Creating Safe Spaces for African American Male Students

Zakeya Tanae Good

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Abstract

In American society, the African American male population is often misinterpreted and misunderstood. The media has played a pivotal role in creating, as well as maintaining, negative and unbalanced perceptions of African American males. This societal phenomenon has become prevalent in the education system as it begins the cycle of perceived stereotypes and exposes African American male students to school experiences that are influenced by personal biases and discrimination. This study served two purposes: (1) to explore the experiences of school leaders as it relates to the interactions with African American male students, and (2) to gain a better understanding of a positive school climate with the underlying goal to create safe spaces for this population in the secondary school setting. The theoretical framework, Critical Race Theory, was the driving force behind this research study. A phenomenological case study design was utilized to collect data via interviews in a single setting - a Title I public high school. With the usage of thematic analysis, six themes emerged: (1) positive role modeling through relationship building, (2) finding the why behind behavior, (3) a decrease in educational value, (4) struggles of a Title I school, (5) African American cultural upbringings, and (6) the act of being tough as a self-defense mechanism. The findings of this study aligned with current research on the unjust school experiences of African American male students and exposed the impact of negative stereotypes by examining the school interactions between students and their school leaders. The findings of this research study reveal a need for additional research on the implementation of fair and unbiased school policies, cultural relevance in academic achievement, and cultural understanding in emotional development for African American male students. As a
final analysis, this research study uncovers the dire need and significance of creating safe spaces for African American male students in the secondary school setting.
Dedication

As a first-generation doctoral student, I dedicate this dissertation to my family. I would not be the person that I am today without my loving and supportive family. To my mother, Kathy Yates Williams, thank you for being the ultimate role model in my life. All my accomplishments, I owe to you. From those long nights of sitting at the kitchen table until I completed all my essay assignments in its entirety, including an introduction paragraph, three main paragraphs, and a conclusion paragraph with at least five full sentences in each, to staying up on the phone with me, countless nights, as I re-read my research and chapter edits to you for sound advice...thank you so much. As an African American woman, you taught me to not only set the standard high, but to exceed that standard – ten times over. This dissertation is ours! To my grandparents, Josephus and Clara Yates, thank you for instilling the importance of hard work, dedication, and perseverance within our family values. You two have taught me one of the most important mottos of my life. “Anything in this world can be mine, if I work hard, stay dedicated, and preserve through any and every obstacle, as it is my birthright.” To the rest of my loving family, thank you for encouraging me in tough times, seeing my full potential when I couldn’t see it for myself, and praying me to the finish line. I am who I am, because of all of you. Thank you and I love you dearly.
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Chapter 1

A societal phenomenon has become prevalent in the education system as it begins the cycle of perceived stereotypes and exposes African American male students to school experiences that are influenced by personal biases and discrimination. According to Washington (2016), schools are tremendously potent socializing institutions that operate as microcosms of the larger society; this means that many of society’s common-sense notions, including those about race, exist and are reproduced within schools. Schools are powerful but contested sites of cultural reproduction that, in addition to contributing to inequitable economic stratification, also reproduce dominant ideologies (Allen, 2017). A few researchers have also stated that schools draw upon and contribute to dominate ideologies of African American male identity by positioning African American boys as culturally deficient, anti-intellectual, deviant, and intimidating (Ferguson, 2001; Howard et al., 2012; Sewell, 1997). Howard and Howard (2021) believe the mainstream depictions of African American boys fail to recognize the multiple dimensions of boyhood, and its variance across contexts, and fail to portray the human qualities of African American boys as they experience joy, wonder, kindness, love, and happiness just like all other children.

Problem Background

In the last decade, the United States has witnessed a string of police killings of unarmed African Americans – with the deaths of Michael Brown, Walter Scott, Sandra Bland, and Eric Garner being only the tip of the iceberg (Wilson & Wolfer, 2020). The recent deaths of George Floyd, Daniel Prude, Rayshard Brooks, and Breonna Taylor have sparked unprecedented mass protests, debates, and social movements such as Black Lives Matter. The most recent deaths of unarmed African American men and woman at the hands of the police have underscored an
ongoing systemic problem within our society and intensified awareness and outrage of racism and racial inequality (Henry et al., 2021). Throughout history, the African American community has experienced increased rates of brutality by citizens and authorities. According to Wilson and Wolfer (2020), African Americans have long known about elevated rates of police brutality in their communities and cautioned their children accordingly, despite law officials, as well as the U.S. criminal justice system, lacking official documentation of a comprehensive record to substantiate the statistics of this harsh reality.

Within a historical context, American policing originated from the system of slavery as slave patrol, the first formal arrangements of the police, duties entailed maintaining white supremacy over African Americans (Taylor et al., 2019; Turner et al., 2006). Slave patrols were utilized to gather enslaved Africans, host slave auctions, capture runaway slaves, prevent slave revolts, and protect the institution of slavery (Cooper, 2015; Moore et al., 2018; Wilson & Wolfer, 2020). They were essentially allowed to use brutality at free will and without consequences. Given that American policing has its roots in the system of slavery and racialized violence, it is perhaps less surprising that we continue to witness present-day police brutality against African Americans (Wilson & Wolfer, 2020). The current and existing problem of police brutality is viewed as a continuation of unchecked and unabated violence against African Americans at the hands of the police (Gilbert & Ray, 2016; Moore et al., 2018). Inequity and racism are not new, yet the sequence of current police brutality events, including a world-wide pandemic, has disproportionately affected African Americans both physically and economically (Henry et al., 2021). It is evident that the African American population has always been mistreated, misinterpreted, and misunderstood in society.
Within this special population, African American males have experienced different life struggles due to their intersectional identity of race and gender. Ladson-Billings (2011) describes American society in a love-hate relationship with African American males as they are viewed as seductive (e.g. Denzel Washington) and intriguing (e.g. Lebron James), yet also feared. Staggering statistics from The Counted, a crowd-sourced database used to report and track police killings in 2015 and 2016, indicated that African American boys and men in the United States between the ages 15-34 were nine times more likely than other Americans to be killed by police officers (Swaine & McCarthy, 2017). At alarming rates, African American males are being murdered by tragic police shootings. During the Civil Rights era, it became public knowledge that African American males were victims of police brutality and yet the mysterious uninvestigated deaths “in the line of duty” were publicly acceptable (Taylor et al., 2019). Brutality toward African American males occurs because (a) authorities and white citizens tend to stereotype minorities as dangerous and criminally prone; (b) authorities see racially dissimilar minority groups as threatening to the existing social order; and (c) the police may perceive poor minority citizens as a direct threat to their well-being (Smith & Holmes, 2003). Due to the advancements in technology of the 21st century, the trend of unarmed African Americans being killed by police has become news-worthy and more visible to the public as smart phones, video recordings, live streaming, and social media capture instant footage of unarmed shootings and police brutality. We are living in the era of Trayvon Martin, an era where the silencing and killing of African American men is normalized through viral YouTube videos, Snapchat images, tweets, and public posts (Taylor, 2016). Perhaps more than anything else, advancements in technology have exposed injustices, forcing police brutality into broader public consciousness
(Wilson & Wolfer, 2020). Ultimately, these advancements have helped disseminate messages of anti-Black violence and racism across our American media platforms.

In addition, the media has also played a pivotal role in creating, as well as maintaining, negative and unbalanced perceptions of African American males. The world, including Black men and boys, is fed consistent images of Black male failure and delinquency in the absence of much noticeable balance (Grant, 2016). What is perplexing is the intensity and persistence in which the social ills continue to have a deleterious effect on Black males well into adulthood in ways that it does not affect other populations (Howard, 2013). In addition to police brutality, African American males experience high incarceration and unemployment rates, and low academic and career attainment. In 2010, Black men represented a little over 6% of the entire U.S. population, but had a 13% unemployment rate, made up 40% of all people incarcerated, and a graduation rate of 52% (Grant, 2016). Mainstream society has disseminated negative perceptions of African American males and intensified the evident disproportionality across a variety of domains for this population. Images of African American men fighting, going to prison, selling drugs, and neglecting fatherhood are publicized more than images of them being doctors, fathers, and leaders. As stated by Grant (2016), as more dangerous stereotypes of Black men are disproportionately projected onto the consciousness of America, the dangers for Black men and boys grow exponentially.

**Problem Statement**

In American society, the African American population is often misinterpreted and misunderstood. Within this special population, African American males have experienced different life struggles due to their intersectional identity of race and gender. The media has played a pivotal role in creating, as well as maintaining, negative and unbalanced perceptions of
African American males. Mainstream society has disseminated negative perceptions of African American males and intensified the evident disproportionality across a variety of domains for this population. This societal phenomenon has become prevalent in the education system as it begins the cycle of perceived stereotypes and exposes African American male students to school experiences that are influenced by personal biases and discrimination. What is perplexing is the intensity and persistence in which the social ills continue to have a deleterious effect on Black males well into adulthood in ways that it does not affect other populations (Howard, 2013).

Schools are tremendously potent socializing institutions that operate as microcosms of the larger society; this means that many of society’s common-sense notions, including those about race, exist and are reproduced within schools (Washington, 2016).

In the education system, African American male students are viewed as deviant, at-risk, and dangerous (Love, 2014; Raby, 2002; Wotherspoon & Schissel, 2001). As a result, these students are excessively disciplined through suspension and expulsion, while criminalized with the zero-tolerance disciplinary policies. Prejudice and stereotype acceptance can lead to miscommunications between black students and white teachers; this is a possible contributor to the racial disproportionality in suspension and expulsion (Heitzeg, 2009). The stereotypes of African American male students being uninterested in learning, remedial, and uneducable feed into the evident achievement gap between this population and their white counterparts (Brown, 2011; Cohen et al., 2009; Duncan, 2002; Gibbs, 1998; Kunjufu, 2016). Habitually labeled as academically at-risk in schools, African American males are seen as a detriment to the academic mission of the schools they attend (Washington, 2016). In addition, these stereotypes influence the undervalued need of implementing culturally relevant teaching and understanding, as well as cultural competence as educators. The stereotyped perception of African American male students
being unemotional, detached, and tough impact their interactions with school leaders who perpetuate a hostile school climate that lacks empathy, understanding, and a sense of belonging. These stereotypes exist in relation to each other, and they serve to categorize, essentialize, and disenfranchise Black young male students as they navigate and negotiate the school system (James, 2012). In essence, the social construction of negative racial stereotypes on African American male students has impacted their school experiences as it relates to the following: school-to-prison pipeline, academic achievement gaps, and negative school climates. Last but not least, negative racial stereotypes have also impacted the school interactions between African American male students and their school leaders – principals, teachers, and school counselors.

**Purpose and Significance of Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of school leaders as it relates to the interactions with African American male students. This study is informative and exploratory in nature as it may expose the impact of negative stereotypes in the educational school setting on this special population. In addition to exploring the perceptions of school leaders, the purpose of this study is to also gain a better understanding of a positive school climate with the underlining goal to create safe spaces in the high school setting for African American male students. Understanding and addressing the educational barriers that racial and ethnic minority adolescents experience is a priority (Peguero et al., 2015). This study will provide the education field with data regarding the need and significance of creating safe spaces for African American male students as well as advance existing literature on minority students in the counseling field.
Chapter 2

In American society, the African American population is often misinterpreted and misunderstood (Gilbert & Ray, 2016; Henry et al., 2021; Moore et al., 2018; Wilson & Wolfer, 2020). Within this special population, African American males have experienced different life struggles due to their intersectional identity of race and gender (Grant, 2016; Howard, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2011). The media has played a pivotal role in creating, as well as maintaining, negative and unbalanced perceptions of African American males (Howard & Howard, 2021; Kellow & Jones, 2008; Taylor et al., 2019). The world, including African American men and boys, is fed consistent images of Black male failure and delinquency in the absence of much noticeable balance (Grant, 2016). Black men are overrepresented in news broadcast as perpetrators of violent crimes when compared to actual arrest records, are more likely to be shown in roles on television and movie “perp walks,” and are more likely than other groups, to occupy television mug shots (Entman & Gross, 2008). Finding images of Black men fighting, going to prison, selling drugs, and abandoning their children and families is perpetuated in modern media. It, however, remains challenging to find images of these same men as doctors, responsible fathers, and successful businessmen (Grant, 2016). This societal phenomenon has become prevalent in the education system as it begins the cycle of perceived stereotypes and exposes African American male students to school experiences that are influenced by personal biases and discrimination. As stated by Peguero et al. (2014), the U.S. public school system has a persistent history of racial and ethnic stratification; consequently, stereotypes have become a part of the schooling experience for many racial and ethnic minorities.
Stereotypes

Stereotypes have a long and convoluted history in the USA, widely influencing African American males who are the most visibly stereotyped racial group in the USA (Harpalnai, 2017). Stereotypes are dangerous just by virtue of what they are: widely held beliefs and images that represent an over-simplistic and rigid view of a particular out-group, which impacts people’s perceptions of themselves and others (Grant, 2016; Shih et al., 2002). Cohen and Ruble (2001) believe that stereotypes, defined as judgements of individuals based on their membership in a specific social group or status, are an important form of social categorizing often used to establish behavioral standards. The expected behavior of African American males is influenced by stereotypes that are maintained by the status quo – the dominant population (Ellis et al., 2018; Marsh & Noguera, 2018; Peguero et al., 2013; Taylor et al., 2019). Stereotypes are linked to biases and prejudices, which promotes and maintains systemic discrimination (Larnell et al., 2014). The problem with stereotypes is that they limit opportunities for specific groups (Taylor et al., 2019). For African Americans, stereotypes influence educational outcomes, employment opportunities, disproportional incarceration rates, and unfair treatment within society (Hadden, 2001). The stereotypes perpetuated also leads to racial oppression and poverty, which explains the ongoing status of this population. Grant (2016) believes that the dangers for African American men and boys grows exponentially as more dangerous stereotypes of African American men are being projected on the consciousness of America.

Within their original research study, Steele and Aronson (1995) introduced the concept of stereotype threat, which occurs when a group of people are confronted with a situation where fulfilling a negative stereotype of themselves is eminent. Since the original experiments, the effects of stereotype threat have gained widely accepted empirical support regarding their
negative impact on most people who hold at least one social identity to which a negative stereotype is directed (Grant, 2016). Stereotypes about collective group membership can be negative or positive, where children and adolescents become aware of racial and gender stereotypes early in life from interactions with significant others at home and in schools (Ellis et al., 2018). Research indicates that African American men and boys have an increased chance of experiencing stereotype threat as a multitude of negative stereotypes exist in society (Appel & Kronberger, 2012; Brown et al., 2019; Kellow & Jones, 2008). The characterizations of Black males undoubtedly influence the way the larger society may frame its perception of the group, and most disturbingly these same characterizations can be internalized by the group itself, and subsequently have an impact on the way they view themselves and become complicit in their own challenges educationally and socially (Howard, 2013; Howard & Flennaugh, 2011). Consistent exposure to stereotype threat can directly impact self-concept and racial identity, academic performance, and self-motivation for African American male students. According to Allen et al. (2013), stereotype threat has been noted as one of the most detrimental effects of student internalized intellectual inferiority – academically and behaviorally. Grant (2016) believes that stereotypes create attitudes, and attitudes influence behavior. “The more frequently people are exposed to these negative images, the more easily their brain relies on them when making choices about behaviors, attitudes and world views” (pg. 218). Shih and colleagues (2002) share similar beliefs as they have found stereotypes to exert powerful effects on cognition and behavior, impacting people’s perceptions of themselves and others. The societal phenomenon of negative and unbalanced stereotypes being heavily perpetuated in the media not only threatens the positive self-identity development and worldview formation for African American males, but also threatens their experiences within one of society’s main systems: the
education system (Brown et al., 2019; Grant, 2016; Hall, 2019; Smith & Hope, 2020; Taylor et al., 2019; Washington, 2016). This research study will examine the impact of racial stereotypes in the education system as it relates to the implementation of zero-tolerance policies, the school-to-prison pipeline, the current academic achievement gap, and overall school climate for African American male students.

**Zero-Tolerance Policies**

Zero tolerance is defined as a disciplinary policy that calls for a mandatory sanction for student disciplinary infractions without regard for the severity of the misconduct (American Psychological Association [APA] Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008). Skiba et al. (2006) describes zero tolerance as a philosophy or policy that mandates the application of predetermined consequences, most often severe and punitive in nature, that are intended to be applied regardless of the seriousness of behavior, mitigating circumstances, or situational context. In 1990, the U.S. Congress enacted the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1990 to respond to the growing trend of violence towards students with weapons at or near school grounds and address school safety. Four years later, the Clinton Administration signed the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994, which mandates that all schools that receive federal funding must have policies to expel any student, for a calendar year, who brings a firearm to school, or to a school zone, and report that student to local law enforcement (Heitzeg, 2009). The GFSA set the foundation for implementing zero-tolerance policies within the educational school system. Initially, the GFSA focused objectively on eliminating criminal activities, such as weapon possession, to ensure school safety. The stated intent of this zero-tolerance policy was to create a safe, conducive learning environment and to create a fair and equal chance of success for students across schools, using consistency in punishment (Fowler, 2007; Tapia et al., 2020). Although this may be true, critics of this initiative
believe that implementation of such policies has created problems within the school setting for certain student populations (Gwathney, 2021; Heilburn et al., 2015; Johnson et al., 2012; Skiba & Peterson, 2000). Skiba and Peterson (2000) and Johnson et al. (2012) believe that zero tolerance policies serve as disciplinary practices that are intended primarily as a method of sending a message that certain behaviors will not be tolerated, by punishing all offenses severely. Critics also believe that schools are engaging in discriminatory and inequitable practices with the implementation of zero tolerance policies (Gwathney, 2021; Johnson et al., 2012; Skiba & Peterson, 2000).

Over the past two decades, zero tolerance policies in education have contributed to suspension and expulsion being common methods of reacting to problem behaviors in schools (Achilles, et al., 2007; Johnson et al., 2017). In a review of zero-tolerance school suspensions, several scholars revealed that nationwide 75% of schools use this approach as a standard disciplinary process (Gregory & Fergus, 2017; Gwathney, 2021; Mallet, 2016). An investigative report conducted by the U.S. Government Office of Accountability (GOA) (2018) reports that in 2016, African American males in high school represented 18% of America’s student population and disproportionately represented 39% of school suspensions, whereas white peers represented 50% of the student population and accounted for 5% of school suspensions (GOA, 2018; Gwathney, 2021). Moreover, African American males are 3.5 times more likely to be suspended than their white counterparts as intersections of their identity and sexual orientation increase the likelihood of being suspended from school (Bottiani et al, 2018; Gwathney, 2021). As efforts to maintain control increased, schools extended the federal policy to include violations such as fighting, gang membership, alcohol and drug usage, threats, and inappropriate off campus behavior. In most cases 100% of school districts had prohibitions against weapons, and fighting,
nearly 80% had bans on gang-activity at school, and over 90% had implemented zero tolerance policies for alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs (Heitzeg, 2009). Non-dangerous behaviors were also included on the disciplinary list for zero tolerance (Johnson et al., 2017). For example, the zero tolerance policies utilized in Massachusetts resulted in a fifth grader being suspended for making a “threatening” gesture in the form of pointing his finger like a laser gun and making laser noises (DeMitchell & Hambacher, 2016). Yet, despite the significantly higher rates of out-of-school suspension for African American students, they are less likely than their Native American/Alaskan Native, Hispanic, or white peers to carry weapons to school and equally or less likely to have access to illegal drugs at school (de Brey et al., 2019). The extension continued as schools expanded the mandate of zero tolerance to cover a range of behavioral issues such as disrespect, insubordination, and disruption, which have little impact on the overall safety in schools (Triplett et al., 2014).

The implementation of zero-tolerance policies is often subjective as the behaviors of African American students are misinterpreted, which ultimately leads to a disciplinary action. In a study conducted by Skiba et al. (2011), data findings revealed that African American students were more likely to be referred to the office for subjective behaviors, like disrespect, while white students were more likely to be referred to the office for objective behaviors, like fighting. School professionals’ subjective interpretation of these behaviors contributes to biased and exclusionary discipline (Henry at al., 2021; Losen et al., 2015). Studies conducted by Monroe (2005) and Weinstein et al. (2004) revealed that white teachers regularly interpret African American students’ behaviors as inappropriate (e.g., overlapping speech as disrespect, play fighting as authentic aggression, and humor as valid insults) when the actions are not intended to be so. Cultural misconceptions guide the hand of punishment (Hall, 2019). Since research has
found no indication that African youth violate rules at higher rates than other groups, the persistence of stereotypes of young males and cultural miscommunication between students and teachers is often cited as one key factor (Heitzeg, 2009; Skiba, 2001). Due to the influence of biases and prejudice on the interpretation of behavior, implementing zero-tolerance policies can lead to systemic racism in a single school setting, as well as the entire education system (Allen, 2017; Bell, 2015; Heitzeg, 2009; Webster & Knaus, 2020).

Within the school setting, African American male students are heavily profiled due to their skin color. In her seminal study, Ferguson (2001) demonstrated how racialized narratives and stereotypes are internalized by school staff to think Black male students facing discipline are uncontrollable and bound for jail. Schools’ reactions to the stereotypes of unruliness and deviance are in forms of extreme control as districts increase the presence of uniformed security guards and police. According to Heitzeg (2009), zero-tolerance policies are additionally associated with an increased use of school metal detectors, security cameras, canine units, personal searches (e.g., clothes, backpacks, lockers) and all the accoutrements of formal legal control. Ironically, enhanced security measures were largely inspired by the school shootings in largely white suburban schools and have been most readily adopted and enforced in urban schools with low student-to teacher ratios, high percentages of students of color and lower test scores (Skiba et al., 2011). Schools begin to mimic prison with dress codes (e.g., no hoodies allowed), limiting or prohibiting social interaction between students in hallways and cafeterias, removing “disruptive” students from classrooms in handcuffs, using Tasers on elementary school students, and regulating students’ recess or free time in a manner reminiscent of a prison yard (Love, 2014).
In addition to being perceived as undisciplined and deviant, African American male students are also viewed as at-risk youth. According to Wotherspoon and Schissel (2001), the term “at-risk” can serve as a euphemism for racism, sexism, and biases based on factors such as class, family makeup, cultural assumptions, and other “risk-inducing constructs. And “in the name of instilling discipline,” as Raby (2002) put it, the “at-risk” discourse “justifies mechanisms of social control” (p. 431). As a result, the stereotypical term “at-risk” reinforces the school patrolling behavior. To thwart students’ potential insubordinate and disruptive behaviors, school administrators and teachers take what might be considered a “preemptive” stance by having security cameras, locked outside doors while classes are in session, and students dressed in uniforms (James, 2012). However, Farmer (2010) and James (2012) believe that the responses are part of the criminalization of schools as school environments reflect the contemporary criminal justice system with reactive-disciplinary policies, surveillance, metal detectors, and unwarranted searching and lockdowns.

Despite the popularity of these policies, there is limited data that supports the effectiveness of its implementation (Bakken & Kortering, 1999; Gwathney, 2021; Johnson et al., 2017). Skiba (2014) revealed that the implementation of zero tolerance policies have not improved the overall safety in school or its climate yet increased the number of students being asked to leave school for short periods of time or permanently for disciplinary purposes related to non-dangerous behaviors. Findings also suggest that such practices have not been associated with reductions in student misconduct or improvements in academic outcomes (Gwathney, 2021). Yet, these policies are associated with social disengagement, which increases the likelihood that students will be subjected to additional exclusionary practices, academic failure, and dropout (Bakken & Kortering, 1999; Skiba, 2014). Zero tolerance policies also do not
consider students’ cultural context due to lacking the understanding of behaviors and perceptions of expectations being largely dictated by the cultural contexts in which they learn and develop (Johnson et al., 2017). Such policies fail to help students improve behavior, be successful, and stay in school as zero tolerance policies prevent case-by-case analysis of risk, contextual variables, or consequences that may be in the best interest of students (Henry et al., 2021; Johnson et al., 2017). Gwathney (2021) believes that the implications of zero tolerance school suspensions interrupt academic attainment and dehumanize the holistic development of adolescent African American males. Ultimately, zero-tolerance has led to disproportionate rates of injustice for Black students, causing a school-to-prison pipeline in which students, predominately Black males, are pushed into the criminal justice system through suspensions and expulsions (Bailey, 2017; OME, 2020).

School-to-Prison Pipeline

The school to prison pipeline is the process by which students become derailed from academic and career goals due to a system of ever-increasing punishment, including disciplinary infractions, suspensions, expulsions, arrests, and incarcerations (Welfare et al., 2020). In similar fashion, Heitzeg (2009) describes the school to prison pipeline as a growing pattern of tracking students out of educational institutions, primarily via “zero tolerance” policies, and directly and/or indirectly, into the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems. Many scholars believe that the root cause of the school to prison pipeline is due to the misuse and abuse of zero tolerance policies, which promote strict, uncompromising, and automatic punishment to eliminate bad behavior (Bryan, 2017; Heitzeg, 2009; Henry et al., 2021; Welfare et al., 2021). The United States currently has the highest incarceration rate in the world (Darensbourg et al., 2010; Heitzeg, 2009; Tapia et al., 2020). An article by Barbarin (2010) highlighted the current trend of
prison progression for African American males. Incarceration is a much more common experience for African American males than white males as white males are incarcerated at a rate of 8.5 per thousand compared to 48.3 per thousand for African American males. The prison industry thrives on a steady supply of African American males, who account for 10% of all youth but 60% of incarcerated youth under the age of 18. Barbarin (2010) introduces a theory to describe the prison progression by using the population number of African American four-year-old males to project the number of African American males who will be incarcerated in the next 15-20 years. Of the approximately 600,000 four-year old African American males growing up in the United Stated in 2008, prisons are being planned to house 28,134 of them by the year 2029 (Barbarin, 2010).

African American male students are vacuumed into the school to prison pipeline as they are criminalized by zero tolerance policies and incarcerated, at early ages, through the juvenile justice system. The tendency towards criminalization and incarceration has seeped into the schools, and with each year, this legal net ensnares younger and younger children (Heitzeg, 2009). According to Washington (2016), society’s prevalent representation of crime being overwhelmingly committed by young African American males robs them of their innocence, well before they reach puberty. Perhaps what is most disheartening is the fact that myths about the deviance and criminality of African American males begin so early in the educational pipeline (Ferguson, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2011). From the moment African American children enter school, they are dehumanized and criminalized (Johnson & Johnson, 2014; Love, 2016; Webster & Knaus, 2020). The U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (2014) revealed that almost half of all students who are suspended from preschool more than once are African American. Likewise, African American students account for 42% of preschool students
suspended on one occasion and 48% of preschool students suspended on more than one occasion. Yet only 18% of total preschool enrollment is African American children. Skiba and colleagues (2011) conducted a disaggregated analysis of national data and discovered that elementary school-aged African American students were twice as likely to receive Office Discipline Referrals (ODRs) as compared to white students and the discrepancy increases two-fold in middle school as African American students are four times as likely to receive an ODR. African American males often spend more time in a disciplinary space (e.g., principal’s office, dean’s office, isolation, or alternative discipline setting) than in a classroom (Ferguson, 2001). A data report from the U.S. Department of Justice and Education (2018) revealed that African American students comprise 15% of the U.S. school population with 35% of all suspended students are African American. Consequently, more than 50% of African American students who are suspended were involved in school-related arrests or referred to law enforcement (U.S. Department of Justice and Education, 2018). The continuous exposure of discipline disparities from early childhood to secondary schools has a direct impact on the number of African American male high school graduates and college attendees as dropout rates among Black males have reached roughly three times the rate in comparison to their white male counterparts (Bryan, 2017; Gwathney, 2019; Tapia et al., 2020; Taylor et al., 2019). As a result of these dropout rates, African American males are susceptible to encounters with law enforcement and the prison system (Barbarin, 2010; Basford et al., 2021; Heitzeg, 2009; Tapia et al., 2019).

The plight of Black males in U.S. schools is grim and frightening, but ultimately predictable due to Americans’ obsession with dehumanizing Black males and criminalizing their every move (Love, 2014). The reliance on zero tolerance policies to ensure school safety, as well as reinforce school control, feeds into the progression of African American male students
through the school to prison pipeline with the underlining factor of racial stereotypes (Bell, 2015; Henry et al., 2021; Simmons-Reed & Cartledge, 2014; Webster & Knaus, 2020). The socially constructed racial and gender identity of Black males has permanently cast them as violent criminals and too aggressive to educate (Love, 2014). In addition to being criminals and aggressive, African American male students are also viewed as super-predators and unruly (Heitzeg, 2009; Washington, 2016). Law officials raised concerns that schools often use zero-tolerance policies to “push out” students they deem as challenging (Henry et al., 2021). As a result of these stereotypes, African American male students are excessively disciplined. The disproportionality is so pronounced that the percentage of black suspensions is more than double their percentage of the student body (Heitzeg, 2009). In fact, Black students receive more harsh punitive measures (suspension, expulsion, corporal punishment) and less mild discipline than their non-minority peers for the very same conduct, even when controlling for socio-economic status (Advancement Project, 2005).

The Academic Achievement Gap and Cultural Mismatch

In American society, stereotypes related to the intellectual performance of African Americans are pervasive. (Devine, 1989; Kellow & Jones, 2008). In addition to impacting the disproportionate disciplinary actions on African American male students, stereotypes also impact their overall academic achievement and classroom dynamics (Appel & Kronberger, 2012; Kellow & Jones, 2008; Quinn, 2020). African American males are often perceived to be uneducable, lazy, and unintelligent (Cohen et al., 2009; Gibbs, 1998; Kunjufu, 2016). African American male students are frequently thought of as a problem that must be dealt with – academically and behaviorally (Howard, 2013; Trenton et al., 2018). In addition, African American males are more likely to be labeled underachievers, treated as though they are beyond
love, stigmatized as being at-risk, endangered, and viewed as in crisis (Anderson, 2008; Brown, 2011; Duncan, 2002; Noguera, 1997; Taylor-Gibbs, 1988). James (2012) believes that stereotypes are maintained by teachers’ perceptions and practices, as well as how African American males take up or act upon these perceptions – stereotype threat. Stereotype threat is known – first and foremost – as a factor that inhibits stereotyped individuals to perform up to their ability (Appel, 2012). McCray et al. (2015) describes stereotype threat as a cultural collusion when African American male students conform to the perceptions that teachers and school leaders have of them. They also introduce the concept of deficit thinking when teachers deem minority students as unintelligible with little value to offer and contribute to the overall learning process and classroom dynamics (McCray et al., 2015). Several scholars have reported that deficit thinking by white teachers is one of the most powerful forces working against students of color (Hale, 2001; Milner, 2006; Thompson, 2004). Teachers’ perceptions have a direct impact on academic success for all students, especially minority populations such as African American male students (Marsh & Noguera, 2018; McCray et al., 2015). The dreams, hopes, and futures of Black male students are tied to their teachers’ perceptions (Love, 2014).

A study conducted by Lynn et al. (2010) revealed that majority of teachers believe that African American male students fail, academically, because of the lacking parental support and outside community influence. Eighty percent of teachers, within this study, stated that African American male students fail due to lacking the following: the motivation and interest to learn, preparation for school, and innate ability to focus (Lynn et al., 2010). They also believe that poor attendance and behavior, as well as engagement in street culture, are contributing factors in their overall academic failure (Lynn et al., 2010). Findings from this study also revealed that teachers overlook the impact of their perceptions and stereotypes on the current academic status of
African American male students. Teachers’ lower expectations for minority students are based on their perceptions of students’ current performance rather than the students’ potential to perform (White & Cotton, 2009). Children live up or down to teachers’ expectations (White & Cotton, 2009). Furthermore, teachers’ perceptions and beliefs, explicitly or implicitly, influence students’ behavior and classroom engagement. Holding an explicit stereotype means that one consciously endorses the stereotype, whereas an implicit stereotype is one that is not identifiable through introspection (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Quinn, 2020). Race and racism in the United States situates African American students, both implicitly and explicitly, as deficient in comparison to white students (Grant et al., 2015; Jackson et al., 2021). Whether explicit or implicit, stereotypes negatively impact student performance, which perpetuates the current educational achievement gap (Grant, 2016; Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Jackson et al., 2021; Quinn, 2020).

The NBC News (2014) described the academic achievement gap as “the civil rights issue of our time.” The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 required educators and administrators to disaggregate test scores by subgroup and monitor the progress of every student regardless of their race or socioeconomic status. This was an attempt to hold schools accountable for their school data (Hess and Petrilli, 2005; Quinn, 2020). Coincidentally, the tracking of students’ information further indicated an achievement gap between Black students and their non-Black peers (Quinn, 2020). Substantial numbers of African American males are bombarded with a range of individual, family, and community trauma, beginning early in life, that divert them onto a developmental trajectory that is filled with adverse academic and social outcomes (Barbarin, 2010). The achievement gap between African American students and their peers begins in early childhood education as African American males enter kindergarten with deficits
in literacy and language with minor behavior problems (Barbarin, 2010; Quinn, 2020; White & Cotton, 2009). Specifically, African American males enter school with less general knowledge of the world as they are often unable to recognize letters, pair letter sounds, identify primary colors, and write their names. In addition, they tend to have less well-developed capacities for self-regulation of attention and behavior (Barbarin, 2010). Research indicates that only 12 percent of African American fourth graders reach proficient or advanced levels in reading, and 61 percent of African American students performed below the basic levels on the eighth-grade measure of mathematics attainment compared to 21 percent of white students (White & Cotton, 2009).

Although the gap in skills is evident when boys start school, it widens over time with the result that African American males are consistently underrepresented among the highest achievers and overrepresented among the lowest achievers (Barbarin, 2010).

By high school, the academic achievement gap has expanded as only 17% of African Americans, compared to 46% of white students, are reading at or above proficient levels in the 12th grade, averaged ACT scores of African American students were 17.1 compared to 22.4 for their white peers, and the high school graduation rates for African American students were 73% compared to 87% for their white counterparts (Taylor et al., 2019). Gaps within academic achievement are also evident as African American male students are underrepresented in honors or advanced placement courses and overrepresented in special education programs (White & Cotton, 2009). The high dropout rate of African American male students is also an existing gap within academic achievement (Gwathney, 2019; Tapia et al., 2020; Taylor et al., 2019). By the end of high school, African American students’ math and reading skills are comparable to white eighth graders (Education Trust, 2003; Hoffman & Llagas, 2003). The academic achievement gap between African American students and their counterparts not only exists in the K-12
educational setting, but also in post-secondary education at the collegiate level. As a comparison, only 42% of African Americans graduate from college as a comparison to 62% of white peers, and 46% of African American females graduate at a higher rate than African American males at 35% (Taylor et al., 2019). An academic achievement gap also exists amongst ethnic genders as African American females outperform African American males at every socioeconomic level (White & Cotton, 2009). The current academic achievement gap is a direct result of stereotypes and teacher misperceptions impacting the classroom learning environment, as well as foreshadowing the academic potential and longevity for African American male students (James, 2012; Love, 2014; Lynn et al., 2010; Marsh & Noguero, 2018; McCray et al., 2015). Ultimately, perception is a fundamental aspect of student success, and stretches beyond a single classroom and into the school community (Love, 2014).

**Cultural Mismatch.** Cultural mismatch in the context of the classroom refers to an unawareness of the tactics, rules, nuances, and idiosyncrasies that exist between teachers and their students (Davis, 2009). Research indicates that African American males across the country are enduring their teachers’ cultural ignorance and insensitivity all too frequently (Love, 2014). Most teachers employed in the United States are female and white, with 84% of the teaching force consisting of white teachers (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2011). Many Black students enter U.S. classrooms where the cultural mismatch between them and their teacher is so wide that it undermines student learning (Howard, 2001). Beachum and McCray (2004, 2011) describe this cultural mismatch as a cultural collision when African American male students come to school with different values and perspectives than those of their teachers and other school officials. Researchers revealed that many white teachers work from within a hegemonic and Western framework, which often predisposes them to have lower expectations of African
American students and a lack of respect for the students’ families and primary culture (Boykin, 1992; Darder, 1991; Scheurich, 1993). Research also indicates that Black males’ performance of masculinity is misunderstood by teachers, and therefore targeted as oppositional (Love, 2014). Their masculinity is also perceived as aggressive, impulsive, hyper, and uncontrollable within the learning environment (Marsh & Noguer, 2018; Peaguer et al., 2015; Taylor et al., 2019). Hewitt (2017) believes that masculinity refers to the attitudes, behaviors, beliefs, and roles associated with what it means to be a boy or a man, which is culturally bound and varies by culture. Communication is also a factor in the cultural mismatch between African American students and their school leaders. The way some African American students communicate with their peers can be misperceived as loud and confrontational as white individuals tend to engage in communication styles that are less emotional and direct (Cartledge & Fellows-Milburn, 1996).

The cultural mismatch is maintained as teachers view African American male students through a deficit perspective by overlooking their academic potential and deeming their cultural differences as the lack thereof. Because a deficit model of instruction attempts to make students fit into the existing system of teaching and learning, the model cannot build on the strengths of cultural characteristics or cultural preferences in learning (Lewis et al., 2008). African American male students are placed in a stereotypical box, with low expectations and minimal cultural understanding, which stifies their potential and limits their ability to succeed in the classroom.

School Climate

According to Zullig and Mathews (2014), school climate is a general construct used to define a child’s subjective school experience and is shaped by various areas of school life including relationships, learning, environment, and safety. School climate is measured by meeting the physical, emotional, and social needs of students (Liang et al., 2019; Shirley &
Cornell, 2011). Jackson et al. (2021) believes that a dimension of school climate that affects African American males is the relationship between students and school staff. Research indicates that many urban African American students are disconnected from the school setting because of a cultural divide between students and educators (Thompson, 2004). Hewitt (2017) states that African American male students feel the primary emotions of anger, rejection, humiliation, and sadness as they are perceived to be tough guys, thugs, or gangsters. There is an evident lack of understanding of the role of belonging and its impact on the overall well-being, as well as academic achievement, for diverse students (Boston & Warren, 2017; Faircloth & Hamm, 2015). Generally, a sense of belonging embodies the feeling of relatedness or connection to others. Within a cultural context, belongingness has a different meaning for African American students whose racial group is associated with negative stereotypes and historical discrimination in mainstream settings such as schools (Boston & Warren, 2017). It is also imperative to highlight how settings alone have the power to signal the degree of threat or safety an individual will experience (Goodenow & Grady, 1993). It is also very difficult to excel in school, work, or other areas of one’s life when safety needs are not met (Taylor et al., 2019). Ultimately, school climate is a factor in academic achievement and success.

Racism, which is deeply embedded in American society, negatively affects the quality of teacher-student relationships (Carter, 1992). Our world today is inundated with racist and negative stereotypes, stories, and images of African American males -which inevitably impact the way that teachers interact with, care for, and think about African American boys (Howard & Howard, 2021). As a response to African American male students being stereotyped as unemotional and detached from the learning environment, teachers may become easily frustrated, distance themselves emotionally, misinterpret their behavior, and resort to overly
punitve actions to rectify classroom problems (Barbarin, 2010). Within the classroom setting, African American male students receive less attention, less encouragement, less praise, less time to respond, less eye-contact, and more verbal and nonverbal criticism (Villegas, 2007). Consequently, school interactions tend to feel superficial and unsafe as educators lack empathy and understanding. Having to come to school every day and be placed in the care of individuals who do not see their value becomes so dreadful and hopeless that it literally rips the innocence of childhood away, replacing it with rage, discontentment, and depression (Brown et al., 2019; Dahlsgaard, 2018). Epstein et al., (2017) also expresses the loss of innocence due to school trauma as African American students seek the constant need to feel connected to school and crave the acceptance of adults in positions of power.

Research presented by Voight et al. (2015) suggests that race may be a factor that influences how minority students experience school processes as African American and Hispanic students reported less favorable relationships with educators, as well as less opportunities to participate in school than their white peers, due to objective differences in school treatment and subjective interpretations of the school environment. African American students also feel less supported and view the school environment as more threatening and aggressive than their white peers (Marsh & Cornell, 2001). Bell (2020) believes that negative school climates are maintained as racial stereotypes and perceptions are upheld in classroom settings, as well as throughout the overall school environment. Much of the connective tissue of how we interact with and treat black adolescents is part of societal perceptions of black people overall that are grounded in (un)conscious stereotypes and racism (Hall, 2019). As a response, African American male students either conform to, or resist, the negative stereotypes that are perpetuated in the educational school setting. According to James (2009), those who conform internalize those stereotypes of
being deviant, underachievers, and tough and believe that academic success is not for them. Many have performed the role of disinterested black male for so long that it’s become almost second nature to underperform in school (Emdin, 2012). Those who resist the stereotypes set out to challenge it; hence, they work “harder” to “prove” that they are not like their peers or to prove their teachers wrong (James, 2009).

Voight et al. (2015) describes a positive school climate as a school environment that makes students feel emotionally and physically safe and a part of the school community. It is also characterized by educators expressing respect for all students and caring for their overall well-being by having high expectations for student success and providing them with opportunities to provide input in how things work at the school. Cohen et al. (2009) believes that a positive school climate generates norms, values, and expectations that make students feel safe, emotionally secure, and motivated to learn. For African American male students, a positive school climate is characterized with inclusion, equity, support, and cultural understanding (Cohen et al., 2009; Leary at al., 2005; Voight, 2015). Specifically, a positive school climate, for African American male students, promotes relationships with respect and genuineness. As described by Leary et al. (2005), respect is meaningful for all people, as it demonstrates dignity and work, and needs to be understood within a historical context of racial discrimination and masculinity as giving and receiving respect may be particularly important for boys and men of color. Respect is revered as an intrinsic part of masculinity and manhood as African American fathers communicate the importance of being respectful toward both themselves and others (Doyle et al., 2016). Leary and his colleagues (2005) argued that respect contributes to a sense of identity and feelings of safety and belonging among boys and men, whereas the lack of respect contributes to a sense of mistrust. A school climate that is congruent with students’ racial identity
and supportive of their culture contributes greatly to their sense of belonging and fosters a strong school connection (Cohen et al., 2009; Doyle et al., 2016; Leary et al., 2005; Voight, 2015).

Correspondingly, a safe, secure, and nurturing environment is essential to self-development for African American male students (Cunningham et al., 2013; Emdin, 2012; Palmer & Maramba, 2012). Cunningham et al. (2013) describes the adolescent development of African American males as a fragile process due to the impact of perceptions and school experiences – negative and positive. Adolescent development is the time that youth will begin to create the blueprint of who they envision themselves to be in the world and how capable they are to navigate life’s challenges (Greer & Webb, 2020). Palmer and Maramba (2012) discuss the significance of creating positive school climates as African American males’ development consists of worrying if they will be able to comfortably transition into new roles and responsibilities, accompanied with a sense of belonging. Without a sense of belonging, task completion could decrease in efficacy (Palmer & Maramba, 2012). This sensitive period of self-efficacy development is particularly important for males from marginalized cultures in society (Greer & Webb, 2021). Research conducted by Emdin (2012) indicates that African American male students are constantly in a search to find themselves and to perform versions of these selves based on the expectations of those within these spaces. During adolescent development, it is vital for school leaders to support positive trajectories of self-esteem and self-concept by adopting holistic frameworks of empowerment to address the academic needs of young African American males, as self-esteem is not solely based on achievement (Greer & Webb, 2021; Wilson, 2003). The education of African American boys requires a sincere, authentic commitment to seeing the absolute best in them as no other group of students in schools are
vilified, scrutinized, and deemed a problem more than African American boys (Howard & Howard, 2021).

**School Leadership Roles**

**Zero Tolerance Policies and the School-to-Prison Pipeline**

As it relates to the implementation of zero tolerance policies in schools, principals have a direct impact on the school to prison pipeline as one of their leadership roles is to maintain safe schools through fair discipline practices. Skiba et al. (2007) and Wu et al. (1982) suggest that suspension rate variations from school-to-school cannot be solely explained by differences in student behavior, but partly caused by the attitudes held by school principals regarding the value of school suspension as a disciplinary practice. A study conducted by Skiba et al. (2007) surveyed public high school principals in Indiana on their endorsement of zero tolerance as a disciplinary philosophy regarding suspension rates in their schools. Participants were categorized into two groups: prevention orientation group and exclusion orientation group. Principals in the prevention orientation group believed in utilizing preventive disciplinary interventions and did not believe that suspension and expulsion improved the school climate. On the contrary, principals in the exclusion orientation group believed that zero tolerance policies helped maintain order and safety in schools with improvements in school climate and reductions in discipline problems. Consequently, principal attitudes reflected their schools’ disciplinary practices as principals in the preventive group had significantly lower rates of out of school suspension and expulsion due to being less likely to suspend students for nonviolent offenses and principals in the expulsion group had higher suspension rates and a greater racial disparity in suspensions. In addition to principals’ attitudes toward the implementation of zero tolerance policies, principals’ standpoint on appropriate and effective classroom management is also a factor within their
schools’ disciplinary patterns. Brackett et al. (2011), Losen (2011), and Nishioka (2013), suggest that principals should address the issue of poor classroom management by providing teachers with professional development on culturally responsive classroom management and implementing progressive discipline to ensure safety of all students.

Most teachers employed in the United States are female and white, with 84% of the teaching force consisting of white teachers (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2011). Studies conducted by Monroe (2005) and Weinstein et al. (2004) revealed that white teachers regularly interpret African American students’ behaviors as inappropriate (e.g., overlapping speech as disrespect, play fighting as authentic aggression, and humor as valid insults) when the actions are not intended to be so. For that reason, a cultural mismatch exists in the classroom between teachers and African American students. (Davis, 2009). This cultural disconnect is also maintained as teachers view African American male students through a deficit perspective (Lewis et al., 2008). The school to prison pipeline is one symptom of the impact of cultural deficit thinking in U.S. schools and teacher education programs (Hamer & Johnson, 2021). Because of limited preparation in culturally relevant pedagogies and classroom management, white teachers enter and leave in-service teaching with deficit thinking about African American boys (Bryan, 2017). Recent literature suggests that teachers’ struggle with classroom management may in fact be a result of problems with curriculum and pedagogy and the challenge to engage learners of diverse backgrounds (Feiman-Nemser, 2003). Under-prepared teachers may in fact do more harm than good, particularly by adopting uncritically the roles and practice of surveillance and behavior management that bolster the school-to-prison pipeline (Raible, J. & Irizarry, J.G., 2010). Scholars have studied the importance of teachers’ engagement in culturally responsive classroom management (CRCM) practices to prepare white pre-service
teachers to support African American and other students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and to dismantle inequitable school disciplinary practices which lead to the school-to-prison pipeline (Bryan, 2017). Culturally responsive classroom management (CRCM) practices include: (a) teachers’ ability to recognize their biases and stereotypes understand students’ cultural background; (b) teachers’ ability to build strong relationships with students inside and outside of the classroom; (c) teachers’ ability to build caring classroom environments with emphasizes the importance of teaching and learning; (d) teachers’ ability to value students’ voice and opinions to facilitate the classroom; (e) teachers’ ability to teach with assertiveness; and (f) teachers’ ability to emphasize and establish clear expectations and to teach in an assertive manner (Brown, 2009; Durden et al., 2015).

In addition to principals and teachers, school counselors also have a role in the implementation of zero-tolerance policies and the school-to-prison pipeline. School counselors support the healthy development of K-12 students by advocating for systemic changes to maximize academic, career, and social/emotional outcomes (American Counseling Association, 2014; American School Counselor Association, 2019). School discipline issues and its consequences are major barriers to success for some students as suspensions and arrests reduce the likelihood of graduation and career development (Skiba et al., 2014). Because school counselors support the development of all students, they must pay specific attention to the students who are involved in school disciplinary incidents and seek ways to maximize their success (Welfare et al., 2021). School counselors must promote positive student behaviors by helping students foster social and emotional tools such as communication and conflict resolution skills as well as advocate for behavioral at-risk students at the school and student level (Bruns et al., 2005). These school leaders are well positioned to advocate for changes in how student
behavioral problems are perceived and addressed in schools (Belser et al., 2016; Brown et al., 2019). Even though school counselors are not involved in meting out disciplinary consequences, school counselors do serve as resources and consultants for administration, teacher, staff, students, and parents with issues related to the disciplinary process (ASCA, 2019; Cowan et al., 2013). By utilizing a multi-tiered approach of direct counseling services, as well as collaboration and consultation to plan an active, informed, and intentional role in school discipline, school counselors can support the mission of the school (i.e., increasing graduation rate, decreasing dropout rate, decreasing truancy, etc.) and help decrease disparities in the school to prison pipeline (Belser et al., 2016; Cowan et al., 2013). For some students, preventing school discipline problems may be the most important way to maximize academic achievement, career readiness, and social/emotional development and disrupt the perpetuation of systemic oppression (Ratts et al., 2007). All things considered, school leaders, such as principals, teachers, and counselors, play an important role in the implementation of zero tolerance policies, as well as the prevention of the school to prison pipeline phenomenon.

**Academic Achievement Gap**

School leaders have a direct impact on the current academic achievement gap as leadership in the education system plays a central role in facilitating equal grounds for all the learners to achieve their academic potential, especially African American male students (Cooper, 2013; Tatum & Muhammad, 2012). Greer and Webb (2020), Moore III et al. (2009), and Uwah et al., (2009) argue that the academic achievement gap is due, in part, to other in-school factors affecting African American males such as peer dynamics, interactions with staff, and institutional culture. Research conducted by Ladson-Billings and Tate (2016) indicates that school leaders are key factors in learners’ academic achievement, especially school principals as
immediate leaders in schools. Shatzer and colleagues (2014) believe that principals are expected to be impartial in all the decisions they make by acknowledging diversity within the institutions and work forward achieving a common goal for all: academic success. When principals show impartiality in making decisions, where they favor some students while oppressing others, then the oppressed students tend to develop negative attitudes toward the school, which further negatively impacts their performance (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2016; Nieto, 2015). School principals are viewed as the ultimate school leaders whose influence on student performance cannot be underestimated as they are expected to guide and lead other school leaders such as teachers and counselors (Godfrey, 2016; Grissom et al., 2015). In addition, school principals are responsible for ensuring student centered learning in their schools by managing the diversity within the learning environment and meeting the specific needs of all students (Lonergan et al., 2012; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012; Nieto, 2015).

Teachers’ perceptions have a direct impact on academic success for all students (Marsh & Noguera, 2018; McCray et al., 2015). For African American male students, the current academic achievement gap is a direct result of stereotypes and teacher misperceptions impacting the classroom learning environment, as well as foreshadowing their academic potential and longevity (James, 2012; Love, 2014; Lynn et al., 2010; Marsh & Noguero, 2018; McCray et al., 2015). The concept of deficit thinking, when teachers deem minority students as unintelligible with little value to offer and contribute to the overall learning process and classroom dynamics, also influences the current academic achievement gap for this special population (McCray et al., 2015). Several scholars have reported that deficit thinking by white teachers is one of the most powerful forces working against students of color (Hale, 2001; Milner, 2006; Thompson, 2004). It is imperative that educators shift away from the historical deficit-based approaches, which
focuses on the weaknesses of groups or individual, and try to incorporate best practices in learning for students of all races, colors, and socioeconomic backgrounds (Bemak & Chung, 2005; Ratts et al., 2007). Education professionals who work with students of color must be familiar with their students’ culture before they are able to fully understand student behaviors and learning (Neville & Mobley, 2001). The dreams, hopes, and futures of Black male students are tied to their teachers’ perceptions as children live up or down to teachers’ expectations (Love, 2014; White & Cotton, 2009).

As it relates to the current academic achievement gap for African American male students, school counselors uphold the professional duties to (a) collect and analyze data to identify areas of success or gaps between and among different groups of students in achievement, attendance, discipline and opportunities; (b) educate school officials on how students’ cultural, social and economic background may affect their academic achievement, behavior, relationships, and overall performance in school; and (c) collaborate with administrators, teachers, and other staff in the school and district to ensure culturally responsive curricula and student-centered instruction (ASCA, 2019). It is important for school counselors to effectively address the needs of African American male students who may be experiencing poor academic outcomes due to systemic racism by creating culturally meaningful programs and interventions to meet their academic needs and push them to reach their full academic potential (Greer & Webb, 2020; Grover, 2005). Greer and Webb (2020) believe that school counselors play a pivotal role in helping students feel more empowered and engaged in curriculum that is not culturally tailored to fit their academic needs, which describes the current academic problem for African American male students. Schools must be willing to accept that there are approaches to teaching and learning, as well as ways of looking at the world, that are unique to Black males
From this, it can be deduced that, school leaders, such as principals, teachers, and school counselors, play an important role in the academic success of African American students.

**School Climate**

Many researchers believe that principals have a critical role in building a positive school climate (Fullan, 2002; Howard, 2010; Kunjufu, 2013). As ultimate leaders of the school, principals serve as the ultimate role model for both students and teachers to emulate (Whitehead, Boshcee, & Decker, 2012). Principals should possess the qualities and characteristics of a good leader by fostering a positive school climate that upholds cultural values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors with respect to diversity (Bowman, 2012; Shatzer et al., 2014). Within a negative school climate, Shatzer et al. (2014) believes that principals have the ultimate responsibility of changing the school climate to suit every student within the school. Principals can improve school climate by understanding their role in the school environment and working to improve them (Sweeney & Winter, 1994). Not only do principals set the tone for effective learning, but principals also set the tone for school relationships, amongst educators and between students, to build an inclusive and positive school climate, which promotes student belongingness and connectedness (Muijs & Harris, 2007; Tajasom & Ahmad, 2011; Tschannen-Moran, 2014). A lack of belongingness and connectedness in school can account for increased rates of dropouts, academic failure, and students displaying disruptive behaviors in schools (Hawkins, 2018). Ultimately, principals’ initial impact extends to teachers who strive to contribute to the positive school climate by following suit and implementing culturally responsive instructional practices while promoting positive student perceptions, which directly impacts the academic success of students, especially African American males (Fullan, 2010; Marsh & Noguera, 2018; McCray et al., 2015).
Boston and Warren (2017) believe that a positive school environment cultivates a culture of acceptance for all racial groups with positive teacher-student relationships being a focal point in the classrooms. The teacher-student relationship is critical and lies at the heart of educating all students (Hawkins, 2018). When these relationships are caring, affirming, and supportive, the effect on students can be profound (Cassidy & Bates, 2005). In addition to implementing culturally responsive classroom management (CRCM) to ensure fairness regarding discipline, teachers also implement culturally relevant teaching to foster strong positive teacher-student relationships in the classroom setting. Byrd (2016) believes that culturally relevant teaching centers students’ culture in teaching practice through three primary approaches: high expectations, promoting cultural competence, and promoting critical consciousness. Culturally relevant teachers create classroom climates that are respectful and inclusive and help students value and understand the cultures of their peers (Byrd, 2016). A significant factor in contributing to school success is the presence or absence of trusting, caring, supportive relationships between teachers and students (Meier, 2002). When students feel they can trust their teachers, they build confidence in adults who are entrusted to protect, nurture, and teach them in order to develop healthy identities (Hawkins, 2018).

As it relates to school climate and African American male students, school counselors uphold the professional duties to (a) act as systems change agents to create an environment promoting and supporting student success and development; (b) provide support for students, including individual and small-group counseling, during times of transition, heightened stress, critical change, or other situations impeding student success and safety; and (c) maintain and communicate high expectations for every student, regardless of cultural, social or economic background (ASCA, 2019). With that in mind, one area of emerging concern for African
American male students is the student-counselor relationship (Bryan & Gallant, 2012). Research suggests that most counselors are not adequately prepared to counsel African American male students in the urban school setting due to lacking cultural knowledge and understanding (Owens et al., 2009). Nevertheless, a quality relationship between the counselor and student is critical, but it may be especially important for African American males (Bailey & Moore, 2004; Moore, 2000; Moore et al., 2008). Research conducted by Moore et al. (2005) and Moore (2006) suggest that school counselors who are culturally competent and able to communicate high expectations are more likely to foster meaningful relationships with African American male students than those who are not culturally competent. When school counselors are not culturally competent and not able to communicate high expectations, African American male students are often negativity impacted (Moore & Owen, 2008). School counselors are uniquely positioned to positively affect African American male students’ academic performance, career development, and social-emotional growth (Martin, 2002; Moore & Owens, 2008). Moreover, school counselors can mediate the risks African American males face by developing a school counseling program that offers responsive services that support academic and personal/social development within a cultural context (House & Sears, 2002). Given these points, principals, teachers, and school counselors play an important role in creating, as well as maintaining, positive school climates for African American male students.

**Theoretical Framework**

This section introduces the theoretical framework that is associated with this study as it relates to race, gender, and systemic racism. Critical Race Theory (CRT) is an academic framework that examines how systems, policies, and the law perpetuate systemic racism (Jones, 2021). CRT has five major tenets: (a) racism is ordinary and pervasive in society; (b) the idea of
an interest convergence (the notion that whites will support racial injustice to the extent they will benefit from it or that there is a “convergence” between whites and non-whites); (c) the social construction of race to the detriment of people of color; (d) the use of storytelling and counter-storytelling; and (e) whites have been primary beneficiaries of civil rights legislation (Bell, 1980; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1998). The primary premise of CRT is that racism is a pervasive part of American culture, and is not an aberrant occurrence (Bhattacharya, 2017). CRT scholars believe that racism is all-encompassing with white dominance so embedded in legal, educational, and political organizations that it remains nearly unrecognizable (Solorzano et al., 2006). CRT seeks to contest racism by challenging dominant narratives about race and gender and identifying possibilities for liberation and social change (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004). In essence, CRT aims to understand why racial inequities exist in society with intentions to mitigate those inequities at the root cause. (Jones, 2021; Lynn & Parker, 2006).

Although CRT began with a focus on issues of race and racism in the law, educators have begun to use CRT to address issues of discrimination and inequities in the education system and explain the pervasive role of race and racism in the classroom (Howard, 2008; Moss & Singh, 2015). This theoretical framework allows educators to conceptualize how the intersections of race and gender influence achievement as it relates to school discipline, school leader perception, curriculum bias, and school structure (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Howard, 2008; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). CRT posits that labeling African American males as underachievers, amongst other things, is a direct effect of the pervasive structure of institutional racism engrained in American society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). In addition, CRT insists that race, racism, and class inhibit the academic opportunities of African American males as they face constant barriers to their schooling, such as microaggressions and white privilege (Howard, 2008; Solorazano &
Yosso, 2001). For this phenomenological study, Critical Race Theory will be utilized as an analytical tool to explore the potential stereotypes and biases of school leaders, as it relates to African American male students, and its impact on their school interactions and experiences.

**Statement of the Problem**

In American society, the African American population is often misinterpreted and misunderstood. Within this special population, African American males have experienced different life struggles due to their intersectional identity of race and gender. The media has played a pivotal role in creating, as well as maintaining, negative and unbalanced perceptions of African American males. Mainstream society has disseminated negative perceptions of African American males and intensified the evident disproportionality across a variety of domains for this population. This societal phenomenon has become prevalent in the education system as it begins the cycle of perceived stereotypes and exposes African American male students to school experiences that are influenced by personal biases and discrimination. What is perplexing is the intensity and persistence in which the social ills continue to have a deleterious effect on Black males well into adulthood in ways that it does not affect other populations (Howard, 2013). Schools are tremendously potent socializing institutions that operate as microcosms of the larger society; this means that many of society’s common-sense notions, including those about race, exist and are reproduced within schools (Washington, 2016).

In the education system, African American male students are viewed as deviant, at-risk, and dangerous (Love, 2014; Raby, 2002; Wotherspoon & Schissel, 2001). As a result, these students are excessively disciplined through suspension and expulsion, while criminalized with the zero-tolerance disciplinary policies. Prejudice and stereotype acceptance can lead to miscommunications between black students and white teachers; this is a possible contributor to
the racial disproportionality in suspension and expulsion (Heitzeg, 2009). The stereotypes of African American male students being uninterested in learning, remedial, and uneducable feed into the evident achievement gap between this population and their white counterparts (Brown, 2011; Cohen et al., 2009; Duncan, 2002; Gibbs, 1998; Kunjufu, 2016). Habitually labeled as academically at-risk in schools, African American males are seen as a detriment to the academic mission of the schools they attend (Washington, 2016). In addition, these stereotypes influence the undervalued need of implementing culturally relevant teaching and understanding, as well as cultural competence as educators. The stereotyped perception of African American male students being unemotional, detached, and tough impact their interactions with school leaders who perpetuate a hostile school climate that lacks empathy, understanding, and a sense of belonging. These stereotypes exist in relation to each other, and they serve to categorize, essentialize, and disenfranchise Black young male students as they navigate and negotiate the school system (James, 2012). In essence, these negative racial stereotypes have played a key role in sustaining the communication barriers between African American male students and their school leaders.

**Purpose and Significance of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of school leaders as it relates to the interactions with African American male students. This study is informative and exploratory in nature as it may expose the impact of negative stereotypes in the educational school setting on this special population. In addition to exploring the perceptions of school leaders, the purpose of this study is to also gain a better understanding of a positive school climate with the underlining goal to create safe spaces in the secondary school setting for African American male students. Understanding and addressing the educational barriers that racial and ethnic minority adolescents experience is a priority (Peguero et al., 2015). In essence, the findings of this study will highlight
the significance of safe spaces in the educational school setting and advance current literature on African American minority students.
Chapter 3

In American society, the African American male population is often misinterpreted and misunderstood. The media has played a pivotal role in creating, as well as maintaining, negative and unbalanced perceptions of African American males. This societal phenomenon has become prevalent in the education system as it begins the cycle of perceived stereotypes and exposes African American male students to school experiences that are influenced by personal biases and discrimination. These negative racial stereotypes have influenced the following school inequities: disciplinary patterns, academic achievement, and school climate. Stereotypes exist in relation to each other, and they serve to categorize, essentialize, and disenfranchise Black young male students as they navigate and negotiate the school system (James, 2012). These negative racial stereotypes have also impacted school relationships as communication barriers exist between African American male students and their school leaders. This research study explored the experiences of school leaders as it relates to the interactions with African American male students and exposed the impact of negative stereotypes in the educational school setting for this special population. This study also aimed to gain a better understanding of a positive school climate with the underlying goal to create safe spaces in the secondary school setting for African American male students.

Research Design Rationale

A qualitative phenomenological approach with a case study design was utilized for this study as it sought to gain school leaders’ perceptions of school experiences as it relates to the interactions between African American male students in single school setting. Phenomenology is a research approach that attempts to uncover what several participants who experience a phenomenon have in common (Creswell, 2007). The goal is to uncover both what and how
individuals experience a phenomenon. It is about studying the essences of conscious experiences and its meaning. A particular phenomenon that several individuals experience is the focus, which is to be understood in phenomenology in terms of the way it presents itself to the consciousness of the person who encounters it (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). In other words, the experience is shared from a first-person point of view and knowledge is gained by interpreting their unique experience. A phenomenological study attempts to understand people’s perceptions and perspectives relative to a particular situation (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019).

Within the field of education, the philosophical approach of phenomenology has been utilized as a tool to identify and maximize student learning, explore students’ school experiences and perceptions on current educational trends, and examine multiple relationships within the school setting between students, school leaders, and the educational environment (Savin-Baden & Major; 2013; Selvi, 2008; West, 2013). Phenomenology was initially developed to understand the phenomena of teaching and learning in a coherent way (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). A group of educationalists in Sweden produced seminal studies that introduced a new research method of conducting interviews to identify different levels of student understanding, which revealed various approaches to student learning (Savin-Baden & Major; 2013). This has been accepted and utilized in higher education today. The application of the phenomenological method in education has led to a phenomenological pedagogy (Selvi, 2008). Phenomenological pedagogy highlights the student-teacher relationship with emphasis on individuality in teaching and learning.

As phenomenology is within the qualitative research paradigm, one of its strengths is its ability to allow researchers to explore the views of homogeneous, as well as diverse groups of people, and reveal different perspectives within a group or community (Choy, 2014). Qualitative
research values and embodies unique experiences. In addition, this research inquiry is broad and open-ended with its flexible nature and allows participants to raise issues that matter most to them while driving the research study. Nevertheless, qualitative researchers don’t necessarily measure variables, at least not in the numerical sense of the word, but they need to ensure that their research is trustworthy, that data are collected ethically and accurately, and the findings are credible, plausible, and well-substantiated (Shenton, 2004). Qualitative researchers also can change and shift research directions, as needed, throughout the process. The methodology often involves an iterative and recursive process in which the researcher moves back and forth between data collection and data analysis (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019).

On the other hand, the open-endedness may also be one of its weaknesses as participants have more control over the content that becomes collected data. As a result, qualitative research may be time-consuming due to its need for intensive analysis of content through coding or the categorization of themes. Another major drawback of qualitative research is the researcher’s ability to interject personal experiences and jeopardize the study by influencing observations and responses. The potential downside of this instrument, the human mind, is that it can be biased by its preconceived theories and expectations, and such biases can adversely affect the quality of the data obtained (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019). Within a qualitative study, complete objectivity is impossible; therefore, qualitative researchers must adhere to the standard of confirmability by using such strategies as reflexivity, member checking, and audit trails. Finally, the findings in qualitative research are not as generalizable as the findings in quantitative research because qualitative research studies are purposeful in its sampling with hopes to explore specific populations with smaller sample sizes.
In regard to my research study, which is rooted within the field of education and counseling, a phenomenological approach was utilized to serve three purposes: (a) to gain school leaders’ perceptions of school experiences as it relates to the interactions with African American male students; (b) to gain a better understanding of a positive school climate with an underlying goal to create safe spaces; and (c) to expose the impact of negative stereotypes in the secondary school setting for African American male students. As stated by Peguero et al. (2015), understanding and addressing the educational barriers that racial and ethnic minority adolescents experience is a priority. The findings of this study provided the field of education with rich data regarding the need and significance of creating safe spaces for African American male students in the secondary school setting. In addition, the findings also provide the counseling profession with more opportunities for continued research, as well as insight that will be useful for school educators. Polkinghorne (1989) believes the ultimate goal of a phenomenological study should be, not only for the researcher but also for readers of the final research report, to provide a sense that “I understand better what it is like for someone to experience that” (p. 46).

**Case Study Design.** Case study research is described as a systematic investigation that is conducted in a natural setting where the contemporary case or phenomenon has embedded and interacted within its real-life social context, and where the boundary between the case and its context is unclear (Nilmanat and Kurniawan, 2021; Yin, 2012). It is a specific, complex, functioning entity that researchers are interested in not only for its uniqueness, but also its commonality. The case can be a person, family, community, program, decision, or an event that bounded in its system by time and place (Nilmanat & Kurniawan, 2021). In qualitative research design, the case study method allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events, such as individual life cycles, small group behavior,
organizational and managerial processes, school performance, and interpersonal relations in real contexts (Cohen et al., 2007; Venze & Gray, 2020; Yin, 2012;). For this study, a phenomenological case study approach was utilized to gain an in-depth and holistic perspective on the school interactions between school leaders and African American male students in their natural setting – one public high school. More so, this approach also granted this study the opportunity to investigate real-life events such as small group behavior (school leaders), school performance (African American male students), and interpersonal relations (school relationships) in real-life events (a public high school).

**Theoretical Framework**

This phenomenological study is grounded in Critical Race Theory (CRT), which is an academic framework that examines how systems, policies, and the law perpetuate systemic racism (Jones, 2021). CRT aims to understand why racial inequities exist in society with intentions to mitigate those inequities at the root cause. (Jones, 2021; Lynn & Parker, 2006). Although CRT began with a focus on issues of race and racism in the law, educators have begun to use CRT to address issues of discrimination and inequities in the education system and explain the pervasive role of race and racism in the classroom (Howard, 2008; Moss & Singh, 2015).

This theoretical framework provides a strong foundation to investigate how institutional structures, practices, policies, and processes help uphold inequalities for students of color (Love, 2004). CRT allows educators to conceptualize how the intersections of race and gender influence achievement as it relates to school discipline, school leader perception, curriculum bias, and school structure (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Howard, 2008; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). In addition, CRT insists that race, racism, and class inhibit the academic opportunities of African American males as they face constant barriers to their schooling, such as microaggressions and
white privilege (Howard, 2008; Solorazano & Yosso, 2001). As an analytical tool within this study, Critical Race Theory was utilized to explore the stereotypes and biases of school leaders and its direct impact on the school experiences for African American male students.

**School Selection and Demographics**

A phenomenological case study approach was utilized within this study to gain an in-depth and holistic perspective on the school interactions between school leaders and African American male students in their natural setting – one public high school. This particular public high school was selected for this study due to its identification as a Title I school. Title I is a federally funded program for school districts that is designed to improve academic achievement of disadvantaged students (United States Department of Education, 2004). The basic premise of Title I stipulate that schools with large concentrations of low-income students will receive supplemental funds to assist in meeting students’ educational goals (United States Department of Education, 2004). To qualify for Title I funds, students from low-income families must make up at least 40% of the school’s enrollment (United States Department of Education, 2018). In other words, Title I funds are distributed to high poverty schools based on the percentage of students who qualify for free or reduced lunches and schools considered to be highest at risk.

For the 2021-2022 academic school year, the total school enrollment consisted of 1,379 students with 40.5% identifying as direct certified for free benefits. Seventy-five percent, 1,033 students, of this student population identifies as Black or African-American and the next highest student population identifies as Hispanic or Latino at 20% with 276 students. The African American male student population consisted of 514 students with 39.3% identifying as direct certified. With the selection of this particular school, this study had the opportunity to investigate real-life events between school leaders and African American male students within their natural
setting, a Title I school. The selection of this school also supported the theoretical framework driving this study, Critical Race Theory, which insists that socioeconomic status is one of the key factors inhibiting the academic opportunities of African American males (Howard, 2008; Solorazano & Yosso, 2001). Last but not least, this particular high school resides in the largest school district in the state of Tennessee and stands as the largest Title I school located in the Southeast region of Memphis.

**Research Questions**

Phenomenology aims to highlight the perceptions and experiences of individuals from their own perspectives (Ersoy, 2016). It is a philosophic method for questioning and not answering or determining conclusions. A phenomenological study tries to answer the question “What is it like to experience such-and-such?” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019). Creswell (1998) recommends starting with one overarching question and having no more than seven total questions. The overarching question of this study places school leaders at the focal point of a current social phenomenon in the education system and challenges them to become agents of change to create safe spaces for African American male students. The research questions within this study explored the experiences of school leaders as it relates to the interactions with African American male students and the impact of negative stereotypes in the educational school setting. The overarching research question directing this inquiry is: What are the experiences of school leaders as it relates to the school interactions with African American male students?

**Sample and Population**

For this phenomenological case study, purposive sampling was conducted to collect participants. Most sampling in qualitative studies is purposive sampling – that is, it entails choosing those individuals or objects that will yield the most information about the topic under
investigation (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019). The targeted population for this study was school leaders. The criteria were that participants must be: (a) principal, (b) teacher, or (c) school counselor. This research study places school leaders at the focal point to become agents of change as principals, school counselors, and teachers have an ethical duty to serve all students. This criterion was set specifically for principals, teachers, and school counselors due to their direct contact, as well as immediate impact, with students daily. As leaders of the school, principals serve as the ultimate role model for both students and teachers to emulate (Whitehead, Boshcee, & Decker, 2012). Principals should possess the qualities and characteristics of a good leader, and role model, by fostering a positive school climate that upholds cultural values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors with respect to diversity (Bowman, 2012; Shatzer et al., 2014). Furthermore, principals’ initial impact extends to teachers who strive to contribute to the positive school climate by following suit and implementing culturally responsive instructional practices while promoting positive student perceptions, which directly impacts the academic success of students, especially African American males (Fullan, 2010; Marsh & Noguera, 2018; McCray et al., 2015).

For African American male students, the current academic achievement gap is a direct result of stereotypes and teacher misperceptions impacting the classroom learning environment, as well as foreshadowing their academic potential and longevity (James, 2012; Love, 2014; Lynn et al., 2010; Marsh & Noguero, 2018; McCray et al., 2015). Teachers’ perceptions have a direct impact on academic success for all students (Marsh & Noguera, 2018; McCray et al., 2015). The dreams, hopes, and futures of Black male students are tied to their teachers’ perceptions as children live up or down to teachers’ expectations (Love, 2014; White & Cotton, 2009). In relation to school counseling, a quality relationship between the school counselor and student is
crucial for all students, but it may be especially important for African American males (Bailey & Moore, 2004; Moore, 2000; Moore et al., 2008). School counselors are uniquely positioned to positively affect African American male students’ academic performance, career development, and social-emotional growth (Martin, 2002; Moore & Owens, 2008). School counselors can also mediate the risks African American males face by developing a school counseling program that offers responsive services that support academic and personal/social development within a cultural context (House & Sears, 2002). Given these points, school leaders – principals, teachers, and school counselors – were selected for this study to serve as change agents due to their direct impact on the school experiences for African American male students.

The projected sample size for this study was 5 to 10 participants. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2019), the sample size in phenomenological studies is generally between 5 and 25 participants. This sample size also allowed for purposive sampling to be conducted until data saturation was reached. The recruitment procedure began with a review of the school directory to identify school leaders who meet the criteria and followed by direct contact via email from the primary researcher. A recruitment letter was sent via email (See Appendix A). Selected participants received a $25 gift card from Amazon. Participants were required to complete an informed consent. The informed consent was informative and explicit with research purposes and its procedures, the duration of the study, potential risks and benefits, confidentiality, rights to privacy, and researcher’s contact information (See Appendix B). In addition to the informed consent, participants were also required to complete a demographic form, via Qualtrics, with the following information: leadership role, age, gender, race, level of education, years of employment at current high school, and total years of educational experience. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2019), the people being studied must know the nature of the study and be
willing participants in it (i.e., informed consent), and any data collected should not be traceable back to individuals, thus keeping personal data confidential and maintaining participants’ rights to privacy. Participation in this study was voluntary. To protect identifiable information, participants were labeled by their school leader title and assigned a number to indicate their interview order.

**Data Collection and Instrumentation**

Within this phenomenological approach, a case study method was utilized to collect data in a single school setting. According to Errasti-Ibarrondo et al. (2018), phenomenological research methods in the social science field aim to gather lived experience descriptions through interviews, observations, writings, and existing literature. In case studies, data sources are individuals who can reflect on the phenomenon, holistically, and interviews are conducted to reveal experiences within the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). For this study, semi-structured individual interviews were conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the unique school experiences of school leaders within a public high school. Semi-structured interviews would allow the flexibility, for example, to change the order of questions, simplify questions, and to probe the interviewees more deeply about particular topics (Cohen et al., 2007). Interview questions were open-ended, and an interview guide was utilized, as needed, to maintain consistency (See Appendix C). Probe questions were also introduced as needed. Interviews were held via an online platform such as Zoom. Participants signed up for an interview time slot through the Signup Genius platform. The estimated timeframe for each individual interview was 60 minutes. Interviews were video and audio recorded via Zoom to collect data. During interviews, analytical memos were created to notate initial interpretations. Leedy and Ormrod (2019) believe that analytical memos might involve discussions of emerging themes in people’s
actions or statements, or they might make note of initial hunches and intuitions that a researcher should pursue through further observations or interview questions. After conducting interviews, participants had the opportunity to review their transcribed interview dialogue and add or delete entries in the transcript to accurately reflect their intended responses. The coding process began after member checking with all research participants.

Data Analysis

Within a qualitative design, data collection, data analysis, and data interpretation are intertwined. Analysis is an iterative process in which researchers move back and forth among data collection and data analysis/interpretation, with initial analyses and interpretations driving later data collection (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019). For this study, video recordings were converted into transcriptions via NVivo Transcription software, and handwritten analytical memos were converted into word-processing documents. Data was stored into desktop e-folders and labeled by school leader title and order of interview to protect participants’ identifiable information. Hard copies of transcriptions were also labeled by school leader title and order and stored in a locked file cabinet.

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2019), a primary goal of coding in any qualitative study is to identity patterns and thematic threads within the entire data set. For this study, a thematic analysis method was utilized for the coding process. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe thematic analysis, an independent qualitative descriptive approach, as a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns and themes within data. In other words, thematic analysis is the search for and identification of common threads that extend across an entire interview or set of interviews (DeSantis & Noel Ugarriza, 2000). As it relates to the phenomenological approach of this study, thematic analysis is relevant to phenomenology as it stresses subjects’ perceptions,
feelings, and experiences subjectively (Chang & Wang, 2021). The aim of thematic analysis is to consider how the reported information addresses a specific research question or invites a new conceptual or theoretical understanding (Lochmiller, 2021). The overarching research question of this study was grounded in the conceptual framework of Critical Race Theory. As an exploratory tool, thematic analysis can also be used to infer meaning about a phenomenon through the lens of a particular theoretical framework (Lochmiller, 2021). As such, the use of thematic analysis within this study demonstrates how CRT can be validated through the identification of repeated patterns in data as it aims to explore the current educational phenomenon between school leaders and African American male students.

Thematic analysis consists of six phases: familiarization of data, generating initial codes, searching for themes among codes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and producing the final report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the familiarization of data phase, researchers are expected to transcribe interviews and obtain the sense of the whole by reading the transcripts several times (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). In thematic analysis, researchers are also advised to consider both manifest and latent content (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Manifest content refers to the transcribed interviews, whereas latent content refers to the researchers’ interpretation of transcriptions and participants’ initial reactions and body language. Analytical memos notate latent content. As described by Braun and Clarke (2006), the analysis of latent content of data is an inseparable part of the manifest analysis approach. For this phase, NVivo Transcription software was utilized to assist with interview transcription.

The next phase, generating initial codes, began with a deductive orientation to coding as this approach is theory driven. A deductive approach involves a priori design in which the researcher defines parameters for coding information within a given theoretical framework and
then classifies content into categories based on a specified coding procedure (McKibben et al., 2020). For this study, initial codes were derived from the theoretical framework, Critical Race Theory. A codebook, a list of codes with code definitions, was created to assist with the initial coding process and identify codes in interview transcriptions. For pilot testing, the research team transcribed one interview, independently, and met briefly to compare and discuss the coding results. After finalizing the codebook, all transcribed interviews were coded accordingly. The codebook was created with Microsoft Excel. To begin the third phase, searching for themes among codes, a categorization matrix was created and utilized as a tool for collating codes into themes. A categorization matrix consists of main themes and related subthemes, which is also deductively derived from existing theory (Assarroudu et al., 2018; McKibben et al., 2020). Codes were placed into designated themes accordingly. Categorization matrixes were also created with Microsoft Excel. The next phase, reviewing themes, is characterized by a deeper review of each theme, and considering whether the data supports the context. Themes can be combined, refined, separated, or discarded. Thematic maps were generated during this phase. A thematic map is a visual presentation of themes, codes, and their relationships (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). As one part of data analysis, it helps with reviewing themes and achieving the aim of identifying coherent but distinctive themes (Ryan & Bernard, 2000; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Microsoft Word was utilized to create thematic maps. The fifth phase, defining themes, is the final refinement stage of thematic analysis. This phase is characterized by an ongoing analysis of each theme and identifying the overall story of the data. Clear definitions and names of each theme were generated to capture the essence of each theme and its relation to one another. To illustrate this, thematic maps were compared and finalized.
The final phase in thematic analysis is producing the final report, which is the selection of vivid extract examples to relate back to the research question and literature (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This phase is highlighted as the final opportunity of data analysis in thematic analysis (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). The final report was illustrated and produced with the creation of this dissertation. In addition, the final phase also includes reporting the validity of the analysis. Credibility of research findings pertains to how well the categories cover the data (Granaheim & Lundman, 2004). To ensure credibility and transferability, data was analyzed, and simplified, into categories that reflected the research study by the creation of a categorization matrix and utilization of a codebook. Tables were utilized to showcase the categorization matrix and codebook. A detailed report of the data analysis process and its procedures also ensured dependability. Furthermore, tables were utilized to display the analysis process and procedures, as well as demonstrate the link between the data and results. In addition, a research team was utilized for all phases of the thematic analysis. The research team consisted of two individuals: myself, a current doctoral candidate, and my colleague, a current doctoral student, within the same counselor education and supervision doctoral program. The research team was utilized for interrater reliability, which minimizes researcher bias and enhances research credibility.

**Ethical Considerations**

Most of the research in the counseling and education fields is characterized using human subjects. Most ethical issues in research fall into one of four categories: protection from harm, voluntary and informed participation, right to privacy, and honesty with professional colleagues (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019). The primary focus of the IRB is to protect human participants by requiring researchers to follow federal guidelines and ethics. According to Flamez et al. (2017), there are always risks in human subjects’ research. However, the risks should not be greater than
the normal risks of day-to-day activity and should not outweigh the benefits of the research study. The possible benefit of this study was the creation of safe spaces for the African American male student population in the secondary school setting.

Participation in this study was voluntary. Within a cultural context, minority individuals may have feelings of distrust when it comes to research and counseling. It was imperative to be explicit with research purposes and its procedures within the informed consent. It was also imperative to be honest and patient with participants throughout the study. For confidentiality and privacy, participants were labeled by their school leader role and assigned a number to indicate their interview order. Interview videos and analytical memos were saved and stored, on a computer device with password security, by individualized labels, school leader title and order of interview, to protect participants’ identifiable information. Hard copies of interview transcriptions and analytical memos were also stored in a locked file cabinet. Finally, for member checking, participants had the opportunity to review their transcribed interview dialogue and add or delete entries in the transcript.

**Role of the Researcher**

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2019), qualitative research requires the researcher to make significant decisions and judgements throughout the data analysis process. To enhance the overall trustworthiness within this study, I strove for rigorous subjectivity by ensuring that data analyses and interpretations are credible and transferable, documenting data procedures with dependability and confirmability, and identifying personal biases with reflexivity. Patton (2015) also identified six aspects of trustworthiness: prolonged engagement, persistent engagement, triangulation, peer debriefing, member checks, and audit trail. For this research study, I implemented the following strategies: forming a research team, researcher reflexivity,
triangulation, member checking, and audit trails. A research team was utilized for all six phases of the thematic analysis process. The research team consisted of two individuals: myself, as a current doctoral research candidate, and my colleague, a current doctoral student, within the same counselor education and supervision doctoral program. The research team was utilized for interrater reliability, which minimizes researcher bias and enhances research credibility. I engaged in researcher reflexivity by writing reflective memos or journaling to address my positionality and identified personal biases or preconceived notions. A good case study researcher has a firm grasp of the issues studied through an unbiased approach (Yin, 2003). To maintain an unbiased approach, I became aware of the potential connection between my research topic and intersectional identity. I am an African American woman who is also a professional school counselor. As a minority, I am aware of the research topic as it relates to the societal phenomenon of stereotypes and its impact on perceptions and individual treatment, as well as the racial plight for African Americans. My experience and knowledge are assets as well as vulnerabilities because I have an emotional connection to African American male students, and I personally believe in the importance of safe spaces in schools. Coupled with my personal connection to this topic as a minority woman and professional school counselor, research for this study was also conducted at my current place of employment. Therefore, it was imperative to engage in reflexivity and bracketing as the primary researcher of this study. Bracketing is an essential tent of phenomenology that requires researchers to set aside personal theories, research presuppositions, inherent knowledge, and assumptions as separate from what is observed in the research process (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013; Creswell, 2007). With bracketing, I strived to separate my personal experiences of the phenomenon, racism, and the impact of stereotypes, from interfering with the research process and mitigating the potential deleterious effects by
maintaining a personal journal, as needed, during the extent of this study. I also became aware of the impact of dual roles and relationships, as researcher and colleague, while conducting interviews and interpreting participants’ responses. Analytical memos were created during interviews to notate latent content such as my interpretations of transcriptions and participants’ initial reactions and body language. A research team was utilized for all phases of the data analysis process to minimize potential biases during transcript interpretation, coding, and formation of themes. Researcher reflexivity and bracketing were utilized during the entire research process. Nevertheless, my ethnic identity and counseling experience led me to pursue this topic with hopes to improve the school experiences for African American male students, enhance professional competence, and inform current literature on minority students.

Triangulation was implemented by collecting multiple forms of data – interviews transcriptions, analytical memos, school profile data – to find consistencies or inconsistencies within the data. Member checking and an audit trail was utilized to serve as “checks and balances” and enhance the overall credibility within this research study. To member check, I asked participants to review their transcribed dialogue for accuracy and feedback. Understanding, as well as validating, their unique school experiences is the ultimate goal. An audit trail of data collection and data analysis procedures was created to record research activities, in detail, for continued research and transferability. Ultimately, the role of the researcher in a qualitative study is to uncover multiple meanings and often divergent perspectives that can help us all better understand an issue, process, belief system, or experience (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019).
Chapter 4

In the education system, African American male students are viewed as deviant, at-risk, and dangerous (Love, 2014; Raby, 2002; Wotherspoon & Schissel, 2001). As a result, these students are excessively disciplined through suspension and expulsion, while being criminalized with zero-tolerance disciplinary policies. The stereotypical views of African American male students being uninterested in learning, remedial, and uneducable feed into the evident achievement gap between this population and their white counterparts (Brown, 2011; Cohen et al., 2009; Duncan, 2002; Gibbs, 1998; Kunjufu, 2016). These stereotypes also influence the undervalued need of implementing culturally relevant teaching and understanding, as well as cultural competence in educators. Moreover, the stereotyped perceptions of African American male students being unemotional, detached, and tough impact their interactions with school leaders who perpetuate a hostile school climate that lacks empathy, understanding, and a sense of belonging. As stated by Peguero et al. (2015), understanding and addressing the educational barriers that racial and ethnic minority adolescents experience is a priority.

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of school leaders as it relates to their interactions with African American male students. This study is informative and exploratory in nature as it may expose the impact of negative stereotypes in the educational school setting on this special population. In addition to exploring the perceptions of school leaders, the purpose of this study was to also gain a better understanding of a positive school climate with the underlying goal to create safe spaces in the secondary school setting for African American male students. This study provided the education field with data regarding the need and significance of creating safe spaces for African American male students as well as advancing existing literature on minority students in the counseling field.
**Research Questions**

For this study, a phenomenological case study approach was utilized to gain an in-depth and holistic perspective on the school interactions between school leaders and African American male students in their natural setting – one public high school. This public high school was selected for this study due to its identification as a Title I school. In addition, this school resides in the largest school district in the state of Tennessee and stands as the largest Title I school located in the Southeast region of Memphis. The premise of Title I stipulates that schools with large concentrations of low-income students will receive supplemental funds to assist in meeting students’ educational goals (United States Department of Education, 2004). Title I funds are distributed to high poverty schools based on the percentage of students who qualify for free or reduced lunches and schools considered to be highest at risk. More so, this phenomenological case study approach provides this study with the opportunity to investigate real-life events including small group behaviors of school leaders, school performances of African American male students, and the interpersonal relationships between these two populations in a real-life setting of a public high school.

This phenomenological study is grounded in Critical Race Theory (CRT), which is an academic framework that examines how systems, policies, and the law perpetuate systemic racism (Jones, 2021). Although CRT began with a focus on issues of race and racism in the law, educators have begun to use CRT to address issues of discrimination and inequities in the education system and explain the pervasive role of race and racism in the classroom (Howard, 2008; Moss & Singh, 2015). CRT allows educators to conceptualize how the intersections of race and gender influence achievement as it relates to school discipline, school leader perception, curriculum bias, and school structure (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Howard, 2008; Solorzano &
Yosso, 2001). The overarching question of this study places school leaders at the focal point of a current social phenomenon in the education system and challenges them to become agents of change to create safe spaces for African American male students. The research questions within this study explored the experiences of school leaders as it relates to interactions with African American male students and the impact of negative stereotypes in the educational school setting. The overarching research question directing this inquiry is: What are the experiences of school leaders as it relates to the school interactions with African American male students?

**School Selection and Demographics**

A phenomenological case study approach was utilized within this study to gain an in-depth and holistic perspective on the school interactions between school leaders and African American male students in their natural setting – one public high school. This particular public high school was selected for this study due to its identification as a Title I school. To qualify for Title I funds, students from low-income families must make up at least 40% of the school’s enrollment (United States Department of Education, 2018). In other words, Title I funds are distributed to high poverty schools based on the percentage of students who qualify for free or reduced lunches and schools considered to be highest at risk. For the 2021-2022 academic school year, the total school enrollment consisted of 1,379 students with 40.5% identifying as direct certified for free benefits. The African American male student population consisted of 514 students with 39.3% identifying as direct certified. The selection of this school supported the theoretical framework driving this study, Critical Race Theory, which insists that socioeconomic status is one of the key factors inhibiting the academic opportunities of African American males (Howard, 2008; Solorazano & Yosso, 2001). Last but not least, this particular high school resides...
in the largest school district in the state of Tennessee and stands as the largest Title I school located in the Southeast region of Memphis.

Data Collection

For this study, semi-structured individual interviews were conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the unique school experiences of school leaders within a single public high school. Interview questions were open-ended, and an interview guide was utilized, as needed, to maintain consistency. Interviews were conducted and video recorded via Zoom within a three-week time period. The timeframe for each individual interview ranged from 45 to 60 minutes. Video recordings were converted into transcriptions via NVivo software. Participants were given pseudonyms to protect identifiable information. After conducting interviews, participants had the opportunity to review their transcribed interview dialogue and add or delete entries in the transcript to accurately reflect their intended responses.

Sample and Population

For this phenomenological case study, purposive sampling was conducted to collect participants. The targeted population for this study was school leaders. The criteria were that participants must be: (a) principal, (b) teacher, or (c) school counselor. This criterion was set due to their direct contact, as well as immediate impact, with students daily. Ten people signed up for this research study. Only 9 individuals were selected as participants with hopes to have 3 participants in each school leader category – principal, teacher, and school counselor. Despite this attempt, 1 individual was not able to participate in this research study due to personal matters. Overall, 8 individuals successfully completed this study. By the end of the data analysis process, data collected revealed similar themes and repetitive codes amongst research participants. Therefore, an additional research participant was not needed for this study and data
was saturated. Table 1 below lists participant demographics with emphasis on gender, race, and years at current school.

Table 1

**Participant Demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership Role</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Years at Current School</th>
<th>Total Years of Experiences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal 1</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>2 months</td>
<td>17 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal 2</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>1 month</td>
<td>16 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal 3</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>12 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 1</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>6 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 2</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>21 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Counselor 1</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>12 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Counselor 2</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>17 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Counselor 3</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>22 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data Analysis**

For this study, a thematic analysis method was utilized for the coding process. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe thematic analysis, an independent qualitative descriptive approach, as a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns and themes within data. The aim of thematic analysis is to consider how the reported information addresses a specific research question or invites a new conceptual or theoretical understanding (Lochmiller, 2021). The overarching research question of this study is grounded in the conceptual framework of Critical Race Theory. As an exploratory tool, thematic analysis can also be used to infer meaning about a phenomenon through the lens of a particular theoretical framework (Lochmiller, 2021). As such, the use of thematic analysis within this study demonstrates how CRT can be validated through the identification of repeated patterns in data as it aims to explore the current educational phenomenon between school leaders and African American male students. Thematic analysis
consists of six phases: familiarization of data, generating initial codes, searching for themes among codes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and producing the final report (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In phase one, the familiarization of data, interview recordings were transcribed using NVivo software, and transcriptions were read several times to obtain the sense of the whole interview. Analytical memos were also notated to capture researchers’ initial interpretations of transcriptions and participants’ reactions and body language. Phase two, generating initial codes, began with a deductive approach, which involved a priori design with defined parameters for coding information within a given theoretical framework to classify content into categories based on a specified coding procedure (McKibben et al., 2020). The theoretical framework, Critical Race Theory (CRT), was utilized to derive three initial codes: gender/racial inequities, systemic racism, and school institution. CRT addresses issues of discrimination and inequities in the education system and examines the connection between race and gender as it relates to school discipline, school leader perception, curriculum bias, and school structure. A codebook, a list of codes with code definitions, was created to assist with the initial coding process and identify codes in interview transcriptions. The three initial CRT terms, gender/racial inequities, systemic racism, and school institution, were expanded into three research study categories. Category 1 included the terms disciplinary patterns, school-to-prison pipeline, and drop-out. Category 2 included the terms academic achievement, curriculum and instruction, and socioeconomic status. Category 3 included the terms school climate, school practices and structure, and school leader perceptions. From these three research categories derived the final set of terms, which were coded into three stereotype sets – (1) deviant, at-risk, and dangerous, (2) uninterested in learning, remedial, and uneducable, and (3) detached, unemotional, and tough (See Appendix D). In phase
three, searching for themes among codes, a categorization matrix, which consists of main themes and related subthemes, was created, and utilized as a tool to collate codes into themes. Like the codebook, categorization matrixes are also derived from theory. For this study, three categorization matrixes were created, via Microsoft Excel, to organize code and themes by school leadership role – principal, teacher, and school counselor (See Appendices E, F, & G).

Phase four, reviewing themes, consisted of a deeper review of combining, refining, separating, and discarding themes. A thematic map, a visual presentation of themes, codes, and their relationships, was generated during this phase (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). For this phase, 9 thematic maps were initially created with 3 maps per leadership group (See Appendices H, I, J, K, L, M N, O & P). Phase five, defining themes, is the final refinement stage of thematic analysis and consisted of an ongoing analysis of each theme and establishing clear definitions and theme titles. During this phase, thematic maps were compared and finalized. As a result, the initial 9 thematic maps were refined into 3 final thematic maps (See Appendices Q, R, & S). The final phase in thematic analysis is producing the final report, which is the selection of vivid extract examples to relate back to the research question and literature (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The final phase also includes reporting the validity of the analysis. The final report is illustrated and produced within this dissertation by the implementation of a codebook, creation of categorization matrixes, thematic maps, and data tables, and the employment of a research team. Table 2 below presents the thematic analysis process utilized within this study and a description of analyses throughout each phase.
Table 2

**Thematic Analysis Process**

| Phase 1: Familiarization of Data | Transcribed interview recordings with NVivo  
|                               | Read transcriptions several times  
|                               | Highlighted key statements |
| Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes | Implemented a codebook  
|                               | Derived theoretical categories  
|                               | Finalized set of initial codes |
| Phase 3: Searching for Themes | Created categorization matrixes  
|                               | 3 matrixes for each school leader group |
| Phase 4: Reviewing Themes | Created thematic maps  
|                               | 9 thematic maps with 3 per school leader group |
| Phase 5: Defining Themes | Compared thematic maps  
|                               | Refined 9 maps to 3 final thematic maps |
| Phase 6: Producing the Final Report | Dissertation |

**Emerging Themes**

In this study, research questions explored the experiences of school leaders as they relate to interactions with African American male students as well as the impact of negative stereotypes in the educational school setting. Participants were specifically asked to share their initial feelings and thoughts regarding three stereotype sets: (a) deviant, at-risk, and dangerous; (b) uninterested in learning, remedial, and uneducable; and (c) detached, unemotional, and tough. The first stereotype set, deviant, at-risk, and dangerous, became one of the focal points within research interviews due to its impact on the excessive disciplinary patterns, regarding African American male students, and the school-to-prison pipeline effect. The second stereotype set, uninterested in learning, remedial, and uneducable, was emphasized due to its connection with low academic achievement for African American male students and the disconnect in academic learning. The third stereotype set, detached, unemotional, and tough, was introduced within research interviews to address the hostile school climate and unbalanced perceptions, regarding emotional expression, for African American male students. This research study utilized Critical
Race Theory as an analytical tool to explore the stereotypes and biases of school leaders and its direct impact on the school experiences for this special population. The underlying goals of this study were to discover why these stereotypes exist, how these stereotypes are portrayed in the secondary school setting, and ways to possibly eradicate or decrease the negative school experiences for African American male students. As a result of this analytical process, six research themes emerged: (1) positive role modeling through relationship building, (2) finding the why behind behavior, (3) a decrease in educational value, (4) struggles of a Title I school, (5) African American cultural upbringings, and (6) the act of being tough as a self-defense mechanism.

**Emerging Theme 1: Positive Role Modeling through Relationship Building**

School leader participants expressed their viewpoints on the current discipline problem as African American male students are disciplined more harshly and excessively with higher teacher referrals and punitive reprimands from administration. Principal 3 stated that “attitudes reflect leadership and school leaders should model what we expect students to do as the remedy/secret ingredient to the basis of discipline, especially for African American males, is working to build that positive modeling relationship.” In essence, school leaders should lead by example by demonstrating positive behavior and exceeding expectations. Teacher 2 stated that “a lot of students, especially African American males, don’t have a lot of positive role models...especially ones that treat them with dignity and respect. And when you treat people with respect, most of the time, you get the respect back and I think that’s the biggest ingredient to building relationships.” Both school leaders, Principal 3 and Teacher 2, believe that the current discipline problem can be improved by establishing positive student relationships with modeling behavior and treating them with respect and dignity. Additionally, School Counselor 2 described
his impact in role modeling by stating the possibility that he could “be the only positive male influence that they have so just being that advocate for them, even when they get in trouble, I can still be there to help them know that hey you messed up, which everybody does, but they still got somebody who is there for them.” For African American male students, a positive role model relationship is one that involves personal accountability as well. These quotes introduce the need for more positive school relationships, which includes mutual respect, between African American male students and school leaders as well as the significance of positive role modeling.

**Emerging Theme 2: Finding the Why Behind Behavior**

School leader participants also expressed their beliefs on taking a new approach before disciplining African American male students as they are often misunderstood as student individuals when it comes to interpreting their misbehavior and deviance. Principal 1 introduced the concept of a “due process” and the belief that it “is very important to give them an opportunity to speak and be heard.” She also stated that the effort of “trying to find a solution to the misconduct or the misbehavior” is essential in finding a backstory to their behavior. Teacher 1 shared similar sentiments as certain behaviors that are deemed “deviance in nature” should be viewed as “a teenage behavior and a living common thing amongst all teenagers,” and not “subjectively viewed towards African American male students.” School Counselor 1 provided further insight on how schools view and reprimand misbehavior from African American male students by stating “as it relates to African American males, there’s a standard for them and then there’s a standard for everyone else...remove versus mediate...without understanding...and we tend to give harsher punishment on our own people than do others.” These quotes describe one of the current school trends for African American male students as it relates to unbalanced
disciplinary patterns accompanied with the common response that lacks the internal desire to understand and explore the meaning behind certain behaviors.

**Emerging Theme 3: Decrease in Educational Value**

School leaders shared common beliefs regarding the decrease in educational value as African American male students are experiencing a lack of interest in excelling academically. Principal 3 stated his viewpoint on African American males “who come from generational poverty” tend “to go out and sell drugs and get a quick return on what they did...that’s tangible, that’s right now” rather than focusing solely on academic success which is “over time.” Perhaps the educational mindset shifts as Teacher 1 believes that the “decrease in education is most observed during transition periods as African American males lose the love of learning between middle school and high school.” Similarly, School Counselor 3 expressed the same sentiment as “the love for school in students of today isn’t seen or their excitement for school isn’t noticeable which may be a part of the current culture and school climate.” School Counselor 2 provided a different perspective on why African American male students lose interest throughout their educational journey. He believes the reason behind the current educational disconnect for African American males is due to them “often being labeled and given IEPs in the 2nd and 3rd grade, which follows them throughout high school when they may not even still need it and limits them on some level as it comes to classes they are placed and allowed to be in.” These quotes provide insight on the current disconnect between African American male students and education as students’ mindsets have shifted to value tangible gains, such as money, over educational assets, such as a high school diploma.

**Emerging Theme 4: Struggles of a Title I School**
Due to the demographics of this particular school, school leader participants were able to share their viewpoints on the educational disadvantages of a high poverty populated school. For the 2021-2022 academic school year, the total school enrollment of this school consisted of 1,379 students with 40.5% identifying as direct certified for free benefits. In detail, the African American male student population consisted of 514 students with 39.3% identifying as direct certified. Principal 1 introduced the educational plight as it relates to the missing foundational piece for poverty-stricken students. She stated, “a child in a Title I school comes to us automatically with a deficiency as there is no foundational building and a lack of exposure and interaction which goes back to our teachers need training on being culturally responsive and they need to understand the demographics in which they serve and what comes along with a poverty-stricken kid.” Similarly, Principal 2 shared the same beliefs as “the boring classroom environment” is the result of “a teacher who only teaches to one learning style without knowing the different types of learners or what it is that you need in order to learn.” She believes that this intensifies the overall struggles of Title I schools and increases the educational gap amongst students with different needs and backgrounds. Teacher 1 shared his dislike for the “current trend in education” as “teacher programs place new teachers in poverty-stricken or low-income areas with bare minimum expectations” which leaves them unprepared for teaching such underserved populations. He believes that certain teacher programs are a disservice to both minority students and the overall education profession. School Counselor 1 introduced a new layer of the Title I schools’ plight as it relates to the lack of educational funding and resources. He stated that “it puts us at a disadvantage when academically the resources are limited with classroom materials and qualified teachers, in addition to the accessibility concerns for laptops and wi-fi.” These
quotes showcase the embedded problems of Title I schools by highlighting the educational disadvantages of low resources, minimum accessibility, and underprepared teachers.

**Emerging Theme 5: African American Cultural Upbringings**

For this research study, majority of the school leader participants racially identified as African American. Participants were able to add cultural context to the expectations, as well as limitations, of appropriate emotional expression for African American male students. Principal 2 introduced a gender comparison on the reception of crying by stating “the natural response to females is crying and we’re automatically moved by tears versus the natural response to males is anger and we’re automatically moved to regulate.” From a cultural standpoint, Principal 3 described the opposition of African American males crying as “a by-product of culture” and stated “how a lot of African American males are being raised and have been raised...you don’t show emotion. You don’t cry. You don’t say I love you because all these things either make you weak as a man or gay.” In the same token, Teacher 2 stated “most of the young men are being taught to be tough as a response to crying. If you’re a man and emotional, you are seen as weak or less than...so, I think because our society has basically eradicated the idea that men are supposed to have emotion.” School Counselor 2 added to the “Stop Crying Speech” as he felt that the terms tough, unemotional, and detached accurately described African American males and stated that “this is also a part of the culture where an African American man is supposed to be tough and not show emotion... it’s not even the country putting this on us completely, maybe our own race and family.” He believes that the “no crying and be tough” expectation is engraved within the African American culture. School Counselor 3 believes that African American males are born with the “short end of the stick” and stated, “I’m not sure if males are given the opportunity from birth or if they have that coming into this world to know it’s okay for you to
shed tears...it’s okay for you to be upset and angry...it’s okay for you to express your feelings.”
These quotes represent the detriment of the cultural norm and expectation of “no crying” and the negative impact it has on African American male students and their emotional development.

**Emerging Theme 6: Act of Being Tough as a Self-Defense Mechanism**

School leader participants shared their viewpoints on how African American male students cope with the cultural expectation of mental and emotional toughness by creating self-defense mechanisms. Principal 2 introduced the stereotype threat concept as “people have said that’s how men are supposed to be that a lot of our adolescent males may be trying to portray themselves as unemotional and automatically detaching themselves from emotion...which hurts them in the long run from understanding their feelings and how to deal with emotions.” Teacher 1 stated that “we are raising young African American males to be tough and to not wear their emotions on their sleeves” which is “creating brick walls where emotion can’t get through.” He expressed his wish for individuals to understand that “pain isn’t relegated to gender.” Teacher 2 shared his belief that African American male students are in fact, full of emotion, as toughness is still a form of emotional expression. He stated, “the detachment is kind of a self-defense mechanism for a lot because they do have emotions...and to protect themselves from those emotions, they try to become or become detached.” He also believes that being tough can be defined as a “self-defense mechanism” or a “resilient skill” to overcome personal life challenges.

Yet, School Counselor 1 believes that using toughness as a self-defense mechanism can potentially cause a trickle-down effect of more emotional issues for African American male students. He stated, “our kids have been taught to be this way and don’t even know what a proper way to express an emotion is as they’re struggling with understanding deep emotion.” With that in mind, he believes that African American male students who do not understand their deep
emotion will continue to have issues with communicating their emotions effectively and appropriately. These quotes introduce the concept of stereotype threat as African American male students fulfill the notion of being tough and unemotional, yet in the same token, the act of being tough can also be viewed as a positive form of emotional expression and resilience.

**Summary**

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of school leaders as it relates to interactions with African American male students. This study is informative and exploratory in nature as it may expose the impact of negative stereotypes in the educational school setting on this special population. In addition to exploring the perceptions of school leaders, the purpose of this study was to also gain a better understanding of a positive school climate with the goal to create safe spaces in the secondary school setting for African American male students.

In this study, research questions explored the experiences of school leaders as it relates to interactions with African American male students as well as the impact of negative stereotypes in the educational school setting. Participants were specifically asked to share their initial feelings and experiences regarding three stereotype sets: (a) deviant, at-risk, and dangerous; (b) uninterested in learning, remedial, and uneducable; and (c) detached, unemotional, and tough. Data from this study emerged six themes: (1) positive role modeling through relationship building, (2) finding the why behind behavior, (3) decrease in educational value, (4) struggles of a Title I school, (5) African American cultural upbringing, and (6) the act of being tough as a self-defense mechanism. These findings added to existing knowledge that highlights Critical Race Theory and the impact of negative stereotypes in the education system for African American male students as it relates to school discipline, academic achievement, and school climate.
Chapter 5

In American society, the African American population is often misinterpreted and misunderstood (Gilbert & Ray, 2016; Henry et al., 2021; Moore et al., 2018; Wilson & Wolfer, 2020). Within this special population, African American males have experienced different life struggles due to their intersectional identity of race and gender (Grant, 2016; Howard, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2011). Mainstream society has disseminated negative perceptions of African American males and intensified the evident disproportionality across a variety of domains for this population. This societal phenomenon has become prevalent in the education system as it begins the cycle of perceived stereotypes and exposes African American male students to school experiences that are influenced by personal biases and discrimination. This research study served two purposes: (1) to explore the experiences of school leaders as it relates to interactions with African American male students, and (2) to gain a better understanding of a positive school climate with the underlying goal to create safe spaces in the secondary school setting for African American male students. The overarching question of this study placed school leaders at the focal point of a current social phenomenon in the education system and challenges them to become agents of change to create safe spaces for African American male students. The overarching research question that directed this inquiry was: What are the experiences of school leaders as it relates to the school interactions with African American male students? Lastly, this study was also informative and exploratory in nature as it exposed the impact of negative stereotypes in the educational school setting for African American male students.

For this study, a phenomenological case study design was utilized to gain an in-depth and holistic perspective on the school interactions within one Title I public high school. Title I schools are characterized by a high percentage of students who qualify for free or reduced lunch
due to their socioeconomic status. The theoretical framework, Critical Race Theory, served as the driving force behind this study and was utilized as an analytical tool to explore the stereotypes and biases of school leaders and its direct impact on the school experiences of African American male students. In addition, thematic analysis was used within this study to infer meaning about a phenomenon through the lens of a particular theoretical framework. As such, the use of thematic analysis demonstrates how CRT can be validated through the identification of repeated patterns in data as it aims to explore the current educational phenomenon between school leaders and African American male students.

**Discussion of Themes**

The research questions presented in this study explored the experiences of school leaders as they relate to interactions with African American male students as well as the impact of negative stereotypes in the educational school setting. Participants were specifically asked to share their initial feelings and thoughts regarding three stereotype sets: (a) deviant, at-risk, and dangerous; (b) uninterested in learning, remedial, and uneducable; and (c) detached, unemotional, and tough. The underlying goals of this study were to discover why these stereotypes exist, how these stereotypes are portrayed in the secondary school setting, and ways to possibly eradicate or decrease the negative school experiences for African America male students. In the final analysis, six research themes emerged: (1) positive role modeling through relationship building, (2) finding the why behind behavior, (3) a decrease in educational value, (4) struggles of a Title I school, (5) African American cultural upbringings, and (6) the act of being tough as a self-defense mechanism.
Emerging Theme 1: Positive Role Modeling through Relationship Building

School climate is a concept that describes a child’s subjective school experiences as it relates to their school life including relationships, learning environments, and school safety (Liang et al., 2019; Zullig & Mathews, 2014; Shirley & Cornell, 2011). A dimension of school climate that affects African American males is the relationship between students and school staff as research indicates that there is a current school disconnect due to the lack of cultural understanding, empathy, respect, and positive role modeling within their school relationships (Jackson et al., 2021; Thompson, 2004). Research states that African American male students experience hostile school environments, with less favorable connections between school leaders, due to objective differences in school treatment as it relates to school discipline and belongingness (Howard & Howard, 2021; Barbarin, 2010; Villegas, 2007; Thompson, 2004).

The findings of this study support existing literature as participants introduced the concept of African American male students needing school relationships that are centered around positive role modeling. School relationships that emphasize positive role modeling showcase mutual respect, empathy, and understanding amongst school leaders, as role models of the school, as well as towards all students. These positive role modeling relationships also demonstrate acceptable behavior and set high expectations to foster a healthy school climate environment. Examples of these acceptable behaviors and high expectations include expressing emotions respectfully and having reciprocal conversations between school leaders and students. The research findings indicated that a positive school climate is characterized by school leaders expressing respect for all students and caring for their overall well-being by setting high expectations and fostering school norms and values that make students feel safe, emotionally secure, and motivated to learn. Research participants believed that positive role modeling would
also potentially improve the current discipline problem. Through positive role modeling, school leaders can show African American male students how to uphold respect during adversity and meet school expectations of appropriate behavior. When faced with adversity, African American male students are encouraged to address school leaders with respect by remaining calm and expressing their viewpoints in a receptive manner or requesting to talk with a school leader whom they have deemed safe and emotionally secure. The research findings show that a positive school climate for African American male students promotes relationships with respect, empathy, and inclusion. Respect, which is revered as one of the most influential factors in African American male development, contributes to a sense of identity and feelings of belongingness which has a different meaning for individuals whose racial group is associated with negative stereotypes and historical discrimination in mainstream settings such as schools (Boston & Warren, 2017; Leary et al., 2005). The lack of respect leads to a sense of mistrust, which hinders the formation of healthy school relationships, maintains the disconnect between African American male students and school leaders, and supports the current discipline problem of unfairness and excessiveness in punishment.

The findings of this study also supported existing literature on school leadership roles as they relate to the implementation of zero tolerance policies in schools and the school-to-prison pipeline effect. Principal participants believed that their attitudes towards discipline and the usage of disciplinarian consequences, such as referrals, suspensions, and expulsions, impacts the overall school functionality and can be a positive or negative factor depending on how situations are resolved. These individuals also expressed the need to not only serve as positive role models for African American male students, but also for all school leaders in the building. In essence, principals set the tone for all factors including effective learning, positive school climates, and
healthy school interactions with respect to diversity. The beliefs from teacher participants also aligned as individuals expressed the importance of role modeling, to set the standard of respect in classrooms, and its direct impact on proper classroom management and overall student achievement. When students are treated with respect, they are more likely to succeed in the classroom with less chances of receiving discipline referrals. From a different standpoint, school counselor participants believed that teachers have the greatest impact on the current discipline problem as students receive a great amount of discipline referrals in the classrooms. Their viewpoints on respect and discipline aligned with both principal and teacher participants, yet placed a greater responsibility on teachers as these school leaders begin the discipline referral process. School counselor participants also believed their role in relationship building is modeling positive behaviors such as practicing appropriate communication skills, utilizing proper conflict resolution skills, and accepting personal accountability. Research participants also viewed the three stereotypes, deviant, at-risk, and dangerous, as major hindrances to fostering healthy relationships with mutual respect, empathy, and understanding. In other words, these stereotypes exacerbate the current school disconnect, as well as the discipline gap. Ultimately, the emerging theme of positive role modeling through relationship building was supported by participants’ viewpoints and expanded current existing literature on positive school relationships and its impact on school discipline.

Emerging Theme 2: Finding the Why Behind Behavior

Current research states that the behaviors of African American male students are misinterpreted and misunderstood as the implementation of zero tolerance policies is often subjective (Henry et al., 2021; Alle, 2017; Losen et al., 2015; Skiba et al., 2011; Monroe, 2005; Weinsten et al., 2004; Ferguson, 2001). As a comparison to their counterparts, African American
male students are more likely to be referred to the office for subjective behaviors, such as
disrespect, which are interpreted through biased lenses of school leaders (Henry at al., 2021;
Losen et al., 2015). The findings within this study align with existing literature as participants
expressed a common belief that African American males are quickly punished for common
teenage behaviors without a fair due process. Common teenage behaviors were described as
“talking back” or having a response to a directive, being unresponsive within communication
exchanges, and expressing their emotions through actions rather than words. Instead of school
leaders practicing efforts to find the meaning behind certain disruptive behaviors, African
American male students encounter school interactions that are influenced by stereotypes and a
lack of patience and understanding, which exacerbates the school-to-prison pipeline effect.
African American male students are heavily profiled due to their skin color and automatically
deemed as deviant, at-risk, and dangerous (Ferguson, 2001). Research findings indicated that
African American male students are not given the opportunity to explain themselves nor met
with a pure intent to find a reasoning behind their behavior. These findings also align with the
theoretical framework of Critical Race Theory as the impact of societal stereotypes and school
experiences is revealed as African American male students are treated with less empathy in
reprimands due to negative racial perceptions on deviance. Zero tolerance polices do not
consider students’ cultural context due to lacking the understanding of behaviors and perceptions
of expectations being largely dictated by the cultural contexts in which they learn and develop
(Johnson et al., 2017). Study findings support the notion that African American males are held to
a harsher standard, as it relates to interpreting deviant behavior, and reprimanded quicker without
school leaders attempting to understand their behavior with hopes to possibly decrease unwanted
behaviors and increase mutual understanding.
Not only do the research findings of this study support current literature regarding African American male students and the misinterpretation of their behaviors, but these findings also introduce a new unparalleled relationship between African American male school leaders and African American male students. Research findings revealed that an intense power struggle exists between these two populations despite their similar ethnic backgrounds. It was indicated that the power struggle exists due to the cultural clashing of upbringings regarding African American male dominance, respect, and physical toughness. Neither school populations, African American male school leaders and male students, want to appear weak or submissive within this school dynamic, which creates a challenge for male dominance. This challenge is often times expressed through an intense back-and-forth exchange of communication. Notably, this study was conducted in a Title I school that is predominately African American in both the school leader and student populations. Yet, the excessive disciplinary pattern was still prevalent within this school despite common ethnic demographics. Conversely, a great amount of existing literature only examines the school relationships between African American male students and white school leaders with high emphasis on white teachers. Therefore, research findings of this study contradicted the belief that African American male students only experience lack of understanding and mistreatment from other races and added a new cultural dialogue regarding African American male students and their relationships with African American school leaders. Given these points, the emerging theme of finding the why behind behavior was supported by participants’ experiences of subjectiveness in behavior interpretation and reprimands and extended current existing literature with the examination of school relationships amongst minority individuals – students and school leaders.
Emerging Theme 3: Decrease in Educational Value

Within the field of education, a great amount of research studies have explored the current trend of an overall disconnect between African American male students and education as these individuals are perceived to be uninterested in learning, remedial, and uneducable (Kunjufu, 2016; Cohen et al., 2009; Gibbs, 1998). From the research findings, the majority, if not all, of participants disagreed with the stereotypical terms remedial and uneducable, yet agreed with the belief that African American male students are indeed uninterested in learning. As a collective, participants believed that these students became uninterested in learning due to the continuous exposure of deficit thinking from their school leaders, especially teachers, spanning from elementary to high school. Deficit thinking, a negative concept that deems minority students as unintelligible with little value to offer, contributes to the overall learning process and classroom dynamics (McCray et al., 2015). For African American male students, deficit thinking has a detrimental effect on their overall academic success as their dreams, hopes, and futures are tied to their teachers’ perceptions (Marsh & Noguera, 2018; McCray et al., 2015; Love, 2014). As African American male students experience more school interactions with school leaders from a deficit framework, the value in education decreases over time and the focal point for advancement becomes money, which is a quicker gain than a high school diploma. In addition, African American male students are bound by academic glass ceilings with minimal chances of academic advancement (Marsh & Noguero, 2018; McCray et al., 2015; Love, 2014). Due to deficit thinking on their academic capabilities, African American male students are underrepresented in rigorous courses such as Honors, Dual Credit, Dual Enrollment, and Advanced Placement. Research findings revealed an explanation for this current school trend as African American male students are often misdiagnosed and placed within special education.
services during their early years of kindergarten with less chances of being removed from these services. As their academic and social abilities improve throughout their secondary years of education, African American male students are still denied opportunities to reach their full academic potential. For this reason, African American male students become uninterested in learning due to negative academic viewpoints, such as deficit thinking, from their school leaders and it impacts their desire to learn and excel academically thus devaluing education.

The research findings of this study clarified the current trend of a decrease in educational value by providing insight on why African American male students are uninterested in learning and disengaged from education. These findings also extended existing literature by introducing the generational mindset of success as educational values have shifted from academic achievement, such as a high school diploma, to quick and tangible, yet efficient, values such as money. Likewise, research findings of this study also support the theoretical framework of Critical Race Theory. CRT posits that labeling African American males as underachievers, amongst other deficit thinking logics, is a direct effect of the pervasive structure of institutional racism engrained in American society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). With CRT as an analytical tool, study findings conceptualized the intersections of race and gender as it relates to academic achievement and school leader perceptions. Ultimately, the emerging theme of a decrease in educational value was supported by participants’ experiences of the impact of deficit thinking on African American male students and their desire to learn and succeed academically.

**Emerging Theme 4: Struggles of a Title I School**

This study was conducted in a Title I school with a demographic background that consisted of mostly African American and Hispanic students. Title I, a federally funded program that is designed to improve academic achievement of disadvantaged students, is designated to
schools with at least 40% of enrollment from low-income families (United States Department of Education, 2018). In other words, Title I funds are distributed to high poverty schools based on the percentage of students who qualify for free or reduced lunches. Research participants believed that African American male students could be disconnected and uninterested in learning due to the common struggles of a Title I school. This particular school’s characteristics included students lacking solid foundations of knowledge with minimal exposure in the homes, uncultured and underprepared teachers, and a lack of accessibility for classroom materials and educational resources such as laptops and Wi-Fi. In reference to the lacking foundational knowledge, African American male students enter kindergarten with deficits in literacy and language due to the minimal exposure at home during early development years (Barbarin, 2010). With high demands to work in low socioeconomic status households, participants believe that African American male students do not receive a sufficient amount of social interactions to learn foundational skills such as recognizing letters, pairing letter sounds, identifying primary colors, and writing their names. As a result, African American male students enter their school age years with an educational disadvantage. The cycle continues as African American males attend Title I schools with teachers from special teaching programs who possess little to no experience with poverty-stricken students and their diverse educational needs. Research indicates that African American males across the country are enduring their teachers’ cultural ignorance and insensitivity all too frequently (Love, 2014). Therefore, under-prepared teachers may do more harm than good as they possess limited preparation in teaching culturally relevant curriculums and engaging students of diverse backgrounds. Lastly, despite Title I schools receiving additional federal funding, minority students still experience a lack of resources as education has become more technology based with computers and tablets, along with Wi-Fi, being classroom essentials for
instruction and learning. For the most part, textbooks have become digitalized, and assignments are given and submitted through online educational platforms.

Research states that most teachers employed in the United States are female and White, with 84% of the teaching force consisting of White teachers (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2011). Many of these teachers teach from a hegemonic and Western framework, which often predisposes a lack of respect for diverse students’ primary cultures, socioeconomic statuses, and academic needs. With this being said, the research findings of this study align with existing literature as it relates to the high prevalence of underprepared teachers and its negative impact on African American male students’ academic achievement and overall development as well as the lack of educational resources and accessibility in poverty-stricken schools. The introduction of a lacking foundational knowledge piece with limited exposure adds to current literature as it provides a new influential factor to the current academic problem, yet within a cultural context. Most research acknowledges and attempts to rationalize the current academic achievement gap for African American male students and their peers, but overlooks the connection between education and early exposure in the homes (McCray et al., 2015; Love, 2014; James, 2012; Lynn et al., 2010). Moreover, research findings of this study also support Critical Race Theory as African American male students are being forced to fit into the dominant culture’s existing system of teaching and learning without considering their cultural characteristics and preferences. With CRT as an analytical tool, study findings conceptualized the intersections of race and gender as it relates to socioeconomic status, school structure, and curriculum bias. Given these points, the emerging theme of struggles of a Title I school was supported by participants’ experiences of the impact of limited exposure in low socioeconomic
households on educational readiness for African American male students, as well as the impact of underprepared teachers coupled with limited accessibility to educational resources.

**Emerging Theme 5: African American Cultural Upbringings**

The research findings of this study revealed diverse cultural upbringings for African American male students as it relates to emotional expression and masculinity. Research participants were able to provide insight on the cultural expectations of appropriate emotional expression as well as its limitations on social and emotional development. From a cultural standpoint within the research findings, African American males are encouraged to show emotional toughness by not crying or showing any physical signs of weakness. Yet, society has deemed African American male students to be unemotional, detached, and tough which leads to school experiences that lack empathy and understanding within student-school leader interactions, as well as hostile school climates and distrustful learning environments. Participants believed that this “by-product of culture” is detrimental as African American cultural expectations such as these perpetuate the existing stereotypes for African American men. As a result of these stereotypes, African American male students receive less attention, less encouragement, less praise, less time to respond, less eye-contact, and more verbal and nonverbal criticism (Villegas, 2007). Additionally, substantial numbers of African American males are bombarded with a range of individual, family, and community trauma, beginning early in life, that divert them onto a developmental trajectory that is filled with adverse academic and social outcomes (Barbarin, 2010). Research findings suggest that African American male students are not only experiencing home environments with minimal social interaction for academic development, but also experiencing home environments that lack safe spaces to properly process emotions. Participants also highlighted the gender response difference, within
the African American culture, as the responses to crying for African American females are empathy and understanding whereas the responses for African American males are anger and regulation.

As an analysis on existing literature, African American male students are deemed as unemotional, detached, and tough with direct connections to their excessive school disciplinary patterns, low academic achievement, and hostile school environments (Howard & Howard, 2021; Hewitt, 2017; Babarin, 2010). However, current existing literature bestows little to no consideration of their cultural expectation of emotional toughness and the overall impact of their cultural upbringings. As a result, research findings of this study extended current research literature by adding concepts, or explanations, within a cultural context and asserting the need for more cultural understanding for this special population. Research findings also clarified the misinterpretation of African American male masculinity as teachers view African American male students’ masculinity as oppositional, aggressive, and socially reclusive, yet, in actuality, they are only operating from their cultural worldview. Masculinity refers to the attitudes, behaviors, beliefs, and roles associated with what it means to be a boy or a man, which is culturally bound and varies by culture (Hewitt, 2017). Given these points, the emerging theme of African American cultural upbringings was supported by participants’ viewpoints of African American masculinity with limited emotional expression and its detrimental impact on their overall social and emotional development as well as its perpetuation of existing negative stereotypes in the school setting.

**Emerging Theme 6: Act of Being Tough as a Self-Defense Mechanism**

The research findings indicate a new viewpoint on the stereotype threat concept as the focal point shifts from academic performance to emotional expression. Stereotype threat occurs
when a group of people are confronted with a situation in which fulfilling a negative stereotype of themselves is imminent (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Negative stereotypes are internalized by the group itself, which impacts the way they view themselves, and becomes complicit in their own challenges educationally and socially (Howard, 2013; Howard & Flennaugh, 2011). In other words, African American male students either conform to, or resist, the negative stereotypes that are perpetuated in the educational setting. Research findings suggest that African American male students have experienced stereotype threat by conforming to the stereotypes of being unemotional, detached, and tough. Participants believed that the act of being tough is not only a by-product of African American culture and stereotype threat, but also stands as an act to protect themselves from hostile interactions and mistreatment in the educational school setting. African American male students are creating brick walls that have become difficult to break down, which intensifies the feelings of unbelonging and hinders the formation of healthy school relationships. The act of being tough is not only used as a self-defense mechanism in the school setting, but in the real world as well as African American male students engage in detachment to avoid accumulating feelings and showing emotional expression within their personal relationships. As a result of acting tough, participants believed that African American male students lack essential life skills, such as understanding deep emotions and communicating emotions effectively and appropriately, which also intensifies their current issues in the school setting. In addition, the act of being tough may also cause more emotional issues in their adulthood. Nevertheless, the act of being tough can be viewed as a positive characteristic when it is used as a resiliency skill to overcome personal life challenges.

The findings of this study, as they relate to the act of being tough, neither contradicted nor confirmed current existing literature as findings added a new cultural viewpoint on the
underlying meanings of being tough. Existing literature describes the stereotype “tough” as a negative characteristic with educational ramifications. The cultural context of toughness and masculinity is not considered nor is the act of being tough as a self-defense mechanism or resiliency skill. There is also limited research on stereotype threat and its impact on emotional development and expression. If anything, the findings assert the need for more cultural understanding for this special population. Ultimately, the emerging theme of being tough as a self-defense mechanism was supported by participants’ application of stereotype threat, as it relates to emotional expression, and revealed the various meanings of toughness as an African American male student.

**Recommendations for Future Practice**

The main purposes of this research study were to explore the experiences of school leaders as they relate to interactions with African American male students and gain a better understanding of a positive school climate with the goal to create safe spaces in the secondary school setting. To address the unjust and excessive disciplinary gap for African American male students, the first recommendation for school leaders is to utilize alternative forms of discipline rather than suspension and expulsion. Alternative forms of discipline include positive behavior incentives, peer-to-peer counseling, male mentorships, and community service. As attempts to mitigate the excessive disciplinary rates through punitive discipline policies and high dropout rates, these alternatives are utilized to address the root causes of student behavior by building strong and healthy relationships with students and improving their engagement in the learning environment (Education Commission of the States, 2018). To address the academic achievement gap, the second recommendation is for school leaders, especially teachers, to participate in more multicultural trainings as an effort to increase cultural awareness as it relates to the need for
diverse teaching styles, appropriately interpreting behaviors within a cultural context, and understanding emotional expression as a by-product of cultural upbringings. It is also a recommendation for teachers to attend more professional development trainings on culturally responsive classroom management. Education professionals who work with students of color must be familiar with their students’ culture before they are able to fully understand student behaviors and learning (Neville & Mobley, 2001). To address unfair and hostile school environments, school leaders are recommended to utilize the core conditions of Person-Centered Therapy in their interactions with African American male students. Person-Centered Therapy is based on a phenomenological understanding of the client’s subjective world view with three core conditions: unconditional positive regard, congruence, and empathy. (Rogers, 1957; Rogers, 1961; Rogers, 1980). Within a person-centered approach, African American male students are viewed with unconditional positive regard and empathy toward their race and gender, which has not been previously considered. (Hamilton, 2016). When African American male students are received with unconditional positive regard, the influence and impact of negative stereotypes is alleviated, and students are meet with positive expectations and standards. Empathy begins, first, with being warm and welcoming to African American male students. It also includes school leaders showing that they genuinely care for African American male students by taking honest and authentic steps to publicly display their true desire to understand them and cultivate a culture of belonging (Ford, 2016). As a recommendation within the theoretical orientation of Critical Race Theory, school leaders are challenged to uphold the responsibility of addressing issues of discrimination and inequities in the education system and mitigating these inequities at the root cause. School leaders should always strive to achieve equity for all students.
Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this research study revealed a need for additional research on the implementation of fair and unbiased school policies, cultural relevance in academic achievement, and cultural understanding in emotional development for African American male students. One of the recommendations for future research is to explore the male-to-male relationship dynamics between African American male students and African American male school leaders as their interactions were characterized by intense power struggles for male dominance. Role modeling has been deemed as a positive factor in building healthy relationships; however, the instinct of masculinity between African American male students and school leaders clashes as both populations attempt to exemplify their cultural expectations of toughness and respect. Another recommendation for future research is the application of stereotype threat for emotional development as African American male students conform to being tough and detached as a means for self-defense and protection. Current literature does not consider the cultural context of toughness and masculinity nor include the impact of cultural expectations on negative stereotypes. Additionally, the need to explore the impact of cultural upbringings and household dynamics is also deemed as a recommendation for future research as African American male students are enduring academic disadvantages due to limited exposure in the home and lacking essential life skills for adequate academic, social, and emotional development.

Limitations

A qualitative phenomenological approach within a case study design was utilized in this research study to gain an in-depth and holistic perspective on the school interactions between school leaders and African American male students in a Title I public high school. The purpose of phenomenology research is to highlight the perceptions and experiences of individuals from
their own perspectives (Ersoy, 2016). Despite this methodology’s commitment to capture unique experiences, the value of open-endedness is considered a limitation within this research study as research participants have ultimate control of the collected content. The data collected in this study is based solely on subjectivity and risks the possibility of notating personal biases and prejudices. Another limitation of this research study is researcher bias due to the inevitable connection between the research topic and intersectional identities. The primary researcher of this study is an African American woman who is also a professional school counselor with personal and professional experiences as a minority individual. Researcher reflexivity and bracketing was utilized during the entire research process, as well as the employment of a research team. The sample size is also within limitations as 9 individuals were selected to participate in this research study, yet only 8 completed this study in its entirety. As a result, the risk for unsaturation was possible as participant enrollment consisted of 3 principals, 2 teachers, and 3 school counselors. In addition, only 1 participant identified as white with majority of participants, 7, identifying as African American. Due to this, data collected could have been more diverse with the inclusion of participants from other races and ethnicities. Lastly, this research study is limited with generalizability as this study focuses solely on African American male students in the secondary education school setting; however, the findings of this study could be utilized for further research on application to other minority student populations.

**Conclusion**

In summary, six research themes emerged from this study: (1) positive role modeling through relationship building, (2) finding the why behind behavior, (3) a decrease in educational value, (4) struggles of a Title I school, (5) African American cultural upbringings, and (6) the act of being tough as a self-defense mechanism. Theme 1, positive role modeling through
relationship building, introduced the concept of African American male students needing school relationships that model mutual respect, empathy, and understanding amongst school leaders, as role models of the school, as well as towards all students. A positive role modeling relationship also demonstrates acceptable behavior and sets high expectations to foster a healthy school climate environment. Theme 2, finding the why behind behavior, suggested that school leaders should treat African American males with more empathy, as it relates to discipline, by granting them the opportunity to explain their behavior with due process before being immediately reprimanded. Theme 3, a decrease in educational value, highlighted the impact of deficit thinking on academic achievement and advancement for African American male students. This theme also introduced the new generational mindset of success as educational values have shifted from academic achievement, such as a high school diploma, to quick and tangible, yet efficient, values such as money. Theme 4, struggles of a Title I school, addressed the educational disadvantages that African American male students experience with minimal home exposure for proper adolescent development, underprepared and uncultured teachers, and limited accessibility to educational resources such as computers and Wi-Fi. Theme 5, African American cultural upbringing, posited that African American male students are taught to show emotional toughness by not crying or showing any physical signs of weakness instead of how to properly process and express intense emotions. Theme 6, the act of being tough as a self-defense mechanism, applied the concept of stereotype threat to emotional expression as African American male students have conformed to protect themselves from hostile interactions and mistreatment in the educational school setting.

Ultimately, the findings of this study aligned with current research on African American male students and their school experiences, which are characterized by punitive and excessive
disciplinary actions, deficit thinking teacher perceptions with low academic achievement, and hostile school climates that lack cultural awareness and understanding. This study exposed the impact of negative stereotypes by examining the school interactions between African American male students and their school leaders. As agents of change, Critical Race Theory challenges school leaders to uphold the responsibility of addressing issues of discrimination and inequities in the education system and mitigating these inequities to improve the overall educational experiences for African American male students. Research findings also revealed the need for additional research on the implementation of fair and unbiased school policies, cultural relevance in academic achievement, and cultural understanding in emotional development for African American male students. As a final analysis, this research study uncovers the dire need and significance of creating safe spaces for African American male students in the secondary school setting.
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Appendix A

ARE YOU A SCHOOL LEADER?
If you are an administrator, school counselor, or teacher, this study is just for you!

Creating Safe Spaces for African American Male Students
You are invited to participate in a research study that will examine the phenomenon of negative stereotypes of African American male students in K-12 settings. This study will ask that you share your experiences in interacting with African American male students in your role as a school leader – principal, school counselor, or teacher - in the school environment.

What will participants be asked to do?
Participants will be asked to engage in a 60-minute interview via Zoom. Selected participants will receive a $25 Amazon gift card.

How do I sign up?
Sign up by scanning the QR code below or contacting Ms. Zakeya Good at zgood@memphis.edu or 901-488-6106.

It takes a village of school leaders to make a change!
Appendix B

Consent for Research Participation

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Creating Safe Spaces for African American Male Students</th>
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| **Researcher(s)** | Zakeya Good, University of Memphis  
Dr. Patrick Murphy, University of Memphis |
| **Researchers Contact Information** | Zakeya Good (901-488-6106), zggood@memphis.edu  
Dr. Murphy (901-678-3164), pdmurphy@memphis.edu |

You are invited to participate in a research study that will examine the phenomenon of negative stereotypes of African American male students in high school. This study will ask that you share your experiences in interacting (disciplining, assisting, or teaching) with African American male students in your role as a school leader in the school environment. You are invited to take part in this study because you are a school leader – principal, school counselor, or teacher. Please ask researchers any questions about the study before you make your decision. If you volunteer, you will be one of an estimated 10 other school leaders.

| **Key Information for You to Consider** |
| **Voluntary Consent:** | You are being asked to volunteer for a research study. It is up to you whether you choose to participate or not. There will be no penalty or loss of benefit to which you are otherwise entitled if you choose not to participate or discontinue participation. |
| **Purpose:** | The purpose of this research is to gain a better understanding of a positive school climate with the underlining goal of creating safe spaces in the high school setting for African American male students. |
| **Duration:** | The estimated interview timeframe is 60 minutes. Once the interview has been transcribed, you will be asked to review for your feedback and accuracy. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is 2 hours. |
| **Procedures and Activities:** | You will be asked to engage in an individual interview via Zoom to share your honest perspective, views, and beliefs on your school experiences with African American male student. You will also be asked to complete a demographic survey. Your interview will be recorded, and audio will be utilized for transcription. You will also be asked to review your interview transcription for accuracy. |
**Risk:** One of the foreseeable risk or discomforts of your participation include experiencing minor emotional or social discomfort about revealing your perceptions to the researcher. You may find some questions we ask you to be upsetting or stressful. If so, we can tell you about some people who may be able to help you with these feelings. **Benefits:** You will not get any personal benefit from taking part in this study. Your willingness to take part, however, may, in the future, help society as a whole better understand this research topic.

**Alternatives:** Participation is voluntary, and the only alternative is to not participate.

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**Who is conducting this research?**

Zakeya Good, of the University of Memphis, Department of Counseling, Educational Psychology and Research is in charge of the study. Her faculty advisor is Dr. Patrick Murphy. There may be other research team members assisting during the study.

**Why is this research being done?**

The purpose is to gain a better understanding of a positive school climate with the underlining goal of creating safe spaces in the high school setting for African American male students. We also hope to learn how negative stereotypes have impacted the school experiences between school leaders and African American male students. You are being invited to participate because you are a school leader – principal, school leader, or teacher. If you volunteer to take part in this study, you will be one of an estimated 10 other school leaders.

**How long will I be in this research?**

Interviews will be conducted via Zoom. The estimated interview timeframe is 60 minutes. Once the interview has been transcribed, you will be asked to review for your feedback and accuracy. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is 2 hours.

**What happens if I agree to participate in this Research?**

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to engage in an individual interview via Zoom and complete a demographic survey. You will be asked to share your honest perspective, views, and beliefs on your school experiences with African American male student. Your Zoom video will be recorded, and audio will be utilized for transcription. You will then be asked to review your interview transcription for accuracy.

**What happens to the information collected for this research?**
Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When we write about this study to share it with other researchers, you will not be personally identified in these written materials. We may publish the results of this study; however, we will keep your name and other identifying information private.

**How will my privacy and data confidentiality be protected?**

We promise to protect your privacy and security of your personal information as best we can. Although you need to know about some limits to this promise. Measures we will take include:

- Assigning a pseudonym to all participants to de-identify data for usage
- Utilizing a password secured computer for digital data storage (recordings and audio)
- Utilizing a locked file cabinet for hard copies (transcriptions)
- Utilizing a private Zoom to conduct research
- Storing data for the duration of the study and destroying after study completion

Individuals and organizations that monitor this research may be permitted access to inspect the research records. This monitoring may include access to your private information. These individuals and organizations include research team members and the University of Memphis Institutional Review Board. Research team members are required to report the following if a team member suspects child abuse or neglect, or suicidal thoughts. TN Laws may require this suspicion be reported. In such case, the research team may be obligated to breach confidentiality and may be required to disclose personal information.

**What if I want to stop participating in this research?**

It is up to you to decide whether you want to volunteer for this study. It is also ok to decide to end your participation at any time. There is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled if you decided to withdraw your participation. Your decision about participating will not affect your relationship with the researcher(s) or the University of Memphis.

**Will it cost me money to take part in this research?**

There are no costs associated with participation in this research study.

**Will I receive any compensation or reward for participating in this research?**

For taking part in this study, you will receive an electronic $25 Amazon gift card via email.

**Who can answer my question about this research?**
Before you decide to volunteer for this study, please ask any questions that might come to mind. Later, if you have questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints about the study, you can contact the investigator, Zakeya Good at zggood@memphis.edu or 901-488-6106 or her faculty advisor, Dr. Patrick Murphy, at pdmurphy@memphis.edu or 901-678-3164. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the Institutional Review Board staff at the University of Memphis at 901-678-2705 or email irb@memphis.edu. We will give you a signed copy of this consent to take with you.

**STATEMENT OF CONSENT**

I have had the opportunity to consider the information in this document. I have asked any questions needed for me to decide about my participation. I understand that I can ask additional questions through the study.

By signing below, I volunteer to participate in this research. I understand that I am not waiving any legal rights. I have been given a copy of this consent document. I understand that if my ability to consent for myself changes, my legal representative or I may be asked to consent again prior to my continued participation.

As described above, you will be audio/video recorded while performing the activities described above. Audio/video recordings will be used for transcription purposes only. Initial the space below if you consent to the use of audio/video recordings as described.

____ I agree to the use of audio/video recording.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Adult Participant</th>
<th>Signature of Adult Participant</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Researcher Signature** (To be completed at the time of Informed Consent)

I have explained the research to the participant and answered all of his/her questions. I believe that he/she understand the information described in this consent and freely consent to participate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Research Team Member</th>
<th>Signature of Research Team Member</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Appendix C

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

The overarching research question directing this inquiry is:

As a school leader, what are your experiences in interacting (disciplining, assisting, or teaching) with African American male students in the secondary educational setting?

The secondary research questions are:

How would you describe your school relationships with AA male students?

What do you believe is your role as a school leader in supporting AA male students?

In your school, what relationships, if any, do you perceive between race and education – discipline, academic achievement, and school climate?

How do stereotypes about AA males exist within your school?

Please provide your perceptions regarding your school climate as a whole.

Probe: For AA males specifically.

What are safe spaces for AA male students in your school?

Probes: In what ways do you, and others in your school, cultivate safe spaces for AA male students? What does a safe space look like? What can you be doing differently to cultivate those spaces?

The potential probe questions are:

How do you feel about stereotypes in regard to AA male students?

How do you view and treat African American male students?

What comes to your mind when I say AA male student?
Research states that AA male students are negatively perceived. How do you feel about these terms as it relates to AA male students?

- Deviant, at-risk, and dangerous
- Uninterested in learning, remedial, and uneducable
- Unemotional, detached, and tough

What do you know about the current academic status of AA male students?

How do you feel about the current disciplinary gap in suspensions, expulsions, and detention?

- What do you think causes this gap?
- What about at your school?

How do you feel about the current academic gap between African American male students and their peers?

- What do you think causes this gap?
- What about at your school?

How do you feel about the current school disconnect?

- What do you think causes this gap?
- Do you think a disconnect exists in your school?
## Appendix D

### Creating Safe Spaces for African American Male Students

#### Codebook: Codes & Subcodes

#### Theoretical Framework: Critical Race Theory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRT Terminology</th>
<th>Research Study Terms</th>
<th>Stereotype Set</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender/Racial Inequities &amp; Disparities</td>
<td>Disciplinary Pattern</td>
<td>Deviant, At-Risk, Dangerous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School-to-Prison Pipeline</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Drop-Out</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systemic Racism</td>
<td>Academic Achievement</td>
<td>Uninterested in Learning, Remedial,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Curriculum &amp; Instruction</td>
<td>Uneducable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Socioeconomic Status</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Institution</td>
<td>School Climate</td>
<td>Detached, Unemotional, Tough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School Practices &amp; Structure</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School Leader Perceptions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix E

Creating Safe Spaces for African American Male Students

**Categorization Matrix**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Deviant, At-Risk, Dangerous</th>
<th>Uninterested in Learning, Remedial, Uneducable</th>
<th>Detached, Unemotional, Tough</th>
<th>Implications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal 1</td>
<td>&quot;Disagree and unfair.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;I do think a lot of people feel that way.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;It depends on the kid and what you consider to be tough.&quot;</td>
<td>Male-to-Male Relationship Building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Saying you are all three as it describes on single student.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;A lot of it is just that they're so far behind.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;When you hear some of the stories of some of the quiet ones of some of the kids who fall through the cracks and you're like, oh my god - you're tough.&quot;</td>
<td>More Mentoring Group for Black Males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;I've been guilty of being bias...your whole body is tattooed up, you're in a gang or you're going to be a problem.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Or as teachers, they aren't meeting their needs.&quot;</td>
<td>Male Vs. Female Approach: &quot;I'm a man, you want to be a man, I'll show you how it's done.&quot;</td>
<td>Grade Level Chats: Life Skills (How to Communicate with the Police or Regulate Emotions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Due process is very important and giving them an opportunity to speak and be heard. Finding out the why behind what's going on.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;We're not tiering instruction.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;I try to take a nurturing approaching with guys.&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trying to find a solution to the misconduct or the misbehavior.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;It kind of goes back to our teachers need training and being culturally responsive and they need to understand the demographics in which they serve and what comes along with a poverty-stricken kid.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Cultural difference within the Black race.&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;So, the system is corrupt, the criminal system, but we start their pipeline in the schools and how we implement these systems. We start to build a prison mindset in schools by some of the ways we put rules and procedures in place.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;If you have not had an in-depth training and coursework, a lot of times you don't know all the things that come along with poverty.&quot;</td>
<td>Male to Male: Power Struggle; &quot;Finding ways to help them calm down and not get in power struggles.&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;So often the kids are misbehaving, not because they want to misbehave, but hey I can't do school.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;So, a lot of it is just ignorance on the part of teacher.&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Greater Impact on Discipline = Teacher but principals too with support</td>
<td>&quot;Let's work with them as failure is not an option. An F is not an option.&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;A child in a Title I school, those kids come to us automatically with a deficiency as there is no foundational building and a lack of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**130**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal 2</th>
<th>&quot;exposure/interaction.&quot;</th>
<th>&quot;Sometimes that's a cry for I'd rather act up than to try and do your work...or go to sleep, get smart with you, and get in trouble.&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I wish at-risk weren't in there with deviant and dangerous as you can be at-risk without being deviant and dangerous.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;No one is uneducable. Everybody is able.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Probably used to describe a lot of black males, and in that order probably adolescent black males and adult black males.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Once we get to being or saying that a kid is dangerous to me, it's almost as though you're fearful. And when people respond out of fear, it is never a good response.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Remedial and uninterested in learning can go hand in hand as the lack of interest can lead to being remedial.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;People have made that comment so much or said that that's how men are supposed to be that a lot of our adolescent males may be trying to portray themselves as unemotional or 'I can't let them see me cry and not supposed to cry' and automatically detaching themselves from emotions.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;And sometimes, they're not always given a fair chance because of how they may appear.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;However, I feel as though the lack of interest can come from having a boring classroom environment, from having a teacher who only teaches to one learning style without knowing the different types of learners or what it is that you need in order to learn.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;And I think that they are trying to be that way and it hurts them in the long run from understanding their feelings and how to deal with emotions.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They're not all the same. They're not all coming from the same background.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Remedial can be used in a negative way, but I think it could be used in a positive way too if we look at the students' data to drive our instruction the way that we should.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;People (Black males) actually conform to these words because of age old stereotypes.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater Impact on Discipline = Teachers</td>
<td>&quot;Your remedial kids should just be the students who need that extra TLC.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;And once they start dealing with their emotions, you questioning their sexuality.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;And I think that they are trying to be that way and it hurts them in the long run from understanding their feelings and how to deal with emotions.&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;And I think that they are trying to be that way and it hurts them in the long run from understanding their feelings and how to deal with emotions.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holistic Viewpoint: Develop the Whole Child</td>
<td>Self-Esteem Boosters</td>
<td>Collaborative Approach to Discipline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiate Approaches &amp; Outlets</td>
<td></td>
<td>Reset Room &amp; Calming Jars</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
"But you know when you have teachers that are from different cultures, different countries... they are sometimes offended by the way that black people do not value education. Which leads to generalizations."

"Group of educators... just because it's something that we've always done right mean it's something we need to continue to do... a lot of the males in the building need that mindset shifts. But it's hard to get a male to see how they're treating a male, not unfairly."

"It's a mindset." (teacher)

"The natural response to females is crying and we’re automatically moved by tears vs the natural response to males is anger."

"Deficit data (words and reading) points to the foundational level and economic class."

"How to get them in tune with those emotions so that you didn’t punish them for every little act out that they have."

"And there are some words that you truly just learned through conversation... you learn from interacting with people and having those conversations... but the conversations are not at home."

"Helping them realize that sometimes it’s just realizing the wrong in what you may have done, accepting the correction without being angry or trying to be tough."

"There are deviants. There are dangerous people. There are at-risk people in every racial subgroup."

"I disagree with the last two, but I do agree to a certain extent that we have taken an uninterest in learning."

"A by-product of culture and how a lot of AA males are being raised and have been raised."

"I despise the term black on black crime because that breeds labeling as you described."

"We really don't see the value of education and to a certain extent, I get it."

"You don't show emotion. You don't cry. You don't say 'I love you.' All those thing either make you weak as a man or gay."

"I feel like those types of stereotypes contribute to the fact that people think the AA male is dangerous, devious, and lazy."

"When you look at AA males who come from a generational poverty, it’s easy for that AA male to go out and sell drugs and get a quick return on what they did that's tangible, that's right now... whereas education is over time."

"One thing I know about AA children, especially AA males, is that it's relational. That lack of care, if you will, impacts them more so than that of an administrator or teacher."

"The remedy/secret ingredient to the basis of discipline, especially for AA males, is working to build that positive relationship."

"Yet, poverty is not the reason why AA males are doing what they’re doing in education."

"Build rapport... build a culture where they felt like they had a voice and that they belong."

---

The Whole Child

Pure Intentions = Organic Interactions

Principal 3
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal Mindset = apply the discipline; &quot;attitudes reflect leadership and as administrators/teachers, we should model what we expect students to do.&quot;</th>
<th>&quot;I don't buy the notion that somehow you have to be educated or be wealthy to value education. It is a mindset and I think that is what's lost.&quot;</th>
<th>&quot;Take a proactive approach to advocate and ensure that they will receive the quality education, that the will be treated fairly, that they got a fair shot in the classroom, that they aren't targeted, and that they don't feel like they are in an academic prison.&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;We are not monolithic in any way.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;The idea that maybe perhaps the disconnect could be you assuming just because you, you are an AA male teacher/admin, that you automatically connect to AA male student... we're not monolithic people.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;When you talk to people who didn't grow up in families like that (okay to show emotions), you're seen as soft or gay, you don't fit the mold of what we identified as the typical AA male. Now that translates into the school building. Those same cultural expectations of what a male should be is what we're seeing in kids at school.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Discipline gap is dysfunction in the home and upbringing - missing structure.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;You really do have to earn their respect.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Being tough is showing emotion.&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Phrase: "home to prison pipeline"
## Appendix F

### Creating Safe Spaces for African American Male Students

#### Categorization Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Deviant, At-Risk, Dangerous</th>
<th>Uninterested in Learning, Remedial, Uneducable</th>
<th>Detached, Unemotional, Tough</th>
<th>Implications/Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotion: Irritation and Anger</td>
<td>&quot;In the education system that supports the public education system, it's like somewhere around middle school students lose the love of learning.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Given the historical prudence of men… men are supposed to be tough and we really don't have any examples in literature or in movies of a man being in touch with emotions.&quot;</td>
<td>Increase Teacher Expectations vs. Student Outcome</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Negative Connotations: applies to an entire group, primarily based off a small population of that group.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;But it's like middle school to high school, that learning is lost.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;If you’re a man and emotional, you are seen as weak, less than… so I think because our society has basically eradicated the idea that men are supposed to have emotion.&quot;</td>
<td>Increase Cultural Awareness &amp; Relatability; Teaching Strategy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deviant: &quot;That's a teenage behavior, a living common thing amongst teenagers.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Maybe because the teacher may not have had a great handle on engagement, or they feel like the work was too hard and no one actually broke it down to them to make them understand.&quot;</td>
<td>Uprising: &quot;Most of the young men are being taught to be tough… as a response to crying.&quot;</td>
<td>Male Representation Matters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tough guy persona feeds into the discipline gap and pattern.</td>
<td>&quot;No one is incapable of being educated, but anyone can become uninterested and disengaged.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Pain isn't relegated to gender.&quot;</td>
<td>Building Rapport with Students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generalizing Statement (Loden/Green)</td>
<td>&quot;Teachers may not be cognizant of the things they're doing or the thoughts in the back of their mind of personal biases and stereotypes - stated or not.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;We are raising young AA makes to be tough and to not wear their emotions on their sleeves… but what we're doing is creating brick walls where emotions can't get through.&quot;</td>
<td>Model Behavior: Life Skills &amp; High Expectations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 1</td>
<td>Teacher programs - &quot;Okay, we're going to place you in a poverty-stricken area or low income, and so there's not much expectation there&quot; so you don't have much expectation before you even start.'</td>
<td>&quot;Brick walls are a defense mechanism because you don't want to be seen as weak or less than.&quot;</td>
<td>Minority vs. Minority (Hispanic/Latino vs. AA)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deviance: AA male students are children first.</td>
<td>&quot;They speak in what we call AA vernacular. And so, because they don't use mainstream English... they always are more likely to be perceived as being&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Children pick up on that, regardless of their level intellect number of IQ. They do pick up on when you are disinterested in them. You don't believe in them, and you don't have&quot;</td>
<td>Alternative Forms of Discipline</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;They speak in what we call AA vernacular. And so, because they don't use mainstream English... they always are more likely to be perceived as being&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;And if you're exposed to that and that person has never been taught a better way (right vs. wrong), you grow up thinking it's okay.&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Children pick up on that, regardless of their level intellect number of IQ. They do pick up on when you are disinterested in them. You don't believe in them, and you don't have&quot;</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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| Accusations = resistance | "I do think it discourages them. It does create resistance." | "But I feel like if you have someone that expects more from you, you're more bound to try to expect things from yourself as well." | Stereotype Threat (Low academic expectations and tough guy standard) | "You don't think I can do it anyway so why try?" | More Leadership Opportunities for AA Males |
| "Bare minimum mentality" | "I try to show them how to communicate." |
| "Between them and their peers, the emotional safety (brick wall) creates majority of the gap because you have a lot of AA males that have not went to college or engage in things that are not ideal… and when they must perform rather than do the bare minimum, they are afraid of failure and judgement so they keep up a wall." |
| "Okay, at risk...probably so far, a lot of them...and that goes back to a lot of times to the neighborhoods that they come from... the role models that they have..." | "Everyone can be educated. I firmly believe that. Now, can everyone be educated the same way on the same thing? No, because we're all different." | "Detached... probably to some degree... a lot of that goes back to the neighborhoods and environment that a lot have grown up in. They've had to grow up that way to make it as far as they have." | Differentiate teaching styles (incorporate technology and collaborative approach) | "We can look at it together." |
| "Gangs are a big issue now, and a lot of them see that as their only way out a lot of times. And so, a lot of them are at-risk." | "I think everybody can be educated, everybody can learn things... Now it may not be the same things that everybody else can learn... but they can learn, you know, they can learn things." | Fatherless Homes = "Man of the House" | Holistic Viewpoint/Approach |
| "Now, do a lot of students participate in some deviant behaviors? Sometimes, yes they do...but to label them as deviant as a whole. I don't think it's true." | "I do think that that (uninterested in learning) is probably true of a lot that most but a lot and that goes back to the way that we teach, the way that the education in general is set up." | "So, a lot of times they have been the man of the house and so they have had to take care of things, and a lot of cases help pay the bill and things like that... so, I think that even if it's not physically tough, I think mentally tough..." | Life Skills: Teaching them to how to deal with emotions |
"To label all of them as dangerous is completely unfair and unfounded."

"The system in general does a lot of students an injustice in that regard."

"I think they are detached a lot of times because they really don't have anything to attach to in a lot of cases, you know, don't have a male role model in the home... mother working two jobs and barely at home...they don't have that structure...that family structure and environment at home."

Building Relationships: Mutual Respect
Secret Ingredient (Best Interest)

Definition of "at-risk" a lot of them are at risk for going one way or the other and as school leaders...it goes back to our responsibility we have of trying to be those role models and show them other opportunities so that they don't take the riskier option.

"Teachers, like you said, while your teachers today have to be adaptable and you have to get to meet students where they are, and if you're unwilling to do that, then they are going to tune you out and become uninterested in learning whatever it is you have to say..."

"The detachment is kind of a self-defense mechanism for a lot because they do have emotions. As a way to protect themselves from those emotions, they try to become or become detached."

Representation Matters: Positive Role Models

"...Treat people with respect as long as you can, you can treat all people with respect. And when you treat people with respect, most of the time you get respect back and I think that's the biggest ingredient to building relationships."

"Trying to expose them to as many different things and opportunities and things like that as possible to help them see that there's more to life than just their neighborhood and what they think they have to do to survive or whatever in their neighborhood... I think that's a big responsibility that we have to many AA males."

"A lot of them are very emotional."

Exposure - Mindset Shift

"A lot of students and especially AA males don't have a lot of positive role models sometimes...especially ones that treat them with dignity and respect..."

"Primarily a fault of the system itself...education systems are set up and is managed because of the way that certain students are classified. A lot of it is systemic...the way that schools are designed, managed, curriculum...locations of the schools."

Connected = "Once they become interested in something positive and start pursuing something positive, it kind of eliminates those other two groups of stereotypes because once they become interested in something positive and start working towards that, it's going to help them to not follow those paths to be at risk and considered dangerous and things like that."

Increase School Engagement/Involvement

"And when someone comes along and shows them no matter who they are or where they come from...you can respect who they are and as a person and not just look at their situation/race... you can treat "whitewashing" curriculum = systemic

Stereotypes = "a lot of that goes back to things you see on the news...television and social media...the music industry...those things tend to promote a lot of those stereotypes in schools"
them that way with that respect and then I think you get that back.”
## Appendix G

### Creating Safe Spaces for African American Male Students

#### Categorization Matrix

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<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
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<th>Implications/Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I would put deviant, together, and that will be labeled on a kid that you consistently see in trouble or see not doing the right thing...that's not best interest to them.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;All of them are judgmental. All of them are non-motivating. All of them are self-esteem crushers.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Those are our kids that we see day to day because there are a lot of...our kids have been taught how to...a lot of our kids don't even know what a proper way to express an emotion is.&quot;</td>
<td>Triangle Connection amongst all 3 sets</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;At-Risk would be the kid who is very...can be manipulative easily, be persuaded to go a different way that they know might not should go this way.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;This set is tell them that you don't have the ability to be successful. You don't have the ability to succeed. You don't have the skills, the knowledge to obtain your goals, your dreams... you are beneath everyone else.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;They're struggling with understanding deep emotion.&quot;</td>
<td>Nurturing &amp; Empathy &amp; Unconditional Positive Regard</td>
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<td>&quot;If they don't know how to properly display bad emotions, that's when you see all of the other behaviors...but that is something that can be taught with learned patience. I think we spend less time with informing and teaching and go straight to get them out of here, ISS.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Here's when it counts the most...when we can get them to understand/show their emotions in the proper way...we'd probably have less deviant, dangerous, at risk students and a decrease in the those that are being considered uninterested in learning and remedial.&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;Exposure: &quot;You don't have to be an athlete/rapper/sell drugs to be successful. You don't have to be affiliated with a gang to be popular. You can be you and do what you enjoy doing and be able to live and have a good life.&quot;</td>
<td>Overall Disadvantage: &quot;So it puts us at a disadvantage when academically the resources are limited, disciplined the harshest...what is there for a young black male to think that the school system is really beneficial to them.&quot;</td>
<td>Building Relationships = Relatability, Love, and Openness</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;(Discipline) It is not balanced. So that systematically passed down to us within the school system...giving the harsher punishments.&quot;</td>
<td>Student-Teacher Relationships: Classroom Dynamics/Approach/Interactions (Why? Self-Reflection, Connection)</td>
<td>Positive Interactions = Greetings/Dap</td>
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**School Counselor 1**

- **Title I schools: Survival Mindset**
  - "First thing instinct is survival mode...a lot of things that other students in other schools/settings/districts don't have to worry or think about...our students do."

- **Academic Gap:** "There's a big connection when you really look at resources - accessibility (laptops/Wi-Fi)."

- **Stereotype Threat:** "If you label a kid deviant, dangerous or at risk...they're going to question themselves. And once that gives question, they gone start believing that within themselves."

- **Uninterested or I Don't Care Mentality = Because their focus is survival."**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Quote</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gap vs. Standard = &quot;I think it's a standard for AA students then there's a standard for everyone else.&quot; (Remove vs. Mediate)</td>
<td>&quot;But you also have more things placed on teachers like PMOS standards, PLCs...so it takes away from them really being able to engage with students...it's trickle-down effect.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excessive Discipline = &quot;No one is going to defend or fight for me. Who is going to protect me if you are out for me?&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;And ultimately, our AA males are the ones that are suffering from the trickle-down effect of all the things that really are put on admin, teachers, counselors that negate the main reason why kids aren't successful and poor relationships.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Impact = &quot;Teachers do because they are the first line of defense.&quot; (Questions their classroom management skills, cultural awareness, and student viewpoint/holistic)</td>
<td>&quot;I feel like these terms describe AA males, but it's also part of like the culture...it's supposed to be like...AA man is supposed to be tough but not show emotion...not supposed to cry.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Counselor 2</td>
<td>&quot;I feel like these terms describe AA males, but it's also part of like the culture...it's supposed to be like...AA man is supposed to be tough but not show emotion...not supposed to cry.&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>School Counselor Role = Protector</td>
<td>&quot;Stop Crying Speech&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>School Counselor 3</td>
<td>Academics: &quot;I don't take that passive approach. I get in their business because I'm concerned. Because I care enough to.&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;Let me be on the giving end as far as listening and compassion.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Students know love.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I would approach a male student and try to correct them, but I wouldn't get the response that I would get when I have earned my way through relationship. When I've seen them not make the most wise decision, I can step in and correction in an empathetic way when a relationship is established.&quot;</td>
<td>Educational Disconnect: &quot;I don't see that (the love for school) in students of today. I don't see what they enjoy about school or their excitement for school...that's a part of the culture and climate.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I find their response is more open and that they would be more willing to comply with me than just somebody they don't really have a relationship with.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;When you hear words like you're never going to be nobody, derogatory words, when teenagers are just teenagering.&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;If you can't respect the people in the building who love you, who care about you, who are concerned about you...you're going to have a very hard time respecting those in authority outside of the building - cops and authority.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;We have all made unwise choices. We have all made decisions that we wish we did not have made at that point in time. However, we understand that's a part of the life cycle (growth). We have to build those dumb days (= snow days) in and give students grace for those days and don't take a critical approach.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration = set the tone structure wise (school climate, discipline, safe)</td>
<td>&quot;When we degrade and belittle students for choices that the make...to me that perpetuates the disconnect and supports it.&quot;</td>
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Appendix H

Stereotype Set 1
Thematic Map 1
Principals
Appendix I

Stereotype Set 2
Thematic Map 2
Principals

Uninterested in Learning
Remedial
Uneducable

Not Meeting Students' Needs

Limiting Learning Styles

Value of Education (Decrease)

Learning begins with Home Exposure

Disengaged Classroom Environment

Work Avoidance

Tier I = Learning Deficiencies

Improve Teacher Preparation and Training
Appendix J

Stereotype Set 3
Thematic Map 3
Principals

Detached
Unemotional
Tough

- Male vs. Female "Crying"
- Male to Male "Power Struggle"
- Stereotype Threat "Can't Show Emotions"
- Cultural By-product "Upbringing"
- Question Sexuality
- Definition of Tough = Resilient & Expression of an Emotion
Appendix K

Stereotype Set 1
Thematic Map 4
Teachers

Deviant At-Risk Dangerous

Generalizable Statement = Teenage Behavior

Accusations Lead to Resistance

Set Feeds Into Discipline Gap & Pattern

At-Risk Definition = In-between Choices

Respect is Required in Relationships

Negative Role Models = Positive Needed
Uninterested in Learning
Remedial
Uneducable

Students' Bare Minimum Mentality

Uninterested = Educational Set Up & Injustices

Everyone Educable yet How Differs

Brick Wall = Emotional Safety = Afraid of Failure or Embarrassment

Fault of the System (Managed, Designed, Zoned, Curriculum)

Exposure is Crucial

Teacher Programs = Low Expectations for Poverty Stricken Students

Lose the Love of Learning = MS to HS Transition

Poor Classroom Engagement & Lack Ability to Adjust

Appendix L

Stereotype Set 2
Thematic Map 5
Teachers
Appendix M

Stereotype Set 3
Thematic Map 6
Teachers

Detached
Unemotional
Tough

Historical Prudence of Black Men

Cultural Upbringing
"Pain isn’t relegated to gender."

Showing Emotion = Weak or Less Than

Brick Wall = Self-Defense Mechanism

Detached due to Lacking Bonds

Emotional Beings & Shows Differently than Other Races

"Pain isn’t relegated to gender."
Appendix N

Stereotype Set 1
Thematic Map 7
School Counselors

At-Risk Definition = In-Between

Gap vs. Standard (Remove vs. Mediate) "Harsher on Own"

Stereotype Set Feeds into Discipline Gap = Systemically

Societal Threat in All Aspects

Teachers and Administration

Positive Role Models Needed

Deviant At-Risk Dangerous
Appendix O

Stereotype Set 2
Thematic Map 8
School Counselors

SS = Self-Esteem
Crushers = Stereotype
Threat in Classrooms

Increased Teacher
Demands = Less
Time for AA
Engagement

Uninterested
in Learning
Remedial
Uneducable

Survival Mode
Overpowers
Learning

Limited
Resources as a
Title I school =
Accessibility

Labeling of IEP =
Limiting
Academic
Advancement =
Glass Ceiling

Disconnect =
Excitement for
School is Absent

Increased
Teacher
Demands = Less
Time for AA
Engagement
Appendix P

Stereotype Set 3
Thematic Map 9
School Counselors

Detached
Unemotional
Tough

Taught this Stereotype Set = Stop Crying = Racial More than Society

Lacking Skills/Life Tools = Communicate & Express Emotions Positively

Cultural Upbringing = AA Man Expectation

School Leaders Lack Patience & Desire to Show

Lack of School Racial Pride

Exposure to Heathy Communication & "It's OK Not to be OK"
Appendix Q

Stereotype Set 1
Thematic Map

Deviant
At-Risk
Dangerous

Gap vs. Standard (Remove vs. Mediate) “Harsher on Own”

Generalizable Statement = Teenage Behavior (Deviant)

Due Process & Finding the Why Behind Behavior

At-Risk Definition = In-between Choices

Not Monolithic Individuals

Building Relationships = Earn Their Respect

Positive Role Models Needed

Atitudes Reflect Leadership = Model Behavior

Theme 1: Positive Role Modeling through Relationship Building

Theme 2: Finding the Why Behind Behavior
Appendix R

Stereotype Set 2
Thematic Map 2

Uninterested in Learning
Remedial Uneducable

Loss the Love of Learning
Limiting Learning Styles
Title I School Characteristics
Classroom Disconnect
IEP Labeling = Academic Achievement Limitation
Students’ Bare Minimum Mentality
Learning begins with Home Exposure
Value of Education (Decrease)

Theme 3: A Decrease in Educational Value
Theme 4: Struggles of a Title I School
Appendix S

Stereotype Set 3
Thematic Map 3

Detached
Unemotional
Tough

Male vs. Female
"Stop Crying"
(Weak, Gay, Less
Than)

Male to Male
"Power Struggle"

Brick Wall = Self-
Defense
Mechanism
(Lacking Bonds)

Lacking Life
Skills/Tools =
Communicate &
Express
Emotions
Positively

Defintion of
Tough = Resilient
& Expression of
an Emotion

Cultural
Upbringing
"Pain isn't
relegated to
gender."

Emotional Beings
& Shows
Differently than
Other Races

Theme 5: African American
Cultural Standard and
Upbringing

Theme 6: The Act of Being
Tough as a Self-Defense
Mechanism