

2020

## JaQuan's Seat at the Table: Breaking Down the Barriers to Academic Success

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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2020

Abstract

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by

Dianne Small-Jordan

MS, Hodges University, 2015

BS, Hodges University, 2014

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Criminal Justice

Walden University

August 2020

## Abstract

African American boys who graduate from high school and college increase their chances of success in society and greatly decrease their chances of being incarcerated. The gap in academic proficiency for African Americans is concerning due to low graduation rates and high school dropout risks when compared to boys of other ethnicities. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore teachers' perceptions and to gain insight into the causes of the poor performances leading to the academic achievement gap of high school African American boys. The policy feedback theory and ecological model theory were used to determine what was needed to improve the boys' learning capabilities for academic achievement. Participants were recruited by social media, and identifiers were used to select geographic location and occupation as teachers and administrators who were employed at their present public high school for at least 2 years. Data were collected by using semi-structured interviews with 10 high school teachers. Results of thematic analysis indicated 4 themes: (a) imprisoning the future, (b) role model effect, (c) testing the test, and (d) scholars and teachers. Results confirmed the importance of community involvement and student-teacher relationship to develop psychosocial skills and motivation for African American boys to cope with the pressures of high school. The findings from this study can be used to provide educators and policy makers with an insight on the barriers faced by African American males in education and some of the strategies used to combat them.

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## Dedication

This pursuit of knowledge is dedicated to my son, Jaden Jordan. My inspiration that kept me going through the darkest of time. Know that with perseverance you can achieve your greatest desire. I love you more. To the ultimate phenomenal woman, Sadie Maxine Small. You paved the road for my success and guided my life by setting positive examples. May perpetual light shine upon you as you Rest In Peace (09/19).

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Introduction**

African American boys in school systems across the United States have shown a significant pattern in the achievement gap wherever they are placed. Whether it is in urban or rural schools, the Black male achievement rate remains consistently lower when compared to their white counterparts, regardless of grade or age level. Published literature shows agreement that the lack of resources within school systems affects African American boys, which makes it a social problem. Researchers have explored different theories of community values, single parent households, teachers not being culturally aware, low self-esteem, and desistance as causes of this issue (Benner, 2014).

When the No Child Left Behind law (NCLB) was signed into law in 2002, it was done to eliminate the achievement gap and make American children more competitive on an international level, holding schools accountable for the students' progress. Under the law, students would be tested in reading and mathematics from third grade through eighth grade, and once in high school. The idea was to make the children proficient by the end of each school year. Title 1 was also introduced to provide federal funding to school districts to educate disadvantaged children. The NCLB failed because of the "one size fits all" concept. Its purpose was to ensure opportunity for every child, but instead focused on test scores rather than resources that would provide equal learning opportunities for all students in the school system.

## **Background of the Problem**

Poverty is one of the significant factors affecting minority youths' ability to achieve success. Many African American boys are also faced with bias, which can become prejudicial and systematic where they are shunted and placed into remedial or special education classes (Fremont, 1997). For example, according to the Florida Department of Education, the graduation rate for African American children in Florida remains low despite an increase for all students statewide. African American boys continue to graduate at a low rate with a mere 69.4% compared to 81.3% of whites for the 2016-2017 school year. Sixty-eight percent of youths who are incarcerated do not have a high school diploma, and the majority of those incarcerated are black youths (Jagger, 2016).

Standardized testing is another area that prevents African American boys from achievement. In fact, the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) begins at the third grade where there is a mandatory retention of students who are not reading at the required state level. If students do not score a level two or higher, they will not be promoted to the fourth grade. This goes along with the NCLB Law, which was the FCAT benchmark for reading proficiency, with one in five at risk of retention (Jasper, 2016). The standardized testing created a "make it or break it" pathway, where achieving academic success is deemed impossible due to the testing and other hindrances African American boys face as they try to make it to graduation day.

Currently, African American boys are overrepresented in special education programs but underrepresented in gifted programs throughout the United States (Meyers,

2018). African American boys are also overrepresented in disciplinary actions and are more likely to be a part of the school to prison pipeline. This occurs throughout kindergarten through twelfth grade (K-12). This affects the graduation rate as the boys drop out of school and more likely than not, get caught up into the criminal justice system where there is an over representation of young Black males; this is a major problem. These issues must be faced to be solved.

### **Problem Statement**

The achievement gap between African American youths in comparison to youths of other ethnicities has become much larger since the implementation of the Common Core educational standards. The Common Core is a new state standard initiative that was developed through a collaboration of experts, school administrators and teachers to provide students with a consistent path to college and preparation for the workforce (Common Core State Standards, 2014). Though this method was supposed to be the highlight for the new age of learning, it has unfortunately not improved student learning or closed the achievement gap (Wolk, 2010). The objective was for states to be in accordance with the new Common Core method, but many students are not able to score outside of the low achieving category.

Students of color, especially boys and the ones of low socio-economic status, remain on the lower end of the score marks, with struggles to find out how to improve their academic achievement. To meet the needs of these children, it is important to recognize how to effectively teach them.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to bridge the gap in knowledge, by investigating the reasons why academic achievement between African American boys and their ethnic counterparts has not narrowed. Having explored this phenomenon, the data received from the interviews was analyzed to see the decision-making process, to determine the role the administrators and teachers played in a student's life, and their effect, if any. This research may contribute to an understanding of the lack of academic achievement from a teacher's and administrator's perspective of African American boys and contribute to the social change of academic success. Academic success will see more African- American boys attending four-year colleges and becoming productive men and positive contributors to society. This research has revealed the factors that play an influential role on African American boys' poor performance within the school system. The findings have provided additional data that can contribute to the body of knowledge (see Brun-Bevel & Byrd, 2015) and be significant in helping lawmakers create policies that will work in the public school system.

The theoretical frameworks that were used for this study included policy feedback theory and ecological model theory. Policy feedback theory allows for changes in old policies and implementation of new policies that will influence policies and address social problems. The policy feedback theory was designed to drive political issues and policy through conversation to bring about righting the wrongs, especially since perception is reality. This approach provided the foundation needed to connect the public perception to what was really happening. The results of this dissertation showed the



effectiveness of policy feedback when expanded to show human behavior, and how its impact on school leaders influence future legislations and the ones who effect change. The second framework used was the ecological model theory, which allowed me to look at the impact of the environment on African American youth, versus their impact on the environment. The theories determined the effort or influence specific policies have on social change. They are also used to give positive influence and view behavioral trends (Sabatier & Weble, 2014).

### **Research Questions**

The following are the questions used to address the barriers faced by African American boys, preventing their path to success and eliminating the achievement gap.

RQ1: In what ways is the prison pipeline a factor in the low graduation rate of African American boys?

RQ2: What are the primary ways standardized testing impacts African American student success?

RQ3: How would having African American role models in the home and community increase in the graduation rates of African American boys?

RQ4: What impact would mandatory cultural training for teachers and administrators have in the public-school system?

### **Theoretical Foundation**

The theoretical framework selected for this study was the policy feedback theory (PFT). The PFT is known to examine political behavior and policymaking processes (Beland, 2010). It has a solid foundation for analyzing the academic achievement gap

amongst African American boys in public schools. If society continues to hold the negative perception of African American boys and public education policy, it is possible that PFT can be used to drive political references without engagement. Based on this study, the PFT can be used to explain the connection between human behavior and political legislative action and the impact of policy reform (see Mettler & Soss, 2004); the theory also explains how opposition to action can impact policy reform.

This approach provides the foundation for a connection between public policy perception from teachers and administrators and the behavior of African American boys and the impact of their behavior on policy implementation. This study shows how PFT can be expanded to explain how human behavior can influence future legislation, but also how politics can play a role in the public school environment, which can negate legislative intent and impact existing policies such as standardized testing and disciplinary measures, both of which reflect negatively on African American boys.

Although they were policies that were intently put in place to narrow the achievement gap, the high school dropout rate increased, and the graduation rate has decreased among African American boys. This illuminates the impact of standardized testing and disciplinary measures that support the existence of a policy feedback. With PFT, the teachers and administrators are able to see the capability of the impact that the policy implementation has and have their independent views.

African American high school boys may seem to be disenfranchised by the traditional public school system and policy feedback reaction could serve as a negatively perceived implementation of certain tested policy. The policy's network of influence has

current actors who allocate resources to implement related initiatives (Campbell, 201; Soss & Monihan, 2014). PFT is based on the premise that politics affects policies and that policies impact the school system, and academic success can show that policies can create interest groups that can be influential to public officials who can include or exclude certain options that can impact their own interests (Mettler & Soelle, 2014). The policy process can be used to help the teachers and administrators to examine policy creation and focus on ways and means to assist the African American boys achieve academic success and increase the graduation rate. The PFT brings a new look at the policy process and the “feedbacks effects;” therefore, providing insight on the how policymakers can help correct what is not working and improve those areas (Mettler & Soelle, 2014). Based on this study, the PFT is focused on the social and educational well-being of the African American high school boys and an effort to solve social problems or to evaluate existing policies (see Mettler & Soelle, 2014). The PFT can look at the shape of the political dynamics in education and the effects on African American boys’ academic achievement, as well as the perception of the teachers and administrators, including their thoughts on the input and output of the policy process, which can be used to with the teachers affix identities and resources that can change or improve policies.

### **Nature of the Study**

The nature of this study was qualitative, with a case study design, using semi-structured interviews. The case study involved the exploration and understanding of an individual or group (teacher-administrator) associated with a social or human problem (see Creswell, 2014). Therefore, as a researcher, my aim was to get to the “meat” of the

matter, to get rich data from decision-making participants who had experienced the process as it was designed, but still see the children fail. I sought to analyze the problem. I looked at the policies that were in place and the solution methods to find out why there is a disconnect between the education process and academic achievement for African American boys. I invoked data collection methods that involved documentation, observation, and interviews.

### **Definitions**

*K-12*: - public education policy.

*Common core*: Set academic standards in Mathematics and English in America.

*CRDC*: U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights Data Collection -

*DOE*: Department of Education.

*ESSA*: Every Student Succeed Act. Law passed in 2015 that governs America's

-

*FCAT*: Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test. State standardized test. It is no longer being used.

*FSA*: The Florida Standards Assessment is a test to measure student performance in reading, writing and math.

*IRB*: International Review Board. An administrative body of an institution that recruits subjects for research activities and protects their rights and welfare under the auspice of the institution of affiliation.

*NCLB*: No Child Left Behind Act – established 2001 that reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act: It included Title 1 provisions applying to disadvantaged students. It was replaced by ESSA.

*PFT*: Policy feedback theory.

*School to prison pipeline*: The disproportionate incarceration of minors and young adults due to harsh school and municipal policies.

*Standardized testing*: State tests that are administered and scored in a consistent manner.

*Title 1*: Federally funded educational program that provides supplemental funds to school districts to assist students in poverty-stricken areas meet school educational goals.

### **Assumptions**

A number of assumptions were made in this study. First, I assumed everyone would be honest and forthcoming with their answers. Participation was voluntary and confidential. Secondly, I assumed that the participants expressed themselves through lived experiences. Lastly, I assumed that the participants were wholly interested in making the learning experience for the African American boys better and believed that they would be effective in narrowing the academic achievement gap and increase the graduation rate.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

Teachers were only asked about how they felt towards African American boys' increasing their graduation rate and not about narrowing the achievement gap in order to

minimize academic performance. My small sample limits the opportunity to generalize the findings. Therefore, the results may be labeled to the geographical area, the particular school district, and their teachers and administrators. This study was also delimited to African American boys in high school. The interview protocol for this study was conducted with the same questions for all participants and focused on what they needed to do to prevent high school dropout. Another delimitation was only using teachers and administrators, and not students. However, conducting the study with just the teachers and administrators was sufficient for the study.

### **Limitations**

First limitation is that the study cannot be generalized due to the small sample of participants. However, despite the small sample, the narrative derived from this study may be transferred to school districts across the nation. The research contents were made readily transferrable for it to be used in similar demographics. I relied on the teacher's and administrator's perspective, which has more in-depth narrative available than a quantitative study when reports are compared.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study was significant, as it had an impact on social change. It highlighted the barriers faced by African American boys within the school system. I was able to understand how some teachers reacted to their active male students and if resentments were formed from defiance, as well as teacher perceptions.

### **Summary**

NCLB did not get to the root of the problem with the African American male students, so there has been an even greater gap between African American males and males of other ethnicities; the barriers have not been completely understood for them to be resolved. This study was able to pinpoint the barriers and determine what is necessary to encourage and inspire African American male students so they will be motivated to learn.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

Through conducting this literature review, I sought to examine reasons that were associated with the academic achievement gap between African American boys and other ethnicities. I investigated the perception of issues that could affect academic success through the lens of teachers and administrators. I explored differential treatment of African American boys within the school system and sought solutions for improving academic success through a review of programs and policies that are already in place and consideration for implementation of new programs and policies that would make way for success.

Throughout history, the African American male has struggled to achieve quality education within the United States. Today, the struggles of yester year in areas of civil rights and justice, economics and politics remain. African American boys have been marred by unequal education and the school to prison pipeline in the public school system. Therefore, academic success plays a very important role in their lives in order to achieve success in life and have their place at the table whether it be economical, political, or civil equality. Self-worth plays a very important part in the life of a young African American male, as it provides a distinctiveness of their ethnic identity and their self-esteem and gives the confidence to achieve.



### **Literary Search Strategy**

All of the literature for this research information came from online databases, including Walden University's databases. All the resources included scholarly articles, newspaper articles, and peer-reviewed published journals from 2014 through 2018.

The key terms that were used to search for literature included the following: *academic achievement gap, motivation, African American male, public school, African American high school dropouts, graduation rate, academic performance, behavioral, academic success, student engagement, emotional engagement, African American culture in the public school, positive role models, community involvement, teaching strategy, school policy, school to prison pipeline, discipline, resource officers, standardized testing, teacher to student relationship, education policy. No Child Left Behind, and socialization.* These key phrases were used to write the review.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

The PFT is important in the public school system because not only can it guide and shape or structure, it can also be a guide for future policies to make or prevent necessary or unnecessary changes, or implementations that may come through the pipeline. The outcome of this study has demonstrated how the power of policy feedback can help to eliminate the achievement gap between African American males and other ethnicities and enforce present policies.

The interpretation of current literature revealed that policies are not only influenced by the government officials who want to implement the program, but also by the participants' views towards the program and their feelings on the politics of the

program. The curriculum that is given and the method of teaching used to include the standardized testing reflects on how well African American students learn. Policy dictates that everything is rolled out into one with no preference given to any given group.

Early implementation of policies and the relationship students have with their teachers and parents can influence a student's belief of the policy and their preference of which rule to follow. Policy can play a role in a student's belief. Policy feedback can come from the teachers' and administrators' perceptions of student exposure to the policy and how they and their peers react to the policy. The exposure will enact change that will bring forth additional changes for the future to determine what works best to eliminate or shorten the achievement gap. By looking at the terms of analysis, I also looked at the framework on visibility and proximity to determine what was working and what was not.

Policy feedback is policy exposure. The determination was made to find out if the school's policy directly or indirectly targeted inner-city African American kids and if that affected their learning, creating a further educational divide between African American boys and other ethnicities. Though the participants in the study were teachers and administrators and could also be creators of the policy, they would know more about it and its influence. However, this does not mean it precludes the others from having knowledge of the policy or its impact. The feedback on the policy and its influence is what was sought.

### **Ecological Theory in Effect**

Urie Bronfenbrenner developed the ecological model theory, which is divided into five environmental levels: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem,

and chronosystem. Of the five levels, the microsystem has the most influence on a person. In this study, I looked at the teacher-administrator microsystem due to the teachers' and administrators' direct contact with African Americans students at school. Because the relationship is bi-directional, I investigated the policies and the reaction to students at school, as well as when the boys are in their community. A study of the bi-directional relationship also showed how the teacher-administrator believed the children were treated in return when it comes to learning. The microsystem is the most influential level of the systems theory and that is why it was studied to determine if a child's development is affected by everything in their environment.

### **Literary Review**

#### **Academic Challenges**

Butler-Barnes et al. (2013) asserted that the racial discrimination that African American boys experience is linked to the inner-city public schools and results in lower school achievement. The lower school achievement is also caused by a lack of motivation and no faith in grade performance. An environment that is designed to protect is instead serving as an inhibiting force in their circle, which brings a double impact on their learning competencies and academic persistence.

Serbin, Stack, and Kingdon (2013) proclaimed that during the high school years the academic performance of youths' decline, especially males. The risk factors of being in the inner-city public school and male do not allow for academic success especially since the academic decline from the middle school to high school years, where some kids start getting into trouble, getting suspended, and expelled. During these

secondary schooling years is when African American males who are not performing or keep getting into trouble will drop out of school because they do not see the purpose for completion or the need to graduate. Education has no purpose to them.

In contrast, Turner's (2014) research showed that some African-American boys from the inner-city rose above the negative circumstances within their community and the schools to stay in school through graduation. They seemingly achieved more academic grades than their peers if the home environment was focused on academic success, which would allow for those boys to study more and give value to education; giving impact to the student's achievement.

African American boys tend to lose their enthusiasm around fourth grade, a phenomenon called "the fourth-grade failure syndrome," as explained by early childhood educator, Henry Morgan (Jenkins, 2018). Morgan explained this occurred due to the change in class environment where the children become more interactive, more competitive, and work more on an individual basis. The cooperative cultural environment that is preferential to African American males no longer exists and makes school more challenging throughout their high school journey (Jenkins, 2018).

### **No Child Left Behind**

The Department of Education believed that the NCLB, created and signed into law in 2002, would eliminate the achievement gap. It would make American children more competitive on an international level and hold schools accountable for the student's progress (Department of Education [DOE], 2002). Under the law, students would be tested in reading and mathematics from third grade through eighth grade, and once in

high schools. The idea was to make the children proficient by the end of each school year. Title 1 was also introduced to provide federal funding to school districts to educate disadvantaged children. In 2005, the Secretary of Education wanted to tweak the NCLB law, as the “one size fits all” approach was not progressing and allowed states to have some flexibility to achieve their goals. In 2010, the Obama administration revised the law, which gave more control to the states and allowed them to intervene when necessary (DOE, 2018).

By June 2012, more than half the states were granted waivers, which proved that the NCLB law was not functioning as it should. In 2013, the House of Representatives passed a bill to renew the NCLB law which would give less accountability of K-12. By March of 2015, the schools began to apply for new waivers. Nothing was accomplished since no school in the United States got 100% of their students proficient, instead, it also created an enormous achievement gap between the Caucasian students and minority students. Especially black males. Here was a concern as to whether qualified teachers were evenly distributed throughout the school system, or if Black boys were progressing in their education and whether supplemental education services were being utilized. Of course, many schools were not offering supplemental education services and showed that Black boys were in need of the help, so they would not be left so far behind.

The standardized testing created a make it or break it pathway for them, where achieving academic success is deemed impossible due to the testing and other hindrances they face as they try to make it to graduation day. The graduation rate for African American children in Florida remains low despite an increase nationwide. Black boys

continue to graduate at a low rate with the Florida Department of Education reporting a mere 69.4%. DOE (2018).

In December 2015, it was decided that the NCLB was dead with no hope for resurrection and a new law named Every Student Succeeds Act, (ESSA) was birthed by the Obama administration. It holds a hands-off approach from the federal level and allows for the education policies to be state managed. The ESSA would replace NCLB as of May 1, 2018. The states are obligated to submit accountability plans to the Education Department. States would set their own goals, focus on closing the achievement gap and improve the graduation rates. A bigger Title 1 would be given to help to educate the kids in poverty, though the testing will remain. DOE (2018)

### **Changes from the Middle to High School Levels**

Transitioning from the elementary school level to the middle school level, shows some interest of academic success but the transition from middle school to high school show high risk of academic difficulty. In the inner-city it is contributed to disadvantaged family background. There is no predictor that says inner-city children will be poor performers or that they cannot be academically successful because of their family background. The change from middle to high school may depend on certain support skills to deal with behavior which makes it critical to have the availability of resources on hand to determine if the administrators, teachers, principals will be able to deal with the processes which may lead to poor performance. The student's adaptation to change in academia may have to include new curriculums and skill requirements for high school,

and if making the facilities clean and welcoming may serve as motivation and a boost for self-esteem.

Bloomberg (2012) holds the views that African Americans have a cumulative disadvantage when it comes to education because they start off behind whites and run into various problems along the way that prevent progress. This starts at the kindergarten level. Many in the inner-city will encounter failing schools, labeling, inexperienced teachers and a lack of resources that is needed to enhance learning. Small incidents that occur either directly or indirectly that affect the black students can grow larger with negative consequences resulting in academic failure. This leads to problems in the criminal justice system and society at large, as many high school dropouts become a part of the juvenile delinquency system and later become career criminals.

Turner (2017) holds that some schools are not doing enough to retain the young African American males, so they will stay in school and not dropout. For example, statistics show that Black boys dropped out of school at a much higher rate than their Caucasian counterparts. The National Center for Education Statistics (2015) reports that the dropout rate for Black children was 4.3% when compared to the dropout rate for Whites that stands at 2.1%.

### **School to Prison Pipeline**

Perry (2017) expresses that the school- to- prison pipeline plays a role with the low graduation rates and the increasing juvenile delinquency system. Children as young as elementary school age are being introduced to the prison industry complex instead of an alternative form of discipline. Many public schools in the United States are outfitted

with a school resource officer who also play the role of disciplinarians and discipline in the way they know how, which is to arrest and charge in many cases. Minor offences become zero tolerance and a child has a juvenile record. (Perry, 2017) Usually, zero tolerance would result in suspension or expulsion for certain behaviors with no exception was reserved for the most severe behaviors, until certain type of infractions which were milder became mainstream and children were being removed from the schools and carted off to juvenile. This led to further academic struggles and often due to stigmatization, there were dropouts and future suspensions. Because the schools serve as a protective factor and help to prevent delinquent behavior, when that is stripped away from a student the risk of juvenile delinquency occurs. (Perry, 2017)

The inner-city children are affected the most as they are the ones who have troubled homes lives and would be unsupervised. The rate of suspension and expulsion of African American children are at a rate of two to three times higher than other ethnic school children and becomes the disproportionate rate of African American boys in the prison pipeline. (Odom, 2015). The School-to- Prison- Pipeline, impacts the inner city African American kids, the poor and disabled. When compared with other ethnicities though they break the same rule, it is the African American boy who will more likely be introduced to the criminal justice system.

For example, public schools in the inner-city areas or Metropolitan areas have metal detectors. The schools that have a high African American population have an increase in the numbers of metal detectors. (Odom, 2015) These schools show a lack of culture and unfair policing strategies. It is discrimination the African American boys face



on school grounds and in their own communities. From preschool to adulthood. These children are singled out by the teachers in the classroom. Society teaches them how to treat kids from the inner city through stereotypes, and teachers from different backgrounds or who are not culturally aware will subconsciously play a role.

There is an overrepresentation of minority students who fall into the failing gap in school, and some who are placed in special education which limits the learning capability. A number of things are looked at. First the special education process, the resource of general education and the socio demographics of the contributions. (Togu,2011) Those are the main factors that are identified to be directly related to a child's learning process and the effects of student achievement. This also includes their community, their home environment, health care and anything related to their socioeconomic status. There is no doubt that the African American children from the inner city will be subjected to attend low performing schools and therefore miss out on quality education as compared to their Caucasians peers.

The teacher's perception of the students who are low performers and are from a lower socioeconomic background, will be placed in lower level classes as slow performers. (Togu, 2011)

Schools have implemented a zero-tolerance concept where African American males are punished more severely than their Caucasian counterparts for lesser offenses which adds to the negativity of the school to prison pipeline on the minority students. These children are sometimes tried as adults in states where there is no legislation against it. (Odom, 2017) The reincarceration rates for high school dropouts is very high. It shows

that by dropping out of high school and failing to graduate makes an easy highway to prison.

The school to prison pipeline slowly manifested itself across state lines with incident rates higher for African American students, especially the ones who receive special education services. Most of the infractions are non-violent. Studies have shown that the African American student's referral are no more serious than those of the Caucasian student who are referred for less infractions. Some referrals begin from kindergarten level.

### **Student-Teacher Relationship**

Barile (2012) asserted that a good teacher student relationship would allow for the students to have a sense of belonging to promote positivity in school which can in turn facilitate academic success. Students who were engaged in educational experiences from middle school would bring that attitude over to high school if they felt connected. The teacher student relationship provides a voice to the student. This positive relationship will provide for greater opportunities which will potentially lead to academic success. The relationship high school students experience provides various forms of motivation for their academic aspirations and has the influence of their parents as well as peers. Consideration given to certain factors within the school such as class tests, socioeconomic composition and graduation requirements that may damper the areas of academic success regardless of the teacher-student relationship.

Long (2012) asserted that different learning styles can be used to motivate African American boys to help them improve their grades. By using different styles, the weaker

learners can be identified and separated where they can use a different curriculum or have teachers specifically for them to help achieve and not become failures.

In contrast, Brunn and Byrd (2015) expressed that finances and segregation can be an influence in the African American's student performance on standardized tests. In some public school, there is no strategy to get necessary funding for tutors or teachers to stay after school to give extra lessons to the students that are failing. The students are often from impoverished communities, so they are not able to pay for tutors and extra lessons that could help them keep up with the brighter set of kids. Resources in their community is either very limited or non-existent, therefore there is no help given to the children who need the extra lessons for the standardized tests. Failing in the classroom on a regular test is an indicator that they will not be successful on the standardized test. Other measures must be in place where African American students will have an opportunity to get help needed for them to pass standardized tests.

### **Standardized Testing Make or Break**

Zarchin (2012) at 17 years old or close to graduation age, African American students standardized test score fell four years behind white students standardized test scores. Even though there has been some focus on education school reform, the public school still does not have proper direction to effectively address the problem. Although it has been pointed out that collaboration is needed to foster the necessary skills needed to reduce the education gap, there has not been any show of improvement. Because the achievement gap has not improved or shown any indication of decrease, the focus turns to racial discrimination. Although African Americans have equal opportunity to attend

school, the treatment towards them are different. The unfair treatment impacts the student's background and their experiences on learning. If the school administrator is unable to respond effectively to what the student's face, then there is a transformation towards the negative in student culture and academic achievement.

Milner (2012) asserts that the education achievement gaps focuses on standardized tests and the possibility for it to be graded differently. Without the use of standardized tests there is no alternative in place for academic measurement. The Ministry of Education has failed to reform any effort that would significantly decrease or increase the education achievement gaps.

Michilin (2012) analysis standardization shows that students live and operate in an environment with whatever opportunity is afforded to them. It is necessary that teachers are held accountable for the learning growth of all their students. Students react to how they are being tested. In some cases, they are tested too much or not tested enough. In some cases, the student may not understand the need for testing because they don't know the value of education. It is important for them to understand and get in their belief system that it is not just the academics that brings success, but social achievement also brings success and is synonymous to learning. For example, "Bubba" may exist and seem to be successful catching shrimp, or the top basketball player was discovered shooting hoops in a park and sign a million-dollar deal. But what happens if Bubba's boat sinks and he is unable to get another or the Basketball player gets his arm cut off his rookie year? What happens next? It is important to teach the youths about the values of education. Teachers should do likewise. It is best that the teachers learn to build a

common language in which to draw to and from to avoid any disconnection of studies, so that there can be consistency to move the students forward in sustainable ways. They should listen and comprehend to know what is being talked about. (Michelin, 2012)

Standardized testing impacts the Black community more than what is considered. Even though there have been focus on the importance of obtaining high score for funding, the African American students have historically failed to be on the front way despite the efforts of NCLB as the scores remain lower than their peers. Because the African-American boys are more likely to live in an area which is economically damaged, and education is often time dependent on the zip code, there is no doubt that the educational gap is institutionalized and have been for some time, based on historical factors. The achievement gap and general population is trending upwards instead of down. (Holloway, 2014)

There are challenges that the Black students face, which is not just from their socio-economic or community situations, but also from the teacher demographics along with their teaching style. Many students get into trouble by dropping out of school because they do not believe they are supported by the teachers, due to the teacher's inability to accommodate different learning styles where they can fully comprehend. Holloway (2014) believes this falls on a lack of teacher training which is a recognized problem.

### **African American Teachers in the Classroom**

Having African American teachers in the classroom helps to fortify the student's self-esteem. Holloway (2014) contends that it makes them effective towards the students,

because they are relatable and become advocates to the Black students in times of need. For example, some African American socio-political beliefs can be used to enhance the school's curriculum by helping to fortify the student's confidence to boost the test scores. Holloway (2014) Some African American teachers may feel the need to take a more active role within their students' lives and become role models. Due to their understanding of the Black culture, the students are able to relate and express themselves more, because they believe they have someone who supports them and understands the challenges that they face. The classes tend to be more challenging when the students are taught by teachers of other ethnicities who are not culturally aware. The African American male teachers are more successful in providing insight and support which can lead to incentive programs for the Black youths to utilize and attain their necessary learning goals.

### **Role Models**

Kawakami (2016) holds that a role model is a person that wears many hats and is a supporter for all activity or events, no matter what. Together, they are constantly being changed. The African American male have been faced with challenges throughout history and belong to a subset of the community that portrays them in a negative light inclusive of high incarceration rates, high illiteracy rates and no self-worth. These issues make role models to an African American child in the inner-city community and school much more crucial. Role models for the African American inner-city boys can prove to be effective as they lead by example. Often the role model went through the same challenges as what the youngster may be going through and are able to inspire others through their own

conduct. Gibson (2004) believes a role model provides learning, motivation, inspiration and also helps the youngster to have self-awareness and self-confidence. In contrast, a mentor exposes the youths to ideas and concepts and usually work in an area of expertise where role models do not work as closely. However, there are significant qualities that they have that's able to shape the young person into becoming a productive citizen of society.

It is common knowledge that African American high school boys lack the educational tools that are needed to prepare them for the present technology age. With the lack of basics in literacy, mathematics, computer skills, data processing and critical thinking skills is a salient characteristic for African American boys in the public school system. With a lack of role models, their academic progression is stifled which may ultimately lead to violence making them a menace to society (Holland , 1996). Having positive role models would curb the epidemic of academic failure and low graduation rate of the African American boys. Their involvement within the public-school system, churches and inner-city communities will create a paradigm shift and result in greater achievement and academic success.

### **African Americans and the Achievement Gap**

Nogueira (2012) believes that the educational gap may be seen as an African American community problem which is to be handled within the community. But it is not just an African American community problem and should not be singled out as such because it is an American problem. With the dropout rate the way it has been, African American children are less likely to enroll or much less become a college graduate.

Instead, many African American boys will continue to look at rap or professional sport as a road to success instead of education. Within the school system, many African American boys are more likely to be classified as mentally retarded or have a learning disability and are placed in special education classes which prohibits them from learning opportunities that would normally be available to them.

Very few African American children are placed in gifted programs or given class privilege when compared to whites. Having African American teachers in the classroom will ensure that more African American children are placed in gifted programs. (There are even some middleclass African American children who remain a grade point average behind or significantly behind on standardized tests of Caucasian children; Davis, 2015). This matter had aroused some educators to consider the possibility of single sex education as a way to help African American children achieve their full potential. It is important that the African American students see the importance of their education and the effectiveness of a passing score. With good teachers in the classroom, African American or the ones who are culturally aware, will allow for the students to get a better grasp of their learning and comprehension and be competitive with their Caucasian counterparts in standardized testing. (Davis, 2015).

### **The Possible Alternative**

Dumas (2015) expresses that neoliberal governmentality should be used in schools to effectively create solutions to the problems that are currently being faced. He believes that professional managerial skills, along with the use of technical knowledge will bring about the needed change in the public classrooms and inner-city communities.



With the use of the neoliberal project, the school would recruit a fair amount of familiar racial teachers for their ideological policy agenda. With racial familiars, the African American boys who have lost interest in education or have a lack of interest in delayed gratification, would offer some form of motivation to the youths over the choice of a rap career or professional sports, which is where the emphasis for success lies. Dumas (2015) believes that racial familial responsibility comes into focus when the community gets involved by having the elders, role models and mentors come together to assist the youths and show society that they can help themselves.

Oeur (2017) contends that all male schools for African American boys would be great for their academics, because all male academies tend to nurture resilience. Should the male academies use Afrocentric curricula, it would empower young black boys to become confident and produce successful black men who will serve their communities as role models by showing the youths how to overcome adversity by creating success through resilient brotherhood. The school would be a source to draw from teaching on morals and social boundaries and by shifting resilience. The respectability will create a change of behavior where they will not be faced with educational disadvantages or school punishment such as suspension or expulsion. The Eurocentrism of the school curriculum would be challenged when implementing an Afrocentric Curricula within the school system.

An emphasis must be placed on recruiting African American male teachers to boost self-esteem, self-confidence, social resilience and the ability to advance to the next level. Heavy recruitment of black teachers as students for all subjects, as people need to

see people who look like them, be where they've been, seen what they've seen, have a shared cultural experience. By recruiting African American, teachers especially African American male teachers into the classrooms, will show the potential of the students improving in academics. There is a need to recruit and retain black teachers to not only teach core subjects but to also teach gifted programs. There are only 4% of black males in the gifted program today and no incentive in place to increase that number in the public or private schools.

### **Community Relations**

Prioleau (2013) identified that strong partnerships and collaboration of the stakeholders, (parents, students, teacher, administrators and community) will lead to academic achievement and success, as together the drive for institutional change that is needed to make an impact on the school which will systematically change the way they educate African American children. On a whole, the school system can establish support systems for all its students and their different needs. In fact, every household has its dysfunction, which is played out in the community and carried over into the school; the support system is the buffer to keep things on its rightful track.

The school must maintain the focus on its support for high achievement of African American students and look towards closing the gap. The school will go through cultural transformation and focus on new ways of doing things, by implementing policies that affect change. A strategic plan must be in place to detail the new changes, one of which is to develop school and community relationship, this will call for parents and community members to get together to support education programs. (Palue, 2013)

believes that rigorous academic achievement goals should be set and driven by data. The goals should be attainable and measured in increments related to the rising achievement and the existing achievement gap.

To reduce or eliminate the achievement gap the policies and procedure for black learning must reflect the identifiable need of the students while highlighting their strengths. Teachers must be placed in classes based on their experience. The purpose of this qualitative study is to find solutions for the achievement gap between African American boys and other ethnicities. Though this study may not bring all the answers into narrowing the gap, when compared to current literature there is information that can be tapped that will give insight to policy makers to reform public school policy.

It is possible that African American boys can be alongside their Caucasian peers where there is no gap and can achieve success through the public-school system despite the factors that are laid against them. The impact of the achievement gap is reflected in the graduation rate and the task was to find out how the boys felt about what they were doing and what they should do to make things achievable. By using the ecological theory, I observed the behavior, the moods and the attitudes, of the teacher and administrator to hear their thoughts of what would make the African American boys improve in learning. The effectiveness of the ecological theory will explore and gain insight in the behavior, it will also be shown during the interview through body language.

Lacewell (2016) believes that it does take a village to raise a child including meeting academic achievements. Who makes sure that the latch-key kids are indoors doing homework instead of hanging on the streets when parents are working late? The

community does. The church, community leaders and elective officials as well as school administrators are needed to create meaningful relationships which will be used to improve the child's academic behavior. Instead of standing alone there is to be social relationships. Social relationship will allow for learning to be enhanced, which will play a significant role in the African American community.

### **Closing the Gap**

It is important for African American boys to understand the achievement gap and their involvement in closing it. Being able to achieve academic success must be shared with a sense of pride within their community to remove the sense of powerlessness. They should collectively be taught how to improve their self-worth and their environment by removing the feeling of reluctance where they believe that they are incapable of being academically successful and unable to make progress. By doing the study, the results will show discrimination, social injustice, the lack of pride and other negativity that society has put upon the African American community where they can understand the feelings of helplessness that the African American children bear.

These negative behaviors are exhibited by African American students from the elementary level. Their parents may not have completed school or barely made it through high school, but parents will say they want the best for their children. If education is respected, at times the desire of the parent is for their children to achieve a higher education level than what they got. The ones with that feeling are sometimes more able to motivate the children so they can see the importance of educational achievement. Many parents want their children to attain a higher education level than them however, if they

have not completed high school or have a tertiary level education, they may face a challenge in encouraging the child to see the importance of academic achievement at any level.

Henderson (2012) contends that the failures in the public-school system disproportionately falls on the African American boys. As in the schools, so is it in society with injustice against the African American children who are labeled most violent. According to the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC; 2014), African American children represent 18% of preschoolers, with 48% of preschoolers being suspended more than once when compared to Caucasian preschoolers who represent 43% but 28% of preschoolers. African Americans children have a disproportional suspension and expulsion rate when compared to Caucasian. African American students are suspended or expelled at three times the rate of Caucasian students and on average 5% of Caucasian children are suspended compared to 15% of African American ones. African American students with disabilities represent 19% enrolled students, but 36% of them are restrained at school by some form of mechanical device or restraints. Even though African American students represent 16% of enrolled students, 27% have been referred to law enforcement with 31% of them subjected to school related arrests. (CRDC, 2014). The arrests serve as a new form of discipline and is conducted from the elementary level to high school. Instead of making things better, it has made things worse and has developed into a movement known as the “school to prison pipeline”, the new discipline alternative. Many who are arrested are also detained

and are judicially waived to criminal court. This has further widened the academic achievement gap.

This trend begins as early as the elementary level and goes through to grade 12. According to the Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality, an African American male is five times more likely to be arrested than a Caucasian male, and one in 10 African American child has a parent who is incarcerated compared to one in 60 Caucasian children (Hager, 2017). The money spent on prisons and jails have increased triple time when compared to the money spent on public education and public schools.

The implementation of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 was intended to eliminate the achievement gap yet African American boys continued to see poor graduation rates and steady high school dropout rates. More and more students graduate and are not able to read or capable of having the proper skills needed to become productive members of society. Unfortunately, America's public schools continues to show the gaps and the struggles of the African American students for the past 50 years. The public schools remain unequal and the use of disciplinary actions such as expulsions, suspensions and arrests take lead. This study has shown how that would change.

### **School and Community Impact**

LaSalle (2013) believes that the school, family and the student and community may influence the student's perception of the school's climate and their learning ability. The connections to academic, social and psychological outcome looked at race or family socioeconomic status which looked at the classroom dynamic. To have teacher's perception of the child within the school environs through narrow lens of culture, showed

how some kids were left behind and not progressing along as their peers. That knowledge can be used as a school to strengthen the African American boys' curriculum and identify areas that have caused the gap. The purpose of using this theory was to focus on narrowing the education gap and strengthening the student experience and improve grades. By targeting specific areas that the African American boys are failing then the students would have an edge to improve and not fall outside the area of learning. The community helps by providing recreation centers that will help the students with afterschool programs such as homework help and free tutoring.

### **Teacher-Student Relations**

Lane (2015) holds that a child is able to succeed academically at school on the teacher -student relationship as well as the student-peer to create a positive relation. However, if the positive behavior is built up at school with the teacher and is reflected in their work but there is negative behavior at home, the child could take that negative behavior back to school which will create a challenge. When this happens, the behavior at school changes and the child gets reprimanded with a referral for non-compliance. If the teachers are properly trained on some of the challenges the African American boys face, it will allow them some form of leniency instead of an automatic referral. In comparison, once the teacher offers support for child behavior within the classroom, he or she can make a difference in her class and the opportunity for growth and learning becomes available. The teacher can predict the behavior of noncompliance if they have been properly trained. The teacher will also look at peer-to-peer relationships and will be able

to focus on the group who may struggle more compared to the group that displays strength.

### **Interference**

Per Gaither (2015), hypermasculinity cannot be avoided in preteens and adolescence. However, the hypermasculinity with peers may have a negative effect where it interferes with school performance. Peer pressure is often times increased so there is rejection in areas that can help the boys succeed and they refuse help and discourage their peers from taking the help that they need. They do not see a need for tutoring and even though they may not understand the work, will resist compliance. African American boys are good up to third grade of elementary level but the zest to succeed tends to decrease at fourth grade. This becomes evident in middle school and more so in high school where the dropouts occur.

### **Summary**

Current literary has shown that the No Child Left Behind concept was a failure and did nothing for “it takes a village.” Unfortunately, the public-school system and society has failed the African American boy, who are more likely than not be found incarcerated than walking across the stage to take his diploma and head on to college. The school looked at policy theory from the teachers and administrators’ point of view to see what affected the African American boys learning pattern to achieve success and what would be an effective change.



## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

In Chapter 3, I described the methodologies, design, tools, and analysis that were used to answer the research questions. The purpose of this qualitative study was to find solutions for the achievement gap between African American boys and other ethnicities. Though this study may not have brought forth all the answers into narrowing the gap, when compared to current literature, there is information that could be tapped into to give insight to policy makers to reform public school policy. It is possible that African American boys can be alongside their Caucasian peers where there is no gap and can achieve success through the public school system despite the factors they face. The impact of the achievement gap can have negative outcome to the African American community in terms of economics and unhealthy lifestyles, which can lead to the use of more public health resources, a higher risk of incarceration if they are high school dropouts, and even civil engagements (NAEP, 2015). Narrowing the gap would help to enhance various aspects that affect the African American community; knowing how the teachers and administrators felt about what they were doing and what they believed they should do to make things achievable for their students. The examination of public policy feedback theory and ecological theory could give insight to the necessary steps that should be taken in an effort to narrow the academic gap and put the African American boys on a path to success. The details of the research design (policy feedback theory and ecological theory) for this study are elaborated on throughout this chapter. The rationale for the methodology used in this study for responding to the education gaps is explained,

which involved exploring the different learning experiences of African American boys who attend public school. I sought to understand the lived experiences of the teachers and administrators over a period of time and compare the issues they see happening with the African American boys at school and within the community. I also investigated how they would be able to make the situation evolve to produce meaningful solutions and create success by narrowing the achievement gap.

In addition to the methodology, I also describe in this chapter my role as a researcher, the design of the study, the participants, data collection procedures, and data analysis. The use of the ecological theory and policy feedback theory were the foundation of this research. This study used a pragmatic approach with the interview participants in Broward County, Florida.

The research design generated answers to the research questions and created solutions for implementation into the school system. Towards the end of the chapter, I describe the ethical treatment and trust of the participants and why a qualitative study was appropriate for this research.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

The study allowed for a view of the issue from the teachers' and administrators' perspectives. The research questions were posed to find out if circumstances could block opportunity for students' achievement. By using the research questions, teachers and administrators were able to express certain dynamics that they did not understand. This case study helped to deepen understanding about what goes on in the teachers' and

administrators' minds and their day to day encounters with the young African American youths, and how they helped or added to the problem.

### **Role of the Researcher**

My role as the researcher was significant, as I became a part of the process that allowed me to have a better understanding of the research events (see Patton, 2014). As a part of the process, I took the necessary steps to ensure that there were checks and balances to reduce biases both within the research and interview process that could influence my study (see Maxwell, 2019). The participants' interviews were recorded to ensure accuracy, as well as transcribed. The participants had the opportunity to review the transcripts to ensure that the interviews captured their thoughts correctly. I had no personal relationships with any of the parties who were involved in the study.

### **Research Methodology**

Creswell (2013) asserted that qualitative case studies were consistent with research that sought to obtain an in-depth understanding of policy decision making. To find out why there is such a large achievement gap between the African American boys and Caucasian boys and the interpretive effects of etiology and public policy feedback would provide some insight for the challenge. The school's policies were looked at, which allows for solutions to be offered for feedback and implementation. This can help to determine if more harm or help is occurring with the African American boys and their reasoning.

This study focused on high school teachers and administrators, mainly because of the low graduation rate and high school dropout in Broward County, Florida. This high

school is a public school. Upon approval from Walden's Institutional Review Board (IRB; ) and receipt of signed informed consent from each participant, interviews were conducted. This study determined if there was a significant relationship between student academic achievement and if (a) the school to prison pipeline is a factor, (b) whether standardized testing impacts African American boys negatively, (c) whether having African American role models in the home and community will increase the graduation rates of African American boys, and (d) if having more African American teachers in the classroom would help with grasping what is being taught. The research questions were designed in a manner to gain the perception of the teachers and administrators and their attitudes on academic achievement and what they believe will allow African American boys to succeed.

### **Participants of the Study**

The participants were given an in-depth interview. The primary participants of this study worked at the schools in the Broward/Miami Dade public-school district in Florida. The primary purpose of selecting the school was because of its location and its problems. Just like many other inner-city schools, this school is faced with overcrowded classrooms (e.g., student-teacher ratio of 22:1), and lack of parental involvement, as parents are not getting involved with student activity or having hands on approach to schoolwork with their children. There is a lack of resources that would help with academic achievement and motivation, funding for tutoring or academic clubs to help public school children learn and to better on standardized tests, and inexperienced

teachers are faced with challenges and without support, which makes it difficult to develop a positive student-teacher relationship.

The interviews were focused on the policies in place at the public school, and what the participants believe they could do based on their perceptions for the African American boys to grow academically to narrow the achievement gap. Selecting random administrators allowed the research to point out the similarities, as well as differences, based on their experience, including cultural experience. At time of data collection, it was required that all participants had previously served as an administrator or teacher, and had taught or encountered African American males during the ninth, tenth, or eleventh grade of high school. This study gave a purposeful insight into the reasons why there is an achievement gap between African Americans and other ethnicities.

### **Research Questions**

The following questions were used to address the hindrances African American boys face within the school system:

RQ1: In what ways is the prison pipeline a factor in the low graduation rate of African American boys?

RQ2: What are the primary ways standardized testing impacts African American student success?

RQ3: How would having African American role models in the home and community increase in the graduation rates of African American boys?

RQ4: What impact would mandatory cultural training for teachers and administrators have in the public-school system?

### **Data Analysis**

The data from the interview were collected through notes and tape recordings. At the end of interviews, everything was written down verbatim and then transcribed into a computer. This study analyzed data generated from a few high school administrators. The data analysis was in two stages: descriptive analysis and association; the two were split. I coded and transcribed to a clear sheet of paper. The data derived from the study were from personal experiences and perceptions. The study was able to offer information as to what was needed to motivate and encourage the boys, which might encourage future research and future policy implementation. The data came from personal experiences and perceptions of the teachers and administrators, as they explained the factors that may prohibit learning for African American boys.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

In qualitative studies, it is important that trustworthiness is established due to the absence of quantitative measurements of validity and credibility (Graneheim & Lundman 2004). Researchers often use credibility, confirmability, reliability and transferability to enhance their trustworthiness of qualitative studies. (Graneheim, Lundman, 2004).

### **Credibility**

This includes confirmation of the findings to be accurate and reflective of the participants lived experience or perceptions. (Haughton, et al 2013) To check credibility, I had the teachers and administrators review the transcript and highlight any errors or corrections that was needed then made the necessary corrections for data analysis.

**Dependability**

This occurs when there is consistency and repeatability in the findings. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) I listed details so that other researchers would be able to perform the same study and arrive at the same or similar conclusion as this study.

**Conformability**

I documented certain decisions, including reflective notes throughout the study. It included participant recruitment, data collection and analysis, along with data organization and created an audit trail to support the results.

**Transferability**

I enhanced transferability by providing an in-depth description of the phenomenon so that other researchers would have clear understanding of the study. This was done to see if the study aligned with the study or could be applied to a particular setting.

**Ethical Procedures**

To ensure ethical processes in this study the participants were told that participation was voluntary, acquiring informed consent, guaranteed confidentiality and proper disposal of data.

Each participant was given an informed consent form that included a detailed aspect of the study. It included the purpose of the study, confidentiality, anticipated risks, procedure for data disposal and acquiring signatures as a form of acceptance to proceed with the study. There was no bias in this study as participants were not known to me personally. Priority was given to confidentiality of every participant. The use of unique

identifiers was used to secure anonymity and all identity was protected by electronic data which was password protected. Data will be secured under Walden University IRB guidelines until time for eradication.

### **Summary**

Qualitative method was suitable for this study because of the goal to acquire solutions to narrow the achievement gap between African American boys and other ethnicities. School teachers and administrators would be interviewed to gain understanding of why the gap was so large and what can be implemented to narrow it. The data collection process was instrumental in gaining information on positive change that can be made so they can best fit their students. The sample was 10 teachers and administrators based on assumptions of saturation. Assign teachers who were culturally aware and recruit more African American male teachers and ensure that they were supplied with the tools they need to teach effectively. With adequate resources in place for academic support and extended learning opportunity such as tutoring and afterschool programs, the motivation will be within the boys to want to do better.

The next chapter includes presentation of the findings stemming from the data analysis explained. The themes were broken down separately and narrated to answer the research questions.



## Chapter 4: Results

### **Introduction**

The gap in literature is about student performance and the reasons that cause academic deficiency in African American boys. Many do not graduate due to dropping out of school or are expelled due to varied reasons. I conducted a qualitative study to explore the barriers to academic success for African American boys, and offer solutions to close the academic gap. In this chapter, I provide insight into the experiences of the teachers and administrators who taught African American high school boys and give an accurate account of the research findings. The results in this chapter are the accurate viewpoints of the participants.

### **Settings**

The focus of the study was high school teachers and administrators from a school district in the southeastern United States. High school is considered a critical phase for African American boys due to the high dropout rate and low graduation rate. The perception of teachers' and administrators' strategies to motivate and influence students to graduate and narrow the achievement gap were explored.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection tools that were utilized were interviews and phone calls. The interviews provided the information about each teacher's perception of the barriers to African American educational success, by providing answers to the research questions. It gave them the opportunity to express their thoughts and experiences freely. From the initial invite, I selected 10 participants for the study, as 10 was enough for saturation.

They were given consent forms which were collected via email, and to ensure anonymity, teachers were given alphanumeric codes to conceal their identity. Ensuring confidentiality is important in gaining trust of the participants. The interviews were recorded on a smart phone with a digital voice recorder app and uploaded to a digital notebook that was password protected and then transcribed. A small home office was used to conduct the interviews.

The interview questions provided the opportunity for the teachers and administrators to reflect on their experiences in the public-school setting. The questionnaires allowed for them to reflect on their responses. They were later given a copy of their response to ensure accuracy. There were no changes made to any of the transcripts.

### **Data Analysis**

The purpose of this research was to understand the barriers that are preventing African American high school boys from achieving academic success and to understand the perceptions of their teachers and administrators. The participants for the study consisted of 10 high school teachers and administrators from the southeastern part of the United States. The requirement for participation included that the teachers (a) taught high school African American boys, (b) were full time employees at a public-school (c) had at least two years of service at their present school, and (d) consented to a 30-minute interview. Exclusions were middle school or elementary school teachers, teachers who worked less than two years at their present school, and retired teachers or online

instructors. This allowed me the opportunity to seek participants with knowledge to share about what was being studied and to give insight on the phenomenon.

Purposely selecting teachers who taught grades nine through 12 in a public school setting, was critical to understanding the problem being investigated and to provide the answers to the research questions. One of the benefits of interviewing these participants was that it enabled me to control the line of questioning. Potential teachers and administrators were identified through social media and contact was made through messenger for possible participants. After they were identified, each was formally contacted and provided the details of the study. The teachers who were interviewed had between 4 years to 24 years of teaching experience.

This chapter also contains a self-reported demographic profile of the participants, and an analysis of the qualitative data collected from in depth interviews. There was no bias or forcefulness within the interview process. Each participant agreed to be interviewed on a volunteer basis and participated in an extensive personal interview. Prior to any interview, each participant was informed to express their personal beliefs and views and were reminded that their information would remain confidential. To ensure anonymity, I used pseudonyms acquired from a pseudonym generator for all participants. Participant information is listed in Table 1.

To understand how the teachers' perceptions could affect the students' learning behavior within the public school, four research questions provided the framework to organize the data. A category system was designed to obtain the data for it to be categorized systematically. Lumping the data allowed the formation of the categories,

which provided the differences and classification of the data into meaningful relevant chunks of information. Every attempt was made to ensure that the various bits of information would fit into only one category. This process provided the format for the coding and analysis phase. The research questions guiding this study were:

RQ1: In what way is the prison pipeline a factor in the low graduation rate of African American boys?

RQ2: What are the primary ways standardized testing impacts African American students' success?

RQ3: How would having African American role models in the home and community increase in the graduation rates of African American boys?

RQ4: What impact would mandatory cultural training for teachers and administrators have in the public-school system?

Table 1

*Self-Reported Educator Demographic Information*

Name	Age	Years of teaching	Ethnicity
Ray Jackson	46-55	12.5	Black
Dawna Ochieda	36-45	5	Black
Kim Motely	36-45	8	Black
Donovan Migley	56-65	20	Black
Odella Crawford	46-55	24	Black
Camellia Tullius	36-45	15	Anglo
Dora Toomajian	26-35	4	Asian
Perceval Straits	46-55	9	Black
Whitney Litchfield	36-45	14	Anglo
Dell Wilkenson	36-45	10	Black

Ten teachers were interviewed with one who served the role as teacher/administrator. The questions were grouped into four categories to allow familiarization of the data, a code generator, theme identification and final report The four categories were:

1. Role model effect
2. Testing the test
3. Scholars and teachers
4. Cradle to prison

The first step of analysis was familiarizing myself with the data and conducting the interviews. During this data collection process, I observed the tone of the participants

and made notations. Information was then transferred into Microsoft Word files. The transcripts were reread to select the themes and common patterns for application. The next phase initiated the code generation. Transcripts were read verbatim and information was loaded into a folder, labeled "Interviews." The data were lumped into individual files and data that were considered pertinent to the research question were highlighted and coded. For example, the statement from the transcript of Teacher 7 was "Provide access to resources...teach self-advocacy skills at early age...Put disciplinarians back in the school...develop apprenticeship program from middle school to engage them...prepare the boys to be global citizens...keep them motivated so they will graduate from high school." These statements were highlighted and assigned under the label *Cradle to prison*. The statement was coded as and interpreted to be an applicable answer to the research questions.

The process continued until all interviews and observation transcripts were coded. The codes were then identified. This included codes from the second phase that were reviewed for familiarity and patterns among the data. Texts that contained the same information were considered common patterns and were highlighted. For instance, the sample initial code *Imprisoning the Future* was compared to school resource system, school resource officers, principals, community involvement, and parental or other kind of support from home. I found the initial codes pertaining to data that showed African American boys who were punished by school resource officers lose motivation to stay in school. However, if they were involved in technical or educational programs it would keep them motivated and reduce their chances of incarceration and increase their chances

for graduation. These programs would help with their learning ability by giving them aspirations. Therefore, the theme *Imprisoning the Future* was identified. Table 2 shows how the codes were assigned and how they were brought together under a theme to commit to the completion of the study.

**Table 2: Name and Definition of Themes**

<b><i>Imprisoning the Future</i></b>	School to prison pipeline's effect on graduation rate
<b><i>Role Model Effect</i></b>	Motivation. Aspiration. Value of education. Mental Attitude
<b><i>Testing the Test</i></b>	Biased. African American boys unable to relate. Inadequacy.
<b><i>Scholars and Teachers</i></b>	Cultural awareness. African American male teacher's effect.

Once the themes were generated, it was time to proceed to the fourth phase of the data analysis. At this venture, the data was sorted to determine whether to put together or separate, combine or discard but ultimately identify and refine the category of responses. The themes were identified and reviewed to see how they related to each other. The themes were once again reviewed to see if they made sense amongst each other, while being separate from each other and whether they answered the research question and contributed without repeating itself. For instance, in answering RQ1, I looked at themes relating to the school to prison pipeline and how it prevented the African American high school boys from graduating and a reason for poor academic performance.

The themes were compared with the interview to view the explicitness of the participants or if it was directly implied. The data from the interviews and observations were triangulated, compared and contrasted based on their similarities and differences

from their contribution in creating and strengthening the themes and findings. The context of raw data and the overall dataset contributed to the creation of the themes. Once the theme was defined and named, the objective was for each theme to capture the essence of the response.

The final report production began the last phase of data analysis. This final report contains the narratives and excerpts from the participants and the themes used to answer the research questions from the data. The supporting evidence of the themes are presented in the next section.

The purpose of this research study was to understand how teachers perceived African American boys, if they saw them as having potential for success and what they believed would motivate the boys to stop or lower the high school dropout rate. I wanted to understand the effectiveness of the teacher student relationships and if having African American teachers or teachers who are culturally aware would make a significant impact on the African American boys and give them a sense of purpose. I wanted to understand how these perceptions impacted the learning and teaching strategies in the classroom. I sought to understand the following questions”

1. In what ways is the prison pipeline a factor in the low graduation rate of African American boys?
2. What are the primary ways standardized testing impacts African American student success?
3. How would having African American role models in the home and community increase in the graduation rates of African American boys?



4. What impact would mandatory cultural training for teachers and administrators have in the public-school system?

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

To ensure trustworthiness of the study, strategic procedures outlined in chapter 3 were followed. Participants answers were not distorted in any way to fit the narrative of data interpretation. Credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability were confirmed. I used data triangulation to ensure validity of the findings. The participants were sourced from the southeastern part of the United States. The participants were earnest in their responses that solidified credibility of the study. The study proved to be dependable due to its consistency and the ability to be duplicated. Transferability showed how the study could be generalized and used in other contexts and cross-checking the data ensured confirmability. All participants were informed that the study was voluntary and there would be no reimbursement of any sort for participating. Data saturation was identified upon exhausting the data collection and not bring about any new findings. Transcripts were sent to the participants to ensure accuracy and edits if warranted.

I described the study to participants in detail and any questions asked was answered and noted the safeguard of their privacy. Through early discussions rapport was established to determine if the participant was a good candidate for the study and emphasized for them to express their thoughts and feelings without bias, by doing that, it allowed me to gain in-depth understanding of their response to the questions. The participants acknowledged the consent form for participation and were given the option

to withdraw. Reflective notes served as an audit trail for the study. Proper documentation will help in future replication and increased confirmability in this study.

## **Results**

The results were presented in this section. This section was organized into subsections that contains narratives and excerpts from data of the following themes, (a) Imprisoning the Future, (b) Testing the Test, (c) Role Model Effect (d) Scholars and Teachers. The themes were identified to answer the research questions.

### **Category 1 Findings: Imprisoning the Future**

The responses within this category were all very similar in nature. All the participants believed that the school to prison pipeline form of punishment had caused lower graduation rates of African American boys and was part of the reason why they dropped out of school. The veteran teachers believed that though some form of punishment should be given to the misbehaving student, arresting them is not helpful and they should be disciplined by school faculty. They believed it is a function of the school and not the school resource officers, even though they are there to help. They believed that an alternative form of discipline should be administered instead of the students being sent off to juvenile detention centers which instead of improving behavior, often times make their behavior worse. When the African American boys are taken out of school, the motivation to continue learning is not there. Graduation rates would increase if the schools intervened to reduce the boys from incarceration. All the teachers believed that another form of discipline should be exercised by the school instead of incarceration.

A few noted that the high incarceration rate of African American males and the school to prison pipeline policy added to the problem. When they are arrested so young along with their separation from school, it helps to fuel their decision to drop out of school which usually causes them to develop criminal behavior. Teacher Odella - believed that the schools should minimize that. She further stated that districts partnered with the juvenile system and a youth program such as Promise Program to intervene in disciplinary actions with the school to reduce the incarceration rate. Participants all believed that youth programs in the community and at school would be effective for the African American boys with discipline and learning problems. “The youth programs will create discipline, build confidence and motivate them to stay in school.... These programs place a value on education and will teach the youths the necessary skill sets in order to achieve and help with behavioral issues.... Extracurricular activities are good for mental and emotional stability, plus it keeps them out of trouble in the community and keeps them out of jail...It will help with homework assignments and make them a good allrounder”. Participant

Perceval suggested “The schools need to take back discipline and implement apprenticeship programs in the school for the boys who do not desire to go to college so they can become global citizens through their skills...they will learn to respect everyone around them which will help their behavior and not be subjected to the school resource officers punishment. By teaching self-advocacy skills and giving them access to resources will help them achieve their goals and graduate.” Participant Donovan recommended, “Have single gender classes so they will be more focused”. Another

participant suggested “Get the boys involved in 5000 Role Model Club, Big Brother Big Sister program, Cub Scouts, Promise Program, and more parental involvement which help them graduate instead of being incarcerated.”

### **Category 2 Findings: Testing the Test**

Participants were questioned about their thoughts on the Florida Standardized Assessment (FSA), and whether it will help the African American boys’ achievement gap to improve. This category gave a glimpse of what the teachers believe the African American boys face when they do the FSA. All but one believed that the questions were biased, and that the African American male did not have many of the experiences to reflect on. They also stated the they boys struggled with reading and writing and that their failings resulted in diminished confidence and they lacked the motivation to move forward causing many of them to be held back due to their inability to pass the test. Participant Donovan believed that standardized tests highlight the learning deficit. “As the student struggles to read and comprehend, along with poor math scores only makes a recipe for failure.” Participant Dell stated, “the test does not test the ability to read and write but tests information that white boys take for granted, such as test for knowledge of baseball versus basketball or football”. One of the 10 participants did not believe that the standardized testing was biased or too hard for the boys, but that if they applied themselves by studying the material, had the necessary skillset and contend then they should be able to succeed. Two out of 10 participants believed that teachers were forced to focus on the tests and not enough time was spent teaching the African American boys

the necessary skillset to successfully pass the test. They believed that the testing was unfair.

### **Category 3 Findings: Role Models**

Participants answered questions pertaining to role models in the home and communities to and how their presence would influence the African American boys to stay in school and graduate and narrow the academic gap. The responses were similar in saying that having the role models in the home and communities who were successful within the workplace would show the boys the value of education and how they could be a success. Role models would be someone who the boys really respected and would be inspired and motivated by their success with hopes to emulate them. So, while role models in the homes are important it is also important that they have them in the community. One participant did not believe that a role model in the home or community would help the boys stay in school and graduate “unless there was value of education in the home it would not make a difference. If that was not there, then the boys would do whatever they wanted to do such as drop out of school”

### **Category 4 Findings: Scholars and Teachers**

This theme was in response to the questions on cultural training. Four out of ten teachers were against it and they said, “it would not make an impact.....training would take time away from what they need to do in the classrooms....it would not be well received by teachers...no need for cultural training, it is teacher application that is important.” The remaining six teachers thought that being culturally aware would help in teaching the African American boys as they would be better able to understand them and

see to their needs. By doing so it would help to encourage the boys in their learning and by doing so create motivation for them to stay in school until they graduated. One teacher revealed a better learning process for the boys would be to have African American male teachers teach science, mathematics and language arts as it would have an impact on the boys' motivation and engagement.

***Table 3: The Findings***

<b><i>Effective classroom Strategy</i></b>	Increase graduation rates and narrows the achievement gap
<b><i>Motivation</i></b>	Understanding the value of education will achieve academic success
<b><i>Social activities away from school/academics</i></b>	Help in developmental skills and learning ability.
<b><i>Role models in the Community</i></b>	Positive role models help in community help to remove barriers preventing academic success
<b><i>Prison Pipeline</i></b>	Discipline brought back to the schools and not handled by police
<b><i>Juvenile facility-School Partnership</i></b>	Programs created to help keep boys in school and reduce the dropout rate
<b><i>Teacher-Student Relationship</i></b>	Positive approach coupled with compassion motivates and achieve academic success

### **Summary**

This purpose of this research was to understand and explore, through qualitative methods, high school teachers' perceptions of the barriers that could be preventing the African American high school boys from achieving academic success. Poor academic performance leading to low graduation rates due to high school dropout rates amongst

African American boys have either increased or remained stagnant while the achievement gap has gotten wider. Though the current study did not define instructional methods on how to narrow the achievement gap, it is understood that different approaches taken from the study can be effectively engaged through the classroom which can identify the African American boys' processes through suggested methods of the teachers and their practices.

Furthermore, the current findings could be interpreted to have positive impacts on effective classroom strategies that would lead to an increase in the graduation rates and subsequently narrow the achievement gap. The findings revealed teachers perceived that African American boys can achieve academic success if they are guided in areas of motivation which would help them to understand the value of education. The current study also found that teachers perceive that African American males display elevated levels of socialization for activities that are away from the school though not directly related to academics which would help in their developmental skills, which in turn will improve their learning ability. Teachers were found to believe that having positive role models or being involved in community upbuilding programs were key components to the African American males' success and help to remove the barriers preventing their academic success. Findings showed that the school to prison pipeline is a detriment and discipline needs to be brought back under the school's control to reduce African American incarceration. The study found that should schools partner with state juvenile programs it would help in keeping the boys in school and minimize the dropout rate. Positive relations are desired for student-teacher relationship and I recognized that the teachers who sounded excited and compassionate were found to be the most helpful for

the achieving of academic success. Some participants believed that some students did not see themselves a success and that education did not matter.

This chapter explained how the boys could not be motivated which causes them to underperform and a change of some disciplinary issues could be implemented to improve academic performance, and also emotionally engaging the students would help to break down barriers. A look at the relationship between the themes and the findings and how they connected to the theoretical framework and existing literature was also explained. In Chapter 5, the conclusion is presented and based on the analysis of the study, supporting literature, implications of the study, and the recommendation for future research.



## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this research was to understand the barriers preventing African American males from achieving academic success. Narrowing the education gap and understanding teacher's perceptions of African American male students was my focus as well. I sought to understand how the teachers' perceptions impacted the learning ability and behavior in the school and how the academic gap could be lowered. In Chapter 4, I summarized the research to include an overview of the research questions, and provided a summary of the findings. In this chapter, I discuss the implications for practice, the purpose of the research questions, recommendations for future research, and provide a conclusion and final remarks.

At-risk students are always a cause for concern due to the high incidents of grade retention and dropouts due to under-performance, disciplinary actions, and the transition from middle to high school. The transition from middle to high school includes not only higher academics but also socioemotional challenges that the African American males face. The federal mandates, like NCLB, were a failure with dismal results. Research has shown that student teacher engagement is a critical factor to learning as it increases motivation and student achievement (Alwan, 2014). I conducted the study to explore teachers' perceptions of African American boys in public high schools. The teacher perception must be understood in order to be able to address the gap in knowledge to determine the reasoning for the poor academic skills.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

To fulfill the purpose of the study, I conducted a qualitative single case study and formulated four research questions that addressed the teachers' perceptions on the causes for the low performances and the widening of the academic gap. I collected the qualitative data by conducting semi-structured interviews with 10 high school teachers from the same school district in the southeastern part of the United States. The data were formulated through thematic analysis in order to formulate the relevant themes.

The findings of the current study could be interpreted to have a positive effect on African American boys in the public high schools. The teacher-student relationship along with the community support where the boys are able to participate in various programs geared towards discipline will help the boys by not only motivating them, but also cause them to place a value on education which will be beneficial to them along life's journey. The study also showed that teachers equated similar ideas on how they saw the children's ability to achieve success, which was not necessarily through activities related to academics. Teachers believed that positive relationships within the classroom along with extracurricular activities were a key component to the success of African American boys in the classroom. The participants who were interviewed used shared experiences along with their beliefs, which lead to meaningful interaction.

Addressing the academic success of African American boys in today's society is a difficult task. One of the major challenges is having to transform educational issues into the public-school system and making it work. This requires a concentrated effort from all stakeholders. It is well known that the educational system, especially in the southern part

of the United States, is a source of dissonance and detriment for the African American males (Jenkins 2006). Schools are a microcosm of society. Simply stated, the level of interaction in society correlates with a person's physiological development, perception, and daily interaction with others in society (Jenkins 2006).

The consistent failure of African American boys attending public schools in the United States contradicts the American promise of equal opportunity and liberty. Unfortunately, the schools that have shown to have failure in academic achievement should address the issue at hand with urgency on narrowing the education gap that is occurring with the African American community. However, current literature shows statistics and figures that only show the negative and nothing about the positives that may be occurring within some schools and therefore only highlights the continued failure. Within this study I sought the perceptions of teachers of African American boys to gain information that would turn the negative into a positive pathway that would bring about academic excellence.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The limitations of the study were that the results cannot be generalized because the participants were based from one area. However, due to data analysis, research context can be described so that results were transferable for a more accurate determination. The findings were based on a small sample size, but researchers will be able to use the results; the traits are transferable to other contexts. The data and results from this study were purely perceptions from the participants' lived experience working with high school African American males.

### **Recommendations**

The academic achievement of African American boys remains a critical topic within the education system and requires further investigation. This study represents a step in furthering the research on effectively providing for the needs of African American boys.

Another opportunity to further examine this topic is to replicate this study in schools in the urban region in the northern part of the United States to find out if the teachers' perceptions differ from the results of this study. This study was with a mixed group of participants, but could also be adapted to interview teachers of a single race, such as Whites only, African Americans only, and Asian/Latinos to see if there would be similarities or major differences in their perceptions.

Finally, the efficacy of the interview questions could be explored for future studies. Future researchers could look at how effective teachers are with a comparison between effective ones and less effective ones through job performances. This could serve as a control group which would answer some research questions by using participants from multiple districts, including suburban and rural areas where the student body is predominantly African American.

### **Purpose and Research Questions: Review of Design**

For the purpose of this study, the targeted area of public high school teachers of Broward County provided good quality data. Once I received IRB approval, the data collection process began with the call for interviews. The purpose of the study was fully explained, as well as the rights to participants. The data collection provided in depth

personal interviews that were recorded and transcribed. Once the transcripts were completed, the next process was to code and label the themes from the various data source. A summary of themes was presented and organized based on the answers and how they related to the research questions. There were four major themes found, which led to major findings based on how the participants answered the questions.

### **Implications for Practice and Social Change**

Black achievement remains a topic of conversation in academia and in current literature and remains predominantly negative. This phenomenological study focused on the teachers' and administrators' thoughts of how they saw African American boys' potential to achieving academic success. The study was conducted with a hope to provide an opportunity for teachers to have a better student-teacher relationship so they can better understand implementing best practices in their classroom to motivate and increase learning among their students. This can be accomplished by knowing what it takes to motivate African American boys, how to culturally relate to them, and how to implement differentiated guidance within their classrooms.

There is a continuous need for new knowledge on implementation of strategies and interventions that are effective to serve African American boys to keep them in school for them to graduate and narrow the academic gap. In an effort to gain understanding of the teachers' points of view towards the African American student, it was imperative to understand their thought process to know if they had the African American boys' best interest at hand and if they believed they had the potential for academic success. The implications that there is the need for community help and

extracurricular activities will help with disciplining and motivating the young men is paramount to attaining academic success in the public-school system.

The results of this study have implications for social change by implementing policies that focus on academia and criminal justice for African American boys from elementary level through high school. The academic success of African American boys impacts an entire community throughout their entire academic journey. They leave high school and go on to college and eventually into their employment life, but that journey still remains a struggle for them. This study can close the gap aligning with public policies and finding stakeholders who will implement social change. Indicators of poverty, health status, education performance and family risks are all barriers that can prohibit success and hold a negative impact in society. Current literature reveals the negative effects of the lack of educational access in the African American community. (Fram, Miller-Crib & Horn, 2007) This research sought to offer insight into how changes can be made to offer African American boys a positive school experience and supportive communities. Having a supportive community will allow the boys to have a sense of pride and dignity that fosters positivity and a desire towards academic excellence.

By analyzing the best practices and the involvement of extracurricular activities such as the Boys and Girls Club could be a positive pathway into various career paths which would be made available and offered to the African American boys. Implementing a partnership between the school and community will bring awareness to the needs of these boys and be better able to serve them.

## Conclusion

This study looked at the barriers the African American boys face in a public high school system and how the teachers' perceptions can add to the knowledge base of current literature. This empirical study began with four open-ended questions and the participants responded. The data analysis showed four relevant themes. The four themes were:

1. Role Model Effect
2. Testing the Test
3. Scholars and teachers
4. Cradle to Prison

Each theme has its significance and was based on the teachers' experiences. The research question focused on how the teachers perceived the African American students in becoming academic successors.

Responses to the first research question, "Is the school to prison pipeline a factor in the low graduation rate of African American boys?," revealed the teachers believed that having the children arrested did not benefit them and would allow for them to continue on a negative path which would allow them to either drop out of school or be expelled, continue to get poor grades due to the amount of classes missed, and increase of African American youths in the juvenile justice system. They believed if the disciplinary action was handled by principals or disciplinarians at school to help to correct behavior, there would be an increase in the graduation rates.

In analyzing the teacher's response to this question, I believed that the teachers held the African American boys' interest at heart and had a desire for them to excel. Conversely none of the teachers described what form of disciplinary acts or behavior management system could help or be instrumental for the African American boys.

Feedback obtained from the second research question, "How does standardized testing impact African American boy's success?" revealed a dichotomy of thoughts. Some believed that the tests were biased, and that the African American boys were not exposed to a lot of things they were being tested on so they were not able to relate compared to their White counterparts. Others believed that the boys should apply themselves to the work and they would be able to make the grade. However, current literature states that there are barriers to the achievement gap because educational opportunities are not equalized. African American children who are exposed to poverty, violence and other issues in the community are hindered from better learning strategies because their potential is compromised.

The third research question addressed, "Would having more African American role models in the home and community increase the graduation rates of African American boys?" Existing literature supports the need for role models in the home and community to help raise or guide African American boys. Though the majority of the participants interviewed agreed with current literature and the need for more role models within the community, one participant stated that she didn't believe a role model would make any difference in an African American boy's life, because the child would do whatever he wants regardless of who is giving guidance, therefore a role model would be



a non-factor. Despite that participant's view, it can be concluded that role models within the home and community can be inspirational to the African American boys and be a source for academic achievement.

The fourth research question posed, "How would an increase of Black teachers in the classrooms, affect the learning ability of African American boys in the public-school system?" The majority of teachers believed that being culturally aware or having a teacher who represents the African American student is essential to their learning. They spoke about the relationship factor between an African American teacher and the African American boys and how they can understand their background, know their struggles and look beyond the bias that have hindered them. They agreed that in the absence of African American teachers, teachers of other races should take cultural awareness and racial sensitivity classes so they can understand the culture of the African American boys. They also stated that the children learn better from those who look like them. Not all agreed to those facts. One participant in particular, stated that cultural awareness training would be a waste of time and could serve as a negative mark on a teacher who may believe the training would have nothing to do with their teaching skills and it would thus not matter if training is done.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The phenomenological research originated from discovering the staggering education gap in America. Many literature sources focused on the African American student but not many if any focused on the teachers and how they saw their African American students. Many have preconceived notions of how African American student

should act and there is the stereotype and racial bias that is a part of the public-school system. This study allowed for the thought process of the participants to be expressed and showed if they cared about the negativity of the African American boys and how they would want to see them in a positive light. This was expressed by the suggestions of various clubs that would enhance the boys' confidence, motivate them and give them a sense of purpose. If they were able to participate in those programs, the teachers believed it would make an impact in their public-school lives and society as well.

Discovering what will work in terms of academic success is not an easy task for any school but it is doable. As a researcher the knowledge that I attained from the interviews was enlightening and I look forward to ways I may be able to contribute to the larger body of literature in order to assist African American boys in society.

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## Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. In what way is the prison pipeline a factor in the low graduation rate of African American boys?
2. What are the primary ways standardized testing impacts African American student success?
3. How would having African American role models in the home and community increase in the graduation rates of African American boys?
4. What impact would mandatory cultural training for teachers and administrators have in the public-school system?

## Appendix B: Participation Letter

Hello Participant,

My name is Dianne Small-Jordan. I am a doctoral student at Walden University's Criminal Justice program. I thank you for responding to my request in this doctoral research study that I am conducting titled: *JaQuan's seat at the Table: Breaking down the Barriers to Academic Success*. The intention is to assess for difficulties in academics with African American boys and identify what can be done to motivate and create academic success. The study involves completing basic demographic information and an interview. Participation is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time. The study is confidential and will not use your name or any other identifying information in it. If you would like to participate in the study, please read the Informed Consent letter. Your participation in the research will be of great importance to assist in social change in ensuring that African American boys are receiving adequate teaching and effective learning capabilities by assessing test scores and graduation rates. Thank you for your time and participation.

Dianne Small-Jordan, MSCJ, Doctoral Student, Walden University

## APPENDIX C : Consent Form

**CONSENT FORM**

You are invited to take part in a research study about the barriers affecting the academic achievement gap between African American boys and other races. The researcher is inviting teachers and administrators who have worked at a public high school for at least two years to be in the study. This form is part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by me, I am a researcher and doctoral student at Walden University.

**Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to explore and understand some of the barriers that prohibit the African American boys from graduating and being motivated to narrow the achievement gap .

**Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- Complete a 30 minute interview
- Answer truthfully about the questions being asked
- Have no fear of repercussion to answers

Here are some sample questions:

- What are the primary ways standardized testing impacts African American students?
- How would African American role models increase the graduation rate?

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

This study is voluntary. You are free to accept or turn down the invitation. No one at Hialeah-Miami Lakes High School will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to be in the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as you becoming upset or stressed. Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing. This research will have a benefit on the community when the African American male graduates from high school and becomes a productive member of society.

**Payment:**

This study is completely voluntary. There will be no payment for participation.

**Privacy:**

Reports coming out of this study will not share the identities of individual participants.

Details that might identify participants, such as the location of the study, also will not be shared. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purpose outside of this research project. Data will be kept secure by password protected data encryption file.

Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

Please print or save this consent form for your records.

**Obtaining Your Consent**

If you feel you understand the study well enough to make a decision about it, please indicate your consent by replying to this email with the words “I consent.”

#### Appendix D: Demographic Questions

1. Have you worked at this high school for at least 2 years?
2. What is your occupation?
3. How long have you held that position?
4. Please specify your ethnicity.
5. Is your age between 22-35, 36-45, 46 – 55, 56 – 65?
6. What is the highest degree you have achieved?

## Appendix E: Participant Demographics

NB: Names listed below are not the real names of the participants.

*Self-Reported Educator Demographic Information*

Name	Age	Years of teaching	Ethnicity
Ray Jackson	46- 55	12.5	Black
Dawna Ochieda	36-45	5	Black
Kim Motely	36-45	8	Black
Donovan Migley	56-65	20	Black
Odella Crawford	46-55	24	Black
Camellia Tullius	36-45	15	Anglo
Dora Toomajian	26-35	4	Asian
Perceval Straits	46-55	9	Black
Whitney Litchfield	36-45	14	Anglo
Dell Wilkenson	36-45	10	Black



## Appendix F: Name and definition of Themes

Imprisoning the future	School to prison pipeline's effect on graduation rate
Role model effect	Motivation. Aspiration. Value of education. Mental Attitude
Testing the test	Biased. African American boys unable to relate. Inadequacy.
Scholars and teachers	Cultural awareness. African American male teacher's effect.

## Appendix G: Findings

Effective classroom strategy	Increase graduation rates and narrows the achievement gap
Motivation	Understanding the value of education will achieve academic success
Social activities away from school/academics	Help in developmental skills and learning ability.
Role models in the community	Positive role models help in community help to remove barriers preventing academic success
Prison pipeline	Discipline brought back to the schools and not handled by police
Juvenile facility-school partnership	Programs created to help keep boys in school and reduce the dropout rate
Teacher-student relationship	Positive approach coupled with compassion motivates and achieve academic success