

EXPLORING THE ROLE OF SPOKEN WORD AS A TOOL
OF RESISTANCE TO BUFFER RACIALIZED EXPERIENCES
OF BLACK MALES IN ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL CONTEXTS

by

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ABSTRACT

TIFFANY NICOLE HOLLIS. Exploring the role of spoken word as a tool of resistance to buffer racialized experiences of black males in academic and social contexts.
(Under the direction of DR. CHANCE W. LEWIS)

My research and scholarship is part of a growing body of work in the fields of critical pedagogy and critical youth studies research that is looking at how Black males make sense of the realities that they encounter daily, in school and in society as a Black male. Using Critical Race Theory, this study looked at how participation in a community-based spoken word poetry program is a coping mechanism for Black males who encounter racialized experiences in school and in society. I worked with seven Black male youth at a local spoken word community-based empowerment center in an urban area in the Southeastern United States. This study explored how Black male youth negotiate and reframe their identities, center their voices, and make sense of their everyday lived experiences, particularly racialized experiences in school and in society through artistic expression, specifically spoken word poetry. The students participated in interviews and wrote poems based on their lived experiences. This study underscores what it means for Black male youth who exist in such institutions; and explains why spoken word culture, for many Black male youth, has in many ways (for better and worse) replaced the pedagogical void left vacant by the traditional culture of urban public schools. The findings showed that spoken word can serve as a buffer and a coping mechanism against microaggressions, discriminatory incidents, and other forms of racism in school and in society. Recommendations for educational stakeholders and for future research are discussed.

DEDICATION

This journey has been one filled with late nights, tears, and countless hugs from my sunshine who reminded me to turn every disaster piece into a masterpiece. I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my *raison d'être* (reason for being), my niece Makya Nivet Williams. I call her my sunshine because even in my darkest of days her smile and her laugh brightened up those days as even at the tender age of 5, she continues to remind me about “*hakuna matata*”, means no worries. I pray that as long as her TeeTee is here, she will never have any worries.

Next, I dedicate this work to my mother—Detra Hollis---for all of her countless sacrifices during my childhood despite the tough times and the obstacles that we faced, her fortitude and resilience gave me the drive and determination to be my best and to aspire for greatness. It is because of her guidance and many sacrifices that I am the woman that I am today. And for that I am grateful. My grandmother, the matriarch of the family, Mrs. Lenora Hollis, for continuing to believe in me and for praying for me and keeping me covered, not only as I went through the program, but through life in general.

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and reminded me that I am not a soldier, but a warrior whose strength would come from being able to name my vulnerability and realize that being vulnerable shows true strength. Dr. Donna Ford, who has shown me that it is okay to stand for what you believe in as long as what you believe in does not compromise who you are and whose you are.

This dissertation is also dedicated to the many members of my extended village, my friends, my colleagues, and my R.A.C.E. Mentoring family. Thank you for all of your support, encouragement, and listening ears during my dissertation journey.

Lastly, in loving memory of my angels who have transitioned on, but who continue to inspire me. I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my grandfather, Mr. Forse Lee Hollis, for standing in the gap and being that father figure who showed me so much love and support; Ms. Alisa Moree Sims, my best friend, who left this world at the tender age of 20, but not before blessing me with my god son, Daveyon Williams who has grown into a fine young man. Mr. Aaron Anderson, aka Mr. Table Talk, who gave me so much wisdom and encouraged me to apply for the Ph. D. program. Dean Will Holt Terry, who took a chance on me and made me a Terry Fellow at Davidson College. He opened his home and his heart to me and continued to encourage me to break cycles and use my gifts to improve the world. He served as that person who kept me in line and would often tell me not to dim my light or silence my voice because of people's insecurities.

DEDICATION

This is dedicated in memoriam to the many people who have lost their lives
as a result of state sanctioned violence or police brutality:

#saytheirnames #blacklivesmatter

Trayvon Martin
Eric Garner
Philando Castile
Michael Brown
Tamir Rice
Sandra Bland
Korryn Gaines
Freddie Gray
Sean Bell
Walter Scott
Keith Lamont Scott
LaQuan McDonald
Alton Sterling
Kendra James
Amadou Diallo
Natasha McKenna
Rekia Boyd
Jordan Edwards

*this is dedicated to those victims whose names I left out and those whose names should
not appear on a list because they have become victims and have become a hashtag

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Although police brutality (especially against African Americans) is not a new topic in America, the recent shootings of young black men by law enforcement officers in cities around the United States, including Charlotte, NC has caused this issue to be at the forefront of media examination (Hill, 2016). There have been numerous protests and riots due to police officers not being indicted for killing unarmed young black men, and with these protests a new social movement was formed that started out as a twitter hashtag that is entitled #BlackLivesMatter (Hill, 2016). Although a civil rights movement is nothing new to America, this particular movement comes at a time when America sees itself as a “colorblind” or “post-racial” society (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). In fact, the election of a Black president and an increase in the number of Black millionaires, entertainers, athletes, etc. who have reached new levels of economic, social, and educational success could be interpreted as progress among people of color.

Race and racism are noticeable forces in the lives of people of color in this country (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005); consequently, the perception of Black youth in educational and social contexts warrants theoretical attention to capture methods for best practices, in addition to shaping the discourse about what it means to be Black and young in America. Codes for race historically and currently are often embedded within educational and social policies targeting youth (Giroux, 2003), which has exacerbated deficit discourse about what it means to be a low-income urban Black youth and a Black male in general. Secondly, despite the growing dominance of post racial rhetoric in

national discourse, race and racism are indeed still pervasive forces that shape the experiences of all Americans whether acknowledged or not (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Bonilla-Silva & Ray, 2009). Lastly, race is a structural and ideological force that is embedded within every American institution, and thus affects the educational experiences of youth of color in harmful ways (Bonilla-Silva, 1994).

At a time when public discourse around race and racism are conversations such as: we now live in a “postracial” world, race and racism are of the past, or, the more commonplace accusation, you are pulling the “race-card,” it is easy to lose sight of subtle and systemic manifestations of racism (Cobb, 2011; Joseph, 2011; Ono, 2010; Squires, Watts, Vavrus, Ono, Feyh, Calafell, & Brouwer, 2010). For example, although we have an African American biracial president who identifies as Black (of Kenyan descent) and White American there are still young Black men who are disproportionately imprisoned in the U.S. (Alexander, 2010). Lacy and Ono (2011) remind us that instantiations of racism can play out at individual and institutional levels. Historically, overt forms of racism were easy to mark (e.g., lynching, segregating, and beating people of color); while these forms still exist today, racism has become increasingly more difficult to identify (Bonilla-Silva, 2010). Doane (2006) writes that a “key division in the debate over the nature of racism is between the definition of racism as [an] individual attitude or behavior and the view of racism as a set of systemic and institutional practices” (p. 267). It is my contention that this is one reason for the incorrect assertion that we live in a “postracial” society. More specifically, I believe that our lack of discussion about institutional racism prevents us from seeing the larger effects of racism on bodies of color.

Of course, the significance of a Black male president cannot be understated. This monumental moment in history represented overcoming a major obstacle in the United States and provided a sense of hope to so many. It also seemed to leave many people feeling as if race relations had improved. However, the author would be remiss if the numerous incidents of racism, including excessive use of force by police, verbal slurs about the President, and other race-based incidents that continued in the United States after the election of President Barack Obama, were not addressed. This means that the general population of people living in America believes that they are not racist and that they do not take into consideration the color of a person's skin. The colorblind ideology that is prevalent in the post-Civil Rights era, that America is currently in, considers everyone to be nonracial or not belonging to any race (Van Cleve & Mayes, 2015). Consequently, in what seemed to have been a post-racial moment with the election of President Obama in 2008, race persists as one of the most significant and enduring factors influencing the lived experiences and the educational opportunities of Black youth (Lipsitz, 2011).

For most urban youth (particularly males of color) who reside in lower income communities, a totally different picture is painted when one looks at the statistics as many youths continue to be over-represented in prisons, yet are under-represented in the nation's workforce and colleges (Alexander, 2010). Since 2012 and the incident where Trayvon Martin was shot and killed by a vigilante neighborhood watchman known as George Zimmerman, there have been incidents of police killings of unarmed black men that have caused a conversation about race, race relations, state violence, and policing in America to be brought back to the forefront (Hill, 2016). It is an important time for

discussions around black manhood. Recent events in the United States illustrate this: the brutal shootings of unarmed teenagers, both before and after Trayvon Martin, who was killed after being followed by an armed adult while walking home through a middle-class neighborhood one rainy evening in February of 2012. A trial ensued, and the white/Latino man who shot him was acquitted on all counts in the criminal trial. Perhaps most disturbing, according to scholarly and media analyses of the trial and the case, are the ways that Trayvon himself was on trial: the extent to which he was a “thug” or a good kid; his reasons for not calling the police; and whether or not he had gotten into trouble prior to the incident were all debated in the public. What was at issue was the extent to which Trayvon embodied the stereotypical notions of black manhood—as criminal, as anti-school, as hardcore. Implied here is that if he embodied these traits, he was less human and more deserving of the fate he met. Salient here is the way that stereotypical notions of urban black males are consonant with how they are treated in society—by the educational system, by the criminal justice system, and by society at large. It also brings to the fore how pervasive these stereotypical notions are, and how they are imposed upon young black men as they go about their daily lives.

Since Trayvon Martin’s death, new research (Goff et al, 2014) has found that the context of decision-making as it relates to Black males may in fact be informed by historical and contemporary images about the dangerous Black male. This study has profoundly shown that history has helped engender a kind of implicit knowledge about Black males that has had deleterious implications to the discursive and material context of Black males’ lives and more specifically, to the life of Trayvon Martin.

For Goff et al (2014) and his colleagues, they recently found that Black boys are not as likely to be seen as “childlike” than White males. This kind of *adultification* of Black boys described by Goff et al. (2014) and Ferguson (2001) has had a significant impact on how they are perceived in schools and society.

Unfortunately, urban youth are not often granted the opportunity to voice their opinions or to respond to the countless inequalities that they experience. One way to bring about change in communities facing racial and economic inequalities is to provide space where youth become active participants in their development and given opportunities to address their communities’ needs. Youth-centered opportunities for guided reflection and discussion can be both enjoyable and intellectually challenging (DiBenedetto, 1992). In addition to developing skills in facilitating critical reflection, adult leaders need to consider methods that appeal to young people. The belief that youth need new kinds of spaces where resistance and resiliency can be developed through formal (and informal) processes, pedagogical structures, and youth cultural practices is gaining currency in the field of critical youth studies and is vital towards creating a movement of social justice and equity.

There are few places in society where Black youth can find a safe space to retreat from the negativity in the media, the mistrust of authority figures, and the lowered expectations of educators or “find refuge from the deluge of negativism and mistrust that often seeps into their daily lives” (Sealey-Ruiz & Greene, 2011, p. 348). Sealey-Ruiz and Greene (2011) emphasize the importance of having the voices of Black males that are often silenced in society and in the classrooms brought to the margins. Many of them do not have an outlet to discuss the impact that race and discrimination has on them daily

leaving them unable to process through the situation properly. Even after the election of our first African-American president, many people are still uncomfortable having courageous conversations about race and racism in society today especially in the classroom setting at K-12 and even higher education levels.

Classrooms should provide a safe space where students can interact, have authentic dialogue, and construct counter narratives to deconstruct the grand narratives that are present in the literature and provide marginalized students with a voice (Jocson, 2009). Unfortunately, schools are often sites where race and racism are not discussed. As a result, the young Black males are left without a way or an outlet to express themselves and to process through the incidents that have happened in their communities or in communities around the world (Sealey-Ruiz & Greene, 2011; Jocson, 2009). Non-school literacy practices play an important role in helping youth heal and process through the race-based events such as community violence, police killings, and killings of unarmed black men that are unraveling in the media. The incidents that have happened are bigger than police brutality. The incidents and subsequent uprisings point to the social, cultural, and economic conditions that undermine the lives of the youth who are most vulnerable (Hill, 2016).

Acts of empowerment, resistance, and healing can come through many forms of creative expression i.e., hip hop music, dancing, graffiti, art, and even spoken word. Photography, music, theater, and graphic arts can serve as triggers for reflection as well as the medium through which youth can express their views and messages regarding social issues. This study explored how Black male youth negotiate and reframe their identities, center their voices, and make sense of their everyday lived experiences,

particularly racialized experiences in school and in society through artistic expression, specifically spoken word poetry.

Statement of the Problem

In the U.S., African Americans have historically been denied access to an equitable, high quality education (Anderson, 1988; DuBois, 1903; Kozol, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Rury, 2013; Wilder, 2013; Woodson, 1933). Historic differences in educational opportunities have resulted in a persistent pattern of disparate educational outcomes between African American students and their counterparts in other racial and ethnic groups (Anderson, 1988; DuBois, 1903; Green, 1969; Losen & Orfield, 2002; Rebell & Wolff, 2008; Rury, 2013; Tyack & Cuban, 1995; USDOE, 2014; Wilder, 2013; Woodson, 1933). African American students, and African American males in particular, encounter a variety of structural inequities that engender negative school experiences and contribute to poor academic performance (Delpit, 1995; DuBois, 1903; Hopkins, 1997; Howard, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2009; Noguera, 2008; Schott Foundation, 2012, 2015; Woodson, 1933). Such inequities include lack of access to qualified teachers, inequitable school resource allocation, race-based academic tracking patterns, and discriminatory discipline practices (Haberman, 2005; Kozol, 2005; Mickelson, Smith, & Nelson, 2015; Rebell & Wolff, 2008; Steinberg & Kinchloe, 2007; USDOE, 2014).

As a group, African American males experience higher occurrences of school dropouts, special education placements and school suspensions and expulsions (Cartledge, Gibson & Keys, 2012; Dixon-Roman, 2013; Harry, Klingner, & Cramer, 2007; Kim, Losen, & Hewitt, 2010; Kunjufu, 2005). Additionally, African American males encounter higher rates of school failure and grade retention, and report heightened

levels of academic disengagement (Harmon, 2002; Moore & Flowers, 2012; Noguera, 2008; Schott Foundation, 2012, 2015).

One of the most dominant and persistent social narratives in the United States is that young African American males are in a continuous state of crisis. The mainstream media portrays Black youth as criminals, thugs, and dangerous, while education literature depicts African American males as lazy, underachieving, and “at-risk” academically (Hill, 2016). Such stories have increased the public’s awareness of the disparities and inequalities this social group disproportionately endures. Consequently, the narrative of urban education is often dominated by discussions of students’ low academic outcomes, discipline problems, poor health, and limited access to supplemental learning resources (Robers et al. 2012; Sampson 2012). Low-income Black students do not receive advantages characteristically ascribed to more affluent students (e.g., schools with adequate resources, advanced curricular opportunities, high-quality teachers), which plays a critical role in stifling lower-income students’ chances of achieving academic success (Milner, 2013). This opportunity gap is most apparent in urban schools located in low-income neighborhoods, which often have limited access to experienced and qualified teachers, often employ educators with racist attitudes that negatively impact Black student achievement; and where per-student funding is dismal in comparison to some affluent communities (Barton & Coley 2009; McLendon et al. 2011).

Purpose of Study

When one examines the structural, social, political, educational, and the constraints that exist in the lives of low-income Black youth, there is a clear impact on their educational and social experiences. Growing out of our concern for developing

pedagogical spaces of resistance and resiliency is the examination of specific ways that race is lived inside and outside of schools, how students make meaning of their identities, and the hidden ways that hierarchies of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation are reproduced through hidden curriculums.

This study explored how Black male youth negotiated and reframed their identities, centered their voices, and made sense of their everyday lived experiences, particularly racialized experiences in school and in society through artistic expression, specifically spoken word poetry. Emphasis was also placed on the role of community-based youth organizations have become recognized as critical in the psychological, socioemotional, academic, and even physical well-being of youth, especially youth from marginalized populations (i.e., Black males).

Research Questions

The study explored the intersection between the everyday lived experiences of Black male youth and spoken word as a way to address the contemporary problems of race, racism, and power relationships that influence the academic and social experiences, the daily realities and the identity of this group within the larger societal structures. This study will address the following questions:

- (1) How do Black males negotiate their identities (racial, gender, or otherwise) in school and society?
- (2) How do perceptions, stereotypes, and media portrayal of Black males impact Black males' perceptions of their identities as Black males?
- (3) How are Black males impacted by racialized experiences that they encounter, either directly or indirectly, in school and in society?

- (4) How do Black males cope with and navigate through those racialized experiences that they hear, see, or encounter as a Black male?

Throughout the analysis, the study explored how the use of counter spaces and the production of counter narratives in the form of spoken word poetry contribute to reframing the identities of urban male youth of color. This reframing will allow African American males to affirm their identity and heal from past, present, and future racialized trauma. Consequently, while addressing societal injustices and systemic issues, while finding resilience in the margins, navigate the educational process, and heal while advocating for change. Hence, poetry will be used to create hope, create connection, and create possibility in a time of such conflict. In acknowledging, hearing, feeling, seeing and valuing student voice, educators articulate the power of spoken word poetry as a tool that builds upon students' home and local literacies and creates a sense of identity. Consequently, these students who are often marginalized and viewed as invisible can have their presence affirmed and justified within a predominantly white, upper class, heterosexual male dominated society. Youth start to feel as if their experiences and identities are valued and respected.

Consequently, Poetry Ink (pseudonym) will help youth of color affirm their identity and heal from past, present, and future racialized trauma, while addressing societal injustices and systemic issues. Consequently, spoken word is a cultural site where race, class, and gender identities converge simultaneously; thereby, opening up new pedagogical and curricular possibilities for students in urban contexts. Analyzing student perspectives and beliefs gives policymakers, educators, and concerned community members an insider's understanding of the scholastic environment and

experience from these urban students of color. Student perceptions about schooling influence academic performance (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008). The power of change begins with each person's mental model or at the level of beliefs and values. Students' beliefs about schooling and their beliefs about their role in the educational system may positively or negatively impact efforts to improve student achievement and close achievement and opportunity gaps.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is important to my work as a framing theoretical standpoint as well as a methodology to center the counter-narratives of Black youth navigating their lives as Black males in society. CRT calls to question racism and attempts to expose it and all forms of injustice. A major tenet of CRT is counter-storytelling or producing counter-narratives. These counter-narratives are told by people of color to counter the master narratives that exist (Lopez, 2003). Critical race theorists argue that counter-narratives should be captured by the researcher, experienced by the research participants, and told by people of color (Milner, 2007).

People of color and other oppressed groups must be given space to voice their experiences and concerns in an effort to counter the discourse that marginalizes their existence. Race and racism are placed at the center of the narrative and counter-narrative in critical race theory. Critical race theory in education challenges the dominant ideology and centralizes the experiential knowledge of the research. A qualitative narrative case study design was used in order for me to conduct a detailed examination of a single setting (Bogdan and Biklen 2007; Merriam, 1998).

As previously stated, black males are often discussed in educational literature, but their actual voices are often missing from the central analysis (Howard, 2001; Sealey-Ruiz & Green, 2011). In an educational context, a method that is similar to counter-storytelling is the concept of student voice. A number of studies point to the importance of centering the voices of youth, which is also an aim of Critical Race Theory (CRT). Howard (2001) argues that if the policies and practices in school are created with students' best interests in mind, there is no reason for their voices not to be centered. "The scant attention paid to students' voice is inexcusable given their role as the primary clientele in K-12 schools" (p. 132). As the "primary clientele" in school settings, students should have the space to articulate the concerns, needs, and desires for their education. Students have the ability to understand and articulate in complicated ways, their lived realities in educational settings (Cook-Sather, 2002, 2006; Fielding, 2001; Howard, 2001; Lincoln, 1995; Mitra, 2001, 2004, 2009; Sealey-Ruiz & Greene, 2010). "Because youth are keenly aware of the problems that face their communities and their schools, student voice initiatives can help to foster educational change" (Mitra, 2001, p. 313).

This focus on student voice does not come without complications. Researchers that assert student voice as uniform run the risk of not seeing differences among students, their outlooks, and their needs (Cook-Sather, 2006). Furthermore, it is understood that in the traditional school setting students and teachers are not treated as equals with the same authority to make fundamental changes (Fielding, 2004). In order for the inclusion of student voice to move beyond rhetorical calls for their inclusion, teachers have to be willing and open to hearing and honoring these voices (Lincoln, 1995). She argues, "...too little emphasis is placed on eliciting and negotiating students' contributions to

curriculum and on demonstrating how students can help to structure their own learning experiences” (p. 89). The experiences and voices of youth are important to educational research. Silencing the voices of students in educational research has led to misguided theories, programs, and practices (Howard, 2002). If methodologies have been used to silence, then methodologies can also give voice to people of color and “turn the margins into places of transformative resistance” (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 39). There are additional studies that use CRT to highlight the experiences of marginalized populations in a number of settings (see: Harper, 2009; Solorzano & Ornelas, 2002; Lynn, et al. 2010).

Methodology (Overview of Methods)

Qualitative research methods were used to conduct this study. Qualitative research methods represent useful approaches to understanding the meanings people make of their experiences and can be used in situations where there is little or no previous research or when a process or phenomenon is not well known (Walker & Myrick, 2006). A primary purpose of qualitative research is to describe and clarify experience as it is lived and constituted in awareness. Qualitative methods can enable researchers to better understand the meanings that oppressed peoples make of their experiences and give voice to people who have been traditionally marginalized, made invisible, or silenced (Walker & Myrick, 2006). Data collected during the ethnographic case study from up to seven (7) Black males who visit the open mic sessions, spoken word session, and the writing workshops that are hosted by Poetry Ink Collaborative via interviews (individual and focus group) and analyzing poems. The youth used various forms of creative expression to tell their stories and paint the population of youth in a more positive light, while

addressing social problems that are present in their local communities and in the world as they relate to police brutality and the killings of unarmed Black men. The results have the potential to be used to create meaningful relationships that lead to academic achievement among urban youth as educators reframe their perceptions of urban male youth of color (Fisher, 2005; Jocson, 2005; & Kinloch, 2005).

Grounded in the Critical Race Theory and Critical Youth Voice (grounded in critical race theory), the study describes how the use of counter narratives in the form of spoken word poetry contributes to reframing the identities of urban male youth of color so that they can find resilience in the margins and navigate the educational process. Students who are provided with a voice, a greater sense of power and efficacy, and an ability to be more engaged and successful in school can come up with their own solutions to problems that impede their educational, economic, and social development; thereby, building on the power of collective agency in urban schools and communities (Fisher, 2005; Jocson, 2009). Classrooms and schools are spaces where student's voices are often invisible or silenced. Through critical pedagogy, critical race theory, and critical youth voice, youth can create an empowered identity and promote civic engagement for social change across spaces and domains. This approach helps students connect to their own histories, develop legitimate uses of their voices, and employ tools to navigate political and social barriers. Consequently, this creates a transformative educational experience and allows for students to begin to create empowering spaces that resist societal oppression for Black male youth that enable them to process how power, privilege, and oppression impact their lives.

Significance of Study/ Contribution

Discriminatory disciplinary practices, disparate student placement patterns and inequitable access to high quality instruction exemplify some of the ways in which race and gender influence the treatment African American males receive in schools in the U.S. An examination of these factors show that, on average, Black males experience school differently than their counterparts from other groups (Hopkins, 1997; Noguera, 2003). Race and gender-based differences in educational treatments have a cumulative negative effect on African American males' academic performance, and should be included in all scholarly examinations of disparities in academic performance between students from different groups (Brooms, 2014; Emdin, 2012; Lynn et al., 2010; Moore & Lewis, 2012, 2014; Walton & Wiggan, 2010, 2014). Differences in academic performance between Black males and their peers are not a matter of achievement; they are the direct result of structural inequalities and educational policies and practices, which are widely implemented in American public schools (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Howard, 2008; Kunjufu, 2005; Noguera, 2003, 2009; Schott Foundation, 2015). Significant improvements in educational outcomes for African American males can be made if African American males are provided with access to highly effective teachers, receive high quality instruction, and are not subjected to discriminatory disciplinary and school placement practices.

As Fine (1991) argues, the combination of low expectations, negative interactions with teachers and other adults like resource officers, draconian discipline policies, and inadequate educational resources effectively impedes the educational possibilities of Black male youth. Whether unintentionally or most deliberately, the larger American

community has tried to distance itself from African-American youth, and urban youth in particular (Sealey-Ruiz & Greene, 2011). A sizeable portion of academic literature, however, focuses on Black youth as problems and their modes of survival for educational, economic, and political freedom are often pathologized. There is an overabundance of literature written about Black youth that positions them as problems, pathologizes their methods of survival and resistance, and focuses on preventions to keep them from “becoming problems” as Ginwright (2009) claims. Some community-based programs for instance, are more interested in containing Black youth and work to prevent Black youth from being menaces to society versus enhancing their gifts and talents to be productive members of society, socially conscious beings, and agents of change (Damon, 2004).

Critical race theorists believe in raising consciousness of individuals who have been silenced and eliminating every form of oppression (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Counter spaces, according to Delgado and Stefancic (2001) are affirming locations within an environment that are comfortable niches of verbal and nonverbal interactions, for marginalized people. It is important to create empowering spaces that resist societal oppression for Black male youth that enable them to process how power, privilege, and oppression impact their lives. Consequently, Poetry Ink (pseudonym) helps youth of color affirm their identity and heal from past, present, and future racialized trauma, while addressing societal injustices and systemic issues. These spaces are supportive communities where youth of color can embrace each other and share narratives. After school locations, community-based organizations, and cultural centers, for example, are considered counter spaces (Woodland, 2008).

Several studies have revealed the use of the voice of the oppressed, but there remains a gap in literature in terms of how community based organizations can create a space for both the spoken and written word can serve as praxis for social transformation (Fisher, 2005; 2007; Jocson, 2005; 2009, Kinloch, 2005; Morrell, 2008; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002). However, few studies have examined the identity of urban male youth of color from a strengths-based approach and challenged deficit perceptions of their lived experiences as a marginalized and oppressed population. There have been even fewer studies that have explored the racialized lived experiences of urban male youth of color by constructing narratives through the use of spoken word poetry as an alternative pedagogical approach to deconstruct the dominant narratives of inferiority regarding this population. Yet, the literature does not include how urban sanctuaries (safe spaces) can create a space that allows youth to make meaning of their own identities in relation to their everyday lived experiences as a Black male in schools and the larger society. Spoken word can be used as a means of expressing their feelings about the realities of their daily lives, and buffering racialized experiences including exclusion in the classroom setting, stereotypes, perceptions, and even police brutality.

While research related to the experience of being African American and male is growing, one could argue that we still know relatively little about how African American young men are impacted by the messages that they receive about the meaning of being a young Black man. Rarely, have we explored the intersection between the everyday lived experiences of Black male youth and spoken word as a way to address the contemporary problems of race, racism, and power relationships that influence the daily realities and identity of this group within the larger societal structures. Thus, the purpose of this

qualitative study (interviews) is to fill the gap in literature by using spoken word to reframe the deficit perception of male youth of color from urban contexts, while combatting stereotypes and perceptions that they are bombarded with or experience (directly or indirectly) daily. Students will be able to exercise their voices in combating societal injustices and providing insight into their needs and how those needs can best be met in a setting outside of school (i.e., community-based organizations where they perform spoken word, have open mics, and perform poetry slams).

This setting provided students with a chance to use their assets to have their voices, which are normally silenced, heard and provides them with a space to heal from the cultural or racial trauma that has been experienced from directly or indirectly. Ginwright (2007) argues for radical healing, or healing as a process for restoring the health and well-being of students who have been exposed to chronic poverty, racism, and violence. His definition of healing includes developing a critical consciousness of social oppression, which gives one the ability to counter hopelessness and nihilism and to aid in the preparation required for confronting racism and similar forms of oppression (Ginwright, 2015). The radical healing process should include community organizations, which provide important opportunities for students to connect with surrounding neighborhoods and engage in civic activities that address community problems (Ginwright, 2009). Being connected to the larger community can give students a greater sense of purpose, provide them with opportunities to forge important relationships, and help them develop the skills to bring about social change. This “urban sanctuary” or “youthtopia” known as (Poetry Ink) could function as a counter-public space of resistance in which the identities of urban youth are reframed and affirmed so that they can find

resilience and hope in the margins and navigate the educational process, while being given an outlet to creatively express themselves.

The use of spoken word poetry in a community based setting provides a space where youth workers and students are able to engage in a discussion that captures the lived realities of all participants. Within the setting, spoken word poetry can serve as a bridge to connect the often blurred realities for both the oppressed and the oppressor (Freire, 1970). An urban youth of color who has experienced trauma can benefit from spoken word and performance poetry as an outlet to creatively express themselves in an effort to transform their pain into power and use that power to promote social justice for other vulnerable populations. Poetry Ink would provide urban male youth with a space to heal from the cultural and racial trauma that has been experienced directly or indirectly, while allowing them to make sense of the world around them.

The negative life circumstances that African American young men face have been well documented. The inequalities and injustices that African American young men face in the educational, political, economic, and social arenas can make establishing positive and healthy identities extremely difficult. As research and public discourse continue to stimulate conversation related to the disturbing realities for African American young men, the need to address circumstances many young Black men face is more important than ever. The current study aims to add to understanding the lived experiences in academic and social contexts of young African American male existence in the U.S.

Definitions of Terms

The following terms are used in this study:

Color-blind—not influenced by racial prejudice (Bonilla-Silva, 1994).

Community-based program-- a series of activities at the community level aimed at bringing about desired improvement in the social well-being of individuals, groups and neighborhoods.

Counternarrative-- counternarratives, which can also be called counter-storytelling, are accounts or stories used to give people a voice who otherwise would not have one.

Critical Race Theory (CRT)-- is an academic discipline focused upon the application of critical theory, a critical examination of society and culture, to the intersection of race, law, and power.

Cultural Synchronization--the alignment and parallel between school and home environment of students. Irvine (1990)

Marginalize—to treat as if they are unimportant or insignificant.

Microaggression—indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalized group.

Open mic-- A music, poetry, or comedy stage platform with open invitation, that is, where anyone is invited to perform.

Poetry Slam-- A poetry slam is a competition at which poets read or recite original work. These performances are then judged on a numeric scale by previously selected members of the audience.

Post-racial-- denoting or relating to a period or society in which racial prejudice and discrimination no longer exist.

Radical Healing-- healing as a process for restoring the health and well-being of students who have been exposed to chronic poverty, racism, and violence.

Racialized experience—an experience that deals with a race-based incident such as microaggressions, racism, discrimination, and perceptions.

Spoken word poetry— an oral art that focuses on the aesthetics of word play and intonation and voice inflection.

Youthtopia—nontraditional spaces to hope, heal, repair, and transform personal pain as well as seek refuge from larger social inequalities.

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations

Delimitations are the factors, constructs, and variables that have been intentionally left out of the study, and are identified by the researcher to help delineate the boundaries of the study (Ellis & Levy, 2009). This study contains several delimitations. This study is narrowed by participant criteria. All participants are those who self-identified as African American males who are current participants in Poetry Ink, an arts-based after school program. Participants were purposively selected based on race, gender, and level of school-based engagement in the performing arts. In order to insure the involvement of participants who fit the criteria outlined in this study, recruitment was limited to participants who attended Poetry Ink, thus, the participants do not reflect a national sample. Finally, the study is delimited by my examination of spoken word and its influence on the identity formation and development of African American male young adults between the ages of 18-22.

Limitations

Limitations are potential weaknesses or problems with a study that have been identified by the researcher (Creswell, 2005). One potential limitation related to this study may be the region of the country in which the study was conducted. All participants lived and attended high school in a large urban center in the southeastern U.S. Their attitudes and opinions may be influenced heavily by the context in which they live, the experiences that they engaged in while in high school, and may not reflect attitudes and beliefs held by Black males from other regions. Another limitation is that this study did not involve participants across gender, class, and racial lines.

The study is also limited in its analysis of social locations as of the students in the study came from similar socioeconomic levels and lived in the same or similar neighborhoods. In addition, I only included the focus on the experiences of males in the schools and do not include the voices/stories of the young women who are being impacted by spoken word. The inclusion of women may have widened the scope of the study and provided the researcher with richer and more varied data concerning the connection between spoken word and identity development and formation among African American youth. Current discourse acknowledges that cultural experiences have historical spawn out of a historical context that provides us with present day contexts for how Black youth have been viewed and treated in schools and the larger society. The legacy of slavery and Jim Crow racism have left legacies that have led to the creation of “race-blind” politics in government, media, and even in schools. Consequently, perceptions and portrayals of Black males have a history or a historical context and are rooted in race-based politics.

Organization of Study

This study will consist of five chapters. Chapter one contains an introduction that provides the general context and purpose of spoken word as an alternative pedagogical model of instruction for a set of research questions that will guide the study, delimitations, limitations, assumptions, definition of key terms, and significance of the study. Chapter two provides a review of literature that provides a historical background and context around the treatment and perceptions of Black males and paints the picture of spoken word as a tool of resistance to cope with racialized experiences among African American males. Chapter three outlines the methodology utilized for the study and the data collection and analysis process. Chapter four is a discussion of the results of the study, which details findings and outcomes from data analysis. Chapter five presents the findings, summary, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

February 26, 2012 is a night that many of us will not forget as it is etched in the memories of many Americans, especially those who are Black or Brown. Trayvon Martin, a then seventeen-year old Black teenage male was shot to death in Sanford, Florida. Martin had apparently been unarmed and carrying only a bag of Skittles and an iced tea when he was shot dead by George Zimmerman, a then 28-year-old, white Latino male who served as a neighborhood watch volunteer for “looking suspicious” (Gabbidon & Jordan, 2013). Martin’s murder brought to the surface questions about the role of race in the United States in the allegedly post-racial 21st century. The case also presented a number of complexities about controversial stand-your ground laws. Taken together, issues of race as applied in stand-your-ground cases generally, and in the case against Zimmerman in Martin’s death specifically, created a firestorm of perspectives that at their core reveal the social problematics of race (Fasching-Varner, 2009) that are ingrained in America’s dark past. The moments after Martin’s death led to critical conversations, speculations, news articles, media reports, and ultimately a trial where many of the facts were twisted and were disputed to try to make Martin appear to be on trial. What cannot be disputed is that George Zimmerman, armed with what Peggy McIntosh (1989) described as a knapsack of unearned privileges and a gun, shot and killed an unarmed teenager who was only armed with a tea and skittles (Gabbidon & Jordan, 2013).

Noguera (2008) reminds of about the perceptions of Black males as the problem: “The trouble with Black boys is that too often they are assumed to be at risk because they are too aggressive, too loud, too violent, too dumb, too hard to control, too streetwise,

and too focused on sports” (p. xxi). It is in this statement that we realize that the image of Trayvon Martin was not an unfamiliar one and the murder of Trayvon Martin is nothing new. In fact, Trayvon Martin was more criminalized and vilified than George Zimmerman was. However, we maintain that the new inquiry and focus should be less on Black boys behaviors and dispositions (Brown & Donnor, 2011) and more on the histories (Brown, 2011) that created such conditions. Love (2014) powerfully contextualizes the historical perceptions of Black males in relation to Trayvon Martin,

“To ‘See Trayvon Martin’ is to acknowledge one’s power and privilege, and reconcile these social constructions to the plight of one’s students of color. If educators do not take action to problematize, examine, confront, and challenge their own inscribed dispositions and implicit biases to create social change, they determine that their role in schools is to criminalize Black bodies. So long as educators continue to enforce policies that demonize innocent children, they thus allow for the murder of thousands of Trayvon Martins in classrooms every day” (pp. 11–12).

Numerous scholars have studied how teacher attitudes and institutional inequalities greatly impact the quality of education for a student (Vaught & Castagno, 2008). Can this explain the disproportional suspensions and dismissals of Black males (Butler, Robinson, & Walton, 2014; Lewis, Chambers, & Butler, 2012; Losen & Gillispie, 2012), the systemic placement of Black males into special education programs (Kunjufu, 2005), extreme security measures at schools, and the widening achievement/opportunity gap?

Brown (2013) supports the claim that the mindset that teachers possess about Black students is vital to understanding the ways in which educational inequities are reproduced and normalized. Brown however, also believes that the perception of Black males was created from a framing of the Black male or a dominant discourse (deficit in nature). She remains hopeful about the power of knowledge being able to transform the

ways in which Black youth are perceived, understood, and identified in schools and in society. Western societal perceptions of African American males have been constructed through the horrific lens of white supremacy since the very start of slavery in this country centuries ago.

In other words, Trayvon Martin (or his image) was familiar to many who were present that day. Keffrelyn Brown (2013) argues that deeply entrenched historical discourses delimit how African American students are conceptualized in schools and society. Brown argues that an enduring “framing discourse” encloses Black students’ educational experiences. In a similar sense, Tyrone Howard (2013) argued:

In many ways, DuBois’s question (How does it feel to be a problem?) precisely speaks to the manner in which Black males at the turn of the 21st century may feel if they were to peruse much of the social science literature, popular press, mainstream media, and even within the academic discourse about their academic performance and overall potential. A read through of a majority of the literature on Black males would reveal a number of disturbing classifications. In conducting research for this work, the terms that frequently came up with Black males were phrases such as at-risk, endangered, and remedial, in crisis, uneducable, extinct, and left behind. (p. 57)

Historically, African American males have found themselves occupying the lower levels of the ladder (social, political, education, and otherwise) and occupy a place in society that it consistently consists of negative stereotypes about and against them. This erasure of identity all started with white supremacist ideology cemented during slavery that turned Africa into a “land of savages” and black skin into a “badge of degradation”. By denying the reality of the earliest and most influential civilizations of Egypt, Mali, and the intellectual mecca of Timbuktu, America has for centuries perpetuated lie after lie and created a distorted, dishonest version on history for many of its citizens. As a result,

many Black males are not educated on and aware of their identity as descendants of royalty.

Consequently, while the origins and practices within the legacy of slavery and Jim Crow racism are no longer with us, the creation and ideology of white supremacy have left legacies through seemingly “race-blind” racial politics in government, media, and school policies that reproduce old racial essentialisms and material inequalities for Blacks in society (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). For example, Black males have frequently been portrayed in movies, film, music, magazines, books, and television as animalistic in nature, impulsively violent, aggressive, lacking intelligence, economically incompetent, are sexual predators, and whose very being in society should be feared. These negative portrayals, images, and narratives can be traced back to the religious, scientific, academic, and legal justifications of race throughout history (Anderson, 1988; Marable, 1994).

For many of them, schools have been more confining to, rather than embracing of, their identity and popular cultural knowledge that otherwise could demonstrate useful and relevant learning experiences between students and teachers; and that could evoke empowerment, social change, and transformation in the lives of the students. The residual effects of slavery have disenfranchised African American men. The historical legacy of slavery has impacted African American attitudes toward work, the attainment of property, feelings of personal inferiority, community division the breakdown of the Black family, and color discrimination (Akbar, 1996). What is missing in the literature is empirical research exploring the historical legacy of slavery in relationship to the identity development of African American young men. Most of the literature examining the

gendered racial experiences of Black males has been theoretical in nature while ignoring the influence of slavery and colonialism, the adaptation to Eurocentric paradigms of masculinity, and the effect of racism (DeGruy, 2005). The topic has been theorized extensively in psychological research as well as other disciplines however, future research could examine the historical legacy of slavery by examining the relationship between historical stereotypical images that were birthed in slavery and identity development. It is in the aforementioned contexts that I wish to explore how urban Black male youth negotiate their identities through spoken word, how the subculture functions as a counter-public space of resistance for Black male youth in urban education, and what are the political implications of these findings in furthering education as a democratic practice for this particular population.

Scholars in the field of cultural studies, popular culture, and critical pedagogy suggest that youth are increasingly affirming and negotiating notions of self and identity through popular culture. As such, it has been suggested that in these postmodern times youth no longer affirm their identities through the traditional culture of education and schooling (Giroux, 1996, 2004), and look toward subcultures such as hip-hop to deal with their most pressing issues and concerns of the day (Dimitriadis, 2001). Thus, how youth subcultures are affirming notions of self and identity in relationship to their performative, socially constructed, or everyday lived reality becomes an important site of investigation. Subsequently, this study considers the changing meanings of youth in various historical, social, racial, and political contexts, and is the product of an on-going dialogue between the institution of education and schooling, the social justice system, mass media and the youth produced subculture of spoken word poetry.

Since Trayvon Martin's death, new research (Goff et al, 2014) has found that the context of decision-making as it relates to Black males may in fact be informed by historical and contemporary images about the dangerous Black male. This study has profoundly shown that history has helped engender a kind of implicit knowledge about Black males that has had deleterious implications to the discursive and material context of Black males' lives and more specifically, to the life of Trayvon Martin. For Goff et al (2014) and his colleagues, they recently found that Black boys are not as likely to be seen as "childlike" than White males. This kind of *adultification* of Black boys described by Goff et al. (2014) and Ferguson (2001) has had a significant impact on how they are perceived in schools and society.

Understanding how Black male youth learn and process what it means to be Black and male in urban neighborhoods in American society through the use of rhyme and rhythm, poetic prose, everyday lived culture of spoken word poetry, which emerges from these conditions, provides a kind of pedagogical blueprint. This blueprint is useful in and reconstructing the instructional methods to engage Black male students within the present and possible future context of urban schools. It also means, for example, understanding how a culture of fear (Kincheloe, 2007; Kunjufu, 1995; Noguera, 2008) has been produced in the media about Black male youth, and that inevitably influences the public perception of Black males and impacts how teachers and other public school officials interact with these students on everyday basis in many schools. In consequence, critical discourses suggest that there are material affects to these realities. Schools heighten their surveillance and suspicion of "problem" students, excessively wage discipline and

punishment for menial offenses committed, and alienate these youths from productive educational experiences in the process.

Youth in society wrestle with so many issues on a daily basis. However, youth from urban contexts often also have to wrestle with other issues as they relate to race, class, and negative perceptions. This is reminiscent of what Wade Boykin (1986) calls the “triple quandary” of youth dealing with the challenges associated with race, class, and gender and what Margaret Spencer Beale (2000) examines in terms of the normative challenges in addition to what it means for young people to deal with micro-aggressions that they face daily due to poverty, racism, and negative stereotyping. Black male youths are overrepresented in every educational category associated with failure (i.e., suspension and expulsion rates, dropout rates, special education placements, etc.) and underrepresented in every category associated with educational success (Kunjufu, 2005, Moore & Lewis, 2012; Toldson & Lewis, 2012).

There are scholars who have focused on the positive aspects of males instead of pathologizing them and treating them as a problem needing fixing or needing saving from each other. The real work involves providing mentoring opportunities and opportunities to develop self-discipline and skills that foster leadership among Black male youth. Sometimes that might mean helping them find their voice, which translates into the ability to express their hopes, their dreams, their fears, their frustrations, and even their future goals. This voice can be a means of disrupting the dominant, yet deficit discourse that surrounds Black male youth. Thus, spaces need to be created that allow for Black male youth to express their desires and fears, their hopes and dreams, and their pain allows from them to escape the stereotypical images that are placed on them.

When one examines the structural, social, political, educational, and the constraints that they pose in the lives of low-income Black youth, there is a clear impact on their educational and social experiences. Growing out of our concern for developing pedagogical spaces of resistance and resiliency is the examination of specific ways that race is lived inside and outside of schools, how students think about their identities, and the hidden ways that hierarchies of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation are reproduced through hidden curriculums. When exploring the identities in African-American adolescent males, there are several key concepts that must be considered; racial identity, stereotypes and media images of African American men, microaggressions, the intersection of race and gender for African American young men, cultural contexts that influence identity, and racial socialization messages. In order to help change the life circumstances of young African American men, we need to know more about their identity development process and their perceptions of what it means to be young, Black, and male, and how they are influenced by messages from others about what it means to be young Black men.

Several studies have revealed the use of the voice of the oppressed, but there remains a gap in literature in terms of how community based organizations can create a space for both the spoken and written word can serve as praxis for social transformation (Fisher, 2005; 2007; Jocson, 2005; 2009, Kinloch, 2005; Morrell, 2008; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002). However, few studies have examined the identity of urban male youth of color from a strengths-based approach and challenged deficit perceptions and discourse regarding their lived experiences as a marginalized and oppressed population. There have been even fewer studies that have explored the racialized lived experiences of

urban male youth of color by constructing narratives through the use of spoken word poetry as an alternative pedagogical approach to deconstruct the dominant narratives of inferiority regarding this population. Yet, the literature does not include how urban sanctuaries (safe spaces) can create a space that allows youth to make meaning of their own identities in relation to their everyday lived experiences as a Black male in schools and the larger society. Spoken word can be used as a means of expressing their feelings about the realities of their daily lives, and buffering racialized experiences including exclusion in the classroom setting, stereotypes, perceptions, and even police brutality.

While research related to the experience of being African American and male is growing, one could argue that we still know relatively little about how African American young men are impacted by the messages that they receive about the meaning of being a young Black man. Rarely, have we explored the intersection between the everyday lived experiences of Black male youth and spoken word as a way to address the contemporary problems of race, racism, and power relationships that influence the daily realities and identity of this group within the larger societal structures. Thus, the purpose of this qualitative study (interviews) was to fill the gap in literature by using spoken word to reframe the deficit perception of male youth of color from urban contexts, while combatting stereotypes and perceptions that they are bombarded with or experience (directly or indirectly) daily. Students will be able to exercise their voices in combating societal injustices and providing insight into their needs and how those needs can best be met in a setting outside of school (i.e., community-based organizations where they perform spoken word, have open mics, and perform poetry slams).

This study provides a critical examination and reframing of Black male identity from the deficit perception of male youth of color from urban contexts. Participation in a community-based program that served as a site for resistance and resilience provided students with a chance to use their assets to have their voices--which are normally silenced--heard and provides them with a space to heal from the cultural or racial trauma that has been experienced from directly or indirectly. This review of literature examines the essential concepts, agents, and complexities that surround the discussion of Black male identity as it relates to the social and academic experiences of Black males through an analysis of social issues with spoken word. Western societal perceptions of African American males have been constructed through the horrific lens of white supremacy since the very start of slavery in this country centuries ago. Historically, African American males have found themselves occupying the lower levels regarding academic achievement and occupy a place in society that is consistently laced with negative stereotypes about and against them.

Historical Context of Slavery, Racism, and Stereotypes

Legacy of Slavery

African American men experienced a psychological transition when they arrived on America's shores, shifting from an Afrocentric worldview to a Euro-centric worldview (Whites & Cones, 1999). The meaning of manhood as it was in Africa was no longer applicable to their new home in America. It can be argued that African male slaves were no longer allowed to be men but became property, savages, and sub-human (Whites & Cones, 1999). This slavery experience still has an impact on African American men (DeGruy, 2005). This psychological trauma and its subsequent transition has not been empirically explored in depth in the field of psychology. Some of the outcomes from the

displacement of Africans throughout the Diaspora include the loss of language, family, spiritual practices, and customs (Akbar, 1996; Anderson, 1988; DeGruy, 2005). There are two psychological theories concerning the psychological effects of slavery on Black men. The traditional view maintains that the Black male slave was a passive participant during slavery and allowed himself to be psychologically controlled by the slave owner; whereas, the revisionist view describes the self-determining nature of Black men who have exhibited both active and passive styles of resistance (Whites & Cones, 1999).

The era of slavery has been given the name of *Maafa*, a Kiswahili word meaning “great disaster” (Ani, 1994). It is important to examine the images of Black men during slavery to fully understand how Black men are depicted in the status quo. During slavery, there was an emphasis on the psychical attributes of the Black male, and conversely a devaluation of one’s mind and humanity (Hunter & Davis, 1994). Even though slavery ended over 150 years ago, the scars of this brutal experience still influences the lives of African Americans, both socially and psychologically (Akbar, 1996; DeGruy, 2005). There are several critical incidents that occurred during slavery that continue to shape the structure of the Black community. During this period, we witnessed the breakdown of the Black family. The “divide and conquer” method kept slaves from forming alliances even within their own biological families (Anderson, 1988). Also, during this time one can observe both the covert and overt forms of White supremacy.

The history of White supremacy in this country has included concentrated efforts to control the Black body and specifically the Black male body (Hawkins, 1998). When Africans came to America they lost their language, culture, and name – their entire African identity was lost. It can be argued that politics and institutionalized racism are

constant reminders to the Black person in America that their identity is endangered. Allen (2001) claims that “the African-Americans’ sense of self within a larger society were formulated during the horrendous period of human bondage-that peculiar institution called slavery-during which even the basic humanity of the African was denied” (p.172). The genocide and bondage perpetrated on kidnapped Africans and generations of slaves, followed by more than a century of racial oppression after the Civil War, have effectively kept African Americans disproportionately near the bottom of the social pyramid (Cohen & Northridge, 2000). African American men are still under siege; in schools they have the highest rates of detentions, suspensions, expulsions and special education placements (Harvey & Hill, 2004; Kunjufu, 2005).

Racism

In the previous section, the institutional system of slavery was described, now the paper will turn its attention to the structure of racism. Despite the growing amount of research on racism, the influence of racism on identity development has been overlooked. Racism has had a profound effect on the lives of African Americans. Clark, Anderson, Clark, and Williams (1999) operationalized the term racism as “beliefs, attitudes, institutional arrangements, and acts that tend to denigrate individuals or groups because of phenotypic characteristics or ethnic group affiliation” (p. 805). The authors conceptualize racism as a biopsychosocial framework which considers the contextual factors, sociodemographic factors, as well as the psychological and behavioral factors of racism. Most of the research on racism and African American men focuses on race-related stress (Piters & Carter, 2007; Ustey & Ponterorro, 1996). Most of these studies focus primarily on African American men, not adolescents.

Racism and other forms of group oppression are sources of substantial,

unrelenting stress (Cohen & Northridge, 2000). DeGruy (2005) also states that perceived racism has been positively associated with negative emotional reactions and psychological distress. There have been several studies examining the impact of racism on ethnic minority adolescents. Youth from ethnic minority backgrounds have been found to report distress associated with perceived racial prejudice, and in the case of African American youth institutionalized discrimination in stores and by the police were higher for African American youth (Fisher, Wallace, & Fenton, 2000). Racial discrimination has been associated with lower levels of psychological functioning for African American adolescents (Sellers, Copeland-Lander, Martin, & Lewis, 2006). One of the few longitudinal studies examining racial discrimination among African American adolescents found a relationship between perceived racial discrimination and later conduct problems and depressive symptomatology (Brody et al., 2006).

Despite the growing amount of research on the psychological correlates of racism, the examination of racism as a contextual factor influencing the identity development of Black young men has been overlooked. Of most relevance to this study is the construct of internalized racism. Speight (2007) states, that the field has trivialized the meaning of internalized racism. “Internalized racism is all about the cultural imperialism, the domination, the structure, the normalcy of the ‘way things are’ in our society” (Speight, 2007, p.129). This definition of internalized racism emphasizes the importance of context on social structures and social identities. The gendered-racial identities of African American young men are being shaped within the context of racism and stereotypical roles. Racism and stereotypical roles share a common thread, which is oppression. Stereotypical roles were birthed from the oppressive system of slavery and the images related to these roles are perpetuated in the status quo. It is important to distinguish between the constructs of internalized racism and stereotypical roles since

internalized racism has been operationalized primarily in the literature as the endorsement of stereotypes about one's racial or ethnic group. Victims of racism can support a variety of beliefs and attitudes that support oppression beyond stereotyping (Potapchuk, Leiderman, Bivens, & Major, 2005). Therefore, the endorsement of stereotypical roles is one of many by-products of systemic oppression.

Stereotypes

Racism and stereotypes born of racism have put African Americans at a unique standpoint in regards to identity and well-being, as African American identity in this country has been shaped by societal and environmental phenomena including the presence of racial and ethnic stereotypes. Racial and ethnic stereotypes have been widely studied in the literature. Stereotypes applied to Blacks have had lasting effects from their birth into slavery to the status quo. Stereotypical images can come about in varying degrees and at different times, and can also be internalized and experienced depending on the circumstance (West, 1995). Any understanding of how African American Adolescent male youth form identities would be incomplete without considering the stereotypes, messages, and media images that exist in our society about young Black men. Research suggests that by middle school, racial minority students are aware of and sometimes endorse societal stereotypes (McKown & Weinstein, 2003; Rowley et al., 2007). Much of the research on race-related stereotypes has focused on stereotype threat, a concept that was introduced by Steele (1997), who proposed that awareness of a social stereotype that reflects negatively on one's social group can negatively affect performance of group members.

Stereotypes of Black men in the educational arena have long assisted in hampering the school experiences of young African American men. Due to an

internalized belief in racial stereotypes and the influence of the social label of the Black man as a “villain,” many teachers, White and Black, hesitate to engage and interact in a close and nurturing way with Black boys and often fail to provide them with superior educational service (Noguera, 1997). Navigating stereotypical identities is a considerable challenge for black male students in schools (Noguera 2003). Research has documented how stereotypes influence black males’ lives in and out of the classroom (Carter, 2005; Lewis, 2003; Nasir et al., 2012), including youth’s own reflections on how they navigate being stereotyped and the burden this imposes upon them. For instance, Janelle Dance (2002) recounts an incident where, based on their clothing, a group of high school students were taken for “gangbangers” by a white observer. Dance (2002) points out how these racialized exchanges are a form of symbolic violence that reflect the tendency to “look at Black and Brown males, not see them, and then, assault them with stereotypes and negative racial icons that exemplify the subtle and pervasive exercise of symbolic power wielded by the American mainstream” (128).

Conchas, Oseguera, and Vigil (2012) discuss young black male students’ sentiments about how media portrayals of black men support various misconceptions of them as less capable and potentially dangerous. Young black men are required to navigate these acts of symbolic violence and are bound by the monolithic ideas about who they are. While still somewhat scarce, more investigations are being conducted that focus on media-driven stereotypes that haunt and harm Black men. In Rome’s (2004) book, he asserts that African American men are depicted as “Black Demons” by the U.S. media. As “Black Demons” African American men are stereotyped as prone to criminality and violence and unable to fit into society. This stereotype serves as a

justification for increased society created difficulties for Black men, including high rates of incarceration and close scrutiny. Black men have been stereotyped as an animal and brute in the years of American enslavement to his current stereotypical image as a gangster and thug, the Black male has maintained the stereotypical status of menace to society.

There is Masculinity and Then There is Black Masculinity

Research must continue to explore the intersection of identity factors (e.g. race, gender). The stereotypical roles examined in this study capture both gender and race; therefore, the construct of masculinity needs to be explored. The construct of masculinity is divided into male role norms and masculinity ideology (Pleck, Sorenstein, & Ku, 1993). Pleck (1981) in his seminal text, *The Myth of Masculinity*, challenged the male role norms model as incapable of fully describing the totality of men's experiences. Wade (1998) developed the theory of Male Reference Group Identity Dependence to address the questions of why men vary in their masculinity ideology and in their conformity to standards of masculinity. Male role norms refer to a culture's norms about how men should act; whereas, masculinity ideology refers to the individual's internalization of such norms (Doss & Hopkins, 1998).

In America, Black heterosexual masculinity has been strategically defined and Black men have had their identities prearranged for them (Hawkins, 1998). For too long, Black masculinity has been understood from a Eurocentric (hegemonic) standard. Hegemonic masculinity is defined as "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (Connell, 1995, p.77). The characteristics associated with White masculinity include assertiveness,

toughness, dominance, decisiveness, independence, ambitiousness, self-reliance, forcefulness, reliability, analytic ability, and competitiveness (White & Cones, 1999). Heavy reliance on the Euro-American masculine ideal places little or no value on such qualities as empathy, compassion, harmony within relationships, and the ability to identify and label emotions (White & Cones, 1999). White masculinity is in direct contrast to the Afrocentric view of masculinity which places an emphasis on human relationships and the “synthesis of opposites as a way of resolving conflict (White & Cones, p. 118). Dyson (2007) refers to the concept of manhood as the ability to impose harm or violence as inauthentic and the ability to define strength and accept vulnerability as inauthentic. He goes on to state that American notions of masculinity do not acknowledge the qualities of cooperation, negotiation, and compromise.

What is disturbingly absent from the political economy analysis of schooling is the racialized ideological constructions which foster negative beliefs about Blacks in general, and Black males in particular. The manner in which Black men have been characterized in American society has been well-documented (Howard, 2012; Ferguson, 2001; Madhubuti, 1990). A number of scholars have described the evolution of Black male characterizations over the past several centuries. Early 17th and 18th century images typically cast Black men as physically strong, mentally inept, hyper-sexed brutes who were well suited for slavery, and deemed to be subhuman. Over time, the image became more entrenched of Black men being lazy, docile, and inhumane savages. We have also witnessed the depiction of Black males as the Sambo or minstrel character, who only sought to entertain their superiors. Many of the twentieth century depictions painted Black males as pimps, thugs, hustlers, and law-breaking slicksters who were not to be trusted, were not worthy of equal treatment, and needed to be marginalized because they

were a “menace to society,” prone to violence, and constantly involved in gangs and drugs (Bogle, 2001; Diawara, 1993). These characterizations have become entrenched in the public mind through pseudo-scientific research, literary sources of the day, cinematic outlets, and persistent caricatures. These caricatures contributed to the development of an image that perpetuates widespread disdain for Black men.

Page (1999) contended that, “our assumptions about ‘Black male’ capability derive from the representation of African-American men in local and national media” (p. 99). If we can recognize that media production of Black male imagery is one of the many White cultural practices undergirding the formation of a new world order, then we must...“decolonize the production and dissemination of media representations by developing more appropriate modes of anthropological observation” (p. 99). The perpetuation of negative attitudes toward Black males is troubling because it often starts at an early age and becomes normalized in the national psyche. While still somewhat scarce, more investigations are being conducted that focus on media-driven stereotypes that haunt and harm Black men. In Rome’s (2004) book, he asserts that African American men are depicted as “Black Demons” by the U.S. media. As “Black Demons”, African American men are stereotyped as prone to criminality and violence and unable to fit into society. This stereotype serves as a justification for increased society created difficulties for Black men, including high rates of incarceration and scrutiny. Black men have been stereotyped as an animal and brute in the years of American enslavement to his current stereotypical image as a gangster and thug, the Black male has maintained the stereotypical status of menace to society.

In her field notes which summarized the “institutional narrative” on children and academic outcomes, Ferguson (2001) wrote:

“According to the statistics, the worse-behaved children in the school are Black and male, and when they take tests they score way below their grade level. They eat candy, refuse to work, fight, gamble, chase, hit, instigate, cut class, cut school...They are defiant, disruptive, disrespectful, and profane. These Black males fondle girls, draw obscene pictures, make lewd comments, intimidate others, and call teacher names. They are banished from the classroom to the hall, to the discipline office, to the suspension room, to the streets so that others can learn.” (p. 46)

Ferguson went on to further state that: “In the range of normalizing judgments, there is a group of African-American boys identified by school personnel as, in the words of a teacher, ‘unsalvageable.’” Furthermore, she stated that, “School personnel argue over whether these unsalvageable boys should be given access even to the special programs designed for those who are failing in school. Should resources defined as scarce, be wasted on these boys for whom there is no hope?” (p. 96). Accounts such as these provide further insight into the fact that the bad boy image of Black males occurs early and can often disrupt any efforts for normative social and psychological development. In addition to discussing the documented “institutional practices that produce social identities of at-risk, troublemakers, unsalvageables,” Ferguson (2001) analyzed “how and why many African-American boys actively distance and separate themselves from school as a desirable and authoritative object of identification while simultaneously embracing alternative subject positions as a means for becoming visible and gaining recognition in the social world” (p. 97). The Black males she encountered found it necessary to “actively configure self through two social identities, race and gender, to provide the social, psychic, and emotional resources for recouping a sense of self as competent and

admirable in an institutional setting where they have been categorized as problems or as failures” (p. 97).

Noguera (2003) has called for research that attempts to understand Black males’ perspectives on social imagery (images of violence)—particularly on how Black males interact and understand these images—and subsequently how they identify with them personally. His research revealed that Black males identified more strongly with images of individuals who avoided conflict than those that did not. These findings contradicted messages built into entertainment media that Black males strongly identify with individuals who perpetrate violence. In short, this relationship is nuanced and needs to be studied further if there is to be a revised, more compassionate, and humane notion of Black males. One of the challenges with social imagery is that the constructed descriptions and understandings of particular groups can be rooted in false depictions that ultimately present distorted notions of a group’s history, culture, practices, and norms (Bloor, 1991). This has been an ongoing challenge in the creation of an image for Black males. As a result, inaccurate portrayals of groups can contribute to the development and maintenance of deeply ingrained ideas and beliefs about groups that can profoundly shape their experiences in a given society. A number of important works have documented how race is a socially constructed concept that has been vital in creating social, political, and economic hierarchies in the U.S. (Gould, 1981; Marable, 1994). The concept of race permeates into the schools as well.

Black Male Experiences in a U.S. Context

Concerns about the lived experiences and perceived pathology of Black males have remained important topics for educators, researchers, policy analysts, and the

general public. These often-unqualified perceptions of Black male pathology tend to be divorced from an analysis of the social and structural obstacles facing many Black males. For instance, in his 2008 edited volume on poor, young, Black males in society, Elijah Anderson argues, “Living in areas of concentrated ghetto poverty, still shadowed by slavery and second-class citizenship, many Black males are trapped in a cycle that includes active discrimination, unemployment, crime, poverty, prison, and early death” (p. 3). When a few act out violently to these forms of oppression, with media assistance, the implications for other Black men is expansive. As a result, Black males are assumed violent and untrustworthy, simply based on their skin color. The image of the Black male is seen with fear and suspicion. As previously discussed in the introductory chapter, Duncan (2002) argues that Black males suffer a condition characteristic of a population that is beyond love. This is:

“a condition of those who are excluded from society’s economy and networks of care and thus expelled from useful participation in social life...Black males are constructed as a strange population... as a group with values and attitudes that are fundamentally different from other students, their marginalization and oppression are understood as natural and primarily of their own doing” (p. 140).

This description is a common occurrence for Black males in society. Many young males are targeted in decrepit school environments that have become militarized police zones for many urban centers. The schooling environment, which some consider to be a place where gaps can be equalized, is not always conducive to success for Black students (especially males).

In the U.S., African Americans have historically been denied access to an equitable, high quality education (Anderson, 1988; DuBois, 1903; Kozol, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Rury, 2013; Wilder, 2013; Woodson, 1933). Historic differences in

educational opportunities have resulted in a persistent pattern of disparate educational outcomes between African American students and their counterparts in other racial and ethnic groups (Anderson, 1988; DuBois, 1903; Losen & Orfield, 2002; Rebell & Wolff, 2008; Rury, 2013; Tyack & Cuban, 1995; USDOE, 2014; Wilder, 2013). African American students, and African American males in particular, encounter a variety of structural inequities that engender negative school experiences and contribute to poor academic performance (Delpit, 1995; DuBois, 1903; Hopkins, 1997; Howard, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2009; Noguera, 2008; Schott Foundation, 2012, 2015; Woodson, 1933). Such inequities include lack of access to qualified teachers, inequitable school resource allocation, race-based academic tracking patterns, and discriminatory discipline practices (Haberman, 2005; Kozol, 2005; Mickelson, Smith, & Nelson, 2015; Rebell & Wolff, 2008; Steinberg & Kinchloe, 2007; USDOE, 2014).

As a group, African American males experience higher occurrences of school dropouts, special education placements and school suspensions and expulsions (Cartledge, Gibson & Keys, 2012; Dixon-Roman, 2013; Harry, Klingner, & Cramer, 2007; Kim, Losen, & Hewitt, 2010; Kunjufu, 2005). Additionally, African American males encounter higher rates of school failure and grade retention, and report heightened levels of academic disengagement (Harmon, 2002; Moore & Flowers, 2012; Noguera, 2008; Schott Foundation, 2012, 2015). Educational research demonstrates that race-based differences in school effects can lead African American students to obtain lower grades, attain lower standardized test scores, and experience higher dropout rates than their peers in other racial and ethnic groups (Buddin & Zamarro, 2009; Codrington & Fairchild,

2010; Ford, 2006; Lynn, Bacon, Totten, Bridges, & Jennings, 2010; Rudd, 2014; Wildhagen, 2012).

Although the body of research demonstrates how racial differences in educational treatment contribute to differences in school performance between African American students and their counterparts, persistent racial disparities in educational outcomes have consistently been framed as an “achievement gap,” or difference in academic performance, primarily between Black and White students (Barton & Coley, 2010; Chambers, 2009; Ford, 2006; Haycock, 2001; Jencks & Philips, 1998; Walton & Wiggan, 2014). This deficit-based perspective suggests that the students themselves, rather than school-based structural inequities, are responsible for the differences in academic performance between African American students and their counterparts in other racial and ethnic groups (Barton & Coley, 2010; Chambers, 2009; Coleman, 1966; Payne, 2005; Pitre, 2014). The achievement gap narrative has become a widely accepted framework for examining racial disparities in school performance (Barton & Coley, 2010; Brewster & Stephenson, 2014; Chambers, 2009; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Haycock, 2001; Pitre, 2014; Taylor, 2006). This deficit-based perspective has led to the implementation of instructional and administrative practices, which perpetuate academic disengagement, promote low achievement and engender school failure for Black males (Chambers, 2009; Fink, 2002; Ford, Harris, Tyson, & Trotman, 2002).

One way that the “achievement gap” has been addressed is through the No Child Left Behind Act, which attends to teacher quality and accountability, particularly with historically marginalized students. Unfortunately, in an attempt to improve educational quality for all students, acceptable conceptions of teaching and curriculum have become

narrowed to the point that content knowledge is valued over pedagogical knowledge (Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002). In essence, being a smart person is favored over learning and perfecting one's teaching craft, which attends to the sociocultural nature of teaching and learning. Without this basic assumption guiding instruction, teachers are more likely to teach students in a "one size fits all" approach that has the potential to reproduce the social inequities facing people of color in the larger society.

One obstacle facing African American males in particular is the disproportionate rate with which they are placed into special education programs (Kunjufu, 2009). Critiquing the subjective and socioculturally influenced nature of special education classification and identification, Harry and Anderson (1994) argued, among other things, that African American males are frequently identified as severely emotionally disturbed as a result of teachers' and other professionals' misinterpretation of their behaviors and communication styles. They further argued that such a label may affect both expectations and the types of curriculum and intellectual activities that African American males may access. If African American males represent the majority of students who are identified as needing special services and are thus limited by their lack of educational access, it is not a farfetched conclusion to believe they may be severely hindered in their ability to achieve particular educational outcomes.

Some conceptions for solving the "African American male problem," favor training and/or socializing African American males into assimilating White heteronormative ideas of masculinity. Majors and Billson (1991) have argued that as a means of maintaining their masculine and racial identity, African American males develop coping mechanisms that often create conflicts among them, their teachers, and

other school officials. For instance, the enactment of an aloof attitude that is at times displayed among African American males as a means of protecting how vulnerable or violated they feel may communicate to teachers and other school officials that they do not care about their education and/or adhering to school policies. Conversely, this posturing may also represent a cultural style that African American males adopt as part of their identification with being a Black male.

Approaching the problem of cultural dissonance between African American males and their teachers from the perspective of teaching them discipline potentially maintains hegemonic ideals of masculinity that undermine the cultural expressions and enactments of masculinity performed by African American males. Pedagogy that accurately interprets these behaviors and allows room for them within conceptualizations of what it means to be academically successful may provide more opportunities for African American adolescent males to recognize how their cultural identities may be viewed as strengths within academic settings and in society in general. The inability for teachers to understand the cultural differences among the students that they teach leads to a disproportionate amount of Black and Brown youth being sanctioned.

School to Prison Pipeline and Discipline

“The school-to-prison pipeline named that because it appears actively to collect school-aged youth and funnel them toward a future in prison. Consequently, the school-to-prison pipeline implicates the educational system in the structuring of a path that leads to incarceration” (Simmons, 2009, p. 229).

The school system is often a funnel for Black and Latino youth and structure experiences that prime these students for entry into the prison system, also referred to as the “school-to-prison pipeline” (Butler, Robinson, & Walton, 2014; Meiners and Winn,

2010; Simmons, 2009). Structural racism, the criminalization of Black males, race and class privilege, and zero-tolerance policies in school settings contribute to the increasing number of students being directed to prison (Monroe, 2005). The place where education is thought to take place is also a place where we see other functions of school, such as, socializing, social control, and sorting (Noguera, 2003). These latent functions of the school are powerful in helping to determine the educational and life trajectories of the students entrusted to its system on a daily basis and unfortunately, a life in prison becomes a possibility as a result of these oppressive measures. The main purpose for public schools in the context of youth of color is to ensure that this population accepts a subordinate role in schools, the economy, and society (Duncan, 2000). Duncan (2000) argues the relationship among schooling Black males, the global economy, and the prison-industrial complex is significantly related to three main areas: the service industry, popular culture and media, and the curricula in public schools. He argues that:

These domains work through adolescents of color to construct them as a superfluous population for whom society views prison as a reasonable, if not natural option...urban pedagogies are the means by which information, images, symbols, are proliferated in, and disseminated to, urban populations. As is characteristic of all instructional processes, urban pedagogies have intention, direction, and purpose. Pedagogies are designed to forge identities by inculcating in students behaviors, attitudes and values, by mobilizing their fears, joys, and desires, and by shaping their tastes and perceptions (p. 36).

In 1975, the Children's Defense Fund first examined racial disproportionately associated with school suspensions in the nation. Today the discipline gap, or tendency for African American students to be sanctioned more frequently and severely than their peers, is present in almost every school system throughout the United States (Losen & Gillespie, 2012). These racial and socioeconomic inequalities have been extensively documented in existing research, specifically in the areas of discipline disproportionality,

the school-to-prison pipeline, academic achievement, and school resource inequities in urban schools (Kim, Losen, & Hewitt, 2010; Kozol, 2005; Lewis, Butler, Bonner, & Joubert, 2010). However, a more extensive examination of the economic and social impacts of urbanization is needed to better understand school discipline.

Disciplinary sanctions are imposed in effort to maintain safety, by removing students who are disruptive to the learning environment. Yet, research demonstrates that most Black students receive suspensions or expulsions for non-threatening behavior (Skiba, 2009). Racial bias in the practice of school discipline is part of a broader discourse concerning the undeniable presence of institutional racism or structural inequity in education (Nieto, 2000). Townsend (2000) reported that African American males are suspended at a rate three times their White counterparts. Discipline policy violations often also differed between racial groups. Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson (2012) found that White students tended to be suspended for “serious” violations (e.g., weapons and drugs), while African American students were more likely to be suspended for nebulous infractions such as “disrespect” or “appearing threatening” (Lewis et al., 2010; Skiba et al., 2012). As a result, many minority students perceive bias in the disciplinary practices of their teachers and administrators (Sheets, 2002). In a study citing the perceptions of students in an urban high school in the Pacific Northwest, individuals of all socioeconomic statuses (SES) detected bias in disciplinary practices aimed at students of low socioeconomic status, specifically (Skiba et. al, 2012).

Much of the national data agrees that there is a disparity in the discipline practices in many schools, especially towards Black males. Many Black male students have been tracked into special education and disciplined at disproportion number, as a result of

teacher biases and cultural mismatch (Kunjufu, 2000; Townsend, 2000). Currently, Black males are overrepresented in special education programs for emotional disturbance (ED), emotional/ behavior disorder (EBD), learning disabilities (LD) and mental retardation (MR) compared to their counterparts (Schott Foundation, 2012). Special education referrals and testing usually derive from subjective interpretations of student behavior, which is another component of cultural mismatch (Skiba et al., 2008). Low-income students in urban schools are more likely to be referred to special education due to unequal educational opportunities and lower expectations from teachers (Irvine, 1990). As a result of discipline disproportionality and alarming suspension rates, many schools fail to meet the needs of African American students, especially Black males.

Cultural Synchronization

As a remedy for cultural mismatch, scholars have proposed *cultural synchronization* as a needed area of further research. Irvine (1990) defined cultural synchronization as the alignment and parallel between school and home environment of students. Irvine (1990) and others have presented compelling arguments regarding detrimental effects that result from a lack of cultural synchronization between teachers and students. Examples include the development of deficit views among teachers, the deterioration of interpersonal respect between teachers and students, increased attention to controlling student behavior, and poor use of instructional time (ibid.). However, few scholars have studied that the presence of cultural synchronization and the effects on classroom discipline.

Irvine (1990) emphasizes that if a teacher is familiar with students' cultural backgrounds, this enables teachers to draw on shared knowledge that honors students'

heritage and preexisting knowledge. Irvine and Fraser (1998) termed African American teachers as *warm demanders*. They argued that many Black teachers often employ a firm, authoritative orientation that serves as the foundation of their interactions with students. Warm demanders often use stern voice tones, word choices, and demeanors that clearly model to the students what is expected from them in terms of how to behave (Irvine and Fraser, 1998). Some people may think that warm demanders have a harsh method of discipline, while members of the Black community interpret this as showing concern and care (Delpit, 2006; Gordon, 1998). An implication of the shift to culturally responsive discipline may be that teachers learn to adopt disciplinary strategies that address inappropriate behavior in meaningful ways and often avoid office referrals by addressing the minor infractions in class. Gilmore (1985) and others have demonstrated how a lack of cultural synchronization between teachers and students contributes to disproportionate disciplinary actions, particularly among boys. As Irvine (1990) mentions, “the language, style of walking, glances, and dress of Black children, particularly males, has engendered fear, apprehension, and overreaction among many teachers and school administrators” (p. 27). Gordon’s (1998) study of inner-city African American educators suggests that teachers often use voice tones, facial expressions, and word choices that convey a strong and intense style.

In schools, the neediest children are often punished as the system tends to focus on managing student behaviors and controlling their bodies rather than educating them (Noguera, 2003). The focus on discipline and punishment is falsely considered more central to the school’s success and quality education often takes a back seat to the other priorities of control. Under this regime of control, students are often labeled as behavioral

problems resulting in a stigma that tends to follow them throughout their school experiences. Some researchers show that the practice of labeling along with exclusionary discipline practices have the potential to create a self-fulfilling prophecy that often results in negative student behaviors that become habitual (Noguera, 2003). As students internalize the label placed upon them by the institution, they are perceptive enough to begin to notice that their educational trajectories will not get them to the same levels as others and begin to view school as a waste of time. “Once they know that the rewards of education—namely, acquisition of knowledge and skills and ultimately, admission to college, and access to good paying jobs—are not available to them, students have little incentive to comply with school rules” (Noguera, 2003, p. 343).

School teaches them, in other words, that it is not here to work for them. In addition, the disciplinary practices in schools closely resemble our approach to crime in the larger society. We attempt to remove the “bad apples” before they spoil the rest. These exclusionary practices keep students out of the classroom and are seen as methods that allow the students that “want to learn” the space to do so without being distracted by the students who are assumed to have no interest in learning. Seldom are the institutional barriers to student learning called into question. Schools, for these students, serve as places where oppression and repression are reified. Not only do they face these harsh realities in the world, but the school re-inscribes their second-class citizenship and reproduces systems of inequity. Not only are inequalities reproduced in urban educational spaces, but as previously argued these tactics are part of the prepping for students to enter the prison industrial complex (Ferguson, 2001).

Black Males and Education

Unfortunately, social scientists' infatuation with describing the "crisis" faced by African American males and the media's depiction of them as entertainers, sports figures, and/or criminals renders invisible the everyday successes of African American males as they go about being responsible citizens, contributing to their communities, and providing for their families (Howard & Flenbaugh, 2011). Stereotypes of Black men in the educational arena have long assisted in hampering the school experiences of young African American men. Due to an internalized belief in racial stereotypes and the influence of the social label of the Black man as a "villain," many teachers, White and Black, hesitate to engage and interact in a close and nurturing way with Black boys and often fail to provide them with superior educational service (Noguera, 1997).

Microaggressions in the School Environment

The current body of literature about African American male secondary educational experiences, concerning racial microaggressions, is primarily situated within the intersection of two categories. *Structural* pertains to systemic policies and climates (Losen & Skiba, 2010; Vega et al., 2012). *Individual* discusses teacher curriculum and deficit thinking (Q. Allen; 2012; Ighodaro & Wiggan, 2011; Landsman & Lewis, 2011). The rest focuses on educational disenfranchisement related to systemic racism. Lewis, Bonner, Butler, and Joubert (2010) asserts that historically marginalized populations disproportionately receive greater punitive repercussions when compared to their White peers, and are punished harsher for less serious acts of delinquency (Losen & Skiba, 2010; Losen et. al, 2015). Further studies explore perceptions of teachers caring little about Black male learning, administrators who disproportionately suspend Black males at

greater rates than their White male peers and ever increasing expulsion rates of Black males for minor infractions (Howard, 2008; Noguera, 2003; Losen & Skiba, 2010).

Along these same lines, Black males within secondary schools are frequently academically tracked into less rigorous courses, which denigrates their educational experiences thereby placing this group of students in further jeopardy of being unprepared to enter college (A. Allen et al., 2013). Being underprepared also has cultural connotations that are present in secondary classrooms where curriculum violence occurs. According to Ighodaro and Wiggan (2011), curriculum violence is representative of centering majoritarian values and narratives as relevant while excluding the truths of people color with the purpose of continuing oppression. These school institutional practices, which are coupled with teacher cultural biases, only serve to disadvantage many minority youth in the school system.

The adverse cultural, academic, and social effects of race-related interactions on African American students in K–20 educational learning environments has been broached by various scholars (Allen, 2010; Allen, Scott, & Lewis, 2013, Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2007). These studies highlight the point that racism is endemic and harms those who experience it. Exposure to racism and racial microaggressions have been found to have unfavorable effects on African American students' learning outcomes across secondary and college contexts that are primarily related to academic and social-capital- accruing experiences. These experiences disrupt the acquisition of academic and social capital by African American students (Feagin, 1992; Loo & Rolison, 1986; Steele & Aronson, 1995).

High school educational environments and Black males experience systemic racial microaggressions in the form of discipline policies (e.g. zero tolerance), academic tracking, and hegemonic curriculum (Allen, Scott, & Lewis, 2013); practices which limit in-class instructional time, that leads increases college unpreparedness and reinforce the miseducation of history. Black males in high school are more likely than their White male peers to have high school trancies and be viewed as intentionally sinister (Allen, 2010; Allen, Scott, & Lewis, 2013). White teachers and administrators label Black males as deviant for issues like talking in class, dress code violations, and being tardy (Skiba et al., 2011). Deficit perceptions about African American students as held by White teachers and administrators serve as sources of racial microaggressions within K–12 context. White teachers' stereotypical perceptions of Black males are due to cultural incongruences that are based on inaccurate racial assumptions of deviance and ultimately create hostile learning environments for these students (Allen, 2012; Landsman & Lewis, 2011).

The scholarship of Allen, Scott, and Lewis (2013) intensifies the scrutiny of the school context, as a set of conditions, which impact the actions of learner. Applying the lens of Critical Race Theory, Allen et al. (2013) uncover the impact of racial microaggressions that permeate school environment and its ability to impact the actions, or inactions, of the learner. An environment riddled with micro-insults, subtle invalidations, deficit-based perspectives of students, a pedagogy of poverty, and hyper criminalization, scholarship assert that urban learners are tasked with developing a healthy racial and ethnic identity and aspire to the ideas of educational attainment (Allen et. al., 2013; Haberman, 2010;

Similarly, mainstream discourses about African American students and education create the illusion of Black intellectual inferiority and a devaluing of education. However, an examination of historical research focused on African Americans and education, as revealed above in the words of Frederick Douglass, reveals African Americans' unwavering commitment to education for the realization of freedom, humanity, and racial uplift. Perry (2003) theorized about what is required for African American students to achieve academic success and argued that segregated schools produced students who were able to maintain high academic standards and ethnic integrity because of the "counterhegemonic figured communities" (p. 91) created within their schools. Hip Hop Scholar, Bettina Love, discusses this perception in her recent article, "I See Trayvon Martin". She explains, "Negative social constructs regarding Black males are ubiquitous to American life and, therefore, reach every corner of our schools...[T]oo often, teachers make judgments concerning Black male students having nothing to do with their intellectual ability and everything to do with stereotypes, assumptions, and fear" (2014). This suggests that no one is exempt from these dynamics and must work diligently to internally examine the beliefs that inform how they treat those around them—critical work for all teachers.

As a result of Black males' negative interactions with White educators, we better understand how these students are disenfranchised throughout the education setting. Across the previous research findings, Black students perceive school as not viewing "them as allies in education or as victims of the disruptive environment. Instead, they are frequently treated as the source of the problem, as hopeless cases against whom the school struggles" (Mateu-Gelabert & Lune, 2007, p. 188). Being treated as the K-12

problem source is a phenomenon experienced by Black males across a variety of systemic and individual racial microaggressions in educational spaces. The common thread of the structural and individual research is that race- and gender-based impingements adversely affect the Black males holistically within K–12.

This study contributes to the limited body of literature about the application of Black male coping strategies as a result of experiencing racial microaggressions and racialized experiences in learning environments. Consequently, youth in society wrestle with so many issues on a daily basis. However, youth from urban contexts often also have to wrestle with other issues as they relate to race, class, and negative perceptions. The negative life, societal, and academic circumstances that Black males face have been well documented. The inequalities and injustices that Black young men face in the educational, political, economic, judicial, and social arenas can make establishing positive and healthy identities extremely difficult, which is why coping mechanisms and strategies to buffer those inequalities and injustices is more important than ever. The next section will explore literature written regarding the use of spoken word as one of those possible coping mechanisms.

Spoken Word

Spoken Word Performance Poetry is a form of oral poetry that dates back to protest songs of the civil rights era, and even to African storytelling traditions. It combines elements of poetic verse, music, and theater. Traditional poetic forms, other performance poets, rap, and hip-hop songs (Ingalls, 2012; Parmar & Bain, 2007) can influence poets. "Commonly referred to as simply 'spoken word', the naming of the form itself stands in contrast to the 'written word' in which the verse of the Western literary canon is traditionally composed and experienced" (Parmar & Bain, 2007, p. 131). Langston Hughes and other Harlem Renaissance poets, as well as

beatnik poets such as Jack Kerouac influenced performance poetry heavily from the 1920s to the 1950s. Poets of the Harlem Renaissance era did not attempt to write like the Western poetry they had read, but instead embraced their own culture, history, and struggles. Beatnik poets, while not typically black, mirrored improvisation techniques already present in African American writing, and are widely known for their stage presence (Parmar & Bain, 2007). Spoken word grew further during the Black Arts Movement (1965-1975) with influential poets such as Amiri Baraka, Nikki Giovanni, and Sonia Sanchez (Parmar & Bain, 2007).

Other authors state that the origins of spoken word include the continent of Africa and countries of Greece, Spain, and Japan (Ingalls, 2012). While spoken word may not have commonly been thought of as similar to hip-hop music, the two art forms are closely related and have many areas of intersection. For example, the performance poet and hip-hop emcee use similar vocal techniques to communicate similar themes in their artistic works. Rappers often do not refer to themselves as spoken word artists because of the aesthetic difference in their songs, but the energy and excitement of both live hip hop shows and spoken word performances are similar (Parmar & Bain, 2007). Parmar and Bain (2007) write: "In a cultural context, both use powerful language to articulate the experiences and marginality that African American and Latino working-class people experience" (p. 131). Hip hop battles, which emerged in the 1970s, are improvised performances in which two emcees go back and forth in a "lyrical boxing match" (Parmar & Bain, 2007, p. 141). Similarly, poetry slams allow poets to compete by performing their pieces for a few minutes at a time and then are judged by audience members (Parmar & Bain, 2007). The popularity of hip-hop has also influenced young people to write performance poetry to express their feelings and views (Ingalls, 2012).

Performance poetry and hip-hop are relevant mediums to help teens develop their voices and positive assets, particularly in the areas of support, empowerment, constructive use of time, and positive identity (Search Institute, 2007). They are cultural art forms that have been shown to engage, empower, and motivate the adolescent population (Clay, 2006). Hip-hop can create physical and psychological spaces for youth that are conducive to community building and resiliency (Payne & Gibson, 2009). A school-based intervention with African American males showed that incorporating hip-hop to illustrate both individual and community empowerment contributed to improvements in several of their developmental assets as well as their energy and enthusiasm (Travis & Ausbrooks, 2012).

A participatory research program with female adolescents combined the creation of spoken word poetry with researching issues that were important to the group. They created a performance piece called "Echoes" which was about *Brown vs. the Board of Education* Supreme Court case. Another youth wrote a spoken word piece about things she witnessed in her life, such as a peer being arrested and being taken away in squad car (Torre, Fine, Alexandre, & Genao, 2007). Through this program, youth were able to stand up for what they believed in and start conversations between themselves and audience members. They created a space to talk about social injustice and collective responsibility (Torre, et al., 2007). Furthermore, Ingalls (2012) argues, "Spoken-word requires its participants not only to write, but also to show up, to stand behind their perspectives in the spotlight, and to receive immediate audience response" (p. 100). She believes that spoken word helps youth not only express themselves and their experiences, but become "poet-citizens" who have an ability to express their political and social beliefs

to others (Ingalls, 2012, p. 101). Youth learn that they can influence their communities with their writing and performances and learn to collaborate with other youth artists. The increase in local and regional poetry slam competitions as well as The National Poetry Slam shows both the interest and significance of performance poetry to young people (Ingalls, 2012).

Lozenski and Smith (2012) used performance art forms such as spoken word, hip-hop, and popular culture to help Somali immigrant youth build their literacy skills in a way that was interesting and relevant to them. They described this program as a culturally relevant pedagogy, which has been successful in helping students from low income households or cultural minorities to succeed in school. As experienced performing artists themselves, Lozenski and Smith (2012) worked with primarily young Somali females by helping them create spoken word and hip-hop pieces. Programmatic components included tutoring, open gym, open mic sessions, and interactive learning activities which often involved composing and performing a poem, rap, or essay. These activities not only successfully helped students develop literacy skills, but also allowed them to reflect upon and develop their identities. Students also took part in meaningful discussions about parts of their identities that mattered to them, such as gender, religion, ethnicity, and language (Lozenski & Smith, 2012).

In adolescent females, thinking critically about race and gender through a therapy utilizing a feminist hip-hop framework helped to increase their confidence and secure identities and relationships (Veltre & Hadley, 2012). Rap therapy offers a modality that is both strengths-based and youth-centered. It integrates elements of hip-hop culture into therapy to facilitate development (Alvarez, 2012). Alvarez used performance-based

groups to engage young men of color in therapy. He writes, "Participants learn to use rap as a springboard for discussion and as a conduit for positive peer interaction. Youth also learn to use the program to talk about their struggles, seek advice from peers, problem solve, and re-author their narratives from a strength-based perspective" (Alvarez, 2012, p. 124). A longitudinal study of eighteen African American youth showed that a school curriculum which centered around studying hip-hop music, music production, and other related skills created a culture of excellence, taught applicable skills in music, technology, business, communication, and networking, and "made things I thought about come true" (Anderson, 2011, p. 165). Students involved in the after-school and summer hip-hop programs moved from being in a stage of aspiration to a stage of professionalism. Their grades improved and they realized the importance of school in their real lives (Anderson, 2011).

Of course, poetry as a pedagogical tool of possibilities will not solve every educational crisis that is rampant in urban contexts; however, poetry can be used as a form of critical literacy. Consequently, poetry offers a way for unrecognized or traditionally underrepresented cultural groups to imagine and (re)name their experiences, and possibly re(author) their narratives, as well as to assist with rebuilding of identity among Black males. Consequently, this study adds to literature of Black males by challenging the racial stereotypes and re (writing) the racial identities of Black males through the use of spoken word poetry.

Spoken Word: Resistance, Coping, and Cultural Responsiveness

The voices of youth often are ignored in an adult-driven world. Poetry fosters what McCormick (2000) calls an "aesthetic safe zone" where they can be themselves and

embrace their own experiences. Thus, poetry has the potential to be a “sanctuary” of sorts where youth can claim a sense of space.

Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity.

--Chimamanda Adichie (2009)

Gloria Ladson-Billings (1999) clarifies that the ‘voice’ component of Critical Race Theory (CRT) provides a way to communicate the experiences and realities of the oppressed, a first step in understanding the complexities of racism...” (p.16). Voice, as seen through the lens of critical race theory, is about “naming one’s own reality with stories” and doing so in a way that clarifies oppression (Ladson-Billings, 1999, p. 16). Without voice, the language of the colonizer is used to explain the experience of being colonized, and those of the colonizer use the dominant language to try to explain that racism (Smith, 1999; Thiong’o, 1986; Wright, 1957).

June Jordan taught poetry as a way of helping students make sense of their own lives. Her approach was powerful specifically because she saw the world around us being committed to what Donald Maceo (2006) terms “stupidification,” where people see the world around us through the silencing lenses of mass corporate media. Jordan clarified that black males must be taught to navigate the structural and personal levels of oppression that they face. Developing voice makes sense of the oppression one lives, while making sense of the world around them.

Exploring the multiple literacies of young people’s everyday lives, these essays focus on “voluntary productions of literacy texts outside of school” (Mahiri, 2004, p. 11).

Such contextualized literacy or communicative practices include what Mahiri calls “street scripts” or writing by a particular group of African American youth, “most likely to be written off as failures” (p. 45). These urban youth construct narratives about their complicated lives and offer their analysis of “being young, urban, and African American” (p. 19). In a response to Mahiri’s research, Noguera sees such expression of “those without power” as a “potent form of resistance” (2004, p. 43). That is, the “street scripts” run counter to normative depictions of deficient urban youth living in violent, crime-ridden communities. Further, Mahiri (2004) deems the youth-authored narratives as worthy of the same kind of attention given canonical literature and challenges what is and what is not valued as “permissible forms of writing” (p. 20) in schools.

Although Gallagher (2007) writes about the possibilities of theater and drama education in schools, the results from this study extend her notions of creating spaces to out-of-school contexts where youth are able celebrate their plural identities and are afforded opportunities to grapple with the tensions within and between participants. If we are to take seriously the concept of democratic education, we should recognize such creative spaces as Youth Voices that integrate media literacy in teaching and learning, as also a potential space for cultivating critical literacy and civic engagement. Social justice approaches to African American language and literacies require repositioning black youth voices from the margins to the center. Regarding the education reform movement, black youth are absent from the proverbial table concerning U.S. public education policies and practices, despite their capability to articulate what they need to succeed. Routinely silenced or rendered invisible, youth of color thrive in community-based spaces dedicated to positive youth leadership development (Ginwright, 2009).

In *Masculinities at School*, Murtadha-Watts theorizes Black masculinity construction in urban schools, and locates hip-hop as one of the crucial sites of identity negotiation for Black male youth. She states that educators cannot ignore a culture that has so much significance and impact on the lives of Black male youth. As it relates to schools and hip-hop, Murtadha-Watts suggests that Black males adoption of hip-hop's cultural forms and practices is in response and reaction to dominant, mainstream codes and values produced in schools. The historical demonization and fear of the Black males as a menace to society; the disproportionate suspension and expulsion rates at two-three times the general population; the escalating high school dropout rates; the contradictions between getting a high school diploma in relationship to escalating unemployment rates; and the exacerbation of school-to-prison pipelines, shapes their identity in ways that re-adjusts their frame of reference, given the social world in which they live (Noguera, 2005; hooks, 2004; Ferguson, 2001; Kunjufu, 1995). In this way, the subjectivity of Black male identity is situated within and between a racialized cultural politics of exclusion and rejection, which has sufficiently rendered these youth as public outcasts.

In a study about high school youth in Philadelphia, Camitta (1993) notes that poetry is a personal and social act of invention. It is where youth can appropriate cultural materials and incorporate them into their own forms of text. It is a genre that assembles and reassembles what had been conventions of formal literature. This type of vernacular writing is a means to "authenticate the individual through the process of discovery, inscribing the experience of the individual in time, and becoming a souvenir of that experience" (Camitta, 1993, p. 243). The sharing of experiences through writing and

reading further validates the students' identities. It is a reminder of the importance of reinforcing students' abilities and active roles in class.

Jocson (2009), Fisher (2005, 2007) are a few authors who documented the positive impact of spoken word poetry in the classroom; however, there is a gap in literature about the use of spoken word poetry with Black males to form identity and make sense of their identity. In her study, "A Unified Poet Alliance: The Personal and Social Outcomes of Youth Spoken Word Programming" (2010), Weinstein used interviews and observations compiled over three years (2006-2009) of working with "Wordplay," a teen poetry group in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, to support her position on spoken word poetry. She emphasized that it helps students develop literate identities; builds literacy skills, self-esteem, motivation, and fosters a sense of community. As such, it is Weinstein's hope that educators and academics pay "attention to the potential for the arts generally, and literacy arts in particular, to help us think differently about teaching and learning" (p. 22). New Literacy Studies, a scholarly movement "which posits literacy practices as multiple and as based in specific social contexts, theoretically frame Weinstein's work. Weinstein believes that within the forum of spoken word poetry, young people can and do engage directly with these power dynamics while expressing their social identities.

Herndon and Weiss (2001) points out that spoken word expresses a shared language with the audience and demands that we see our community and ourselves in a new light. In addition, spoken word seeks to break down barriers and forge relationships where dialog and true change can take place. Anglesey (1999) concludes that spoken word affirms passionate, even shocking, expression and offers ethical insights for solving

the most severe problems plaguing society. Lastly, Sparks & Grochowski (2002), in their work with young youth, argue that spoken word serves as a method for young people in reinventing language, defining themselves, and mapping their social communities. Moreover, this particular form of poetry provides politically charged testimonies of their own realities and experiences through spoken word, while providing this population of youth with a voice to be heard and a space for their stories to be shared.

In building upon the Fisher, Jocson, & Kinloch (2005) conceptualization of *literocracy*, or, “the intersection of literacy and democracy,” we explore the meshing of oral, auditory, and written forms of literacy “while emphasizing that language processes exist in partnership with action” (p. 92). After a proper and safe space is created, youth engagement in spoken word allows them to face oppression while empowering them to use their voices to inform and to protest against sociopolitical and historical injustices. When that space is provided, youth are willing to share and enlighten their elders with their respective concerns, thoughts, and aspirations. This is critical for teachers because too many times youth voices are dismissed due to academic priorities (e.g., tests, standards, homework). Consequently, spoken word provides the teachers and students the opportunity to create meaningful relationships that leads to academic achievement (Fisher, Jocson, & Kinloch, 2005).

As previously stated, black males are often discussed in educational literature, but their actual voices are often missing from the central analysis (Howard, 2001; Sealey-Ruiz & Green, 2011). In an educational context, a method that is similar to counter-storytelling is the concept of student voice. A number of studies point to the importance of centering the voices of youth, which is also an aim of Critical Race Theory (CRT).

Howard (2001) argues that if the policies and practices in school are created with students' best interests in mind, there is no reason for their voices not to be centered. "The scant attention paid to students' voice is inexcusable given their role as the primary clientele in K-12 schools" (p. 132). As the "primary clientele" in school settings, students should have the space to articulate the concerns, needs, and desires for their education. Students have the ability to understand and articulate in complicated ways, their lived realities in educational settings (Cook-Sather, 2002, 2006; Fielding, 2001; Howard, 2001; Lincoln, 1995; Mitra, 2001, 2004, 2009; Sealey-Ruiz & Greene, 2010). According to Mitra (2001), "Because youth are keenly aware of the problems that face their communities and their schools, student voice initiatives can help to foster educational change" (p. 313).

This focus on student voice does not come without complications. Researchers that assert student voice as uniform run the risk of not seeing differences among students, their outlooks, and their needs (Cook-Sather, 2006). Furthermore, it is understood that in the traditional school setting students and teachers are not treated as equals with the same authority to make fundamental changes (Fielding, 2004). In order for the inclusion of student voice to move beyond rhetorical calls for their inclusion, teachers have to be willing and open to hearing and honoring these voices (Lincoln, 1995). She argues, "...too little emphasis is placed on eliciting and negotiating students' contributions to curriculum and on demonstrating how students can help to structure their own learning experiences" (p. 89). The experiences and voices of youth are important to educational research. Silencing the voices of students in educational research has led to misguided theories, programs, and practices (Howard, 2002). If methodologies have been used to

silence, then methodologies can also give voice to people of color and “turn the margins into places of transformative resistance” (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 39). There are additional studies that use CRT to highlight the experiences of marginalized populations in a number of settings (see: Harper, 2009; Solorzano & Ornelas, 2002; Lynn, et al. 2010).

Critical Race Theory is important to my work as a framing theoretical standpoint as well as a methodology to center the counter-narratives of Black youth navigating their lives as Black males in society. When life at the margins is constantly under the gaze of opposition and surveillance; and the standardization of education and curriculum has removed itself from the everyday lived realities of Black male youth; identity formation, which is always contested and negotiated within the subject, shifts into spaces such as the culture of spoken word poetry. Many studies on Black male students in schools have focused on an analysis of educational outcomes and failure, resistance, accommodation, and reform (Allen, 2010). These studies have highlighted the experiences of Black males in school and the ways in which they are marginalized in the educational system. Students are suffering in an environment that situates them as a problem and is not conducive to their holistic growth and development. Students are continuously bombarded with negative images, words, and actions. These assaults should not be disregarded and must be understood as having a cumulative effect on the academic and social outcomes of young black males.

The use of spoken word poetry in a community based setting provides a space where youth workers and students are able to engage in a discussion that captures the lived realities of all participants and serve as a site of resistance. Within

the setting, spoken word poetry can serve as a bridge to connect the often blurred realities for both the oppressed and the oppressor (Freire, 1970). An urban youth of color who has experienced trauma can benefit from spoken word and performance poetry as an outlet to creatively express themselves in an effort to transform their pain into power and use that power to promote social justice for other vulnerable populations. Poetry Ink would provide urban male youth with a space to heal from the cultural and racial trauma experienced directly or indirectly through social and academic experiences as Black males.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Chapter three addressed the design of the study and the methodology used. Included in this chapter are the research questions, study design, selection of participants, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis procedures. In this chapter, I discussed the methods and procedures that were used in my study of the social and academic experiences of African American boys in an out of school arts-based program as a third space. The overall purpose of this research was to understand how Black male students ages 18-22 attending a community-based organization (i.e., Poetry Ink): (1) understand and articulate their experiences as a African American male in society where African American males are perceived as “dangerous”, “lazy”, “thugs”, and “unintelligent” (Hill, 2016; Noguera, 2003) and (2) how they make sense of their identity in a society where there are a number of unarmed African American males being killed by police and explore how spoken word helps in the coping process. In an attempt to gain insight into the lived experiences of these students, I wanted to understand how students analyzed and articulated their experiences of being African American males in an urban context. Therefore, the use of qualitative methods (participant observation, in-depth interviews, focus groups, and poem analysis) served me best in uncovering and understanding the articulated experiences of the students. Using Critical Race Theory (CRT) and critical youth voice, these methods allowed for the voices of these often marginalized students to be moved from the margins to the center.

With CRT, the participants in the study are valued and seen as co-contributors of knowledge being explored in research projects. I understand that as the researcher, I have the authority to choose and craft which stories I tell, but a commitment to a reflexive and

respectful methodology grounds me in an understanding of the value of my research participants. CRT calls to question racism and attempts to expose it and all forms of injustice. A major tenet of CRT is counter-storytelling or producing counter-narratives. These counter-narratives are told by people of color to counter the master narratives that exist (Lopez, 2003). Critical race theorists argue that counter-narratives should be captured by the researcher, experienced by the research participants, and told by people of color (Milner, 2007). People of color and other oppressed groups must be given space to voice their experiences and concerns in an effort to counter the discourse that marginalizes their existence. Race and racism are placed at the center of the narrative and counter-narrative in critical race theory. Critical race theory in education challenges the dominant ideology and centralizes the experiential knowledge of the research. A qualitative ethnographic case study design was used in order for me to conduct a detailed examination of a single setting (Bogdan and Biklen 2007; Merriam, 1998).

Using the spoken word poetry to explain and alter physical and political landscapes that maintain inequality, CRT was implemented, specifically youth's counter-narratives, as a way to analyze racialized spaces and experiences as Black males. Linking youth's perspectives with race and place is central to the questions that motivated this study. Moreover, CRT provides a framework that not only unmask objectivity to identify structural inequality and the permanence of racism, but CRT also underscores the importance of civic engagement as a means for creating meaningful change.

The value of counter-narratives for research using spoken word poetry as a method is perhaps best asserted by Delgado (1989) as the need for "naming one's own reality." After all, much of 'reality is socially constructed; stories provide members of

outgroups with a vehicle for psychic self-preservation; and the exchange of stories from teller to listener can help overcome “ethnocentrism and the dysconscious drive or need to view the world in one way” (as cited in Ladson-Billings 2009, p. 23). Indeed, counter-stories “can strengthen traditions of social, political, and cultural survival and resistance” by providing a window into the experiences of marginalized groups and creating spaces of possibility by sharing strategies of transformation (Solorzano and Yosso 2002, p. 32). Importantly, Delgado Bernal (2002) explains that counterstories not only affirm youth as both “holders and creators of knowledge” (p. 113), but also serve as tools that enable youth to navigate obstacles in their day-to-day lives in school and in the community.

Thus, the purpose of this qualitative study (interviews and observations) was to fill the gap in literature by using spoken word to reframe the deficit perception of male youth of color from urban contexts. Students exercised their voices in combating societal injustices and racialized experiences while providing insight into their needs and how those needs can best be met in a setting outside of school (i.e., community-based organizations where they perform spoken word, have open mics, and perform poetry slams). This setting provided students with a chance to use their assets to have their voices, which are normally silenced, heard and provides them with a space to heal from the cultural or racial trauma that has been experienced from directly or indirectly. Ginwright (2007) argues for radical healing, or healing as a process for restoring the health and well-being of students who have been exposed to chronic poverty, racism, and violence. His definition of healing includes developing a critical consciousness of social oppression, which gives one the ability to counter hopelessness and nihilism and to aid in

the preparation required for confronting racism and similar forms of oppression (Ginwright, 2015).

Qualitative research involves the collection, analysis, and interpretation of comprehensive narrative and visual data to gain insight into a particular phenomenon (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012). Data sources employed in qualitative research include text, images, and sounds (Nkwi, Nyamongo, & Ryan, 2001). Qualitative research asserts that people operate in particular contexts and have different perspectives, and rejects the idea that phenomenon can only be understood through uniform, stable and quantifiable inquiry methods (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012). Within qualitative research frameworks, meaning is socially constructed by individuals as they interact in their environments, thus there are multiple constructions and interpretations of reality that change over time (Merriam, 2002). This study utilized a narrative case study method (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 2002). A narrative case study provides an intensive description and analysis of a particular social unit, such as an individual, group, institution or community (Merriam, 2002). The social unit under investigation is an integrated system bounded by place and time (Stake, 1995).

The sample being researched in this study included Black between the ages of 18-22 who actively participated in an out of school arts-based youth development program in a metropolitan city in the Southeastern United States. This case is bound in that all participants were African American males who attended Poetry Ink during their teen years. Case study methodology is particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic: it focuses on a particular group, illustrates the complexity of the situation, and can explain the reasons behind a problem or question (Merriam, 1998). Additionally, case studies allow multiple

sources of qualitative and quantitative data to be used for analysis and interpretation. In a narrative case study, the goal is to use thick and rich descriptive data to identify and describe themes, which illustrate or support theoretical assumptions (Merriam, 1998).

This information allows the researcher to interpret and theorize about the phenomenon under investigation. This particular study was informed by participant interviews and the existing literature in the field. This information will allow the researcher to interpret and theorize about the phenomenon under investigation. This particular study was informed by participant interviews and the existing literature in the field. This project is a qualitative investigation of the social and academic experiences of African American adolescent males in an out of school setting. Student voices were a critical piece to this study, as their voices are often underrepresented and marginalized in educational research (Cook-Sather, 2002, 2006; Fielding, 2001, 2004; Howard, 2001; Lincoln, 1995; Mitra, 2001, 2004, 2009; Sealey-Ruiz & Greene, 2010). This study was designed to understand how African American male students articulate and make sense of their educational and social experiences. In an effort to gain insight, I conducted participant observations, in-depth interviews, focus groups, and analyze poems produced by my participants.

Participants

The participants in this study were African American (Black) male students who actively participated in the out of school arts-based program, Poetry Ink. This particular group of individuals was identified as information-rich in regards to describing the possible influence spoken word poetry and performing arts participation may have on their identity development, as well as, their academic and social experiences. The desired

sample size for the population under study was estimated to be between 5-7 participants. This number of participants was selected because it provided a sufficient amount of data to reach saturation based on the scope of the study (Creswell, 1998). Creswell (1998) maintains that sample sizes of 5 to 25 participants are acceptable in qualitative research. Qualitative methods were selected because I was interested in learning about how the students made sense of the world around them with everything that was going on.

Research Design

I was very interested in the stories of these students. Many studies (Fashola, 2005; Foster & Peele, 1999; Hopkins, 1997; Sealey-Ruiz & Greene, 2010) talk about African American male youth, but seldom talk to them and give their voices a centered location. The use of multiple methods will allow me to triangulate my findings and provide more insight into the phenomena in question, than any one method could do if used singularly. The first phase of my data collection will consist of participant observation. Once given permission from the director and program managers of the program, I observed students in the setting in various activities (open mic, spoken word, writing groups, etc.). Most of my initial observations were conducted at the location of the open mic and slam poetry competitions. During my initial visits, I sat in the audience and listened to the poets speak their truth on the stage. From my observations, I decided who I would approach for participation in my study. After my initial phase of observations, I moved into the in-depth interviews and focus groups. I used the initial phase to become a “familiar” face at the location. I had also built relationships with the students during my informal observations. Many of the students remembered me from the year before and we had a discussion about my trip to Indonesia which kept me from attending Brave New Voice

competitions with them in the DC area that summer. As a result of my established rapport and connection with some of the students, they pretty much gave me status of being alright and being cool for them to talk to. I had at least 9 young African American males to show interest in being involved in my project; however only 7 participated. These relationships also created an environment where even the female students wanted to be involved in the study, so I will probably do a study with the young ladies as well in the near future.

This study used a narrative case study method (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 2002). A narrative case study provides an intensive description and analysis of a particular social unit, such as an individual, group, institution or community (Merriam, 2002). The social unit under investigation is an integrated system bounded by place and time (Stake, 1995). In this study the case being investigated was Black males who participated in spoken word sessions at Breathe Ink. This case is bounded in that all participants were Black who attended Poetry Ink and were between the ages of 18-22. Case study methodology is particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic: it focuses on a particular group, illustrates the complexity of the situation, and can explain the reasons behind a problem or question (Merriam, 1998). Additionally, case studies allow multiple sources of qualitative and quantitative data to be used for analysis and interpretation. In a narrative case study, the goal is to use thick and rich descriptive data to identify and describe themes, which illustrate or support theoretical assumptions (Merriam, 1998). This information allows the researcher to interpret and theorize about the phenomenon under investigation. This particular study was informed by participant interviews and the existing literature in the field.

This study utilized a narrative case study method (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 2002). A narrative case study provides an intensive description and analysis of a particular social unit, such as an individual, group, institution or community (Merriam, 2002). The social unit under investigation is an integrated system bounded by place and time (Stake, 1995). This case is bound in that all participants were African American males between the ages of 18-22 who attended Poetry Ink. I analyzed how this subculture of spoken word acts as a counterspace of resistance and resilience for Black male youth in urban education. The case explored how participation in spoken word allowed youth to find a pedagogical and social site in which they can construct their identity as a Black male, while making sense of the racialized realities that they live daily (in academic, social, and political contexts) and developing a sense of racial pride in the process.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

Data was collected during the early months of Spring 2017. I spent the first week after IRB approval with the participants doing interviews. I watched them perform the poems and asked for a written copy of the poems to analyze them for patterns and codes. The interview protocol was organized in a manner that used specific, open and closed ended questions which provided structure and organization to participants' thoughts and experiences. Interviews were conducted either in-person or by telephone, depending upon the location of individual participants. Each interview lasted from 35 to 45 minutes and were audio-recorded and transcribed for data analysis purposes. Participant interviews were central to this study. Interviews provided me with opportunities to learn about what cannot be seen, and they allowed me to explore alternative explanations of what can be

seen (Glesne, 2006). Additionally, interview data was also provided on participants' attitudes, perceptions and experiences, which were crucial for this study.

Data Analysis

Constant comparative analysis was used as the primary method for analyzing the data compiled from this study. Constant comparative analysis is an integrated approach to data collection, coding and analysis, which generates and refines theory in a manner that allows for further testing and examination (Conrad, Neuman, Haworth, & Scott, 1993). With this method, I developed concepts by simultaneously coding and analyzing the data (Kolb, 2012). Simultaneous data collection and analysis allows the analysis to be shaped by the participants in a more fundamental way than if analysis is left until after data collection has been finished (Creswell, 2003; Ezzy, 2002). Additionally, simultaneous data collection and analysis allows the researcher to focus and shape the study as it proceeds (Glesne, 2006). Concurrent data collection and analysis was achieved by organizing data as it was collected, writing memos, developing analytic files and organizing it into emergent concepts or themes. Constant comparative analysis was achieved through coding. Coding is the process of identifying themes or concepts that are found within the data (Ezzy, 2002), and involves sorting data into themes that are germane to the research focus (Glesne, 2006). Coding enables the researcher to attach labels to segments of data that depict what each segment represents (Charmaz, 2006). Coding allowed me to build an account of what had been observed and recorded, and theory emerged as a result of the coding process.

Validity

Research validity was established by member checking. Member checking refers to the practice of sharing interview questions, analytical thoughts and drafts of reports with research participants to ensure that the researcher is representing them and their thoughts accurately (Glesne, 2006). Member checking can also be achieved by explaining major categories to select participants who have participated in the study and then inquire as to whether these categories fit participants' experiences (Charmaz, 2006). Member checks provide participants with opportunities to confirm the validity of their responses, challenge interpretations of the data, provide their own interpretations of the data and give additional information to the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Participants were provided with transcripts of their responses as a member checking strategy and were given the opportunity to verify accuracy and make corrections. To provide increased credibility to this study, I employed peer review and debriefing as verification strategies. Peer review and debriefing takes place when the researcher invites colleagues and peers to examine and provide feedback during the data collection and analysis process (Ezzy, 2002).

Reflexivity Statement

My own experiences have shaped my insight as an educator, and as such, I share my experiences with students. I spent many days in the principal's office during my elementary and middle school years. I was required to meet weekly with the school counselors 'because I was angry'. I remember multiple teachers begging me to calm down and get my act together, kicking me out of class, and writing me up, but no one ever really took the time to ask what was happening at home or what was actually wrong

with me. More importantly, not one educator who gave me the space to talk about what I was reacting to or why I was acting the way that I was. In essence, I experienced numerous suspensions instead of being taught how to deal with my pain. I was suspended from school, rather than being given a sanctuary or safe space to express myself and share my story. It was through the power of spoken word and being allowed to put my pain and hurt into words that I began to find solace and get my anger out in more appropriate ways.

As a critical social justice educator who empowers marginalized youth, I often create environments and opportunities for youth to speak their truths and tell what is on their mind and on their chests. Over the years as an educator, I have seen students receive suspensions for reacting to the personal violence that school curriculum ignores. Indeed, students that cause in-class disturbances are often sent out of the classroom and often miss instruction. In many ways, schools urge students to forget the very circumstances that shape who they are as individuals and how important these circumstances are to their identity formation. Educators must remember how students live before, during and after school. To fail to consider students' personal context is to ensure that what we teach is irrelevant to their daily survival. Indeed, I argue that in a democratic society, educators have no greater task than to equip youth for speaking the realities they see so that we can then begin to address, with youth, these realities. For far too many people, the realities of urban life for these students are represented by media stereotypes, not by the voices of those living in such conditions. What sort of a democracy do we live in if we do not develop in all students the ability to participate in shaping (and not just

being shaped by) society? Yet many students who I have encountered over the years, live complex realities that are often ignored by educators.

I admit that when I started this project, I wanted to research marginalized youth from all backgrounds and analyze how spoken word allows them to speak their truth and make meaning of their identities as Black males. In short, they need to talk through the issues that shape their lives, and I attempt to create spaces where they can do alternative pedagogical interventions such as spoken word poetry. I teach passionately because my educational experiences were largely monotonous, disengaging, and monocultural. I often have used my classroom setting to allow students to share their stories, but in a society where that is not encouraged, I have worked with youth to allow them to express themselves creatively outside of the classroom space. With my own personal histories of trauma, poetry became my sense of security. I could express my hurt through the stroke of a pen. Through coming to express my voice, I began to witness how others lived similar lives, and came to realize that I am a survivor of homelessness, fatherlessness, family violence, poverty, and miseducation in schools where I was labeled and often demeaned by educators. This is the purpose of developing voice: to have students develop confidence in their lives, a sense of hope in the hopeless and be able to use their experiences to set higher expectations than what has been set for them. I decided to focus on Black males and how they make sense of their reality as a Black male in a society that perceives them as a problem. I wanted to hear from them regarding their academic and social experiences as a Black male. I want to analyze how this subculture of spoken word acts as a counterspace of resistance and resilience for Black male youth in urban education. It is through spoken word that youth can find a pedagogical and social site in which they

can construct their identity as a Black male, while questioning the realities that they live daily (in academic, social, and political contexts).

Drawing on the sentiments of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement, on Wednesday, September 21, 2017, the students at UNC Charlotte organized a die-in at the student union. There were chants, songs, and even messages of solidarity among the over 300 students who responded to a call for solidarity to students on the campus. The die-in was in response to the murder of the unarmed Black man who had a Traumatic Brain Injury, Keith Lamont Scott. Several protesters joined the call. This time, they met in downtown Charlotte. People from all over Charlotte and even surrounding counties joined this call and marched through the streets to share in the outrage, actions, and demands of local Charlotte activists on the ground. As the protesters marched down the streets of Charlotte NC, many of them held their hands up in the universal sign of surrender while shouting, “HANDS UP! DON’T SHOOT!”...As I looked at the Facebook Live footage, I saw that marching alongside a White man were the tiny feet of a 7-year old Black daughter, holding onto a small “It was a book” sign and chanting with as much vigor as the older Black woman who walked slightly ahead of the young girl. You could hear the chants together as the protesters shouted to the world with every fiber of their beings that if there is NO JUSTICE! there will be NO PEACE!...As the protesters turned the street corner, they were met with tear gas, rubber bullets, etc. ...the events that led up to what happened next will be etched into the memory of many of the people who were in the trenches and on the ground marching and many who were watching the events unfold on Facebook live.

As eyewitness to the protests that happened right near where Keith Lamont Scott lost his life at the hands of an officer, a young man covered the tragedy over the next few hours for the entire Facebook world to see. Primed by the highly publicized incident of justice that unfolded following the murder of unarmed teenager, Trayvon Martin (<http://www.cnn.com/2013/06/05/us/trayvonmartin-shooting-fast-facts/>) and many other Black women and men over recent years, I tuned into the gruesome event as it unfolded and shared in the visceral impact that this real-time crisis was having on the young man. His documentation on Facebook Live served as a crucial component for the forthcoming explosion of protests and actions against racial injustice and police brutality across the nation. The protests started out as peaceful, but footage from the Facebook Live feed showed that things got a little hectic and police started firing off tear gas and the crowd dispersed only to lock the highway and to protest on the Interstate. Over the next few days, a familiar trauma swept across Black America...one that has reminded us of the “threat” that unarmed men of color pose and how the police can frame a story to make it seem as if Black men are dangerous or aggressive.

The protests and anger that erupted on the streets of uptown Charlotte were unlike any concerted outburst against racial injustice in America that we had witnessed for decades. Led by young local residents of Charlotte, hours of protests were intentionally sustained and met with military presence that included tanks, machine guns, tear gas, and rubber bullets that were released onto protesters on the normally busy streets of uptown Charlotte. Very different accounts of these live events were fed to the general public via mainstream media versus social media. While mainstream media vilified Scott’s character through images a joint that he had smoked and hypervisualized the small pool

of protesters who were committing violent acts, Twitter, Facebook, and live streamed videos from protesters on the ground told stories of excessive force by officers, of united outrage by the people who were taking a stand in their first amendment right, of a demand for answers, and of legitimate pain in the face of continuous racism against their community.

In many of those videos, there were youth out in the middle of the protests and some were even marching alongside their parents or family members. I went out to the site of the vigil for the slain young man and father. I spoke with the youth at the site only to find out that many of them experienced the incident, the backlash of the incident including the protests right outside of their door, and yet they were not granted access to speak with a grief counselor or a therapist or any other helping professional who could help them process through what they had witnessed and/or experienced. The children needed to release and to get the residue of revolt and resistance off of them. Many of the youth said that their teachers did not address what had happened and had not even asked about how they were feeling even though most of them knew the community in which they lived. Youth all across Charlotte were looking for ways to process through what had happened, looking for ways to get involved, looking for ways to find out about the incident, and looking for ways to voice their concerns as youth from the Charlotte area where this incident had gone national and was all over the media.

Many youth in urban contexts experience traumatic experiences and often do not have a way to process through the trauma. As a result of experiencing the trauma of the murder of an unarmed Black man here in Charlotte and processing through the situation with young men who I respect and even love, I decided to change the focus of the study

so that I can capture the voice of those Black males through spoken word. This shift allows me, as a community activist and social change agent, to understand their lived social world in relation to their academic and social experiences as Black males.

Summary

This study employed a qualitative research approach. A narrative case study method was used to examine the relationship between spoken word and identity development and formation among Black males who face racialized experiences and discrimination. Data was collected via interviews, poem reviews, and review of the literature. A constant comparative method was used for data analysis purposes. Primary categories and themes will be derived from initial, axial, and selective coding. Rich and thick descriptions of research participants' responses will be developed from the organizational and categorical themes identified through the coding process. Validity was established through triangulation, reflexivity, member checking, peer review, and the utilization of thick, rich descriptions.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

This chapter includes the analysis of the data collected during my inquiry into the academic and social experiences of Black males in school and society and the role that race, perceptions, and societal messages play in those experiences. In addition to exploring the academic and social experiences of Black males, the research explored the use of spoken word as a way to address the contemporary problems of race, racism, and perceptions that influence their academic and social experiences. In an effort to explore the perceptions of being a young Black male and the potential influence of racialized experiences in school and in society on what it means to be young, Black, and male, individual interviews were conducted and a focus group was formed to interview the young men. A total of seven young men participated in the individual interviews and a follow up focus group was formed.

To contribute to my inquiry and findings, this chapter is organized into two sections, the first section uses pseudonyms and provides a brief background each participant in the research study. These profiles were built from the individual interviews, as well as interaction with the participants through the data collection process. The second section presents the themes that emerged from their interviews and focus groups. These themes are represented using select phrases from the participant's interviews that support and explain the theme. This process is known as *in vivo* coding (Charmaz, 2006).

Many of the questions addressed the following aspects of the Black male experience: (1) identity as a male and perceptions of identity as a young, Black male (2) perceptions, stereotypes, and messages about Black males (3) the academic and social

experiences of Black males (4) the presence of race and racism (5) how they cope with the incidents of race, racism, and discrimination that they encounter and (6) also the role that spoken word plays in buffering those incidents, and creating resilience among the participants. While research related to the academic and social experience of being African American and male is growing (Carter, 2008; Duncan, 2002; Griffin & Cummins, 2012; Hopkins, 1997; Moore & Lewis, 2012; Toldson & Lewis, 2012; Noguera, 2008; Walton & Wiggan, 2014; Wiggan, 2011), one could argue that we still know relatively little about how African American young men are impacted by the messages that they receive about the meaning of being a young Black man and how they cope with or buffer those negative messages that they hear or see in school and society.

Rarely have we explored the intersection between the everyday lived experiences of Black male youth and spoken word as a way to address the contemporary problems of race, racism, and power relationships that influence the daily realities and identity of this group within the larger societal structures. Consequently, little is known about how Black males are impacted by the messages that they receive in the school setting and from society and about the meaning of being a young, Black man in society today. The narratives of the young, Black male participants in the study provide insight into how Black male youth negotiate and reframe their identities, center their voices, and make sense of their everyday lived experiences and their interactions with race and racism in school and in society.

Youth in society wrestle with so many issues on a daily basis. The different developmental stages youth go through shape their identity (knowing who they are), their abilities (the power and control they have for their life), and intimacy (the types of

relationships and bonds that are developed) (Harold, Colarossi, & Mercier, 2007).

Identity formation is one of the most critical developmental tasks of adolescence (Arnett, 2007). However, Black male youth often also have to wrestle with more challenging issues as they relate to race, class, and stereotypes and perceptions of Black males, which contributes to what Boykin (1986) calls a “triple quandary” by adding the layers of race, gender, and perceptions which add challenges to the normal youth developmental challenges. Hence, young Black males encounter challenges in society and school, in addition to what it means for young people to deal with micro-aggressions that they face daily due to race, racism, and negative stereotyping.

Yet, the literature does not include how urban sanctuaries (safe spaces) can create a space that allows youth to make meaning of their own identities in relation to their everyday lived experiences in schools and the larger society as a means of coping with and navigating through those experiences. The participants in the study spoke about several incidents that happened (in school and in society) and how they look for outlets and ways to heal and deal with the incidents. The narratives provided insight about combating societal injustices and providing insight into their needs and how those needs can best be met in a setting outside of school (i.e., community-based organizations where they perform spoken word, have open mics, and perform poetry slams). Consequently, they spoke about how this setting provided them with a chance to use their assets to have their voices, which are normally silenced, heard and provides them with a space to heal from the cultural or racial trauma that has been experienced directly or indirectly from the racialized experiences that they encounter. This study provides a useful contribution to our understanding of both how young Black males perceive the various experiences that

they encounter in school and in society. This study also sheds light on how these young males combat stereotypes and racialized experiences through the use of spoken word and creative expression.

Critical Race Theory provided a tool for shaping my inquiry so I could examine the perceptions of these young Black males who speak to internalized oppression, stereotypes, and racism function in both school and in society. The themes of this study actually expanded beyond CRT tenets by focusing on the role of Spoken Word Poetry in helping to combat that oppression, stereotypes, and racism to illuminate their everyday lived experiences and bring their stories from the margin to the center. Woven into the discussions of each theme are the answers to the study's research questions. Each of the emergent themes and subthemes identified during the coding process is applied to the research questions throughout this chapter. This study addressed the following questions:

- (1) How do Black males negotiate their identities (racial, gender, or otherwise) in school and society?
- (2) How do perceptions, stereotypes, and media portrayal of Black males impact Black males' perceptions of their identities as a Black males?
- (3) How are Black males impacted by racialized experiences that they encounter, either directly or indirectly, in school and in society?
- (4) How do Black males cope with and navigate through those racialized experiences that they hear, see, or encounter as a Black male?

In this study, interviewees participated in face-to-face interviews that lasted approximately 35-45 minutes each. Given that facial expressions and body language are a telling communicative behavior in interactions, face-to-face interviews are a benefit to

qualitative interviewing, especially during the analysis of the interview (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Five of the interviews took place in an office space at a local university, which allowed for a common meeting place and relative privacy. The remaining two interviews took place over the phone. The interviews were conducted from March to April 2017. Prior to data collection interviewees read and signed an informed consent. Before starting the interview, interviewees were asked to select their own pseudonym to maintain confidentiality.

After transcribing the individual interviews and the focus group interview, the transcripts were sent to the participants to confirm the accuracy of the interview and the quotes that they said. Commentaries and asides allowed me to engage the interviews more intimately by documenting my reactions to and interpretations of the interviews. This interaction with the data sparked my initial stages of analyzing the participants' narratives. Lindlof and Taylor (2011) write that analysis is the "process of labeling and breaking down (or decontextualizing) raw data and then reconstituting them into" (p. 243) categories, patterns, and themes. After listening to the interviews and reading my transcripts several times, I went through each of them to identify themes, concepts, and/or ideas that related to my overall research questions and theoretical framework. Following the in-process writing and preliminary engagement with the transcripts, I used an inductive and deductive approach (Patton, 2002). I created categories from themes that emerged from the narratives (inductive); however, categories were also rooted in tenets of CRT (deductive). Lindlof and Taylor (2011) and Patton (2002) posit that researchers who apply concepts from existing theoretical frameworks and research to code their data use an etic form of coding.

I also read several of their poems for patterns and codes to determine if any of the codes uncovered in the poems validated or refuted my initial hypothesis and argument of Black males not having an outlet or space to cope with racialized experiences that they face as Black males. The data collected and analyzed for this study provided information regarding racialized experiences in school and society, perceptions, stereotype threat, racial identity, the importance of safe spaces to buffer racialized experiences, as well as, the use of spoken word poetry as a tool of resistance among Black males in the 21st century. In particular, the data analysis generated 4 main themes: the perceptions of masculinity and male identity (including perceptions of Black male identity as a subcategory), the impact of perceptions, stereotypes, and messages in academic and social contexts, the presence of race in their daily lives, (including experiences with race and racism in school and in society), and the strategies to create counter spaces of refuge, resilience, and resistance as a Black male in the 21st century, which includes the significance of creative expression as an outlet for the males.

The next section will provide a demographic profile of the participants who participated in the study. The themes that were developed and sample statements that support the themes are discussed in the following section. Participants are identified by the names (pseudonyms) that they provided for themselves at the time of data collection. The overarching themes which emanated from the data analysis were: 1) Perceptions of Being a Male and a Black Male 2) Influence of Perceptions, Stereotypes, and Messages in the Media on Black Male Identity 3) Racialized Experiences of Black Males in School and Society 4) Black Males and Creative Expression as a Coping Mechanism. Each of the themes yielded at least two sub-themes which provided additional details and

information on the relationship between racialized experiences in school and society as a young, Black male among Black males between the ages of 18-22 (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1. Emergent Themes and Sub-Themes by Research Question

<p>Research Question #1</p> <p>How do Black males negotiate their identities (racial, gender, or otherwise) in school and society?</p>	<p>Research Question #2</p> <p>How do perceptions, stereotypes, and media portrayal of Black males impact Black males' perceptions of their identities as a Black male?</p>	<p>Research Question #3: How are Black males impacted by racialized experiences that they experience, either directly or indirectly, in school and in society?</p>	<p>Research Question #4: How do Black males cope with and navigate through those racialized experiences that they hear, see, or encounter as a Black male?</p>
<p>Theme: Masculinity</p>	<p>Theme:</p> <p>Influence of Perceptions, Stereotypes, and Messages in the Media on Black Male Identity</p> <p>(Identity Construction)</p>	<p>Theme:</p> <p>Race, Racism, and Discrimination</p> <p>(Race-Based Incidents)</p>	<p>Theme:</p> <p>Coping</p> <p>Resistance</p> <p>Resilience</p>
<p>Subtheme 1:</p> <p>Masculinity</p> <p>“Men are supposed to protect and provide”</p>	<p>Subtheme 1:</p> <p>“Fitting the Description”</p> <p>Society’s perception of being a Black male</p>	<p>Subtheme 1:</p> <p>“Target”</p> <p>Racialized Experiences in Society</p> <p>(Racial Profiling, shootings of unarmed men, police brutality)</p>	<p>Subtheme 1:</p> <p>Creative expression</p> <p>(Poetry as a safe space, outlet, form of liberation and resistance)</p>
<p>Subtheme 2:</p> <p>Black Masculinity</p> <p>“Being Black is like having a target on your back while carrying the world on your shoulders”</p>	<p>Subtheme 2:</p> <p>Reality of Being a Black Male (Blackness)</p> <p>“The Usual Suspects”</p>	<p>Subtheme 2:</p> <p>Demeaned, Devalued, and Disengaged, but Not Deterred</p> <p>Racialized Experiences in School</p> <p>(teacher bias, microaggressions, low teacher expectations, etc.)</p>	<p>Subtheme 2:</p> <p>Racial Socialization</p> <p>(“The talk”, Knowledge of Self, Learning one’s history)</p>

Part I. Demographic Profiles of Participants

Illmind

Illmind is an 18 year old Black male who is originally from Brooklyn, New York. He moved to Charlotte when he was about 5 or 6. He is currently homeschooled and will be graduating soon. He considers himself to be an all-around lyricist, but recently discovered a new found love for poetry. He says that he is in tune with hip-hop music overall and he is passionate about it. He knows that he wants to do poetry, music, or some type of entertainment where he can counter the negative images. He will be attending the Brave New Voices competition in the summer as a first-time spoken word artist. He has only been involved with the program Poetry Ink since the beginning of the school year.

Dallas

Dallas is a 19 year old Black male who classifies himself as pro black and a lover of the arts. He began participating in theater classes in middle school because it was a required elective. He enjoyed being on the stage in front of people so he continued to pursue the arts and majored in theater in high school. He just recently graduated from broadcasting school. He decided to attend broadcasting school because acting seemed a little more difficult and doing broadcasting seemed more probable him. He recently graduated from broadcasting school. Since attending college, he has not been as involved with Poetry Ink as much, but has been coming back to help aspiring spoken word artist and poets. Dallas plans to eventually use his platform as a poet and a radio personality to promote discussion about social issues. Dallas wants to bring positivity back to the arts and use the arts to promote social change.

Static

Static is a 19 year old Black male from Charlotte. He has dreadlocks and wears glasses. He describes himself as blacker than black and as superblack in terms of ethnicity and race. He attended an arts magnet high school after transferring from the high school where he was because his grades were failing. He has Bipolar Disorder 2 so the performing arts have been great for him. He enjoys writing poetry, performing spoken word, participating in open mics, watching wrestling, listening to music and writing in his spare time. He has been involved with the spoken word poetry initiative for about 4 years. Although he did not qualify his first year in the program, but he continues to compete and has been a part of the winning international team for the past two years. He will be attending the Brave New Voices competition in the summer for the third time.

Blessed1

Blessed1 is an 18 year old male who just joined the spoken word and poetry arena. He moved to Charlotte from New Orleans a few years back during Hurricane Katrina, but he had no clue that there were other youth who felt isolated until he heard about a group from his friends at school. He has a little color in his hair and said that this allows him to be unique and speaks to his creativity. He is slowly learning to become more confident and realizing his gifts as a poet. He enjoys telling his truth on paper and creating poems from the truth that he is telling so that it might help someone else. He wants to get more involved in writing poetry about social issues.

Truly

Truly is the youngest of my participants as he is only 18. Truly has dreadlocks and often appears very clean shaven and always dresses nice. He says that sometimes his dreadlocks make people have certain perceptions of him until they have a conversation

with him. He is currently still in high school and planning to attend a state college or go in state so that he can save up some money and eventually work on starting his own venue for youth to come out and creatively express themselves and use their work for good (to promote change). He wants to create positive vibes among the young generations and help them see that they can be a part of the change and not always considered a problem. He enjoys writing poetry, writing songs, and even writing in his journal. Truly has only been a part of Poetry Ink for almost two years.

Phil Donner

Phil Donner is 19 years old. He has short dreadlocks that are colored (kind of a blonde color) on the tips. He wore tee shirts that often had pictures of various Black activists. The individual interview he wore a Bob Marley shirt, but at the focus group interview, he wore a Marcus Garvey shirt. He does not do as much spoken word, but he does write poetry and do creative expression through dance. He attends a community college and works with youth as a part of a community-based theater group that he is a part of. He moved from Brooklyn, New York. He considers himself Black and Hispanic in terms of race and ethnicity. He is laid back, but passionate about theater and doing poetry on the stage even though he does not write a lot. Phil only comes and hangs out on occasion at Poetry Ink when he does not have a gig performing somewhere else.

Honyst

Honyst and his twin are the oldest of 9 children. He is 19 years old. His mom and dad have been married for 20 years and they are all blood siblings. He enjoys writing poems and songs about various social justice issues and social change. He wants to use his venue to bring about change in the area and to empower the new generation of youth.

He has a low cut, while his twin has the ends of his dreadlocks dyed. Honyst was very laid back and very matter of fact in his response and appeared passionate whenever he spoke about wanting to help others through his platform as an artist.

Table 4.2 Participant Profiles

Pseudonym	Illmind	Blessed1	Truly	Dallas	Phil	Static	Honyst
Age	18	19	19	19	18	18	19

Part II: Themes and Analysis

This second section of chapter four discusses the themes that emerged from the data. As described in chapter three, thematic analysis was used to create themes to represent the essence of student's experiences and identity construction. Data analysis led to the organization of 4 themes (one per research question) and eight subthemes (2 per theme) as shown in Table 1. The focus group and interview protocols were organized by research question, which helped guide the conversation in a particular order. This strategy supported the data analysis process because as codes were identified and collapsed by commonality, they were naturally organized by research question. All of the themes are named and have subheadings that are direct student quotes. These direct quotes are from interviews and holistically captured a majority, if not all of the student experiences.

It became clear through the interview responses that many of the young men often revealed that their perceptions of what it meant to be a male and a Black male were totally different in nature. Several interview questions were used to address the first research question: How do Black males negotiate their identities (racial, gender, or otherwise), in school and in society? In order to truly answer this question, the

participants were asked to define what it meant to be a male and what it meant to be a Black male in today's society.

Two main themes as they relate to research question number one are as follows: Being a male in the 21st century and being a Black male in the 21st century emerged from the data capturing each participant's description of their perceptions of being a male and a Black male in the 21st century. The two subthemes that emerged from the data are as follows: (1) *Be A Real Man: Protect, Provide, and Man Up* (2) *Being Black: Having a Target on My Back While Carrying The World on My Shoulders*.

Be a Real Man: Protect, Provide, and Man Up

Being a male in the 21st century. During the course of my inquiry, students were asked to reflect on what it meant to be both a male and a Black male in the 21st century. For many of the respondents, they noted that men were "providers and protectors", "respectful, responsible, protective, assertive, and powerful leaders"; "a man is defined by his ability to work and provide for the home even if that meant having to hustle and work several jobs." Phil commented that "men were providers and protectors who often took care of home," while Blessed1 mentioned that "it is important to be masculine and not be a punk, but being a real man. Being a real man means protecting and providing for your family even from your sickbed." All of the descriptions about what it means to be a male in the 21st century depicts that many of them realize and recognize the characteristics and traits of what it means to be a man.

The respondents were confident in their responses and even mentioned the importance of providing for and protecting the family unit. Although these responses proved to be synonymous with manhood, masculinity, and maleness, many of the

responses appeared to be based on the hegemonic, patriarchal definition of what it means to be a male. Historically, men are seen as the provider and the protector in their families. Many of the participants mentioned the importance of men being strong mentally, physically, and even financially for their families. Many of the participants spoke about how society labels and defines who they are based on perceptions and stereotypes that they might have about what it means to be a male and what it means to be a Black male. Historically, Black men were seen as chattel and not seen as human so this plays into the delineations in definitions of masculinity. Consequently, it is imperative for Black men to create their own perception of Black masculinity in order to stop being misunderstood and mislabeled, which is why this question was asked of Black males who could provide rich data to this question.

Being Black: Having a Target on Your Back While Carrying the World on Your Shoulders

Being a Black Male in the 21st Century. It is imperative for Black men to create their own perception of Black masculinity in order to stop being misunderstood and mislabeled, which is why this question was asked of Black males who could provide rich data to this question. Consequently, I noticed the mood of many of the participants as they answered the question about being a Black male in the 21st century. All of the participants' responses about being a Black male in the 21st century consisted of quotes about life circumstances and attributed difficulties and struggles with being somewhat synonymous with being a Black male. Hence, the theme of struggle and challenges that many of them face as Black males was immediately present in the interview data. Illmind's response clearly captured the shared reality of being a Black male:

It sounds cliché...but I feel like struggle is everyday life for us. Everything we do is a Struggle, but it is not just about going through the struggle, but overcoming the struggle. I'm from New York and racial profiling is real. How you handle it and if you come out unscathed defines you as a Black male...like a rite of passage.

Static echoed what Illmind had mentioned in his response describing how constricted a Black man is in society by saying, "being a Black male means you gotta walk a certain way, you gotta talk a certain way, and you gotta be a certain way. You gotta carry yourself so that you don't get profiled and so you won't scare certain people...so you won't be seen as a target. Dallas spoke of the double entendre of being proud of being Black, but also how there are consequences to being Black.

Being a Black male is a lot. You've got to try harder, for like half of the recognition...It's stressful. There is pride that comes with being a Black male, but there is also fear.

Truly mentioned:

It's not easy being a Black man, because there are a lot of expectations and many of them aren't good like being dead or in jail. It motivates me to want to be the exception, but I know it will be hard because I am a Black male.

Phil mentioned historical perceptions of what it means to be a Black male in his narrative:

Black males are perceived as not having emotion, being rigid, being tough...kind of hypermasculine. It goes back to slavery days when the strongest Black men would be sold for profit. It has basically been a rough life for Black males since

they arrived here from Africa...Being a Black male is complex. You have so many ideals bombarded at you to tell you who you should be, but then you have outside forces of what people and society tell you. Consequently, your inner self and your outer self are conflicting and it is not healthy.

Extending most of the participant's thoughts about attitudes towards being a Black male in the 21st century, Blessed1 explained that being a Black male is more about societal definitions and expectations set forth by your family and society. Dallas's thoughts were similar. He indicated there was difficulty in being able to define yourself as a Black apart from "the social definitions of what it means in society, how it's used and what it could be, how you are even viewed by your family as a Black man." His narrative depicts the overall theme of what masculinity means and what Black masculinity means. He continued with his assertion about the difficulty and hard it is to talk about being a Black man without gendering it, but it was just as hard to discuss what it means to be a male without addressing what it means to be a Black male. It adds that layer of race, gender, and perceptions. He went on to comment that "it is as if Black men have to work harder than their non-Black counterparts. Historically, Black males have had to prove their manhood and their value as they once were considered 3/5 a person and slaves and did not have equal rights and were not treated as citizens because they were considered property...chattel."

Honyst's statement about, "Black men not having as many equal rights as Black men should have" highlights the difficulties that Black males face even today in the 21st century; while Blessed1's comments about how hard Black men have to work only to continue to be left behind is insightful, "...[B]lack men have to carry the world on their

shoulders and the family on your back because they are always trying to provide but there are so many things like limited job opportunities and low paying jobs that do not allow you to get ahead and so the struggle continues and the cycle perpetuates itself support the comparison to struggle and difficulties as a Black male.”

Static expounds further on his perception of being a Black male with a mental health issue. As a result, his narrative is different from the others as he has to navigate being young, Black, and having a mental health issue. Of course, this adds a new layer to his identity as a young, Black male.

Can't talk about mental illness at all as a black man. It's ... you cannot ... anytime a black man talks about mental illness, oh that's white people stuff, oh that don't ... we don't do that, that's always what I've heard. You can't talk about that. You have to be a cookie cut out black man, you gotta be milk chocolate, tall, haircut, light voice, proper English, proper vernacular for you to be accepted.

From the ... it's raining and from the car to here with this long hair, I have my hat on but you could tell I have a lot of hair. It was peeping out. The dirty looks I got ... you gotta look a certain way, dress a certain way, act a certain way to be taken serious. And don't ... you can't bring up mental illness and that's what people in our culture ... even out of our culture, you can't bring up mental illness without it being a surprise that black men go through it, because it's not. You gotta be masculine, you gotta be overly masculine. You gotta ... because you know men are the protectors so you gotta be ... show no weakness, no mercy, no nothing. No emotion whatsoever. It's hard actually knowing that there are people who do not understand and as a result, make assumptions.

The conversations with students proved to be very insightful about their perceptions about being a male and about being a Black male. The characteristics associated with White masculinity include assertiveness, toughness, dominance, decisiveness, independence, ambitiousness, self-reliance, forcefulness, reliability, analytic ability, and competitiveness (White & Cones, 1999). Many of the respondents spoke to the strength, gendered roles, and how being a Black male puts a little more weight on their shoulders. They spoke to the belief that being Black is like having a target on your back while carrying the world on your shoulders. Their narratives spoke to the struggle that Black men face, the obstacles and the barriers that they have to overcome, the how they are perceived by others, and also how being a Black male is different from being a male of other races and ethnicities, especially as a Caucasian man who historically has been granted more rights, liberties, and privileges than any other group in American. It is evident that struggle and facing difficulties in various areas of life was synonymous among the participants with regards to their perceptions of being a Black male.

Research Question Two

Research question two was: How do perceptions, stereotypes, and media portrayal of Black males impact their perceptions of their identities as a Black male? Discussions with the students and the data revealed regarding the students' thoughts can be best explained and understood by clearly looking at each subtheme. When exploring the identities of young Black males, there are several key concepts that must be considered; racial identity, stereotypes and media images of Black men, microaggressions, the intersection of race and gender for Black young men, and cultural contexts that influence

identity. In order to help change the life circumstances of young Black men, we need to know more about their identity development process and their perceptions of what it means to be young, Black, and male, and how they are influenced by messages from others about what it means to be young, Black men.

One of the challenges with social imagery is that the constructed descriptions and understandings of particular groups can be rooted in false depictions that ultimately present distorted notions of a group's history, culture, practices, and norms (Bloor, 1991). This has been an ongoing challenge in the creation of an image for Black males. As a result, inaccurate portrayals of groups can contribute to the development and maintenance of deeply ingrained ideas and beliefs about groups that can profoundly shape their experiences in a given society. Many of the participants discuss the stereotypes and perceptions that they see in the media and how those perceptions and stereotypes contribute to how they themselves are perceived in school and in society.

Thus, I continue the analysis by examining the perceptions and stereotypes of Black males in the media and in society and how those perceptions and stereotypes influence school experiences and their daily lived experiences as a young, Black male in society. Then, I proceed to examine their experiences by asking questions that addressed race and racism in school and in society and how they deal with the presence of these racialized experiences. My inquiry indicated that many of the young men are viewed negatively in society and that those perceptions can date back to slavery days where Black men were viewed as slaves, property, and 3/5 of a human. Thus, some of the respondents spoke about how they are perceived in the media, while others mentioned the racialized encounters that they had, in school and in society.

Misrepresentations In the Media

Fitting the description. Many of the respondents provided narratives that reflected on the depiction and perception of Black men as entertainers, athletes, criminals, and even thugs. While some responded that Black men are perceived as dangerous and are seen as targets in school and in society, others responded by depicting how they are perceived and giving examples of incidents where those perceptions led to the reality of them being Black males. Static emphasizes how Black men are portrayed in the media and how they are not valued unless they are entertaining:

Honyst mentioned that Black males are viewed and looked at negatively in society. His response also speaks to the negative portrayal of Black males and how they are often perceived:

I believe that they view black males as still slaves to be honest. It's either do as they say, end up in jail or killed...I feel like they are seen as niggas, niggers, hoodlums, bums, uneducated, and many other things to be honest.

Blessed1 elaborated a bit more when describing the perceptions of Black males:

We're unstable, we're dangerous, we're just...untouchable I would say. We're seen as a joke, we're misguided, we're misleading, we are rebellious, unconfomative.

Neanderthals, monkeys. Yea, they just see us as a circus act I would say.

Dallas goes a little further in his response to give a few examples of Black males and the influence of negative perceptions and stereotypes on them with his response about Black men being seen as unworthy of protection and viewed as less than and often times indispensable and expendable:

Black men are viewed negatively. They view Black males as less than...They view Black males as dangerous. Not worth protecting...So, I want to give examples, but the problem is there have been so many issues with cops like, Black police brutality like Philando Castle or Alton Sterling, even Trayvon way back, which started the unfortunate trend. Black men are not worth protecting in the sense that, you know we have the Black Lives Matter, then people started saying Blue Lives Matter, which is ridiculous because police come in all colors, blue is not a race, blue is the color of the uniform, you chose to be an officer. The fact that someone's occupation means more than an entire culture, is ridiculous.

Dallas continues his discussion about Black males and how they are negatively viewed and portrayed in society:

But that's just proof that we're not worth protecting because we're not...Black men aren't viewed as...back in slavery we were viewed as tools to help liberate White men, to help get their own freedom, to help them be successful. And now, we're not viewed as...people don't think Black men can help the world. People think that we're just kind of there, that we're in the way, that we're obstacles. Like, why would keep obstacles in the way, you get rid of them, you eliminate them. We're not viewed as valuable. Our lives are expendable.

The narratives that many of the participants provided support the idea that media and society often view Black males in a negative manner. Black males appear to be the “usual suspects” according to the perceptions and societal images of Black males. After inquiring about how Black males are perceived and having the participants provide their perspectives regarding imagery of Black males, I decided to follow up by asking them to

recall the first time that they realized that they were “Black” or treated differently because of their skin color or being seen as “the usual suspects”.

The Usual Suspects. Many of the participants discussed their interactions either in school or in society. Some of the participants talked about interactions with police, while others talked about interactions in the classroom or school in general. In an effort to expound further on the racialized experiences of Black men and how these incidents of injustice have been happening for years, but are being captured thanks to social media. Seeing incidents of ignorance and images of injustice in social media and on TV, Illmind recalls the reality check that he experienced during his middle school years:

I'm going to be honest. I ain't realize until I was 15. I'm 18 now. 15 hit, my father sat me down, he told me. I didn't believe it. Then again, when I was 15...when I hit 15, I was also aware of all the killings that were going on of young black males. I don't know why, but it seemed like when I was 14, up to 14, life was so good. 15 hit and it's like, reality check. I wish I would have noticed it at a younger age because I feel like I'm aware of it, but I could be so much more aware of it. It's to the point where if I was still in New York, I probably would have noticed it at a younger age. My parents felt it was a good idea to take me out and to keep me sheltered from it, which it probably was. I didn't realize it until 15 because media is so heavy now. Social media, news, it's everywhere now. When I realized that "Oh, slavery is gone, but segregation isn't. Inequality, that's not gone, it's still here" ... and around 15 is when I started really writing seriously because like I said, these things opened up my eyes.

Honyst's thoughts about when he realized that he was Black revolved around the concept

of how racist ideals and hate rhetoric rooted in white supremacist ideals are learned from their parents, which adds to the `negative perceptions of Black males in society and in school:

I want to say I realized that around maybe sixth, seventh grade. I was actually walking down the hallway from a ceremony that we had had in the auditorium. I had colored my hair because it was I want to say like a school pep rally and everyone was wearing school colors, dyeing their hair, and whatnot. We were all just blending in with the crowd and having fun. As I was walking down the hallway, someone was like take that color out your hair because you're black. I just looked and said, 'So what does that have to do with anything?' Then a few of my friends and teachers were like 'You need not to say that. You need to apologize.'

They had put him into the principal's office and dealt with him and his parents on that behalf. Their parents had to apologize for the incident that had happened that day, but my thing is if the child is saying that, it has to originate from parents itself because no child would just come outright and say something like that, so it would had to have come from the parents. My question is what is being taught in the home when it comes to the black nationality?

While many of the respondents spoke transparently about their experiences, Phil Donner said that he has not experienced mistreatment firsthand per se. He sheds light on how seeing other Black males be mistreated or discriminated against has an impact on him as a Black male even if he has not experienced it first hand:

I may have not seen it firsthand, but I see it through media. That's not a good thing, because like I said, it's subconscious. You see all these news reports of these Black men getting killed, and subconsciously you're in fear. Fear is not a good thing to be in when there's so much stuff going around you. It makes you aware of what reality is. But, it's hurting you subconsciously, and the worst thing that you could ever do to yourself is mess up yourself mentally because what's inside, is expressed outside, in your physical. Yea...that's really it.

This question seemed to really evoke some emotions among the group when the participants were asked this question as a part of the focus group. The stories that many of them shared in the group provided some rich data as they shared their experiences with the others in the group setting. Six out of the seven participants reported that negative views about young, Black men as a group or people and/or the awareness of negative views of young, Black men by society at large. Illmind reminds us that we have some examples of Black males doing positive things, but then you have more examples of Black males doing negative things or glorifying negative things through their platforms. His narrative is synonymous with the negative portrayals and imagery of Black males in the media.

I see a lot of negativity in the media. Ironically, I see it from other Black males. It's crazy how you turn on the radio and rappers and entertainers went from talking about the struggle and how to come together as a people to talking about drugs and gun violence. They glorify negative messages in the music...[W]e can have one Obama, but there are like 10 Little Uzi Verts who glorify negativity.

Static further expounds on the negative portrayal of Black men in society, either by the media, by their circumstances or by the systems that they interact with on a daily basis:

“...sometimes it’s bad stuff. Like getting arrested for small and petty things. Not all Black people are bad. It’s just that sometimes you have to do things to survive. When you don’t have any money and you’re trying to take care of your family because that is what a man is supposed to do. Sometimes it’s not our fault. Sometimes it is what happens when you are trying to make certain systems work for you when they never were meant to work for you or to help you. So, that causes a disconnect and things become skewed or misperceived.” Static also indicates that African American men are sometimes targeted and profiled. Many of the young men recounted incidents where they were harassed or profiled by police and even by adults in the community and even in their schools.

These stereotypes, biases, perceptions and the mistreatment of young Black men can be seen in the racialized experiences that they face in society and in school. In the previous section, many of the participants discussed realizing that they were Black and being mistreated because of their skin color mostly during their middle school years. In this next section, the participant’s experiences of being a Black male, several questions relating to the messages that the participants see in the media, as well as, the influence of those messages on them in school and in society were analyzed. Consequently, this next section will explore the racialized experiences in school and in society of the participants through their narratives and quotes.

Research Question Three

Research question number three was: How are Black males impacted by racialized experiences that they encounter, either directly or indirectly, in school and in society? In continuing to explore the participant's experiences of being a Black male, several questions relating to the messages that the participants see in the media, as well as, the influence of those messages on them in school and in society were analyzed.

Does My Black Life Really Matter?

Hypersurveillance and control of black males. Six of the participants reported encounters with others from apparently different racial backgrounds that somehow brought these young men to the realization that they were Black and somehow different and could easily be targeted as a result of the color of their skin. Many of their narrative accounts talked about interactions with police. Their narratives allude to the theme of hypersurveillance and control of the Black body. Static recounted an incident where he experienced a racialized experience during an interaction with a cop when he was just feet away from his house:

Yeah for me, I remember it was labor day weekend last year because I was driving my mom's car, I was coming from a friend's house going down 85 south and I saw the lights so I got off on the [Marshwood] exit and I parked right there. The guy comes ... he takes a little longer to get to me so I have time to get my license and registration out, but I keep my hands on the wheel, I know how this goes. He just started harassing me and I tried to block it out of my mind so I can't remember but I remember distinctly, he said 'are you scared, boy? You scared?' Like this is like 1950's and I'm on a dirt road. I live two minutes, this was the exit I was supposed to turn off to get home. I live two minutes that way! It was ... at

the time it wasn't weird but the more I think about it, it's so ridiculous. Like you're going to threaten my life for no reason.

Illmind recalled a time when he, too, was profiled and mistreated by police officers. He was also not too far from home when the incident occurred. His narrative supports Static's account of being profiled and mistreated by those who are sworn to protect and serve.

I remember last year, I was living in a neighborhood called Beckley Hills and it's a really nice area. It's predominantly white. I went to Marcus Garvey High School at the time and I had got off the bus with two of my other friends, black males...we noticed the cops in the neighborhood, but we have a sheriff who lives in the neighborhood so we didn't think anything of it.

This particular day, it's raining, we all got hoods on. The cops pull up. I immediately take my hood off, we all immediately take our hood off. This was a little bit after the Trayvon Martin case, so we immediately take our hood off. They approached us. They say, "Where you guys coming from?" Bookbags on and everything, the bus is still leaving the neighborhood. To me, it was a no-brainer we had just came from school.

I didn't say that. I said, "We're coming from school." My friends said, "We go to Garvey High." Told him our grade. He says, "Oh, well, we just got a report that three black males had stole a TV." Thing going in my head is like, "You don't really think that's us, do you?" We got bookbags on, we don't have a TV in our hand. I see the way he looks at me. In my head, it's like, "Okay, we're about to get patted down, arrested, or who knows what's going to happen?"

By the grace of God, there's a call on the walkie talkie saying that the three men had been spotted. I almost saw a look of disappointment on his face. It was probably about one of the scariest things I had ever experienced because it's like, at that moment, you don't know what's going to happen. You don't know where things are going to go. That was my one big incident with the cops, racial profiling.

Several of the other participants shared experiences and interactions with the cops as well, which leads the researcher and the readers to hypothesize that one in 7 young males of color between the ages of 18-22 experience some type of negative interaction with the police as a result of hypersurveillance and control.

Honyst provides an account of his encounter with a police officer and how it made him feel. His account is different in that his father was the one who was directly impacted by the incident, but it had an impact on him as a Black male:

There was an officer who had also pulled him over as well. Nighttime, we was coming back to my football game. We had other passengers in the car. It was raining. My dad had pulled over in the lane from where the officer was at. The officer had pulled him over, got out his car, and immediately was aggressive, aggravated, agitated, and said, "What the hell are you doing? Why are you getting over in this lane," and whatnot and blah, blah, blah. There was a big blowout as far as the officer. He asked my dad, "Do you want to go to jail?"

My dad remained calm and said, "No, I don't." He said, "Well, stay in your F-ing lane." From there on he left and went back into his vehicle. Then he raced off into the rain. That's when we pulled off, and we were afraid and not knowing what

was going to happen from that moment on because at that time this had been an occurrence of a lot of shootings and a whole bunch of other things with Black males.

Seeing how his dad handled the situation also was a teachable moment for Honyst as it was at that moment that he realized that his skin color is seen as a target and that even when you remain calm, the situation could still escalate. Truly mentioned how his encounter made him feel as a young, Black male and mentioned that experiences are not new, they are similar to what others experienced in the past. Truly's narrative is similar to Honyst's narrative but instead he speaks about knowing how to behave when these situations occur and remaining calm as a result of channeling the power that he has as a Black male in terms of knowing who he is and being proud to be a Black male:

Well, it was at this one point when me and my brother, my dad was driving in the car and the police had pulled us over. They was getting rowdy and like wanted us to give them a reason to have an argument, to get hype, that way they could have a reason to take us in. But we had stayed calm actually, and remained just calm again, and, nothing to it. Yea.

It was making me feel some type of way because if you look at it, it's not new, but it is new because of how everything is the same from not too long ago, the past years. You know, there's people still out there who hate, racism, and just because you're not their kind make you feel like you're not a human. And myself, I have to look at myself and say I'm Black and I'm proud and I am who I am, and it makes me just feel great. So, what other people do or say, or how they feel, I shouldn't react because I know who I am.

Blessed1 talks about an incident that impacted him indirectly and how that incident had a huge impact on him as a young, Black male:

There was an event that had happened not too long ago as far as a death. It was based off of a police brutality. A man was in his car allegedly and was picking up his I believe daughter from the bus station and police officers had shot him. Then there was a huge protest, rallies and much more that was occurring and riots as well that had happened from him being shot by police and killed that I had seen on the media. It was just shocking to me to know that being a black man you don't know when your time is before you are just a hashtag away or engraved in a stone and people putting flowers over you.

It's scary to know that each day that you wake up, get dressed, and go out to do what you do in life that something so tragic could happen to you in a blink of an eye just because of your color.

Most of the participants were able to share their stories about how incidents that involved other Black men had an impact on them and caused them to reflect on how they could be a part of the solution and not a part of the problem. Honyst spoke of the same incident and how it made him feel as well as many of the other incidents that have been in the news regarding shootings of unarmed men. He elaborated on his sense of agency and wanting to be involved because of the impact that the incidents had on him, which is a sentiment that was shared by a few of the participants:

It sparked for me to also join in the protest. Okay, we've been protesting for hundreds of years. Yes, protests are a good thing, but there's a certain level of involvement to go with doing protest. You don't go out of control and start doing

riots. Yes, you may be frustrated and angry, but still there's a well-mannered way that you go about it because what they label us as we can't upset for acting out based off of yes a tragedy happening, but the label they put us underneath for giving them even more reason to keep calling for change.

I feel like protests help, but sometimes it's not all about protesting. What's the black community doing right now even when such things are not happening? What are they doing as a group to say, hey, we need to get together to build up a community development center, for students to get out the streets and our black men to be a father to a child or be a big brother to them, stuff like that, having the black women in the community cook meals for our black young men and women.

Phil Donner also talks about how experiences in society impact him indirectly and how he internalizes them, even if he has not experienced them directly:

I may have not seen it firsthand, but I see it through media. That's not a good thing, because like I said, it's subconscious. You see all these news reportings of these Black men getting killed, and subconsciously you're in fear. Fear is not a good thing to be in when there's so much stuff going around you. It makes you aware of what reality is. But, it's hurting you subconsciously, and the worst thing that you could ever do to yourself is mess up yourself mentally because what's inside, is expressed outside, in your physical. Yea...that's really it.

The narratives of the young men reflect how race played a factor in how many of the participants were treated in society. Many of their narratives provided detailed accounts about how those stereotypes, messages, and images are also visible in society and how those stereotypes, messages, and images can lead to the hypersurveillance and

control of Black males in society. The next section provides narrative accounts about their experiences in the school setting.

Degraded, Devalued, Disengaged, but Not Deterred

In addition to the racialized experiences that many of the participants experienced, either directly or indirectly, students identified how these experiences also occurred in the classroom or school settings as well. Sadly, many of the participants expressed how these incidents made them feel and how important it is to understand how to interact with cops and even with people of a different race as a black male. Many of them mentioned that they are seen as less than human and as if their lives have no value. As it relates to how the interviewees experienced race-based incidents in the classroom and incidents when those stereotypes and perceptions permeated the classroom setting, many of them spoke to the role of teacher biases and perceptions and how those biases play a role in the academic experiences of Black males. The perceptions and stereotypes of teachers actually filter into the classroom setting and result in exclusion by teachers and the expectations of teachers arose when examining the experiences in the school setting. Blessed1 recounted how an interaction with a teacher motivated him to want to work harder and be successful because of how she perceived him in the classroom setting:

I can say I had a teacher who really did not seem happy about her job. I was in class just talking, which pretty much a lot of students do when we have free time, talking. I mean you want to get your work done, but she had told me I wasn't gonna amount to nothing because all I do is sit in class and just talk and play around. And, I heard it before, so when I hear that, it makes me work harder just

not only to prove to others but prove to myself that I can do what people say I can't do. And, it makes me feel like I achieved something and I am someone.

Illmind creates a connection to how teachers can contribute to students being disengaged from the schooling process. His story provides insight into why his parents chose to homeschool him:

Well, for one, I'm homeschooled now... but when I was in school, nah, we couldn't talk about current issues and issues that youth face. Crazy thing is all my history teachers have been white. I had one black history teacher for half a year in 8th grade named Ms. Smith. She didn't stress it, though. She didn't stress this inequality, she didn't...[W]e spent a week or two on slavery, but spent a month and a half on the Holocaust.

In high school, I had a history teacher named Mr. Chuck. He was a really cool dude, but once again, we spent a week or two on slavery and how it affects us now, but when it came to the Roman Empire and all these other tragedies, we talking about it for half the year it seems like. I didn't have a outlet. I mean, even if we were talking about it outside of class, other kids would look at you like, "Why are you talking about it? It's over."

Little do they know, it's not over. Crazy thing is I would say social media is a outlet, but people don't post these Trayvon Martin posts anymore. People forget about Trayvon Martin and Oscar Grant until another case like that happen. Then it's #ripblank for about a month, then it disappears again. People will talk about anything that's relevant for the longest time, but it's funny how slavery isn't as relevant as the Holocaust is now.

Middle school can also be a crucial time in a young man's life. Dallas talks about a time in middle school when he was disciplined differently from peers of other races and ethnicities and he noticed it and questioned it:

I do remember...so there was this one time, also in middle school, weird time that was. I got into a fight with another Black male, and we were immediately, we had like ISS and we were like out of commission the next two days. Like, we couldn't go out and have recess or whatever. But then I saw, it was a huge field and there was a track around it and there were soccer games, and they would get super aggressive, I guess because they were into it. There was like, White people, Asian people, and they got in fights constantly, like on the field, and no one ever said anything about them. And there was way more people over there. So, I don't know if it was an issue of, well we can't take all of them in, or if it was an issue of, oh these guys are Black, we need...got to cage them.

During the focus group, several of the participants recalled incidents where their teachers had low expectations of them and would not really push them or try to engage them and motivate them. Static's comments about how teachers act differently towards him and how teachers tried to discourage him from taking certain courses resonates with the low expectations that teachers have of them:

Yes it's like ... I don't know, I feel like I was starting to notice it more in high school, because you know that's when people start to think about their future. Actually no, in middle school. In 8th grade I can distinctly remember when this white teacher would pull kids to the side for being in trouble. She would distinctly talk to the black kids differently than she would talk to the white ones. And you

could hear ... you could hear her conversation. This kid Cameron, he's white, he got in trouble for something, 'now Cameron why did you do that? Why did you do that? That doesn't seem right. Go sit down, think about this, I don't want to write you out but I will'.

I get pulled over to the side... I distinctly remember the situation, me and a friend Semian got pulled over because we were being loud and disruptive but not too much to where the whole class was disrupted, it was just us. She pulled us aside, she was using slang, she's cursing, it was weird. She's like, 'What's happening? What's goin' on y'all talking shit? What's happenin'?' We were so quiet because we didn't understand. This was the first time we ever got in trouble so we were so confused why she was talking to us like that. She was G from the block, it was confusing.

He continues his recollection by discussing how teacher expectations and negative comments seemed to happen more during his high school years.

Then 9th grade you start to see it just more widespread. Definitely 10th grade my biology teacher, she always kept asking me what my plans for my future were, more than anybody else and I thought she had a general concern. I did actually want to go to college but she kept telling me 'no college is hard, you might just want to probably get a job or something, you don't have to' ... she would tell me which classes to take; she would say 'oh you don't have to take extra science your senior year. That's only for people who want to go to college. It looks good on their application.'

Oh well I'm going to take an extra social studies because I'm not good at science but I'll take an extra social studies, because that looks good on my transcript. 'Oh you're going to college?! That's hmm, that's good, be careful, it's hard'. There was a lot of that from teachers, principals, administrators. They don't expect much. Especially in the neighborhood I lived in, everybody knew where I lived because I lived right across from the school, they knew it was like lock downs every other week ...

Phil Donner speaks of further exclusion in the school setting in an account that examined interaction with a peer: “When I went to an all-White school. It was like three Black people at the whole school.” Phil Donner went on to say, “The teachers, they had their ways. They talked to me like I was slow.” Phil Donner would later report being acutely aware of his “Blackness” after he tried to date a White girl at his school and was told by her that her family did not accept his kind. He admits that this was the first time that he truly realized that his Blackness could be a negative attribute in society where he might be perceived as not being valued.

Little is known about how Black males are impacted by the messages that they receive from society and in the school setting about the meaning of being a young Black man in society today. The narratives of the young, Black male participants in the study provides insight into how Black male youth negotiate and reframe their identities, center their voices, and make sense of their everyday lived experiences and their interactions with race and racism in school and in society. Youth in society wrestle with so many issues on a daily basis. However, youth from urban contexts often also have to wrestle with other issues as they relate to race, class, and negative perceptions. Young Black

males encounter challenges in society and school, in addition to what it means for young people to deal with micro-aggressions that they face daily due to race, racism, and negative stereotyping. Yet, the literature does not include how urban sanctuaries (safe spaces) can create a space that allows youth to make meaning of their own identities in relation to their everyday lived experiences in schools and the larger society as a means of coping with and navigating through those experiences. The next section will discuss methods of coping with the race-based incidents and combatting stereotypes as a Black male.

Research Question Four

The fourth and final research question was: How do Black males cope with and navigate through those racialized experiences that they hear, see, or encounter as a Black male? The participants were asked about the presence of outlets and spaces to cope and deal with racialized experiences. Beyond the capacity to be a way to creatively express themselves, a way to vent, and a way to speak their truths, many of the participants spoke about how being on the stage allows them the freedom and the space to be themselves. The participants in the study spoke about several incidents that happened and how they look for outlets and ways to heal and deal with the incidents, which according to their responses are few and few between.

Each young man clearly spoke about the importance of having a space to vent and also about the lack of spaces to vent, especially in school, and have candid conversations about race and how they are impacted by race, stereotypes, and discrimination. Often the classroom did not serve as a safe space and a warm and inviting environment as mentioned above in the narratives. Many of the young men spoke about finding refuge in

a space known as Poetry Ink, where they could come together and do poetry slams or open mics about personal, political, or any other issues that they felt passionate about.

Poetry Saved My Life and Changed My Life

When providing evidence about the importance of having this art form available, Dallas talks about how his involvement in Poetry Ink allows him to deal with issues as a young Black male:

Poetry Ink. That was a beautiful place for me to kind of talk about these issues.

Outside of Poetry Ink, I can't really say there is a place. I know that they try to say there's counselors in school, but like, the White, Italian, female counselor is not going to understand me talking about the trials and tribulations of being a Black man. So, it doesn't feel as comfortable. You want people that look like you to be able to talk to them so they'll be able to understand you...It's way more relaxing to talk about these issues because other men will talk about the same issues with you. So, it's beautiful how spoken word poetry is, it's a form of expression that is popularized and very much used as a vehicle for people as color. You also have music, but rap music has been so negative and it's so easy to put a negative light on rap music. So, the view of spoken word poetry hasn't been as tainted, so that's why it's important.

It's also cool because spoken word is just that, you're speaking, so you get to...there's different styles of poetry, there are styles of performance, but ultimately it's free form. You can use whatever rhythm, whatever, you can say whatever you want to say, and that's what's so beautiful about spoken word poetry...is the audience, everyone involved in events, they don't censor you. There

is times when you may hear or say something that someone else does not agree with, but you get to say it. It's...you're performing. It's not...it can start a conversation, but it's not. So, you won't have someone interrupting you while you're doing your poem, because that's three or so minutes you get to speak your mind about whatever is upsetting you that day. And that's very important.

Static also talked about Poetry Ink. He mentioned how Spoken Word Poetry has changed his life and engaged him and motivated him to want to be successful and to want to do well. He gained confidence in himself as an artist. He sounded enthusiastic as he talked about his passion for having this space to discuss issues of importance with other people:

I'm going to age out soon, so I guess I'm going to be on that list, they'll put me in charge of stuff hopefully. It's...we've beat the Brave new voices three times going on four. We work on poems, but we don't just focus on the poems, if we're talking about important things in our poetry we say we discuss it. When we did the HB2 poem, we read articles, we'd spend our whole practice, all 6 of us talking about okay what is HB2? How does this affect everybody? This affects everybody, how does this make y'all feel that this has happened? Every single thing that happened, we wrote a lot of poems that didn't get used at BNV...a lot of those felt important to all of us. We got a lot of things out that you didn't even know you were feeling...They...Poetry Ink... pulls a lot of stuff out of you and it makes... I feel like I'm a better person because of it, because I get to hang around all these dope poets and I get to see stuff that I never thought I would see. I never thought I'd go to DC to do poems, at the Kennedy Center, that's weird.

The role of having a space to process about issues is illustrated by Illmind. Like other

participants, Illmind also asserts the importance of having this space as a young, Black male in his comments:

Yeah. I mean, the comfort of your home. I feel like, Poetry Ink. That's a really good place. I mean, that was one of the first places I went to openly that allowed me to speak on this. I feel like Poetry Ink was such a good place because it's so diverse. Not just in race or ethnicity, I'm talking about mindsets.

People were speaking their minds to the point where it made sense. Something wasn't wrong just because they thought it was wrong, something was wrong because they really had a point of view on it...

Illmind goes on to provide reasons about why having an outlet is important to him as a Black male who was disengaged and unmotivated by school. Poetry and art became important and impacted him to the point where he continued to push through school and defy the odds as a young, Black male. He became confident and knew that this could be a venue to bring some positivity to the lives of others, especially his peers and the younger generations:

The very first poem I saw him do was 'School Does Not Define'. At the moment, that was speaking volumes to me. I was probably in 9th grade about ready to give up on school.

High school was kicking my butt at that point. I saw that video 'School Does Not Define Me', I'm like, "Fact." Showed it to my parents, everything. After that, I'm like, "Oh, I can do that." Once I see somebody do something, I'm like, "Oh, I can do that. Not only can I do it, I can do it better." That introduced slam poetry to

me. Ever since then, it's been crazy. My first time competing in slams, I made it to finals.

That was crazy. It's crazy that I made it in the finals because that was not my best. Whoa, that was definitely not my best. I slept on a lot of the poets there and I just didn't know what to expect. Now that I know what I can do, it's like, "Okay. I can take this slam poetry thing and I can do wonders with it." I'm seeing the kids that's doing it, I'm like, "They talented, but I can outdo them. I can outdo her."

Oh, the biggest thing about slam poetry I always tell my parents is, "It keeps me focused." Parents always tell me, "You got to do the things you need to do to do the things you want to do." Slam poetry is what keeps my grades on point. I know if all my grades not on point, can't do the slam poetry. It keeps me off the streets. If I wasn't musically inclined, if I wasn't talented, I don't know what I'd be doing. I could be out here running around every night, I could not be in school, but this poetry, slam poetry has pushed me to educate myself. I don't want to be on a Cat in the Hat level with poetry, I want to use words to crowds that have never heard it before. I want to stack syllables, I want to put multis in there. I feel like that's ... poetry has pushed me beyond belief.

Static, who has Bipolar Disorder and who once was shy and afraid to speak in front of people described how Spoken Word Poetry is often therapeutic for him as a young Black male with a mental health disorder. He mentioned that he would be seen as weird in some spaces, but he us seen as a creative genius and "that dude" at the open mics and the poetry slams. He also talks about the resurgence of spoken word as an art form and as a way to creatively express one's self and his narrative supports what Illmind said

previously about how poetry changes you and serves as an outlet to just share stories and more importantly to share your truth:

It's an art form that's lost. I feel like right now nobody realizes the reach it has. Everybody thinks ... I know I'm talking to a lot of people and everybody keeps saying, 'Oh people still do spoken word?' It's such a thing to people that I don't even understand that but it's whole sub culture in black communities and it's easier for me. I have a hard time expressing how I'm feeling about stuff. I'm not the best with words. I could write ... you tell me to write how this makes you feel, if I can't say it, I can write it. Expressing it ... getting in front of people and just telling them how you feel without judgment or anything is great and it's changed lives for a lot of people.

The competition aspect ... every time I've been in a slam, team or solo, I've never felt like it was competition because you know when everybody you are competing with comes up to you and hugs you and you go up and hug them, it don't feel like competition, it feels like family. Every slam feels like family reunion. It's changed me and it's made me better at being aware of stuff, of the people around me.

Static acknowledged the importance of writing and sharing your truth when asked what are some of the things that he writes about:

Everything. Everything that's with me. I usually... I never want to...with me I never want to write somebody else's story. I usually...everything I've felt, everything I see, I'll write about. A lot of things I deal with, mental health issues, things that deal with police brutality, you know things that make me happy, things

that make me sad, things that make me angry. Any emotion I feel I've probably written about it. Written about prison systems, everything.

Dallas further supports the role that art, specifically poetry plays in being able to creatively express yourself. He further discusses how art has helped him deal with some tough situations in his life:

Without a doubt. Poetry...I always hold that poetry came at the most perfect time for me, because when I was introduced to poetry I got a lost girlfriend of nearly two years, I was struggling in doing stand up comedy. I think I was a junior, so the thoughts of graduating was like really on me and the senior exit, and what am I going to do after high school, and it was just a lot was going on. Then poetry kind of came like, poof, into my lap and as a senior talk about these things, okay. In many ways it saved my life, kept me on a good track. Being able to get all these things inside of me out, it's so necessary.

Each young man clearly spoke about the importance of having a space to vent and also about the lack of spaces to vent, especially in school, and have candid conversations about race and how they are impacted by race, stereotypes, and discrimination. Although the perception of the role of spoken word poetry was nuanced between the young men that I interviewed, it became evident through my inquiry that students felt they could attend open mics and poetry slams as a place that allows them to be themselves and coping with the cruel realities of the world in which they live.

Knowledge is Power: Know Thyself

The discussion about the lack of spaces to vent and express themselves when dealing with or coping from racialized experiences led to a separate subtheme being

uncovered as many of the young participants spoke about how racial socialization and the conversations that their parents have with them helps them to deal with interactions and to navigate racialized experiences when they arise. Their accounts of their talks with parents and their exposure to history informs the literature about how knowledge of self and an awareness of history and proper etiquette as a Black male contributed to their ability to combat negative stereotypes and racialized experiences in school or society that they have encountered or continue to encounter as a Black male. Thus, racial socialization acts as a tool of resistance against stereotypes, marginalization, and oppressive systems as a Black male in society.

Racial Socialization. Many of the young males talk about how their parents have kind of taught them or talked to them about how to interact with people of opposite race and authority figures such as police. Illmind recounts how his dad has constantly reminded him about the importance of learning the truth about his heritage:

We'll sit here, we'll watch a documentary on Anne Frank every grade I've been in from 5th to up, but I've only seen Hotel Rwanda in one class. I had to watch Roots with my parents. That's crazy. It's almost humorous. It does make you kind of laugh because it's like, "This don't make no sense." I think that's why from a young age, my dad has told me, "History is really 'his story' because it's how the white man writes it. It's how they write it." No, school has not been a outlet and I wish it could be.

Truly references the importance of knowing who you are and knowing about your history and heritage as a way to deal with race-related situations when they arise:

...Again, like, I know once a person knows who they are, then you just gotta take pride and don't let no one change you otherwise. You can either be the reaction or how they come towards you or to you. But you still have to stay calm and remain the same. My father and mother have always stressed the importance of being reminded that you are royalty and that some people just do not value you, but it is about their personal insecurities and it has nothing to do with you. I remember those words every time someone calls me the N word or tells me I cannot do something because of the color of my skin.

Phil Donner also expounds further on the ideal of knowledge of self and knowing one's history in his comments about how he would deal with race-based incidents:

Well, I've been learning about my history, our history, as so-called African Americans. I wouldn't call myself African American. I would call myself, where my origin, my roots came from. And, it's basically in Central America, near the Caribbean, because there were Black people in America too, you know, before European. There were dark skinned Native Americans, I would say. You heard of the Moors, right?...

Phil Donner further discusses the role that his father played in helping him learn about his history and how to use knowledge of self as a tool of resistance against racialized experiences. He asserts how knowledgeable his father is about history:

It was actually instilled in me at a very young, young age. My dad, when we used to live in Brooklyn, he used to watch documentaries of Egypt, ancient Egypt, and he saw that there were white people, Caucasian people, in the hieroglyphics, the carvings. And he was like, this is all fake. At that young age, I was kind of scared,

because he used to look at me dead in my face, like he was pretty pissed, and thinking that I understood what was happening, but I didn't know. He was like, we're going to find out soon, that these people were not there. He was a very Black...he was very educated. He didn't have a college...I think he dropped out. But when I tell you he is the most educated, he knows so much. I'm saying you don't need a college degree to know so much. That man knows a lot, a lot, a lot. I think he can outsmart a college graduate.

Their quotes echoed the sentiments of each participant who stressed the ability to know how to deal with situations as they arise because of the tools of socialization and the talks about knowing one's history and knowing how to act when faced with certain situations in school or in society. The quotes of the participants show that young, Black males can benefit from spoken word and performance poetry as an outlet to creatively express themselves in an effort to transform their pain into power and use that power to promote social justice for other vulnerable populations. One thing that was discovered from the comments and narratives of the participants was the fact that many of the participants were able to speak about being socialized and taught by their parents or their own acquisition of knowledge helps them in being able to cope with and navigate through racialized experiences that they might encounter as Black males.

Summary

Chapter four highlighted the emergent themes from the data collection. Findings were presented for the four research questions guiding the study: (1) How do Black males negotiate their identities (racial, gender, or otherwise) in school and society? (2) How do

perceptions, stereotypes, and media portrayal of Black males impact Black males' perceptions of their identities as a Black male? (3) How are Black males impacted by racialized experiences that they experience, either directly or indirectly, in school and in society? (4) How do Black males cope with and navigate through those racialized experiences that they hear, see, or encounter as a Black male? This chapter was organized into two sections: part one provided an overview of the participant profiles of the seven participants who participated in the study. Part two provided the thematic overview of the eight themes which developed from focus groups and interviews with participants. The main themes that surfaced from the data for research question one: perceptions and definitions of being a male (protector, provider, and being responsible) and of being a Black male (struggle and challenge); research question two: (how society views Black males in terms of perceptions, stereotypes, and images in the media and the realization of being a young, Black male—"Blackness"); research question three: (racialized experiences in society and racialized experiences in school) and research question four: creative outlets (poetry and other means of creative expression and socialization and having the talk about what it means to be a young, Black male and what that entails) were presented in great detail in their narrative accounts via the quotes mentioned in this chapter. The next and final chapter will present a discussion of the findings.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Overview

The information presented in this final chapter focuses on providing a summative discussion of the four research questions. More specifically, this chapter is organized by research question and individual themes; the findings are summarized, connected to the broader literature, and positioned within the theoretical framework that guided the research. In the final section, implications and recommendations for educational stakeholders are made as well as recommendations for future research.

Review of the Study

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the purpose of this study is to explore the intersection between the everyday lived experiences of Black male youth (ages 18-22) and spoken word as a way to address the contemporary problems of race, racism, and perceptions that influence their academic and social experiences, and the daily realities and the identity of this group within the larger societal structures. This study examined the meaning of being a young Black male, explore the potential influence of life experiences and societal messages on perceptions of being young, Black, and male, and how young, Black males are impacted by racialized experiences in school and in society. Focusing exclusively on Black male students and using a single case study design, the guiding research questions were:

- (1) How do Black males negotiate their identities (racial, gender, or otherwise) in school and society?
- (2) How do perceptions, stereotypes, and media portrayal of Black males impact

Black males' perceptions of their identities as a Black males?

- (3) How are Black males impacted by racialized experiences that they encounter, either directly or indirectly, in school and in society?
- (4) How do Black males cope with and navigate through those racialized experiences that they hear, see, or encounter as a Black male?

This study began with an analysis of the complex, multifaceted problem of how Black males are perceived in society and in school considering that many think that Black males are “in crisis” and in need of being fixed. Chapter 1 identified the factors which contribute to how Black males perceive themselves in terms of societal norms and expectations and also how they are viewed in the media and in the classroom and how those perceptions contribute to how they impact their experiences in school and in society. Chapter 2 contained a review of relevant literature which examines race, stereotypes, and perceptions, Black male identity, and identity construction of Black males who encounter racialized experiences. Chapter 3 outlined the framework for the research method employed to address the critical research questions. Chapter 4 presented a detailed presentation of the research findings. Chapter 5 concludes the study with a discussion of the key themes which emerged from the data analysis, examines the implications of the findings and gives recommendations for future policy, practice and research.

Many of the questions addressed identity as a male and perceptions of identity as a young, Black male, perceptions, stereotypes, and messages about Black males, the academic and social experiences of Black males, the presence of race and racism, how they cope with the incidents of race, racism, and discrimination that they encounter, and

also the role that spoken word plays in buffering those incidents, and creating resilience among the participants. While research related to the experience of being Black and male is growing, it could be argued that relatively little is known about how Black young men are impacted by the messages that they receive about the meaning of being a young Black man and how they cope or buffer those negative messages that they hear or see in society and school.

Rarely, have we explored the intersection between the everyday lived experiences of Black male youth and spoken word as a way to address the contemporary problems of race, racism, and power relationships that influence the daily realities and identity of this group within the larger societal structures. Consequently, little is known about how Black males are impacted by the messages that they receive from society and in the school setting about the meaning of being a young, Black man in society today. The narratives of the young, Black male participants in the study provide insight into how Black male youth negotiate and reframe their identities, center their voices, and make sense of their everyday lived experiences and their interactions with race and racism in school and in society.

Youth in society wrestle with so many issues on a daily basis; however, Black male youth often also have to wrestle with other issues as they relate to race, class, and stereotypes and perceptions of Black males. Hence, young Black males encounter challenges in society and school, in addition to what it means for young people to deal with micro-aggressions that they face daily due to race, racism, and negative stereotyping. Yet, the literature does not include how urban sanctuaries (safe spaces) can create a space that allows youth to make meaning of their own identities in relation to

their everyday lived experiences in schools and the larger society as a means of coping with and navigating through racialized experiences. The participants in the study speak about several incidents that happened and how they look for outlets and ways to heal and deal with the incidents. Students were able to exercise their voices in combating societal injustices and providing insight into their needs and how those needs can best be met in a setting outside of school (i.e., community-based organizations where they perform spoken word, have open mics, and perform poetry slams). This setting provided students with a chance to use their assets to have their voices, which are normally silenced, heard and provides them with a space to heal from the cultural or racial trauma that has been experienced directly or indirectly from the racialized experiences that they encounter.

Research Question One

In providing an understanding of student perceptions of what it means to be a male and to be a Black male in society in the 21st century, two themes that materialized for the first research question. They were: "Men should be protectors and providers" (Perceptions of masculinity and maleness), "Black Men have to overcome struggles and challenges" (Perceptions of Black masculinity/maleness. Each theme is revisited below.

Theme One: Perceptions of Masculinity: "Males are Providers and Protectors." A significant component of the student narratives as they described what it meant to be a male was the existence of more traits and roles, either ascribed by society or by the family unit. Students shared that society views men as strong and masculine. The perceptions were not limited to just strength and masculinity, but to their roles as men as well. Participants noted the roles of men in society and as men in the family unit. Blessed1's description: "it is important to be masculine and not be a punk, but being a

real man. To tell the truth, I think that being a real man means protecting and providing for your family even from your sickbed.”

The idea of men being protectors and providers within the family unit is not a surprising phenomenon. Historically, men protected the home and provided for the family. However, historically Black men were considered property and not citizens or even humans for that matter. For too long, Black masculinity has been understood from a Eurocentric (hegemonic) standard. Hegemonic masculinity is defined as “the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (Connell, 1995, p.77). The characteristics associated with White masculinity include assertiveness, toughness, dominance, decisiveness, independence, ambitiousness, self-reliance, forcefulness, reliability, analytic ability, and competitiveness (White & Cones, 1999). Heavy reliance on the Euro-American masculine ideal places little or no value on such qualities as empathy, compassion, harmony within relationships, and the ability to identify and label emotions (White & Cones, 1999).

Consequently, white masculinity is in direct contrast to the Afrocentric view of masculinity which places an emphasis on human relationships and the “synthesis of opposites as a way of resolving conflict (White & Cones, p. 118). Dyson (2007) refers to the concept of manhood as the ability to impose harm or violence as inauthentic and the ability to define strength and accept vulnerability as inauthentic. He goes on to state that American notions of masculinity do not acknowledge the qualities of cooperation,

negotiation, and compromise. This dissertation corroborates the ideal image of what it means to be a male, especially from a Eurocentric and hegemonic viewpoint.

The hypothesis that there is not much difference between being a male and being a Black male is proven wrong by the qualitative accounts of the participants. In fact, many of the participants speak about what it means to be a Black male according to norms and also what it means to be a Black male in society today. The manner in which Black men have been characterized in American society has been well-documented (Howard, 2012; Ferguson, 2001; Madhubuti, 1990). According to the participants, Black males live lives full of struggle and challenges. Illmind's comment: "It sounds cliché...but I feel like struggle is everyday life for us. Everything we do is a struggle, but it is not just about going through the struggle, but overcoming the struggle" captures the essence of the theme of being a Black male; while, Blessed1 further elaborated on the theme of struggle and difficulties: "...[B]lack men have to carry the world on their shoulders and the family on your back because they are always trying to provide but there are so many things like limited job opportunities and low paying jobs that do not allow you to get ahead and so the struggle continues and the cycle perpetuates itself support the comparison to struggle and difficulties as a Black male." Static added another layer to the identity of being a Black male by acknowledging that he is a young, Black male with a mental health disorder and so his struggle is a little bit different:

Can't talk about mental illness at all as a black man. It's ... you cannot ... anytime a black man talks about mental illness, oh that's white people stuff, oh that don't ... we don't do that, that's always what I've heard. You can't talk about that. You have to be a cookie cut out black man, you gotta be milk chocolate, tall, hair cut, light

voice, proper english, proper vernacular for you to be accepted... The dirty looks I got...you gotta look a certain way, dress a certain way, act a certain way to be taken serious. And don't ... you can't bring up mental illness and that's what people in our culture...even out of our culture, you can't bring up mental illness without it being a surprise that black men go through it, because it's not.

The theme of masculinity in terms of discrepancies between Eurocentric ideals of maleness and that espoused by Black males relates to the theoretical framework of Critical Race Theory (CRT) tenet that acknowledges that racism is recognized as being prevalent in American society. The descriptions that many of the participants provided regarding the disparities between being a man and being a Black man asserts this notion that race is central and prevalent in society. Gloria Ladson-Billings (1999) clarifies that the 'voice' component of Critical Race Theory (CRT) provides a way to communicate the experiences and realities of the oppressed, a first step in understanding the complexities of racism..." (p.16). Thus, the participants' acknowledgement of the disparities that exist as a result of race supports the idea that Black maleness is certainly perceived as being different from that of Eurocentric maleness; thereby, supporting the notion that race is prevalent in society. In relation to the theoretical framework, racial identity and pride and masculinity support the construction of this theme. The students' emphasis on the need for diversity and increased representation in the fields highlights their desire to see themselves reflected in more spaces. This desire is connected to them having pride in their racial group. Furthermore, the desire to see equity in gender representation highlights their expansive and nonrestrictive views on masculinity.

Theme Two. Black Male Identity (Identity Construction)

In order to help change the life circumstances of young Black men, we need to know more about their identity development process and their perceptions of what it means to be young, Black, and male, and how they are influenced by messages from others about what it means to be young, Black men. One of the challenges with social imagery is that the constructed descriptions and understandings of particular groups can be rooted in false depictions that ultimately present distorted notions of a group's history, culture, practices, and norms (Bloor, 1991).

This erasure of identity all started with white supremacist ideology cemented during slavery that turned Africa into a “land of savages” and black skin into a “badge of degradation”. By denying the reality of the earliest and most influential civilizations of Egypt, Mali, and the intellectual mecca of Timbuktu, America has for centuries perpetuated lie after lie and created a distorted, dishonest version on history for many of its citizens. As a result, many Black males are not educated on and aware of their identity as descendants of royalty.

Consequently, while the origins and practices within the legacy of slavery and Jim Crow racism are no longer with us, the creation and ideology of white supremacy have left legacies through seemingly “race-blind” racial politics in government, media, and school policies that reproduce old racial essentialisms and material inequalities for Blacks in society (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). For example, Black males have frequently been portrayed in movies, film, music, magazines, books, and television as animalistic in nature, impulsively violent, aggressive, lacking intelligence, economically incompetent, are sexual predators, and whose very being in society should be feared. These negative

portrayals, images, and narratives can be traced back to the religious, scientific, academic, and legal justifications of race throughout history (Anderson, 1988; Marable, 1994). The responses of the participants support how Black males are viewed in society and the role that stereotypes, perceptions, and media portrayals of Black males have on their identity as Black males. Many of the participants spoke about incidents that reminded them of their Blackness and their identity as a Black male and how they are perceived because they were mistreated and reminded of their value as a result.

According to Static Black males are not viewed in any way, unless they are entertaining, but even then, they are not taken seriously because they are considered “play things and entertainment” and are still viewed negatively. Honyst supports the notion that Black males are viewed and looked at negatively in society and are viewed as still being slaves and “being seen as niggas, niggers, hoodlums, bums, uneducated, and many other things. Dallas goes a little further in his response to give a few examples of Black males and the influence of negative perceptions and stereotypes on them. Black males are viewed “as less than... as dangerous. Not worth protecting...So, I want to give examples, but the problem is there have been so many issues with cops like, Black police brutality like Philando Castile or Alton Sterling, even Trayvon way back, which started the unfortunate trend. Black men are not worth protecting...People think that we're just kind of there, that we're in the way, that we're obstacles. Like, why would keep obstacles in the way, you get rid of them, you eliminate them. We're not viewed as valuable. Our lives are expendable.”

These accounts support the notion of loss among the African-American and Black culture and the impact of that loss on present-day identity construction and formation of

Black males. For instance, when Africans came to America they lost their language, culture, and name – their entire African identity was lost. It can be argued that politics and institutionalized racism are constant reminders to the Black person in America that their identity is endangered. Allen (2001) claims that “the African-Americans’ sense of self within a larger society were formulated during the horrendous period of human bondage-that peculiar institution called slavery-during which even the basic humanity of the African was denied” (p.172). The genocide and bondage perpetrated on kidnapped Africans and generations of slaves, followed by more than a century of racial oppression after the Civil War, have effectively kept Blacks disproportionately near the bottom of the social pyramid (Cohen & Northridge, 2000). The comments of the participants supports the notion that the prevalence of race highlights the impact of stereotypes, perceptions, and media images as crucial elements of their experiences and is an overall contributor to their identity formation as Black males.

Theme Three: Race-Based Incidents (Racialized Experiences)

Stereotypes, messages, and media images of Black males also influence how they are perceived in school and society. Many of the participants’ recalled incidents where race was prevalent either in school or society. The findings from Rome’s (2004) study about the impact of stereotypes on Black males are supported by the narratives and quotes of the participants who provide instances where Black males have been negatively viewed. As a result, Black males have had to negotiate their identities based on race, gender, and stereotypes.

In Rome’s (2004) book, he asserts that Black men are depicted as “Black Demons” by the U.S. media. As “Black Demons”, Black men are stereotyped as prone to

criminality and violence and unable to fit into society. This stereotype serves as a justification for increased society created difficulties for Black men, including high rates of incarceration and scrutiny. Black men have been stereotyped as an animal and brute in the years of American enslavement to his current stereotypical image as a gangster and thug, the Black male has maintained the stereotypical status of menace to society. Honyst mentioned that Black males are “still seen as slaves...I feel like they are seen as niggas, niggers, hoodlums, bums, uneducated, and many other things to be honest.”

According to Ferguson (2001), the Black males she encountered found it necessary to “actively configure self through two social identities, race and gender, to provide the social, psychic, and emotional resources for recouping a sense of self as competent and admirable in an institutional setting where they have been categorized as problems or as failures” (p. 97). This is also recounted in many of the racialized experiences of the males in the study.

Noguera (2003) has called for research that attempts to understand Black males’ perspectives on social imagery (images of violence)—particularly on how Black males interact and understand these images—and subsequently how they identify with them personally. His research revealed that Black males identified more strongly with images of individuals who avoided conflict than those that did not. These findings contradicted messages built into entertainment media that Black males strongly identify with individuals who perpetrate violence. In short, this relationship is nuanced and needs to be studied further if there is to be a revised, more compassionate, and humane notion of Black males. Many of the Black males in my study are focused on using their platforms to help others and to bring about positive change. Many of them stated that they want to

bring positivity back into the young generations. Illmind's comment about the power of poetry and music supports Noguera's findings, but contradicts other findings that Black males are not civically engaged, "I feel like me, I feel like for one, I'm here to help people. In a way, I'm a helper. Yeah, and school. If it's something I get, if I get a subject I see somebody struggling, it's within me to help that person. I think that's why I write poems. That's why I write music: to help people. I want to go into society, I don't want to just be another rapper. I want to be a public figure, I want someone to look at me. I want someone to listen to my music, read my poems, see what I do on social media. I want to help somebody get through their day. That's not just black people, that's everybody. I think that's my purpose for being here. That's why I'm here." Illmind and many of the other participants are on a mission to help change the negative views of Black males through their venues and their respective art forms.

As explained in Chapter 4, many of the participants had racialized experiences in school or in society that made them feel as if their lives were not valued and made them fearful of being a Black male, but this also caused many of them to examine themselves in relation to societal expectations. More specifically, their racial and gender identities were discussed. This theme captures the participants' thoughts on race as a construct and the importance of culture. Students recounted the racialized experiences, but many also explained that their identification as Black was a significant part of their identity. In addition to their personal identification, students discussed stereotypes that are often attributed to them as Black men which included being linked to sports, lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and criminal activity. A final aspect of this theme was the discussion of masculinity. All of the participants in the study explained that masculinity

is a construct based on expectation and because of that, it is difficult to define. Many of the students' responses reflected both personal experiences in school and in society that are often perpetuated by the media.

Within the theoretical framework, critical race theory allows for voices from the margins to be brought to the center through narratives, storytelling, and counterstorytelling. A number of studies point to the importance of centering the voices of youth which is also an aim of Critical Race Theory (CRT). Howard (2001) argues that if the policies and practices in school are created with students' best interests in mind, there is no reason for their voices not to be centered. In this study, the racialized experiences in school and in society are brought to the center by the male participants who not only share their narratives, but who also share how those experiences impacted them. Consequently, the student narratives highlight, in relation to the theoretical framework, their voices being centered. To have your voice centered and to "turn the margins into places of transformative resistance" (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 39), one must be able to self-assess and provide an honest account of how they see themselves and how they are perceived by others. The participants in the study were conscious of the role that race played in their existence as a Black male in school and in society and how race-based encounters, directly or indirectly, affects them as Black males. Prime examples of participants acknowledging the impacts of the racialized experiences and how these encounters inadvertently affect them: Phil Donner acknowledging that the media portrayals of he may have not seen it firsthand, but he sees it through media, "That's not a good thing, because like I said, it's subconscious. You see all these news reportings of these Black men getting killed, and subconsciously you're in fear. Fear is not a good thing

to be in when there's so much stuff going around you. It makes you aware of what reality is. But, it's hurting you subconsciously, and the worst thing that you could ever do to yourself is mess up yourself mentally because what's inside, is expressed outside, in your physical. Yea...that's really it.”

Overall, these findings illuminated that in spite of the negative views of Black males in society and in the media, many of the participants were adamant about using their platforms and venues to make a difference and to counter the narrative of Black males as criminal, gangsters, or otherwise. The participants were knowledgeable about how stereotypes and media portrayals can impact how they also perceive themselves as Black males. They have chosen to use that negativity and create positive messages and messages of hope for the younger generations. Overall, despite the negativity, they were able to uphold positive perceptions of racial identity and masculinity as a young, Black male in the 21st century who is bombarded by all of these racialized experiences in school and in society.

Theme Four: Spoken Word: Coping, Refuge, Resistance, and Resilience

There are few places in society where Black youth can find a safe space to retreat from the negativity in the media, the mistrust of authority figures, and the lowered expectations of educators or “find refuge from the deluge of negativism and mistrust that often seeps into their daily lives” (Sealey-Ruiz & Greene, 2011, p. 348). Sealey-Ruiz and Greene (2011) emphasize the importance of having the voices of Black males that are often silenced in society and in the classrooms brought to the margins. Many of them do not have an outlet to discuss the impact that race and discrimination has on them daily leaving them unable to process through the situation properly. Even after the election of

our first African-American president, many people are still uncomfortable having courageous conversations about race and racism in society today especially in the classroom setting at K-12 and even higher education levels.

The findings from the study support the findings from Sealey-Ruiz (2011) which states that Black males do not have a safe space which allows for them to heal and deal with the many race-based and racialized experiences that they encounter either directly or indirectly on a daily basis. All of the participants mentioned that when certain issues arise that are relevant and affects them as Black males, they do not have critical conversations in a classroom setting. They also assert that there are times when they want to discuss how certain issues like police brutality, racial profiling, and even teacher attitudes impact them.

Classrooms should provide a safe space where students can interact, have authentic dialogue, and construct counter narratives to deconstruct the grand narratives that are present in the literature and provide marginalized students with a voice (Jocson, 2009). Unfortunately, schools are often sites where race and racism are not discussed. As a result, the young Black males are left without a way or an outlet to express themselves and to process through the incidents that have happened in their communities or in communities around the world (Sealey-Ruiz & Greene, 2011; Jocson, 2009). Non-school literacy practices play an important role in helping youth heal and process through the race-based events such as community violence, police killings, and killings of unarmed black men that are unraveling in the media.

Dallas mentions the importance of being able to go to a spot called Poetry Ink where he can discuss issues that impact him as a Black man: “I know that they try to say

there's counselors in school, but like, the White, Italian, female counselor is not going to understand me talking about the trials and tribulations of being a Black man. So, it doesn't feel as comfortable. You want people that look like you to be able to talk to them so they'll be able to understand you...It's way more relaxing to talk about these issues because other men will talk about the same issues with you. So, it's beautiful how spoken word poetry is, it's a form of expression that is popularized and very much used as a vehicle for people as color..."

The incidents that have happened are bigger than police brutality. The incidents and subsequent uprisings point to the social, cultural, and economic conditions that undermine the lives of the youth who are most vulnerable (Hill, 2016). Acts of empowerment, resistance, and healing can come through many forms of creative expression i.e., hip hop music, dancing, graffiti, art, and even spoken word. Photography, music, theater, and graphic arts can serve as triggers for reflection as well as the medium through which youth can express their views and messages regarding social issues.

As mentioned in Chapter 4, many of the youth talk about the lack of spaces to help to buffer the negative views, perceptions, and images of Black males in society and in the media. Other participants talk about the importance of a community-based space called Poetry Ink that allows for them to talk about issues and to not be judged in the process. This is also a space where many of them can find refuge from and resistance against those negative images by being around positive people who are also talking about how to heal and deal with life in general. Many of them talk about the lack of spaces, but are working to create spaces for youth and fill that gap so this study is useful in helping with that endeavor. Consequently, the space that Poetry Ink provides allows for Black

male youth negotiate and reframe their identities, center their voices, and make sense of their everyday lived experiences through artistic expression, specifically spoken word poetry. The literature that addresses the lack of these spaces, supports what the participants mentioned in their narrative accounts and the focus group interviews.

One of the findings that was discovered that I had not considered was how important the talk about how to interact with non-black people, how to interact around police, and how to carry yourself as a Black male in society in various settings (Black male etiquette), was to many of the participants in the study. This theme emerged a few times and so I decided to pull it out as a major theme and to focus on it in more detail. After reviewing the transcripts and the poems, I noticed that all of the participants were aware of how to act and how to interact in certain situations as a male of color. Illmind recalls an incident where it was raining and he and his friends had just gotten off of the school bus, but they took their hoods off when they saw the cop approaching them. Illmind also talks about how his dad taught him the importance of being aware of your history:” I think that's why from a young age, my dad has told me, "History is really 'his story' because it's how the white man writes it. It's how they write it." No, school has not been a outlet and I wish it could be.”

Truly mentioned that having pride in one’s self and one’s history is important: “...Again, like, I know once a person knows who they are, then you just gotta take pride and don't let no one change you otherwise. You can either be the reaction or how they come towards you or to you. But you still have to stay calm and remain the same. My father and mother have always stressed the importance of

being reminded that you are royalty and that some people just do not value you, but it is about their personal insecurities and it has nothing to do with you. I remember those words every time someone calls me the N word or tells me I cannot do something because of the color of my skin.” One thing that was discovered from the comments and narratives of the participants was the fact that many of the participants were able to speak about being socialized and taught by their parents or their own acquisition of knowledge helps them in being able to cope with and navigate through racialized experiences that they might encounter as Black males.

In relation to the theoretical framework, bringing one’s voice to the center through narratives support the construction of this theme. The participants’ emphasis on the need for spaces of refuge, resilience, and resistance against negative images and perceptions in the media and their ability to know what to do when racialized situations arise, highlights their desire to see change and to be a part of that change. This desire is connected to them having a positive outlook on the future generations and an impact on the positive perception of young, Black males. Furthermore, the desire to want to use their venue and their gifts to see change brought about highlights their expansive and nonrestrictive views on the importance of the arts and the importance of spaces for youth to heal and deal with social issues and societal messages and expectations.

Consequently, the theoretical framework supports the notion of giving voice to people of color in an effort to “turn the margins into places of transformative resistance” (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 39). CRT brings the voices of those who are marginalized and oppressed to the center through their narratives and in this case through the poems that many of them wrote. Many studies on Black male students in schools have focused

on an analysis of educational outcomes and failure, resistance, accommodation, and reform (Allen, 2010). These studies have highlighted the experiences of Black males in school and the ways in which they are marginalized in the educational system. Students are suffering in an environment that situates them as a problem and is not conducive to their holistic growth and development. Students are continuously bombarded with negative images, words, and actions.

The use of spoken word poetry in a community based setting provides a space where youth workers and students are able to engage in a discussion that captures the lived realities of all participants and serve as a site of resistance. Within the setting, spoken word poetry can serve as a bridge to connect the often blurred realities for both the oppressed and the oppressor (Freire, 1970). An urban youth of color who has experienced trauma can benefit from spoken word and performance poetry as an outlet to creatively express themselves in an effort to transform their pain into power and use that power to promote social justice for other vulnerable populations. According to the narrative accounts, Poetry Ink provides urban male youth with a space to heal from the cultural and racial trauma experienced directly or indirectly through social and academic experiences as Black males.

It is hard to know exactly how the young Black men from this study are affected by the overwhelming amount of negative perceptions and stereotypes that exist for Black men. As previously stated, some of the young men who participated in this study acknowledged the difficulties that exist for young Black men. Some of the young men from my study reported that they are not negatively affected by these negative perceptions. Some responded that they are subconsciously and inadvertently impacted;

while, others responded that they were impacted directly and/or indirectly. What is amazing is that many of the young men who mentioned being affected by the many negative images that society produces of young Black men also shared that they have high expectations for themselves and their ability to bring forth change. The message that seemed to be communicated by the young men was that they will not be derailed from their goals by societal obstacles that have historically existed for Black men. These young men presented themselves as resilient in the face of sizable societal obstacles that continue to exist for Black men. It is to be hopeful for these young men, their current life situations and future possibilities. Using poetry and the role of racial socialization has helped them buffer these negative views and not internalize them. Through my interactions with them and the interviews, I could see that they appeared to be exceptions and, that due to personal resiliency and a positive and unwavering belief in self and knowledge of self, that they would rise above the societal perceptions of Black men that can be so constraining and reach their goals and have positive beliefs about themselves as individuals. Spoken word and racial socialization support the ways that these young men cope and maintain positive views of themselves in the face of so much negativity present in society in regards to them as young, Black males in society.

Spaces that provide refuge, resistance and personal resiliency and support from those that care can prove to be tremendously important and helpful for the young men that participated in this study and for Black young men across the nation for that matter. As we discuss the results of the current study, many are still reeling from the Trayvon Martin tragedy. The Trayvon Martin tragedy has presumably delivered a powerfully negative message to many young Black men about their worth and value in this society.

This recent happening has served as a reminder and reinforcer for this writer that there is a need for those who value social justice, compassion, and humanity to continue to take on the responsibility and commitment of being a part of a positive and persistent effort to oppose the societal messages and treatment that can be so damaging to Black men. This study serves as an important contribution to research concerning the lives of young Black men. Existing research related to the lives and experiences of young Black men as can be described as sparse and very little of this existing research gives young Black men the opportunity to speak to their own experiences. Much of the existing research seems to be commentary, speculation, and second-hand analysis on what others have had to say about young Black men, without accounting for their perspectives.

While the current study just scratches the surface in terms of providing insight into the life experiences of young Black men, it does provide some information about the beliefs this group has about Black men and the types of experiences and socialization messages that contribute to perceptions of being young, Black, and male. There are numerous factors that influence how Black young men males generate positive and negative meanings associated with being a Black man. A number of life experiences and socialization messages such as racism, stereotyping, and communicated beliefs about Black culture contribute to perceptions of being a young Black man. More rigorous studies related to the development of identity and various forms or components of identity are needed to help improve our understanding of how young Black men view themselves and their racial group and how they navigate those multiple marginalized identities as a Black male.

Limitations

Several limitations to this study are noted here. This study was limited by the sample size. A larger sample may have provided a greater variety of responses between participants. This study was also limited by the researcher's decision to focus primarily on participants who attended Poetry Ink, but talked about other avenues of creative expression, such as music, art, dancing, and even writing. If the research questions focused on other forms of creative expression, one could determine how a more detailed account of the importance of safe spaces and outlets in terms of buffering negative views in society. Second, only participants who were spoken word artists or had participated in spoken word poetry events such as poetry slams and open mics.

Many of the young men that were interviewed were seniors in high school or of college age and their perspectives are different from those who are in middle school or younger. These limitations are likely to impact the findings and any application of these findings should be done with great care. Females were excluded from this study, but adding a gendered unit of analysis to this case study could be a great comparative cross case study, while adding in the intersectional lens of gender. Another potential limitation concerns my role as the researcher. As the only researcher working on this project, there was a risk of researcher bias. To mitigate potential researcher bias, I used triangulation, member checks, peer reviews and debriefing.

The broader findings of my research revealed how the center functioned as a counter-public space of resistance in which students could process through racialized experiences, affirm their creativity, and be self-actualized, while making meaning of their

social and academic experiences through the art-form that in large part could not be expressed in urban public schools.

This study utilized a narrative case study method (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 2002). A narrative case study provides an intensive description and analysis of a particular social unit, such as an individual, group, institution or community (Merriam, 2002). The social unit under investigation is an integrated system bounded by place and time (Stake, 1995). This case is bound in that all participants were African American males between the ages of 18-22 who attended Poetry Ink. I analyzed how this subculture of spoken word acts as a counterspace of resistance and resilience for Black male youth in urban education. The case explored how participation in spoken word allowed youth to find a pedagogical and social site in which they can construct their identity as a Black male, while making sense of the racialized realities that they live daily (in academic, social, and political contexts) and developing a sense of racial pride in the process.

Recommendations

The results of this study necessitate the inclusion of recommendations for education policy makers as well. The findings from this report challenge national, state, and local education policymakers to review the existing literature on how the perceptions, stereotypes, and media images in society contribute to teacher bias, racialized experiences, and instances of discrimination in the school setting. In addition, state and local policy makers should also conduct assessments to determine the levels of access African American males and students from other underserved groups have to spaces and opportunities to have critical conversations about race and how race affects Black males and other students as well.

The findings from this study suggest that educators who work with and support African American males familiarize themselves with the literature on the contributions of Black males to society so that the stereotypes, perceptions, and media images do not contribute to teacher bias. This will provide them with a foundational level of understanding concerning the effects of perceptions, stereotypes, and media images on school experiences. Interested educators should form learning communities and work together to find meaningful ways in which to integrate research-based performing arts education or approaches to have critical conversations about race and race-based incidents into daily instruction. In schools that lack access to safe spaces, teachers and administrators should work with district leaders, businesses, and political leaders to find ways to begin including historical contributions of Blacks into the school curriculum and provide spaces for students to discuss their lived experiences and how those experiences affect them in the academic setting.

Engage in Creative Ways to Expand the Curriculum

The historic narrative of Blacks focuses on triumph and the stride toward freedom. To illuminate this, students must be engaged with critical texts that focus on experiences that resonate with their own. As noted earlier, African American males have again emerged as a topic of interest—and much concern—in education. Expanding our curricula allows educators to tap into a wide range of the cultural knowledge, experiences, contributions, and perspectives of Black males. One way to achieve this is by incorporating culturally relevant pedagogy into the curriculum.

Ladson-Billings (1995) defines culturally relevant pedagogy as an education that “not only addresses student achievement but also helps students to accept and affirm their

cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate” (p. 469). Culturally relevant teachers believe that all students can succeed by using an engaging curriculum that represents students’ culture and background (Ladson-Billings 1994, p. 45). When teachers ignore the identity of students, their curriculum will not be culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings 1994, p. 33). Many students may be able to complete tasks in the context of their daily life, but not in the “decontextualized paper and pencil exercises in school”, (Delpit, 1995, p. 173). These same students do not see the connection or urgency to perform in school. Schools for many students, are disconnected from what really matters; teachers often fail to create a connection to students’ daily lives and fail to provide varied opportunities to apply their knowledge in school, or life. There are many things that we try to teach our students that could be engaging. However, in a school environment they are so decontextualized that the endeavor becomes pointless.

Culturally relevant pedagogy creates a space where the lived experiences of students are welcomed, embraced, utilized, and analyzed in the classroom (Davis & McCarther, 2015; Esposito & Swain, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Students of color are able to relate to the content that is being taught in a culturally relevant pedagogy because the material can be correlated to their lived experiences. Consequently, integration of the arts provides students of color with multiple opportunities in which they can utilize their lived experiences to explore identify, analyze, and reconstruct various concepts. Educators must create a learning environment that calls upon and utilizes the lived experiences of students of color so that students of color can feel validated, respected, and empowered as creative thinkers.

Therefore, the creation of a curriculum and working with community organizations to create partnerships that incorporate and integrate arts into the curriculum are encouraged. Several recommendations to incorporate a culturally relevant social justice arts-based curriculum could possibly reflect the following:

- Creating a partnership with artists in order to develop an instructional climate that promotes a positive racial identity. Curriculum that promotes a positive racial identity serves as a counter-narrative in an environment that often communicates to African American children, and their teachers, that they are less than capable. Working with spoken word artists and poets who can engage children in the creative genius of poetry as it relates to the arts of the African Diaspora is one way poetry can be used to develop this counter-narrative. In order to facilitate this process, schools and programs should augment positive lessons from a child's home and community, and provide children with examples of how African Americans have achieved in spite of racism and oppression.
- Forging a collaboration among arts specialists, teaching artists and teachers of other core subject areas. Culturally responsive arts education (CRAE) requires adaptations in instructional practice, classroom organization, curricula, and delivery of the programming. CRAE programs are to be grounded in real world projects that exemplify challenges and opportunities that are germane to the lives of African American children in the Charlotte area.
- Employing artists in connecting to and developing relationships with a child's family. Parents and families play a critical role in identity development. Research indicates that children, whose parents explain the existence of racial barriers, and

how to circumvent them, achieve at higher levels than those children who do not have these barriers explained to them. Arts specialists and teaching artists should be given opportunities to involve families in their own unique way, which could include engaging them directly in art forms. Parent engagement is linked to a variety of protective factors for children and is particularly important in student success.

- Engaging artists in the building of relationships between child and school. According to Gloria Ladson Billings, the core elements of culturally responsive teaching include developing caring relationships with children and not avoiding issues of race and identity as they emerge in classroom settings. For this reason, artist residencies should be of sufficient length that these relationships can be established. In an ideal setting, residencies could be as many as 100 days. Classroom teachers might look at how high-quality teaching artists connect with children as one model in this area. There is funding provided by the Arts and Science Council (ASC) to bring in various arts-based programming to classroom setting.
- Working alongside spoken word artists, nonprofit organization leaders, cultural workers and Arts and Science Council staff through a process that includes anti-racism work, racial pride and uplift, and consensus building in order to answer the question: “How can the arts be empowering and transformative in the lives of young people living in Charlotte, especially in neighborhoods that might be considered “distressed?” The hope is to engage participants with a broad range of ideas, including youth development and engagement, culturally relevant

pedagogical approaches, arts and social justice, and out-of-school time programming in this effort to develop new initiatives that utilize the arts to address the issues that are facing youth.

Future Directions for Research

This study presented data that suggest that some Black young men view life hardships and struggle, as well as an awareness of the history of Black struggle and sacrifices as essential to the experience of being young, Black, and male. Findings from this study also suggest that some Black young men believe that Black men are generally portrayed negatively in our society and that these negative messages and stereotypes have potentially prompted some Black men to also think negatively about Black men as a group, however some Black young men also report that they do not view these stereotypes and negative messages as inhibitors to their life pursuits or as having a negative influence on how they view themselves. There are numerous directions for researchers to take in regards to conducting future research in an effort to achieve a better understanding of the lives of Black young men.

Being that this study attempted to explore the experience of being a Black young men male and influence of life experiences and societal messages on young Black men's perceptions of being Black, more research related to racial identity development is needed. While the body of research for racial identity development for Blacks continues to grow and more study is being devoted to the racial identity development process for Black young men, it is critical that some studies related to racial identity development be specifically devoted to the experiences of Black young men males. There is much criticism, speculation, and fear directed towards Black men in our society. The types of

racism, discrimination and stereotypes that Black young men are subjected to are some of the most intense and unique that our society has to offer and it has an impact on them. More studies related to racial identity development may provide us with more important information about young Black people, how they perceive their race, how they perceive themselves in relation to their race, how they develop racial identities in the face of continued racism and discrimination, how they use or do not use their thoughts about their race as means of coping with racism and discrimination, and how other aspects of their identities emerge, along with racial identity.

A second future direction in terms of understanding the life experiences of Black young men would include addressing the distressing low amount of research available related to the stereotypes and societal messages that are directed at young Black men. We simply need to know more about how young Black men are influenced by the largely negative stereotypes and societal messages that are directed at them. Finally, it is interesting that some of the young men who participated in this study reported that they are not personally influenced and deterred by the negative societal messages that exist for young Black men. More research needs to be devoted to investigating how these young men are able to stay resilient while being bombarded with so many negative and hurtful messages. Can the resiliency that these young men seem to communicate be a product of some aspect of racial identity, racial socialization, or personal strength? This was touched on a little bit with the last theme as I uncovered that many of the participants were being talked to by parents or were being educated about their history and therefore, were aware of their roles.

Being given a greater voice in the policy decisions that affect their lives may be important to Black male youth who are marginalized and often feel oppressed, as it ensures social justice, supports civic engagement, and promotes positive youth development and positive youth outcomes among youth from such a vulnerable population. This study seeks to capture the voice of these youth through the use of critical youth voice (counter narratives, spoken word, presentations, poetry, etc.) in terms of addressing educational and social issues exposing inequalities of concern to create change and become agents of change as praxis for transformation. Consequently, the use of spoken word could be analyzed and examined in a community-based setting (third space) to explore spoken word as a tool for youth development, social change (transformation), and identity formation.

The future directions for research that I have detailed may not only provide us with valuable information, but as previously mentioned, we may also be able to use this information to develop interventions that will improve the quality of life and social standing of young Black men, as well as how those negative perceptions can be countered.

Summary

While the current study just scratches the surface in terms of providing insight into the life experiences of young Black men, it does provide some information about the beliefs this group has about Black men and the types of experiences and socialization messages that contribute to perceptions of being young, Black, and male. There are numerous factors that influence how Black young men males generate positive and negative meanings associated with being a Black man. A number of life experiences and

socialization messages such as racism, stereotyping, and communicated beliefs about Black culture contribute to perceptions of being a young Black man. More rigorous studies related to the development of identity and various forms or components of identity are needed to help improve our understanding of how young Black men view themselves and their racial group and how they navigate those multiple marginalized identities as a Black male.

The combination of performing arts engagement and having courageous conversations around race and discrimination encouraged social agency and community engagement skill development, enhanced achievement motivation, and encouraged persistence among the participants. Finally, data derived from this study suggests that attending and participating in Poetry Ink events helped participants develop more positive racial identities. They benefitted from positive interactions with other poets and artists and gained greater appreciation for the arts and how the arts provided them with a space to allow many of the Black males to heal and deal from the direct or indirect encounters that are race-based. Overall, the participants in this study stated that Poetry Ink was a positive creative experience for them and for their male peers who might be going through some of the same racialized experiences. Such findings indicate that community based venues that focus on creative expression and the arts warrants greater attention from researchers, educators and policymakers who are committed to improving schooling experiences and experiences as a young Black male in society.

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APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT FOLLOW UP EMAIL

SCRIPT FOR RECRUITMENT: FOLLOW UP EMAIL

That was a great performance at the last slam. Do you remember the discussion that we had about issues and writing poems about issues that impact you as a Black male in an urban city and in school? I am following up to tell you more about the study including the incentive (gift card in the amount of \$20 and UNCC paraphernalia and spirit gear) and answer any questions that you might have if you are still interested in participating in the study.

The focus of this research study is to examine the social and academic experiences of Black males ages 18-22. This research aims to challenge negative views of Black students in urban school settings and counter the ways in which they are often described and seen in educational and social settings and even in research.

Students will be interviewed about their experiences. One of the interviews will be a poem analysis and discussion interview. Students will write poems about experiences (social or academic) that they deem important in their lives as Black male students.

Please feel free to contact Tiffany Hollis at:

Tiffany Hollis

The University of North Carolina at Charlotte

Charlotte, NC

(980) 206-0512

tnhollis@uncc.edu

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT



Department of Middle, Secondary and K12 Education
9201 University City Boulevard, Charlotte, NC 28223-0001
t/ 704-687-8740

Informed ConsentStudy Purpose:

You have been invited to participate in a dissertation research study. The purpose of this study is to explore how stereotypes, messages, and media images of Black males influence how Black males are perceived in school and society. Consequently, little is known about how Black males are impacted by the messages that they receive from society and in the school setting about the meaning of being a young Black man in society today. The voices of black males will provide insight into how Black male youth negotiate and reframe their identities, center their voices, and make sense of their everyday lived experiences through artistic expression, specifically spoken word poetry.

Spoken word poetry will serve as a means to combat stereotypes, debunk deficit discourse, and construct counter-narratives, while serving as a buffer and an act of resistance and resilience against negative messages in the media.

Investigator

This study is being conducted by Tiffany Nicole Hollis, a Doctoral Candidate at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. The responsible faculty member associated with this study is Dr. Chance Lewis of the department of Middle, Secondary and K-12 Education at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

Description of Participation:

You are asked to participate in a study which includes a 45 to 60 minute interview, followed by a 20-30 minute focus group interview. The initial interview will follow a semi-structured interview protocol. The interview will be audiotaped and then transcribed. Your name will not be included on the transcript or any written reports. This will help to make sure that your information will be protected. The particular steps to ensure data protection include maintaining all collected data on a password protected computer and storage device, which is only accessible by the investigator. Audio Data will be disposed of after one year.

A focus group interview activity where questions will be asked and recorded will be scheduled during the study as well. This portion of the data will not be completely

confidential due to the use of email, however the researcher will only access email from a private password protected device.

At the completion of the interview and focus group interview session, you will be asked to participate in a short follow-up activity where you will write and perform a poem based on an experience or a topic related to an issue facing Black males in education, in society, etc.

Length of Participation:

The entire duration of participation may last between 65-90 minutes, which will include a 45-60 minute interview, followed by a 20-30 minute focus group interview, and creation and performance of a poem. The poem will be created based on responses to the interview questions. Your poem will be analyzed for themes as well to support the findings from the interviews. Your participation in this project will begin on the date and time of your scheduled interview. If you decide to grant consent to participate, you will be one of approximately 7-10 participants in this study.

Risks and Benefits of Participation:

There is no risk associated with this study. There may be risks, which are currently unforeseeable. The benefits associated with participation in this study include strengthening and improving the educational policies and practices that affect Black males as stakeholders (educators, administrators, community leaders, etc.) will hear from the youth about their lived experiences and the various things that they face in academic and social contexts to try to improve their experiences through the incorporation of arts-based interventions to combat stereotypes, perceptions, etc.

Volunteer Statement:

You are a volunteer. The decision to participate in this study is completely up to you. If you decide to be in the study, you may stop at any time. You will not be treated any differently if you decide not to participate in the study.

Confidentiality:

The data collected by the Investigator will be protected to the extent possible. Information shared through email is not confidential, however no participant will ever be mentioned by name in the reported results. Participants can end their participation at any time. Participants can choose not to respond to any question(s). Only the principal investigator will have access to the raw data. All gathered data will be stored on a protected storage device in a locked cabinet and only accessed on a password-protected computer.

Fair Treatment and Respect:

UNC Charlotte wants to make sure that you are treated in a fair and respectful manner. Contact the University's Research Compliance Office (704-687-1871) if you have any questions about how you are treated as a study participant. If you have any questions about the study, please contact Principal Investigator: Tiffany Hollis, (P: 980-206-0512; email: tnhollis@unc.edu). Responsible Faculty: Chance Lewis, PhD (P: 704-743-4207;

email: chance.lewis@uncc.edu).

Participant Consent:

I have read the information in this consent form. I have had the chance to ask questions about this study, and those questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I am at least 18 years of age, and I agree to participate in this research study. I understand that I will receive a copy of this form after it has been signed by me and the Principal Investigator.

Participant Name (print)

Participant Signature

DATE

Investigator Signature

DATE

This form was approved for use on *March 13, 2017* for a period of one (1) year.

APPENDIX C: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Research purposes

1. Make sense of their lived experiences (academic and social context)
2. Negotiate and reframe identity through narratives
3. Identity affirming spaces Spoken word-act of resistance

Research questions:

- (1) How do Black males negotiate their identities (racial, gender, or otherwise) in school and society?
- (2) How do perceptions, stereotypes, and media portrayal of Black males influence Black males' perceptions of their identities as a Black males?
- (3) How are Black males impacted by racialized experiences that they encounter, either directly or indirectly, in school and in society?
- (4) How do Black males cope with and navigate through those racialized experiences that they hear, see, or encounter as a Black male?

Interview questions

1. If you could choose an alternate name to go by for the purposes of this interview, what pseudonym (or alternate name) would you like to be called on today?
2. Tell me a little bit about yourself.
3. What do you like to do in your spare time?
4. How do you identify yourself in terms of ethnic/racial identity?
5. In your opinion, what does it mean to be a male? A Black male?
6. What messages do you see in the media about being a Black male?
7. How do you perceive yourself in this world? (probing: academic, community, and society)
8. What do you feel are some of the struggles of Black males?
9. What major challenges, if any, have you faced in school as a Black male? In society as a Black male?
10. What do you think are some of the issues Black males are facing today? In school? In society?
11. Are any of those issues of importance to you? If so, why?
12. Have you or family members had any experiences of racist acts against you? If so, please

briefly share that experience.

Probing question: Discrimination, police interactions, interactions with teachers, etc.

13. How do you perceive yourself as a Black male in society today?
14. How do you feel society views Black males?
15. How do you feel about life in general being a Black male?
16. When did you realize that you were different or being treated differently because of the color of their skin?
17. Can you think of an incident where a Black male was treated differently because of his race?
18. Do you feel like being Black male is considered an advantage or disadvantage?
19. When did you begin to realize that by being a Black male, society would look at you differently?
20. Are there spaces where you can talk about your experiences in school and society?
21. Are there spaces that exist that allow you to talk about race and its impact on your life (academic, society, or community)?
22. Have you experienced racism on campus? In society? If so, please describe in what ways.
23. Do you believe that you have to negotiate who you are as a Black male in the classroom? If so, can you talk a little about why you feel you have to?

ROLE OF SPOKEN WORD (RESISTANCE AND RESILIENCE)

1. Tell me a little bit about the program. What have you found to be important? Valuable? What is a typical event like?
 2. How did you get involved with the program?
 3. Why spoken word poetry? What is important about this art form to you?
 4. What is your creative process and what do you like to write about?
 5. In your opinion, has poetry helped you in any way? How?
 6. Anything else you would like to share?
-

APPENDIX D: FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. What messages do you see in the media about being a Black male?
2. How do you perceive yourself in this world?
(probing: academic, community, and society)
3. What do you feel are some of the struggles of Black males?
4. What major challenges, if any, have you faced in school as a Black male?
In society as a Black male?
5. What do you think are some of the issues Black males are facing today? In school? In society?
6. Are any of those issues of importance to you? If so, why?
7. Have you or family members had any experiences of racist acts against you? If so, please briefly share that experience.
 - a. Probing question: Discrimination, police interactions, interactions with teachers, etc.
 - b. How do those incidents make you feel?
8. How do you perceive yourself as a Black male in society today?
9. How do you feel society views Black males?
10. Have you experienced racism on campus? In society? If so, please describe in what ways.
11. Are there spaces that exist that allow for you to talk about race and its impact on your life (academic, society, or community)?
12. How does spoken word or creative expression help you when faced with some of the issues that you mentioned above?
13. Why is it important to have arts programs in schools and in the community?

APPENDIX E: THEMES

Table 1 below lists the themes and corresponding sub-themes which emerged from the data analysis.

Table 1: Emergent Themes and Sub-Themes by Research Question

RQ1: How do Black males describe what it means to be both a male and a Black male?	Research Question #2 How do perceptions, stereotypes, and media portrayal of Black males impact Black males' perceptions of their identities as a Black male?	RQ3: How are Black males impacted by racialized experiences that they encounter, either directly or indirectly, in school and in society?	RQ4: How do Black males cope with and navigate through those racialized experiences that they hear, see, or encounter as a Black male?
Theme: Masculinity	Theme: Influence of Perceptions, Stereotypes, and Messages in the Media on Black Male Identity (Identity Construction)	Theme: Race, Racism, and Discrimination (Race-Based Incidents)	Theme: Coping, Refuge, Resistance, Resilience
Subtheme 1: Perceptions of Masculinity (Protector, Provider)	Subtheme 1: "Fitting the Description" Society's perception of being a Black male	Subtheme 1: Racialized Experiences in Society (Racial Profiling, Shootings of unarmed men, police brutality, etc.)	Subtheme 1: Creative expression (Poetry as a safe space, outlet, form of liberation and resistance) "Poetry Saved My Life"
Subtheme 2: Perceptions of Black Masculinity (Struggle, Challenge)	Subtheme 2: Reality of Being a Black Male (Blackness) "The Usual Suspects"	Subtheme 2: Racialized Experiences in School (teacher bias, microaggressions, etc.)	Subtheme 2: Racial Socialization (The talk, Knowledge of Self, Learning one's history)

APPENDIX F: IRB APPROVAL FORM



OFFICE OF RESEARCH COMPLIANCE
 9201 University City Boulevard
 319 Cameron Hall
 Charlotte NC 28223-0001
 (704)-687-1871
 Web site: <http://research.uncc.edu/>
 Federalwide Assurance (FWA) #00000649

To: Tiffany Hollis

From: IRB

Approval Date: 3/13/2017

Expiration Date of Approval: 3/12/2018

RE: Notice of IRB Approval by Expedited Review (under 45 CFR 46.110)

Submission Type: Initial

Expedited Category: 6.Voice/image research recordings,7.Surveys/interviews/focus groups

Study #: 17-0053

Study Title: ALL I NEED IS ONE MIC: EXPLORING THE ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL EXPERIENCES OF BLACK MALES THROUGH THE USE OF SPOKEN WORD

This submission has been approved by the IRB for the period indicated. It has been determined that the risk involved in this research is no more than minimal.

Study Description:

My research is part of a growing body of work in the fields of critical pedagogy, cultural studies, and critical youth studies research that is looking at how Black males make sense of the realities that they encounter daily, in school and in society as a Black male. Using Critical Race Theory and Critical Pedagogy, this study will look at how participation in a community based spoken word poetry program contributes to identity formation, mental health, and youth development of Black males in urban communities. I will work with 7 urban Black male youth who attend spoken word sessions in an urban area in the Southeastern United States. The students will write poems, recite the poems, and perform the poems during slam poetry sessions (performing their poems is optional). This will help them make sense of their own identities in relationship to their everyday lived experiences in schools and the larger society.

The broader findings of my research will reveal how spoken word serves as an act of resistance and resilience in which students could work through difficult life circumstances, affirm their creativity, and be self-actualized, while making meaning of their social and academic experiences through the creative expression. This study underscores what it means for Black male youth in society and explains why spoken word culture, for many Black male youth, allows the youth to bring their voices to the center and provide insight into their social and academic experiences.

Investigator's Responsibilities:

Federal regulations require that all research be reviewed at least annually. It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to submit for renewal and obtain approval before the expiration date. You may not continue any research activity beyond the expiration date without IRB approval. Failure to receive approval for continuation before the expiration date will result in automatic termination of the approval for this study on the expiration date.

Your approved consent forms and other documents are available online at

http://uncc.myresearchonline.org/irb/index.cfm?event=home.dashboard.irbStudyManagement&irb_id=17-0053.

You are required to obtain IRB approval for any changes to any aspect of this study before they can be implemented.

Data security procedures must follow procedures as approved in the protocol and in accordance with ITS [Guidelines for Data Handling](#) and the [End User Checklist](#).

Any unanticipated problem involving risks to subjects or others (including adverse events) should be reported to the IRB by contacting the Compliance Office. uncc-irb@uncc.edu

Please be aware that additional approvals may still be required from other relevant authorities or "gatekeepers" (e.g., school principals, facility directors, custodians of records).

This study was reviewed in accordance with federal regulations governing human subjects research, including those found at 45 CFR 46 (Common Rule) and 21 CFR 50 & 56 (FDA), where applicable.

CC:

Chance Lewis, Middle, Secondary and K-12 Education