The Male Academy was a proposed solution to a specific social problem. Examining how the problem was defined through the dominant voices in the discourse reveals the powerful foundation for the collective action frame. A collective action frame includes the concepts of punctuation, attribution, and articulation. This chapter focuses on the element of punctuation and the definition of the social problem. The overall problem in the collective action frame was one involving the interaction among three entities: (1) a socially constructed group—the inner-city Black male, (2) a social structure—the education system, and (3) a political process—the legal adjudication of rights through a court proceeding. These are separate yet interlocking concepts, and it is the interlocking quality that creates the complex social problem. Deconstructing the discourse enables a succinct understanding of each concept and how the concepts intersect. Understanding the intersection is critical because it is at the point of intersection that additional themes of hegemony, patriarchy, and Black manhood emerge. By using TASJ and the academic disciplines of sociology, law, political science, and history we can understand how the social problem was defined in Detroit, ultimately influencing the outcome.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section examines the discourse about Black males in Detroit. A deconstruction of the discourse reveals the social construction of an intersecting race, class, and gender category of the “urban male.” This was an economically disadvantaged and socially disenfranchised group with significant and crisis-level social and educational problems requiring immediate and drastic action. The social problem and the need for urgent action was demonstrated with five key discursive
strategies: (1) using specific adjectives and phrases to describe Black males and their problems, (2) presenting the problems facing Black males as urgent, and impacting the Black race, (3) using legal terms to imply that Black males were victims of race, class, and gender discrimination, (4) minimizing the problems of Black female students in comparison to Black male students, and (5) claiming collective community responsibility for the status of Black males. This first section reveals that an analysis of social groups cannot be isolated from the social systems and political processes in which they exist.

The second section explores the structural and procedural constraints for social justice advocacy on behalf of Black boys. This section analyzes the legal interpretation of federal and state education and civil rights law. The Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution, Title IX, the Michigan Equal Education Opportunities Act, and the Elliott-Larsen Act were legal obstacles that needed to be addressed. On their face, the laws limited the creative and innovative policy reform sought by the Detroit School Board. The legal arguments in the Garrett v. Board of Education case are analyzed to illustrate the obstacles that the political process presented for the Male Academy advocates.

The third section connects the first two sections. There was an underlying concept intermixed and embodied within the issues of the dire social status of Black boys, the inflexible structure of the education system, and the limits posed by legal interpretations of civil rights laws. At the point of intersection of individuals, structures, and process was the concept of power, authority, and control. In the Detroit Male Academy context, the discourse of the Male Academy supporters can be deconstructed to reveal the themes of hegemony, patriarchy, and Black manhood. These concepts, therefore, become the cement that binds together the building blocks of groups, structures, and process to create the solid, almost impenetrable foundation for the punctuation element of the collective action frame.

2.1 The Urban Male

Race, class, and gender are socially and culturally constructed categories influenced by historical contexts. They can also be seen as "social practice[s] situated within social structures of specific social relations and institutions" (Vojdik, 2002). These are practices that enforce and institutionalize domination and subordination. It is essential to