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## Students vs. suspects: A qualitative examination of stereotype threat and the impact on behavior of Black males

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STUDENTS VS. SUSPECTS: A QUALITATIVE EXAMINATION OF STEREOTYPE  
THREAT AND THE IMPACT ON BEHAVIOR OF BLACK MALES.

An Abstract of a Dissertation  
Submitted  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Education

Approved:

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Dr. Shuaib Meacham, Committee Chair

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Ryan J. Williamson  
University of Northern Iowa  
July 2022

## ABSTRACT

This qualitative study focused on the impact of stereotype threat on the behavior of black males in the educational system. Black males currently involved in the juvenile justice system were interviewed about their lived experiences in the educational system. The literature surrounding stereotype threat focuses on academic achievement and performance. It provides spaces in the potential of stereotype threat impacting behavior.

Stereotype threat argues that individuals will confirm a self-characteristic which supports a negative stereotype associated with a specific group within society (Spencer et al., 2016). In theory, people will underperform based on a preconceived notion of failure. If a negative stereotype exists about a person or group, they will act out the negative threat, ultimately impacting their performance or success.

Systems of oppression have had a direct impact on several aspects of the black male population for some time. According to the research, black males are disproportionately identified among students that are forced out of school through withdrawal, suspensions, and extremely low academic achievement (Jenkins, 2006). Black males drop out or withdrawal from high school at alarming rates. According to Noguera (1997), 20% to 30% of black males are exiting school prior to graduation. Furthermore, students that withdraw from school potentially lack the simple literacy skills necessary to function in society, “It is now estimated that 44% of all black men are functionally illiterate” (p. 31).

While there is an abundance of research surrounding stereotype threat and its impact on educational outcomes, there is gaps in the literature connecting stereotype

threat and its impact on behavior specific to black males. According to Noguera (2009), the internal belief in racial stereotypes threats and the societal label of Black men as villain, many teachers, both white and black, fail to provide engaging superior education. This project examines how young Black men are perceived in education and greater society. Furthermore, how do those perceptions have a direct impact on their behavior? Specifically, if African-American males are subjected to stereotype threat within the educational system, what is the impact on their behavior?

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I feel especially compelled to thank the three young men who volunteered their time to support this project. Without their voices this project would not have happened. I would like to thank them for sharing their stories with me. I hope I have honored your voices and experiences through my words. I am very confident these three young men will move forward in their lives despite their school experiences. I honor you for the brilliant and talented young Black men you are.

I am humbled by the members of my committee. I greatly appreciate you giving me this opportunity to share my research with the world. I believe each of you have a purpose on my committee. From my initial proposal defense, I worked hard to honor each of you. I understand the importance of listing your names as committee members and I definitely do not take it lightly. I hope you are proud of the work I have submitted and I greatly appreciate your support.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Where This Started

At one point in time, I owned a T-shirt which stated “danger, educated black man,” or “the most dangerous thing on earth is an educated black man.” In the past, I reverently believed it to true. Yet today, as I examine our current educational system, I find it much more difficult to believe. It seems as though many Black males have zero faith in a system designed to ensure failure. More alarming, perhaps, is that it seems the education system has zero faith in Black boys.

Research argues that black males are losing the battle in the educational system. As we examine statistics, we find that there is an educational divide between black males and any other subgroup. Black males are being suspended and expelled from school at a much higher rate than any other sub-group. These young men are being referred to the office at alarming rates, and black males lead the nation in incarceration rates. This research study looks to examine the relationship between stereotype threat and its impact on behavior of African-American males.

As a young African American man being raised in the inner city, I had two dreams. One was to become a fighter pilot in the United States Armed Forces; the other dream was to become a mental health professional. While I thought long and hard about joining the service, I ultimately decided the safer profession was to encourage and support young people, in particular African-American males. Being from the inner city, I was surrounded daily with poverty, crime, and drugs. By all accounts, it was expected I

would continue the trend of most inner-city youth; however, I was determined to prove otherwise.

During my youth, I witnessed countless African-American males be evicted from the educational system. Not only were students being suspended from school at alarming rates, they were also being expelled. Some students were exited from class for seemingly minor offenses while others simply left without explanation. While this seemed “odd” to most students, it seemed to become the norm in school. African American males became targets, not those targeted for a bright future and academic excellence, rather, targeted for substandard expectation.

It was clear not only to me but others, that black and brown students were being sent to the office more than their white counterparts. However, it was never clear which rule had been broken by these students when they were, sometimes forcibly, removed from class. Staff never held restorative conversations with students to mend the relationship. Students were simply returned to class and expected to reintegrate into a classroom which clearly placed little value on their perspective. This created a toxic learning environment not only for African American young men but for all students in the classroom.

When said students would re-integrate into the classroom, the expectation of learning seemed non-existent. Not only did the students return without an understanding of what they did wrong, it is possible the instructor harbored ill feelings from the students’ behaviors. The more the instructor tried to gain control of said behavior, the

harder the student will challenge the authority. The students' behavior ultimately was a result of the interaction between them and the instructor.

### Looking Back

Because I work in the educational setting, I am able to examine similar situations from a different perspective. Even though it's been 20 years since my own experiences as a student, I see similarities in how instructors address African-American males. There seems to be a rush to judgement when dealing with this population. Students were being sent to the office for minor offenses labeled disrespect or insubordination. Students were accused of theft with little proof, disciplined without regard for the facts. One colleague jokingly referred to a group of African American males as "prison bound." The more I thought about the "prison bound" comment, the more I realized he could be right. However, were these young men being directed down this "prison" path upon their own devices or that of a systematic oppression known as "*stereotype threat*?" This begs the question, are African-American males viewed as students or are they suspects?

Stereotype threat refers to when someone is at risk of confirming a self-characteristic which is a negative stereotype associated with the social group the person belongs to (Spencer et al., 2016). Essentially, stereotype threat argues that individuals underperform based on preconceived thoughts of a group. If negative stereotypes are present regarding a specific group, they will act out the negative threat, which ultimately will hinder their success.

While a great deal of research supports the impact of stereotype threat on academic achievement, it fails to identify these threats of influencing behavior. Are

personal biases and stereotype threat in education creating an environment of failure and possible juvenile justice interaction for young black males? This research opportunity will examine the impact implicit bias and stereotype threat has on student behavior. Due to the dearth of research that exists regarding stereotype threat influencing behavior among young black males, this study will contribute to that absence in the existing literature.



## CHAPTER 2

### AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

#### The Call

Finally, the call I was waiting for had come. Woodrow Wilson High School, the premier public school in the Century City area phoned to inform me that my offer to transfer to that building had been accepted. I was ecstatic; I had been waiting for this moment for well over six years. Wilson was the place I called home for four years as a high school student myself. When I graduated, I vowed to come back as a staff member to make it better than when I'd left. Now, the vow I'd made many years before was finally transpiring into reality.

Wilson was an amazing school for many reasons. The school was known for its academic excellence, diversity, athletics, and arts. The athletic department has three state championships in its illustrious history, several state boys' and girls' team state titles, and many individual track athletes have won state as well. Many of its notable alumni include famous actresses and Olympians. I was honored to say that I attended the school.

Built in 1923, the halls were lined with dark oak paneling, giving it an extremely warm feel. The floors were of smooth concrete, which accented the oak, giving the building a distinct and unique ambiance. Just a few blocks from the school were multi-million-dollar homes. When families moved into the Century City area and wanted a public school, they would find residence within the Woodrow Wilson

boundaries. Families wanted their children to go to the school known for its academic excellence.

Despite the character of the building, the most important part of the school for me was a personal history: two of my own relatives had walked the halls. My uncle was an alumnus, as was my brother. Following them made me feel like I was part of a legacy.

As much as I desired to get back to Wilson as a staff member, the pathways of getting there required much more than solely desire. As an African American male, it is important for me to understand where I have come from. Century City was your typical urban community. It housed several communities within its boundaries. The downtown area, inner city, metro, and suburbs all made up this community of approximately 200,000 people.

Growing up in the inner city of Century City, I witnessed America's racial injustices on a regular basis. From gang violence to poverty, I watch a generation of young men of color -- young men like me -- struggle to gain the promises of this country which include life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. More often than not, their struggles were in vain, and their opportunities simply did not materialize.

As I reflect on my experiences, I find myself asking the question, how did I not fall victim to the same injustices of my teenage counterparts? Was it my internal drive that kept me focused on graduating from high school and moving on to college? Was it my fear of guns and violence that kept me away from the path so many of my "friends" chose? In full transparency, I would say it was none of the above. The reason I did not become a statistic was one reason and one reason only: Sherry.

Sherry was my mother. She is by far the strongest women I have ever met. She kept an extremely tight leash on my siblings and me. We had a strict curfew, which had exceedingly harsh consequences if it were ever broken. She had a look that could melt ice with a single glance. Many African-Americans know this look. It is a “steel in the face” look that ultimately meant “don’t mess with me.” We feared that look. It was because of that woman that I can say I survived the harsh realities that took down other young black males.

Despite living in a single-parent home, we never went without our basic needs being met. We always had clean clothes, food, a home, and transportation. Mom worked extremely hard to provide a comfortable living environment. In retrospect, it seems as though she knew the dangers lurking right outside our front door. At the time, while we understood some of those dangers, we didn’t recognize them all.

For example, while I was attending Wilson, I was extremely involved in extracurricular activities such as athletics, vocal music, culture-club, and student council. I was a good student that tended to be a rule follower. One night after a football game I was being dropped off at home by a group of friends. As I exited the car and began to walk up my driveway and my friends began to drive away, I heard a voice in the distance say, “Buddy, turn around and come here.” This white male whom I did not recognize was about 30 feet away in the street walking toward me. I immediately responded, “No, I’m going to go in,” and I continued up my driveway. I heard the same command from the man again, but this time when I turned around to say no, I was shocked to find a gun pointed at my face. Within minutes, my street was lit up like a

Christmas tree. Multiple police cars appeared out of nowhere as if I were a member of the Black Gangster Disciples (BGD, was a local gang known for their involvement with guns and drugs.) After several minutes and several questions, the white male identified himself as a police officer and he was patrolling the neighborhood looking for a black male with a black bag. It was assumed that since I matched the description, I must be a criminal and deemed dangerous, hence his firearm in my face. We watched the same thing happen through summer 2016, played out on homemade videos and played endlessly on television news. While white America may have just realized that black males are an endangered species, my community has always known this to be the case.

While we lived with that reality, we also came to understand that we lived in a neighborhood plagued with danger and violence. We could look out the front window and witness a drug deal. Our next-door neighbor's house was shot up during a drive-by shooting. We came to believe that our house had previously been home to a drug dealer, as we had many individuals knock on our door asking for a known drug supplier. To escape the mayhem of inner-city life, I found refuge in school.

Wilson was home to many walks of life. The economic diversity within the walls was staggering. While most students of color arrived to the building on a yellow bus, most white students drove to school. Students on the north side of the building, essentially the black students, would file off the bus as though they were being dropped off at the local prison, the way we had all seen on television. Few, if any, white faces appeared on buses. The white kids usually had money to have cars. Blacks had to ride

the bus to attend school, giving our experience something of an institutional feel. This was not the same experience of someone who drives to school. There was clearly a difference in how one subgroup lived compared to the other.

Black students, especially black males, could see the things they didn't have, yet badly wanted. The cars, the clothes, the money, the girls. These are all things we wanted but simply could not afford. Thank goodness, Mom kept me focused on athletics, books, and the arts--mainly vocal music and drama. Many of my black classmates chose to sell drugs to obtain the material things they wanted. The more drugs they sold the more independent they believed themselves to be. These students argued with teachers and acted out in class which resulted in office referrals and often suspension. I watched it all and realized I had to make a choice: engage in activities that could end with me being suspended, in jail or dead; or respect my mother's expectations and concentrate my energy on graduating from Wilson.

The tension of the choice was as difficult as it was consistent. Watching my friends walk around with several thousand dollars in their pockets caused an immense sense of jealousy. They began to drive to school in fancy cars decked out with flashy wheels and expensive stereo systems, just like the white kids in the south parking lot. The girls flocked to them as though they carried the same fame and fortune as the designer and owner of the Nike Air Jordan label. All I had to do was make a few drug deals and I could have everything they and my white counterparts had. Despite the allure of the flashy things I wanted, Mom's "look" was more powerful.

Ultimately, I watched my friends fall victim to the system. The system of educational failure, office referrals and sometimes expulsions was almost the norm for those in my cypher. Many of my “friends,” became involved in illegal activities: Substance abuse, drug trafficking, theft and a host of other activities. Encouraged by Mom, I kept moving forward on a positive trajectory. Ultimately, by the time I graduated, many of my black friends either withdrew from school or had been arrested.

My time at Wilson High and the things I witnessed helped me determine the academic path I chose to follow. The teachers and coaches of Wilson encouraged me to work hard and persevere through adversity. One teacher in particular, Mrs. Haylett who taught theater, told me I should go into education. I remember her saying that the school needed more black male educators. Despite the ethnic and economic diversity at Wilson, there were only two African-Americans on staff, Mr. Lovelady and Mrs. White.

The lessons from my mom and the encouragement from the teachers caused me to start down this path. This educational system, coupled with growing crime and death rate among young African-American males charged me to make a positive impact on a negative system. I needed to help young men of color avoid the constant cycle of office referrals and suspensions, and help them navigate a system that clearly sets them up for failure. I needed to halt what had effectively become a pipeline to prison; a system that starts with being disaffected then goes to office referrals and ultimately to wearing an orange jumpsuit isolated from society. Black males were not surviving in school and it had to stop. I could make an impact not only on the community from which I hailed, but

the entire Century City community and possibly everywhere. I could do this by entering the world of education and surrounding myself with young men of color to provide support systems to help them develop and achieve their goals. Working with black males is what I wanted to do. Addressing the issues within the black male community is where my passion simmered. It is what guided me into the educational profession.

### High School Graduation and College

When I graduated from Wilson, many of my friends did not graduate with me. Even though this pained me, I was on a mission. My path was clear, I needed to get my education so I could come back and make an impact. In 1992 I left Century City and headed off to Lakeside College. I was excited to start college. It afforded me the opportunity to surround myself with other likeminded people of color. Black males that wanted to attend school and not involved in the chaos of the inner city.

I joined several organizations such as Black Student Union and Ethnic Student Promoters simply to be around positive people of color. I majored in social studies education because I wanted to be a psychology teacher. I joined a historically black Greek organization, Phi Beta Sigma Inc., to surround myself with other black males wanting to make a difference in their respective communities. The motto of the organization was, "Culture for Service, Service for Humanity," meaning a dedication to community service which in turn would impact humanity. Ultimately, I wanted to fill my toolbox with positive interactions with black people that I could take back to the educational system.

As I moved through my experience at Lakeside College, the opportunity to support black males as a school counselor intrigued me. I remember in one of my education classes listening to a school counselor speak of the benefits of the profession. They had the opportunity to meet with students' one on one, form small groups, take field trips, and help students envision a life and future beyond high school. I knew many of my black peers in high school had trouble envisioning one beyond their flashy items acquired through questionable means. This provided me the perfect platform to work with black males. So at the end of my undergraduate career I enrolled in the master's program in school counseling.

#### First Job

As I completed my master's degree in counseling and made plans to enter the workforce, I was afforded the opportunity to join the team at Morris High School in a small community uniquely named Bridgestone. The population of Bridgestone was 22,697, as indicated by the United States Census. The racial makeup of the city was 90% white and a handful of other races. It was a blue-collar river town located on the eastern side of the state with tons of manufacturing and farming opportunities. One of its chief employers was The Jelly Corporation, the second largest office furniture manufacturer in the world. The Village Corporation (formerly Grimes Foods), manufactures grain for human and animal feed, while the Wright Company produced herbicides and pesticides. These companies generously equipped the schools with chairs, desks, computers and other furnishing to support student learning.



Morris High School was a large school with a small-town feel. According to the principal, I was the first African-American male to join their staff in over 10 years. It was the perfect opportunity for me to “show my skills” and learn more about the counseling profession. Even though I spent three years learning the profession from professors and textbooks, I was eager and a bit uncertain about how effectively I could address the social and emotional needs of students. My role in the building was yet to be determined as the principal wanted me to work with the at-risk population, yet I was a licensed school counselor. Regardless of the unknown, I was extremely excited at the possibility to support young people. It was an opportunity for me to put into practice all of the education and training. I was eager and nervous—cautiously optimistic.

The high school was dynamic in many ways. Not only did it have the complete support of the community, the staff was fully vested in educating students. The principal, Jack Benson, was a very vibrant leader. He brought new student-focused ideas to the learning environment. He led the school and the district in the concept of teaming and interdisciplinary housing, where groups of students would be housed by a core group of teachers. These teachers then had time to meet and discuss student issues, offer curricular planning, host parent meetings, and undergo professional development.

Despite Morris being a great place to work, it did not diminish my hunger for working with a larger population of Black males. Even though I was able to facilitate small groups, provide academic, personal, and social support to the small number of African-American at Morris, my hunger ran deep. As an African-American male in

education, I wanted to impact the lives of young African-American males. As such, it was time to move on.

### Capitol City

Century City is the largest city in the state. The community and schools were diverse, and the population was continually growing.

Century City Public Schools was the largest urban school district in the state of Iowa. It also housed Wilson, the school I wanted to get back to. The population of the district during 2001 was around 35,000: 41 elementary schools, 10 middle schools, three special schools and programs, and five comprehensive high schools. During that time there were 10,114 high school students in Century City school district. Southview High School was the first building in the district where I worked. Even though it was not my first choice, I jumped at the chance to work in the CCSD. I knew I would be beneficial to this district; I knew it was the place for me.

### The Pride of The Southside

Southview High School, also known as the “Pride of the Southside,” was a good placement which allowed me to get my foot in the proverbial door of Century City. The building was approximately 85% white 7% black, 5% Hispanic, and 3% other races. Southside had a rich tradition of academic and athletic excellence. When I entered the building, they had six national merit scholars and over 50 Advanced Placement scholars.

While Southview was rich in tradition, it was infamous for its lack of ethnic diversity. There are many factors that could have determined the lack of ethnic diversity

at Southview high. A majority of the Century City African-American population lived within the inner city. These students attended King, Perkins, Northridge, and Southview. The southside, for many, was viewed as a suburb rather than a part of the overall Century City community. Simply geography could have been a determining factor which impacted Southview's ethnic diversity.

When I arrived on staff, I was one of two African-American adults in the building. There were over 80 faculty for a student population of 2200. With Mr. Martin, African American adult male, in the building, I immediately began discussing interventions we could implement to support the students of color in the building, specifically young Black males. During our conversation, we noticed a recurring theme among the students: they did not feel as though they were a part of the school community. Many complained that they were being treated unfairly by the staff. They felt they were the recipients of many racial slurs from peers, and often received consequences based on their reactions to them. This was extremely troubling as an adult of color in this building. The frustration I felt for the treatment these students spurred me into action

The data at the time was very discouraging for students of color. The data followed the trends within the district. Students of color were not graduating from high school, being suspended at a much higher rate than their white counterparts, and were referred to the office three times as often as their white peers. Mr. Martin and I came to the conclusion that this data must be addressed if we were to have any impact on the students of color. Out of our conversation emerged an idea of the first Black Student

Union (BSU) within Century City Public Schools. The group's primary mission was to inspire students of color within Southview High School.

### Black Student Union

Mr. White and I met several times over the next few weeks to outline the formation of BSU. We knew we wanted to create a dynamic group that was all-encompassing of the student body. At no point did we want to isolate a specific population within Southview High. However, we wanted to focus on issues pertinent to data surrounding African-American students. We came up with a simple vision: Address the needs of African-American students within Southview High. Our mission was to "Examine the barriers to success with Southview High for African-American student to create positive pathway which would lead to decreased office referrals, suspensions, and expulsions in an effort to increase graduation rates." Now that we had our direction, it was time to pitch the idea to administration.

We scheduled time with meet with our principal to share our idea. He listened with intent as we outlined our mission, vision and goal to positively support African-American Students. Despite our desire to focus on African-American experiences, BSU was all inclusive. We wanted all our student, Black, White, Hispanic, Asian, and Native-American to be involved in the conversation. In our opinion, it was a win-win situation. Students of color would be provided a safe space within the school building to reflect on their status within the school's community. Our other students could learn and empathize from shared experiences of our African-Americans students. Together, the students could make a difference.

Our conversation with the principal seemed extremely cold. He asked questions such as, “How could this group impact the climate of the building?”, and “How do we plan to share the results of the discussion with the entire staff?” The tone of his questioning implied a sense of worry surrounding white feelings. As we were being bombarded with questions, I began to believe we would not receive approval, however, I forged on. Despite some discouragement, he gave us our approval. Now it was time to share our new group with the student body.

I can remember my heart pounding with excitement as I announced the formation of the BSU to the student body. That excitement turned to irritation when, hours later, I began receiving message and phone calls from our staff asking why we were starting a group which, by its name, was extremely divisive. I explained that that the group was all encompassing of Southside High School, but the *topics* that the group would discuss would focus around the concerns of our African-American students. We welcomed anyone who wanted to join in the conversation.

It was difficult for us to understand the intentions of these teachers who seems somewhat opposed to the group and yet continuously questioned the educational commitment of students of color. The dichotomy of examining the dismal data related to the academic and social performance of African-American students while showing timidity or hesitation in fully addressing the problem felt completely absurd. If these teachers were truly troubled by the data surrounding their students of color, why question the formation of a group that’s sole purpose was to address this very data?

Despite the subtle questioning and palpable resistance, I never faced any direct opposition from the staff. They did not want to help the group, per se, but I did not experience any overt backlash from my colleagues. I would like to believe they recognized the problem. Perhaps they lacked the comfort necessary to engage in these conversations. Perhaps they felt the plight of African-American students was not their issue, in a predominantly white school. Discussing race and racial inequality is difficult and personal. It creates a level of discomfort among adults which most people do not wish to deal with. With Mr. Martin and me leading the charge, they were off the hook, so to speak.

The first BSU meeting shocked us! We expected some students and maybe a couple staff members would show up to the conversation. Unfortunately no staff members were present to the first meeting; however, over 45 students were in attendance. Over 30 students were African-American, eight were Hispanic and seven were White. We wondered whether the kids need a place to share their thoughts and experiences in a non-threatening environment or if they were just curious about the formation of this new group.

We began by sharing some of the data on African-American students with those attending the BSU meeting. We wanted to open the group with a simply discussion of the facts. While unsure how the students would react to hearing the data, we decided, after many discussions, that they needed to know how they were perceived both inside and outside of the school. Then, we opened discussion to the students. The facts were glaringly obvious; students of color were not graduating (dropping out), were referred to

the office, and were suspended more than white students. We also noticed that more students of color were being escorted out of the building in handcuffs rather than graduation gowns. We needed to hear from the students firsthand what they were experiencing so we could begin talking about ways to make it better. With the data placed in front of the students, we posed one simple question, “What does it mean to be African-American in today’s society”?

One African-American male stepped forward and cut through the clutter with his response stating, “I’m waiting my turn to be referred to the office or suspended.” Another female student stated, “If I make it out of Southview High it will not be because of Southview High, it will be in spite of Southview high.” What powerful statements made by these students.

They felt as though Southview was doing nothing to help them become productive members of society. In their view, Southview was killing their self-esteem. If they were to make it out, it would be despite the negativity of the school.

At that moment, the room went quiet. You could feel the chill in the air. The students of color in the room exhaled in unison as their classmate articulated a shared experience. The proverbial elephant in the room had reared its ugly head and now it was time to openly discuss how these students were feeling.

In all of his classes, every other black male in the course was asked to leave because of behavior or lack of focus. He struggled with this because he did not understand what he did wrong, which led him to believe it was unfair treatment. Because of this belief, it was only a matter of time before he was asked to leave the class.

Clearly, the teacher was inherently unfair and would send him again for no reason. It was either live in fear of the instructor or not attend the class. Neither were viable options for student success.

Other students responded by saying being Black in today's society meant a life of poverty, crime, substance abuse, lack of education, and racism. They felt as though school and the community as a whole wanted to exterminate them like unwanted rodents. Being African-American provided no advantages in life, only hardships. These students were broken, largely because of their environment.

This was heart-wrenching to me, not only as an educator but as a man of color. Despite having similar feelings growing up, I believed in success because of the encouragement of my mom. She was the driving force to my siblings and me. We were taught to work hard and success was always achievable. Did the students of Southside High not have any positive role models in their lives? Did they not have a cheerleader always encouraging them to work hard socially and academically to achieve success? I hoped BSU would be the vessel of encouragement these students needed to improve their outlook on their educational experience.

### Culture Shock

If not a universal belief, it was a prevalent one: Black students did not believe they could achieve at high levels. Graduation from high school was the end game. Post-secondary education was not an option. If students believe that college could be in their future, it is imperative they hear this whenever possible. Students need encouragement--continuous positive feedback to completely believe in their capabilities. This was not



happening among the minority populations. While white students were being introduced to college representatives, minority students were invited to career, military, and trade fairs. These low expectations led to a mentality of underachievement which required immediate attention.

With BSU, we wanted to empower the students of Southview High School. We wanted them to believe in themselves and not be deterred from high expectations because of their ethnic identity. The building seemed to be toxic in its views of ethnic diversity. Students of color were held to a different standard than their white counterparts. The expectations among staff were glaringly different for students of color, therefore it became palpably obvious to Mr. Martin and me that we needed to address cultural self-awareness with these students. Just because they were minorities did not mean they could not achieve academically at high levels.

We followed up this discussion during future union meetings, trying to understand the racial implications and correlations between suspension, academic achievement, behavior, and self-worth. We reintroduced positivity into their academic lives in order to address the lack of self-esteem. Through positive self-talk and reflection, we focused energy on helping students understand their value. We brought in college representatives to speak with our minority students, and arranged college visits. We had the inaugural “Healthy Living Week” that focused on education, physical, psychological, and emotional wellness. Lastly, we hosted our “Positive Leadership Speaker Series” which invited leaders from the community to come share stories of inspiration. We provided a

positive, safe, and nurturing environment in which students of color could feel a sense of community and belong.

Gradually, as we rolled out these initiatives steadily for four years, we began to see a shift in the thinking of students of color. They began to believe in themselves and their abilities. Education beyond high school no longer was only for white students. They accepted the challenges to excel not only academically but socially. We saw an increased number of minority students enrolling in advanced placement courses, fewer attendance concerns, decreased suspensions, and increased graduation rates, within the minority population. Over time, students learned that what they looked like should not determine their place in the world. They learned to be proud of their ethnicity so their ethnicity could be proud of them.

Even though we couldn't prove causation, I believed—and still believe—there was a correlation between the BSU and the positive climate that began to surround Black students at Southview High School. I continued the work with BSU while my counterpart took position at a different school and established a group there that featured many of the core values of our BSU.

Black Student Union at Southview High School became a staple within the school culture. And yet, despite notable gains, most teachers failed to fully support the group. No other staff member in the building ever showed their support by coming to meetings and engaging our students in dialogue. Even though we were beginning to see successes in behavior and academic outcomes, the support of staff and administration was lukewarm at best.

While I focused a lot of my time on meeting the needs to our African-American population, it was equally important to ensure the success of all students. Some people could view my efforts with BSU as discriminatory. In retrospect, yes, I did discriminate as I purposely worked hard to impact the negative stereotype of failure among Southview's students of color. But my discrimination was not geared only towards young Black students. I supported our White, Hispanic, Bosnian, Asian, Native American, and refugee students as well.

#### For It Is Time to Move On

Despite the energy and fulfillment that BSU and the improving status of African-American students brought me, over time, I began feeling worn down. Coming to work became a chore. Perhaps the lack of visible and practical support from others had taken its toll on me. Perhaps it was just my time. When I first came to Southview, supporting students of color drove me. We facilitated discussions, we engaged staff members in cultural proficiency trainings, we encouraged staff to talk and listen to our young students of color. But after all that we had accomplished, I felt as though I was losing my drive. As a result, I requested a transfer to another building.

I needed a new challenge to continue my own professional growth. So when I received the call that my transfer was approved, I knew it was time to move on. My heart sang when I saw the opportunity to transfer to my alma mater, Woodrow Wilson High School. I told myself years before that I would come back to Wilson as a staff member. I had come full circle. I was going back to the place I once called home.

### Welcome to Woodrow Wilson

Wilson High School clearly was not going to have similar issues as Southview. While Southview has an extremely low minority population, Wilson's was around 40%. This differed from my days as a student, when it was approximately 20%. With this diverse population, I imagined they would have addressed the racial disparities within the population. This, however, was an inaccurate assessment based on the preconceived notion that Wilson was the "premier" school within Century City Public Schools.

Walking back into Woodrow Wilson High School caused a flood of emotions, both good and bad. The reputation and oak paneled corridors remained undamaged 15 years later. Pockets of students clogged the hallways disrupting staff as they moved about the building. The south parking lot remained a refuge for expensive cars and wealthy students, while the north lot was termed "the ghetto lot", a response to minority students exiting the yellow school bus. The availability of advanced placement courses had increased, so had the number of students of color.

On paper, tradition and reputation suggested these students were the best that Century City had to offer. Academically, students were graduating at much higher levels than the other schools in the district. Wilson had the highest number of students graduating with advanced placement (AP) distinction than any other school. Wilson received higher achievement scores on standardized assessments. Wilson by all accounts was still "the place to be."

Wilson's reputation was founded on academics, yet it was all encompassing of its surrounding community. It housed poverty-stricken students alongside those who come from wealth. It was an accepting school, as demonstrated by its community involved GSA (gay straight alliance) and thriving FCA (Fellowship of Christian Athletes). Wilson was a melting pot of the community and I was ready to jump in with both feet.

When I came to Wilson, I received a heaping dose of reality. I needed to adjust my thinking in terms of diversity and racial issues. Because of the reputation of the school, I naively assumed that students of color were achieving at high levels and not faced with racial inferiority similar to Southview. I assumed students of color were valued in each classroom and expected to learn at high levels. There were no differences based on race and every student regardless of ethnicity was appreciated. This was, after all, Woodrow Wilson High School. The place to be.

I was wrong. I was naïve in my thinking. Wilson was not what I perceived it to be from the outside looking in. Despite the luster of the 1923 woodwork, the accolades of famous Olympians, actresses, military personnel, authors, and state championships, Wilson high School had a secret masked behind its history. I found a much different reality when I walked into the building as a staff member. I learned that students of color were receiving similar treatment and living a similar experience as Southview students. The minority population was 44%, 23% of whom were African-Americans. As a student, I recall Wilson having a population of 25% minority with 12% being of African descent. It was shocking to learn of the racial inequities that existed in this

building. While the community was being told Wilson is the leading academic school in the area, its students of color lived a much different reality.

It was continually argued at Wilson High that the best way to address racial differences was to provide the best possible instruction. If the school employed only the best instructors and provided them with quality professional development all students could learn at high levels. So the mentality of the educational environment became that all students were treated equally regardless of race. If students of color received the best instruction, any supposed inequities or cultural or environmental disadvantages would be easily overcome. The thinking was that no specific attention to race, class, culture or ethnicity was needed. Excellence and high expectations, plain and simple, was the strategy for all.

Even though the building touted this rhetoric of equality, the data being collected painted a different picture. Students of color, particularly Black students were being suspended at a much higher rate than their nonblack peers. The number of behavioral referrals for Black students almost doubled that of white students. Achievement scores on standardized assessments were substantially lower for students of color. From my office, I often saw young Black men being escorted down the pristine hallways and down the marble steps by Century City Police officers. If Wilson, which spoke highly of its diversity and agreed with its pedagogical philosophy of high expectations and excellence as the recipe for achievement and success for all students, why was it not substantiated with data and evidence?

### Introduction

I was introduced to Travis by Mrs. Bennett, vice principal at Wilson. Travis was a senior and had a great deal of potential. He had a fair complexion which matched mine. He wore his hair in a tight, short afro with a bald fade. He always looked like a million bucks, a potential cover for *Ebony* magazine. He would always wear his flashy white Nike Air Force One's which never ever had a speck of dust on them. His shirt was always pressed and his jeans always had a sharp crease down the front. Travis and I had an immediate connection--not because of the color of our skin, but because of the music we listened to. We were both huge fans of Ice Cube and NWA. Their lyrics articulated feelings both Travis and I shared, and made plain the things we had felt and experienced yet no one else was saying.

My office became a sanctuary for Travis and many students alike. I prided myself on creating a safe and harmonious environment. I had college posters covering an entire wall in hopes that it would spark conversation with students about their college potential. I kept the lighting soft and low with the intention of creating a warm and inviting atmosphere to give space to open up and talk.

Many would argue that Travis came from the perfect home. Both his parents had graduated from college and maintained gainful employment. By all accounts, society would consider them upper middle class. His younger sister was doing extremely well academically at Alice Parker middle School. Though he came from an extremely educated family, Travis was not encouraged to work towards his academic potential. Although his parents both had graduated from college, Travis stumbled

around to a 2.5 cumulative grade point average. He was never taken seriously as a potential college student. Many of his instructors described him to me as the student that could make it, but chose not to. In their minds, the WWHS strategy of excellent instruction would work, if Travis would just let it. I saw something very different. Like so many other young Black men, I felt Travis just needed someone to believe in him.

I began working with Travis as a personal favor to Mrs. Bennett. She saw his potential and wanted him to have positive relationship with a man of color in the building. I had become well-accustomed to being one of only a couple of Black staff members in my schools. Despite WWHS's diverse student population, I was again one of only two Black males in the building. When I first began working with Travis, I took the time to learn about his past behaviors. After examining his referral and suspension history, I determined most of his referrals were based on subjective views of instructors. As I dug into his file, I found numerous reports of him being sent to the office for tardies, talking when the teacher was talking, and the most common: showing disrespect to those in authority. There were no referrals for major defiance, violence, or behavior.

I realized in short order that most of his referrals and suspensions could have been avoided if both parties would have listened to each other. Once both individuals were challenged, they would not back down. Travis felt he was being disrespected, as did the instructor. I asked Travis, "Who is right in that situation?" In that moment, he believed he was right. During a follow up meeting, he admitted that both he and the instructor were right.



Travis's record revealed that he had been suspended during his junior year more than six times for level two referrals such as disrespect, profanity, and attendance. In one incident, Travis used profanity toward an instructor. Because this incident seemed more intense than the others, I asked him to describe it to me.

Travis had been accused of theft by a teacher. Chemistry students had been moving around the classroom working on an experiment when a student realized his cell phone was missing. Travis told me, "The teacher came directly to me and asked me to go to the hallway." When he got to the hallway, the teacher directed him, "Empty your pockets, *now!*"

Travis immediately became defensive because he was not told why he was asked to leave the class and empty his pockets. He didn't know something was missing until the instructor told him, "Something in the class has turned up missing and another student believes he saw you by the table." Travis's anger intensified quickly. In a loud voice he snapped, "I didn't steal shit from anyone! Everyone in that classroom walked past that table!"

He told the instructor that he would not empty his pockets because he had not stolen anything. He went on to ask, "Why aren't you asking everyone in the classroom to empty their pockets? There are 25 other students in the class, yet I'm the only one being accused of anything."

No one in the class ever came to Travis's defense. No one else was told to empty their pockets. They simply listened to the teacher grill Travis in the hallway as if he were a criminal on the TV show *Cops*. Eventually, Travis stormed back into the classroom

and grabbed his backpack and jacket. Despite being told to stay put and wait for campus monitors, he told the teacher, “I am not a thief and I didn’t steal anything, get the hell out of my way. I am leaving.”

Instead of going to the vice principal’s office as he had been told, Travis stormed into my office to tell me what just had transpired. He was, in his words, “pissed.” Every other word out of his mouth was a swear word, as he attempted to explain the altercation to me. He voiced that he was never going back to that class. That teacher had questioned his character and as a result, Travis lost all respect for him as a teacher and adult.

After I let Travis vent his frustration, it was time to talk. I asked him to calm down so we could take a minute to examine and process the event. Travis’s white-hot anger prevented him from understanding why he was the first and only person being accused of theft. In his mind he did nothing to deserve the unfair treatment. My heart ached when he asked, “If people automatically assume I’m a thief, why disappointment them?”

The vice principal’s investigation revealed that Travis was telling the truth. He had not stolen the cell phone. A classmate jokingly picked up his friend’s device and placed it in his own pocket. The instructor never apologized to Travis. The damage was done. Travis’s status as a suspect had been solidified in front of his peers.

Travis and I had worked countless hours developing and practicing strategies that would help him deescalate tense situations. I felt we had made progress in helping him see other’s perspectives. Yet, in the heat of this moment, all of the negative experiences from his past came crashing back into reality. He was, as so many times in the past, a

suspect, and there was little he could do about it. His anger made it worse. Even when following the rules, he felt as though he was being continually harassed by staff as if expected to fail academically, personally, and socially.

This became a turning point for Travis. Despite our continued efforts, Travis struggled to develop relationships with his instructors. He believed he was labeled a troublemaker without ever stepping foot inside a classroom. In his mind, every teacher at WWHS targeted the bullseye painted on his back. He believed he could do no right notwithstanding every concerted effort to be positive in the building. To him, he became 'public enemy number one.'

As the lack of respect towards Travis grew, so did the disrespect from Travis to his teachers. The office referrals were handed out for extremely minor infractions. If Travis were late to class by 30 seconds, he would be sent immediately to the office. If he would ask a neighboring student a question during an instructor's lecture, he would be asked to leave the classroom. There was nothing he could do without some form of punishment. Woodrow Wilson High School eventually became Travis's prison.

### Graduation

Despite his frequent run-ins with the teachers and administrators, Travis had a reasonable chance to graduate from high school, however, he needed to pass U.S. History first. The semester was wearing on and he was struggling to complete his work. His motivation to complete his school work was fading, and with it, his prospects for graduation.

Travis and his U.S. History instructor never seemed to get along. Their relationship was tumultuous at best, yet Travis needed this course for graduation. As the semester wore on, Travis was showing signs of defeat. His attendance became sporadic, and he was often tardy to class. I continually encouraged Travis telling him, “You are almost to the finish line, don’t give up now.” Unfortunately, the instructor would never cut him any slack. The instructor repeatedly told Travis that he would never graduate. Hearing this, I wondered if the teacher was trying to motivate Travis or was taking pleasure in predicting his failure. Whatever the case, it seemed rather than being in control, Travis was a spectator viewing his own life.

Still, Travis had not given up all hope for graduation. He was coming in after school and meeting with the teacher. He submitted all of his late and missing homework assignments in an effort to catch up. Travis was under the impression that he was going to make it. Despite his efforts, the teacher told again that he would not pass the class. This discouraging comment created a domino effect in his world. His attitude towards school, teachers, even me, changed. He felt defeated. He was not going to graduate despite making every effort to pass all his classes. Travis’s overall grade at the end of the semester was 58.2%. In this instance, the teacher had a choice--give Travis a chance and allow him to submit one more missing assignment to complete the course, or assign him the failing grade, sealing his fate as another Black non-graduate.

I thought Travis deserved to graduate. He deserved the benefit of the doubt. This was the perfect opportunity for a teacher to show compassion to a student in need who had been largely misunderstood and under-supported by the system. He needed this

instructor to believe in him and articulate those words. Travis deserved every opportunity to pass the course and graduate with his classmates. Even though his grade was not above the official threshold for passing according to the strict percentage, he worked hard to improve his grade and one more turned-in assignment would have meant graduation. Shouldn't hard work account for something in education?

I knew this young man's heart was good. I could envision a bright future for Travis even though the system saw a criminal. I was infuriated by this lack of human compassion. As a counselor, I wanted teachers to care for and attend to the whole student. I felt that this lack of flexibility and sensitivity destroyed any hope Travis had left for graduating. I could see the defeat in his eyes. Despite his efforts, Travis could only view himself as a failure and a suspect. It seemed that all my efforts went for naught.

Even though Travis would not participate in commencement with his class, I urged him to complete the course during summer school. I lobbied Mrs. Bennet for alternative options that would allow Travis to earn a diploma. Rather than wait two weeks until summer school started, could he begin the work immediately? Could Travis be allowed to submit the only last unit since this was the cause of the non-passing grade? I put every option available on the table. I simply wanted this young man to graduate before we lost him forever.

Despite these efforts, the teacher ultimately won this battle. He convinced the principal that Travis should be given no preferential treatment. He insisted that Travis be required to complete the entire course. Simply submitting one missing assignment

was not enough. He asked the principal, “What precedent are we setting if we do not hold this student accountable to his actions?” Unfortunately, the principal sided with the instructor and required Travis to complete the entire semester course over in summer school. When that decision was made, I knew it was over. I knew he would not attend summer school over 1.8%.

My passion and disappointment led me to address the instructor individually asking, “Haven’t we failed this young man enough? Now we are going to strip him of his dignity too?” I lobbied Mrs. Bennett to speak with the instructor also. Even with her best efforts, we were told, “He got what he deserved.” I believe this unfortunate incident forever changed the course of Travis’s life.

Travis was waiting in my office. I was tasked with sharing the options Travis could choose from to earn his diploma. I told him he could retake the course during summer school, or return to WWHS in the fall as a fifth-year senior. The tension in the room was palpable, and the silence unnerving. The sanctuary Travis once found in my office had vanished. I saw the fear and hatred in his eyes as they began to well up with tears. As he processed my words, I could sense the devastation and defeat he was feeling and watched as it turned to anger. Travis exploded in my office like I had never seen before. He jumped out of the seat and began yelling at the top of his lung how much he hated Wilson High School. He said, “I’m never coming back to this place!” He used verbiage that most people would find extremely offensive, yet I understood. The situation warranted and justified the response.

As Travis turned to walk out of my office, he looked at me and stated, “Thanks for nothing Mr. Williamson. I tried to tell you.” Those were the last words Travis ever spoke to me. I slowly watched him exit the building for the last time as he continued to voice his anger and frustration with Wilson High. I was just as upset as Travis. I felt powerless to help him. We failed this young man. Travis became yet another statistic of a young Black male not graduating from high school.

Eventually I lost track of Travis until the night I saw a news report. One night during the following October, I was watching the local evening news. At the beginning of the broadcast, the news anchor commented on a recent drug-related altercation. As a Black male, the first thing that comes to mind when I hear of a negative story in the news is “I sure hope it is not a Black man that has done this crime.” The story was about a drug bust by the Century City police narcotics division. An undercover police officer staged a drug exchange in an effort to catch a major player in the local drug scene. The transaction led to several arrests and formal charges. The suspects were identified as three Black males and one Black female. They were apprehended with over two kilos of cocaine, which has a street value of over \$60,000, and ten pounds of marijuana at a value of \$20,000.

My heart sank when I saw that one of the young men was Travis. Instead of moving forward in life, he was headed to shackles and federal prison. Travis’s life took another turn for the worst. I felt paralyzed by the weight of the system’s failure. I was infuriated by my inability to fix it, to save Travis. The opportunity to work with students

like him was, after all, what attracted me back to WWHS. I began to question the implications of putting another young Black man on the streets without an education.

At the age of 19, this once charismatic young man with a zest for life was now facing 20 years in federal prison. He was the latest Black face without a high school diploma in the school-to-prison pipeline. Questions filled my head. Did we, the education system, do this by pushing Travis to the side? Should we be held partially responsible for his involvement in criminal activity? Did Travis have to become yet another statistic involving Black males, education, and the penal system? How could Wilson High School, the premiere school in Century City not meet the needs of this student?

I failed Travis. The education system, which is supposed to prepare young people for everything the world has to offer, failed this young man. Was I a part of a larger system that was actually designed to ensure failure to students that looked like me? Or was the system just ill-informed and poorly equipped to meet the needs of students like Travis, students who don't arrive at school with an abundance of tools for success? The frustration and deep sadness I felt was as intense as the passion that, as a young man, made me vow to return to WWHS as an educator.

### Intensifying My Mission

Unfortunately, stories similar to Travis are far too common in today's educational system. Black males seem to be a species on a continuous decline academically, socially, and behaviorally. Bottom line: Black males in today's society are in trouble. When examining data about Black males in the United States, it is not



comforting knowing that Black males have significantly higher hardships when being compared to their non-minority counterparts. Black males have lower academic achievement, are dropping out of school and being incarcerated at a much higher rate than any other subgroup (Littles et al., 2007). With respect to education, employment, income, and overall well-being, Black males by all accounts are distinguishable by hardships, disadvantages, and vulnerability. These distinguishable characteristics are the societal norms which measure the self-efficacy of Black males.

At one point in time I owned a t-shirt which stated, “Danger, educated black man”, or maybe it was, “The most dangerous thing on earth is an educated black man.” In the past I used to believe both statements were true. It is these statements that charge me in my efforts to work closely with Black males. To truly have an impact on situations similar to Travis, I need to learn more about it to have a stronger voice in implementing systems to combat the problem. It is only in this expertise that I can truly have a positive impact on young Black males and avoid future situations similar to Travis.

As I examine the current social system, I have to believe that I can no longer place any value on the two previously mentioned statements. It seems as though society is condemning Black males to a life of poverty, lackluster education, and ultimately imprisonment.

## CHAPTER 3

### FOUNDATION OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION

Stereotype threat is a multifaceted phenomenon in modern society, stemming from diverse sources and affecting individual's and communities in different ways. Having deep roots in nationalism, culture, and psychosocial identity, stereotype threat finds itself a lot in social and academic discourse. The research literature surrounding stereotype threat breaks down into four categories: victimization, consequences, situational, and mechanism. By examining the nature of the research and studies informing the current knowledge of stereotype threat, this aims to shed more light on the existing understanding of the issue.

The research on victimization, as it relates to stereotype threat has garnered a lot of attention from researchers. The literature would argue that almost anyone is vulnerable to stereotype threat, according to Beaton et al. (2007). Regardless of economic status, race, or education, anyone may fall victim to stereotype threat. This idea is supported by research conducted by Cohen and Garcia (2005), which examined the performances of marginalized communities and gender constructs. The research determined that anyone, regardless of race or gender could fall victim to negative outcomes when stereotypes were implied. Clawson and Trice (2000), also supports this theory by examining the depiction of African-Americans in news media as it serves to reinforce stereotypes, positive or negative while Cho and Ho (2018), examined the possibility of African-American becoming less sensitive to victimization of stereotype

threats than their White counterparts. In essence, the research articulates that any member of society may be a victim of stereotype threat.

Even though the research surrounding victimization argues application to all parts of society, the consequences are detrimental to all those impacted. The research goes on to state that members of society may decline career advancement to avoid situations causing negative judgement based on stereotype threat. This argument is supported by Good et al. (2008), which hypothesized that women are more likely to perform poorly in mathematics and science as a result of stereotyping. Murphy et al. (2007), conducted a similar study which examined how women might be discouraged to engage in careers in which women are underrepresented. Von Hippel et al. (2017) also conducted a study to determine the consequences of stereotype threat. These researchers examined if policy would in fact result in desired outcomes. In essence, what are the consequences of stereotype threat as it relates to policy implementation. Ultimately, it was learned that the primary consequence of stereotype threat is the negative impact on the mental dexterity of its victims.

Situational research establishes the overall impact of situations and how they produce decreased outcomes. Stereotype threat forced on marginalized groups often had an impact on their performance. McGlone and Aronson (2006), conducted research which supported this theory. Their research hypothesized that the performance of students would be impacted by their awareness of their membership to a group that is subject to stereotype threat. Another study by Sekaquaptewa et al. (2007), examined the situational context of African-American men and women and their ability for self-control

when subjected to solo racial situations. The outcome concluded that situations heightened the stereotype threat of participants belonging to a stereotyped gender or race. Murphy and Taylor (2012), also examined situational cues by researching African-American women and their achievement when compared to their White counterparts. The study revealed a vulnerability of a person to stereotype threat was dependent upon certain situations and social settings. Ultimately the research supports the ideal of situations increasing the societal groups to a given stereotype.

Lastly, the research behind mechanism argues that members of societal groups work to reject stereotypes yet surrender to the stress of success. The heightened awareness of success becomes detrimental as it results in negative performance. Trinkner et al. (2019), examined the mechanisms surrounding stereotype threat and the use of force by police to maintain order. It was learned that officers were more likely to resist policy and engage in unreasonable force based on the psychological mechanism of stereotype threat. Croizet et al. (2004), conducted a study examining the impact of triggering an upsetting mental load affects stereotype threat. The study proves that the mechanism of stereotype threat has an impact on cognitive ability. Ultimately, the research of mechanisms concludes there is a positive relationship between thought processes and stereotype.

### This Study

While it becomes clear that victims of stereotype threat are those across societal groups, become more identifiable based on situations, create lasting consequences on mental prowess, and overstimulate the need for success, what it does not demonstrate is

the impact on behavior. Stereotype threat clearly impacts performance; however, we still have yet to understand its impacts on behaviors within certain societal groups, African-American in particular. Notwithstanding the current research, advancement in stereotype threat lends itself to the need for further research surrounding the impact on behavior.

The experiences, frustrations, and statistics have led to the development of this research study. The project examines how young Black males are perceived in education and the greater society and how those perceptions may have a direct impact on their behavior. Specifically, if African-American males are subjected to stereotype threat, what is the impact on their behavior?

## CHAPTER 4

### LITERATURE REVIEW

I am invisible. Misunderstood, simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass. When they approach me, they see only my surroundings, themselves, or fragments of their imagination—indeed, everything and anything except me (Ralph Ellison, 1952).

#### Stereotype Threat

A stereotype threat refers to a psychological threat arising from a situation for which a negative stereotype regarding an individual's group applies. According to the stereotype threat theory, members belonging to a particular marginalized group recognize the existence of a negative stereotype in reference to their group (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Additionally, the members of such a group often demonstrate apprehension relating to the confirmation of the negative stereotype by engaging in particular activities. Members belonging to the group for which a certain negative stereotype applies tend to perform poorly in many areas relative to the dominant group. As such, the members tend to live up to the negative stereotype about their group, often to their detriment.

The theory of stereotype threat was developed by Claude Steele and Joshua Aronson. The two social scientists created the term stereotype threat based on an important early study that they conducted in 1995. The study defined the stereotype threat as a risk of confirming a particular negative stereotype about an individual's group as part of a self-characteristic. Thus, the two scientists suggested that the members of such a

group would always be socially defined by the negative stereotype associated with their group.

In their study, Steele and Aronson observed that the performance of Black students was different from that of their white counterpart. Essentially, the study was developed in response to a negative stereotype about Black students that pervaded culture. The negative stereotype was that Black students were generally less intelligent than white students (Steele et al., 2002). Based on this particular negative stereotype about Black students, the two social scientists sought to establish whether the Black students would try to disidentify with achievement in school protectively thus causing them to live up to the identified stereotype threat. Unfortunately, the results of the study confirmed the suspicion of the two social scientists. The Black students were observed to perform worse on the test when the instructor emphasized the role of race in their performance. However, when the instructors did *not* emphasize the role of race in performance, the Black students matched their white counterparts. The research literature surrounding stereotype threat is categorized into four primary domains; victimization, consequences, situational, and mechanisms.

### Victimization

Victimization, as it pertains to stereotype threat, is a broad area of study that has attracted the interest of many scholars and psychologists for years. Researchers and scholars have sought to examine how stereotypes victimize various sections of the society through perceptions and representations. Research has shown that almost everyone is vulnerable: Stereotype threat can affect any individual whose situation invokes some

stereotype-based expectation of poor performance. This is because every individual in the society belongs to at least one group that is associated with some type of stereotype (Beaton et al., 2007). Essentially, any salient social identity can warrant poor performance on a task that offer the possibility of confirmation of a particular negative stereotype. Because many groups are associated with some type of negative stereotype, any individual can face stereotype threat.

Cohen and Garcia (2005) conducted a number of studies to identify those affected by stereotype threat and the collective threat that results from stereotype-based victimization. In this study, the authors hypothesized that stereotypes are collective threats, which affect members of a group due to the behavior of a person who is identified as a member of the group. The authors argued that humans derive self-worth and identity from the groups in which they belong. Thus, their actions, feelings, and thoughts are greatly influenced by the achievements of other members of the group. For instance, members of a group may experience an increase in self-esteem and self-worth when a member of their group succeeds in an activity. The same applies when a member or members of a group are involved in a transgression, however, this makes other group members feel guilty, even if they had no involvement in the act or behavior. To prove this hypothesis, Cohen and Garcia conducted a series of studies covering both race and gender, which are the most affected by stereotypes and their resulting victimizations. On one of the field studies, the researchers found out that collective threat was high in minority racial groups that have been subjected to specific stereotypes, compared to whites and other less stereotyped groups. In the other three experimental studies, the



study found out that women and lower self-esteem minority groups were more likely to be victimized by the poor performance of a member of their respective group. In these experimental studies, participants reported experiences and situations where they faced prejudice because of their gender and/or minority group affiliation.

In another study, Clawson and Trice (2000) conducted a study to understand the emergence of victimization because of stereotypes that are exaggerated by the media. In this study, Clawson and Trice argue that the portrayal of African-Americans in news media serves to reinforce stereotypes that shape the attitudes of other races about African-Americans. Based on this argument, Clawson and Trice (2000), conducted a cross-sectional review of poverty stories in mainstream news to find out the representation of featured people across the racial spectrum. The study found out that there was a disproportionate representation of African Americans in poverty news stories. For instance, media stories on poverty pushed the idea that low-income African Americans tend to live in slums or urban areas as opposed to other races, which is impractical. These poverty stories also tend to portray poor African Americans as idle or lackadaisical, as opposed to other races that are hardworking. Clawson and Trice (2000) come to the conclusion that these reorientations shape the attitudes of other races towards African-Americans in general. The authors go further to attribute the prevalence of inequality and discrimination to these stereotypes. In other words, other races use these stereotypes to justify discrimination and inequality against Black people.

Frantz et al. (2004) also conducted a study with the aim of identifying the underlying factors in the victimization of members of a group based on stereotypes that

develop as a result of the behavior of in-group members. This study focused on the categorization of whites as racist by members of minority groups that experience racism. The authors interviewed individuals and groups from minority groups including Hispanics and African Americans. Sections of the study populations had experienced racism in one way or another. The participants were asked to describe and identify white people randomly, giving their opinion of whether that type of person might be racist or not. Upon analysis of responses from the participants, the study identified patterns, which were used to construct a list of factors that guide the categorization of a white person as racist, or not. Some of the traits and characteristics that were identified as racist included behavior in the presence of Black people, views and opinions on policies affecting Black people, and even, in some cases, place of origin. This study concluded that white people were much likely to be perceived as racist by Blacks if they shared a commonality with another white person or persons.

In 2018, Cho and Ho sought to determine if Blacks become less sensitive to victimization than their White counterparts in predominantly Black and Latino neighborhoods. This multi-year study on perceptions of race, victimization, and public safety hypothesized that racial stereotype and violence would desensitize Blacks to crime within a neighborhood, while over-sensitizing whites living in the same neighborhood despite increased public safety presence. Researches conducted quarterly citizen surveys in Kansas City, Missouri to track public perception of the quality of life in the city. It was determined that white individuals in Black neighborhoods feel less safe regardless of increase public safety presence. It goes on to state that not only do white residents feel

less satisfied with public safety in highly segregated racial minority neighborhood, but also that this negative feeling is likely to increase as the racial dissimilarity to their own race increases. This heightened awareness of safety may be attributed to the stereotype of Blacks' involvement in criminal behavior, despite national statistics of violent crime rates steadily declining since the early 1990's (Baumer & Wolff, 2014). Therefore, whites become victims of stereotype threat in their belief in criminal involvement by Blacks in Black and Latino neighborhoods. So the victims of stereotype threat are not only those who are stereotyped against, but those who begin to believe stereotypes?

It is clear that anyone can be a victim of stereotype threat in certain circumstances. Stereotypes can shape the opinions, perceptions, and actions of people towards others based on the behavior of another person with whom they share commonalities. Victimization may also arise as a result of the reinforcement of stereotypes through media portrayals of specific groups of people.

### Consequences

Stereotype threat has a number of detrimental consequences to those affected by it. Various studies have established a close correlation between negative outcomes in many areas and exposure to stereotype threat. For instance, stereotyped individuals tend to forego a career and other aspirations in life in order to avoid situations and settings that expose them to the risk of being judged negatively based on stereotypes (Spencer et al., 2016). There are several research studies and academic articles to support this.

Good et al. (2008) hypothesized that women performing poorly in mathematics and science areas could be credited to stereotyping rather than their ability to flourish.

The experiment featured women and men in college-level mathematics majors. For the test group, the instructions to the calculus test emphasized that previous versions of the exam had reported wide disparities in gender--grooming candidates with gender biases. As for the control group, the exam instructions indicated that the test only measured math ability, and the gender factor was insignificant. The duration of the assessment was intentionally made shorter for the degree of complexity of the test. A questionnaire was provided at the end of the quiz to collect feedback on the exam instructions gender bias.

From the two-way ANOVA analysis on the grades, female students from the test group performed marginally lower than the males and females in the control group. As predicted, the males from both groups showed no differences in performance, elevating the disparity with women's performance. Similarly, women nodded to gender bias on the end-of-test questionnaire, which also proved to be a factor in their lower performance, as it reduced their confidence. We learn from the study that the consequences of a particular group affect the spirit of its members, thus impacting their performance and decision-making ability. The effects can be glaring, especially when the individuals are primed right before the task.

Murphy et al. (2007) conducted a study similar to that of Good et al. (2008). In this study, the researchers sought to examine a hypothesis that suggests which suggest specific cues in a situation present a stereotype threat to potential targets. The female participants were made to watch a conference on MSE (Math Science and Engineering) depicting a setting where the ratio of men and women was unbalanced. The participants were issued a questionnaire to determine if there were more or less likely to attend the

conference based on the participants. The results of the study showed that women who watched the video reported less desire to be part of the event and a lower sense of belonging. This shows that women might be discouraged to engage in careers and other occupations in which women are underrepresented.

In another study, Schimel et al. (2004) conducted studies with the aim of investigating the impact of intrinsic and extrinsic affirmation on the social function and cognitive performance in contexts involving evaluation. Forty-nine Introductory to Psychology students (11 men and 38 women) at the University of Alberta participated in this study. Participants were instructed to rank each self-definition in order of their importance from 1 (most important) to 12 (least important). The second part of the task consisted of six sentence stems. Participants were instructed to insert their highest ranked self-definition from the previous page into blanks in the sentence stems and then complete each sentence. The control group received sentence stems designed to focus them on their most valued self-definition *not* connected to socially imposed standards of performance, while the blind group received sentence stems that did focus on the socially imposed standards of performance).

Von Hippel et al. (2017), conducted a study to determine consequences of stereotype threat. The researches set out to examine if policy in fact resulted in its desired outcomes. Hippel, Kalokerinos, and Zacher hypothesized that women who experiences gender-based stereotypes at work would face negative career consequences for utilizing family friendly policies. The study set out to examine two separate policies, the first being women returning to work after giving birth, and the second examined

family-friendly policies. Sixty-five new mothers were surveyed, and 473 women received surveys to examine family-friendly policies. The results of the research clearly learned that the mere policy stating a family-friendly working environment did not equate to women's belief in said policy. Female employees who reported feelings of stereotype threat perceived more negative consequences for utilizing family-friendly policies, but they also reported greater intentions to use these policies. This stereotype threat among women is associated with more negative views of family-friendly policies, therefore, the mere existence of such policies may not create the kind of family-friendly workplaces that organizations are attempting to provide. The consequences of stereotype threat are undesired outcomes.

The studies showed that intrinsic affirmation was effective in reducing self-handicapping and led to an increase in the levels of performance. Self-affirmation was found to boost the performance of women in situations that would have undermined their scores due to stereotype threat. The findings of this study highlighted the consequences of stereotype threat to individuals who rely on *extrinsic* affirmation. In all the studies, extrinsic affirmation did not have any positive impact on the participants. The findings of these studies also explained the avoidance of rewarding opportunities due to the risk of exposure to stereotype threat by individuals from stereotyped groups.

These studies highlight the consequences of stereotype threat with regard to the limitations they pose to individuals in stereotyped groups. In all the studies, the risk of exposure to stereotype threat discourages women from pursuing careers and academic fields that subject them to prejudice. Limitations and discouragement like this undermine

the chances of success and opportunities that could have brought the individual desirable rewards.

### Situational

Stereotype threat varied from person to person depending on their identity and the stereotype associated with a group they identify with. That said, the risk of stereotype threat increases dramatically when one is exposed to situations or settings that remind them of their weakness in the perceptions of others (Shih et al., 2006). This section covers literature on how individuals in stereotyped groups are affected by situational stereotype threat.

McGlone and Aronson (2006) conducted a study to test the effect of group identity salience on the performance of students. In this study, the authors hypothesized that the performance of students would be affected by their awareness of their membership to a group that is subject to a related stereotype. The authors tested administered the Vandenberg Mental Rotation Test on undergraduates who were primed for their social identities. The study found out those female students who were primed to contemplate their gender had lower scores compared to female students who were primed to contemplate their identity as intellectuals. In the case of male students, those that were primed to identify with gender performed better than those in the average student priming did. The results of this study show that awareness of belonging to a stereotyped identity or group can increase the exposure of a person to stereotype threat, which in return factors in their performance.

In another study, Sekaquaptewa et al. (2007) conducted a study to investigate the situational context known as numerical minority status. The authors argued that in situations where a person was or expected to be the only representative of a minority group that is subjected to a specific stereotype. The study involved African-American men and women who were tested for self-control when subjected to solo racial situations, and additional solo gender situations for women. The results of the tests showed that both women and men were affected when placed under situations where they were solo representatives of their gender and race respectively. Besides, women who were placed in situations where they were both gender and race representatives, the impact was even greater. In both tests, apprehension and self-handicapping were present and higher, which affected performance. Solo situations heightened the stereotype threat of participants belonging to a stereotyped gender or race.

Steele and Aronson (1995) conducted a similar study in which they sought to investigate the impact of evaluative scrutiny on the performance of an individual. In this study, white students and African-American students were given a test that they were informed would be used to evaluate their intellectual capacities. Another test was given to a similar group but the students were told it would be used to test psychological mechanisms of solving problems. In the first group, white students performed better than Black students did. In the second test, the scores were balanced across the participants from both races. This study shows that a situation that is designed to remind a person of their racial identity can create stress, which in return limits their concentration and relaxation which are necessary to perform well.



The article 'The Role of Situational Cues in Signaling and Maintaining Stereotype', by Murphy and Taylor (2012) focuses on how the stereotype of generated and maintained throughout situational cues in the environment. The researcher set out to study the impact of stereotype threat in academics on women of color in STEM fields. It was argued that Black women would often underachieve in academic institutions when encouraged to enter fields focusing on science, mathematics, engineering and technology. This study examined assessment data of Black woman in STEM fields. It was determined that Black women, when encouraged to enter STEM related fields, would often underachieve when compared to their White female counterparts. Black women that voluntarily chose to enroll in STEM fields of study achieved comparable outcomes to white females. It was concluded that situational cues, such as STEM fields, caused Black women to doubt their abilities, therefore decreasing their sense of belonging in a given setting.

These studies reveal that the vulnerability of a person to stereotype threat depends on certain situations and social settings. Situations, settings, and backgrounds, that remind the potential victim of their perceived weakness or limitation, lead to the individual or group into a psychological state where they become receptive and sensitive to stereotypes against them. When the victim internalizes the negative stereotype, it can have a negative effect on them, which could potentially undermine their performance or wellbeing.

### Mechanism

Individuals in stereotyped groups are subjected to high levels of pressure to succeed against the stereotypes directed towards them. However, an increase in pressure affects their ability to concentrate and in most cases leads to underperformance. This involves psychological and physiological mechanisms that increase stress and mental load (Shapiro & Neuberg, 2007).

One study by Cadinu et al. (2005) best explains the mechanisms that catalyze the impact of stereotype threat on individuals. The individual of concern is negative thoughts. The study involved 60 female participants presented with a challenging mathematics task. The review uses a thought-listing technique to draw a link between performance and negative thoughts about the women (and the idea that women aren't so good in math). The paper builds on earlier research related to anxiety in participants of a study with a stereotype threat to establish a direct link between thought intrusion and negative thought about performance. Like the test in a study by Good et al. (2008), participants in the stereotype-threat group were informed that recent research held that women and men performed distinctively in logical math tasks, while the control group was told the absolute opposite. Before proceeding to start the paper, a blank page was provided, and a prompt required the candidate to write anything that came to mind.

Following an analysis by the ANOVA technique, the prediction that results, as well as responses on the blank page, would be distinctive between the test and control groups was realized. The implication is that negative thoughts related to math would facilitate the stereotype threat's effects on performance. This study concluded that there is

a strong relationship between thought processes and stereotype threat, where negative thoughts are more likely to occur when one is under stereotype threat.

Furthermore, Croizet et al. (2004) conducted a study to measure cognitive ability at the group level, taking into account the particular situational burden (evaluated as emotional load). In this study, what comes across uniquely is the consideration of the psychological factor, obtained by measuring heart pulses, unlike previous researches that ignored the situational context. Croizet et al. (2004) apply an adaptation of the Raven Advanced Progressive Matrices Test to whether the impact of triggering an upsetting mental load affects stereotype threat. The paper sets up an experiment modelled on a psychophysiological recording for a neuroscience class. Based on a sample size of 164 college students from four departments in the 21 to 56 age brackets, the outcomes proved the hypothesis. Analysis indicated that participants who imagined that the test was meant to measure cognitive ability panicked, as indicated by pulse rates. The number of problems solved depended on their majors. Croizet et al. (2004) successfully illustrate that stereotype affects physiological and psychological processes in equal measure. Thus, the study shows the psychological and physiological effect as a mechanism of enhancing stereotype threat.

In another study, Inzlicht et al. (2006) examined the impact of stigma on the ability of people to control behavior. The authors hypothesized that people from stereotyped or stigmatized groups would be less capable to control their behavior, especially when placed in stigmatizing situations. In the preliminary study on the relationship between behavior control and stigma, Black students were found to be less

capable of self-control, depending on their exposure to stereotype threat and stigma levels. Additional studies showed evidence of ego being depleted when placed in stigmatizing situations. These studies indicate that stereotype threat and stigma deplete the ego of an individual and limit their ability to regulate and control impulses and general behavior.

Trinkner et al. (2019), set out to study the mechanisms surrounding stereotype threat and the use of force by police to maintain order. According to Trinkner et al., “this study presents the first empirical test of the hypothesized psychological mechanism linking stereotype threat to police support for violence” (p. 421). The researchers hypothesized that stereotype threat undermines officers’ self-legitimacy, or the confidence they have in their inherent authority, encouraging overreliance on coercive policing to maintain control. Surveys were distributed to 784 police officers in large urban areas to test the hypothesis. The researchers sought to examine the belief in approval of unreasonable force, fair policing, and resistance to the use of force. Ultimately, the mechanism of stereotype threat led police officers to believe they were viewed as “racist police officers.” This belief impacted their self-legitimacy, therefore causing resistance towards their departments’ use of force policy and their own support for unreasonable force. The researchers determined that police officers were more inclined to resist policy and engage in unreasonable force of policing bases on the psychological mechanisms of stereotype threat.

The studies discussed above paint a clear picture of how the psychological and physiological domains of stereotyped individuals are affected by exposure to stereotype

threat. The evidence provided by these studies shows strong correlations between the performance of stereotyped individuals and mechanisms which take place upon exposure to stereotype threat.

### Conclusion

In summary, the research demonstrates the overall number of Black males being referred to the office, suspended from school, and becoming involved in the juvenile justice system is staggering. Black males are being suspended at a much higher rate than their white counterparts. If these said students are suspended, they have a much higher rate of becoming involved with the juvenile justice system.

The onset of these staggering statistics begins early in their academic career. Perceptions of education are formed in elementary school and carry over into high school and the surrounding communities. Not only can these perceptions have a negative impact, the perceptions that teachers have may also have a negative impact on Black male students. Outcomes for Black male students would indicate they have a higher likelihood of dropping out of school and engaging in criminal behaviour. The future is uncertain for these students, and it is questionable what the education and penal system are doing to address it.

Following the research, it has been determined that almost everyone may be a victim of stereotype threat. According to Beaton et al. (2007), this is a result of everyone in society belonging to a societal group. Regardless of race, gender, socioeconomic status, etc, all members of society may become victims of stereotypes. The study conducted by Cohen and Garcia supported this theory by examining the performances of

both minority and gender constructs. It was determined that when stereotypes were implied to both groups, negative performance was the result. Regardless, the research supports the notion that all members of society may be victims of stereotype.

The research surrounding victimization proves applicable to all members of society, and shows detrimental consequences to those affected by it. The various research articulates that members of society may forgo personal or professional advancement to avoid situations which may cause negative judgement based on a stereotype. The primary consequence of stereotype is the negative impact on the mental prowess of its victims resulting in decreased performance and substandard outcomes. This is supported by Good et al. (2008), which learned that stereotypes affect the spirit of its members, which have an impact on their performance.

Situational research demonstrates the overall impact of given situations and how they elicit decreased outcomes. Awareness of belonging to a stereotype by members of a marginalized group impacted their performance. The research goes on to say that situations heighten the awareness of stereotypes causing a negative impact on achievement and performance. Additionally, the research supports the idea of these situations increasing the vulnerability of societal groups to a given stereotype.

Lastly, the research surrounding mechanism argue that members of societal groups work to disavow stereotypes yet succumb to the pressure of success. This increased awareness of achievement becomes counterproductive as it results in negative performance. The research concludes that there is a strong relationship between thought

processes and stereotype, where the overwhelming desire to achieve success may result in a negative outcome or poor performance.

Ultimately, stereotype threat may have an impact on how members of a societal group are not only perceived but also their interactions with individuals around them. The domains surrounding stereotype threat presents the possible impact academically, personally, and socially, however there are gaps within the literature which require further study.

While statistics clearly show African-American males are being suspended and expelled at a much higher rate than their white males, achieve lower academically, and are more likely to be involved in the juvenile justice system, there is limited research on the cause of this national crisis. In reviewing the literature, it becomes obvious that stereotype threat may be correlational with academic performance, suspensions, and the justice system.

While it is clear stereotype threat impacts victims across societal groups, grows more identifiable in particular situations, create lasting consequences to mental prowess, and overstimulate the need for success, what we still do not know is the impact on behaviour. Stereotype clearly impacts performance; however, we still do not know with absolutely certainty if it impacts the behaviours within certain societal groups, African-American males in particular.

Notwithstanding the current research, advancement in stereotype threat lends itself to the need for further research on its impact on behaviour.

## CHAPTER 5

### RESEARCH DESIGN

#### Methodology

The goal of this research project is to gain insight on the impact of perception and how it can impact behavior. This study is considered interpretive research in which the main source of information is obtained through interviews with Black males currently involved in the juvenile justice system. Individual narratives, results, and recommendations are written for each participant in Chapter 6 of this dissertation.

Interpretive research is an ideal methodology as it exploits many of the same methods as qualitative research yet affords flexibility in order to gain the most expressive data. According to Smith (1992), interpretive research is a deviation of qualitative research that is different in several ways: (a) choices in procedures are not defined by the aspiration to remain objective; (b) a tool for interpretation is self-inquiry; and (c) the research is allowed to adjust questions during the interview to achieve the ideal understanding of the interviewee. Since all the information from the interviews are interpreted by the researcher from the individual interviews, it is extremely important to have the flexibility that interpretive research provided with this dissertation study.

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect interpretive data for this research project. Data analysis occurred as themes were extracted from the interviews and each individual story. Comparisons of the individual interviews were made as all the data was being compiled from the interviews. This process is described in greater detail below.



## Methods Used

### Research Participants

In crafting this research, the ultimate goal was to allow Travis's voice to be heard. Ideally, he would have been included as a participant within the research, however, he is inaccessible because of his current incarceration within the Mississippi state correctional facility. Therefore, research participants will shadow Travis's life circumstances as closely as possible.

Participants of this study resembled Travis as much as possible. Participants had involvement within the juvenile justice system. They were cisgender African-American males from a two-parent house hold, with siblings. Ideally, both parents will have advanced degrees affording them gainful employment. They will be classified as middle to upper middle class. While imperative to find participants whom mirror Travis's life experiences, it will be difficult to identify someone with the exact same life circumstances. Therefore, participants were identified as close to Travis as possible.

To identify the participants, I contacted the local juvenile detention center. This facility was identified based on location and availability of high school aged Black males currently involved in the juvenile justice system. Acknowledging confidentiality restraints, the facility administrator was contacted and informed of the project. The administrator asked Black males if they are willing to participate in the study. The opportunity was extended to all residents within the facility, so long as they are of high school aged. The number of participants was limited to three to five. Once the administrator receives verbal consent, written permission agreement must be signed by

both the participant and their legal parent and/or guardian (Appendix). Once all paperwork was completed, a schedule was made to begin interviews. To avoid any potential conflicts of interest, I did not interview anyone that I have had prior interaction or involvement with.

Current high school students, who have served probation, deferred judgement or pending trial, may also be included in this study. To identify students, I contacted the juvenile court officers (JCO), in local high schools to determine which students had juvenile court involvement. The JCO invited students to participate in the research project. If willing to participate, they would receive the appropriate paperwork. Similarly, I did not interview anyone I had a previous relationship with.

Once the paperwork was completed, interviews were scheduled. The interviews focused on how the perception of others may or may not impact their behavior. During our first encounter, I reviewed the research study outline and consent form that was signed. I then provided them the opportunity to remove themselves from the study if they wished to discontinue their participation. Once the final decision had been made to participate, I asked them to sign the consent as issued by the University of Northern Iowa's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Once signed, the participants received a copy of the study outline and consent.

While educators see much data suggesting that Black males are more likely to be involved in the juvenile justice than graduate from high school or college, they see very little examining *why*. It is important to understand the stories of these students and how their interactions, choices, and behavior may have been impacted by adults in education.

## Interviews

The location of the interview was based on student availability. I reviewed the study and the potential risks in person with the interviewee and asked them to sign the informed consent. It is imperative that the interviewee know that they could end the interview at any point during the discussion. I provided them with the opportunity to ask any clarifying questions about the study or their participation in the study.

Qualitative research often includes semi-structured, one-time interviews (Patton, 2002), as in this study. Semi-structured interviews begin with predetermined questions, probing, and follow up questions. This allows the interviewer the liberty to establish an overall direction for the dialogue pursuant to the responses from the interviewee. Creswell (1998) emphasizes the fact that the qualitative research is “emergent,” meaning “the initial plan for research cannot be tightly prescribed, and that all phases of the process may change or shift after the interviewer enter the field and begin to collect data” (p. 39).

The use of semi-structured interviews also allows the interviewer to examine new pathways based on the responses of the interviewee which may not have been explored initially (Gray, 2004). The questions used in the interviews were created based on my personal experiences as a Black male and research surrounding Black males and the school to prison pipeline (Appendix A). I audio recorded the interviews, and transcribed them upon completion. A summary was created based upon the transcripts. In essence, I attempted to understand and interpret human behavior through the lens of personal

experiences. According to Jackson et al. (2007), qualitative research is concerned with understanding human beings' experiences in a humanistic and interpretive approach.

### Narrative Summaries

Narrative summaries was used to examine and understand the data. Narrative inquiry is a process of interpretation that focuses on understanding the lived experiences of human beings. Connelly and Clandinin (1990), states that humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives. As researchers, we must constantly collaborate and exchange dialogue with our participants.

Narratives were written for each interviewee in the form of educational life experiences. The data collected during the interviews were summarized using the transcripts from the interviews of the interviewee. For accuracy, a copy of the findings were sent to the interviewee for review. Pseudonyms were used for all interviewee names and locations to protect confidentiality and identity. All transcripts were destroyed to preserve the privacy of the interviewees.

### Member Checking

Creswell and Miller (2000), describe member checking as a “taking data and interpretations back to the participants in the study so they can confirm the credibility of the information and narrative accounts” (p.127.) Member checking simply provides participants of the study the opportunity to examine and provide feedback of the narrative summaries. Therefore, as part of the narrative inquiry process, it was important to offer the interviewee the opportunity to check the narrative for accuracy. According to Creswell and Miller (2000), researchers must receive feedback to ensure validity,

authenticity, and credibility. Participants were given the opportunity to review and approve different aspects of how the researcher interpreted the data provided during the interview (Doyle, 2007). Participants were given the option of meeting in person to discuss my interpretation and summarization of their personal story (narrative summary). They also received the option of reviewing the summary independently. The interviewees had the opportunity to ask clarifying questions if they believed their personal stories were misrecorded or misinterpreted. This was done via email, mail, and personal meeting. Additionally, all audio recordings were destroyed once the narrative summaries were member-checked.

### Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis is a search for themes or meaning in a systematic, exploratory manner. Flick (2014), states that “qualitative data analysis is the interpretation of material to make statements about implicit and explicit dimensions and structures of meaning-making in the material” (p. 5). Meaning making simply refers to the subjective interpretation of the collected data. Strauss and Corbin (1998) discuss “microanalysis” as an extremely important step in the analysis of qualitative data. Microanalysis is defined as “careful scrutiny of data, line by line, that researchers are able to uncover new concepts and novel relationships and to systematically develop categories in terms of their properties and dimensions” (p. 71). Strauss and Corbin (1998) go on to discuss asking questions to gain more insight into things, as well as challenging researcher bias and continuing to connect data throughout the study through coding and looking for themes within the data.

Once the narrative summaries were member-checked, the data was organized and categorized into themes derived from each question during the interview. Each question was examined separately to identify possible themes (Appendix B). Because this is interpretative research, the researcher had the opportunity to ask probing and follow up questions during the interview. This provided more meaningful information from the interviewee.

In summary, the juvenile detention facility was contacted to provide potential names for the research project. The workers at the facility checked with potential candidates to make sure they were willing to participate in this research project. Upon agreement, the participants were explained the study as well as potential risks of the study. When the participants were selected, I traveled to the facility for participants to provide the necessary consent forms. Once signed, appointment times to conduct interviews were scheduled. During the scheduled appointment time, interviews were completed along with audio recordings. Transcripts of the interviews were written into narrative summaries. Opportunities were provided to the participants to examine the narrative summary to ensure the accuracy of the interpretations from their perspectives. The data was compiled and analyzed to determine themes, which are reported in future chapters.

## CHAPTER 6

### INTERPRETATION

The intent of this chapter is to identify and exam the themes and links from the interviews and shed light on the narrative stories of those interviewed and how they connect to the literature. With intent, I examine the life factors, school factors, and public perception as it relates to being a young Black man in America and how stereotype threat impacts behavior. Life factors include family involvement in the juvenile justice system, along with family systems and structures. School factors includes relationships, mentoring, attendance, and connectedness. Public perceptions will include the perception of Black men and incarceration. Lastly, I discuss the educational system and its impact on Black men along with some advice from the young men interviewed.

The research question was critical in the data collection process. The question looked to examine how young Black males are perceived in education and the greater society and how it could potentially impact their behavior. The research question is: If African-American males are subjected to stereotype threat, what is the impact on their behavior?

#### Introduction

##### Black Men

The three students interviewed were all young Black men with involvement in the juvenile justice system. Their physical attributes describe them to be vigorous and healthy young men. Tre'mon is considered tall by any measure. He stood roughly 6'3'' tall and weighed approximately 240 pounds. Despite his mass, Tre'mon was a gentle

soul. His mannerism and demeanor proved him to be a gentleman with tremendous promise.

Keyshawn would also be considered tall, similar to Tre'mon. He stood upward of 6' feet tall, however he was considerably thinner than Tre'mon. Despite these differences, he carried himself in an extremely professional manner. These characteristics were similar to Derrick which stood 6'2'' tall. All three young men were similar in their complexion which matched a dark mocha like color. Despite being three separate entities, they all were extremely respectful and professional during the interviews.

Despite their consistent display of respect during the interviews, society has a tendency to view young men of color, especially Black men, as threats. Simply being black may have an impact on the overall perception of these young men, not only in school, but in society as well. According to Wilson, et al. (2017), Black men tend to be stereotyped as threatening. The literature goes on to say that people with biases are more likely to judge Black men as threats based on their physical size including height, weight, and muscle mass. When examining the physical characteristic of these young men, one may conclude that simply being black may have an impact on how they are perceived or judged.

In essence, Black male students often begin their lives as a disadvantaged one. Education however has the potential to change this disadvantaged lifestyle. It can offer an alternative, cultivating and inspiring environment which could counter the negative self-imagery which has been ingrained since birth. Unfortunately, it often fails to do so.



According to Noguera (2009), the internal belief in racial stereotypes threats and the societal label of Black man as villain, many teachers, both white and black, fail to provide engaging superior education. Therefore, being a Black male in the education system, increases the likelihood of disengagement, poor relationships, and disenfranchisement.

## THE STORIES

### Tre'mon

#### About Tre'mon

Tre'mon, also known as Bubba was a 17-year-old young Black man that was currently on probation for stealing a car. While this was his primary offense, he has been involved with the juvenile justice system for the better part of his young adult life. Bubba was a junior in high school in a neighboring school district to Century City. He was not involved in any sports or extra-curricular activities despite his rather large physique. Per the judge's ruling, his probation would be suspended upon his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday barring any more interactions with law enforcement.

Bubba was born on the south side of Chicago, Il. Until the age of seven, Tre'mon lived with his married birth parents and younger sister before being adopted by his adoptive mother and father. Upon their adoption they moved to his current place of residence just east of Century City. Even though his adoptive parents were married at the time of the adoption, they would later divorce when Bubba was 12 years old. He currently lives with his adoptive mother and younger sister.

During the first seven years of Bubba's life, he consistently remembers life as a struggle. He moved from one apartment to another, and although he could not remember the exact number of moves, he experienced during his short seven years, he said, "it was a lot." Bubba was able to articulate that the constant movement took a toll on his ability to make friends. Bubba said,

"Every time I would make new a new friend at my apartment complex, we would have to move, you know. I would always be mad when we had to move because I

had a hard time making new friends. I remember telling my mom and dad that I didn't want to move."

Bubba describes the relationship between his biological mother and father as difficulty. While they struggled to make ends meet it clearly impacted their relationship. Bubba recalls being in his bedroom one night while his parents were fighting. He said, "the fighting became so loud, I stuck my head under my pillow to block out the noise." When he woke up the next morning, he was greeted by both parents as if nothing had happened. Bubba believed his parents wanted to shield he and his younger sister from their struggles as much as possible. It was not something that was formally discussed as a family unit which caused him to believe they were simply trying to protect them.

At five years old Bubba's biological parents divorced. He could not recall a conversation with his parents informing him of the divorce. He remembers his dad leaving one morning and not coming back for a long time. Bubba said, "my dad was eating breakfast when I walked out of my apartment going to school. When I got home all his stuff was gone." He recalls asking his mom where his dad was and she responded by saying he was going to be gone for a while for work. While this left Bubba perplexed, he had become conditioned to not ask questions.

Over the next few years, Bubba's dad would come in and out of his life. Sometimes he would go and live with his dad for a few weeks, then he would be sent back to live with his mother. Bubba could remember his dad coming back to live with he and his mother. An argument would ensue, and the next morning, his dad would be gone.

This cause a great deal of confusion for Bubba. He stated, “I just kept going back and forth between my mom and my dad and no one ever told me why.”

This constant transition happened for the next 18 months. Bubba struggled to make sense of the constant shuffle between his mom and dad, but again, did not ask any questions. When Bubba was seven years old, he was told by his mother that she would be picking him up after school as she had done many times before. However, this day was different. Bubba was picked up by a tall slender white woman by the name of Mrs. Hopkins. Bubba stated, “Mrs. Hopkins told me I had to go with her because my mom was not coming home for a long time.” Not knowing how to ask why, Bubba followed Mrs. Hopkins out of the school and got into her car. The next day he was living in a stranger’s home and attending a strange school. “I didn’t know where I was at and I didn’t know these people I was livin’ wit’. I didn’t ask questions because I didn’t think I could, so I just pretended like nothing happened.”

Bubba entered the foster care system for a short time before being adopted by his adoptive parents and moved to Century City. It was not until Bubba was 12 years old that he learned why he was later adopted. His adoptive mother told him both his biological mother and father were jailed for drug trafficking. He did not know what to think. For the longest time he felt abandoned as no one ever explained why he was uprooted from his home in Chicago and moved five hours away. He was able to begin making sense of the world around him. Rather than making assumptions about his parents, his adoptive parents told him the truth about his parents. While this was a relief, it also consumed his thoughts. Bubba said,

“While I was glad my mom told me about my parents, I could not stop thinking about it. Why didn’t nobody tell me? Why they take so long to tell me? Why didn’t Mrs. Hopkins tell me what was going on? Why everyone keeping secrets from me?”

Clearly Bubba had several unanswered questions he struggled to understand.

At this point in Bubba’s life, things began to change. His adoptive parents would soon divorce and he would become estranged from his adoptive mother. Similar to his living in Chicago, he bounced between his adoptive mother and father. At one point, he lived with his adoptive father for almost three years with little communication with his adoptive mother. When asked about the relationship with his adoptive mother and why he chose to live with his adoptive dad, he responded by saying, “my dad is the coolest dad!”

Bubba lived with his dad for several years following the divorce of his adoptive parents. He stated his dad was cool. Bubba spoke of him and his sister being loved just like all his other kids, even though they were adopted. In total, Bubba’s adoptive dad had 12 children, mostly through previous relationships. Bubba said,

“I was gone from her house probably two or three years because I was living with my dad. My dad is the coolest dad you could ever have. He has 12 kids but he raises me and my little sister like we are his actual kids, and, um, that is why I chose to live with him.”

While Bubba was living with his father, he kept his distance from his mother. Their relationship was rocky at best. Despite the tumultuous relationship Bubba had with his mother, he worked very hard to maintain his relationship with his sister. This was the only person that had a similar experience to Bubba. According to Bubba, “My sister and me are tight like that. She knows what I was going through when we move here just like

I know what she was going through when we moved here. Ain't no one can change that for us.”

### School

Life circumstances play a major factor in success and failure. Mobility, divorce, and lack of diversity were prevalent in Tre'mon's life. Mobility prevented him from generating authentic relationships with peers and students. Divorce may have impacted him emotionally and socially. According to Thiessen (1993), divorce can create a degree of emotional trauma in children. Tre'mon moved between several different apartment complexes prior to moving to Century City. Despite these factors, they failed in comparison to his lived experiences while in schools.

Ideally, school should be a place of refuge for students. A place which supports social emotional learning and provides opportunities for academic advancement. An environment which fosters career and college readiness. A place which nurtures young people into becoming productive members of society. Tre'mon story argues the exact opposite. Rather than generating relationships, the constant weight of stereotype threat yielded behavior changes which had a lasting impact on his educational experience.

Bubba attended several schools. He tried to recall every school he attended but stopped, eventually saying it was “over 10-15 schools.” Bubba attended mostly public schools. While in the detention center he was required to participate in course work being supplied by the local school district. While living in Chicago, his family moved around frequently, sometimes changing schools two to three times in the same year.

### Elementary School

Bubba's birth parents were not very involved in his schooling. He was able to recall one time in second grade in which his parents came to the school for his holiday program, a program in which Bubba was performing. Because of the small role he was assigned, Bubba was not overly excited to participate. Speaking in front of his peers caused a great deal of anxiety for Bubba. He said, "I remember being nervous as hell! Spittin truth, I was pissed off that I had to do it. I told the teacher I didn't want to do it but she made me do it anyway." Aside from the program, Bubba remembers his parents attending conferences when he was in elementary school.

Bubba spoke positively about one experience encompassing school. Something he constantly looked forward to at the beginning of each school year, shopping for new school clothes. This yearly tradition brought a smile to Bubba's face. He would be allowed to select several new items, including new tennis shoes. He appreciated the beginning of each school year because it allowed him to show off his new clothes to his classmates.

Bubba spoke very highly of one school he attended. This new school was the result of one of the many moves made by his birth parents. He recalls his nervousness with great detail. Bubba said, "I hated going to a new school because I never had any friends. I had to work hard to make new friends, which is why I never wanted to move." When he arrived, other students did not know what to make of him. In the beginning, he claimed not to have many friends, but soon thereafter, he would make numerous friends. Bubba had taken a liking to his new school. He described the school as "hot," despite not

getting along with his teachers or the principal. He recalls all of the students in his class liking him, which was why it was hard leaving when told he was moving again.

Like most young boys, Bubba's favorite subject in school was gym. It allowed him to run around and play like most kids enjoyed doing. His favorite game to play was basketball. He said, "I was always picked first to be on a team because my friends knew we would always win. I loved hoopin." While Bubba spoke of positive memories of his early education years, he also remembers the challenges of school. Being yelled at by his teachers accompanied with frequent visits to the principal's office became routine. Bubba struggled to recall any good memories of schools aside from those previously mentioned. Bubba was always in trouble and that is what he remembers about school.

Bubba spoke of one teacher that constantly threatened him with detention. He struggled to understand why his actions warranted detention. Talking out of turn, telling jokes to classmates, getting up without permission were just a few examples of his behaviors. Bubba noticed his white classmates exhibiting similar behaviors but they did not receive the attentions of the teachers nor the same response. Bubba stated, "Why was I the only one to have to go to the principal's office? Why I get detention? I wasn't doing anything different than my friends, but I was the only one getting sent out of class or held from recess." The shadow of consequences, exacerbate his behavior to warrant being sent to the office. "I started acting a fool."

The negative response combined with the threat of detention and suspension fueled Tre'mon's anger. He responded by engaging in challenging behaviors with increased frequency. He became determined to engage in behavior that justified office



referrals and suspension. His anger, with no support from adults to help him process, increased the likelihood of bad behavior. The assumption of guilt and aggression directed at Tre'mon had an impact on his behavior.

There seemed to be a constant fear of school. Partially because of mobility, also the lack of connectedness he felt with his teachers and administrators. The lack of connectedness may be the result of constant threat of detention issued by teachers. Tre'mom struggled to understand why he was told he would be disciplined when his actions mirrored his classmates. Being in a school with limited access to diversity, he began acknowledging how he was being treated differently than his peers. Research also supports that zero tolerance policies or consequences to behavior provide little evidence of increased school safety or improved student behavior (Skiba & Peterson, 2000). Therefore the constant threat of detention coupled with inconsistent treatment among peers challenged Tre'mon's behavior. Rather than conforming to teacher and classroom expectation, he began behaving in a manner which warranted detention and office referrals.

As Bubba recalled his elementary years, these memories continued to surface. Even though he attended several different elementary schools, the experiences were similar or all the same. Visits with the principal were often multiple times per week. Teachers would send Bubba to the, "thinking chair," as a result of his behavior. No one spoke to Bubba about his behavior, they were consistently met with discipline, rather than instruction. He recalls being suspended from school for shoving a classmate that shoved him first. Bubba said,

“I got suspended because this white boy pushed me as we were getting in line to go to gym class. I pushed him back and he fell on the floor. The teacher sent me to the principal’s office and I got kicked out of school for three days. The other boy didn’t have to go to the principal’s office. I told the principal that he pushed me first and I pushed him back. That dude didn’t even listen to me. He kept saying I was wrong for pushing him and that I needed to control my temper.”

In that moment Bubba became angry. He did not understand why he was being treated differently than his white classmate for the same behavior. Without any support in processing his anger, his behaviors increased in frequency. This increase was met with more detention and more suspensions. The negative response combined with the threat of detention and suspension fueled Tre’mon’s anger. He responded by engaging in challenging behaviors with increased frequency. He became determined to engage in behavior that justified office referrals and suspension. His anger, with no support from adults to help him process, increased the likelihood of bad behavior. The assumption of guilt and aggression directed at Tre’mon had an impact on his behavior.

Tre-mon articulated he felt targeted by his teachers and administrators. He was sent to the “thinking chair” more often than his classmates. He became involved in a physical altercation with a white classmate which resulted in suspension. Even though he was not the aggressor, he was suspended for three days with no explanation while the other student received no consequences for his actions. Tre’mon was viewed as the threat despite telling the administrator the other student pushed him first.

Following the separation of his birth parents and the adoption, Bubba moved to the suburbs of Century City. When asked what he noticed most about this new school, he responded by saying, “In Chicago, let’s see, my new school was nice. I don’t even remember what school I was going to, but it wasn’t as diverse. There was a bunch of

black kids in my Chicago school. My new school there's a bunch of white people instead of black people." This was new for Bubba as most of his school experiences involved schools with mostly students of color. It wasn't until post third grade that he recognized being the minority as one of a few students of color in his class.

Bubba's new school did not change his behavior. He continued to live the same behaviors displayed in his Chicago school. The behaviors were met with the same results, frequent visits with principal and zero tolerance by the teacher. While he refrained from physical aggression towards other students, he still engaged in behaviors which resulting in suspension. When asked for examples of his behavior, Bubba mentioned, "I walked out of the school because my teacher wouldn't leave me the hell alone. I told the teacher it was bullshit because I got recess detention for talking to my friends in class. I even got kicked out of class for not putting on my coat to go outside for recess." It was these behaviors that often resulted in Bubba being suspended, sent to the principal's office, or in the time out chair (thinking chair). He explained that this behavior occurred mostly in elementary school as he recalls calming down in high school. Most of his suspension were for being disrespectful rather than physical aggression towards other students.

Tre'mon's mobility did not improve his behavior, it only exacerbated it. The stigma of bad student followed him through the many elementary schools he attended. With every elementary school came more trips to the principal's office without explanation. Someone could assume that transitioning to a new school would warrant a fresh start for students. However, Tre'mon's negative experience shadowed him

wherever he went. As permanent records transition between school with students, so does the belief in poor behavior without justification or reason.

One thing Bubba noticed was everyone's ability to pretend nothing was going on in his life. Mrs. Hopkins never asked if he understood what was happening. He left for school one morning fully expecting this birth mother to pick him up from school that afternoon. To his surprise he was met by a total stranger at the end of the school day. He was soon adopted and moved to a different city by adults he did not know. His adoptive parents never asked if he was ok. The people in Bubba's new school never asked if he was ok, nor did they ask about his previous school experiences. Everyone was making decisions for Bubba without ever discussing with him what was going on around him, from his perspective. Bubba stated,

“No one at school ever seem to care what was going on in my life. When I was adopted and moved to Century City, no one told me why. It seemed like no one even cared. The school just expected me to do what they did. Everyone just gave me a chair, a few books and told me to learn just like the other kids. Well I was not like the other kids. I lost my mom and dad and got a new mom and dad in a week. I moved to a place I didn't know anyone. I went from a school with all black people to all white people. There was only like 11 black kids in my entire school when I moved here, and no one asked me if I was ok. Nobody gave a shit about me, especially not my teachers.”

A lack of compassion also triggered Tre'mon's poor behavior. Tre'mon argued that adults in the system did not care about his life outside of school. There was no recollection of school staff questioning his experiences beyond basic academic progress. Specifically, no one questioned or recommended emotional support during his adoption and relocation. In his opinion, no one expressed concern for him. According to Tre'mon, “No one at school ever seem to care what was going on in my life.”

This lack of empathy continued to support Tre'mon's bad behavior. According to Wink et al. (2021), teachers with the ability to empathize with students could impact their behaviors. The research goes on to say that teachers which lack empathy receive more negative misbehaviors, relationship conflicts, and provide fewer problem-solving strategies. The lack of empathy expressed to Tre'mon negatively impacted his behavior.

### Middle School

Secondary school systems work differently than elementary schools. Students are afforded a lot more freedoms. While students at the elementary level are confined to one classroom with one instructor, secondary students are introduced to multiple classrooms with multiple instructors. This system forces students to building relationships with multiple teachers in multiple classroom systems. Each classroom has its own established expectations to which students must conform. This can prove difficult for students that enter secondary school with a negative perception based on their elementary experience.

Middle school was a blur to Bubba. He recalled having the worse attitude in school during middle school than any other time. His mentality became, "fuck everything and everybody." His behaviors in middle school were problematic as well. At one point, he was sent to an alternative school in the district which supported students with behavior goals as a part of their individualized education plan (IEP). Even though Bubba was never evaluated for special education services to address his behavior, he was remanded to the alternative school.

Tre'mon spoke to his poor attitude during middle school. He was unable to forget the treatment he received during elementary school. He was sent to an alternative school

for students with individualized education plans (IEP), despite never being evaluated for special education services. It was assumed that he would behave poorly or similar to students with behavior goals. This assumption reinforced the negative stereotype of bad behavior.

Bubba had a much different experience in high school than elementary and middle school. While his behavior dictated the relationship he had with his instructors and principals, his attendance dictated his lack of connectedness during high school. Bubba became much calmer at this point in his life. Rather than disrespecting his teachers, he simply avoided class therefore avoiding his teachers. He believed this was the best way to stay out of trouble. Bubba never had good attendance at school, and this became worse as he matured. He would frequently come and go from high school classes depending on his mood. Bubba remembered one semester missing a total of 30 full days of school.

Rather than providing opportunities for adults to label him as a behavior concern, he avoided classrooms altogether. He avoided conflict by avoiding class and adults. Even though his decision making was based on self-preservation, the behavior was the result of stereotype threat. The belief that teachers would view him negatively resulted in classroom and school avoidance.

### High School

Before transferring to his current suburban high school, he attended a school in Century city. Bubba wanted to attend a school with a high number of Black students. Therefore he convinced his mother to transfer schools. He thought this school would be

different. Bubba assumed his new school, with a higher minority population, would not inquire about his previous school experiences. This assumption would never come to fruition. He quickly learned that the baggage he carried would follow him to the new school.

When Bubba enrolled at his new school, he was scheduled to meet with the counselor to complete his enrollment. This was a good sign, as he had never met with the school counselor at any of his previous schools. While he was expecting questions about middle school, adoption, or elementary school, he was met with questions about course work at the alternative schools. The counselor, with Bubba in the room, phoned his previous school to learn more about his course work. The conversation quickly detoured from his coursework to his lack of attendance and poor behavior. Bubba stated, "I heard the principal through the phone tell this counselor that I never came to school, I would always cuss the teachers out, and they kicked me out. So before I started, I was already the bad kid." Because of this interaction, Bubba believed he would be treated exactly how he was treated at his previous school.

For the first time at a new school, Tre'mon met with a counselor. He thought this experience would be different. Rather than focusing on coursework, his previous school shared information surrounding his poor attendance and negative behavior. Without reservation, the information was circulated among his new teachers. He was once again labeled as the "bad kid." The preconceived notions formulated among teachers would overshadow his experience. Stereotype threat would again thwart his behavior.

Tre'mon believed part of the issue was the lack of diversity in his school. He requested a transfer to a school with a higher minority population. He thought he would be treated differently if he were around more people that looked like himself. In fact, the research argues differently. According to Bickel and Qualls (1980), schools with higher minority populations had triple the suspension rates of their white counterparts. Therefore, being in an environment with a higher minority population increases the chances of suspension.

Despite attending a school with a higher minority population, the teaching staff is mostly white. According to Frankenberg (2006), white teachers make up an overwhelming majority of the nation's teachers. The research goes on to say that white teachers were the least likely to have had much experience with racial diversity. This lack of experience coupled with the increase likelihood of viewing Black males as threats creates a system which targets Black males. The system results in altered behavior by Black males as a means of survival rather than a nurturing school environment.

Bubba's attendance began to mirror his previous school experience. Missing one class period quickly turned into missing full days. When he was present in class, he was often met with disappointment or discouragement from his teachers. One teacher said, "why bother coming to class, you have no chance of passing at this point." Rarely was he encouraged or praised for attending class.

Relationships are crucial to the educational experience. According to Roffey (2012), positive relationships in school are critical to student and staff well-being. It also supports a positive culture and climate within the learning environment. Tre'mon



struggled to form authentic relationships with other students. One instructor stated, “why bother coming to class, you have no chance of passing at this point.” To assume a student would fail a class is to assume they are unintelligent, unmotivated, and unwilling to engage in the learning experience. Being told he was a failure resulted in confrontation and disrespect.

Bubba believed his teachers didn’t care if he attended class or not. He recalled a conversation he had with a female instructor he encountered. After missing several classes Bubba went to class. At the beginning of class he asked for his missing work. The instructor said no, she was not going to give him the assignments. This upset Bubba and he became confrontational. Bubba said,

“Why can’t I have my work? She said because I haven’t been there and that I didn’t deserve to get the work. That shit pissed me off, so I asked her again for the work. She said no and if I didn’t like it, I could leave. She didn’t send me to the office, she just told me to get out, so I left. I never went back to her class. She didn’t want me there. As I was walking out the class, I heard her say, you gonna be in jail or dead if I keep doing what I’m doing. What pissed me off is that she didn’t know shit about me. Why she say that?”

This exchanged between Bubba and the teacher was very similar to other experiences.

He spoke of several interactions which resulted in him walking out of class. It was these interactions which limited his desire to generate authentic relationships with his instructors.

The stereotype threat Bubba experienced impacted his desire to attend school regularly. Bubba began to dismiss school just as his instructors dismissed him. His attendance deteriorated similar to the relationships he had with instructors. When Bubba

was not in school, he spent more time with others students that should have been in school.

During the school year, Bubba made another poor decision by stealing a car. He was out late one evening after meeting up with friends on the other side of town to attend a party. The party ended up being raided by police compelling everyone to scatter due to the underage drinking. Bubba was separated from his friends whom ultimately left him. Rather than making the ten mile walk home, he noticed an unattended vehicle left running in a convenience store parking lot. He got in the car and drove away. Within 15 minutes, he was being followed by a single police cruiser. Within seconds the sirens began to bellow a distinct noise from the cruiser, a clear sign to pull the vehicle over. Bubba continued to drive away, increasing his speed. Eventually he would crash the car. With no options but to follow the directions of the police officers, he exited the car with his hands in the air. He was told to walk towards the officers, which he complied. Without reason or provocation he heard gun shots and immediately felt extremely sharp pains in his lower extremities. His legs buckled as he fell to the ground. Bubba later learned that he had been shot with rubber bullets to subdue him.

Following his arrest, Bubba was taken to the juvenile detention center. He referred to this place as “The Hole.” He did not want to provide much detail about this experience as it stole seven months of his life. Seven months of his life he knew he would not get back. Even though Bubba realized his choices caused his placement, it was difficult to comprehend being incarcerated. Bubba said,

“I don’t know why I stole that car. I know I was wrong but what else I’m supposed to do. Yeah, I took it, but I didn’t think I was finna go to jail. I got

locked up for something stupid. Gone from school, gone from my sister. Guess I'm just like my real mom and dad.”

Bubba did not want to be like his parents in Chicago. He vowed he was not going to live a similar life, however his decisions would prove otherwise.

The Hole was a placement facility that was considered a prison for juvenile offenders. Bubba described it as the most restrictive place he had ever experienced. The regime he was required to follow proved difficult in the beginning. Bubba described the first night as the longest night of his life. Dressed in a state issued jumpsuit, he was escorted to his room. He tried very hard to sleep, but found himself questioning “why” he was there. The next morning he was woke up by the ringing of a bell followed by several staffers yelling for him to get up, along with the other juvenile offenders. He was allowed 20 minutes to clean himself up prior to breakfast. Even though he honored the commands of the staffers, he was met with constant hostility.

The regimen of the detention center was strictly adhered to. Breakfast every morning, followed by school, then back to his room. At 12:00 p.m. he and others were escorted to lunch. Thirty minutes was all the time allowed to eat lunch and converse with other offenders. Bubba kept to himself, not wanting to generate relationships. He stated, “I need to get up out a here.” Following lunch, he was allowed one hour of free time which was spent watching television. He was taken back to his room which consisted of a single bed, four bare walls, and a toilet. At 5:00 p.m. he was taken to dinner followed by another 60 minutes of free time then back to his room for the remainder of the evening. The lights in the facility would shut off at 10:00 p.m. sharp. This schedule was

followed seven days a week without failure. For the next seven months, this was Bubba's life.

When asked if Bubba could remember a positive interaction with a teacher, he could remember only one. During his time at the juvenile detention center, he worked with a teacher he referred to as Ms. Tiffany. I asked what he liked about Ms. Tiffany. Bubba said, "Miss Tiffany treated me like a normal person." Even though he was at the detention center, "she was cool, she asked me about my other schools. She asked me what I did to get locked up. I told her about my mom and dad and how I never got to say bye. Jessica was the only teacher that seem to give a shit about me." Bubba described her by saying that she did not treat him like a criminal. This helped him feel as though she actually cared about him.

### Perceptions of School

Even though Bubba had very few positive memories of school, he spoke about one teacher in particular that made him feel welcomed. Ms. Tiffany, an instructor at the juvenile detention center "actually cared," according to Bubba.

She treated me like a normal person, you know. She treated me like my age, like I was a real person. She made me feel like I wasn't locked up. Like I mattered. If all my teachers treated me like Ms. Tiffany did, I probably wouldn't be where I'm is right now. She the only one that asked me anything about my life. She was good people.

The interaction with Ms. Tiffany had an impact on Bubba. It was the first time someone inquired about his lived experiences. It caused Bubba to think that there were teachers who were interested in his life outside of class.

Based on Bubba's experiences in school, his perceptions of school became very negative. The constant threat of being sent to the thinking chair or principal's office increased his growing frustration with his educational experience. During his elementary years, he began to notice his classmates were not "threatened" as often as he was. When Bubba was caught selling Xanax, he was disciplined differently than his white counterpart who purchased the Xanax. Bubba began to notice the subtle differences between he and his classmates. When asked when he began noticing these differences, Bubba stated, "I think it was in elementary that I started seeing I was getting in trouble more than my friends for doing the same things I was."

As for the teachers, Bubba got the impression they simply didn't care if he was successful. Not only did teachers rarely inquire about his personal life, he failed to generate authentic relations with his instructors. According to Oberski et al. (1999), the relationship between teachers and students is vital to the success of student learning. Bubba spoke about the lack of relationships he had with his teachers and how that impacted his desire to be in school. Bubba stated,

"If teachers did not care if I was there, then why go? So I just stopped going because when I went, they made me feel like I owed them something. Like it was my job to be in class. Hell, it was their job to teach. I didn't think I owed them shit, so I said fuck it, excuse my language. I just stopped caring. That one teacher I was talking about who told me I would end up dead or in jail, she didn't know shit about me or my life. She should as hell had no reason to say that to me. That shit wasn't necessary. She told me to get out and that's exact what I did, I got out. I thought she already had her mind made up about who I was."

Tre'mon was a victim of stereotype threat. He was labeled a behavior concern and placed at an alternative school for students with behavior goals. A lack of

connectedness with students and staff resulted in office referrals and school suspensions. Teachers articulated failure which incited confrontation. All of these situations negatively impacted his behavior. Tre'mon disconnected with school as a means of self-preservation. Rather than the ongoing threat of stereotype, he avoided situations, peers, teachers, and administrations. This change in behavior was a direct result of the treats he faced as a student in the educational environment. Stereotype threat is a damaging phenomenon that Black males are experiencing in schools.

### Keyshawn

I interviewed Keyshawn in a local high school in the area. I was introduced to Keyshawn as a person working on a graduate degree in need of interviewing Black males that were involved in the juvenile justice system. While the introduction was appreciated, the research being conducted was much more extensive than what was being described to Keyshawn. After the counselor left the room, I reintroduced myself and provided him with a much more intricate description of the interview process.

When Keyshawn walked into the room, I immediately recognized his stature. He stood approximately 6'1'' tall and weighed approximately 180 pounds. Again, this is an assumption based on many years of athletics, coaching, and officiating. Keyshawn's hair looked like he had recently visited the barbershop. He had a bald fade with a shadow beard echoing his cheek line. Throughout the interview, he frequently ran his hand over his hair as we talked. As he walked into the room, I immediately stood to my feet so I could offer a proper greeting. As I extended my hand, he mirrored the gesture. As our palms collided, I expected a similar greeting to that of Bubba, however I was

disappointed. Keyshawn kept his feet planted firmly on the ground as we shook hands. For a moment, our eyes locked in on each other. I noticed Keyshawn's eyes glance down at my feet, gradually working his way up my body, as if he were sizing me up or asserting his dominance in the room.

Keyshawn was wearing black jeans, black and white Nike hoodie, along with a black and white pair of Nike Air Jordan series one. His medium brown complexion matched that of Denzel Washington. It was apparent that Keyshawn took pride in his appearance. With his backpack in hand, I pointed to the table and two chairs tucked next to the wall in the office. The office space was decorated with an oak desk, black chair behind the desk, along with several photos on the walls. The pictures were of an African-American man dressed in a three-piece suite which caught my attention. The man in the photo was the associate principal of the high school. It seemed ironic that a Black researcher was interviewing a Black student in the office of a Black administrator.

Keyshawn answered most questions without hesitation; however his body language shared a different message. With both his arms and legs crossed and bag lying still across his lap, I got the impression that he was guarded in his responses. During the interview, Keyshawn would pause as if to calculate a response ensuring he provided nothing too sensitive or incriminating. He was accommodating throughout the entire interview, but he never fully let his guard down. His behavior during the interview was different than Bubba, as Keyshawn did not trust me instantaneously.

### About Keyshawn

Keyshawn was raised primarily by his father, until his dad married his step-mother when he was eleven years old. His birth mother attempted to give him up for adoption at just 12 weeks old. He was unaware of the adoption until age nine, by which his dad shared with him about the adoption. At that time, a class mate made an inappropriate joke insulting Keyshawn's mother causing him to become upset. This resulted in a physical altercation between he and the other third grader. This prompted a conversation between he and his father about the lack of presence his mom had in his life.

According to Keyshawn's father, his mom originally put him up for adoption when he was just 12 weeks old. His dad was not originally told he was going to be a father. He heard about it from his mother's best friend at the time. Once he learned of the child and adoption, he immediately made a phone call putting a halt to the adoption. Following several conversations, his mother agreed to give complete guardianship of Keyshawn to his father. Since then he has had no relationship nor contact with his birth mother. When asked if he knew where she was currently living, he responded by saying, "no." I asked how this has impacted him as a person? Keyshawn said,

Negatively and positively. Negatively as in, I don't have that mother figure like everyone else. I'm always seeking for it like everybody else, you know. And then, like the positive has made me stronger, like I don't really need nobody to nurture me. I can nurture myself, you know?

Talking about this seemly made Keyshawn uncomfortable. His arms became tighter across his chest as he began to slump down in the chair. The eye contact we once shared dissipated as the tension in the air became palpable. The mood in the room changed as we discussed his mother. Clearly this topic weighted heavily on him cognitively.



When Keyshawn was ten years old, his father began dating a woman named Kelly. She was a very nice woman that treated Keyshawn well. Prior to Kelly, his father had many short-term relationships, none of which seemed to last for an extended period of time. These short relationships resulted in two half siblings for Keyshawn. He was fond of his younger brother and sister. Even though they did not live with him, he was able to spend a great deal of time with them. Two to three weekends a month his siblings were at his house which allowed them to form strong bonds.

Kelly was the first woman in Keyshawn's life who created a level of comfort. At some point Kelly, along with her son, Andre, moved in with him and his father. He finally had a mother figure in his life. Something he was constantly looking for since learning of the adoption. Now, he had a family. With Kelly filling the void, Keyshawn felt like he now had both a mother and a father. Keyshawn stated, "Finally I was just like my friends, you know, I had a mom and dad. No one could make fun of me anymore."

Keyshawn spoke very highly of the relationship he had with Kelly. As previously mentioned, he spoke as though Kelly loved him as her own. Never did he feel as though he was treated differently. He recalled Andre having a birthday. Even though it was Andre's special day, Kelly took Keyshawn out to lunch and to get ice cream with her and Andre. They both were made to feel special even though the day should have been about Andre. It was this interaction that made their relationship special. Keyshawn stated, "I never knew why she treated me the way she did, but I never felt left out by Kelly. She was who I needed".

The relationship Kelly had with Keyshawn's father seemed "hard," according to Keyshawn. He remembers them fighting a lot. What would start as a discussion would turn into a large argument resulting in both Andre and Keyshawn being sent to their room. When he was in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade, Kelly took the boys out to lunch on a Saturday afternoon. In that conversation she told him that she and Andre were moving out of the house. According to Keyshawn, "Kelly said she can't take the fighting any more. She needed to get out. She said she was sorry, like um, about 20 times to me. I didn't say anything, I just sat there." Keyshawn asked, "Can I come with you?" Kelly told him no, but if he needed anything all he would have to do is call. The next day, Kelly and Andre would move out of the house leaving only Keyshawn and his dad.

Even though the break up between Kelly and his father impacted Keyshawn, his dad never had a conversation with him about it. This seemed to bother Keyshawn. During the interview, he posed the question, "why he couldn't talk to me about? I just wanted to know why she was leaving." This conversation never happened only leaving Keyshawn with questions as to why she left. It was as if he felt abandoned with no clear explanation of why.

Over the next year, the relationship between Keyshawn and his father took a turn for the worst. His dad jumped from one relationship to the next. Keyshawn would not develop a relationship with these women similar to Kelly. He purposefully kept his distance from the women in his dad's life.

Approximately six months after Kelly moved out of the house, Keyshawn found out the real reason why she left. Even though they were fighting, the ultimate reason for

her leaving was infidelity. Keyshawn's dad would eventually invite another woman and her son to move into their home. When he was introduced to the boy, he was told that it was his brother, not the son of his dad's new girlfriend. This took Keyshawn by surprise. Not knowing what to say during the introduction, he simply said nothing. Later that evening, Keyshawn asked his dad why he referred to him as his brother? His dad said that it was his brother. Keyshawn said,

“My dad told me that this lil dude was my brother and that they was going to be moving in with us. He didn't ask me if I wanted them to move in, he just said they was moving in, you know. Like, why they moving in and why he say he my brother. I didn't know what to think and I sure as hell didn't know why he tell me I had a brother.”

Keyshawn kept his distance from his dad's new girlfriend. There was a lack of trust which resulted from the uncertainty of their introduction. He had very little time to process Kelly's moving out and the new girlfriend moving in. Also, with the lack of communication between he and his dad, he was left to form his own opinions as to why a new woman was living in his home. Little did he know, the relationship he had with his father was going from bad to worst.

One Friday night, Keyshawn was hanging out with one of his friends. They were involved in underaged drinking. When his friend dropped him off at home, his dad's girlfriend was also home and had been drinking as well. As they sat in the living room talking, they made the mistake of becoming physically involved. While Keyshawn did not go into detail surrounding the event, he was able to articulate that his dad found out about the one-time event. Rather than forcing his girlfriend out of the house, his dad held him responsible for the event and forced him out of the house. Keyshawn said,

“Yeah, um, I had a pretty strong relationship with my dad, uh, I don’t know, life just kind-a played out as we expected. We don’t have the best relationship as we used to. I ended up with his baby mama. Since she didn’t have any place to go, he ended up kicking me out, and then, I’ve been with someone else for the past two years.”

### School

Life bestowed many challenges towards Keyshawn over the years. At 12 weeks old, his biological mother contemplated adoption without sharing the information with his biological father. Despite growing up with his biological father, he longed for an impactful relationship with a mother figure. According to Shelton et al. (2014), the relationship and interaction between and mother and child is an important and dynamic process. After generating a relationship with his father’s live-in girlfriend and step siblings, she too would withdrawal from his life with little explanation. The absence of these relationship had a negative impact on Keyshawn as he navigated his adolescent years.

Keyshawn experienced a dysfunctional home. He witnessed his father and fathers girlfriend engaged in many verbal altercations. While none became violent, the contact verbal abuse and arguments would negatively impact him. Keyshawn was arrested while driving in a car with his cousin. He became sexually involved with his father’s girlfriend which resulted in Keyshawn being forced out of his home. With nowhere to go, he squatted at various friends’ houses. Despite these hardships, Keyshawn experienced even greater challenges in school. The threat of being stereotyped negatively impacted his ability to be successful in school.

Keyshawn attended school in the city he was born and raised in. When trying to recall the schools that he attended, Keyshawn went to four different elementary schools, two different middle schools, and the single high school he is currently attending. Two of the elementary schools he attended were in a neighboring suburb of Century City. He started in one middle school prior to transferring to the second. The second middle school was physically connected to the high school he would eventually start as a ninth-grade student. In total, Keyshawn attended seven schools that he could name.

One thing Keyshawn liked best about school was the opportunity to display his fashion. Keyshawn enjoyed looking nice in school. He spoke highly of his Air Jordan collection, stating he has well over ten pairs in a variety of colors. He liked dressing well because of the attention he received, not only from his friends, but from the girls as well. For the middle school yearbook, he was voted the best dressed in his entire eighth grade class. An honor he wore with great pride. As the attention from his peers grew, so did the desire to continue impressing them with his clothes. “You got to keep your gear tight. Fresh fit, fresh cut, and a fresh pair of sneaks,” Keyshawn said with a grin on his face.

#### Elementary School

During the third grade, Keyshawn joined a new class. His new teacher was a male. His previous teacher was a female instructor. He was escorted into the class by the principal and introduced as Keyshawn, a student joining the class. The new teacher had a desk cleared in the back of the room for Keyshawn. Rather than being welcomed in the new class, he was taken to the back of the room where his desk was waiting. Later that

afternoon, Keyshawn recalled the conversation he had with his new teachers. Keyshawn said,

“The teacher let all the kids go to recess but he told me to stay in my seat. I didn’t do nothing wrong so I didn’t know why I had to say. Um, so he walked up. He was standing over me. He seemed like a giant. He looked down at me and said, there will be no fighting in my classroom. Fight and I will kick you out for good.”

Keyshawn was visibly shaken by this memory. His eyes went to the floor, voice became somber, while his posture slouched in the chair. This event clearly had a lasting impact on Keyshawn’s connection to school.

Without justification, the male teacher stereotyped Keyshawn as a threat. Rather than welcoming him into the new environment with a clean slate, the instructor made assumptions about Keyshawn with zero student interaction. By articulating he would not tolerate fighting in class, assumes that Keyshawn was more inclined to engage in physical altercations. This view of Keyshawn being a threat caused a negative impact on his ability to connect which impacted his behavior.

It was assumed that Keyshawn was going to bully other students, despite the white student igniting the negative behavior by making inappropriate comments about his mom. Rather than the school repairing the relationship between the students, they chose to separate them without communicating with Keyshawn. According to McCluskey et al. (2008), there is a need to restore good relationships when there has been conflict. Conflict resolution would have been a good alternative to support the situation. However, the administration changed Keyshawn’s entire environment despite him responding to the other students advances.

The teacher also attempted to intimidate Keyshawn by standing over him as he sat at his desk. Treating Keyshawn as a threat only angered him more. The constant threat and intimidation negatively impacted his behavior. Hein et al. (2015), examines how students' perceptions of intimidation exhibited by their teacher had indirect effect on students' feelings of anger. The teachers attempt to intimidate Keyshawn, only increased his anger resulting in more adverse behaviors.

Prior to this incident, Keyshawn did not get into any trouble in school. He considered himself a "good student." He liked attending school because he was able to play with his friend. Keyshawn spoke of his stellar math schools, citing math as his favorite subject. He also enjoyed physical education as it allowed him to burn a lot of energy during the day. This was necessary for him to remain focused throughout the day.

Elementary came easy to Keyshawn. He excelled in all his subject areas. Not only was math his favorite subject, he also liked reading as well. Keyshawn recalled attending a different class for reading. He received others books to read which were different from his classmates. According to Keyshawn, "Those books in my smaller class were harder than the ones we were reading in my normal class, you know." Keyshawn thought he was in an acceleration group for reading, although he was not 100% sure.

The remainder of elementary school involved Keyshawn transferring to two other schools. He attended one elementary for a total of seven months before transferring to his final elementary school. No matter where he went to school, Keshawn believed he was being watched all the time by his instructors. He thought it related back to the fight,

however he could not prove it. He said, “for some reason I just thought they be watching me, expecting me to fight or something.” When asked if the teachers did anything to cause this reaction. He responded by saying, “I don’t think so, um, at lease I can’t remember, you know, except that teacher telling me not to fight. But that’s it I think.”

Keyshawn was asked if he could describe the differences between the four elementary schools he attended? He struggled to recall any differences with the exception of location. The first and last elementary schools he attended were in the inner city while the two in the middle were in the suburbs of Century City. Keyshawn felt more comfortable at the inner city as the number of students that shared his complexion was much higher compared to the suburb schools. In his suburban schools, he could only remember seeing three others students of color in all of his classes.

Despite Keyshawn’s personal perceived academic success in elementary school, he was forced to navigate a negative self-perception. His lived experiences forced him to behave in a protective manner. While he enjoyed school, the constant threat of being watched loomed over his elementary experiences. The intimidation he felt by his instructors created a sense of fear and anger for Keyshawn. His aggressive response to a situation ignited a perception among the adult in his schools.

Rather than providing resources and supports for Keyshawn, the adults determined the best way to address this young Black male was separation. Separation from his peers and spaces in which he felt most comfortable. Their solution was punitive in nature rather than supportive. Lastly, they placed him with an instructor that viewed him as a threat. A teacher that believed in intimidation as an alternative to positive



relationships. Intimidation, stereotype threat, and constant fear of being watched, coupled with the lack of restorative practices resulted in aggressive behavior.

### Middle School

After leaving elementary school he moved on to middle school. Keyshawn attended the first middle school for most of sixth-grade. While he had a number of friends, he did not have great relationships with his instructors. According to Keyshawn, “I think the feelings I had in elementary followed me to jr. high. Um, I just didn’t like any of my teachers, you know.” He would not allow himself to get close to any of his instructors out of fear. Fear they would threaten him like his elementary school teacher.

Keyshawn also struggled taking instructions from his teachers. Keyshawn said, “but I’m the type that like if it’s not my way, it’s no way.” The expectation for middle schoolers was to attend all classes on time. Middle school now offered more freedoms than elementary school. For the first time ever, Keyshawn was allowed to transition from class to class. This structure afforded him the choice to attend class when he wanted. While policy instructed students to attend class on time, Keshawn began to struggle in his attendance. He found himself surfing the hallways rather than attending class on a regular basis. He was instructed by his teachers, administration, and counselors about the importance of attending class. Uncaringly, Keyshawn struggled to internalize their advice.

The fear imbedded in his thinking was a byproduct of his elementary experience. Fear impacted his behavior by his lack of attendance in middle school. The threat and intimidation he experienced in elementary school followed him to middle school.

Keyshawn struggled to generate relationships with his instructors due to the fear of being labeled aggressive or a bully.

In middle school Keyshawn discovered his passion for athletics. He started playing basketball during gym class and during lunch. As he kept playing his skills increased. The gym teacher asked him to be on their middle school basketball team, which he reluctantly agreed. While Keyshawn liked to play basketball in gym class, he did not like the idea of practice. Again, he struggled taking orders from others, therefore causing an issue with his participation on the team.

Middle school continued to be a challenge for Keyshawn. Similar to elementary, he was in a number of fights, which jeopardized his ability to participate in basketball. He recalled getting into a fight because his white classmate called him a “bitch” for talking to his girlfriend. Keyshawn responded by punching rather than talking. This fight afforded him a three-day suspension while the other student received no consequence. When he returned to school, he met with the counselor to discuss his behavior. Keyshawn said, “she say I was a good kid and I shouldn’t be fighting all the time. But this my first fight in this school, so why she say that. I ain’t never fought in that school, so why she assume I fight all the time.” Clearly, Keyshawn’s reputation was superseding him.

Keyshawn was viewed as a threat. Despite never being in a fight in middle school, the counselor made generalizations about his behavior. He was stereotyped as a fighter without justification. The disproportionate enforcement of consequences perplexed Keyshawn. Similar to elementary school, white students were disciplined

differently than the Black students. Even though Keyshawn responded to the behavior of another student, he was viewed as the threat rather than the victim.

During basketball season, Keyshawn knew he needed to focus more time and energy on his grades and attendance if he wanted to participate on the team. His coach promised him a starting spot if he committed to school. His coach even made him sign a behavior contract assuring he would attend class and stay out of trouble during basketball season. Keyshawn asked his teammates if they had to sign behavior contracts as well. After questioning, he figured out he was the only player required to sign a behavior contract. This created a layer of distrust as Keyshawn was the only player expected to sign a contract.

After basketball season ended Keyshawn's attendance began to deteriorate. Without the incentive of athletics, he quickly reverted back to his old ways of low academic performance and lackluster attendance. His grades would nose dive and he would often be found roaming the halls rather than in class. Teachers continued to encourage Keyshawn to attend class, however the freedom to roam the halls was far more appealing than regular classroom attendance.

Keyshawn struggled to develop positive relationships with his middle school teachers. Similar to elementary school, there was a constant fear he had of his instructors. Despite being told by his dad that school was a place to learn, he was unsure how to get past his fear of teachers. The relationship he had with his middle school Spanish instructor exacerbated his fear of teachers. They would argue over his attendance and punctuality. When Keyshawn was in class, he would seek the attention of

his peers. This relationship became so tumultuous, she eventually began calling him “demon,” rather than Keyshawn. According to Keyshawn,

“A, the Spanish teacher, she just, I don’t know, so, I think that was more middle school I believe, so I used to be kind of an attention seeker and she just didn’t like that, so we just didn’t end up blending well cause she, I don’t know, she used to, she didn’t even call me by my name, she called me demon.”

I asked, “how did you take that, being called demon?” Keyshawn said, “Um, I don’t know, um, I don’t really let words affect me. I never really have.” While he said words don’t affect him, it seemed to impact his ability to trust teachers as he continued to avoid class.

The lack of trust Keyshawn felt towards his teachers was overwhelming. To the extent he was called demon by his Spanish instructor. A demon, according to Merriam-Webster dictionary is a source or agent of evil. How is Keyshawn expected to navigate a school or classroom when being labeled a demon? This negative view of Keyshawn impacted his desire to engage in the educational experience. The label of demon resulted in avoidance and more aggressive behavior towards peers.

In March of Keyshawn’s sixth-grade year, he was expelled from school. He was in another fist fight with a classmate. He remembers a white student shoving him from behind without cause, in his opinion. Keyshawn immediately turned around to defend himself. Keyshawn said,

“I didn’t know what I did. Um, ol’ boy just walked up and pushed me in the back while I was in the lunch room. I turned around and shouted why you push me? Kid came toward me so I gave him two and it was on! We wrestled around a bit, he got his licks in and I got mine. Teachers broke it up fast. We went to the principal’s office like always. Like, um, I still to this day don’t know why dude run up on me like that, but I wasn’t about to let this cat punk me, so I had to handle me.”

Keyshawn would never attend this school again. When his dad came to the school, he was told that Keyshawn was being expelled from school for fighting. This required him to transfer to a new school within the same school district. When asked what was happening to the other student, the principal was unable to share the consequences due to district policy. Keyshawn later found out from friends that the student he fought returned to school two days later.

Keyshawn's new middle school was on the other side of town. Even though he would attend a new school in the same town, he did not know any of the students. Keyshawn needed to make a new name for himself. When asked what he meant by this, he stated, "I had friends at my old school. I knew the girls and they knew me," he said with a smile. "Now I got to start all over, make new friends, new teachers, everything started over." I heard anxiety in his voice at this point. As if the thought of a fresh start was overwhelming to Keyshawn.

Keyshawn vowed to make some changes in his school life. He told himself that he was going to try to go to class and not get into any trouble. A new school meant new opportunities to meet people, especially girls. Keyshawn recalled liking his new school because there were more girls there. He articulated his new purpose for attending school was to see the girls. He continued to struggle with his daily attendance, however he could be found in the building, just not in class. When Keyshawn was in class, he could recall texting girls on his phone rather than participating.

Despite his new school, Keyshawn did not recall getting into any other fights during middle school. His attendance did not improve, however, fighting was not

something he participated in. He continued to keep his new teachers at arm's length maintaining his emotional distance. Keyshawn said, "I just didn't want teachers all up in my business. Rather than them treating me like I'm gone do something, um, I just chose to be about me." Keyshawn focused on his relationships with the girls and improving his basketball skills.

The threat and intimidation Keyshawn felt in elementary school was still evident in middle school. He continued to avoid class in an effort to remain distant from his instructors. Keyshawn's goal was to maintain distance to escape the feeling of being viewed as a threat. Distance was also used to avoid being intimidated by his instructors.

### High School

When Keyshawn began high school, he kept a low profile. Because the middle school and high school were attached, he assumed his new high school teachers were aware of his attendance and fighting issues. He started high school by focusing on his course work. He worked hard to attend classes on a regular basis. He even tried to build relationships with his instructors. This decision would backfire with one teacher in particular.

Keyshawn recalled an interaction he had with his male math instructor. He remembered this situation fondly as math was his favorite subject. While in class, he asked a neighbor for help on a problem he was attempting to solve. The instructor came over and told the two to stop talking during instruction. Keyshawn said,

"Uh, I don't know, he be like, oh get back to work and touch me, and I'll tell him know not to touch me, and then he do it again, like, don't sit there and keep touching me. You know, I don't, and then, it's just like, he was never respectful. He never gave that respect so he never got that respect back. I usually try to give

it first, but if you always not giving me that respect, I'm a see it and I'm not gonna give it back to you. So, just like, I got up and walked out the class. As I was leaving, I heard him say, I knew this wouldn't work."

I asked Keyshawn if he knew what the teacher meant by this? He said,

"Like, no, I didn't know what he was talking about, but every time I be in that class, he always kept coming at me, like for no reason, he would always be at me. For nothing. Like, the everybody in the class be talking and he would tell me to stop talking. Me and my friends come in for class late, I be the only one, that like, be told I had detention. All I did was ask that girl for help and he put his hands on me. I asked him not to put his hands on me, but, like, he don't listen. Like you show me respect, I'm gone give it.

That interaction had a lasting impact on Keyshawn.

When Keyshawn enrolled in high school, he was determined to take advantage of the opportunity. He worked hard at the beginning of his high school career to engage in the academic process. His attendance improved as did his attempt to generate relationships with his instructors. Regardless of his efforts, teachers continued to challenge his commitment to his academic success.

Keyshawn was targeted by his math instructor. Even though math was his favorite subject, there was no connection between Keyshawn and the teacher. He attempted to be respectful with the expectation of being respected in return. Despite his efforts, he was met with antagonistic behavior. The instructors lack of respect increased Keyshawn's anxiety surrounding teacher relationships.

Keyshawn would make every effort to have a positive high school experience. However, his behavior was dictated by the negative interactions with his instructor. During an interaction with an instructor, he asked the teacher not to touch him. Rather than respect Keyshawn's wish, he kept touching. This display of power by the instructor

reminded Keyshawn of his previous negative experiences. The lack of respect displayed by the instructor reinforced the distrust Keyshawn has felt towards his instructors.

The math instructor treated Keyshawn differently than the other students. He was disciplined for behaviors that mirrored other classmates. Rather than engaging in a confrontation, to avoid confrontation, Keyshawn chose to leave the classroom. When leaving the classroom he overheard the instructor say, "I knew this wouldn't work." This comment articulates the belief that Keyshawn was not worthy of his attention. The instructor assumed Keyshawn would not be successful in the class. He viewed him as a threat to the learning environment and created situations which caused Keyshawn to leave the class. Keyshawn started high school positively, but the threat of his instructors resulted in behavior changes.

Keyshawn described himself as the type of person that thrived on respect. For those that showed him respect, he would reciprocate this behavior. For those that did not show respect, he would mirror the lack of respect. Keyshawn also thought of himself as someone who did not like authority, and admitted there are a lot of rules in school to follow. Rules, coupled with a lack of respect, cast a shadow over his ability to generate nurturing relationships with his instructors.

Keyshawn would get in trouble for arguing with teachers, not following the direction of teachers, making poor choices, being argumentative with administrators, classmates, and poor attendance. This behavior, according to Keyshawn, "was unnecessary." Keyshawn asked to be respected by all those around him, including peers, staff, and administration. If it was shown to him, he would have responded with this



same behavior. However, the adults seemed to educate through power dynamics and threats rather than relationship building.

During Keyshawn's tenth-grade year, things took a turn for the worse. He was constantly being sent to the principal's office. In Keyshawn's words, "Like, I was never in class." Keyshawn had a negative attitude to everything school related. He was extremely argumentative with his instructors. Keyshawn recalled walking into class and being asked, "What we gonna argue about today Keyshawn?" Rather than engaging in an altercation, he decided to walk out of the class. It seemed as though his teachers prepared themselves for an argument, without just cause. It became an expectation to argue with Keyshawn rather than instruct him. This problematic interaction between student and teacher persisted throughout the remainder of the school year.

Keyshawn was targeted as a threat to the classroom. As he came into class, instructors were expecting an argument rather than a student focused on learning. This impacted his behavior as he was labeled the argumentative student. Rather than attending class ready to learn, Keyshawn felt he was constantly preparing for war in his classrooms. He was treated differently than his peers, given different consequences for similar behaviors, viewed as a threat to the learning environment and expected to argue on a daily basis. These stereotype threats negatively impacted Keyshawn's behavior and led to avoidance, arguments, and disrespect.

The next year was Keyshawn's eleventh grade year. His attitude shifted as a result of his circumstances. He was placed on probation as a result of his cousin being caught with an illegal substance. Due to probation, Keyshawn had regular meetings with

his juvenile court officer. His attendance was monitored very carefully along with his office referrals. To meet his probation requirements, he needed to follow the rules explicitly or risk being placed back at the juvenile detention center. Therefore, Keyshawn honored the requirements of probation to avoid being sent to the facility. This coincided with him looking for a place to stay as he was kicked out of his dad's house.

One evening Keyshawn asked his cousin for a ride home. Rather than going directly home, they decided to drive around the local neighborhood. As the music played in the background, they were conversing about the upcoming homecoming weekend which encompassed the football game and homecoming dance. As Keyshawn spoke of the "drippy fit" he was planning to wear, he noticed the lights of a police car bounding off the side view mirror. He inquired to his cousin about his speed. Shortly after noticing the lights, his cousin pulled over and parked the car.

Keyshawn looked over his left shoulder to see a rather tall police officer approaching the driver's side of the vehicle. His cousin rolled down the window only to be met by a voice asking for his license and registration. His cousin asked the officer why he was being detained? The officer's only response was, "license and registration." As the officer walked away, Keyshawn spoke of the fear that consumed his body. A number of questions engulfed his thoughts, such as, "am I going to jail, who I'm gonna call?" A few minutes passed and the officer returned and immediately asked both boys to step outside of the vehicle. Rather than obeying the officer, Keyshawn became argumentative. He asked, "why we got to get out the car, like you ain't event told us

what we was doing wrong. Now we just got to get up out the car.” Eventually Keyshawn would get out of the car.

They were told to place both hands on the front end of the vehicle. As his heart rate increased, so did his anger. “We didn’t do nothing wrong,” Keyshawn exclaimed. His cousin was searched. The officer went through his cousin’s jacket and found an illegal substance, along with Keyshawn’s medication bottle. When asked about the illegal substance, Keyshawn said, “I didn’t know what it was, um, but I knew he should not have had it.” I also asked why his cousin had his medication bottle. Keyshawn refused to answer this question. I was not exactly sure why he refused to answer, but as a researcher I know it was not in my best interest to harp on this question.

Both boys were taken into custody and detained at the local juvenile detention center. Knowing the nature of Keyshawn’s relationship with his father, he did not know who he could call. The last person he wanted to call was his dad. Being kicked out of his house placed a permanent wedge and lack of trust on their relationship. Keyshawn said, “I refused to call my dad. There was nothing I needed to say to him. Hell, I would rather sit in jail before I call that nigga. It’s good if I say that right?” I responded by saying, “If that’s what’s on your mind, please be as real as you need to be.” Keyshawn said, “Ok, um, I didn’t know what I was gonna do. So I called Kelly. I knew she should know what to.”

Knowing that Kelly was not a member of my immediate family, she made the decision to call my dad. He would eventually come to the detention center. Keyshawn was released to his dad’s custody with a court date set for the following. As Keyshawn

got in his dad's car, he distinctly remembers the conversation. Keyshawn said, "Um, as soon as I got in the car all my dad said was, where you want me to drop you off. I told him to take me to my friend's house I gave him the address and he didn't say anything else to me the whole way. He just drove and I just sit there. He didn't ask if I was ok, if I did it, nothing. He didn't say shit to me." I said, "so he didn't say anything to you the entire way," attempting to clarify the original statement. He said, "He didn't say anything, I sat there listening to music. I remember listening to Jay-Z the whole way to my friend's place. I got out the car, and he drove away. Um, that's it."

The following week, Keyshawn had his court hearing. When he arrived, he was escorted by his public defender. Rather than remaining in the juvenile detention center, Keyshawn was placed on probation. He was told that if he were to get in any trouble, he would be sent to the detention facility until his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. This was the catalyst he needed to stay out of trouble. Barring any issues, Keyshawn will get off probation in the next few months.

Despite the obstacles, Keyshawn was determined to finish school. He maintained the requirements of his probation to avoid being sent away. This had an impact on his schooling as it required him to go to class. Although he had to be in class, probation did not impact the relationship he had with his teachers. Teachers continued to be disrespectful. Rather than being disrespectful in return, Keyshawn made the choice to remain quiet.

### Perceptions of School

Elementary school came easy to Keyshawn. He considered himself a good student. Keyshawn's academic achievement was noticed by his enrollment in a special reading class. He soared in math class as math was his favorite subject. By all accounts, Keyshawn was a model student. When he was in his first physical altercation, things began to change for Keyshawn. He assumed that the school knew he did not have a mother in his life. This was at the heart of his reaction. Prior to this incident, Keyshawn had not been in a physical altercation, therefore this behavior was uncommon. This did not make him a bad student, rather a student with bad circumstances.

When asked how he felt as a young Black man in the educational system, Keyshawn responded, "invisible." He never felt seen. Despite his poor behavior, lack of attendance, fighting, suspensions, and expulsions, he felt like no one seen him. No one asked questions about his personal life. No one wanted to work with him to address any issues displayed in school. Keyshawn was allowed to fight and misbehave with no support within the school. The response to misbehavior was discipline which provided no support to the function of the behavior.

I asked if Keyshawn felt as though he was treated fairly in school. He said, "no." He went on to say,

"All I wanted was to be respected. Um, I don't think I'm asking to much. That kid disrespected my mom. Like, um, why I had to change classes, you know. Why he didn't get kicked out of school. In middle school a teacher called me demon. How she show me respect? Um, ask a teacher to stop touching me. He didn't. Why I got to respect people when they don't have to. So no, school ain't fair for me."

Keyshawn felt disrespected throughout his entire education.

Keyshawn felt like schools required respect but did not respect him in return. Teachers rarely showed respect as a result of the imbalanced power dynamics in schools. Rather than looking for positive solutions for strenuous relationships, teachers would expect bad behavior before it actually happened. These assumptions would create a toxic classroom environment rendering an impossible student/teacher relationship.

### Derrick

Derrick was a tall and slender young Black man. He was an 18 years old senior standing approximately 6 feet, 2 inches tall with long dreadlocks and a darker complexion. He was dressed in all black, wearing black denim, black Nike hoodie with a small Nike swoosh on the left pectoral muscle, black air force ones, and a black stocking cap. Derrick also strolled in carrying a black book bag. Despite the chill in the air, Derrick failed to wear a coat.

Similar to the other interviews, I offered my hand to Derrick as a sign of respect and opportunity to break the ice. I introduced myself as Ryan and offered a short explanation about the research I was conducting. Derrick presented his right hand, offering a firm hand shake and eye contact. Following our handshake, I noticed Derrick took a quick glance around the room. He asked if the associate principal would be joining the interview, as if consequences were about to be issued. I responded by saying, “nope, it’s just going to be you and I. If you would feel more comfortable, I can ask Mr. Michael to join us.” Derrick said, “No, I’m good. Only time I’m up in this office is when I’m in trouble. Thought something was up.”

Derrick's expectation when entering the administrative offices was one of fear. His thinking surrounding the associate principal was angst rather than academic support or collaboration. Their interactions encompassed discipline which negatively impacted the relationship Derrick formed with the adults in the school. The response I received when he entered the room reinforced the probability of stereotype threat during his educational experience.

### About Derrick

Derrick grew up with his mother, father and younger brother for most of his life. There were three years between Derrick and his younger brother. Derrick's parents divorced when he was in the ninth-grade and his brother was in the sixth-grade. Following the divorce of his parents, his father immediately moved back to Massachusetts leaving him without his greatest influence. His father's leaving created a wedge in their relationship which would not be fixed.

Derrick's parents originally immigrated to the United States from Liberia, prior to Derrick's birth. Because of the war, they were forced to leave their home country seeking refuge and access to a better life. Fleeing their country would prove to be difficult for his parents. With very little means, they left their homeland on foot, traveling for miles destined for Ghana. In Ghana, they were fortunate to receive sponsorship from a religious organization in the United States. With nothing except the clothes on their backs, they boarded an airplane headed to the United States.

Liberia is a country in West Africa whose capital city is Monrovia. Originally founded in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by 16,000 freed slaves from America, this small country

spoke a differing dialect of English than the International English of the United States (Singler, 2013). According to Singler (2013), the people of Liberia spoke a Vernacular Liberian English which is an English-lexifier variety which provided a variant of English. This varying dialect would provide Derrick and his family challenges as they navigated the transition from their home country to the United States.

Derrick's parents arrived in the United States in 2000. Their new home would be in Florida. With a different English dialect and no education, his parents were expected to assimilate into the American culture very quickly. The religious group which sponsored Derrick's family provided a temporary furnished apartment in Columbus, Florida. They had food, along with access to public transportation to support employment opportunities.

According to Derrick, "My parents fought hard when they got here." I asked, "what do you mean when you say they fought hard." Derrick stated, "Just like, um, you think they left the war and things gone be good, but like, they had nothing when they got here. They couldn't even speak to no one." Not only did his parents forcibly leave their home country, they landed in a new country with limited English skills and no other family support. By choosing to come to America, they also were making the choice to leave their extended family as well.

After living in the United States for four years, establishing residency, gainful employment, Derrick was born into the family. Derrick was born in 2004 while still living in Florida. His parents were thriving in Columbus. His father was working as a



janitor at the middle school close to their home. His mother found a cleaning job at a local cleaning service. Things seemed to be going well for this refugee family.

Derrick was three years old when his family decided to move to Massachusetts. While they obtained gainful employment in Florida an opportunity presented itself to Derrick's mother. The cleaning services she worked for was opening a new branch in Massachusetts. Her employer asked if she would be interested in relocating to a new city to function as the supervisor of the new branch? This seems like another opportunity for the family, so they decided to move. As Derrick was not in school, and no extended family encouraging them to remain in Florida, they moved to New England.

Shortly after the family arrived in New England, Derrick's mother learned of her second pregnancy. Not only was the family expanding by one, they also were navigating the relocation of the entire family. In October, 2008, Derrick introduced his younger brother to the world. With both his parents working, and their family now at four, things seemed to be going well for this, new to the country, family. Not only did Derrick welcome a sibling to the family, his paternal grandparents also immigrated to the United States joining them in Massachusetts.

While the relocation to Massachusetts would offer greater opportunities for Derrick's mother, his father would struggle to find employment. Being in the United States for four short years still created challenges for the family. Speaking the English language continued to be the greatest challenge for the family. Derrick's father struggled for months to find employment. Finally, in the Spring of 2009 he was able to find a job. The lack of financial support and leadership would weigh heavily on

Derrick's father. I asked Derrick if he could explain what he meant by this weighing heavily on his father. Derrick said,

“See, my dad supposed to be the man. He supposed to be in charge. You know what I'm saying. Like he supposed to show us how we supposed to be when we grow up. Like, you know, this what my mom told me. He supposed to take care of us and when he couldn't, it caused problems. Like, see, my mom tell me that my dad be always mad that he wasn't working. He yell all the time. Like, it just was not good.”

I interpreted this to mean that his dad was impacted by his lack of leadership in the household. In Liberian culture, the father is the patriarch of the family. The inability of Derrick's father to lead the family created discord within the family dynamics.

Derrick's mood began to change during this portion of the interview. When the subject of his father was broached, the air in the room changed. His voice became much softer than before. The eye contact we once shared transitioned to me looking at the top of Derrick's head as his chin met his chest. I also noticed that his arms which were open and inviting were now crossed, signifying to me that he was shutting down. While I wanted to know more about the transition to Massachusetts and the impact it had on his father and the family dynamics, I could visually see it made Derrick feel uncomfortable. Therefore I decided not to push the topic of Derrick's father and the transition to New England.

In 2009 Derrick would begin school as a kindergartener. He would attend public school in Massachusetts until the middle of his third-grade year. At that time, Derrick's mother would again be offered the opportunity to lead another branch of the cleaning service for which she was employed. Similar to the previous opportunity, it would require the family to relocate to the Midwest. While hesitant, they decided to move to

Muscatine, Iowa, leaving his grandparents in Massachusetts. I assumed the hesitancy stemmed from fear, fear his father would struggle to find a job and the impact it would have on the family dynamics.

Derrick was ten years old during the relocation to Muscatine. The family would live in Muscatine for the next two years. Derrick was twelve years old when the family relocated to Century City. The transition seemed seamless as this was their third relocation inside of five years. His parents' English skills were improving with each passing year. "Each time we moved, is just got easier you know," according to Derrick.

When Derrick was 14, his parents made the decision to divorce. When asked if he knew why his parents divorced, he stated, "I don't know because I didn't ask. Like, it wasn't my place to ask what happened, they just told me and my brother that he was moving back to Massachusetts." I asked, "Who was moving?" Derrick said, "My dad."

As a researcher I wanted to ask more question regarding the sudden departure of Derrick's father to gauge the impact on his life at that time. However, I also recognized his reaction when I asked questions about his father earlier in the interview. As I thought about this a little, I believe the information Derrick could provide about his father far outweighed Derrick refusing to answer the questions. In essence, I would take my chances and respond accordingly.

Even though Derrick articulated he did not know why his mother and father chose to divorce, I asked the question directly, "Why did your parents divorce?" Derrick said, "man, I said I don't know. They didn't never tell me why and to this day I don't know. Um like, it wasn't my business to know. All I know is that they say they was splitting up

and that's all I got to say about it. Like, um, he left, he moved back east. Oh well.”

Again Derrick's demeanor changed when discussing his father. This time, his voice elevated, as if this level of questions generated anger. Derrick's eyes pierced on mine as if to challenge me in this line of questioning. Clearly, the questions surrounding his father brought about deep seeded issues, things he was not comfortable discussing, especially during this interview. I felt the relationship we were establishing as researcher and candidate was progressing well and I did not want to create an environment which could ruin this dynamic. Reluctantly, I pulled away from questions aimed directly at understanding the divorce of Derrick's parents and focused more on the impact it had on him as an individual.

The family dynamics changed after his dad moved away. Derrick took on more responsibilities in the home. He was responsible for picking his little brother up from school, ensuring his safe arrival home. Derrick would prepare dinner, and maintain household chores. He assumed this role in the home as a result of his father moving back to New England. He believed the best thing he could do to support his mother was to shoulder more responsibilities at home. This prevented him from thinking about his dad's absence in their lives.

### School

Derrick and his family overcame a number of obstacles during their time in the United States. His parents immigrated from a war-torn country to the shores of American. Landing in Florida with limited means, his parents began to make a life for themselves. Their limited English and lack of access delayed their success opportunities

tremendously. With no formal education, their options for gainful employment were equally limited.

Derrick struggled to navigate the complexities of his parent's divorce. It forced him to mature sooner than he wanted. Rather than being a 14-year-old adolescent who engaged in sporting events and hanging out with friends, Derrick was caring for his little brother. Walking his brother home from school, preparing him meals, ensuring he gets to bed at an appropriate time were all expectations placed on Derrick following the divorce. His dad moved back to New England with no explanation, he simply left.

Not only did the divorce of Derrick's parent force him to mature, it also challenged his decision making. He began spending more time with his friends. They became members of his extended family as a result of the divorce. Derrick found refuge in his friends as a coping mechanism to the patriarch vanishing from the family structure. Poor decision making coupled with the lack of parental influence yielded Derrick's engagement with law enforcement. He was looking for people to fill the void created by his father's departure back to New England.

All of these experiences were traumatic for Derrick. Immigration, family dynamics, language barriers, divorce, and probation were all impactful to his life. Young people who experience trauma, according to Frieze (2015), run the risk of life-long effects including but not limited to mental health concerns, anxiety, and depression. The trauma Derrick experienced in his personal life do not compare to the trauma he experienced in school. The threat of being stereotyped limited his opportunities for academic success and growth. Stereotype threat seemed to magnify his craving for

relationships outside of school. Frieze (2015), goes on to say that more and more students are entering the school system having experienced trauma. The personal trauma Derrick experienced outside of school is incomparable to what he experienced in school.

### Elementary School

Derrick described his school experience as easy yet controversial. Academically Derrick would excel in the classroom, however his interactions with peers and teachers would prove detrimental to his academic success. During the early years of his education, he recalls having friends, but never fully connected with his instructors. Derrick was not able to identify anything specifically to account for the controversial schooling, but he did say that if given the chance, things would be done differently.

Derrick's parents tried very hard to be involved in his schooling. According to Derrick, "they come to school when they could, but like, they couldn't always be there. Like, not like they doing PTA stuff, but they tried." Derrick believed that the constant barriers his parents experienced as a result of their immigration could have been a reason for their lack of involvement. Not only were his parents working extremely hard during their transition to the United States, they battled with the language barrier too.

As previously mentioned, Derrick's parents spoke a differing dialect of English which created additional concerns for the family. Even though they wanted to be involved and supportive of Derrick's education, their own personal lack of education would create another roadblock for their involvement. Derrick spoke of his parent's lack of knowledge surrounding the educational school system within the United States. I asked, "what do you mean by that?" Derrick said, "my parents didn't graduate school

before they come here. Like, um, they did not know about conferences, or coming to school. They just know I'm supposed to be in school." This lack of knowledge in navigating the educational system may have prevented Derrick from having a better school experience.

Over the course of Derrick's school career, he could recall attending five schools. He entered kindergarten when his family was living in Massachusetts. From what he could remember, he really liked attending school in Massachusetts. He commented on having a lot of friends and not really getting into trouble. When asked of the racial make-up of the school, he commented on the high number of students of color. Derrick said, "like I remember there being a lot of Black kids in my school." In full transparency, this comment caught me off guard as I don't think of Massachusetts of having a high minority population, however, from Derrick's perspective he saw a lot of students that looked like him.

Derrick's time in elementary from kindergarten to third grade seemed to go well, with the exception of his English skills. Even though Derrick was born in the United States, he recalled being in English learner classes. Derrick described the class as having a lot of kids that did not speak English. Derrick did not understand why he was placed in that particular classroom. He asked his parents to get him out of the class as he did not feel it was an appropriate placement. His parents were met with resistance when they requested to have Derrick placed in a different classroom. They were told all immigrant students were placed in English learner classrooms. Without his parents understanding

of the education system, they lacked the skills to advocate for his transfer to the general education classroom.

Derrick's first interaction with stereotype threat was the result of his immigration status. His parents, with profound economic instability, limited education, and differing English dialect quickly understood the value in education. Despite the obstacles, Derrick was enrolled in school. It was assumed by his instructors that his immigration status limited his English proficiency skills. Without proper assessment, Derrick was immediately placed in the English language learner program. Therefore, Derrick's initial school experiences with stereotype threat began with African immigrant stereotypes.

Even though Derrick's parents recognized the value of education, they received no information about the educational systems within the United States. Without proper education, they were unable to advocate for Derrick's academic future and forced to accept his placement. MacDonald (1998), argues in the cultural dissonance experienced when immigrant families enroll in schools. The literature goes on to say that schools did not make good use of the information parents provided about their children's educational stages. The school failed to provide Derrick and his family with the proper educational resources to support his initial academic experience. Rather than supporting the immigrant family, they were stereotyped as African immigrants.

This early experience of stereotype threat would follow Derrick for the next several years.

For the next four years, Derrick would work really hard in school. He would practice his "English" in school while speaking "English (Liberian)," at home. This



duality in his life would prove difficult for most people, but not Derrick. He seemed to navigate this system in good spirits. According to Derrick, “Like, I did what I had to do. Um, school was didn’t seem hard to me, I just did it.” The positive attitude spoke to Derrick’s perseverance during his early experiences in school. Derrick would remain in the English learner classroom until his departure from Massachusetts in third grade.

In the middle of third grade, Derrick’s mother would be presented with another opportunity for advancement in the company she was employed by. This opportunity would transition the family to Muscatine. While Derrick hoped his English skills were proficient enough to transition out of the English learner classroom at his new school, unfortunately they were not. He was re-enrolled in the English learner classroom again. When asked, “do you know why you were retained in the English learner program when you moved,” he responded, “Um, I don’t know why, they never said nothing to me. I don’t even think they told my mom and dad, they just put me in the class with more kids that ain’t speak English.”

Not only was stereotype threat prevalent in Derrick’s Massachusetts school experience, it transitioned with him during the family’s relocation. Rather than evaluate his English abilities for proper placement, the new school continued to assumed Derrick lacked the English skills for the general education classroom. Despite his hard work and commitment to English proficiency, he was stereotyped as a student with low English skills.

Derrick’s first impression of his new school was one of difference. He immediately noticed that most students did not look like him. There was a clear

difference than his previous school. He spoke of the increased number of Latino Americans in his school and classroom. Derrick said, “um, my new school had a lot of Mexicans.”

Even though he was one of the very few Black students in his new classroom, Derrick spoke of his immediate connection with his classmates. He made lots of friends in his new school. The school was not as large as his last schools and he felt as though he had more opportunities to engage with students in the new classroom. Even though he continued in the English learner program at his new school, he was offered more opportunities to engage in the general education classroom. This practice was extremely different than his previous school. He felt very isolated while in Massachusetts. His new school offered him more liberties and freedoms to make friends outside of those students identified as English learners.

Derrick and his family would remain in Muscatine for the next two years. At the end of fifth grade, the family would make the move to Century City. Derrick did not want to change schools. He was fearful that he would be re-enrolled in English learner classes. Derrick also had made strong relationships with students in his class. He did not want to start all over. Regardless of his desire to remain in Muscatine, the family moved to their next destination.

### Middle School

Now in Century City, Derrick would begin his transition to middle school. During the summer of his fifth-grade year, he would enroll in middle school. While his English skills continued to improve, he would remain in the confines of the English

learner class. Derrick seriously thought middle school was going to be different, however, it was more of the same. He did not believe he should continue his enrollment in the English learner program. This began to be an issue for Derrick. He seemed to work hard to improve his English skills, yet, his hard work never seemed to produce any results.

Derrick transitioned to his middle school with ease. The new school system Derrick would be attending was designed to merge several different elementary schools into the middle school. Rather than Derrick feeling like the “new kid,” he was able to blend in with the other students. He noticed that some students already knew each other, which made sense as students from varying elementary schools packed the halls of his new school. However, not everyone were friends. This paved the way for Derrick to make new friends just as the other students.

At this point in Derrick’s schooling, things began to take a turn. Because of his continued enrollment in English learner programming, he did not understand the “why” to his enrollment. According to Derrick, “Like, I kept trying to say why they have me in these classes, but nobody say nothing. They just kept telling me it was supposed to help me. I wasn’t dumb, like, I said I didn’t need this class. Didn’t nobody want to listen.” Derrick tried to advocate for himself, however it seems as though no one wanted to listen to his voice. This proved to be frustrating to Derrick and it began to show in his behavior.

The teachers lack of empath began to impact how Derrick engaged in school. He continued to self-advocate which was met with resistance. The stereotype threat Derrick

experienced limited his ability to escape the English learner classroom. His academic efforts to showcase his English abilities proved unimportant as they produced zero results. He remained in the English learner class.

Even though Derrick transitioned to middle school fairly well, he did have his struggles. One of the challenges he faced was the dual life he was living. Despite being born in the United States, his parents spoke their native dialect while at home. This proved to be challenging when he went to school. The disconnect between Derrick's home life and school life was challenging. Having to transition from school to home was hard. In essence, Derrick was living two different lives. He was expected to live a school life and live a home life. The constant transition would prove challenging for anyone, especially for a young man of color at approximately 10-11 years old.

Derrick was living two different lives. He was living the life of a Liberian immigrant when home with his parents, and an African-American student while at school. The dichotomy in thinking would be difficult for anyone. Again, without his parent's ability to advocate for him, he would be required to remain in the English learner classroom.

Despite his disdain for the English learner program, Derrick attempted to make the best of his schooling. His new middle school was set up as a feeder school. This means that several elementary schools would feed into the middle school. Rather than feeling like the new kid in the school, he would blend in with all the other students. This allowed him to make new friends just like the other students. Even though he remained in English learner classrooms, Derrick felt as though he had greater access to other students.

Middle school provided a different experience for Derrick. Even though he made friends, the turmoil of having two different experiences would prove to be overwhelming for Derrick. He tried several times to advocate for himself however he did not feel heard by any of his instructors or administration. When asked how he advocated for himself, Derrick said, “Um, like, I told them people I didn’t need these classes no more. I didn’t want to be in these classes. I just wanted to be in class with my friends.” Despite his efforts, he felt ignored and unheard. This failure to listen by the adults in school would result in a change in Derrick’s behavior.

Middle school was the first time Derrick had any negative interaction with his teachers or administrators. He intentionally would use words and speak to teachers as though he were interacting with his family. When redirected by his teachers he would respond by saying, “What, I don’t understand what you saying.” He would intentionally become defiant with his instructors to gain their attention. Once he had their attention, he would attempt to speak the right way to prove he was smart enough to be in general education. Despite his attempts to communicate, he remained exiled from the general educational classroom.

His efforts seem to fall on deaf ears. When asked why he chose defiance as a form of communication, he responded by saying, “Um, I tried asking the other way but didn’t nobody listen. I see other kids act up and get what they want, so I thought I would see if it work.” I asked if it worked? He said, “Like, no, they still didn’t pay no attention.” Rather than taking a different approach to communicating with his instructors, he continued to be defiant as a means of communication.

Between elementary and middle school, Derrick following the tradition method of communicating his academic needs. He worked hard in school to increase his English proficiency. He asked his parents to advocate on his behalf to be exited from the English learner classroom. Derrick also advocated for himself using his voice to request placement to the general education classroom. However, his instructors stereotyped him as a student needing English learner support, despite his efforts to the contrary. The results were a change in his behavior.

As his middle school years went on, his defiance become more egregious and disrespectful. Because of the lack of engagement, he began wandering the halls at school rather than attending class. According to Derrick, he became a bad influence on other students as well. He would convince his friends to avoid class as well. The ease of school he once had quickly changed because of the lack of engagement and communication with his teachers. Derrick said, “Um, like, all they had to do was listen to me. I just didn’t want to be in those classes no more. Like, I would talk just like everyone else, I didn’t want that. I wasn’t stupid and I feel like they thought I was.” The inability for these two entities to communicate resulted in a shift in his behavior. A student which articulated an ease of school would now misbehave in an effort to draw the attention of his instructors. His disengagement resulted in office referrals and multiple suspensions. It also created a negative perception of Derrick among his peers, teachers and administrators.

This behavior continued for the better part of middle school. Just before transitioning to high school, Derrick was asked to take an English placement assessment.

Of course, Derrick did not know why he was being asked to take the assessment, but he reluctantly agreed. After taking the assessment, Derrick said, “Nobody told me why I took it, and they never told me how I did.” Surprisingly, when Derrick entered high school, he was no longer in the English language program. The assessment he took at the end of middle school was an English proficiency assessment. He scored well enough to transition to general education.

The situational stereotype threat Derrick experienced from his teachers had a negative impact on his behavior. Assumptions were made about his English proficiency based on the immigration status of his parent. As a result, Derrick began misbehaving to garner the attention of his instructors. He also started to disassociate himself from the school environment. According to Murphy and Taylor (2012), the situational cues within stereotype threat impact the sense of belonging and institutional fairness. Derrick believed he was being treated unfairly which impacted his ability to connect with his instructors and the learning environment. Therefore, the threat of being stereotyped as English deficient impacted how Derrick behaved in school.

Ten years after Derrick first enrolled in school, there is a shift in his academic experience. For the better part of his schooling he maintained the English language learner designation. The African immigrant stereotype overshadowed his educational journey. As he negotiated school, Derrick not only worked hard to increase his English proficiency, he worked harder to share his increased skills with his instructors. His hard work was met with little acknowledgment as he maintained this designation for a majority of his schooling.

As Derrick developed, there is an evolution surrounding his experiences. What started as African immigrant stereotype shifted to Black male stereotype threat as he physically and academically matured. Early in his academic experience, teachers assumed he lacked English proficiency skills. As his English improved, the focus shifted from language to perception. Derrick was perceived by his instructors as an argumentative Black male, disengaged from the learning environment.

### High School

Derrick has now entered ninth grade. He was excited to begin high school without the English learner label. He was in classes with several of his friends, and he had access to the entire school building. Derrick made a very interesting comment during this portion of the interview. According to Derrick, “Um, like, I wasn’t in jail no more.” This profound statement resonated with me as Derrick thought of the English learner classroom as ‘jail’ in school.

Even though Derrick thought he was transitioning to high school with a fresh start, he never felt as though this was an accurate assessment of his experience. When asked to explain,

“Like, I never felt like I could just go to school. Um like, it seem like the teachers always

I was gonna do something wrong. Like, they never say anything like that, but I just felt like they was always waiting for me to say something, or do something, or not go to class or something. Like, they expect me to do wrong. Didn’t no one say it, but it sure felt that way.”

Despite these feelings, he tried very hard to navigate the new school. Without the label, he thought things were going to be different.



Derrick's new high school was different than traditional high schools. The middle school was attached to the high school which Derrick attended. Traditional high schools have several middle schools which feed 9<sup>th</sup> grade students into the buildings. This follows a traditional educational model allowing for a fresh crop of incoming 9<sup>th</sup> grade students to transition into the buildings. Derrick's middle school and high school were two separate buildings with a long hallway linking the two. This linkage afforded the buildings combined professional learning, shared staff, and joint administrative meetings. While this collaboration could support the transition from middle to high school, it could also prove detrimental for some students as they would be labeled as "bad kids."

Derrick felt like he was being watched by his teachers and administrators. It seemed as though he entered the high school with the adults having preconceived notions of his behavior. In Derrick's words, "they almost expect me to mouth back." Even though he was no longer labeled as an English learner, the behaviors he exhibited to bring attention to this label superseded his actual behavior. Derrick was under the impression that the teachers were not interested in generating a relationship with him. They only expected him to be disobedient and give minimal effort in class.

He questioned what his teachers knew about his behavior in middle school. Did they know his behavior stemmed from a lack of communication? Did they know he was mislabeled as an English learner despite being born in the United States? These questions consumed Derrick's thoughts as he attempted to navigate the new school. The constant pressure of failure was extremely overwhelming. He felt as though he could not

escape his middle school experience. The stereotype threat of poor behavior and disrespect resulted in Derrick's lack of relationship building with his instructors.

Derrick missed a lot of school because of the threat he faced from his teachers. Even though he started in a new school with hundreds of new students, Derrick was viewed as a threat to the learning environment. Teachers expected poor behavior and someone not engaged in academic system. Teachers thought he would continue the pattern of poor behavior. This perception impacted Derrick in a negative manner. What could have been a smooth transition ended with Derrick being targeted.

Derrick spoke about the transition at length. He genuinely believed he was targeted by his instructors. When asked if he could be more specific, Derrick said,

“I feel like, low key, I feel targeted. Not just me but me and my friends. I mean like, they probably look at us like, I don't know, they look at us a certain way from everyone else. Like, I feel they look at us like a threat for some reason and that is just cause of altercations, like, I been did in the past.”

When asked how being viewed as a threat impacted him, Derrick said,

“I mean, the fact that they already think that, it's like I just gotta focus, do what I do, so they don't have no reason to come bother me.”

To prevent teachers from bothering him, Derrick chose avoidance. Without an authentic connection in school, and feeling like teachers viewed him as a threat, he increasingly spent more time with his friends and less time in class. With the lack of teacher, counselor, or administrative support, he lacked the guidance and structure necessary to navigate away from poor decision making. At this point, his friends became his refuge. Derrick attempted to building relationships with the adults in school, however

they chose not to reciprocate his efforts. This resulted in poor behavior and decision making.

Derrick began spending more and more time with his friends. Collectively, they would all engage in poor decisions. According to Derrick, “like things was good, like, it’s just like, I started hanging out with friends a lot. And we was just doing, we was just doing, you know, just living. Stuff like that.” I asked, “When you say just living, what do you mean?” Derrick said, “We wasn’t just, wasn’t just, just wasn’t really thinking, just doing. Like, it’s like, we was just out here making bad decisions.” I asked, “Give me an example of you all making bad decisions. Derrick said, “Like selling drugs. Like we was too young to be even doing that. That’s why it low key caught up to us.”

The bad decisions and bad behavior would result in an entanglement with law enforcement. Late one night, while out with friends, his entire group was apprehended by the police and caught with drugs. When asked if this is what landed him on probation, Derrick said, “I got caught by the police with drugs. They found all types of stuff.”

Derrick had high expectations for high school. Without the label of English learner, he believed he would be successful in school. Rather than being successful, he quickly felt targeted by his instructors. The stereotype threat Derrick experienced isolated him from the learning environment. His teachers viewed him as a threat which impacted his commitment to school. His attendance was the first thing to deteriorate. He began missing class at a very high rate. Much higher than when he was in middle school. School was not a priority for Derrick. He began spending an absorbent amount of time

with his friends rather than school. School became less of a priority, and it showed in various ways.

Not only was Derrick struggling with the negative perception of his instructors, he was also marveling in the divorce of his parents. Despite Derrick's tough exterior, he was emotionally taxed by his dad's absence and the overpowering expectation of failure his teachers bestowed upon him. He tried several times to speak with his administrator about what he was experiencing in his academic and personal life. Even though Derrick did not reach out to the administrator intentionally, he was called into the office to discuss his attendance. At that time, he tried explaining that life was hard as his dad moved back to Massachusetts. He also tried explaining the lack of respect he received from his instructors. Rather than listening to Derrick and providing support, he focused his attention on getting Derrick back to class. "Um, like I tried to tell him what's up, but like he didn't want to listen. Like he didn't even care, He didn't ask me nothing, he just say I needed to be in class. That dude didn't give shits about me, only me in class. He didn't listen."

Derrick's interpretation of this interaction reinforced his thoughts around the negative perception of the teachers. Derrick believed that the administrator shared in this negative perception. Because of the lack of empathy expressed by the administrator, he felt that he also expected him to be disrespectful. He did not take the time to listen to his concerns. The administrator avoided any conversation that did not support meeting their expectations. Even if those expectation were predicted on a false narrative. The

administrators stereotype threat overshadowed the opportunity to support Derrick academically or personally.

I asked if he had tried to share this information with anyone else in the building such as a counselor or teacher. Derrick said, “Yes, I did, like I talked to my counselor and they only started talking about graduation. My teacher, like, said I need to be in class or I’m gonna fail and have to redo his class. Like I care if I fail that class. They didn’t care either.” Through his many attempts to communicate and ask for help, it seems as though no one was willing to listen to Derrick. The lack of empathy and stereotype threat only pushed Derrick further from school rather than providing him with a space of comfort and support.

#### Perception of School

Derrick’s perception of school stemmed from years of misunderstanding and misidentification. Even though his parents immigrated to the United States, Derrick was born in this country. In some ways, he thought he was isolated simply because his parents were not born in this country. Derrick did acknowledge his English limitations, however he did not believe he should have been limited to the English learner classroom for a majority of his academic career. He explained by saying that he was never given a chance to prove his English skills because it was always assumed, he could not perform at the level of his peers.

Derrick did not remember much classroom instruction for English specifically. He has some limited memories of specific targeted instruction of the English language, however nothing that would change his understanding of the English language.

According to Derrick, his English learner courses consisted of full emersion rather than direct instruction. When asked about middle school in particular, Derrick said he received “zero” English instruction. He believed it was mostly English support. Derrick did not believe that his English learner instructors supported his growth in the English language.

Despite Derrick’s involvement in the English language courses, he stated he liked school. While he did not want to be enrolled in the courses at the elementary level, he did understand why he was enrolled. Derrick recognized very early that the English he was speaking was not like that of his peers. His friends and teachers struggled to understand him even though he was “speaking English.” At the elementary level it seems like the correct placement for him as a young learner. Derrick struggled to understand the continuation of the services through the middle school level.

Derrick needed help at several crucial times in his academic life. Not only was he living two different lives, he felt completely unheard when he needed to be heard the most. According to Derrick, “like, why they tell us to talk to teachers when they ain’t gonna listen.” Derrick tried several times to share his concerns with instructors, administration and counselors. Rather than receiving support, his issues were brushed aside and told to focus on school. He was reminded of the importance of being in class. It seemed as though school was not interested in anything outside of school. This lack of support seemed to alienate Derrick from school verses the school being a refuge for struggling students.

The disconnect between Derrick's home life and school life was challenging. Having to transition from school to home was hard. In essence, Derrick was living two different lives. He was expected to live a school life and live a home life. The constant transition would prove challenging for anyone, especially for a young man of color at approximately 10-11 years old, in my opinion. While he tried to traverse this experience, it took some time for him to feel comfortable living in two different spaces. Derrick said,

“um, I didn't know what to do or say half the time. Like, um, my mom and dad be mad at me for not talking to them how they talk to me, but my teachers be mad when I don't talk like them. That shit was hard, you know what I'm saying. See, like, nobody want to listen to me when I as saying it was hard. Nobody want to listen.”

While Derrick attempted to find his footing living in two different worlds, things were going well for the family. His little brother was now a third grader and both of his parents were gainfully employed. This continued during most of Derrick's middle school years. Living in another city provided opportunities for Derrick's mother and father. With both parents working, Derrick navigating school, and his younger brother in school as well, life was headed in the right direction for the family. Fleeing from a war-torn country, now living in Century City seemed to provide a sense of comfort for everyone. This comfort would soon dissipate and the life Derrick was living would soon change.

Lastly, Derrick's perceptions of the instructors was extremely minimal. He did not believe the teachers were helpful in his quest of a quality educational experience. When asked to explain, Derrick said, “they gonna help and stuff, but that help ain't enough, they just do they job. I don't feel like any teacher in my corner.” This lack of

connection only exacerbated the disconnection Derrick had with school. All of these factors negatively impacted his behaviors in school.

### Reflection & Recommendations

The three students' interviewed were all young Black men with involvement in the juvenile justice system. Their physical attributes, as noted in the narrative summaries, showed them to be healthy young men. Tre'mon would be considered tall by any measures. He stood approximately 6'3'' tall and weighed around 240 pounds. Despite his mass, Tre'mon was a gentle soul. His mannerism and demeanor proved him to be a gentleman with tremendous promise.

Keyshawn would also be considered tall, similar to Tre'mon. He stood upward of 6' feet tall, however he was considerably thinner than Tre'mon. Despite these differences, he carried himself in an extremely professional manner. These characteristics were similar to Derrick which stood 6'2'' tall. All three young men were similar in their complexion which matched a dark mocha like color. All were extremely respectful and professional during the interviews.

While being respectful was what I experienced during the interviews, society has a tendency to view young men of color, especially Black men, as threats. Simply being Black may have an impact on the overall perception of these young men, not only in school, but in society as well. According to Wilson et al. (2017), Black men tend to be stereotyped as threatening. The literature goes on to say that people with biases are more likely to judge Black men as threats based on their physical size including height, weight, and muscle mass. When examining the physical characteristic of these young men, one



may conclude that simply being Black may have an impact on how they are perceived or judged.

### Family Life

All of the young men interviewed had experienced situational trauma at home which impacted their lives. These include adoption, divorce, relocation, and general instability within their family dynamics. Both Tre'mon and Keyshawn were adopted at young ages. Keyshawn was scheduled for adoption by his biological mother before his biological father intervened and assumed custody. Tre'mon was adopted and relocated to a different state and city. Derrick, while not adopted, lived through the divorce of his parents while transitioning to a different state. Each of the young men touted on the relationships they had with family members, despite the trauma they experienced within their family systems.

The stability of the families was challenging. Derrick is one of two children from a refugee family which immigrated to the United States from Liberia. Derrick's family relocated three different times before establishing residency in Century City. Keyshawn was introduced to several women as his father engaged in several short-term relationships. This created inconsistency in his life and impacted his ability to generate meaningful relationships. Tre'mon was adopted during early adolescence and forced to move to a different city.

Each of the young men interviewed experienced the divorce of their parents. Derrick's parents divorced when he was in the ninth-grade during the transition to a different state. Bubba's adoptive parents divorced when he was 12 years old forcing him

to choose between his mother and father. He chose to live with his adoptive father, stating, “my dad is the coolest dad!” Even though Keyshawn’s biological parents were not married, he formed a lasting relationship with Kelly, his live in girlfriend. They too would separate when Keyshawn was in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade.

The impact of divorce impacted the men in different ways. Derrick would be forced to mature sooner than expected as he would take on many adult-like roles. He became the primary care giver to his younger brother while his mother was working outside the home. He would make sure his younger brother made it home from school safely as well and prepare him dinner. The divorce also increased his responsibilities around the home. The increase in responsibility shifted his thinking from that of a young adult to a more mature adult lens of thinking.

While all three young men experienced divorce, it may have impacted their involvement with the juvenile justice system. According to Price and Kunz (2003), children from divorced homes have a higher rate of misbehavior which may result in juvenile justice involvement. The misbehaviors may include but not limited to crimes against other persons, theft, tobacco and/or drug usage. The literature also states that Black and younger children were more likely to be delinquent and engage in than white and older children.

### Legal Issues

Everyone interviewed have had some level of involvement within the juvenile justice system. All the young men have either been on probation and/or spent time in the detention center. Most of them were arrested by age 15. Law violations include grand

theft auto, possession of a controlled substance with the intent to distribute, and possession of a controlled substance.

Tre'mon, also known as Bubba spent seven months locked up in the detention center for stealing a vehicle while Keyshawn was detained for being in a vehicle with an illegal substance. Derrick was placed on probation for being caught by police with drugs and charged with the intent to sell. Despite their involvement with the justice system, none of the young men were jailed for an extended period of time.

The literature indicates that young Black men are more likely to be involved in the juvenile justice system than any other category. According to Morris and Epps (2002), Black males have a disproportionate representation in the juvenile justice system. They go on to say that youth involved in the juvenile justice system are among the most educationally disadvantaged in our society.

#### Perception of Black Males

Each of these young men shared experiences in which they were perceived in a negative manner. While each had some good things to say about their school experience, they were able to articulate specific times in which they felt ostracized by the adults in their academic settings. This 'feeling' may have impacted their ability to build relationships with their instructors. How the students were perceived following a behavior is crucial to a student's engagement in the classroom and academic culture. Endangered, uneducated, dysfunctional, and dangerous are many of the perceptions used to label African-American males (Gibbs, 1988; Majors & Billson, 1992; Parham &

McDavis, 1987). These perceptions often suggest disturbing emotions and perpetuate negative stereotypes.

It is a forgone conclusion that students will misbehave in school. Statistics show that despite the fact that only 18% of student body populations are Black, more than half of students suspended are Black. National records show that out of all the suspended students, 67% are Black boys. This statistic is even worse in Chicago where Black boys make up 75% of all arrested public-school children (McKnight, 2017).

Cherry (2015) explains that when Black boys misbehave, as all children do, teachers and administrators are quick to criminalize their behavior and suspend the said students. Anything as simple as a tantrum from a four-year-old may result in a suspension if the boy is Black. This becomes a pattern of excessive punishment and discrimination formed at an early age, and the young Black male may begin to withdraw socially.

Keyshawn was perceived as a fighter when he was moved to a different class. He was confronted by his instructor and told he would not tolerate fighting in his classroom. Despite having the opportunity of receiving a fresh start in a new classroom, the instructor labeled him a fighter. The negative perception and interaction resulted in a poor relationship between Keyshawn and his instructor. It created a level of distrust and impacted him far beyond elementary school.

Derrick was perceived as a bad student even though he was never told he was a bad student. Similar to Keyshawn, Derrick was hoping to get a fresh start as he transitioned from middle school to high school. Admittedly, he struggled with his

behavior at the middle, however, he was determined to change his attitude towards school. During middle school he equated school to jail. When moving to high school, his belief changed. In his words, “I wasn’t in jail no more.”

Derrick felt watched while he was in school. He felt as though his teachers expected him to fail academically and behaviorally. Even though this was never articulated, Derrick felt as he was being perceived as a problem. He stated,

“Um like, it seem like the teachers always I was gonna do something wrong. Like, they never say anything like that, but I just felt like they was always waiting for me to say something, or do something, or not go to class or something. Like, they expect me to do wrong. Didn’t no one say it, but it sure felt that way.”

This perception could impact his ability to engage in authentic relationships with his instructors. According to Caton (2012), negative perceptions of Black males in school created an unwelcoming school environment and poor student-teacher relationships.

Tre’mon was often threatened with punishment. An instructor in elementary told him he would be disciplined for behavior even though there was no behavior to warrant the discipline. Similar to Derrick and Keyshawn, poor behavior was often the expectation of the teachers. He was disciplined for behaviors displayed by his classmates, yet they were not sent to the office nor suspended. Another experience Tre’mon shared was during his transition to a different school. During the enrollment process, his previous principal explained that Derrick had attendance issues, used vulgar language towards teachers and was ultimately forced out of school. What the principal failed to explain was the interactions which may have impacted his behavior. By failing to explain the entire situation, a negative perception could be formed by his new school

system. Subsequently, Tre'mon believed he would be treated exactly how he was treated at his previous school.

If these young men are perceived to be an issue, they are more likely to believe in the perception. It may have an impact on their behavior as it relates to the school system. It may dictate how young men of color engage in relationships. Lynch (2015) argues that many Black students reduce their interactions with people outside their race because of the risk of labeling. Hellman and McCoy (2017) points out that this is especially true in public schools where a teacher will apply double standards. A white child who shoves another student during a confrontation may be cautioned and called headstrong. If a Black child does the same thing, he is called aggressive, and he automatically becomes a candidate for suspension. These stereotypes that people judge children through are the source of a lot of psychological anguish because the child's outlook is formed by the perception of the adults around him (Mincey et al., 2017). Ultimately, the aforementioned portrayals of young Black males can negatively impact their behavior and ability to be successful in an academic setting.

### Bias

In most studies on the American education system, scholars have established overrepresentation of minority groups in school punishment. This implies that racial discrimination is the primary driver of the growing number of Black male students being suspended. Despite increased public awareness and the extensive use of campaigns to promote a cohesive society, racial discrimination is still a menace in the American education system. This is exemplified by the discriminatory practice of suspension.

Black (2017), argues that the teacher's attitudes are formed because of fear. They are programmed by society to believe that Black males are violent by nature. They think that if the Black males are allowed freedoms like the other children, their behavior will escalate into violence. Tre'mon mentioned the constant threat of detention for what he determined was minimal behavior. The behaviors included talking out of turn, telling jokes and getting up without permission. Tre'mon would also be sent to the "thinking chair" as a result of his behavior. In retrospect, Tre'mon's behaviors were always met with discipline rather than instruction.

Keyshwan believed his teachers had a bias against him because of previous behaviors. He spoke about his teachers constantly watching him and expecting him to fight. He recalled a reintegration meeting with a counselor following a physical altercation with a student. The counselor referred to Keshawn as a good student that should not be fighting all the time. Keyshawn said, "she say I was a good kid and I shouldn't be fighting all the time. But this my first fight in this school, so why she say that. I ain't never fought in that school, so why she assume I fight all the time." Even though the counselors intentions were sincere, her judgment may have been clouded by her biases. Even well-intentioned people can behave in ways that produce unjust outcomes (Staats, 2016).

#### Advice for Others

Keyshawn believed that teachers and administrators need to be aware of the entire student, not just what happens in the classroom. He said, students often navigate life without ever sharing their personal traumas with anyone in school. Keyshawn was very

aware that students may be experiencing life without the guidance of both parents. They may be facing other challenges such as probation or other negative influences. These outside forces may have an impact on school. Rather than assuming students are bad, ask questions to learn and understand the students you are employed to serve.

Respect is simple. If you show respect, you should receive respect. “This ain’t a difficult concept,” according to Keyshawn. If a student asks for their boundaries to be respected, teachers should honor their wishes. Not only should respect be honored, relationships should be formed between the student and instructor. Had Keyshawn formed a relationship with his teacher, conversations may have been generated to better understand his circumstances. People should never underestimate the power of a strong relationship.

When asked what could have happened in school to help him be more successful, Keyshawn suggested being treated fairly. Throughout school, he recognized being treated differently. Keyshawn was moved to a different class in elementary school for fighting while the other student wasn’t. In middle school, he was expelled for fighting and the other student wasn’t. Groups of students were tardy yet Keyshawn was the only student addressed. Unfair treatment became Keshawn’s normal which in turn impacted the relationships he built. Be aware of how one person is being treated compared to the others.

When asked what advice he could offer young Black men, Keyshawn stated, “Um, stay on your p’s and q’s, pay attention, and just keep ya head down.” I asked him what he meant by, “keep your head down.” Keyshawn said,



“Um, it means just don’t make problems, stay out the way, stay on ya own, make sure you got ya own, keep yo grades up, don’t worry about, I mean, worry about other people but make sure you straight first.”

Bubba recommended that teachers should take a personal interest in learning about the life experiences of the students they serve. If teachers have an understanding of their students struggles, resources and supports may be offered to eliminate external forces preventing students from focusing on their learning. These efforts could result in better relationships, which ultimately could lead to more successful students

Most importantly among Bubba’s recommendations is regarding a teacher’s preconceived thoughts about student behavior. Teachers should not make assumptions about students based on their behavior or lack of attendance. When asked to elaborate Bubba states, “I always feel like teachers be thinking I’m a bad kid or I’m gonna do something bad. Just cause I don’t go to class all the time don’t mean I’m out there bad, and when I come to class don’t make me feel like I don’t belong there. And don’t think I’m a failure just because I don’t come to yo class. She don’t know me like that.” Rather than making assumptions about students, get to know them.

In general, Bubba strongly recommended that students should have regular attendance and work hard to complete school. Students with poor attendance should have every opportunity to be successful in school. Students with difficult lived experiences should equally have access to education. Teachers should do a better job of cultivating relationships with students. Administration should examine discipline practices. Lastly, teachers should not place judgements on students, especially without understanding their life circumstances.

Derrick was asked if he had advice he wanted to share with other students. He simply said, “focus on school, that’s all that really matters.” He went on to say, “if we focus on school and get good grades, should be straight. I asked, “if students get good grades and have regular attendance, do you believe that you will no longer be viewed as a threat. Derrick responded by saying, “um, it should make it easier, but the threat ain’t ever gone go away. They don’t know me like that because they don’t want to know me like that. But if they just do they work it could be ok for them.”

### Recommendations

It becomes obvious that we need to adjust how the education system engages and supports young Black males. The juvenile justice system, combined with the educational system creates a vacuum which limits access and opportunities for young men of color. Tre’mon, Keyshan, and Derrick are all products of this system. All three young men had juvenile justice involvement. They all were disengaged with the current educational system model. They all lacked authentic relationships with their academic instructors. They all were forced out of classes through suspensions or office referrals. They were not supported in understanding how their future may be linked to their education. It is crucial that members of the educational system begin to think differently about how they engage with young men of color.

Our system for supporting Black males in the educational setting needs a complete overhaul. These stories provide a glimpse into the thousands of young Black men that are struggling to achieve success in the current academic model. These young men are forced to thrive in a homogenous society where people lack the ability and

fortitude to understand and meet their needs. Rather than being welcomed into a system that meets their needs, they are stereotyped, referred, and suspended at extremely high levels. Because of this disengagement, they become more likely to engage in criminal mischief which ultimately lands them in the juvenile justice system.

When students struggle to read, we provided reading intervention. When students struggle to learn math, we provide additional supports to increase their math competence. When young men of color struggle to engage in their academic success, why do we not provide additional resources, similar to math and reading? The educational system must change its philosophy in addressing young men of color. I will outline and describe recommendations as they apply to: (1) teachers; (2) colleges and universities that prepare teachers and administrators; (3) and school administrators. These are critical steps to address the statistical nightmare of underachievement, suspension, referral, and disengagement associated with young men of color in the educational system.

### Teachers

Teachers can improve their ability to support young men of color. This can be done through extensive training in identity, stereotype threat, and intercultural development. Teachers must have time to examine the pieces of their identity which incite negative stereotypes of young men of color. Secondly, teachers must understand how stereotype threat may present itself in their thinking and ultimately how they engage with young men of color. Lastly, teachers must understand how their intercultural development may impact their interactions with difference.

To increase teacher's capacity to engage young men of color, they must first understand how pieces of their personal identity impacts self-concept. According to Onorato and Turner (2004), self-concept, also known as identity, controls how individuals process self-relevant information across a host of situations. The literature goes on to say how people perceive information is highly variable and context-dependent.

How teachers engage with students of color will vary depending on the situation and pieces of their personal identity. Identity are the concepts people develop about themselves which evolved based on their lived experiences. People may demonstrate pieces of their personal identity outwardly through how they interact with other people. Teachers must constantly be reflective in their identity to better understand how it may impact their interactions, especially with young men of color.

Teachers need support and training in order to understand how their identity impacts their interactions. Self-reflection work is extremely difficult. Teachers need time to examine their lived experiences and how they may dictate their interactions with students, in particular their interactions with students of color. As we learned from Tre'mon, Keyshawn, and Derrick, the interactions they had with their instructors were not positive, and often times became argumentative and fear based. If teachers receive training in identity and self-reflection, could it have changed the trajectory of their relationships? Without proper time to be reflective, it may prove to be detrimental to the interactions with young men of color.

### Administrators

School administrators should consider hiring practices, access to mental health supports, mentoring, and teacher training and support. Hiring practices should include a diverse workforce inclusive of equity-based interview questions. Access to mental health support is crucial in the development of social interactions and positive relationship building. Mentorship may provide an additional resource to support relationships within the education system. Lastly, professional learning for teachers is another factor to support their interactions with young students of color.

According to Todd Whitaker (2003), building leaders should hire great teachers and make the ones they have better. As a part of the hiring process, building leaders should include interview questions which require candidates to understand how they think through their equity lens. Questions may also focus on a candidate's ability to interact with racial and ethnic differences. The interview process may also include a possible scenario which will ask candidates to discuss how they may interact with young men of color with poor attendance, insubordination, and lack of engagement.

As shared by Tre'mon, Keyshawn, and Derrick, these young men have experienced trauma in some form. Their trauma included engagement in the juvenile justice system, family dynamics including divorce and relocations, relationships, and trust. Access to mental health support could have been a viable intervention for these young men of color. The American Academy of Pediatrics (2021), have declared a national state of emergency surrounding child and adolescent mental health. The following statistics provide a state of mental health in America.

- 15.08% (age 12-17) report suffering from at least one major depressive episode in the past year
- 10.6% of youth cope with severe major depression
- 4.08 of youth in the U.S. reported having a substance use disorder in the past year
- 60.3% of youth with major depression do not receive any mental health treatment

Administrators have the ability to ensure access to mental health resources within their educational system.

Administrators should ensure that mental health supports and resources are available to students as needed. Lines of communication between mental health professionals and school staff should be open, fluid, and multi-directional. Professional learning should also be provided to encourage collaboration between mental health professionals and all school staff, especially classroom instructors. Teachers need information about how to support young men of color in the classroom as well as when to make a referral for more support.

Similarly, when students are struggling in their behavior, teachers must have a basic understanding of how to respond appropriately. Threatening students has never proven to be an effective strategy when addressing students. Tre'mom was constantly threatened by one of his instructors. Behaviors that were exhibited by other students were met with different consequences. Staff must have a basic understanding of the difference between major and minor behaviors and when to refer to the office as well as how to manage common behaviors within their classrooms. Staff must also reteach common expectations within their classroom dynamics. If expectations are not met, they

must be retaught and checked for understanding. Staff must do everything in their power to keep students engaged in the learning environment.

Providing access to mentors for students of color could have a positive impact on the relationships within the educational system. As previously mentioned, the educational systems is extremely homogeneous. The average public-school teachers is white, female, age 43, with approximately 14 years of experience (Will, 2020). A lack of diversity in the work force may have an impact on the engagement of young men of color. Coupled with the lack of identity training, and increase in stereotype threat, young men of color face an uphill battle in thriving in the academic setting. Increasing the opportunities young men of color have to engage with those of similar background and experiences may have an impact on academic success. According to Rosen (2018), Black students with one Black teacher by third grade were 13 percent more likely to enroll in college and 32 percent more likely if they experienced two Black teachers. This literature supports the notion that representation matters, especially in the educational setting.

Teacher training and support needs to happen for all staff. Training may include but not limited to culturally responsive teaching, unpacking the invisible knapsack, identity, implicit/explicit bias, stereotype threat, and microaggressions. These types of learning will increase teacher capacity to interact with cultural differences. While our teachers are not mental health professionals, nor are they versed in the experiences of others, they need to have some common understanding around behavior, human development, and how their identity impacts how they interact with cultural differences.

### Colleges and Universities

Colleges and universities that prepare teachers and administrators must focus on two primary areas of needs. These include intercultural development and self-concept theory. Teachers and administrators need to know their capacity of interacting with difference. Leaders and teachers must also know how their personal existence and experiences impact how they interact with the world around them.

Intercultural development looks at inter-cultural competence and how people are able to interact with cultural differences. This may be established by interacting with the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI). The IDI indicates, along a continuum, one's ability to interact with cultural differences. Based on lived experiences, challenges, identity, and cross-cultural goals, the IDI examines how people navigate cultural differences through incidents they may or may not face.

If teachers and leaders understand their current state of cultural competence, they are able to identify their gaps in how they respond to cultural differences. They can then begin to target their learning to become more aware of how to build their capacity to engage in cultural differences. They can become more reflective in how their lived experiences shape how they may interact with cultural differences. Through the IDI, teachers and leaders can develop an intercultural development plan to address their areas of growth surrounding cultural differences.

Colleges and universities need to also focus on self-concept theory. Self-concept theory focuses on how an individual's lived experiences drive their beliefs and attitudes of the world around them. Purkey (1987), defines self-concept theory as a complex system



of learned beliefs, attitudes and opinions that each person holds to be true about his or her personal existence. It is these beliefs that impact how individuals interact with others.

One of the tenets of self-concept theory include the ability to assimilate to new ideas and the expulsion of old ideas. Therefore, individuals may challenge their beliefs and internalize new ideals. This could have a positive impact on how teachers and leaders interact with young students of color. If adult experience cultural differences through the lens of stereotypes, they may consistently alienate young men of color. Self-concept theory argues that old stereotypes may be pushed out of thinking and not negatively impact cultural differences.

Self-concept theory also address individual's behavior regardless of how helpful or hurtful to oneself or others. Teachers and leaders must understand how their identity impacts how they interact with those around them. Self-concept argues that people will live through their experiences without regard to how it will impact others. Therefore it is crucial for all adults in the educational system to understand self-concept theory to actively reflect how their experiences may positively or negatively impact their interactions, especially to cultural differences.

### Future Research

Stereotype threat potentially shapes everyone's perceptions of Black males when they are encountered in school. It systematically defines them as dangerous, threatening, future criminals, and disengaged in the academic process. This perception negatively impacts their behavior while in school. It creates an environment in which students feel disconnected and detached.

While this research project examined how stereotype impacts behavior, future research could focus on the transient population of young Black males. Students and families are more mobile and enrolling in different schools more often. Future research could examine office referrals and suspensions of Black male students that have recently enrolled in a new school. This could be compared to Black male students that have attended the same school for an extended period of time. If Black male students transition to another school, they will receive more office referrals and suspensions than Black male students that have been enrolled in the same school.

### Circling Back

I initially began this study to determine how young men of color were being judged based simply on the color of their skin. I was worried that young men that looked like me were being forced out of the educational system because the adults lacked the capacity to interact and support their needs. I wondered if these young men were aware of how they experienced school. I wanted to hear and honor their voices as they deserved a platform to share their experiences.

Through the voices of Tre'mon, Keyshawn, and Derrick, I confirmed my suspicions. Young men of color are perceived in a negative manner based on the lived experiences of the adults in the educational system. These experiences may impact their behavior, therefore increasing the likelihood they may engage in poor choices resulting in juvenile justice involvement.

The repercussions of how young Black men experience school reaches well beyond the educational system. The increase in incarceration, joblessness, dropout, and

host of other societal factors may be the result of these experiences. The system needs to change. The adults need to be reflective in how their thinking impacts how they interact with young Black men. Why are we as educators complacent in the lackluster educational experience of young Black men? We have to name the failed system and implement professional learning to change our approach. For the sake of all young Black men, we simply cannot wait any longer.

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APPENDIX A  
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Please tell me a little bit about yourself.
  - a. Were you born and raised?
  - b. Were you raised in the inner city or a suburb?
  - c. Please explain your family dynamics?
2. Tell me about your educational experience.
  - a. What is your most memorable experience?
  - b. What are the experiences you wish you could forget?
3. Tell me about the culture of your high school.
  - a. Race, race relations
  - b. Socio-economics
  - c. Religion
  - d. Language
4. Did you find school enjoyable, (why or why not)?
5. Describe your family support system.
6. Can you tell me about the first time you were referred to the office/administration for disciplinary reason?
  - a. What grade were you in?
  - b. Why were you referred to the office?
  - c. What can you remember about the teachers?
  - d. How did you feel when you were referred to the office?
  - e. What was the outcome of the discipline referral (detention, suspension, expulsion)?
7. Tell me about a time you were referred to the office.
8. What was that experience like for your being referred?
9. What was the outcome of that office referral?
  - a. If so, why?
  - b. Can you give me an example?

10. Did that referral impact your relationship with the instructor?
11. Was there a teacher that referred you to the office more than another?
12. What was your perspective of the relationship you had with this instructor?
13. After the incident, did school change for you? If so how?
14. Did the role of education in your future change?
15. Did the role of education in your life impact your community involvement?
16. Tell me the story when you first began your involvement in illegal activity.
17. How do you see yourself as a black male in the educational system?
18. Do you have advice for teachers and administrators?
19. Do you have advice for other black male high school students?
20. Is there anything else you would like to share?

### Summary

The above questions were created to mirror Travis and his experiences. While Travis is unable to participate in the study, the goal is to identify participants with similar backgrounds, parental support systems, and school dynamics. The first five questions were chosen not only to build rapport, but compare the educational and lived experiences of the participants to Travis. Questions 7-17 target the research question by asking participants to share their interactions with teachers and office referrals. These questions are designed to elicit feedback from participants on the possible impact stereotype threat has on their behavior. Lastly, the remaining questions affords participants the opportunity to provide feedback on their lived experiences surrounding stereotype threat and its overall impact on behavior or lack thereof.

APPENDIX B  
DATA COLLECTION FORM

| Question Number | Interview Question                                  | Response(s) | Themes |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------------------------|-------------|--------|
| 1               | Please tell me a little bit about yourself.         |             |        |
| 1a              | Where were you born and raised?                     |             |        |
| 1 b             | Were you rased in the inner city or surburb?        |             |        |
| 1c              | Please explain your family dynamics.                |             |        |
| 2               | Tell me abut your educational experience.           |             |        |
| 2a              | What is your most memorable experience?             |             |        |
| 2b              | What are the experiences you wish you could forget? |             |        |
| 3               | Tell me about the culture of your high school.      |             |        |
| 3a              | Race, race reltions.                                |             |        |
| 3b              | Socio-economics.                                    |             |        |
| 3c              | Religion.                                           |             |        |
| 3d              | Language.                                           |             |        |
| 4               | Did you find school enjoyable, (why or why not)?    |             |        |
| 5               | Describe your family support system.                |             |        |

|    |                                                                                                               |  |  |
|----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|--|
| 6  | Can you tell me about the first time you were referred to the office/administration for disciplinary reasons? |  |  |
| 6a | What grade were you in, why were you referred to the office?                                                  |  |  |
| 6b | What can you remember about the teacher, how did you feel when you were referred to the office?               |  |  |
| 6c | What was the outcome of the discipline referral (detention, suspension, expulsion)?                           |  |  |
| 7  | What was the experience like for you being referred                                                           |  |  |
| 8  | Did the referral impact your relationship with the instructor?                                                |  |  |
| 9  | Was there a teacher that referred you to the office more than another?                                        |  |  |
| 10 | What was your perspective of the relationship you had with this instructor?                                   |  |  |
| 11 | After the incident, did school change for you? If so, how?                                                    |  |  |
| 12 | Did the role of education in your future change?                                                              |  |  |
| 13 | Did the role of education in your life impact your community involvement?                                     |  |  |
| 14 | Tell me the story when you first began your involvement in illegal activity.                                  |  |  |
| 15 | How do you see yourself as a black male in the educational system?                                            |  |  |
| 16 | Do you have advice for teachers and administrators?                                                           |  |  |

|    |                                                              |  |  |
|----|--------------------------------------------------------------|--|--|
| 17 | Do you have advice for other black male high school students |  |  |
| 18 | Is there anything else you would like to share?              |  |  |

## APPENDIX C

## UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA HUMAN PARTICIPANTS REVIEW

## INFORMED CONSENT (GENERAL)

Project Title: Stereotype threat and the impact on behavior of Black males.

Name of Investigator(s): Ryan Williamson

**Invitation to Participate:** You are invited to participate in a research project conducted through the University of Northern Iowa. The University requires that you give your signed agreement to participate in this project. The following information is provided to help you make an informed decision about whether or not to participate.

**Nature and Purpose:** There has been an abundance of research on stereotype threat and its impact on academic achievement. However, there is a gap in the literature surrounding stereotype threat and the impact it has on behavior specific to Black males. The purpose of this study is to interview Black males that have with a large number of office referrals, suspensions, and juvenile court involvement to better understand how stereotype threat impacts behavior. This research will also provide information for educators to understand how stereotype threat impacts their ability to generate authentic relationships with Black males.

**Explanation of Procedures:** As someone who has been referred to the office, suspended and involved in the juvenile justice system, you have been selected as a potential participant in this study. If you choose to participate, the Investigator will meet with you at a date and place of your convenience and ask a series of predetermined questions. Some probing of answers may occur. This interview will be recorded digitally and transcribed at a later date. You will be provided a summary of this transcription if requested. It is anticipated that the interview will take no longer than one hour. Once the study is completed, the Investigator will erase the digital recording and destroy all transcripts of the interview. The recording and notes will be kept in a locked file cabinet to protect confidentiality at all times. Participants will be referred to by a pseudonym. Your actual name will not be used. Quotations may sometimes be used if appropriate, however they will be connected to the pseudonym and not the actual name.

**Discomfort and Risks:** Risks to participation are minimal; you will be one of approximately 3-5 people to be interviewed for this study. Risks to participation are similar to those experienced in day-to-day life. There are no foreseeable risks to participation.

**Benefits and Compensation:** No participant will receive any kind of direct benefit or compensation for this study.

**Confidentiality:** Information obtained during this study which could identify you will be kept confidential. The summarized findings with no identifying information may be published in an academic journal or presented at a scholarly conference.

**Right to Refuse to Withdraw:** Your participation is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from participation at any time or to choose not to participate at all, and by doing so, you will not be penalized or lose benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

**Questions:** If you have questions about the study or desire information in the future regarding your participation in the study, you can contact Ryan Williamson at 515-371-1995 or the project investigator's faculty advisor Shuab Meacham at the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, University of Northern Iowa 319-273-2629. You can also contact the office of the IRB Administrator, University of Northern Iowa, at 319-273-3217, for answers to questions about rights of research participants and the participant review process.

Agreement:

**I am fully aware of the nature and extent of my participation in this project as stated above and the possible risks arising from it. I hereby agree to participate in this project. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent statement.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of participant)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Printed name of participant)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of investigator)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of instructor/advisor)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)