and work right out that shop.” – Casey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members</td>
<td>“My daddy didn't go to college or anything like that, and it took him a little bit longer, and he had to work a lot harder, but he does make a lot more money in the field of work he does. And, that's kind of always what I think about: You don't have to go to college to make money. You might have to work two times harder, but that's life.” – Casey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“…me and my dad, we’ll do little welding jobs and stuff. Like today, I think we’re going to build a dog box for a side-by-side.” – Randall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Sometimes me and daddy go do some plumbing jobs…He’s teaching me. He wants me to learn the trade so when I get my full-time job, I can have a side job plumbing making money.” – Dale</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Theme 1: Male Family Members.** A theme that emerged immediately during the focus group with four rural, working-class masculine students was male family members, namely fathers—“daddy” and “dad,” referenced by three of the four participants—but also including a grandfather—“Pawpaw,” referenced by one of the four participants.

Within this theme emerged a significant pattern: physical labor. Outside of school, Casey, Randall, and Dale all partake in some form of physical labor with a father or grandfather. Randall and his dad “do little welding jobs”; Dale and his daddy “do some plumbing jobs”; Casey and his pawpaw “work on cars in the shop…race and work right out that shop.” Casey also referenced his “daddy,” but he referenced him not to share manual labor they mutually partook in, but to share a lesson learned from him concerning hard work:
[M]y daddy didn't go to college or anything like that, and it took him a little bit longer, and he had to work a lot harder, but he does make a lot more money in the field of work he does. And, that's kind of always what I think about: You don't have to go to college to make money. You might have to work two times harder, but that's life.

For Casey, Randall, and Dale, as boys, work skills and work lessons learned in the past by fathers and grandfathers are transferred, or passed down, to them daily. These lessons from the past, passed down daily by masculine forefathers, are then put into action in the present in the form of work.

Table 4.2 Work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Relevant Data</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work</td>
<td>“…that's when I really started—doing the working and every day. I was like, I know all I need to know in school and what I want to do. Why continue?” – Dale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“My summer right after ninth grade, right when I started working, and I started making money—then I started thinking about it a little bit more….. we didn't start racing until my 10th grade year; I always went out. I didn't really start going out to the shop ‘til probably 9th grade. I started working on cars, and I got a job at a forklift shop, and I started going there and I started taking an interest in it and started making money. That's why I realized, yeah, I mean, I feel like schooling ain’t really…” – Casey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“School takes away from [work]…. School takes up a lot of valuable time that I could be pursuing something that I’m passionate about and making money at the same time.” – Randall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I'd rather be cutting grass all day or plumbing than being in school.” – Dale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Most of the time if I’m out of school, I’m working…. I cut grass and have my own little business.” – J.R.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“If I’m not at school, I’m working a part-time job, at the fire department, or cutting grass.” - Dale</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“We work on cars a lot at the house in afternoons. Take on some jobs. Welding jobs. Whatever someone needs.” – Casey

“I work at somebody’s shop. We sell new and used racecar parts on eBay—from anywhere from motors to inside motors. Just about whatever you need, and then we work on cars in the afternoons.” – Casey

“We’re usually outside doctoring on the dogs. The dogs go through competition hunting which is a bunch of wear and tear on them. It’s like a vet at the house.” – Randall

“I think we shouldn’t have school on Friday, just ‘cause of like jobs and stuff and you can go to work on Friday, Saturday or Sunday, go back to school on Monday.” – J.R.

“…being off on Fridays, that would help working wise because I work in the morning three hours, and when we went four days, I was able to get have 9-10 hours on Friday. So that made up all my hours. And I feel like that’d help out a little better.” – Casey

“Yeah, school’s not important.” – J.R.

**Theme 2: Work.** A second theme that emerged immediately during the focus group with these four rural, working-class masculine students is work. As evidenced above, this theme emerged out of the theme of male family members.

Tension began to develop between these students and the formal educative structure once they began to work outside of the formal educative space more seriously. Dale states, “…that’s when I really started—doing the working and every day. I was like, I know all I need to know in school and what I want to do. Why continue?” Casey explains the origin of this tension as follows:
My summer right after ninth grade, right when I started working, and I started making money—then I started thinking about it a little bit more…. we didn't start racing until my 10th grade year; I always went out. I didn't really start going out to the shop 'til probably 9th grade. I started working on cars, and I got a job at a forklift shop, and I started going there and I started taking an interest in it and started making money. That's why I realized, yeah, I mean, I feel like schooling ain't really…

This tension has persisted for these students ever since. To begin, work made evident the tension. Since, though, the tension has developed into one between the students’ work lives and the students’ school lives. Randall explains it this way: “School takes away from [work]…. School takes up a lot of valuable time that I could be pursuing something that I’m passionate about and making money at the same time.” Dale explains, “I’d rather be cutting grass all day or plumbing than being in school.”

Outside of school, these students work, and they work a lot. When asked to describe “things you do outside of school,” the students nearly exclusively discussed working: J.R. states, “Most of the time if I’m out of school, I’m working…. I cut grass and have my own little business.” Dale states, “If I’m not at school, I’m working a part-time job, at the fire department, or cutting grass.” Randall explains, “We’re usually outside doctoring on the dogs. The dogs go through competition hunting which is a bunch of wear and tear on them. It’s like a vet at the house.” Casey explains,

We work on cars a lot at the house in afternoons. Take on some jobs. Welding jobs. Whatever someone needs….I work at somebody’s shop. We sell new and used racecar parts on eBay—from anywhere from motors to inside motors. Just about whatever you need, and then we work on cars in the afternoons.

According to J.R., compared to and in relation to work, “school’s not important.” In fact, from the perspective of these students, as Randall explains, “School takes up a lot of valuable time that I could be pursuing something that I’m passionate about.” J.R.
argues that “we shouldn't have school on Friday, just ‘cause of like jobs and stuff, and you can go to work on Friday, Saturday, or Sunday, go back to school on Monday.”

Casey concurs: “…being off on Fridays, that would help working wise because I work in the morning three hours, and when we went four days [due to Covid-19], I was able to get have 9-10 hours on Friday. So that made up all my hours. And I feel like that’d help out a little better.”

For Dale, Casey, Randall, and J.R., the work with which they presently engage and in which they presently find value has been inspired and informed by their fathers and grandfathers. The knowledge necessary for the performance of such work has, by and large, not been gathered from the formal educative structure. As such, from the perspective of these students, the formal educative structure has little knowledge to offer their present selves. From their perspective, the formal educative structure has less than little to offer; it has even less than nothing to offer, as it takes time away from that which offers them something in the present and for their future: work.

**Table 4.3 Knowledge**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Relevant Data</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>“There should only be one level of each curricular required.” –Randall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“You got algebra one, two, English one through four—all that stuff. I think you should, in school, get the basics, and at the job you’re own or if you want to just learn more, you should have the…your own option to take that in college. Or, you know, I think you should be able to have your limit in school, and then go do what you want to do. And then if what you want to do needs more, go to college more….I think once I, you know, finished 10th, 11th grade, I didn't need to know more. I'm not gonna use this extra stuff in the career field I'm going into. I'm not gonna need to. I can do simple math…like if I'm reading the pump panel, I ain't gonna have to say, “Hey, that's a noun.”…I got a basic understanding. I can read;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“I feel like school takes up a lot of...I feel like you learn stuff you ain’t never gonna use in life. I feel like you could be out learning a trade like plumbing or welding or, you know, working on cars. I feel like you learn stuff that ain’t really valuable in life.” – Casey

“I want to do welding. I want to go to college for a degree in welding, and one of my, I guess you say, classes, I might take math and English stuff like that. But it’s all gonna go back to welding. It’s just not gonna be no random, random stuff that I probably won’t ever use, but it’ll all weigh in on what I wanna do for a living.” – Casey

“Go take, like, trade classes and be done for the day.” – J.R.

“It’s like a work environment, but you don’t get paid.” – J.R.

“It’s something I enjoy doing, too. Like we wanted to take that. That was our choice and we look forward to it.” – Dale

“I feel like I can go in auto and just work on cars or his truck. I enjoy doing that and don’t have no problem going in there and getting dirty.... I have no problem getting dirty in school and working. Even though I’m not getting paid, I still enjoy it.” – Casey

“You’ve seen me come in from Ag—green legs.” – Dale

“That multipurpose building out there, it needs to be a career center.” – Randall

“...that building out there being a career center. I mean, that would help with driving back and forth. I get to my auto class probably twenty minutes late every day. I have to leave welding early, too, if I’m going to make it, so I feel like I’m losing class time there.” – Casey

“...you ain’t got a lunch block here. You got to stop and get something or eat on the road.” – J.R.

“...the way my classes were scheduled. I'm not here for a lunch.” – Dale

“the only way we can eat, or I know I can get lunch, right when I leave work at 11 o’clock, I gotta go straight to get something to eat, and then still, by the time I get back to Jackson, I’ll miss ten minutes trying to get
there, traveling and stuff like that. I feel like...I don’t know.” –Randall

“…if we had a career center like Jackson did. Because Jackson, my dad went there, and he told me—he rode down there one day with me—he told me, he pointed out houses that they built…. He showed me houses they built that they did electrical work and all that stuff. Right now, one of the building classes is literally building a training building for the fire class…
So if we had a career center like they did, we could be doing that stuff again.” –Dale

“firefighting…Ag…Eaton’s class” –Dale

“Ag…Eaton’s…Algebra Two” –Randall

“Career Center… economics…personal finance” – J.R.

“Welding…Auto…and them” –Casey

“…economics…personal finance” – J.R.

“The first level of every, like, what’s this thing called, curricular…. English 1, Algebra 1, even science, the first science class and the first history class, you’re just getting introduced to it…” –Randall

“Uh, for me, probably the, uh, science classes I took just cause, science, it came easy to me. I do need to know science and chemicals and whatnot—what to mix what not to mix.” – Dale

“Ag, auto, firefighting, and the career center stuff, they treat you like an employee.” –Randall

**Theme 3: Knowledge.** A third theme that emerged during the focus group was that of knowledge. As the theme of work emerged organically out of the theme of male family members, the theme of knowledge emerged organically out of the theme of work, namely in relation to the extent to which there is a tension and disconnect between the work these students do outside of school and the knowledge being taught in school being the sort that according to Casey, “you ain’t never gonna use in life.”
Randall puts his position succinctly: “There should only be one level of each curricular required….English 1, Algebra 1, even science; the first science class and the first history class, you’re just getting introduced to it…..” Dale agrees and expounds:

You got algebra one, two, English one through four—all that stuff. I think you should, in school, get the basics, and at the job you’re own or if you want to just learn more, you should have the…your own option to take that in college. Or, you know, I think you should be able to have your limit in school, and then go do what you want to do. And then if what you want to do needs more, go to college more…. I think once I, you know, finished 10th, 11th grade, I didn't need to know more. I'm not gonna use this extra stuff in the career field I'm going into. I'm not gonna need to. I can do simple math…like if I'm reading the pump panel, I ain't gonna have to say, ‘Hey, that's a noun.’ …I got a basic understanding. I can read; I can write.

Casey explains it this way:

I feel like school takes up a lot of…I feel like you learn stuff you ain’t never gonna use in life. I feel like you could be out learning a trade like plumbing or welding or, you know, working on cars. I feel like you learn stuff that ain’t really valuable in life….I want to do welding. I want to go to college for a degree in welding, and one of my, I guess you say, classes, I might take math and English stuff like that. But it's all gonna go back to welding. It's just not gonna be no random, random stuff that I probably won’t ever use, but it’ll all weigh in on what I wanna do for a living.

J.R. puts his solution forward very simply: “Go take, like, trade classes and be done for the day.”

Made clear through the quotations above, there are valuable classes: firefighting and agriculture, according to Dale and Randall; auto, according to Dale, Randall, and Casey; business classes, according to J.R. and Casey; welding, according to Casey; economics, according to J.R.; and Algebra II, according to Randall, where he first learned his multiplication tables; and according to Dale, science classes, because he does “need to
know science and chemicals and whatnot—what to mix what not to mix.” What is useful to these students about these classes, though, is not only their immediate utility. According to these four students, the relationship between student, teacher, and educative environment was different. Randall explains that in these classes, teachers “treat you like an employee.” J.R. expresses it as follows: “It’s like a work environment, but you don’t get paid.” Casey explains it like this: “I feel like I can go in auto and just work on cars or his truck. I enjoy doing that and don’t have no problem going in there and getting dirty…. I have no problem getting dirty in school and working. Even though I’m not getting paid, I still enjoy it.” Dale illustrates the point: “You’ve seen me come in from Ag—green legs….It’s something I enjoy doing, too. Like we wanted to take that. That was our choice, and we look forward to it.”

Categorically, classes held at Jackson County Career Center—firefighting, welding, etc.—are highly valued by these four students. The issue is that, while John C. Calhoun High School, as the district’s Arts Focus high school, has a Vocal and Performing Arts Center (VPAC), the district’s Career Center is in Jackson (pseudonym), the county seat, a twenty-four minute drive away. In the opinions of Randall and Casey, the VPAC building at JCCHS needs to be a Career Center. Casey, explains, “[T]hat would help with driving back and forth. I get to my auto class probably twenty minutes late every day. I have to leave welding early, too, if I’m going to make it, so I feel like I’m losing class time there.” Students attending classes at the Career Center often must arrive late to and dismiss early from classes at JCCHS and the Career Center to make it work at all, despite the transportation being scheduled, when possible, through the students’ lunch block: J.R. explains, “…you ain’t got a lunch block here. You got to stop
and get something or eat on the road”; Dale explains, “…the way my classes were scheduled. I'm not here for a lunch”; and Randall explains, “[T]he only way we can eat, or I know I can get lunch, right when I leave work at 11 o'clock, I gotta go straight to get something to eat, and then still, by the time I get back to Jackson, I’ll miss ten minutes trying to get there, traveling and stuff like that. I feel like...I don’t know.” Dale makes evident the potential value of having a Career Center on John C. Calhoun’s campus through a memory he has of an experience between him and his father:

Because [Jackson High], my dad went there, and he told me—he rode down there one day with me—he told me, he pointed out houses that they built…. He showed me houses they built that they did electrical work and all that stuff. Right now, one of the building classes is literally building a training building for the fire class…So if we had a career center like they did, we could be doing that stuff again.

According to Dale, Casey, Randall, and J.R., the majority of the knowledge being offered them at John C. Calhoun High School has, at best, little bearing on their present existence and little to offer their future existence. With a few exceptions, the courses they must take at John C. Calhoun High School are nothing more valuable than obstacles in the way of their pursuit of knowledge considered valuable to them in their present and considered valuable to them for their future success.

Table 4.4 Success

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Relevant Data</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Success</td>
<td>“You’re talking about two different people and two different mindsets.” – Randall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Some people…think if you don't go to college…you won't get a good job, you won't get like paid good or nothing. But then you got some people you can talk to out of school, and tell they never went to college—all they did was go straight to work—and you see what they’re doing, how much they're</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“Some teachers think if you don't go to college, you're gonna be living behind the Bojangles... or under a bridge... something.” – Randall

“...you got a teacher saying you don't go to college you won't be nothing. Their idea of being successful is being smart. My idea of being successful is having a good job that I like, and if you've got a job that you like, you won't work a day in your life, and you can make money at it. That's my idea of being successful. Completely different from theirs.” – Dale

“I feel like they push four year colleges when you don’t, honest, you don’t have to go to college, but a two year tech school is just as good as four year Winthrop or, I guess you could say, Harvard. And I feel like that’s just as good. You can live a pretty happy life. I mean, depends on what you want in life.... Being successful in life for me is a house, a family, and doing what my hobby is and what I really enjoy doing. That’s kind of like a pretty happy life to myself.” – Casey

Theme 4: Success. A fourth theme that emerged during the focus group with these four rural, working-class masculine students is success. As the theme of work emerged organically out of the theme of male family members, and the theme of knowledge emerged organically out of the theme of work, the theme of success emerged organically out of the theme of knowledge.

According to these four students, a tension exists concerning success between the rural, working-class masculine student and the majority of those who professionally populate the formal educative structure: “You’re talking about two different people and two different mindsets,” Randall explains. J.R. unpacks this:

Some people... think if you don't go to college... you won't get a good job, you won't get like paid good or nothing. But then you got some people you can talk to out of school, and tell they never went to college—all they did was go straight to work—and you see what they're doing, how much they're making, compared to some other people that went to college.
Randall explains some teachers’ understanding of the relationship between college and success: “Some teachers think if you don't go to college, you're gonna be living behind the Bojangles in Kershaw or under a bridge…something.” Dale explains more thoroughly, offering his ideas on success, illustrating the tension between the two perspectives:

…you got a teacher saying you don't go to college you won't be nothing. Their idea of being successful is being smart. My idea of being successful is having a good job that I like, and if you've got a job that you like, you won't work a day in your life, and you can make money at it. That's my idea of being successful. Completely different from theirs.

Finally, Casey weighs in:

I feel like they push four-year colleges when you don’t, honest, you don’t have to go to college, but a two-year tech school is just as good as four year Winthrop or, I guess you could say, Harvard. And I feel like that’s just as good. You can live a pretty happy life. I mean, depends on what you want in life…. Being successful in life for me is a house, a family, and doing what my hobby is and what I really enjoy doing. That’s kind of like a pretty happy life to myself.

Dale, Casey, Randall, and J.R. illustrate the tension between what a successful future is according to the formal educative structure and what a successful future is according to them. According to the formal educative structure, being successful in the future requires acquiring a certain set of knowledge and attending a four-year college. According to Casey, a two-year tech school is just as good, and according to the other students in the focus group, no college is required at all to lead a successful life. Success, according to these students, is not built upon the knowledge offered by much of the formal educative structure. It is built upon work, as has been illustrated for these students by and with generations of workers that came before them.
Teacher Participant 1: Mr. Hoven

Mr. Hoven is the agriculture teacher at John C. Calhoun High School, and he considers himself to be “a full blown country, masculine, raised as a working class male.”

Mr. Hoven grew up rural and has lived in the country all of his life, has “loved every minute of it,” and “wouldn’t change anything about his country roots.” Growing up rural means, for Mr. Hoven, that he and his family grew their own food, cut their own grass, “went to church every time the doors were open, visited relatives often, hunted, fished, and pretty much lived off the land.” Being raised this way, Mr. Hoven would argue, molded him into the person that he is today—a person who still loves to “grow a garden, farm, hunt, fish, and would not take anything for living in the country.” According to Mr. Hoven, it is because of his “country living, love of the outdoors, and roots” that he chose to be an agricultural teacher and has traveled “down this career path for so many years now.”

Mr. Hoven grew up in a working-class family. His father finished high school and went straight into work. His mother finished high school and “had some technical college education but worked in a factory for many years.” Growing up working class meant that his parents worked hard all their lives and tried to save as much money as they could. Because of this hard work and penny pinching, he and his family “had all the basic essentials of life [and] were able to go on vacation every year.” Because of the necessity, however, to work so hard and pinch pennies, Mr. Hoven’s parents pushed him and his sister to get more education than they had gotten: “I saw what my parents had and how
hard they worked and therefore it guided me to want to work even harder to achieve the things that I wanted in life.”

Growing up, for Mr. Hoven, to be masculine “meant doing all the manly stuff that you could do. Drive a truck, ride 4 wheelers, drive a tractor, play sports, and just generally do all those things that a man would do.” He believes this has shaped him because these are the things he does today: “I would rather be outside all day doing something with my hands than sitting in the house watching TV or playing on my phone. A man needs to be a man and do things that are best for his family and for himself.” This understanding of masculinity also, Mr. Hoven believes, shaped his formal education because of where it led him in his career: “I choose to educate students in the things that I liked to do myself and share my knowledge so that they would be more well-rounded individuals.”

Teacher Participant 2: Mr. Eaton

Mr. Eaton is the automotive teacher at John C. Calhoun High School.

The house Mr. Eaton grew up in was “definitely in the country.” He grew up approximately seven miles outside of town “on a secondary road with little traffic.” His neighbors to the sides were family and behind him was nothing but woods.

He lived with his mother and father in this house until he got married when he was twenty-three years old. After he got married, he moved to another rural location, and he has been there ever since: “So, I would consider myself to be rural by any definition.”
Growing up, both his mother and father worked full-time jobs. Both his mother and father “had some college, but neither had a college degree.” Growing up, the importance of a good work ethic was instilled in him: “My parents took pride in their jobs and were seldom out of work.” Mr. Eaton is certain he grew up in a working-class family, and because of his experience in such, he does not believe that being working-class is a detriment: “I believe it can be an advantage in a lot of cases.”

Concerning masculinity, Mr. Eaton explains that he comes from a “traditional” background: “My father was the head of the household, but my mother was really in charge.” Mr. Eaton feels that part of being masculine is being a “provider and protector for the family. Stepping up in difficult situations and making the right decision even if it hurts.”

**Teacher Participant 3: Mrs. Gillette**

Mrs. Gillette is a former English teacher at John C. Calhoun High School. She is currently an English teacher at an online public high school.

Mrs. Gillette grew up in a subdivision in the city limits of Jackson. According to Mrs. Gillette, this shaped her childhood in many ways:

I could often be found riding bikes around my neighborhood with other girls my age. We all went to the same preschool, the same elementary school, the same dance studio, and then went on to attend the same middle school and high school. Essentially, I knew my best friends from the time we were 3 years old.
Because of the closeness of her and all of her friends, her parents were also very close with all of her friends’ parents, and this created, according to Mrs. Gillette, a certain set of communal expectations for their individual and collective academic achievements.

Both of Mrs. Gillette’s parents have post-secondary degrees. Her mother holds an associate’s degree from USC-Lancaster, and her father holds a bachelor’s degree from the University of South Carolina. Growing up, the expectation for her and her brother was that they would pursue post-secondary education. It was “never up for discussion, but expected.”

Throughout childhood, Mrs. Gillette’s parents had high expectations for her and her brother’s academic achievement: “Good grades for scholarships was always a topic of conversation around the dinner table.” In high school, when she struggled in math, her parents hired a tutor for her. Yet, she never felt that they placed too much pressure on her to perform academically. She feels they always made clear they wanted her to do her best, and because of this she always wanted to do her best for herself.

When Mrs. Gillette was 14 years old, her parents divorced. According to Mrs. Gillette, her mother always was and still is “a very independent and strong woman.” Following the divorce, there were times when “finances were extremely difficult,” but Mrs. Gillette never knew it. This strength and independence her mother demonstrated taught Mrs. Gillette to be strong and independent in all aspects of her own life, including her education and consequent career in education. It is due to her mother’s modeling of independence and strength that Mrs. Gillette was able to graduate from the University of
South Carolina in five years, with minimal cost out of pocket, and with her Master’s degree.

**Teacher Participant 4: Mrs. Cathe**

Mrs. Cathe is a former English teacher at John C. Calhoun High School. She is currently an English teacher at an online public school.

Mrs. Cathe grew up in a middle-class family in a small town “where everyone knew everyone else.” Her parents were well respected in the community. Her father—a graduate of The Citadel, Marine, and World War II veteran—was the principal and her mother was a social studies teacher at the junior high school in town, the junior high Mrs. Cathe attended. She recalls that being the daughter of the principal and a teacher put more pressure on her to make good grades and go to college following high school. Mrs. Cathe was expected to represent as well as possible her parents, just as her older sister had done. She was expected in particular to represent as well as possible her father, as she was raised to believe that men are the authority of the household. She was taught that it was important to represent her father in every way: her looks, behavior, actions, and academic performance.

In school, Mrs. Cathe “walked a bit of a tightrope” trying to please her parents while also trying to be “cool” with her peers. She made good grades, but not as good as she could have; she completed assignments for other students, hoping to make friends; she used drugs and alcohol, but she was “sly enough not to get caught.” Generally, she rebelled against her parents’ authority by rebelling against education.

As an act of rebellion against her parents’ expectations, it wasn’t until after high school graduation that Mrs. Cathe even applied for college. She had no intentions of
attending college, intending instead to marry her high school sweetheart. It wasn’t until a “big conflict with a so-called friend” that she applied to Winthrop and began attending classes the summer after high school graduation. From Winthrop, following numerous major changes, she transferred to the University of South Carolina and “finally began to get serious about college and [her] future.”

**Teacher Participant 5: Mr. Wood**

Mr. Wood is a history teacher in Jackson County School District.

Mr. Wood grew up in northeast Pennsylvania in the Pocono Mountains. Until he was four years old, he and his family lived “in town.” At four years of age, he and his family moved to the “country,” onto an “acre or two of land” and into a house his parents had built. Both of his parents had grown up in the country—gardening, hunting, and visiting neighboring farms—in different parts of the United States. Living in the country, Mr. Wood “became familiar with nature”—gardening, playing sports, climbing trees, building forts, hiking, and hunting with his father.

Mr. Wood’s mother and father both earned college degrees—his father a master’s degree and his mother a bachelor’s degree—and both were public school teachers. Growing up, education was important for Mr. Wood: “…books were everywhere in the house.” According to Mr. Wood, this shaped him more than he can fully know. It never occurred to him that he wouldn’t attend college. It never even necessarily occurred to him that he would; the assumption was just “always there.” Having teachers as parents, he was made to think about things, to ask questions, to value books, and to value learning.
Having teachers as parents also taught Mr. Wood how to “play the game of school.” He enjoyed school—the experience in general, the sports, the social connections. He also enjoyed the competition inherent in school and performed well in it, graduating third in his class “without really working too hard”—admittedly not reading fully many of the assigned books and still completing his work successfully, but without “any great joy or commitment.”

Growing up, Mr. Wood didn’t struggle much to find his identity, as he had an array of male role models to provide a “pretty robust picture of manhood.” His primary role model was his father. Mr. Wood refers to him as a breaker of stereotypes, a “renaissance man of sorts”: an outdoorsman, hunter, athlete, and music teacher. He was also a great model of how to love and care for women, with a wife and three daughters. Mr. Wood was taught that masculinity was the giving and sacrificing of one’s self, the loving of one’s family; being strong, working hard, and speaking truth; and engaging with the surrounding physical world. This picture of manhood put forward by his father allowed Mr. Wood to be comfortable with a picture of his own masculinity as one that is complex and varied, one that breaks stereotypes.

**Administrator Participant 1: Mr. Tadney**

Mr. Tadney is an educational specialist and data analyst for Jackson County School District.

Mr. Tadney did not grow up rural, and he did not grow up necessarily working-class. However, due to his parents’ lack of education and consequential lack of “perceived qualification,” his parents had to work very hard to move up at their jobs and
provide for him his middle-class upbringing. Because of this struggle due to their lack of formal education and consequential lack of “perceived qualification,” Mr. Tadney “really had no choice” but to make decent grades; he would, otherwise “suffer the consequences.”

Growing up, Mr. Tadney was made to work and do manual labor, but it was not “an everyday thing to survive.” He enjoyed manual labor. He enjoyed seeing a job well done. He did not, though, really enjoy formal education and did “just enough to stay out of the dog house at home.” The idea of working with his hands to make a living was one that he didn’t mind at all.

As a boy, for Mr. Tadney, to be masculine was to be tough, to never run from a fight, to “rub some dirt on it,” and to show no emotion. Mr. Tadney wanted to be known as a “tough guy” who wasn’t really bothered by things “one way or the other.”

Now, when Mr. Tadney thinks about rurality, he thinks about the community in which he lives: Rich Springs. His community is made up of “farmers (cattle, turkeys, row cropping), the people that help them on these farmers, and working class men and women.” When he thinks of the working-class, he thinks of people who “work with their hands as much as they do their minds,” performing strenuous work. When he thinks of masculine, he thinks of “true tough sweat of the brow red neck men.”

Administrator Participant 2: Mrs. Robin

Mrs. Robin is the principal at John C. Calhoun High School.
Mrs. Robin grew up in a rural part of Jackson County. Growing up, rurality was all she knew, and it shaped her. She grew up “ok with quiet, staying home, and simple things,” and she still enjoys these things and all other aspects of rural living.

Mrs. Robin grew up in a working-class family. As such, growing up, she saw her family struggle economically, despite hard work, and she didn’t want to have to struggle. Her family also didn’t want her to have to struggle, and so at a very young age she began to be taught that she was going to college, and in order to get there she was going to have to have a scholarship. Through this, she came to know three things: She need to get an “education,” she needed to “go to college,” and she needed to “WORK.”

Throughout elementary, middle, and high school, Mrs. Robin was a good student, and she got into Clemson University. Upon arrival, though, it was evident to her that her “rural education in [her] small town was lacking in many areas.” Reflecting back on it now, Mrs. Robin feels like she had to “work twice as hard to be on a level playing field with some of [her] peers,” peers that came from urban and suburban school districts, school districts with resources to provide superior educational opportunities to their students.

Data Presentation

In order to develop common themes and patterns across data, I analyzed my data inductively, comparatively, and as I conducted my fieldwork (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To analyze gathered data, I personally and as immediately as possible transcribed the interviews. Following, I began my analysis process with my Critical Friends Group (CFG) by open coding as expansively as I felt fruitful, notating data that struck me as potentially relevant to my research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Then, I
conducted analytical coding, grouping, or sorting, based upon my interpretation and my CFG’s interpretation of the meaning of the data (Richards, 2015). Once I moved into my next data set, I conducted the same process as above, looking for groupings I previously extracted from the first data set. When the overlap in coding between the two data sets emerged, I recorded this material. From this material, I constructed my themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Out of these early themes, I located patterns.

Table 4.5 Rurality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Relevant Data</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rurality</td>
<td>“… rural living for some folks is the antithesis of enclosed schooling where being seating all day in artificial environments is the expectation.” –Mr. Wood</td>
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<td>-“I believe that tension is created by their rurality in that this particular group of boys came from a small farm community with little in the way of entertainment. Their activities of choice on the weekends were having bonfire parties, riding dirt bikes or four-wheelers, racing, etc.” – Mrs. Cathe</td>
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<td>-“Rural students have to adapt to some of the norms and expectations of school culture, which aren’t second nature to them.” – Mr. Wood</td>
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<td>-“By trying to pigeonhole students into a one-size fits all system” – Mr. Wood</td>
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<td>-“his whole high school experience had been a struggle. And it wasn't that the kid could not do. He was just your simple country boy. And he wanted to work with his hands, was very good with working with his hands… He was the student that you called on, if the car broke down—that was the student you'd want to call. But when it was time to complete an assignment, that was not the student that you wanted to call on.” – Mrs. Robin</td>
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<td>“for a lot of our rural kids, we've got to do a better job of making the connection for them because for many of them, even if we got them to college, unless we continue to sustain them and support them and check in on them, they don't have the support at home to complete college” – Mrs. Robin</td>
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“Many rural students are expected to help their families with farm chores (many of these students live on farms or have parents who own or work for turkey barns) in addition to working a job outside of school. This causes them to put school on the back burner, because many times there just is not enough time in the day for them to complete any sort of outside, supplemental, academic work.” –Mrs. Gillette

“if their focus is more so on, you know, having to go to a job when they leave school. A lot of times, that's where their focus is—they conserve their energy for that.” –Mrs. Robin

“… during deer season, many students go deer hunting before school. Many do this every day of the week. Whether these students work or enjoy hobbies associated with rural living, these extracurricular activities bleed into and affect their lives at school. Because academics are not a priority, these students often are not prepared for class, and to draw attention away from this, they disrupt the classroom environment… looking back, I see this more as a defense mechanism. For this specific group of students, it was better to be seen as the class clown than look unintelligent to their peers.” –Mrs. Gillette

“I feel they don't see the value in what we're teaching them” –Mrs. Robin

“the biggest impact, I would say, is just the lack of exposure... they don't realize that education is their ticket out of some of the situations that they are currently and so. And that's not for all students, but definitely, I would say for a lot of our rural, more country boys.” –Mrs. Robin

“maybe the education we were trying to provide him with, maybe that wasn't what he needed.” –Mrs. Robin

“John C. Calhoun High School is the Arts Focus School for the district. We don’t really have a lot to offer our rural students outside their normal curriculum.” –Mr. Tadney

“I taught a brother and sister from this particular community. The brother knew that he would be working with his dad farming and raising cattle after high school, so he had no interest in learning anything that I was teaching in an English class.” –Mrs. Cathe

“the biggest impact, I would say, is just the lack of exposure...They don't realize that education is their ticket out of some of the situations...
Theme 1: Rurality. Due to the nature of the research questions and subsequent interview questions, the theme of rurality was the first theme to be explored thoroughly. Within this theme and between all participants, two patterns emerged: 1) the clashing of school and rural cultures and 2) the absence of value in what the school has to offer.

Mr. Wood succinctly and summatively explains a possible root to the tension inherent between rurality and the formal educative structure: “… rural living for some folks is the antithesis of enclosed schooling where being seating all day in artificial environments is the expectation.” Mrs. Cathe gets into more specifics, stating that she believes “tension is created by their rurality in that this particular group of boys [are] from a small farm community with little in the way of entertainment. Their activities of choice on the weekends were having bonfire parties, riding dirt bikes or four-wheelers, racing, etc.”—activities unaligned with activities typically performed within the formal educative structure. The norms and expectations of school culture, Mr. Wood explains, are not second nature to the rural student, as they are to others; the rural students find themselves having to adapt as best they can. Mr. Wood further explains that this creates tension, as the school attempts to “pigeonhole students into a one-size fits all system.” Mrs. Robin illustrates this tension between environments and cultures, norms and expectations:

A former rural, working-class masculine student’s whole high school experience had been a struggle. And it wasn't that the kid could not do. He was just your simple country boy. And he wanted to work with his hands, was very good with
working with his hands….He was the student that you called on, if the car broke down—that was the student you'd want to call. But when it was time to complete an assignment, that was not the student that you wanted to call on.

This clashing of school and rural culture also can lead to a lack of support and consequently a lack of success in the rural student’s academic future. Mrs. Robin, from the position of a school administrator, explains it as such: “For a lot of our rural kids, we've got to do a better job of making the connection for them because for many of them, even if we got them to college, unless we continue to sustain them and support them and check in on them, they don't have the support at home to complete college.”

Part of the rural culture revealed through this data is also work. Having work to tend to, outside of school work, can create tension between school and the rural student. Mrs. Gillette explains:

Many rural students are expected to help their families with farm chores (many of these students live on farms or have parents who own or work for turkey barns) in addition to working a job outside of school. This causes them to put school on the back burner, because many times there just is not enough time in the day for them to complete any sort of outside, supplemental, academic work.

Mrs. Robin further illustrates this point with the following: “…if their focus is more so on, you know, having to go to a job when they leave school. A lot of times, that's where their focus is—they conserve their energy for that.” At times, it is not jobs or chores, in the traditional sense, that create disconnect and tension between rural students and the formal educative structure. At times, it is other extracurricular activities, involuntary and voluntary, in which rural students partake, as Mrs. Gillette explains:

… during deer season, many students go deer hunting before school. Many do this every day of the week. Whether these students work or enjoy hobbies associated with rural living, these extracurricular activities bleed into and affect their lives at school. Because academics are not a priority, these students often are not prepared
for class, and to draw attention away from this, they disrupt the classroom environment… looking back, I see this more as a defense mechanism. For this specific group of students, it was better to be seen as the class clown than look unintelligent to their peers.

To emerge as a pattern in the data pertaining to rural students was also the perceived absence of value in what the formal educative structure has to offer these students. Mrs. Robin states very clearly her opinion on this issue: “I feel they don't see the value in what we're teaching them.” She continues, “…the biggest impact, I would say, is just the lack of exposure….They don't realize that education is their ticket out of some of the situations that they are currently in and so….and that's not for all students, but definitely, I would say for a lot of our rural, more country boys.” Mrs. Cathe illustrates this issue with a particular example: “I taught a brother and sister from [Rich Springs]. The brother knew that he would be working with his dad farming and raising cattle after high school, so he had no interest in learning anything that I was teaching in an English class.”

However, there is also data suggesting the absence of value was not merely perceived. In reference to a particular former rural student at John C. Calhoun High School, Mrs. Robin posits that “maybe the education we were trying to provide him with, maybe that wasn't what he needed.” Mr. Tadney adds to this, quite definitively, “John C. Calhoun High School is the Arts Focus School for the district. We don’t really have a lot to offer our rural students outside their normal curriculum.”
Table 4.6 Working-classness

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<td>“Most of the students within this group that I taught were much more interested in some sort of hands-on learning experience rather than learning through reading, researching, writing, etc.” –Mrs. Cathe</td>
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<td>“It is my experience that students with “working class” parents don’t see education as a priority. These students see that their parents did not go to college, but they still have all of the “things” they want and enjoy. At JCCHS, this commonly includes trucks, four-wheelers, guns to hunt with, land to hunt, horses, and ponds to fish. The phrase I heard more times than I can count was “My Daddy didn’t go to school, and look at all he has!” When this is the case, students feel like there is no point in sitting through an English class where one has to learn subject/verb agreement or read Shakespeare. The conversation turns into and is constantly, “Why do I have to learn this anyway?” –Mrs. Gillette</td>
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<td>“Tensions also could surface simply with work hours and balancing paid work and school work.” –Mr. Wood</td>
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<td>“This was made very evident this past school year with COVID. We have students who, it’s not that they were at home being lazy, that was not the case for a lot of our kids, many of our kids were working full-time jobs, or many, many hours part-time. And they were contributing to the breadwinning for their family....For a lot of our kids, it’s not that</td>
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Theme 2: Working-classness. The second theme explored through the interviews with teachers and administrators was working-classness. As was the case with rurality, two patterns to emerge in the data concerning working-classness are 1) the clashing of school and working-class cultures and 2) the absence of value in what the school has to offer.

Mr. Wood posits that “there are subtle assumptions teachers make about rural students that create tension in the educational process. But I think it more is related to one’s class than rurality.” Mr. Wood continues by pointing out, “Working-class norms might be different from the middle class norms that usually are in place in a school.” “I believe,” Mr. Eaton explains, “students from working-class families may see the importance of learning a skill more than some other students….This will definitely affect how they participate in class.” Mr. Tadney puts forth, “They don’t see us as having anything to offer them that will help them advance the farm or family occupation.”

This clashing of school and working-class cultures, in the data, carries over to a perception of school as lacking any value for the working-class student. Mrs. Cathe explains it this way: “Most of the students within this group that I taught were much more interested in some sort of hands-on learning experience rather than learning through reading, researching, writing, etc.” Mrs. Gillette describes her experience working with students with working-class parents:

It is my experience that students with “working class” parents don’t see education as a priority. These students see that their parents did not go to college, but they still have all of the “things” they want and enjoy. At JCCHS, this commonly includes trucks, four-wheelers, guns to hunt with, land to hunt, horses, and ponds.
to fish. The phrase I heard more times than I can count was “My Daddy didn’t go to school, and look at all he has!” When this is the case, students feel like there is no point in sitting through an English class where one has to learn subject/verb agreement or read Shakespeare. The conversation turns into and is constantly, “Why do I have to learn this anyway?”

Tension, according to Mr. Wood, “could surface simply with work hours and balancing paid work and school work.” Mr. Hoven explains that working-class students “would rather be working.” Mrs. Robin sees tension created due to the “immediate gratification of a check.” Work, according to this data, is very important to and for working-class students. Mrs. Robin shares some specifics:

This was made very evident this past school year with COVID. We have students who, it’s not that they were at home being lazy—that was not the case for a lot of our kids; many of our kids were working full-time jobs, or many, many hours part-time. And they were contributing to the breadwinning for their family....For a lot of our kids, it’s not that they're just lazy; they're just working; they're contributing.”

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<tr>
<td>Masculinity</td>
<td>“good ol’ boy” –Mrs. Gillette</td>
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<td>“Masculinity 20-30 years ago defined a man as working with his hands, getting dirty, doing hard labor everyday…. rural, working- class boys see masculinity in more traditional way than other boys because of the way society, as a whole, is today. If a rural male today has been raised as he should in this generation, then he should see things a lot differently than other males.” –Mr. Hoven</td>
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Theme 3: Masculinity. The third theme explored with teachers and administrators was masculinity. Patterns to emerge in the data concerning masculinity were 1) masculinity’s forms, 2) masculine students’ influences, and 3) masculine students’ values.

Mrs. Gillette defines John C. Calhoun’s masculine student as a “good ol’ boy.”

Mr. Hoven sees masculinity differently:

Masculinity is probably defined in a different way than older generations would see it. The Male generation today most likely sees masculinity as how much you can dead lift and how much you work out... Masculinity 20-30 years ago defined a man as working with his hands, getting dirty, doing hard labor everyday.... rural, working-class boys see masculinity in more traditional ways than other boys because of the way society, as a whole, is today. If a rural male today has been raised as he should in this generation, then he should see things a lot differently than other males.
Mr. Wood, similar to Mr. Hoven, sees “disordered forms of masculinity”—forms created, at least partially, by the school: “Schools have played a role in creating the emasculated male who sits back and wallows in permanent adolescence…”

Mrs. Cathe posits that the masculinity displayed by the rural, working-class masculine student is not one different from older generations, as Mr. Hoven believes, not some newly disordered form of masculinity, as Mr. Wood believes, but something influenced by generations preceding: “…male figures including their fathers, grandfathers, uncles, etc. are the biggest influence in these boys’ lives. In these families, even if the mother works outside the house, males are definitely the dominant authority. I believe that this family dynamic goes back through many generations.” According to Mrs. Cathe, the values associated with this multigenerational rural masculinity define these students: “I believe that the values associated with their rural masculinity define these young men. They value pushing the limits of the law, living on the edge of danger, physical labor, and they put very little value in respecting women, other than family members, and in academic education.”

Mrs. Robin agrees that these students can be a problem in the school; however, she puts forward one more issue beyond their influence—their dominant position in their home: “…it's hard for them to conform and take direction from me, or from their teachers or from anybody else because they are in charge at their house.” Mr. Tadney sees the issue being one not originating in the students, but in the school: “Due to John C. Calhoun High School being the ARTS Focus School, I don’t think the masculine group sees the school as having a lot to offer them.” Mr. Hoven sees the formal educative structure as being one in which the rural, working-class masculine students “are not
looking towards the far future ahead of them, they only see being able to graduate and getting out of school finally."

Table 4.8 The Formal Educative Space

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
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<tr>
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<td>“[A] vast majority of the masculine type guys do not like to sit inside in the math, science, English, social studies classes because they feel that this is information that they will never use in their lives and they don’t see any relevance to it.” -Mr. Hoven</td>
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<td>“How does the current high school math track help a working class student better prepare for the work force? We don’t teach estimating jobs, factions (know them like your multiplication table), and metric measurements (know them like your multiplication table), etc…Where is the importance of factor a 5th degree polynomial to these students that will never use it?” –Mr. Tadney</td>
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|                     | “I feel as though many students at JCCHS see their core academic courses as more feminine, and they see more hands-on classes such as
welding, agriculture, or machine shop as masculine. I believe this is because many of these students have fathers with jobs that relate to the vocational courses, and therefore these courses seem more masculine to them. JCCHS has a program that focuses on the arts. However, if students want to take vocational courses, they have to travel to another high school campus, Jackson High School, to do so. I think this definitely creates tension between students at JCCHS because they feel as though their passion is not as valued as those in the arts courses.” – Mrs. Gillette

“I believe the best way to change their mindset is to show them how the class content pertains to them specifically.” – Mr. Eaton

“This group of boys seemed to view my class as torture and were very resistant to learning anything from me.” – Mrs. Cathe

-“They get a lot of hands on experience in their home life, and they can see where it is applicable.” – Mr. Tadney

-“We expect them to come in, sit down, conform, little hands on, and even less of an understanding of the why this is necessary.” – Mr. Tadney

“Much of the tension is due to the students’ belief that what they are taught at JCCHS in academic courses has no value for them. I taught a few students who either already had a job or had a job lined up upon graduation. They did not see how learning grammar and vocabulary or reading literature and writing essays was relevant to their future. These students seem to feel like I was wasting their time.” – Mrs. Cathe

“So a lot of times, because we love what we do, we try to force our love onto them, instead of allowing them some freedom to find the things that they love, as far as education, you know, giving them more opportunities to use their hands in class, giving them more choice in what they read.” – Mrs. Robin

“I believe that teaching literature that appeals to their values definitely helps to lessen the tension, but the challenge is finding literature that they find appealing and interesting on grade level that meets state standards.” – Mrs. Robin

“As a parent of a daughter that graduated number one in her class and I also have a son that will be graduating with a certification in welding and auto mechanics, I can see where the schools put their money and what is celebrated. We have annual celebration to celebrate the top performers in GPA across the district, but nothing like this exist for the
CATE students. We will bus the ARTS FOCUS students to school, but if you want to take a CATE class that is not offered at your school, you have to drive (and sacrifice missed time in class). We offer enrollment opportunities for college bound students, but nothing like this for CATE students.

“The reason I refer to CATE students is because this is where a lot of our rural, working-class, masculine students wind up. They wind up here because this is what interest them. This is what they want to do. This is what they grew up doing. If you listen to the latest job market studies, this is where the money is at.

“Why can’t CATE students have a chance to graduate high school with a high school diploma and a CATE degree? College bound students have the chance to graduate with a high school diploma and an associate’s degree. Are we not trying to develop a more skilled workforce? These are out workforce workers that we are trying to drive into college. Why is it taboo to celebrate being a great welder, framer, auto mechanic, etc.? We make our rural, working-class, masculine students feel like it is.” –Mr. Tadney

“We are trying to fit these students into a college bond model and they are looking at a CATE model. They have no desire to put on a coat and tie and working for corporate world.” –Mr. Tadney

“[M]ost of them see the relevance of the tech classes and being in those classes and they do not feel that they should be taking the English, math, and other core classes.” –Mr. Tadney

“It really is a neat thing to see how the students unite in [automotive].” –Mr. Eaton

“Students in my part of the building identify as “Auto Guys” or “Ag Guys.” –Mr. Eaton

“I think the tension has been exacerbated at JCCHS is because of the arts focus program. As I stated earlier, I think the rural, working class, male students resent that they have to travel to another school to participate in more hands-on (and many see as more “masculine”) classes that they are interested in, when the arts are given a special home at their school.” –Mrs. Gillette

“There probably is some tension created because of JCCHS being an arts focus school…. I imagine there is some tension from the male students towards the school because they do have to travel to Jackson to take welding or auto body courses. I rarely hear them say anything about it though because they probably like the aspect of being able to have that extra time away from school traveling from one place to
…their own questioning and resistance to participation in the schooling process.” –Mr. Wood

“Of course, we want all students to be well-rounded with a humane education. We want our plumbers to know math and science and all of the cultural literacy that comes from reading great books and being able to write and communicate clearly. We don’t just want people who specialize in something too early and don’t have a broad view of the world. But how do we do this?” –Mr. Wood

**Theme 4: The Formal Educative Space.** The fourth theme explored with teachers and administrators was the formal educative space. Patterns to emerge in data concerning the formal educative space were 1) a lack of relevance and 2) a tension between Arts Focus and CATE.

Mrs. Robin states that in her experience as an administrator, working with rural, working-class masculine students is “exhausting; it is often exhausting getting them to care.” However, Mrs. Robin also points out that a major issue between teachers and rural, working-class masculine students at John C. Calhoun High School is “not being able to empathize…You know, the majority of our teachers in our building are white females, middle class, and I don't think we sometimes can understand, as females, the different feelings associated that males have with education.”

While Mr. Wood posits that rural, working-class masculine students create tension themselves with “their own questioning and resistance to participation in the schooling process,” overwhelmingly, the teachers and administrators interviewed understand a major tension as being developed due to a perceived and at times very real
lack of relevance of the formal educative structure for this subset of students. Mr. Eaton, having commented, “It really is a neat thing to see how the students unite in [automotive],” and how students in his “part of the building” identify as “Auto Guys” or “Ag Guys,” addresses this lack of relevance as a lack of class offerings these students see as relevant to what they understand as important: “They have different ideas about what may be important to them. Some students have no intention of going to college after high school and therefore do not see the importance of certain classes.” Mr. Hoven expands on this issue:

The insinuation of the “college-prep” course does create tension because there again these male students don’t feel as though they need those college prep courses if they are going straight into the work force and won’t ever have to use the information they are learning in the classes….They are going to do the minimum in order to pass the class and move on. There is going to be tension created between what the class says the student has to do and what the student actually wants to do….A vast majority of the masculine type guys do not like to sit inside in the math, science, English, social studies classes because they feel that this is information that they will never use in their lives, and they don’t see any relevance to it.

Mr. Tadney furthers this sentiment, connecting their experience outside of the formal educative space and the disconnect inside the formal educative space: “They get a lot of hands on experience in their home life, and they can see where it is applicable…. [However], we expect them to come in, sit down, conform, little hands on, and even less of an understanding of the why this is necessary.” Mrs. Gillette clarifies:

[M]any students at JCCHS see their core academic courses as more feminine, and they see more hands-on classes such as welding, agriculture, or machine shop as masculine. I believe this is because many of these students have fathers with jobs that relate to the vocational courses, and therefore these courses seem more masculine to them. JCCHS has a program that focuses on the arts. However, if students want to take vocational courses, they have to travel to another high school campus, Jackson High School, to do so. I think this definitely creates
tension between students at JCCHS because they feel as though their passion is not as valued as those in the arts courses.

Concerning math classes specifically, Mr. Tadney questions, “How does the current high school math track help a working class student better prepare for the workforce?” He continues, “We don’t teach estimating jobs, fractions (know them like your multiplication table), and metric measurements (know them like your multiplication table), etc.,” finally questioning, “Where is the importance of factor a 5th degree polynomial to these students that will never use it?” More broadly, Mr. Tadney puts forward that “most of them see the relevance of the tech classes and being in those classes and they do not feel that they should be taking the English, math, and other core classes.” Reflecting on her own experience teaching, Mrs. Cathe expresses that much of the tension is due to the students’ belief that what they are taught at JCCHS in academic courses has no value for them. I taught a few students who either already had a job or had a job lined up upon graduation. They did not see how learning grammar and vocabulary or reading literature and writing essays was relevant to their future. These students seem to feel like I was wasting their time.”

She continues, “This group of boys seemed to view my class as torture and were very resistant to learning anything from me.”

While Mr. Eaton suggests that “the best way to change their mindset is to show them how the class content pertains to them specifically,” Mrs. Robin, from an administrator’s perspective, acknowledges the challenge in such a task, stressing the importance and challenge in connecting the literature taught in an English classroom to the rural, working-class masculine student, arguing that “teaching literature that appeals to their values definitely helps to lessen the tension, but the challenge is finding literature that they find appealing and interesting on grade level that meets state standards.” She
also, however, acknowledges an important disconnect in the classroom: “So a lot of times, because we love what we do, we try to force our love onto them, instead of allowing them some freedom to find the things that they love, as far as education, you know, giving them more opportunities to use their hands in class, giving them more choice in what they read.”

The second pattern to emerge was a tension between JCCHS as the district’s Arts Focus school and the CATE (Career and Technical Education) program. Mrs. Gillette argues that, along with the above-evidenced issues, “The tension has been exacerbated at JCCHS because of the arts focus program….The rural, working class, male students resent that they have to travel to another school to participate in more hands-on (and many see as more “masculine”) classes that they are interested in, when the arts are given a special home at their school.” Mr. Hoven concurs:

There probably is some tension created because of JCCHS being an arts focus school…. I imagine there is some tension from the male students towards the school because they do have to travel to Jackson to take welding or auto body courses….Those males, also, may feel that the school doesn’t care about them because they aren’t arts focused and would rather be in the ag, auto, or drafting courses.

Mr. Tadney, during the interview, wrote extensively concerning tension between the school as the district’s Arts Focus high school and the CATE program, beginning from the perspective of a father and not necessarily an administrator:

As a parent of a daughter that graduated number one in her class and I also have a son that will be graduating with a certification in welding and auto mechanics, I can see where the schools put their money and what is celebrated. We have annual celebration to celebrate the top performers in GPA across the district, but nothing like this exist for the CATE students. We will bus the ARTS FOCUS students to school, but if you want to take a CATE class that is not offered at your school, you have to drive (and sacrifice missed time in class). We offer
enrollment opportunities for college bound students, but nothing like this for CATE students.

Mr. Tadney explains his emphasis on CATE: “The reason I refer to CATE students is because this is where a lot of our rural, working-class masculine students wind up. They wind up here because this is what interest them. This is what they want to do. This is what they grew up doing. If you listen to the latest job market studies, this is where the money is at.”

He continues, questioning:

Why can’t CATE students have a chance to graduate high school with a high school diploma and a CATE degree? College bound students have the chance to graduate with a high school diploma and an associate’s degree. Are we not trying to develop a more skilled work force? These are out work force workers that we are trying to drive into college. Why is it taboo to celebrate being a great welder, framer, auto mechanic, etc.? We make our rural, working-class, masculine students feel like it is.”

He concludes, “We are trying to fit these students into a college bound model, and they are looking at a CATE model. They have no desire to put on a coat and tie and working for corporate world.”

While all teacher and administrator participants addressed the need to offer rural, working-class masculine students education relevant to their current interests and future careers, only one participant, Mr. Wood, addressed the need to offer this education in conjunction with the education currently being offered, the education that, when put forward as the only educational offering, proves so problematic: “Of course, we want all students to be well-rounded with a humane education. We want our plumbers to know math and science and all of the cultural literacy that comes from reading great books and
being able to write and communicate clearly.” What is addressed here is the issue of pigeonholing students, the issue that offering a humane education is intended to avoid, yet the issue that offering by-and-large exclusively an education in the humanities through an Arts Focus school creates for this subset of students. Mr. Wood continues, “We don’t just want people who specialize in something too early and don’t have a broad view of the world.” He then ponders, “But how do we do this?”

Data Analysis

How do we do this? To answer this, we must first answer, “How can this tension between rural, working-class masculinity and the formal educative structure be resolved in a way beneficial to the rural, working-class masculine student?” However, to answer this, we must first answer “Why is the tension occurring between rural, working-class masculinity and the formal educative structure?” Before this is answerable, though, we must be able to answer, “What is the tension occurring between rural, working-class masculinity and the formal educative structure?”

The question “What is the tension occurring between rural, working-class masculinity and the formal educative structure?” is a question that necessitates a grappling with the abstract. This grappling with the abstract is in attempt to answer the question in a fashion that will lay the foundation for the concrete answers developed out of answering “Why is the tension occurring between rural, working-class masculinities and the formal educative structure?” and “How can this tension between rural, working-class masculinities and the formal educative structure be resolved in a way beneficial to the rural, working-class masculine student?”
To begin, it is important to understand tension in its form closest to the form necessitated by the question “What is the tension occurring between rural, working-class masculinity and the formal educative structure?” The Compact Oxford English Dictionary (1994) defines tension in various ways approximating the meaning of tension as used in the question, “What is the tension occurring between rural, working-class masculinity and the formal educative structure?” While there are seven entries that approximate the usage in the question “What is the tension occurring between rural, working-class masculinity and the formal educative structure,” none of these entries fully express the usage, and as such none of these entries fully answer the question “What is the tension occurring between rural, working-class masculinity and the formal educative structure?” However, to begin to understand what the tension is, these entries, as entries approximating the usage, need to be understood.

The first of the seven entries that approximate this usage of tension is the most general entry for tension: “The action of stretching or condition of being stretched: in various senses” (Oxford English Dictionary, 1994, p. 2027). Just as this entry must be taken as metaphorically fitting (see “stretching,” “stretched,” and the admission of the modifier “in various senses”), the first two entries of the following six must also be taken as metaphorically fitting, as they are applicable most directly in the fields of physiology and pathology (entry 1) and botany (entry 2):

1) “The condition, in any part of the body, of being stretched and strained; a sensation indicating or suggesting this; a feeling of tightness” (Oxford English Dictionary, 1994, p. 2027).
2) “Applied to a strain or pressure in the cells or tissues of plants arising from changes taking place in the course of growth” (Oxford English Dictionary, 1994, p. 2027).

The final four can be taken literally, as they speak to the tension as a phenomenon in and of itself or an effect of the phenomenon experienced by either the rural, working-class masculine student, the formal educative structure, or both:


4) “Straining of the mental powers or faculties; severe or strenuous intellectual effort; intense application” (Oxford English Dictionary, 1994, p. 2027).

5) “Nervous or emotional strain; intense suppressed excitement; a strained condition of feeling or mutual relations which is for the time outwardly calm, but is likely to result in a sudden collapse, or in an outburst of anger or violent action of some kind” (Oxford English Dictionary, 1994, p. 2027).

6) “A condition of strain produced in anxiety, need, or by a sense of mental, emotional, or physical disequilibrium” (Oxford English Dictionary, 1994, p. 2027).

Despite the metaphoric and literal applicability of the above meanings of tension, the meanings still lack in specific qualities uncovered in the data concerning the tension between the rural, working-class masculine student and the formal educative structure, and as such do not fully provide the foundation necessary for answering this study’s research questions.
In order for a foundation to be laid that will allow for the answering of both “Why is the tension occurring between rural, working-class masculinities and the formal educative structure?” and “How can this tension between rural, working-class masculinities and the formal educative structure be resolved in a way beneficial to the rural, working-class masculine student,” the question, “What is the tension occurring between rural, working-class masculinity and the formal educative structure?” must be answered more specifically and more precisely than the above entries for tension can answer the question. In order to answer the question as specifically and precisely as the question demands, the term tension will not suffice, and the variant tention, in its stead, must be utilized as a way of understanding just what the tension is between the rural, working-class masculine student, as a variant counter-school culture, and the formal educative structure. Due to the nature of intersectionality, tensions differ between differing populations and the formal educative structure: the more unique the intersectionality, the more unique the tension. While there are common tensions experienced between various populations within the formal educative structure and that structure, unique tensions exist between counter-school cultures and the formal educative structure, and an even more unique tension—tention—exists between rural, working-class masculine students as a counter-school culture and the formal educative structure.

_Tention_, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, is an obsolete shortened form of intention and contention, as well as a shortened form of attention. Tention, more importantly when employed to answer, “What is the tension occurring between rural, working-class masculinity and the formal educative structure,” is a variant of tension (Oxford English Dictionary, 1994). With tension agrees distension, extension, and
pretension; with the variant tension agrees attention, contention, and intention (Oxford English Dictionary, 1994). Tension, as understood in agreement with distension, extension, and pretension, does not capture or express the condition of the relationship between the rural, working-class masculine student and the formal educative structure, and tension as defined with the above entries taken from the OED, approximates the condition of the relationship, but leaves lacking a center from which the relationship strains, tightens, collapses, or bursts—a center that is tension.

To answer, “Why is the tension occurring between rural, working-class masculinities and the formal educative structure?” is to concretize the answer to the question, “What is the tension occurring between rural, working-class masculinity and the formal educative structure?” It is to illustrate through gathered data the numerous tensions manifesting within the containing tension and coalescing to ultimately create that containing tension.

To best understand these tensions, I examined the themes that organically developed during the focus group with four rural, working-class masculine students and the patterns that developed during the interviews with the five teachers and two administrators. The series of tensions revealed through this cross-case analysis—the series of tensions manifesting within the containing tension and coalescing to ultimately create that containing tension—are as follows: 1) a tension between masculine expression in the home and masculine expression in the formal educative structure, 2) a tension between work outside of the formal educative structure and work in the formal educative structure, 3) a tension between knowledge relevant outside of the formal educative structure and knowledge relevant inside of the formal educative structure, and 4) a
tension between success outside of the formal educative structure and success inside of the formal educative structure.

A tension existing between masculine expression in the home and masculine expression in the formal educative structure is made evident through the theme of male family members found in the student data and the patterns of masculine students’ influences and the clashing of school and rural cultures found in the teacher and administrator data. Through data gathered during the focus group with student participants, it is evident that much of masculine expression in the home is conducted through physical labor performed with an older male member of the family: they “do little welding jobs,” “do some plumbing jobs,” “work on cars in the shop [and] race.” Through data gathered during the interviews with teacher and administrator participants, it is evident that the masculine expression in the home is not the masculine expression permissible within the formal educative structure, where the formal educative structure is the “antithesis” of the living the students do in the home. In the home, male members of the family are the “dominant authority” and “fathers, grandfathers, uncles, etc. are the biggest influences in these boys’ lives,” teaching them to value “pushing the limits of the law, living on the edge of danger, [and] physical labor.” Outside of the formal educative structure, the students’ free time is filled with “bonfire parties, riding dirt bikes or four-wheelers, racing.” In the formal educative structure, a student is pigeonholed into a “one-size fits all system,” when he just wants to “work with his hands.”

A tension existing between work outside of the formal educative structure and work in the formal educative structure is made evident through the theme of work found in the student data and the pattern of the absence of value in what the school has to offer.
found in the teacher and administrator data. Through data gathered during the focus group with student participants, it is evident that work performed outside of the formal educative structure is far more valued than work perform inside the formal educative structure: Once they began to work jobs, they felt that “school’s not important,” that school “school takes up a lot of valuable time” that could be spent “pursuing something that they’re “passionate about.” They expressed that they knew all they needed to “know in school,” feeling that “school takes away from [work],” feeling that “school ain’t really....” Through data gathered during the interviews with teacher and administrator participants, it is evident that teachers recognize the lack of value found by the students in the work required in the formal educative structure in relation to the work the students perform outside of the formal educative structure: These students “don’t see the value in what we’re teaching them…They don’t realize that education is their ticket out of some of the situations that they are currently in.” These students “had no interest in learning anything that I was teaching….” These students are “much more interested in some sort of hands-on learning experience rather than learning through reading, researching, writing, etc.” It is only Mrs. Robin, from the perspective of an administrator, who postulates concerning a former student at JCCHS, “maybe the education we were trying to provide him with, maybe that wasn’t what he needed.”

A tension existing between knowledge relevant outside of the formal educative structure and knowledge relevant inside the formal educative structure is made evident through the theme of knowledge found in the student data and the pattern of lack of relevance found in the teacher and administrator data. Through data gathered during the focus group with student participants, it is evident that most knowledge relevant inside
the formal educative structure cannot find relevance outside the formal educative structure. It is knowledge that “you ain’t never gonna use in life,” knowledge that “ain’t really valuable in life,” knowledge that goes too deep but still offers too little: “There should only be one level of each curricular required”; “get the basics, and at the job you’re on or if you want to just learn more, you should have…your own option to take that in college”; “[g]o take, like, trade classes and be done for the day.” Through data gathered during the interviews with teacher and administrator participants, it is evident that teachers and administrators see that rural, working-class masculine students struggle to find knowledge inside the formal educative structure that is relevant to their lives outside the formal educative structure:

They have different ideas about what may be important to them. Some students have no intention of going to college after high school and therefore do not see the importance of certain classes….The insinuation of the ‘college prep’ course does create tension…There is going to be tension created between what the class says the student has to do and what the student actually wants to do…

From an administrative perspective it is clear: “They get a lot of hands on experience in their home life, and they can see where it is applicable…. [However], we expect them to come in, sit down, conform, little hands on, and even less of an understanding of they why this is necessary.”

A tension existing between success outside of the formal educative structure and success inside of the formal educative structure is made evident through the theme of success found in the student data and the pattern of tension between Arts Focus and rural,
working-class masculine student found in the teacher and administrator data. Through data gathered during the focus group with student participants, it is evident that when you’re talking about success according to rural, working-class masculine students and success according to teachers and administrators, you’re talking about “two different people and two different mindsets.” The students understand teachers to think that if students don’t go to college, they will end up “living behind Bojanges” or “under a bridge.” From the students’ perspective, teachers believe that if they don’t go to college they “won’t be nothing.” The students’ idea of being successful, however, is “having a good job that I like,” having “a house, a family, and doing my hobby,” living a “pretty happy life.” Through data gathered during the interviews with teacher and administrator participants, it is evident that teachers and administrators see a tension existing between arts focus and the rural, working-class masculine student. From a teacher’s perspective, it is understood that these students “may feel that the school doesn’t care about them because they aren’t arts focused and would rather be in the ag, auto, or drafting courses.” From an administrator’s perspective, it is clear to everyone “where the schools put their money and what is celebrated.” It isn’t the courses and programs, such as the CATE program, rural, working-class masculine students value; however, “this is what interest [the rural, working-class masculine student]. This is what they want to do. This is what they grew up doing.” In an environment celebrating the arts, an administrator questions

Why can’t CATE students have a chance to graduate high school with a high school diploma and a CATE degree? College bound students have the chance to graduate with a high school diploma and an associate’s degree….Why is it taboo
to celebrate being a great welder, framer, auto mechanic, etc.? We make our rural, working-class, masculine students feel like it is.

The question of “How can this tension between rural, working-class masculinities and the formal educative structure be resolved in a way beneficial to the rural, working-class masculine student?” was a difficult question before gathering the data, and it is still a difficult question after data collection. While what the tension is has been very specifically concluded and why the tension is has been very concretely concluded, how to realistically resolve this tension has only been incompletely concluded. One can conclude through the gathered data needed changes in the classroom, be them shifts in tone between teacher and student or adjustments to the taught material; a needed change in the school, be that an offering of more CATE courses on campus; needed changes in the system, beginning from Pre-K and continuing throughout secondary education, a respect for this subset of students, their culture, their hopes, their dreams. These changes, though, will not be implemented easily, immediately, or based on a single study. However, one conclusion can be drawn from this data, and can be implemented immediately, and it is this: Further critical investigation needs to be conducted, and the data gathered through this study points that investigation in specific and focused directions.

**Summary**

Through an investigative action research approach utilizing practitioner inquiry, I collected and analyzed data from student participants, teacher participants, and administrator participants in an attempt to better understand the tension that exists between the rural, working-class masculine student and the formal educative structure.
Themes and patterns emerged between student, teacher, and administrator participants that led to a very specific, if abstract, answer to the question “What is the tension occurring between rural, working-class masculinity and the formal educative structure?” and a very concrete, if complex, answer to the question “Why is the tension occurring between rural, working-class masculinities and the formal educative structure?” The answer to the question “How can this tension between rural, working-class masculinities and the formal educative structure be resolved in a way beneficial to the rural, working-class masculine student?” is not so conclusive; however, a conclusion confidently drawn from the question “How can this tension between rural, working-class masculinities and the formal educative structure be resolved in a way beneficial to the rural, working-class masculine student?” is that more investigation needs to be conducted, and the data gathered through this study points that investigation in specific and focused directions.
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This investigative action research study’s purpose was to identify and clarify in my context the tension experienced between the rural (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016), working-class (Draut, 2018) masculine (Connell, 1995) student and the formal educative structure. Experiences throughout the decade I have taught at John C. Calhoun High School (JCCHS) have led to my identifying this particular tension as a problem of practice worth investigating. While any number of problems of practice common to formal educative structures also appear JCCHS, this particular problem—this tension—was one I noted during my first year at the school and one I have noted every year since. It is also a problem of which, until this study began, nearly no one spoke, at least not in any professional or developmental capacity. At best, teachers would complain that it is impossible to reach those Rich Springs boys, and at least, teachers would say nothing at all.

The seemingly willful ignoring of this tension is what led me to this problem and this purpose, and this problem and this purpose are what led me to the three research questions driving this study: (1) What is the tension occurring between rural, working-class masculinity and the formal educative structure? (2) Why is the tension occurring between rural, working-class masculinities and the formal educative structure? (3) How can this tension between rural, working-class masculinities and the formal
educative structure be resolved in a way beneficial to the rural, working-class masculine student? In order to answer these research questions from within this investigative study, critical theory provides the theoretical framework. Critical theory, in contrast to traditional theory, aims to critique and alter society at large, not to simply explain it (Levinson, 2011), and as such, critical theory must be at once both theory and revolutionary practice—praxis rooted in concrete situations and guided by practical interests (Freire, 1992)—with the purpose of locating, analyzing, and exposing the contradictions, or tensions, between that which is and that which could be (Held, 1980)—between the present and the possibilities of the future—a theory positioning itself in conscious opposition (Horkheimer, 1992). It is this aim to alter and not simply explain, this aim to practice and not simply theorize, this aim to achieve that which could be and not simply that which is that makes critical theory an ideal theoretical framework for an action research study.

To begin the data collection process for this investigative action research study, semistructured interviews were conducted through a focus group with four rural, working-class masculine students. Though the questioning during this focus group began with an interview protocol and at times returned to the interview protocol, much of the time the students were encouraged to simply converse with me and one another, responding to me responding to them and responding to one another. Following the focus group, the data was organized. Before any analysis of the data, I presented the data to my Critical Friends Group (CFG), and with my CFG I conducted protocol-driven discussions leading to analysis of the data. Following, interviews were conducted with three teachers who were currently teaching in the Jackson County School District, two teachers who had
formerly taught in the Jackson County School District, and two administrators in Jackson County School District. Following these interviews, any necessary follow-up questions were asked. This qualitative approach allowed for the collection of data regarding the participants’ experiences either as rural, working-class masculine students or as educators working with rural, working-class masculine students through the participants’ individual, personal expressions.

In this chapter, a summary of this study’s key findings as responses to the study’s research questions is presented. Findings are then, through research question three—How can this tension between rural, working-class masculinities and the formal educative structure be resolved in a way beneficial to the rural, working-class masculine student?—connected to recommendations for future practice. Following, I reflect on the process of conducting this action research study and address the adjustments that I would make in future investigation to continue this research. Finally, I acknowledge the limitations of this study and discuss new avenues of research I would like to pursue having conducted this study and learned what I have learned.

**Implications**

The key findings from this study can be best understood when organized and presented under the research question the findings most directly answer: (1) What is the tension occurring between rural, working-class masculinity and the formal educative structure, (2) Why is the tension occurring between rural, working-class masculinities and the formal educative structure, or (3) How can this tension between rural, working-class masculinities and the formal educative structure be resolved in a way beneficial to
the rural, working-class masculine student? Organized as such, the findings evolve from
the abstract and theoretical to the concrete and actionable.

**What is the tension occurring between rural, working-class masculinity and the formal educative structure?**

To question “What is the tension occurring between rural, working-class masculinity and the formal educative structure?” is to question the ways in which tension is being utilized and understood when applied to the relationship between rural, working-class masculinity and the formal educative structure and the ways in which this tension is unique from other tensions. To understand tension in a fashion to allow for an eventual understanding of this unique tension, one must begin by understanding tension generally and work toward understanding this tension more specifically. A general understanding of tension that initiates the process of understanding the specific tension experienced between the rural, working-class masculine student and the formal educative structure is as follows: “The action of stretching or condition of being stretched: in various senses” (Oxford English Dictionary, 1994, p. 2027). While this meaning of tension must be taken as metaphorically fitting, it is still the point at which the specific tension experienced between the rural, working-class masculine student and the formal educative structure can begin to be understood.

From this general understanding of the tension experienced between the rural, working-class masculine student and the formal educative structure, a more specific understanding can begin to be developed. Six entries following the above entry begin to clarify this tension, first through application on a metaphoric level and finally through
application on a literal level. The entries to be understood as metaphorically fitting are the following:

1) “The condition, in any part of the body, of being stretched and strained; a sensation indicating or suggesting this; a feeling of tightness” (Oxford English Dictionary, 1994, p. 2027).

2) “Applied to a strain or pressure in the cells or tissues of plants arising from changes taking place in the course of growth” (Oxford English Dictionary, 1994, p. 2027).

Much like tension understood as “The action of stretching or condition of being stretched” (Oxford English Dictionary, 1994, p. 2027), these entries metaphorically capture a general understanding of the tension experienced between the rural, working-class masculine student and the formal educative structure, but add to the experience of “stretching” the experience of being “strained,” the “feeling of tightness,” and “pressure...taking place in the course of growth” (Oxford English Dictionary, 1994, p. 2027). These experiences, however, as metaphoric and general, are not unique to the tension experienced between rural, working-class masculine students and the formal educative structure, but are experienced between counter-school students and the formal educative structure generally.

The following four entries can be taken literally, as they bring meaning to the tension as a phenomenon in and of itself or an effect of the phenomenon experienced by either the rural, working-class masculine student, the formal educative structure, or both:


4) “Straining of the mental powers or faculties; severe or strenuous intellectual effort; intense application” (Oxford English Dictionary, 1994, p. 2027).

5) “Nervous or emotional strain; intense suppressed excitement; a strained condition of feeling or mutual relations which is for the time outwardly calm, but is likely to result in
a sudden collapse, or in an outburst of anger or violent action of some kind” (Oxford English Dictionary, 1994, p. 2027).

6) “A condition of strain produced in anxiety, need, or by a sense of mental, emotional, or physical disequilibrium” (Oxford English Dictionary, 1994, p. 2027).

However, much like tension understood as “[t]he action of stretching or condition of being stretched,” the experience of being “strained,” the “feeling of tightness,” and “pressure...taking place in the course of growth,” this tension as “strain” of the “mind, feelings, or nerves,” “mental powers or faculties”; “[n]ervous or emotional strain...a strained condition of feeling or mutual relations which is for the time outwardly calm, but is likely to result in a sudden collapse, or in an outburst of anger or violent action of some kind”; and “[a] condition of strain produced in anxiety, need, or by a sense of mental, emotional, or physical disequilibrium” (Oxford English Dictionary, 1994, p. 2027) is not a tension unique to the experience between the rural, working-class masculine student and the formal educative structure. While an understanding of the tension experienced between the two is better approximated with these entries than the previous two, as these entries can be applied literally, the tension is one experienced between, again, counter-school students generally and the formal educative structure. The above meanings of tension begin to uncover the answer to the question, “What is the tension occurring between rural, working-class masculinity and the formal educative structure,” but the meanings still lack in specific qualities uncovered in the data concerning this specific tension.

In order for a foundation to be laid that will allow for the answering of both following research questions, the term tension will not suffice. In its stead, a term more directly addressing this tension experienced between the rural, working-class masculine
student and the formal educative structure must be utilized, and that term is the variant tention.

*Tention*, according to the Oxford English Dictionary (1994), is an obsolete shortened form of intention and contention, as well as a shortened form of attention. Tention, more importantly when employed to answer, “What is the tension occurring between rural, working-class masculinity and the formal educative structure,” is a variant of tension. With tension agrees distension, extension, and pretension, but with the variant tention agrees attention, contention, and intention—the very terms of which tention is a shortened form. Tension, as understood in agreement with distension, extension, and pretension, does not capture or express the complete condition of the relationship between the rural, working-class masculine student and the formal educative structure. Tension, as defined with the above entries taken from the OED, approximates the condition of the relationship, but leaves lacking a center from which the relationship strains, tightens, collapses, or bursts—a center that is tention. Due to the nature of intersectionality, tensions differ between differing populations and the formal educative structure: the more unique the intersectionality, the more unique the tension. While there are common tensions between various populations within the formal educative structure and that structure, unique tensions exist between counter-school cultures and the formal educative structure, and an even more unique tension—tention—exists between rural, working-class masculine students as a counter-school culture and the formal educative structure.

This tention is evident and formed from a series of tensions manifesting within the relationship between the rural, working-class masculine student and the formal
educative structure: masculine expression in the home and masculine expression in the formal educative structure, work outside of the formal educative structure and work in the formal educative structure, knowledge relevant outside of the formal educative structure and knowledge relevant inside of the formal educative structure, and success outside of the formal educative structure and success inside of the formal educative structure.

**Why is the tension occurring between rural, working-class masculinities and the formal educative structure?**

To answer, “Why is the tension occurring between rural, working-class masculinities and the formal educative structure?” is to begin to concretize the answer to the question “What is the tension occurring between rural, working-class masculinity and the formal educative structure?” It is to illustrate through gathered data the numerous tensions manifesting within the larger *tension* and coalescing to ultimately create that encompassing *tension*.

The series of tensions manifesting within the larger *tension* and coalescing to ultimately create that encompassing *tension* are as follows: 1) a tension between masculine expression in the home and masculine expression in the formal educative structure, 2) a tension between work outside of the formal educative structure and work in the formal educative structure, 3) a tension between knowledge relevant outside of the formal educative structure and knowledge relevant inside of the formal educative structure, and 4) a tension between success outside of the formal educative structure and success inside of the formal educative structure.
A tension existing between masculine expression in the home and masculine expression in the formal educative structure is made evident through the theme of male family members found in the student data and the patterns of masculine students’ influences and the clashing of school and rural cultures found in the teacher and administrator data. Through data gathered during the focus group with student participants, it is evident that much of masculine expression in the home is conducted through physical labor performed with an older male member of the family: working on cars, welding, and plumbing (See Table 4.1). Through data gathered during the interviews with teacher and administrator participants, it is evident that the masculine expression in the home is not the masculine expression permissible within the formal educative structure, where the formal educative structure is the antithesis of the living the students do in the home—where they are outside working outside with his hands, learning new skills, farming, living dangerously, and seeing other men as the dominant authority (See Table 4.5, Table 4.6, and Table 4.7).

A tension existing between work outside of the formal educative structure and work in the formal educative structure is made evident through the theme of work found in the student data and the pattern of the absence of value in what the school has to offer found in the teacher and administrator data. Through data gathered during the focus group with student participants, it is evident that work performed outside of the formal educative structure is far more valued than work perform inside the formal educative structure: once working a job, students asking why they should even continue with school, understanding school as taking time away from work, and concluding that school’s not important (See Table 4.2). Through data gathered during the interviews with
teacher and administrator participants, it is evident that teachers and administrators recognize the lack of value found by the students in the work required in the formal educative structure in relation to the work the students perform outside of the formal educative structure: the students simply do not see the value in what teachers are teaching them, the students don’t see the structure as having anything to offer, and the teachers admit that at times the education they are trying to provide is not what these students need (See Table 4.5 and Table 4.6).

A tension existing between knowledge relevant outside of the formal educative structure and knowledge relevant inside the formal educative structure is made evident through the theme of knowledge found in the student data and the pattern of lack of relevance found in the teacher and administrator data. Through data gathered during the focus group with student participants, it is evident that most knowledge relevant inside the formal educative structure cannot find relevance outside the formal educative structure: students believing school should be more limited in time, schools should require only a basic understanding of subjects, schools needing to more resemble a work environment and offer career training (See Table 4.3). Through data gathered during the interviews with teacher and administrator participants, it is evident that teachers and administrators see that rural, working-class masculine students struggle to find knowledge inside the formal educative structure that is relevant to their lives outside the formal educative structure: the label of “college-prep,” a difference in what is deemed important, a doubt that much of what is learned is applicable now or will ever be used (See Table 4.8).
A tension existing between success outside of the formal educative structure and success inside of the formal educative structure is made evident through the theme of success found in the student data and the pattern of tension between Arts Focus and the rural, working-class masculine student found in the teacher and administrator data. Through data gathered during the focus group with student participants, it is evident that when you’re talking about success according to rural, working-class masculine students and success according to teachers and administrators, you’re talking about “two different people and two different mindsets”: teachers and administrators pushing college as the only viable option, teachers and administrators believing being successful is being smart; students believing success is working an enjoyable job, having a house, family, and hobby (See Table 4.4). Through data gathered during the interviews with teacher and administrator participants, it is evident that teachers and administrators see a tension existing between Arts Focus and the rural, working-class masculine student: tension created by resources pumped into the Arts Focus program and away from the CATE programs, tension created by the celebration of Arts Focus students’ accomplishments and ambitions and the ignoring of the CATE students’ accomplishments and ambitions, and tension created by JCCHS offering a variety of Arts Focus courses on campus and very limited CATE courses on campus (See Table 4.8).

**How can this tension between rural, working-class masculinities and the formal educative structure be resolved in a way beneficial to the rural, working-class masculine student?**

To answer “How can this tension between rural, working-class masculinities and the formal educative structure be resolved in a way beneficial to the rural, working-class
masculine student?” is to make concrete and actionable the answers to the questions “What is the tension occurring between rural, working-class masculinity and the formal educative structure?” and “Why is the tension occurring between rural, working-class masculinities and the formal educative structure?” While this investigation has not absolutely concluded how this tension can be resolved in a way beneficial to the rural, working-class masculine student, one can conclude through the gathered data needed changes in the classroom, be them shifts in tone between teacher and student or adjustments to the taught material; a needed change in the school, be that an offering of more CATE courses on campus; needed changes in the system, beginning from Pre-K and continuing throughout secondary education, a respect for this subset of students, their culture, their hopes, their dreams. These changes, though, will not be implemented easily, immediately, or based on a single study. However, one conclusion can be drawn from this data, and can be implemented immediately, and it is this: Further critical investigation needs to be conducted, and the data gathered through this study points that investigation in specific and focused directions.

**Rurality**

While conducting further critical investigation, it must be kept in mind that cultural production, certainly including counter-school culture (Willis, 1981), occurs not specifically within either structure or individual agency, but in the space in the middle as a dialectical interaction occurring between individual agency and structure (Weis, 1996). Thus, further investigation must not paint as a powerless victim or romanticize the rural, working-class masculine student or the role of place in the rural student’s development of identity. What is necessary is critical consideration of all attributes of a place—physical,
social, cultural; positive, negative, neutral—as these attributes collectively form the student’s identity (McInerney, P., et al., 2011).

Key to further critical investigation of rurality in an attempt to answer “How can this tension between rural, working-class masculinity and the formal educative structure be resolved in a way beneficial to the rural, working-class masculine student?” is a continued honoring of rural perspectives (Howley, 2004), broadened consideration of rural issues (Howley, 2004), and further addressing of the specifics that rural students and their communities use to construct their narratives of both identity and transformation (McLaren, P. L., & Giroux, H. A., 1990). To resolve this tension between rural, working-class masculinity and the formal educative structure, further investigation must be conceptualized and articulated within rurality; rural problems must be interpreted in light of such conception and articulation; and methods, findings, and conclusions must address rural issues, meanings, and concerns (Howley, 2004). Not only should the lens of criticality be placed on rural education, in other words, but it should be placed on the relationship between rural education and rural culture in order to critically examine the rural lifeworld—the whole of rural experience and its cultural, political, and educational manifestations (Reynolds, 2017).

As local as the rural, working-class masculine student may at times be and hope to remain, his future is ever-growing less and less so. Further investigation needs to be conducted into how the formal educative structure can honor the rural, working-class student’s wish to live a life that is local while preparing him to live a life that is local and global—to understand local phenomena as connected to larger regional-, national-, and global-level processes, and simultaneously to understand how the ways in which lives
that are lived locally have global social, political, economic, and environmental implications (Schafft, 2010). Without interpreting the rural student and the rural lifeworld through a deficit perspective from which the rural student and rural lifeworld are wholly lacking, the rural student’s aspirations should be critically considered along with the elements of the rural student’s lifeworld, both rural and not, that hinder such aspirations (Howley, 2006).

**Working-Classness**

Key to further critical investigation of working-classness in an attempt to answer “How can this tension between rural, working-class masculinity and the formal educative structure be resolved in a way beneficial to the rural, working-class masculine student?” is a meaningful consideration of the aspirations of the student and the elements of the student’s lifeworld that hinder such aspirations. One such aspirational student is the “striver” (Morton, 2019).

Everyone is born in a specific position in society, but some individuals have aspirations to not remain there (Morton, 2019). One example of those born in a position and dissatisfied with remaining there are “strivers” (2019). Strivers are first generation or low-income college students for whom college “holds the promise of self-transformation” and also the “possibility of transforming [their] life circumstances” (Morton, 2019, p. 4).

Investigation is needed into the resources that could most benefit strivers when the time comes for them to leave everything they know to pursue opportunities. From others, strivers have heard that college is the ticket out—the ticket exchangeable for a more comfortable life—but very few, if any, of these people does the striver interact
with, let alone truly know (Morton, 2019). As “disadvantage tends to be concentrated and segregated,” strivers often must leave their communities, families, everyone and everything they truly know, and enter a new place altogether where “opportunities for advancement are available” (Morton, 2019, p. 7).

Purchasing the ticket out, pursuing self-transformation and the transformation of one’s life’s circumstances, comes at a cost, and not merely one paid with student loans and hours upon hours of paid labor (Morton 2019). There is an ethical cost of upward mobility—a cost that concerns “those aspects of a life that give it value and meaning—relationships with family and friends, connection to one’s community, and one’s sense of identity….aspects [that]…count as essential elements of a good life” (Morton, 2019, p. 8). The traditional narrative of upward mobility does not account for these ethical costs, and as such, for these students, is misleading and dishonest (Morton, 2019). These ethical costs can neither be ignored nor can they be counterbalanced by the traditionally accounted for educational or financial gains that come with a college education (Morton, 2019). The “ethical goods” that strivers must barter with for their college education are irreplaceable, and because of this, the costs for college to strivers and the strivers’ families and communities must be taken into account (Morton, 2019, p. 9). In an attempt to answer “How can this tension between rural, working-class masculinities and the formal educative structure be resolved in a way beneficial to the rural, working-class masculine student,” further critical investigation of strivers, their ethical costs of upward mobility, and the support and resources the formal educative structure could provide must be conducted.
Masculinity

Key to further critical investigation of masculinity in an attempt to answer “How can this tension between rural, working-class masculinity and the formal educative structure be resolved in a way beneficial to the rural, working-class masculine student?” is a recognition of diverse masculinities and disparities and inequities among those students enacting diverse masculinities. Further critical investigation into such disparities and inequities could allow for a recognition of the relations existing between different manners of masculinity, including the marginalized rural, working-class masculinity and the local hegemonic masculinities marginalizing it: relations of alliance, relations of dominance, relations of subordination, and it could allow, ultimately, for an uncovering of the gender politics between local masculinities (Schrock and Schwalbe, 2009). To begin, further critical investigation needs to be conducted concerning local internal hegemonic masculinity and the relation of rural, working-class masculinity to it.

Hegemony. Antonio Gramsci (1971) defined hegemony as the following:

the ‘spontaneous’ consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is ‘historically’ caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production. (p. 12)

Put more simply, hegemony is “social, cultural, or economic influence exerted by a dominant group over other groups,” with influence stemming “from the perception of legitimacy afforded the dominant group by subordinate groups” through consent: “tacit
support for the dominant group” (Levinson, 2011, p. 52-53). Schools, as sites of hegemonic order, maintain structural order by reproducing culturally hegemonic assumptions, beliefs, and concepts (Levinson, 2011), and this would include hegemonic order between masculinities.

According to Demetriou (2001), there are two types of hegemonic masculinities: external hegemonic masculinity and internal hegemonic masculinity. External hegemonic masculinity is enacted in men’s dominance over women, and internal hegemonic masculinity is enacted as hegemony over lower-status, marginalized masculinities with fewer social resources (Demetriou, 2001; Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009). Hegemonic masculinity, as such, serves the dual function of domination between and within genders.

In an attempt to answer, “How can this tension between rural, working-class masculinity and the formal educative structure be resolved in a way beneficial to the rural, working-class masculine student,” further critical investigation of the relation between the lower-status, marginalized rural, working-class masculine student and the internal hegemonic masculinities must be conducted.

**Rural, Working-Class Masculinity**

Key to further critical investigation of rural, working-class masculinity in an attempt to answer “How can this tension between rural, working-class masculinity and the formal educative structure be resolved in a way beneficial to the rural, working-class masculine student?” is to first acknowledge what is to be investigated is not exclusively the rural, working-class masculine student, not exclusively the formal educative structure, and not even simply both, but what is to be investigated is the rural, working-class masculine student and the formal educative structure as a means of investigating the
space in the middle of the rural, working-class masculine student and the formal educative structure as a dialectical interaction occurring between individual agency and structure (Weis, 1996). First, in investigation of rurality, critical consideration of all attributes of a place—physical, social, cultural; positive, negative, neutral—must be given, as these attributes collectively form the student’s identity (McInerney, P., et al., 2011). Second, not only should the lens of criticality be placed on rural education, but it should be placed on the relationship between rural education and rural culture in order to critically examine the rural lifeworld—the whole of rural experience and its cultural, political, and educational manifestations (Reynolds, 2017). Third, further critical investigation must be conducted of strivers (Morton, 2019), their ethical costs of upward mobility, and the support and resources the formal educative structure could provide them. Finally, critical investigation of the relation between the lower-status, marginalized rural, working-class masculine student and the internal hegemonic masculinities of the educative structure must be conducted in order to uncover an answer to the question, “How can this tension between rural, working-class masculinity and the formal educative structure be resolved in a way beneficial to the rural, working-class masculine student?”

Because the key findings of this study emerge from qualitative teacher inquiry, generalizability—the extent to which this study’s findings can apply to other populations (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2020)—is not of interest. As teacher inquiry, this study was designed to focus inward rather than outward, and its aim was to inform teaching in my own context, not necessarily anyone else’s (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2020). Of interest, however, in teacher inquiry is the study’s potential transferability to other contexts. With enough similarities between contexts, readers of this study could potentially conclude that
the research findings of this study would be similar or even the same in their own context, and as a result the readers would be able to transfer the findings of this study into their own context (Barnes et al., 2007, n.p.). This study certainly contains findings that I deem to be highly transferable to any formal educative context experiencing tensions between itself and a population of rural, working-class masculine students. Ultimately, though, this would be up to whomever is seeking to transfer my findings and apply them elsewhere, as the “burden of proof” of transferability lies not with me as original investigator, but instead with whomever is seeking to transfer my findings and apply them elsewhere (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 298).

**Reflection on Methodology**

Before beginning this study, I had no knowledge of action research. As I began the study, I was skeptical. I compared action research to the traditional research to which I was accustomed, and I questioned the methodology’s rigor and credibility. It wasn’t long, however, before my readings of Efron and Ravid (2013), Herr and Anderson (2015), Dana and Yendol-Hoppey (2020), and many other scholars made abundantly clear that credibility and validity are both vitally important in action research, and a number of the goals of action research (Guidance Document for Chapter 5: Implications) and indicators of quality in action research (Efron and Ravid, 2013) are shared between traditional research and action research. Beyond that which traditional research and action research share, Herr and Anderson (2015) make evident other aspects of action research that differ from traditional research and are very appealing to me as an educator and researcher: Action research “makes action central to the research enterprise,” while traditional research “tends to take a more distanced approach to research settings,” and
action research is “inquiry that is done by or with insiders to an organization or community, but never to or on them” (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 3).

This study naturally lends itself to an investigative action research approach utilizing teacher inquiry. Dana and Yendol-Hoppey (2020) describe teacher inquiry as a way that teachers can disentangle some professional complexities and elevate teachers’ voices, and this, in a broad sense, encapsulates much of the ambition of this study. While other teachers in my context and I have reflected and inquired at times concerning the tension between the rural, working-class masculine student and the formal educative structure, the reflections and inquiries have been unplanned, unstructured, and informal. Teacher inquiry differs from this reflection and inquiry during and concerning practice in that teacher inquiry is less happenstance, calls for planned reflection to bring more attention to the posing of problems, and is more visible (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2020). As a teacher inquirer engaged in this intentional, focused reflection, I was given the opportunity to purposefully ask questions about teaching and learning, organize and collect information, focus on my specific area of inquiry, and benefit from ongoing collaboration and support of my Critical Friends Group (CFG) (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2020).

The results of this study have a substantial impact on my work as a classroom teacher at JCCHS because I was able to identify very specifically what the exact tension is within the intersection of the rural, working-class masculine student and the formal educative structure: tension. I was also able to identify with great evidence why this tension is occurring: a series of tensions manifesting within the larger tension and coalescing to ultimately create that larger tension between the rural, working-class
masculine student and the formal educative structure. While my conclusion concerning how to resolve this tension is more open-ended than my conclusion concerning why it is occurring, to conclude that further critical investigation needs to be conducted in specific and focused directions is a conclusion to which it is beneficial to come. This conclusion simultaneously points future investigation in specific and focused directions and acknowledges the complexity of this problem of practice by acknowledging that this problem of practice is one that will not be resolved quickly or simply, but is a problem of practice that will require more time and investigation.

**Study Limitations**

As is inevitable, there are limitations of this study. I am certain that given enough consideration, countless limitations would reveal themselves one after another, both great and small. However, the limitations that I currently see that potentially had an impact on the outcome of this study are limited student availability, limited teacher availability, and limited time.

While JCCHS is a rural (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016) school with a large neo-indigenous population (Emdin, 2016) of rural, working-class (Draut, 2018) students, to find students in my classes who were available to participate in the study and who fit the specific conditions of rural, working-class and masculine was challenging. Next, to find a time to conduct a focus group with the student participants was challenging. The focus group could not be held before school because all of the participants were away from JCCHS in the morning for classes elsewhere. The focus group could not be held during school for obvious reasons. Consequently, the focus
group had to be held after school on a day when all four student participants were available, which is challenging when all four student participants work, some working multiple jobs. A fifth rural, working-class masculine student was interested in participating in the study, but as a bus rider, he had no transportation home if he stayed after school—his mother, father, and grandfather would all be unavailable to pick him up—so he was unable to participate. Finally, circumstances due to Covid-19 limited student availability. My classes were hybrid, with some students in the classroom and some students participating through Google Meet. This limited the students available to meet for an in-person focus group after school. I do not believe that any aspect of the limitation of student availability could have been avoided, as all aspects were out of my control as the researcher.

Despite the undeniable generosity the teacher participants demonstrated with their time, inadequate teacher availability was also a limitation that potentially had an impact on this study. This profession, when practiced well, is not a profession that allows for large windows of available time. Therefore, when asking teachers to spend their time responding to my research questions, I, at times, had to practice great patience while waiting for their responses and had to, at times, “nudge” them to get it done. Due to my understanding that in this profession time is a very limited resource, and due to my understanding that by participating at all in this study these teachers were sharing with me more of this resource than I “deserve,” on certain occasions I held back follow-up questions I wished to ask, sticking only with my initial research questions or only with limited follow-up questions that I felt would not require too much of their time. A member of my CFG once jokingly asked how many recertification points he was going to
get for his participation. While this was a joke, it still communicated the degree to which I was asking for something from him—his time—and he was getting nothing in return. A teacher participant who had enthusiastically agreed to participate, once receiving my initial interview questions, never returned to me any answers. When I first emailed to check on his progress, he responded that he was working through the questions. When I emailed a second time to check on his progress, he responded that he was working on the final section of questions. When I emailed a third time, he never responded. I have emailed since to simply assure that everything is okay with him, but I have not heard a response from him. I assume he assumed he had available time to share; yet, it seems, he did not. This limitation of teacher availability potentially could have been avoided by allowing for more time to gather data from teacher participants; however, considering I began gathering data in the Spring of 2021 and gathered data through the Fall of 2021, it’s difficult to imagine how, circumstantially, more time could have been found.

The final limitation that potentially had an impact on this study was inadequate time. Time constraints played a part in the limitation of student availability, time was a factor in limiting teacher availability, and limited time for me to conduct this study potentially had an impact on this study. This limitation is evidenced in my answer to this study’s third research question: How can this tension between rural, working-class masculinity and the formal educative structure be resolved in a way beneficial to the rural, working-class masculine student? The answer to this question, as concluded through this study, is that further critical investigation needs to be conducted. While the data gathered does point the investigation in specific and focused directions, given
enough time, that investigation could be conducted, and how this tension can be resolved could be answered more concretely.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Having conducted the research I have conducted and having concluded what I have concluded concerning the three research questions driving this study, I see three directions for future development of this research at John C. Calhoun High School. First is an extension of the research conducted and key findings in this study through a study attempting to answer more concretely the third research question of this study: How can this tension between rural, working-class masculinities and the formal educative structure be resolved in a way beneficial to the rural, working-class masculine student? Second is a transferring of the research conducted and key findings in this study in the form of a study of students at JCCHS who are Arts Focus students, but who are not school-focused—who are, in other words, part of another counter-school culture at JCCHS. Third is a transferring of the research conducted and key findings in this study in the form of a study of other counter-school cultures present at JCCHS.

The first possible direction for future research is to develop a study attempting to answer more concretely the third research question of this study: How can this tension between rural, working-class masculinities and the formal educative structure be resolved in a way beneficial to the rural, working-class masculine student? Because this study answers this question by stating that further critical investigation needs to be conducted and then points in the directions of critical investigation of all attributes of a place; critical investigation of the relationship between rural education and rural culture in order to critically examine the rural lifeworld; critical investigation of strivers (Morton, 2019),
their ethical costs of upward mobility, and the support and resources the formal educative structure could provide them; and critical investigation of the relation between the lower-status, marginalized rural, working-class masculine student and the internal hegemonic masculinities of the educative structure, an action research study extending out of this research and asking exclusively how this tension between rural, working-class masculinities and the formal educative structure can be resolved in a way beneficial to the rural, working-class masculine student could be conducted.

The second possible direction for future research is to transfer the research conducted and key findings in this study to a study of students at JCCHS who are Arts Focus students, but who are not school-focused—who are, in other words, part of another counter-school culture at JCCHS. As is evidenced throughout the data gathered through this study, much tension is created between the rural, working-class masculine student, as part of a counter-school culture, and the formal educative structure due to JCCHS being the district’s Arts Focus high school. However, being Arts Focused doesn’t necessarily make a student school focused, and, in fact, a number of students make evident they are not. A number of students attend school daily only to attend their art classes and develop their artistic selves. Otherwise, these students are very much counter-school. An action research study transferring this research and inquiring instead about the tension between the Arts Focus, counter-school student and the formal educative structure could be conducted.

The third possible direction for future research is to transfer the research conducted and key findings in this study to a study of any uncovered counter-school culture at JCCHS. The rural, working-class masculine student is not the only counter-
school student to experience tension between himself and the formal educative structure at JCCHS. An action research study transferring this research and inquiring instead about the tension between another counter-school culture and the formal educative structure could be conducted.

**Conclusion**

A tension is experienced between rural (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016), working-class (Draut, 2018) masculine (Connell, 1995) students and the formal educative structure. The underlying causes of tension between this localized masculinity (Messerschmidt, 2016) and the formal educative structure are produced both structurally by the formal educative structure and culturally by the rural, working-class masculine student (Morton, 2019; Weis, 1996) through a counter-school culture (Willis, 1981)—a culture in which ideas, knowledge, and ideals are produced that run counter to those produced through formal schooling, specifically pertaining to formal educative space, formal education, formal educational achievement, and formal educational attainment (Willis, 1981). In one manifestation of a counter-school culture at John C. Calhoun High School, rural, working-class masculine students, as members of the context’s neoindigenous population (Emdin, 2016), partake in practices and enact identities compatible with the local culture’s “educated person,” contradicting the educated person the school aims to produce and, consequently, are marginalized, neglected, and othered (Levinson & Holland, 1996; Howley & Howley, 2010).

This tension that is experienced between the intersection of identity lived out by the rural, working-class masculine student and the formal educative structure is the variant *tention*. Tention is created by a series of tensions manifesting within the tention
and creating the tension simultaneously. These tensions are as follows: 1) a tension between masculine expression in the home and masculine expression in the formal educative structure, 2) a tension between work outside of the formal educative structure and work in the formal educative structure, 3) a tension between knowledge relevant outside of the formal educative structure and knowledge relevant inside of the formal educative structure, and 4) a tension between success outside of the formal educative structure and success inside of the formal educative structure.

To address how this tension between rural, working-class masculinity and the formal educative structure can be resolved in a way beneficial to the rural, working-class masculine student, I call for further critical investigation in the following directions: 1) critical investigation of all attributes of a place; 2) critical investigation of the relationship between rural education and rural culture in order to critically examine the rural lifeworld; 3) critical investigation of strivers (Morton, 2019), their ethical costs of upward mobility, and the support and resources the formal educative structure could provide them; and 4) critical investigation of the relation between the lower-status, marginalized rural, working-class masculine student and the internal hegemonic masculinities of the educative structure. While this study leaves more research to be conducted, it does point us in the right direction for concluding how this tension between rural, working-class masculinity and the formal educative structure can be resolved.
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APPENDIX A

STUDENT FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

1. **Explanation of study:** The study I am conducting is part of the doctoral program I am in at the University of South Carolina. The study is investigating the relationship between working-class “country” boys and John C. Calhoun High School. I am conducting this study in order to better understand the relationship and improve the relationship between working-class country boys and JCCHS.

2. **Address any questions.**

3. **Explanation of who I am:** I also graduated from John C. Calhoun High School. While I grew up “in town,” …

4. **Tell me about yourself:**

   - Where do you live?
   - Did you grow up where you live?
   - How would you describe where you live?
   - What do you do outside of school?
   - Do you work?
   - How do you feel about work?

5. **Tell me about how you feel about school:**
● When did you start feeling this way about school? What classes do you believe are most valuable in school? Why?

● What classes do you believe are least valuable in school? Why?

● How is school valuable for you?

● What are some ways school could be made more valuable for you?

● Do you feel any tension existing between yourself and school or between yourself and your classes? If specific classes, which classes? Why?
  ○ Is tension present between what you believe is important to know or learn and what is important to know or learn according to the class?
  ○ Is tension present between what life you should lead while in or following high school according to you and what life you should lead while in or following high school according to the class?
  ○ Is tension present between what it means to be successful and lead a good life to you and what it means to be successful and lead a good life according to the class?

● Are there classes in which you feel the least tension, or no tension, existing between yourself and that class? Why is this the case?

6. **Provide contact information:** Email

7. **Reminder of possible subsequent contact for clarification, additional questions, and further understanding (member checking):**
APPENDIX B

TEACHER AND ADMINISTRATOR INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The study I am conducting is part of the Ed.D. in Curriculum and Instruction program I am in at the University of South Carolina. For this study, I am investigating the tension existing between rural, working-class masculine students and the formal educative structure. I am conducting this study in order to better understand the relationship between these students and John C. Calhoun High School and open up possibilities for improving the educational experience for these students—and as a consequence, all students—at John C. Calhoun High School.

To determine rurality, locally prevailing understanding of rural as “country” will ultimately decide which students constitute rural students. Similar to the National Center for Education Statistics (2016) defining rural as anything not in an urban area, locally rural is defined as country, which is anywhere not in town. For this study, students with a home address not in town will be considered rural students.

To define working-classness, three methods are commonly employed: occupation, income, and education—and there is no agreed upon correct way to define it (Draut, 2018). Due to the abstraction of defining working-classness based upon occupation and the complications in defining working-classness based upon income, for this study, working-classness will be defined by parental education level. Education level is strongly associated with both job quality and earning power (Draut, 2018), and as such, in this
study the working-class student will be defined as a student with a parent or parents in the workforce who do not have a bachelor’s degree (Draut, 2018).

To determine masculinity, students identifying as male for legal sex or man for gender identity will be considered masculine students. While maleness, man-ness, and masculinity are not synonymous (Connell, 1995), the literature uses these terms overwhelmingly as if they are.

1. **Tell me about your personal understanding of and experience with rurality, working-classness, and masculinity:**

   - What is your understanding of *rural, working-class, and masculine* in relation to the above explained technical, academic understanding of these identity markers?
   
   - What is your experience with *rurality, working-classness, and masculinity*?
     
      o Did you grow up rural?
        
         ▪ What did this mean? How do you feel this shaped you?
         
         ▪ How did this shape your formal educative experience?
     
      o Did you grow up working-class?
        
         ▪ What did this mean? How do you feel this shaped you?
         
         ▪ How did this shape your formal educative experience?
     
      o Growing up, what did it mean to be masculine?
        
         ▪ How do you feel this shaped you?
         
         ▪ How did this shape your formal educative experience?

2. **Tell me about your experience as a teacher working with rural, working-class masculine students:**
• How does these students’ rurality impact their educational experience at John C. Calhoun High School?
  o Is there a tension created between the students due to their rurality and John C. Calhoun High School?
  o What, in your opinion, is the tension created between the students due to their rurality and John C. Calhoun High School?
  o Do you have any specific examples you can share?

• How does these students’ working-classness impact their educational experience at John C. Calhoun High School?
  o Is there a tension created between the students due to their working-classness and John C. Calhoun High School?
  o What, in your opinion, is the tension created between the students due to their working-classness and John C. Calhoun High School?
  o Do you have any specific examples you can share?

• How does these students’ masculinity impact their educational experience at John C. Calhoun High School?
  o Is there a tension created between the students due to their masculinity and John C. Calhoun High School?
  o What, in your opinion, is the tension created between the students due to their masculinity and John C. Calhoun High School?
  o Do you have any specific examples you can share?

• How does the identity of rural, working-class masculine students impact their educational experience at John C. Calhoun High School?
○ Do you have any specific examples you can share?

○ Is there a tension between, specifically, rural, working-class masculine students and John C. Calhoun High School?
  ▪ Do you have any specific examples you can share?
  ▪ What are the ways in which this tension is created by the students?
    • Do you have any specific examples you can share?
  ▪ What are the ways in which this tension is created by John C. Calhoun High School?
    • Do you have any specific examples you can share?