

11-11-2025

Experiences of Formerly Incarcerated College Minority Men Criminalized for Behavioral Issues

Francine Zysk
Walden University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies Collection at ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact ScholarWorks@waldenu.edu.

Walden University

College of Psychology and Community Services

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Francine Zysk

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee

Dr. Gregory Hickman, Committee Chairperson, Human Services Faculty

Dr. Kelly Chermack, Committee Member, Human Services Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost

Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
2025

Abstract

Experiences of Formerly Incarcerated College Minority Men Criminalized for Behavioral

Issues

by

Francine Zysk

MPhil, Walden University, 2024

MSMSL, Michigan State University, 2017

BS, Madonna University, 1991

AA, Henry Ford Community College, 1989

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Human Services

Walden University

November 2025

Abstract

The school-to-prison pipeline, where minority men experience decreased academic performance, higher truancy rates, and increased vulnerability to arrest, persists in the United States. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how systemic racism is experienced by formerly incarcerated, college-educated Black men who were criminalized for behavioral issues that contributed to their incarceration. The research problem was a lack of knowledge of the experiences of educational environments and disciplinary systems that perpetuate racialized behavioral labeling and contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline. Grounded in the theoretical framework of institutional racism, the study featured a constructivist paradigm to capture participants' experiences. Data were collected through five, one-on-one Zoom interviews with purposefully selected participants who met the criteria of being formerly incarcerated and college-educated, Black men. Through thematic analysis in the tradition of Braun and Clarke, four main themes were identified: education and resilience to empowerment and transformation; educational environments as pathways to criminalization; microaggressions, discriminatory practices, and psychological harm; and systemic racism and structural barriers throughout the lifetime. The implications for positive social change include providing insight that stakeholders can potentially use to embed literacy and advocacy development in reentry and campus programs and advance policies to reduce perpetual punishment. The research supports the transformative role of education in providing opportunities to eliminate the school-to-prison pipeline, empowering individuals to become advocates for systemic change.

Experiences of Formerly Incarcerated College Minority Men Criminalized for Behavioral

Issues

by

Francine Zysk

MPhil, Walden University, 2024

MSMSL, Michigan State University, 2017

BS, Madonna University, 1991

AA, Henry Ford Community College, 1989

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Human Services

Walden University

November 2025

Dedication

To my parents, who gave me life and a voice—Thank you for teaching me to speak truth, stand firm in purpose, and lead with compassion.

To my daughter, may you find lifelong love, peace, and happiness that continues to nourish you.

This dissertation is dedicated to all those affected by institutional racism and those whose lives have been unjustly shaped by systemic oppression, yet who continue to rise, resist, and reclaim their stories.

Acknowledgments

To my chair, Dr. Hickman, thank you for your steady encouragement, thoughtful feedback, and belief in this work. Your weekly support in academia, the process, encouragement, and guidance have assisted me in more ways than words can express, and you are a mentor who is beyond words.

To my methodologist, Dr. Chermack, your expertise and insights helped sharpen and elevate this study. I am deeply grateful for your mentorship.

To the Diss Fam, your weekly thoughts, support, and shared challenges were an invaluable part of this journey.

To Dr. Marvin Cotton Jr. and Kenneth Nixon, with gratitude for your voices, kindness, and wisdom. Thank you for everything you taught me, for the inspiration you are, and for your continued pursuit of justice.

To my dear friends Lisa VanLiere, Shrink Friend, Deme Glenn, and Lisa Bove, thank you for walking alongside me during this demanding and transformative chapter. Your support and care have been a proper lifeline.

To Laura McCormick, my class buddy and cheerleader, your encouragement reminded me that I was never alone in this process. I am thankful for our shared journey, and you have been an integral part of my work.

To all the students who leaned into learning who are incarcerated.

With gratitude to the participants in the study.

And to every person who believed in my purpose, your belief became my strength.

Table of Contents

List of Tables.....	v
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study	1
Background	2
Problem Statement.....	4
Purpose of the Study	5
Research Question	5
Theoretical Framework.....	5
Nature of the Study.....	6
Definitions.....	9
Assumptions	10
Scope and Delimitations	11
Limitations	12
Significance.....	13
Summary	14
Chapter 2: Literature Review	16
Introduction	16
Literature Search Strategy.....	17
Theoretical Foundation.....	17
Literature Review Related to Key Variables and/or Concepts	32
The History of Racism Against Blacks and African Americans in the United States	32

History of Enslaved People Forced Into Plantations	36
Abolition of Slavery in the United States.....	41
Civil Rights in the United States and the Adoption of Drug Laws	44
Racial Bias in Death Penalty Sentencing in the United States	46
History of Mass Incarceration	47
Systemic Roots of U.S. Mass Incarceration	49
Wrongful Convictions.....	54
The School to Prison Pipeline	57
Summary and Conclusions.....	62
Chapter 3: Research Method.....	64
Introduction	64
Research Design and Rationale	64
Role of the Researcher	67
Methodology	68
Participant Selection Logic.....	68
Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection.....	72
Instrumentation	75
Data Analysis Plan	76
Issue of Trustworthiness	81
Credibility.....	83
Transferability.....	84
Dependability.....	85

Confirmability.....	85
Ethical Procedures	87
Summary	90
Chapter 4: Results.....	93
Introduction	93
Setting	94
Demographics.....	94
Data Collection.....	95
Data Analysis	100
Evidence of Trustworthiness.....	107
Credibility.....	107
Transferability.....	108
Dependability.....	108
Confirmability.....	109
Results.....	110
Theme 1: Education and Resilience to Empowerment and Transformation.....	110
Theme 2: Educational Environments as Pathways to Criminalization	114
Theme 3: Microaggressions, Discriminatory Practices, and Psychological Harm.	118
Theme 4: Systemic Racism and Structural Barriers Throughout the Lifetime.....	123
Summary	131

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations	135
Introduction	135
Interpretation of the Findings	136
Limitations of the Study	137
Recommendations	138
Implications	139
Conclusion	140
References	142
Appendix A: Interview Questions	187
Appendix B: Codes, Definitions of Codes, Categories, and Themes	188

List of Tables

Table 1. Participant Demographics95

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

There are many factors influencing poor educational outcomes, specifically among minority men. Some of these factors are educational barriers of continued poverty, mass incarceration, racial disparities, neighborhood environment, bullying, and lack of resources (Jacobs et al., 2022). The school-to-prison pipeline is increasing for people of color. The expulsion consequences result in a decrease in attendance, academic performance, self-esteem, graduation rates, increased anxiety, dropout rates, truancy, an increase in crime, and higher arrest rates (Hswen et al., 2020).

A study conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2024 reported that seventy-five percent of Black adults reported individual experiences of racial discrimination or unfair treatment in the United States (Cox, 2024). Similarly, a study by English et al. (2020) involved Black adolescents who reported five incidents or more of discrimination on average daily, including harassment online, against oneself, witnessing racism, and being teased for being Black. Research has identified classroom practices that can address behaviors that deter suspensions, thereby aiding changes in the school-to-prison pipeline (Hemez et al., 2019). The intersection of these issues contributes to the perpetuation of the school-to-prison pipeline, where minority men experience decreased academic performance, higher truancy rates, and increased vulnerability to arrest (Henry et al., 2021). This study examined the experiences and perspectives of individuals who have been formerly incarcerated. According to the Prison Policy Initiative, there are 1,900,000 people incarcerated in the United States (Phillips, 2024). Within the past five years, Second Chance Pell has provided college classes to at least 28,000 students in prison,

with 9,000 receiving credentials, including Associate, Certificate, and bachelor's degrees (Cohen et al., 2023). Education during incarceration plays a crucial role in shaping behavior positively and enhancing post-release opportunities for individuals who are incarcerated (Davis et al., 2013).

Background

Racism is embedded in African Americans' history in the United States, which originated during colonial times, beginning with the kidnapping, torture, and selling into servitude of Black people from the slave trade (Drescher, 2019). The transatlantic slave trade from the 1500s to the 1800s forced around 12,000,000 Africans onto boats to be sold after capture, with 388,000 people being sold as enslaved people into the United States (Equal Justice Initiative, 2022). During the transatlantic slave trade, approximately 12,000,000 Africans were forced onto boats, physically abused, chained, unclothed, and forced into quarters stacked on top of each other across the Atlantic Ocean to be sold for labor purposes if they survived the boats (National Park Service, 2024). Two million people died from the trip over; the horrific conditions are one of the most violent treatments of humanity in history for African Americans (Evans & Wilkins, 2019).

Institutional racism continued in the United States Constitution Article 1, Section 2 of the Three-Fifths Clause, which defines enslaved people as three-fifths of a person of legal slavery (U.S. Constitution, art 1, §2) In 1865, the Thirteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution gave freedom to enslaved people of slavery or involuntary servitude, except punishment for a crime (U.S. Constitution, amend. XIII). The Thirteenth Amendment is an instrumental display of the forced labor of people who are

incarcerated, which allows them no rights and perpetuates mass incarceration (Alexander, 2020). Slavery in the United States dehumanized Black people as property and subjected them to cruel punishment and death, resulting in systemic oppression (Drescher, 2019). The intention of the abolition of slavery in 1865 and the Thirteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution did not end racial domination. Then began the increase of White supremacist groups and the creation and delivery of the Black codes, slave codes, and Code Noir to free Black people (Middleton, 2020).

Black codes and slave codes were enforced even on those free Black people who faced subjugated employment, housing, and basic human living conditions that perpetuated discrimination against people of color in a racial hierarchy (National Park Service, 2024). The first recorded prison increase in the United States occurred after the Civil War in 1865, when there was disproportionate incarceration of Black Americans, which correlates with the signing of the Thirteenth Amendment, freeing Black people and incarcerating them (Basile et al., 2022). The treatment of Black Americans prior to the Civil Rights era was subjugated to legal segregation, known as the Jim Crow Laws, which were heavily enforced from 1877 until the mid-1960s (Equal Justice Initiative, 2022).

The Crime Bill Act of 1984 and the Anti-Crime Bill Act had an impact on people of color with mandatory minimums for drug offenses, longer prison sentences, and three-strikes procedures (Churchwell et al., 2020). Since 2021, people of color have been six times more incarcerated than White people, and in every state in the United States, that is more than double (Vera Institute of Justice, 2022). The effects of drug laws and

sentencing devastated Black communities; with the 5-year mandatory minimum for possession, the selling of crack cocaine of five grams vs. the powdered form of cocaine of 500 g, deferral sentencing of Black defendants was 11% higher than for White defendants (United States Sentencing Commission, 2020).

Problem Statement

The situation or issue that prompted the literature search is barriers influencing poor educational outcomes, specifically minority boys and men (Wint et al., 2021). Some are educational barriers to continued poverty, mass incarceration, racial disparities, neighborhood environment, bullying, and lack of resources. Educational opportunities significantly influence academic outcomes in later education, with youth from racial and ethnic minority groups facing greater challenges (Dwyer-Lindgren et al., 2024). Research has identified classroom practices that can address behaviors that deter suspensions, thereby aiding changes in the school-to-prison pipeline (Hemez et al., 2019). However, the study does not examine the experiences of those who have been formerly incarcerated.

Racial discrimination and disparities are present in housing, sentencing, and policing (Prison Policy Initiative, n.d.). Racial treatment of behavioral issues contributes to the racial disparities in the school-to-prison pipeline, which increases the likelihood of incarceration (Sissoko et al., 2023). However, the overwhelming disproportional of people of color incarcerated is an indicator of racial systemic disparities of mass incarceration (Ghandnoosh, 2021).

Although the aforementioned researchers regarding experiences of formerly incarcerated Black men who were criminalized for behavioral issues illuminates important findings, I have found no research that has examined the voices or experiences of incarcerated college men. Given such, further research is warranted that could explore the experiences of formerly incarcerated college men to address the documented problem of systemic racism that led to criminalizing students who face behavioral incidents that lead to incarceration (Jacobs et al, 2022).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the qualitative study was to explore the experiences of systemic racism among formerly incarcerated, college-educated Black men who face behavioral issues leading to incarceration.

Research Question

What are the experiences of systemic racism among formerly incarcerated, college-educated minority men who faced behavioral issues leading to incarceration?

Theoretical Framework

The theory that grounded this study was Institutional Racism. Institutional racism refers to racially biased and prejudicial practices and approaches that are embedded in various institutions, including government, educational institutions, healthcare services, spiritual institutions, families, and the media, which operate across these institutions (Z. D. Bailey et al., 2021). The results of Institutional racism are the experiences and feelings of the effects of behaviors that are disregarded in societies and institutions, affecting people of color (Bargallie & Lentin, 2022). Institutional racism is classified as structural

or systemic; this is when many agencies align together, which results in a racist system (Williams et al., 2019). Systemic and structural biases create unfair and unjust racism that creates barriers in many areas, including expulsion from education (Braveman et al., 2022).

In this study, the purpose was to hear about the experiences of systemic racism that led to the criminalization of students who faced behavioral issues and who were formerly incarcerated. Institutional racism is systemic and is the unfair racial discrimination against people of color. I asked questions about the institutional racism experiences of those who had experienced unjust, prejudiced behaviors in institutions that led to the criminalization of their behavioral incidents of systemic biases and actions, who were formerly incarcerated.

Nature of the Study

The study focused on the experiences of racism experienced by formerly incarcerated, college-educated Black men. Employing a general qualitative research design aimed to explore how these individuals perceive and make sense of their experiences within historically marginalizing structures. This design choice was crucial, as it enables a thorough examination of personal narratives shaped by institutional discrimination across intersecting systems, including education, criminal justice, and housing. Through one-on-one, semi-structured interviews, the research collected nuanced insights into how systemic racism influences their educational and carceral trajectories. The study's purpose was to highlight the experiential dimensions of systemic racism

while acknowledging the resilience displayed by these individuals as they pursue higher education post-incarceration.

A qualitative research design was particularly suitable for examining systemic racism because it focused on understanding individual perceptions and experiences of racism. By embracing the constructivist paradigm, the study recognized that realities are not static but socially constructed, influenced by cultural, historical, and contextual factors. This paradigm aligned well with exploring systemic racism, as it allows researchers to uncover the intricate ways in which institutional racism manifests and impacts the lives of minority individuals (Collins & Cannella, 2021). The chosen research approach was crucial for capturing the nuanced lived experiences of individuals navigating systems such as education and the criminal justice system. Qualitative inquiry, remarkably when grounded in critical frameworks, allows researchers to uncover the subtle yet pervasive manifestations of systemic oppression that are often overlooked in quantitative analyses (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

In collecting and analyzing data, I sought to emphasize the participants' lived experiences. This approach is adept at exploring how formerly incarcerated, college-educated minority men perceive and process institutional discrimination within various systemic frameworks (Baffour et al., 2024). By interpreting these subjective experiences, the study identified recurring themes of discrimination that influence educational and carceral pathways (Tuncel, 2022). This method allowed for a detailed examination of how these individuals navigate their circumstances, shedding light on the intersections of education, criminal justice, and societal bias (Smith & Osborn, 2014).

Conducting one-on-one, semi-structured interviews was pivotal in examining systemic racism's influence on the educational and carceral trajectories of minority men. These interviews facilitated open dialogue, allowing participants to share individual experiences and perceptions often marginalized in broader societal narratives. Through their firsthand accounts, the study sought to unravel how institutional patterns, such as the school-to-prison pipeline, systematically disadvantage Black men, enforcing barriers to accessing education and escalating disciplinary actions within schools (Daniels et al, 2021). These interviews highlighted the role of race in shaping individual journeys through educational systems and beyond, reflecting the manifold challenges of racial bias (Cramer et al, 2024). The study highlights the resilience of college-educated minority men in overcoming these obstacles, demonstrating their ability to navigate structured inequities with perseverance (Hatton et al., 2019).

I collected data through semi-structured interviews conducted via Zoom. Each session was audio-recorded and automatically transcribed using the platform's cloud-based transcription service. I reviewed and edited each transcript to ensure accuracy, including adding punctuation, correcting misinterpretations, and aligning text with timestamps. After transcription, the data were coded manually and organized into themes using a qualitative data analysis tool. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed, with the researcher meticulously reviewing and editing the transcripts to maintain accuracy and authenticity, thereby ensuring that the participants' experiences were faithfully captured. A particular focus was placed on identifying patterns of institutional racism and the criminalization of behavior, as these themes often intersect with the lived

experiences of the study's participants (Butler-Barnes et al., 2020). By systematically analyzing these themes, the research offered a nuanced understanding of how racial and structural inequities perpetuated the marginalization of minority groups, echoing calls for systemic change within the criminal justice framework (Alexander, 2020).

Resilience was evident in their determination to transform adversity into motivation, proving that education is a formidable tool against systemic constraints (Addison et al., 2022). The lived experiences of the participants revealed how cultural criminalization and racial bias continually impede their progress, creating barriers to accessing both fair education and social reintegration (Crain et al., 2024). By interpreting these subjective experiences, the study identified recurring themes of discrimination that influence educational and carceral pathways, reflecting how systemic racism shapes critical life trajectories for marginalized individuals (Phillips, 2024). Aligning with this, the research methodology employs participant observation and in-depth interviews, offering rich qualitative data that enables the thematic coding of cultural influences (Bryan, 2020). During analysis, the data underwent a process of thematic coding to identify prevalent patterns and themes, facilitated by data reduction and display techniques that refine the qualitative material for interpretation (Mezmir, 2020).

Definitions

Institutional racism: the negative impacts of the health impacts of the determinant perpetuated by discrimination based on the foundation of race, and is integrated into bias within political, housing, health care, economic, educational, and legal institutions (Needham et al., 2022).

Mass incarceration: the United States' criminalization and incarceration of more persons than any other country in the history of the world, and the disadvantage to those people of color (Elias, 2024).

Racism: the oppression of individuals based on the color of their skin, citizenship, ethnicity, or nationality. Actions can include microaggressions, racial epithets, violence, and unfavorable treatment (Banaji et al., 2021).

School-to-prison pipeline: the increase of mass overactive incarceration, with the analyzation of data of students out of schools and leading into juvenile and adult criminal legal systems and carceral settings due to school suspensions and expulsions for minor infractions, with the disproportionate to students of color, with Black students suspended and expelled 3 times greater than of their White peers (Darling-Hammond & Ho, 2024)

Assumptions

In this study, I made several assumptions. I assumed that the participants in the study would discuss their experiences of racism truthfully in the questions being asked. The purpose of this general qualitative study was to explore the experiences of formerly incarcerated Black men to explore barriers of implicit bias/systemic racism leading to the criminalization of students who faced behavioral issues, leading to incarceration. The study employed open-ended questions to understand the participants' responses and gain insight into their experiences, focusing on specific questions. Lastly, participants may have wanted to provide more information with open-ended questions. I assumed that discussing experiences further aided in analyzing the research questions posed for the study.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope and delimitations explain the who and the what of the study. The scope of the study was to examine the experiences and obstacles of implicit bias/racism leading to the criminalization of incarcerated Black men who faced behavioral issues leading to incarceration. A purposeful sampling strategy was used in this study. The purposeful sample aimed to provide a myopic view of selected participants by asking primary questions, as documented in the collected data (Ahmad & Wilkins, 2025). I sought participants who are (a) Black, (b) have attended college, and (c) are formerly incarcerated. The study explored open-ended questions to understand the participants' responses and gain experience with specific questions. The perceived racism and behavioral incidents, prior to being prosecuted for a criminal offense, were discussed during the interview through open-ended questions.

Delimitations are boundaries that articulate the study's scope, contrasting with its limitations and highlighting its uniqueness (Coker, 2022). A delimitation of the study is the specific myopic setting within which it is conducted. The focus of the study was listening to the experiences, which were analyzed thematically. This approach was used to collect data from the interviews and the researcher's notes. Thematic analysis was employed in the interviews to identify common themes within the data collected on the systemic racism experiences of the interviewees (Ahmed et al., 2025). The research questions were addressed by examining the participants' experiences with racism.

Limitations

This study also had potential limitations. One limitation of this study was the insufficient sample size, which hinders the generalizability of findings across diverse demographics and settings. Many studies fail to encompass the broader spectrum of systemic issues affecting this group, thereby limiting their scope and impact (Addison et al., 2022). Methodologically, research often overlooks qualitative approaches that could provide deeper insights into individual experiences and systemic biases (Chavis & Johnson, 2023). The narrow methodological frameworks focus on quantitative data, neglecting the complex socioeconomic and systemic factors that influence educational disparities, resulting in a fragmented understanding of the issue (Hinton, 2021).

The research limitations significantly impact the understanding of how behavioral issues among incarcerated Black men are criminalized during their college education. The lack of attention to qualitative methodologies means these individuals' nuanced personal stories and systemic biases often remain unexamined (Chavis & Johnson, 2023). The focus on quantitative data often overlooks the complex interplay of socioeconomic conditions and systemic factors that perpetuate criminalization (Hinton, 2021).

The limitation of undermining the generalizability of research findings related to the behavioral issues experienced by incarcerated Black men pursuing higher education leads to an incomplete representation of the diverse demographics within this group, thereby reducing the applicability of the results across broader settings (Addison et al., 2022). Further research, facilitated by the qualitative element, can be aligned with the potential of quantitative evidence to reveal systemic biases and socioeconomic issues that

have been highlighted minimally or superficially due to the limitations of the quantitative approach (Noyes et al., 2019).

Significance

This study was significant in that it explored participants' experiences and can help practitioners determine alternative classroom practices that can address behaviors that deter suspension, thereby contributing to changes in the school-to-prison pipeline (Jacobs et al., 2022). The Departments of Education and the Department of Health and Human Services would be impacted by hearing about the research that can provide data for services. The agencies that would benefit and be impacted are schools involving behavioral issues that become criminalized, National Reentry groups for returning citizens from prison, Michigan to End Mass Incarceration that can extend Research for groups of behavioral and criminalization groups, Michigan School of Discipline that examines alternatives of behavioral incidents leading to Juvenile Justice Halls, the Departments of Restorative Justice, Michigan Department of Corrections that provide educational programs while incarcerated, Michigan juvenile detention centers and Rise Up Conference of Prison education.

The research focused on exploring the systemic institutional racism that exists, which leads to incarceration; the Social Determinants of Health impacted by this study are Education Access and Quality. Research in the fields of higher education and criminal justice is vital for understanding and addressing systemic inequities affecting incarcerated and formerly incarcerated populations. Organizations such as Higher Education in Prison (HEP) programs, the National Reentry Association, and national reentry coalitions for

returning citizens provide data and advocacy that demonstrate how education serves as a transformative tool for successful reentry. Groups including End Mass Incarceration, Unlock Higher Education, and the National Association of Community and Restorative Justice (NACRJ) promote policy reform and community-based approaches to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline and reduce recidivism. Similarly, Juvenile Justice Halls and Departments of Corrections that provide education can advance leadership development among formerly incarcerated individuals, empowering systemic change.

The impact of this study on the existing body of research may be that it could directly inform changes in schools regarding behavioral incidents and disciplinary actions. Juvenile Justice Halls can review their policies and procedures to reduce criminalization practices related to behavioral incidents. Schools can examine the systemic practices related to behavioral incidents involving racism and develop new policies. The Rise Up Conference, an online prison education conference, can disseminate research from presentations that inform educational programs aimed at examining systemic racism and behavioral issues. Unlock Higher Education is a national organization that provides research to numerous educational organizations in the United States and educates people about opportunities to effect change.

Summary

In Chapter 1, I set forth how I explored experiences of formerly incarcerated minority men to explore barriers of implicit bias/systemic racism leading to the criminalization of students who faced behavioral issues leading to incarceration. I detailed the background, problem statement, research question, framework, nature of the

study, assumptions, scope, definitions, limitations, and significance. I explained how exploring the experiences of racism in formerly incarcerated Black men attending college and the barriers of how behavioral issues lead to criminalization will aid in understanding how we can use the effects of criminalization on systemic racism and alternatives for social change and educate others about the opportunities to change.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The barriers that lead to the poor educational success of minority men are broad and deep, including poverty, mass incarceration, racial inequality, and lack of resources. Each aspect plays a role in an ongoing cycle of disenfranchisement that affects one's ability to achieve and succeed in the education system. Moreover, the legacy of incarceration injustice has a ripple effect on society through its impact on education, given the prevalent racial injustices committed against minority men (Walker et al., 2022). Specifically, African American men failed to make progress concerning education as the Black community stopped benefiting from shifted efforts focused on problems that were based on the racial context (Schoenfeld, 2023).

The present research aims to provide interventions to address crimes resulting from educational inequities, with a focus on policy development and prison education. Prison education should be viewed as a key determinant of incarceration and recidivism reduction; therefore, its effectiveness can significantly impact the lives of many individuals (Magee, 2021). Exploring the systemic factors contributing to the criminalization of behavioral issues among incarcerated Black men reveals deep-rooted practices that go back centuries. The historical context of systematically criminalizing Black Americans has significantly shaped the contemporary justice system's handling of these individuals (Hinton, 2021). This framework often translates minor behavioral concerns into criminal offenses, perpetuating a cycle of incarceration.

This chapter provides an overview of the literature search strategy, including the key terms searched and the databases consulted. The institutional racism theory, along with systemic racism, is included in the chapter. A review of the literature includes how this study is related to the school-to-prison pipeline, mass incarceration, systemic racism's impact on prison incarceration, and the impacts of the criminalization of Black men. The review focuses on the research of prison education impacts after incarceration, the impacts of systemic racism and criminalization, and the need for research to increase knowledge and impact.

Literature Search Strategy

To conduct an extensive literature search, I utilized Walden University Library databases, including Sage Journals, ProQuest, JSTOR, and ScienceDirect, as well as Google Scholar. I also reviewed the websites of the Department of Justice, the Prison Policy Initiative, the Department of Corrections, and the Department of Education. The literature search was completed utilizing words and phrases that included *the criminalization of behavioral issues of Black men who are incarcerated, poor education outcomes of minorities and barriers, male outcomes and barriers, and education, mass incarceration of the behavioral problems, effects of Black mass incarceration, and the school-to-prison pipeline.*

Theoretical Foundation

Institutional racism refers to the systemic embedding of racial inequities within the fabric of society through laws, norms, and practices; distinct from the overt personal prejudices of individual racism, which targets specific individuals, institutional racism

affects groups on a broader scale by embedding discriminatory practices in structural entities (Vargas et al,2023). Institutional racism emerges from historical configurations of power dynamics, resulting in practices that disadvantage minority groups while privileging others. Institutional racism is often characterized by its pervasive impact that extends across multiple sectors, including education, health services, and the justice system, where racial disparities persistently manifest (Braveman et al., 2022). The origin of institutional racism can be traced to colonial practices where legal and social structures explicitly marginalized racial groups, cementing hierarchies that favored dominant populations (Bhopal, 2023). As history progressed, the guise of institutional racism shifted to more covert mechanisms, such as redlining in housing policies and selective enforcement in the justice system, which perpetuated inequality through neutral practices (Vargas et al, 2023).

A significant current issue is the attribution of racial inequalities to unconscious bias, which some argue marginalizes the responsibility of institutions by deflecting focus from ingrained discriminatory policies (Skinner-Dorkenoo et al, 20203). There are critical discussions around the identification and labeling of certain institutional practices as inherently racist, with some scholars questioning whether this oversimplifies complex socio-political dynamics (Matthew, 2022). Discussions around institutional racism has expanded to include unconscious biases, and implicit racial stereotypes present within institutional frameworks (Skinner-Dorkenoo et al, 20203). It systematically disenfranchises marginalized groups by maintaining barriers to equitable access to resources and opportunities (Vargas et al, 2023). These entrenched disparities manifest

across various sectors, such as education, where unequal distribution of resources limits academic advancement for minority students, perpetuating a cycle of educational disadvantage (Elias & Paradies, 2021).

Laws like the separate but equal doctrine legalized segregation in public facilities, fostering an environment where racial discrimination was legally endorsed (Nuriddin et al., 2020). Similarly, redlining practices in housing severely restricted access to homeownership for African Americans, leading to long-term economic disparities (Egede et al., 2023). Institutional racism manifests in contemporary society through various systems, notably in education, criminal justice, and employment. In education, racial biases in school disciplinary policies disproportionately affect students of color, contributing to the well-documented school-to-prison pipeline (Wilkins, 2019). In the realm of criminal justice, racial profiling and sentencing disparities illustrate how institutional racism continues to target and penalize minority communities unfairly (Braveman et al., 2022). Furthermore, in employment, systemic barriers such as discriminatory hiring practices and wage disparities persist, limiting economic advancement opportunities for racial minorities and perpetuating wealth inequality (Elias & Paradies, 2021).

There was an established precedent for racial subjugation, with slavery further crystallizing attitudes of racial superiority and inferiority. The remnants of these practices continue to manifest in contemporary forms of racial discrimination. Media outlets may disproportionately associate certain ethnic groups with criminal behavior, perpetuating societal biases and prejudices (Braveman et al., 2022). Racism can lead to increased

levels of stress and trauma, which manifests as racial stress and trauma (Cain et al., 2023). The academic success and trajectory of Black boys are heavily affected by their experiences of trauma, which affects how they perceive and interact with learning environments (Thomas et al, 2020). The need for a community trauma framework is a significant component in coping with and understanding how violence within a community influences the school life of Black boys (Opara et al., 2020). In addition, socioeconomic-related causes describe how leadership variables relate to trauma exposure in Black boys, which affects educational success (Cénat, 2022).

The sense of engagement experienced by Black boys in schools is achieved by recognizing and accommodating their cultural identities (Walker et al., 2022). As indicated by the findings, violence at school and in communities contributes to the trauma's psychological ramifications, diminishing students' engagement and school performance (Opara et al., 2020). In addition, the intersectional-contextual approach recognizes the complexity of trauma associated with race, gender, and socioeconomic status and the intersection between them in impacting the educational experience of Black boys (Galán et al., 2022). To help decrease the trauma Black boys encounter, schools must use critical consciousness of anti-Black racism and embed it into the framework of educational systems (Mosley et al., 2021). Further, exposure to racial trauma in the education system adds to the school struggles of Black boys because discrimination is present in more explicit and implicit forms (Alvarez, 2020).

The link between racial trauma and mental health displays that students who experience trauma related to their race experience anxiety and depressive symptoms,

which negatively impact their ability to learn (Cénat, 2022). An educational approach that recognizes race and race-related traumas will create a climate that promotes the success of Black boys in schools (Walker et al., 2022). The analysis of trauma-informed curriculum and pedagogy can enhance the educational experiences of Black boys by creating school environments that are engaging, supportive, and respectful of their needs (Hatcher et al., n.d.).

The cause of trauma to Black boys is family instability, which is the state of the family due to factors like divorce, death, and drug abuse. Family conflict or even the absence of a family member causes trauma as it creates disorder and emotional disturbance at home (Pumariéga et al., 2022). Another common cause of trauma to Black boys is racial discrimination, which is unwelcoming and harsh treatment that undermines the self-esteem and drive to learn in Black boys (Mosley et al., 2021). Exposure to violence in their communities fosters an overwhelming sense of danger and instability that impacts their psychological preparedness to learn (Stritzel et al, 2021). Being without a parent may cause children to perceive abandonment and, consequently, experience emotional distress, which can lead to an unstable foundation for learning in school (Pumariéga et al., 2022). Direct instances of racial bias, such as racial slurs or unequal treatment by teachers and peers, can lead to diminished self-esteem and increased stress, thereby hindering academic performance (Woods-Jaeger et al., 2022). Systemic discrimination embedded within institutional policies and practices often manifests through disproportionate disciplinary actions and a lack of culturally relevant curricula,

which marginalize Black boys and limit their educational opportunities (Walker et al, 2022).

Trauma profoundly impacts the academic performance of Black boys, affecting critical areas such as attendance, grades, and engagement. Exposure to trauma can lead to chronic absenteeism as these students might avoid the school environment due to the associated stress and anxiety it triggers (Anderson et al, 2018). There is disengagement in school activities as these individuals may not participate actively in class or extracurricular activities due to diminished motivation and energy levels (Walker et al., 2022). Racism's effect on Black boys could lead to depression as a form of psychosis because they live in a backdrop where racism is present (Woody et al., 2022).

Cognitive development suggests that Black boys are in environments where they do not see themselves (Roberts & Rizzo, 2021). An analysis of the issue that relates to the racial identity that Black boys face in suburban schools shows that they go through a state of internal conflict that pushes them to break the stereotype placed upon them and be unique (Galán et al., 2022). The socioecological perspective points to the idea that structural racism can be found everywhere (Trawalter et al., 2020).

Resilience plays a crucial role in explaining the responses of Black boys to behaviors amid racism (Churchwell et al., 2020). One meaningful way to support psychological health for Black boys is by implementing strategies that help them embrace and challenge racism (T. K. Bailey et al., 2022). Efforts should be made to build their racial identity and pride by highlighting their cultural identity and resilience. The resilience frameworks are crucial for implementing best practices aimed at mitigating the

negative impact of racism on Black boys, as they emphasize adaptive coping strategies and strengths-based approaches (Marks et al., 2020). Discrimination-oriented schools resort to punishing students without dealing with the origins of behavioral problems that are primarily fueled by racial stress (Sevon, 2022). There is research that presents the ubiquitous presence of racial discrimination invokes a sense of constant alertness that fosters the development of stress and anxiety among individuals (Woody et al., 2022).

Identity conflicts due to racism affect Black boys' social relationships and vastly differ from what they believe is true about themselves and their culture, which creates further disengagement, withdrawal, and detachment from peers (Park & Johnson, 2024). Reports, music, movies, and social media that depict negative images of Black men solidify stereotypes that contribute to anxiety and a negative self-image (Smith & Hope, 2020). The identity of being a Black man is made even more difficult when their self-image is placed against the stereotypes established in the media (Churchwell et.al, 2020). Black boys face microaggressions in streets, classrooms, and locker rooms that result in the normalization of otherness and serve to push Black boys further from identification with the standard peer groups (T. K. Bailey et al., 2022).

Social identity theory provides a valuable lens through which to understand the psychological impacts of racism on Black boys' identity formation. This theory suggests that individuals derive a portion of their self-esteem and identity from their group memberships, including those based on race, gender, or social class (Park & Johnson, 2024). Experiences can foster maladaptive psychological responses, such as anxiety or withdrawal, as Black boys navigate environments that seldom affirm their identities

(Chavis & Johnson, 2023). For instance, in school environments where they are subjected to racial bias, Black boys often internalize negative group perceptions, leading to a diminished sense of self-worth (Chavis & Johnson, 2023). These environments reinforce societal devaluation of their racial identity, prompting Black boys to question their belonging and significance within educational spaces (Roberts & Rizzo, 2021).

The resilience theory states that empowering family and community systems enables Black boys to overcome the devastating impact of racial slurs and discrimination (Ferguson, 2020). Intersectionality theory offers a critical framework for understanding how overlapping identities such as race, gender, and class coalesce to produce differentiated experiences of criminalization among Black men (Carey, 2024). The historical development of critical race theory can be traced back to its roots in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. According to scholars, critical race theory emerged as a response to the need for a more comprehensive understanding of racial inequalities embedded within legal systems and societal structures, such as race, gender, and class, that interact to create complex, layered experiences of privilege and oppression (Plummer et al, 2024). The movement gained momentum during the 1980s as scholars began integrating insights from the civil rights movement, highlighting the structural racism embedded in legal policies (Dodzro, 2023).

Systemic racism refers to the institutional structures and processes that perpetuate racial disparities, often favoring one racial group over others within societal frameworks (Balaghi & Okoroji, 2023). In contrast, microaggressions are subtle, often unintentional, interactions or behaviors that convey implicit bias or prejudice against marginalized

groups (Bryan, 2020). The evolution of institutional racism has historically involved discriminatory immigration policies that have been aimed at undocumented individuals and have prioritized migrants' racial and ethnic distinctions, endowing stereotypes with validity and further reinforcing discriminatory attitudes that provided legitimization for exclusionary practices; the enforcement of racially biased laws and policies has exacerbated discrimination against marginalized minorities as well (Misra et al., 2021).

Racially discriminatory policing practices not only increase the probability of deportation among the undocumented but also create a society-wide fear of law enforcement engagement, further ostracizing them from the mainstream (Jacob & Brown, 2022). Immigration laws typically focus on specific social and ethnic fabric, making them present in the policing practices and harming the social and economic mobility of undocumented persons (Misra et al., 2021). Government policies significantly contribute to the perpetuation of institutional racism, particularly through laws and regulations that disproportionately affect undocumented individuals who emphasize stringent immigration control measures, such as heightened enforcement and deportation initiatives, which disproportionately target racial and ethnic minorities (Dhingra et al., 2022). By prioritizing enforcement over integration, the legal framework further institutionalizes racial bias, as it crafts an environment where undocumented people face systemic exclusion and heightened vulnerability (Fish, 2021). It downplays the depth and diversity of immigrant experiences in favor of generalization and oversimplification, aggravating existing racial biases and structural inequities in public perception (Skinner-Dorkenoo et al, 20203).

One of the significant examples includes government laws to prohibit entry for people from certain ethnicities, which promoted discrimination-based policies on undocumented people as well (Fish, 2021). Early legislation related to immigration in California also aimed to prohibit entry for specific minority groups. Unlike countries in Europe, immigrants from Asia were barred from entering the country through the Chinese Exclusion Act (García & Yosso, 2021). Law enforcement agencies in major cities, particularly the capital, frequently conducted raids in areas mostly settled by racial minorities, creating an atmosphere of fear that prevented the groups from contacting the authorities (Bhatia & Burnett, 2022). These practices not only instill fear within undocumented populations but also discourage engagement with societal institutions due to concerns about racial profiling (Dhingra et al., 2022). An approach involves the creation of collaborative advocacy systems, where collective action on the ground engages policymakers to eliminate xenophobic and racist frameworks in current systems (Wimmer, 1997).

The mechanisms of institutional racism are rooted in frameworks that advantage certain racial groups while disadvantaging others, leading to persistent inequities across critical domains such as education, health care, and employment (Needham et al, 2022). The historical origins of institutional racism are deeply intertwined with a series of key events and policies that have perpetuated systemic inequality. For instance, the establishment of laws and social norms during the colonial period laid a foundational framework for segregation and discrimination that persists to this day (Nuriddin et al., 2020).

Contemporary definitions and interpretations of institutional racism reflect a nuanced understanding that aligns with systemic perspectives. The literature suggests that institutional racism is not confined to explicit policies but rather manifests through organizational norms and implicit biases embedded within various sectors (Ray, 2019). Systemic factors are central to the perpetuation of institutional racism, where institutional frameworks establish and reinforce racial disparities. One significant cause is the historical entrenchment of discriminatory laws and policies, which have been continuously adapted to sustain racial hierarchies (Nuriddin et al., 2020). These systemic constructs create an environment where racial biases become normalized within institutional processes, subtly influencing decision-making and resource allocation.

Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton first introduced the concept of institutional racism in 1967, comparing it to individual racism. They argued that institutional policies and practices are employed to maintain racial equality through passive and rarely used methods (Goose, 2005). While individual racism includes explicit acts of racism and discrimination against Black people, institutional racism is based on anti-Black institutions that strategically include anti-Black policies and practices (Li et al., 2021).

Institutional racism includes how its effects vary across other marginalized communities depending on their intersected identities (Cypress, 2019). A policy that appears to be fair and equal may potentially give rise to inequalities because it does not consider the intersection of distinct categories that affect specific communities (Collins & Cannella, 2021). Storytelling and documenting individual experiences from marginalized

communities reveal the reality of racism, especially racial aggression, experienced in the institutions by creating a counter-story to the accepted dominant narratives, which underestimates racism and downplays its implications (Amiot et al., 2019). Even the accounts presented in the culture often downplay the effects and the historical longevity of systemic racism, perpetuating ignorance against its reduction or eradication at a societal level (Skinner-Dorkenoo et al., 2021)

Racism is a social hierarchy that intersects in such a way that it forms a complex structure of domination, impacting marginalized groups differently (Collins et al., 2021). People are oppressed in different ways depending on how they intersect with their identities (Collins et al., 2021). The Matrix of Domination offers a detailed and nuanced understanding of the intersection of race, gender, and class, revealing the systemic nature of institutional racism (Collins et al., 2021). Collins explains that the matrix illustrates the intersecting nature of social categories, providing a unique and comprehensive coverage of subordination (Collins et al., 2021). The matrix provides insight into how oppression in society operates on a structural level, as social categories reinforce interlocking and related systems of inequality (Collins & Cannella, 2021).

Institutionalized racism is the unequal distribution of health care, housing, and education among races, wherein the setup of the institutions still controls these factors and can affect neighborhood conditions, such as unequal distribution and health care access. (Riley et al., 2024). Systemic practices have their roots in the active politics of oppression, as punitive incarceration policies disproportionately affect certain racial groups and maintain existing hierarchies (Lee, 2023). The system of punishment

disempowers Black and Brown communities from socioeconomic advancement by violating their fundamental civil and human rights and breaking families; mass incarceration is the factor that further exacerbates this cycle of poverty and injustice to Black and brown people by making them and their families entangled in the slavery of the law and cut from socioeconomic advancement (Pettit & Gutierrez, 2018).

Racism as an institution from an economic perspective and its intertwining with the prison system exacerbate growth, demonstrating how economic policies mask racial discrimination inherent in the structural adjustment process (Zare et al., 2022). Prisons are a vehicle of oppression that is part of a complex hierarchy that reproduces racial oppression (Zare et al., 2022). Policy structures create administrative practices that perpetuate biases against marginalized racial minorities (Peters et al., 2024).

Administrative systems justify their actions via broader cultural ideologies that endorse racially discriminatory viewpoints or beliefs forwarded by a dominant group (Johnson & Thomas, 2023). Such interconnectedness illustrates how institutional racism is deeply ingrained in society, emphasizing the need for comprehensive and systemic changes rather than just addressing specific instances or manifestations of racism. Racial segregation creates and maintains an underclass and deprives minorities of accessing resources and opportunities, maintaining inequalities between different races (Dodgson, 2019). Such segregation did not occur because of isolated biases; instead, these factors stem from systemic institutional policy practices, including discriminatory housing and zoning policies (Elias & Paradies, 2021).

Institutional racism as a primary theory includes the idea of Whiteness and how it relies on unconscious bias to uphold the systemic tendency and impacts the perpetuation of institutional racism and the upholding of White privilege while discriminatory behavior towards other races (Skinner-Dorkenoo et al, 20203). Research conducted in minority-serving institutions revealed bias in access to learning materials and limited opportunities available at these institutions. A critique of institutional racism for being overly heuristic, generalizing the outcomes under which institutional mechanisms create disparate impacts (Matthew, 2022). For example, existing literature suggests that minority populations must contend with institutional practices that hinder their access to quality healthcare services (Elias & Paradies, 2021). Standardized tests contain cultural biases that align with privileged schools of thought, awarding benefits to the dominant socioeconomic and ethnic groups over their disadvantaged counterparts. This bias in access to education is reflected in standardized tests (Jones et al., 2020). Biased educational attributes had prominence for specific racial groups, benefiting them rather than aiming for overall improvements in students' capabilities (Jones et al., 2020). Black men are receiving more severe sentencing outcomes and are more likely to be incarcerated as compared to Whites (Merolla & Jackson, 2019). The existing social inequality is worsened for racial minorities as they are overrepresented in prisons and find it hard to reintegrate after being released (Harris & Harding, 2019).

Institutional racism is a theoretical framework that links specific practices and policies to more generalized inequalities in society, thereby reinforcing institutional mechanisms that nurture and reproduce the specified disadvantages (Needham et al.,

2022). Policies are created based on frameworks that favor dominant social groups while simultaneously denying essential rights and privileges to racial minority groups (Banaji et al., 2021). The presence of racial bias in the policy framework indicates institutional racism as a diverse phenomenon capable of operating from the inside to have an adverse effect on society (Skinner-Dorkenoo et al, 20203).

Institutional racism manifests bias in social systems as they are perceived through cultural lenses (Kisa & Kisa, 2025). Such attitudes would then spill over into education, media depictions, and other social systems functioning within institutions. Institutionally created bias has been theorized in the literature due to the long-standing social structures and institutions that have existed, reappearing in various social systems and thereby influencing general cultural discourse and dictating rules in this manner (Jacob & Brown, 2022). Some researchers argue that the theory does not adequately consider the significant role of personal agency alongside structural forces in maintaining racial disparities (Skinner-Dorkenoo et al., 2020). Institutional racism sometimes relies on simplistic oppositions (e.g., "White supremacy" vs. "minoritized-oppressed groups,") which is damaging to the debate concerning the socio-racial dynamics (Ross, 2020). Dismissing the interaction of social institutions with human behavior dismisses the role of human actions (Matthew, 2022).

Structural racism is one of the most important explanations for understanding racial disparities; it is critical to understand how structural and cultural racism work together and develop a larger explanatory framework regarding such issues (Merolla & Jackson, 2019). Institutional racism refers to racism inherent in a system that affects

certain racial groups more disadvantageously than others due to this policy (Banaji et al., 2021). Discrimination caused by systemic racism implies the involvement of all components that comprise society in its discriminatory behavior.

Further research can focus on institutional racism in new sectors, such as technology (Toldson, 2019). Institutional racism stratifies health outcomes by race, emphasizing the need for structural change rather than individual-level interventions (Williams et al., 2022). In school discipline disparities, noting that Black students are disproportionately disciplined in racially segregated school settings, even when controlling for behavior (Hirschfield, 2019). There are algorithmic biases in hiring, policing, and lending systems, which serve as modern extensions of institutional racism (Fountain, 2021). They frame these practices as reproductions of historical inequalities under digital infrastructures (Thomas et al, 2020). There are racial disparities in sentencing and incarceration that reflect the operation of institutional racism in the criminal justice system; these disparities persist even when laws appear facially neutral (Fortner, 2022).

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and/or Concepts

The History of Racism Against Blacks and African Americans in the United States

The legacies of the transatlantic slave trade extend into the complexities of the 20th century, as efforts to suppress slavery exposed enduring societal challenges (Sawyer & Wagner, 2024). This forced migration significantly altered the demographic makeup within the Americas and had profound social and cultural repercussions. For instance, the skewed sex ratios among the enslaved populations frequently led to imbalanced

demographic structures, affecting community development and cultural continuity in various regions (Eltis & Engerman, 2022). The imposition of such demographic transformations was exacerbated by the strategic selection of enslaved individuals from diverse ethnolinguistic groups, which disrupted existing social networks and cultural identities (Fortes-Lima & Verdu, 2021). The demographic composition of Brazil has been fundamentally shaped by its standing as the largest recipient of enslaved Africans during the transatlantic slave trade.

With about 70% of all enslaved Africans in Latin America being brought to Brazil, the nation has a markedly distinct ethnographic landscape that reflects this historical influx (Micheletti et al., 2020). This is attributed to the region's smaller share of enslaved Africans compared to the Northeast, where West African origins are more predominant due to historical settlement patterns. In contrast, the Northeast displays a significantly higher African ancestry percentage of 50.8%, stemming from a larger influx of enslaved Africans, primarily from West Africa, during the transatlantic slave trade (Micheletti et al., 2020). The legacy of slavery has historically influenced social outcomes, particularly within Afro-descendant communities, contributing to systemic inequalities and interracial social stratification (Row & Ross, 2020). An estimated 12,500,000 Africans were forcibly deported to the Americas, with millions enduring horrendous conditions during the Middle Passage, the journey became a graveyard for countless individuals (Micheletti et al., 2020). The transatlantic slave trade's legacy extends deeply into the current fabric of institutional inequality, particularly in the racialization of crime and punishment.

The historical processes that categorized and controlled racial groups through legal systems are still evident today, perpetuating disparities in justice administration (Wilkins, 2020). The impact of the transatlantic slave trade on local economies and infrastructure development in coastal towns was substantial. The trade's economic footprint was evident in the significant growth of these towns as ports and logistical hubs, facilitating the movement of resources and goods. The financial gains generated from the slave trade were instrumental in developing robust port facilities and auxiliary infrastructure, bolstering local markets and employment opportunities. This infrastructural and economic enhancement not only supported the immediate needs of trade but also laid a foundation for future economic activities, thereby embedding the legacy of slavery into the evolving economic framework of these regions (Wright, 2022).

Merchants played a crucial role in the transatlantic transportation of enslaved people by orchestrating the economic transactions that facilitated this inhumane trade. Their motivations were primarily driven by the lucrative financial returns associated with the trade, as they invested in ships and secured cargo of enslaved people. They exchanged trade goods, such as textiles and alcohol, for other goods of equal value (Jones, 2022). The systematic collaboration of merchants and shipbuilders thus provided the operational framework required for the Atlantic slave trade, with merchants' business practices rooted in economic gain, often overshadowing the profound human suffering inflicted (Micheletti et al., 2020). These operations involved complex networks that facilitated the transport of valuable commodities alongside enslaved people, ensuring the perpetual engagement of diverse international players (Mocan, 2020). This duality in legal

enforcement was exacerbated by the global interconnectedness of markets, which demanded a steady flow of enslaved labor, thereby undermining abolitionist efforts (Morgan, 2023). Research provides critical insights into how racial inequities have cemented themselves as foundational elements of systemic discrimination, proving to be transnational in scope (Lewis & Cerezo, 2024).

The transatlantic slave trade's economic impact is further illuminated by examining the productivity of this inhumane enterprise. The total factor productivity of the trade, particularly in French and British contexts, underscores the efficiency with which enslaved individuals were commodified and transported (Wachendorfer et al., 2024). The transatlantic slave trade's influence extended beyond the economic sphere, permeating social structures and racial ideologies in profound ways. Indigenous slavery's decline was a precursor that intensified the African slave trade, demonstrating a pattern of exploitation that reshaped demographics across continents (Wright, 2022).

The transatlantic slave trade, while often overshadowed by the transatlantic trade, provides crucial insights into the broader economic and social impacts of slavery across continents. This extensive network facilitated the movement of enslaved individuals from Africa's interior to coastal regions, where they were then shipped across the Atlantic, illustrating the complex layers of exploitation (Bellagamba et al., 2016). The genetic legacy of the transatlantic slave trade further underscores the pervasive impact of this historical atrocity.

Research reveals that genetic connections between African regions involved in the slave trade and the Americas have left a lasting imprint on population genetics

(Micheletti et al., 2020). The systemic racial inequities that emerged from this trade have become entrenched in the fabric of modern society, manifesting as ongoing racial biases within contemporary legal systems (Mocan, 2020). The transatlantic slave trade has legacy ramifications in institutional inequality as it laid the foundation for the racialization of crime and punishment (Wilkins, 2020).

History of Enslaved People Forced Into Plantations

Enslaved people were a labor force in plantations, and it influenced people of African descent with persecution and enforced racism. Plantations, large tracts of agricultural land under monocrops, began during the colonial era for economic reasons. The large piece of land was made possible by taking over the natives' lands, and the economic interests were promoted by opening plantations, which were mostly owned and run by the colonialists (McAleese & Kilty, 2019). The labor provided by the enslaved people was a form of oppression that allowed the system of colonial planters to work, and the same oppression and inequality have remained up until today (Trisos et al., 2021). Plantations were also a significant economic force in colonial and antebellum America, as they depended on slavery to operate successfully. Economic prosperity relied on the conditions that forced enslaved Black people to work on their farms, producing cotton through heavy agricultural labor (Desmond, 2019).

The plantation economy created a structure in which male labor was often observed to exhibit racial biases; the 19th-century shift from manual to mechanized labor did not break away from the racial dynamics that carried over from plantation life into industrial cities (Fiori, 2020). The colonial and antebellum legal and social systems were

crafted to uphold the plantation system and encourage racial division. The slave codes legalized slavery through the legal perception of African enslaved people as property, which legitimized their exploitation and dehumanization (Bryan, 2020). Slave codes created a distinction to protect the rights and prerogatives of the White landowners. They removed all legal protections for the enslaved, establishing racial injustice as a norm in society. Socially, these legal systems were supported by the widespread acceptance of the idea that the White man was superior to all non-Whites and that the non-Whites could be treated inhumanely when deemed necessary to control their behavior (Fiori, 2020).

Plantations in the American South focused primarily on cotton production, relying on the merciless exploitation of the enslaved African American people. The scale and efficiency of these plantations were facilitated through a system that dehumanized people and put a price on human labor based on race (Desmond, 2019). The legacy of the plantations has had a profound influence on regional racism and economic inequality (Noxolo, 2022). Plantations did not just sustain a plantation economy that was dependent on the exploitation of the enslaved; they also helped establish racial capitalism, which prioritizes and maximizes economic profit at the expense of the oppressed racial populace (Murphy & Schroering, 2020). The socioeconomic systems established by plantations specifically enabled a planter society that oppresses racial, ethnic, and economic minorities (Purifoy, 2021). The economic standards of the plantation encouraged the depiction of racial minorities as inferior and fit for servitude, thereby promoting negative stereotypes that penetrated societal culture. (Collins & Cannella, 2021)

Through narratives that portrayed racial minorities as creatures whose fate rested under servitude. Southeast Asia was characterized by the colonial imposition of mega-plantations that reflected the exploitative model of previous plantation economies along with its structural racism (McAleese & Kilty, 2019). These plantations imitated the economic logic of the slavery system, exploiting indigenous peoples in the region as cheap labor for their plantations while promoting racism as an organizing principle to manage a multicultural workforce. For Indonesia, this ecological and economic shift towards the plantation system reinforced racist ideas and was a key issue in the anticolonial revolts (Tilley, 2020).

The fact that plantation systems were transnational in their spread demonstrates the convergence of economic interests with racism in colonial policy, which allowed for their proliferation and adaptation far beyond the Western countries that birthed them. In this way, the global character of plantation systems confirms the universality of racism as a legacy of colonialism, transcending its specific origin in the Western world. The propagation of such narratives in the cultural sphere continues to influence societal interaction and perception in today's social environment as people adopt cultures that promote racism and discrimination (Kunst & Mesoudi, 2024).

The social and economic inequality created through plantation systems institutionalized racial injustice in the social fabric, allowing for globalized and economic inequalities, which today are reproduced through institutions that overwhelmingly favor the descendants of independent planter societies rather than the other groups (Bryan, 2020). Plantation economies thrive globally but, like their colonial counterparts, come

with a cost for humanity, exploitation, and the environment (Rana & Miller, 2021). There is a systematic inequality in financial status that racial minorities still face today. With time, this became an economic inequality, where racial resources and opportunities were preserved for Whites, and inequality was visible against the non-White population, achieving equal financial status (Bhopal, 2023). Even today, industries that mimic plantation systems and hierarchies are used to maintain a systemic order of labor and continue to provide unequal economic opportunities to people segregated by race (Bryan, 2020).

The legacy of plantations in history affects present-day racial debates because the disparities in the economy and society today are rooted in slave labor on plantations (Tarlow, 2024). Because plantations created a specific racial identity that continues to promote inequalities, a nation's education system, developed through prior plantations or other bases, continues to exacerbate racial debates today, as it promotes certain ideals that continue to favor one party or the other (Squire, 2021). Media and literature, which are based on the memory of the plantation, tend to highlight stereotypes consistent with the society of that time, such as emphasizing oppression and racism as the primary breeding ground for power dynamics in their narratives (Noxolo, 2022).

The representation in media also affects how today's society views culture based on the plantations, including reviving the memory of the plantation to shape how collective consciousness remembers the racist practices and discrimination (Gordon-Reed et al., 2022). These plantations exploited the racially unjust economic model of slavery that treated the enslaved people of African descent on these lands as property and became

entrenched in centuries of a system of racial hierarchy that was based on the economic dependence of the Southern economy itself on slavery (Desmond, 2019).

The other case to consider is the sugar plantations in the Caribbean, which became the commercial equivalent of similar developments before and during the rise of the agricultural economy that eventually established itself in the Americas (Fiori, 2020). Although a contributor to American political thought, Thomas Jefferson maintained a plantation using slave labor, highlighting the tensions between freedom and oppression (Fiori, 2020). Because of the plantations' financial needs, these ideas of liberty translated into evidence from the dehumanization and employment of enslaved Africans as property, and social needs formed racism, both on the premises and institutionally (Bryan, 2020).

The sugar plantations in the Caribbean were instrumental in establishing racial hierarchy and class discrimination by brutally exploiting enslaved Africans in cruel and inhumane working conditions (Beckles, 2013). Today, the ramifications of the plantation economy continue to influence the socio-political landscape, as evident in the prevalent economic systems and racial hierarchies that are remnants of colonial exploitation (Murphy & Schroering, 2020). A further noteworthy demonstration of the international aspect of plantation systems is found in Brazil's coffee plantations during the 19th century. Brazil's growing coffee business depended significantly on the forced labor of abused Africans, much like in other locations. This impacted systemic racism embedded in Brazil's social and economic dynamics (McAleese & Kilty, 2019). The plantation's legacy was exported alongside its coffee (Tilley, 2020).

Cotton plantations in southern America adopted slavery as a practice and a prospect to grow the economy, which formed the basis of systemic racism that further generalized racial division in the nation (Desmond, 2019). These plantations also had systems that highlighted racial divisions, where White landowners exercised economic power. At the same time, non-White workers remained oppressed in the structures where they maintained racial superiority and inferiority among workers, depending on the workers' economic standing and laboring class (Fiori, 2020).

Achieving high productivity based on the labor of enslaved internationals contributed not only to agriculture but also to the growth and enrichment of the plantation owners, and, as a result, to the plantation economy. The plantation economy was a significant contributor to the country's economy (Desmond, 2019). The records also show how laws served the plantation economy, systematically defining enslaved people as property and establishing a structure that benefited plantation owners at the expense of systematic racism entrenched in the legislation (Purifoy, 2021). Besides, plantation formation records also demonstrate how the economy was systematically designed to benefit the White planter elites, a clear economic structure that planned exploitation highlights systematic discrimination based on racial lines (Murphy & Schroering, 2020). Plantations were an economic source that thrived on exploitation and racial discrimination during labor work systems (Everhardt et al., 2024).

Abolition of Slavery in the United States

The Emancipation Proclamation is one of the most significant historical events in the United States, and prior to the Proclamation, the Country was embroiled in a Civil

War. The war ensued due to differences over the Union's withdrawal from slave states. At the time, the Union's war objective did not include the Emancipation of enslaved people. It sought to maintain the Union's integrity, which was necessary (Bargallie & Lentin, 2022). It fostered a transition from war to unity and freedom. President Abraham Lincoln recognized the need to delicately maintain a precarious political balance to protect the border states that were critical to the Union's success (Bargallie & Lentin, 2022). Lincoln needed to navigate the political situation with care, knowing that missteps could result in the alienation of key supporters (Reed, 2019).

The abolition of slavery threatened the economic interests of the Southern states, which aggravated their conflict with the North (Bellani et al., 2022). As a financial foundation, the Southern states were adamant and committed to fighting for Slavery and refused to compromise their practices that supported their social order and economy (Bellani et al., 2022). President Abraham Lincoln announced the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863. It altered the course of the American Civil War and the war's purpose (Bargallie & Lentin, 2022). The Emancipation Proclamation was not just an act to diminish the economic capacity of the Confederacy. However, the demand to end Slavery in the United States, and the primary aim of the Proclamation was to change the focus of the Civil War to include the eradication of slavery alongside the previously established goal of uniting the country (McPherson, 2019).

The Emancipation Proclamation had significant legal implications. It stated that "all people held as slaves" (emphasis in original) in the seceded states "are, and henceforward shall be free" (Gonzalez, 2022). The Emancipation Proclamation's legal

implications came from its moral justification, and the President established it under his Commander-in-Chief powers (Gonzalez, 2022). Subsequently, the Thirteenth Amendment produced the legal act that abolished slavery in the United States.

The Proclamation did not immediately outlaw Slavery in the border states or the parts of the Confederacy already controlled by Union forces (Rodrigue, 2023). The Proclamation undermined pro-Confederate lobbies by challenging them to defend the Confederate cause without the moral justification of supporting Slavery (McPherson, 2019). Its publication transformed the ideological orientation of the Civil War to the abolitionist movement, integrating the fight for ending Slavery with the prewar aims of the abolitionists and reintegrating the fight against

Slavery within its ideological framework, supplanting abstract concerns with abolition with concrete military strategy (Bargallie & Lentin, 2022). By proclaiming the end of Slavery in rebel states, the Proclamation created a political basis for future legislative battles to secure the end of the practice throughout the republic (Parker, 2019). By embedding Emancipation within the war aims of the Union, the Proclamation catalyzed a shift in national priorities towards equality and justice, planting the seeds for future legal and social advancements (Bargallie & Lentin, 2022).

The reason the present-day legal system still carries racial inequality is that it was a legacy of slavery (Wilkins, 2020). The roots of institutional racism in the United States can be traced back to the implementation of the slave codes and the Indentured Servants Act of 1663. These early legislative initiatives established a system that embedded racial discrimination within the legal framework, creating an enduring legacy of inequality

(Vargas et al, 2023). The post-Civil War era marked a critical juncture when Jim Crow laws institutionalized racial segregation and reinforced White supremacy as a legal standard (Hswen et al., 2020). Further compounding these inequalities were the impacts of the War on Drugs in the late 20th century, which disproportionately targeted minority communities, resulting in mass incarceration rates that disproportionately affected Black and Hispanic populations (Taifa, 2024).

Civil Rights in the United States and the Adoption of Drug Laws

The movement's efforts culminated in landmark legislation such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which dismantled legal segregation and prohibited racial discrimination in voting and employment (Hswen et al., 2020). The origins of drug policies in the United States reveal a troubling incorporation of racial biases, setting a precedent that persists today. From the early 20th century, the enactment of drug laws often targeted minority populations under the guise of public health and safety. These race-neutral appearances masked the discriminatory intent underlying many of these regulations (Montes et al, 2020).

The Nixon administration initially portrayed the campaign to reduce drug addiction and trafficking; however, racial motivations quickly became apparent, particularly in targeting African American communities (Daniels et al., 2021). The resulting legislation, such as the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986, introduced disproportionately severe penalties for crack cocaine offenses, substances more prevalent in Black neighborhoods (Camp, 2023). These early policies laid a foundation for systemic racial inequities in law enforcement, effectively criminalizing communities of

color under the guise of public safety and continuing to shape the discourse around drug-related criminal justice to this day (Earp et al., 2021).

President Nixon's declaration of the war on drugs in 1971 marked a pivotal moment for racial dynamics within U.S. drug policy. Nixon's campaign, directed toward reducing drug abuse, deliberately amplified racial stereotypes to justify increased law enforcement in African American communities (Daniels et al., 2021). By promoting an image of drug use as primarily an issue of inner-city and minority populations, Nixon's policies criminalized a vast demographic, resulting in disproportionate arrests and incarcerations (Earp et al., 2021). Subsequent legislation, including the notorious Anti-Drug Abuse Act, further entrenched these disparities, leading to systemic economic and social disadvantages for communities of color (Pamplin et al., 2023). The Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 exemplified this trend by mandating stricter sentences for crack cocaine offenses, a drug more common in minority neighborhoods, thereby exacerbating racial disparities in the criminal justice system (Marsh & Walker, 2022).

One such initiative includes revising sentencing laws to address the disproportionate impact of mandatory minimum sentences on minority communities (Earp et al., 2021). Additionally, state-level reforms, such as decriminalizing certain drug offenses, have emerged as strategies to reduce incarceration rates among African American and Latino populations, seeking to rectify historical injustices (Pamplin et al., 2023).

Racial Bias in Death Penalty Sentencing in the United States

Racial prejudice in sentencing death penalty cases is a matter of grave concern, amplifying alarming disparities in the judicial system that assign more death sentences to defendants who are a minority in society (Baumgartner et al., 2023). Death penalty decisions are more severe according to the defendant's race, and there could be significant disparities in their outcomes (Baumgartner et al., 2023). With organizational policies aimed at minimizing implicit biases, the corresponding biases may be less effective in addressing racial bias and disparity (Exum, 2019). The evidence of racial discrimination in judicial decision-making is not only common but also systematic and results in the discrimination of racial minorities (Mocan, 2020).

Racial minorities, Black and Latino capital defendants, are more likely to receive a death sentence compared to their White peers, holding all else equal (Ulmer et al., 2020). This phenomenon endures due to systemic reasons within the capital justice system, such as the impact of racial stereotypes and Bias on the adjudication process (Gagliardi, 2021). The studies reveal that victims' race intensifies demographic disproportion; the involvement of White victims frequently leads to the death sentences of minority capital defendants, proving strong racial bias as well (Fleury-Steiner & Sarat, 2024).

The pervasive demographic disparity in capital punishment cases points toward biased judicial processes due to systemic inequalities and intrinsic racial discrimination against minority defendants to the point that it undermines the public trust in legal outcomes, as race is disproportionately considered in sentencing outcomes (Kastellec,

2021). Perceived inequity due to demographic disparity, especially when racial minorities are undermined by prejudice because of a socio-political agenda against them, not only violates fundamental justice but also creates a socio-political agenda to discriminate against certain racial minorities, with no means of fair trial ever materializing (Kastellec, 2021).

During the Jim Crow era of the American South, the execution of African Americans became commonplace and reflective of the social acceptance of racism, which resulted in a higher execution rate for Black people than the general White population (Sawyer & Wagner, 2024). The apparent inclination of the U.S. courts to favor and back racial bias through death sentences for Black defendants caused public sensitivity and attention toward their unfair and inequitable application (Steiker & Steiker, 2020). Racial Bias plays a significant role in the usage of the death penalty in the United States, showing that minority defendants receive more death sentences than their White peers (Horowitz, 2023).

History of Mass Incarceration

Mass incarceration refers to the substantial increase in the number of incarcerated individuals, which has become a defining characteristic of the American criminal justice system that not only burdens public resources but also undermines the social fabric of communities (Walker et al, 2022). These circumstances foster an environment where individuals, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds, are systematically disadvantaged, leading to questions about the fairness and equity of justice administration (Gagliardi, 2021).

The historical roots of mass incarceration in the United States can be traced through a series of significant legislative and policy shifts. of racial politics and crime control efforts, reflecting broader societal tensions (Baffour et al, 2024). The introduction of the war on drugs in the 1980s marked a pivotal moment, leading to a dramatic increase in incarceration rates as mandatory minimum sentences and three-strikes laws came into effect (Taifa, 2024). Policies from this era disproportionately targeted minority communities, exacerbating racial disparities within the justice system (Kovera, 2019).

Additionally, the War on Drugs in the 1980s introduced mandatory minimum sentencing laws, which significantly increased the prison population size, as these laws mandated fixed, lengthy sentences for drug-related offenses, removing judicial discretion (Taifa, 2024). Another provision that contributed to rising incarceration rates was the enactment of the three-strikes law, which imposed severe penalties on repeat offenders, further exacerbating the burden on the prison system (Baffour et al., 2024). These policies led to an overwhelming increase in arrests and convictions, disproportionately affecting minority communities and perpetuating racial inequities within the criminal justice system (Katzman & Kovera, 2023).

Neighborhoods characterized by socioeconomic disadvantage frequently lack adequate public resources, such as schools and community programs, which can exacerbate the cycle of marginalization and criminalization (Katzman & Kovera, 2023). Disparities in education further impede these communities, as lower educational attainment is directly correlated with higher incarceration rates, highlighting the systemic inequities prevalent within the justice system (Taifa, 2024). Practices contribute to

extending sentences and prioritizing occupancy over rehabilitation, exacerbating the socioeconomic issues associated with mass incarceration and challenging reformative initiatives aimed at addressing these systemic problems (Galletta et al., 2021). The disproportionate targeting of minority communities manifests in various stages, from initial law enforcement interactions to sentencing and parole decisions (Sawyer & Wagner, 2025). Such disparities are not merely incidental but are deeply embedded in policies and practices that have historically marginalized people of color (Beckett & Francis, 2020). High incarceration rates have significant economic repercussions on communities, often resulting in the loss of workforce and increased poverty (Taifa, 2024).

As societal awareness of racial issues grew, critical pieces of legislation, such as the Civil Rights Act, emerged to explicitly prohibit discrimination based on race and ensure equal treatment under the law (Darnell et al., 2022). A range of laws actively criminalize behaviors rooted in racism, each reflecting the intricate societal commitment to eradicating racial discrimination through legal means. Such statutes encompass hate crime laws that specifically target acts motivated by racial prejudice, providing both punitive and deterrent functions (Elias & Paradies, 2021).

Systemic Roots of U.S. Mass Incarceration

Systemic issues within policing, such as racial profiling and disparities in arrest rates, can undermine the intended deterrent effect of these laws (Najdowski & Stevenson, 2022). Critics argue that these enforcement challenges perpetuate racial biases, questioning the capacity of law enforcement to execute anti-racism laws impartially

(Elias & Paradies, 2021). Legal frameworks can serve as a deterrent, fostering a reduction in overt racial discrimination by emphasizing societal and legal repercussions (Elias & Paradies, 2021). The negative implications also warrant attention; inequities in enforcing these laws can exacerbate racial disparities within the judicial system (Najdowski & Stevenson, 2022). Such empowerment stems from laws that articulate explicit protections and consequences for racist acts, thereby reinforcing norms against racial discrimination (T. K. Bailey et al., 2022). Challenges in the consistent and unbiased enforcement of these laws can unintentionally deepen existing inequalities, as systemic issues in policing and judicial processes adversely affect marginalized groups (Najdowski & Stevenson, 2022)

Media narratives often amplify instances of racism, influencing public attitudes and potentially affecting judicial outcomes. This can either emphasize systemic issues or focus on isolated incidents, thereby shaping the discourse and public understanding (Burnett-Bowie et al., 2022). Systemic issues within law enforcement and the judicial system can lead to differential outcomes, thereby reducing the anticipated effectiveness of these laws (Elias & Paradies, 2021). These initiatives include school-based curricula that educate young individuals on the historical and contemporary impacts of racism, as well as community workshops that address implicit biases and promote inclusive practices (Coker, 2022).

The introduction of stringent legal frameworks targeting racist acts often contributes to a cultural milieu that increasingly condemns overt discrimination, thereby aligning societal values with those enshrined in anti-discrimination laws (T. K. Bailey et

al., 2022). Segments of society may perceive these legal measures as excessive or misdirected, sparking debate on the balance between justice and overcriminalization (T. K. Bailey et al., 2022). The legal approach can also exacerbate tensions, as differential enforcement and perceived biases within the legal system may lead to community mistrust (Najdowski & Stevenson, 2022).

The persistent racial disparities within the criminal justice system are not only a result of overt discrimination but also subtle forms of bias that are embedded in societal norms and practices. Implicit biases, which are unconscious attitudes or stereotypes, play a significant role in the differential treatment of Black men, often contributing to their overrepresentation in criminal statistics (Najdowski & Stevenson, 2022). Racial profiling remains a persistent issue that exacerbates the criminalization of Black men, as it is deeply ingrained in law enforcement practices (Harris, 2020). Biases in criminal legal systems lead to racial disparities in criminalization, denying equitable treatment across racial lines (Najdowski & Stevenson, 2022). Additionally, racial profiling, a problematic practice where law enforcement uses race as a primary factor in apprehending individuals, exacerbates these disparities, making Black men particularly vulnerable to unjust treatment (Harris, 2020).

Black men and the criminal justice system, escalating their vulnerability to unnecessary scrutiny and false accusations (Harris, 2020). The prevalence of such profiling is reflected in the heightened surveillance and frequent stops Black men face, which contribute to inflated arrest rates and their consequent overrepresentation in the prison population (Jones, 2022). According to the literature, these biased policing

strategies not only undermine trust in law enforcement but also perpetuate a cycle of stigmatization and criminalization (Najdowski & Stevenson, 2022). Addressing the issues of racial profiling requires fundamental shifts in training and operational protocols within law enforcement agencies to mitigate biased practices and promote equitable treatment.

The media significantly influence public perception by disproportionately emphasizing negative stereotypes, framing Black men primarily within the context of crime and deviance (Kumah-Abiwu, 2019). This skewed portrayal fosters a societal narrative that cultivates fear and suspicion, leading to biased treatment both within community interactions and institutional settings (Bryan, 2020). Public attitudes towards Black men are further shaped by historical stereotypes that persist in characterizing them as inherently dangerous, contributing to broader societal acts of discrimination and injustice (Taylor et al., 2019).

These stereotypes, perpetuated by media and societal attitudes, often manifest in the form of bias during hiring processes, leading to disproportionately higher unemployment rates among Black men (Owusu-Bempah et al., 2023). The resulting economic instability can lead individuals toward informal economies or activities that may be deemed illegal, increasing contact with the criminal justice system. Furthermore, the lack of stable employment limits economic mobility and entrenches social disadvantage, creating a structural cycle of marginalization and criminality (Najdowski & Stevenson, 2022).

Racial disparity in imprisonment is a pervasive issue that has evolved over decades, reflecting systemic biases ingrained in the justice system (Enders et al., 2019).

The psychological toll includes heightened stress, anxiety, and depression, as minority inmates frequently experience the compounding effects of discrimination and isolation (Reiter et al., 2020). Studies illustrate that drug offenses, particularly in federal prisons, disproportionately affect racial minorities, implicating systemic issues in legal processing and sentencing that prioritize harsher penalties for these groups (Sawyer & Wagner, 2024). Policies focusing on drug offenses have historically contributed to the disproportionate imprisonment of racial minorities, continuing the legacy of racial discrimination within legal frameworks (Sawyer & Wagner, 2024).

According to the Prison Policy Initiative, there are 1,900,000 people incarcerated in the United States. Within the past five years, Second Chance Pell has granted college classes to at least 28,000 students in prison, with 9,000 receiving credentials, including associate's, Certificates, and bachelor's degrees (Vera Institute of Justice, 2022).

Educational opportunities while incarcerated reduce recidivism. Students who participate in some college classes while incarcerated are 43% less likely to be reincarcerated than those who do not. Students who earn an associate degree are approximately 85% less likely to return to prison, and those who receive a bachelor's degree are more than 95% less likely to return (Barry, 2023).

The overwhelming disproportion of people of color incarcerated is an indicator of racial systemic disparities of mass incarceration (Ghandnoosh, 2021). The justice system was often criticized and served as a mirror to society, reflecting the prejudices that allowed racist and unjust patterns to flourish (Kim & Clark, 2013). Such practices that establish a pattern of injustice facilitate and encourage the perception of threat, which in

turn influences judges or prosecutors based on their jury's verdict (Katzman & Kovera, 2023). Perspectives based on racial profiling and stereotypes held by people play a vital role in wrongful incarceration, as one gets convicted due to perception rather than reality; racial features of suspect identification lead to wrong decisions, and their racial bias negatively affects eyewitness evidence (Katzman & Kovera, 2023).

Wrongful Convictions

The implicit bias among police officers and lawyers is another vital contributor to wrongful convictions concerning racial discrimination. It plays a significant role in uncovering prejudicial practices and biases against minorities and is used unconsciously in critical situations (Godsey, 2017). Tunnel vision also promotes implicit bias and predisposition (Rossmo & Pollock, 2019). The racial imbalance in the quality of legal representation has a notable impact on the issue of wrongful imprisonment.

Minority groups often face limited access to competent legal representation due to socioeconomic factors and institutional inefficiencies in providing such representation by public defenders (Umamaheswar, 2023). Implicit biases can also impact members of minority groups indirectly, as defense attorneys may represent prejudiced views in the courtroom when dealing with their cases (Rossmo & Pollock, 2019). The trauma of this injustice can lead to psychological disorders such as anxiety, depression, or posttraumatic stress disorder, all of which have been studied in the psychological effects suffered by people falsely accused (Brooks & Greenberg, 2021). Wrongful incarceration calls for the urgent need for systemic change to laws and policies to curb the influence of racial discrimination and prejudice within the justice system (Brooks & Greenberg, 2021). This

generates a chilling effect, with individuals less likely to report crimes and collaborate with law enforcement, further isolating affected communities (Umamaheswar, 2023). Racially defined minority groups, particularly African Americans and Hispanics, are overrepresented in wrongful conviction data (Katzman & Kovera, 2019).

Due to the absence of standard practices in forensic procedures to eliminate biases, scientific evidence used in wrongful imprisonment cases is subject to misinterpretation and illegal use (Bonventre, 2021). A Black person is likely to have a higher probability of arrest than an average White person, and this persistently finds expression in studies and data sets (Loeffler et al., 2019). The convicted Black or racially minority offenders outnumber the White convict population after arrest, further depicting embedded prejudices in the criminal justice system (Kim & Clark, 2013). Close to 50% of all exonerations in the United States involved Black Americans. However, this group represents a small share of the overall population, which shows racial discrimination in the wrongful conviction process (Kim & Clark, 2013). Faulty eyewitness identifications that occurred in most wrongful convictions had a substantial impact on minority defendants, highlighting the combination of a racial profiling aspect and an error in the legal procedure (Bonventre, 2021).

Mandatory sentencing law disproportionately impacts minority groups due to historical biases against them. Charges against minorities are more likely to fall under mandatory minimum sentencing guidelines due to the bias surrounding minority communities, thereby making them increasingly vulnerable to receiving harsher penalties under the law (Jordan, 2021). Collecting and publishing demographic information on

arrests, stop-and-frisk, and other police actions would ensure transparency and accountability, as the data would allow for the evaluation of police actions to identify any elements of racial bias (Brooks & Greenberg, 2021). Scholars argue that wrongful convictions are not anomalies but are embedded within a racialized system of control that contributes to the ongoing over-incarceration of marginalized populations (Alexander, 2020).

The National Registry of Exonerations reported that Black people are seven times more likely than White people to be wrongfully convicted of murder, sexual, and drug offenses, demonstrating that wrongful convictions both reflect and perpetuate racial inequities within the U.S. justice system (Possley, 2022). Wrongful convictions not only lead to the punishment of innocents but also inflate incarceration statistics, further burdening the penal system (Norris et al., 2020). These erroneous convictions often result from systemic issues, including inadequate legal representation, prosecutorial misconduct, and flawed forensic evidence (Garrett & Crozier, 2019). As these cases accumulate, they reveal substantial deficiencies in the legal process, underlining the urgent need for reforms that address the root causes while protecting the innocent from unjust convictions (Norris et al., 2020). Prosecutorial misconduct, including withholding exculpatory evidence and undue reliance on unreliable witnesses, further exacerbates these injustices within the legal framework (Rossmo & Pollock, 2019a). Individuals from marginalized communities bear the brunt of these convictions, as racial biases and resource limitations render them more vulnerable to erroneous judicial outcomes (Umamaheswar, 2023).

The School to Prison Pipeline

The term *school-to-prison pipeline* refers to the systemic policies and practices within educational and legal frameworks that disproportionately channel minority students, particularly those from African American and Latino communities, towards incarceration. (Zinsser & Wanless, 2020). The significance of the school-to-prison pipeline is especially pronounced when examining its pervasive nature in disciplinary policies, which often treat infractions among minority students with far greater severity compared to their White counterparts (Barrett et al., 2021). Significant legislative changes, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s, such as the implementation of zero-tolerance policies, marked a shift in school disciplinary practices that disproportionately affected minority students (Ford, 2021).

Research indicates that African American students are subjected to more severe punitive measures for comparable infractions committed by their White peers, indicating an entrenched pattern of racial bias (Wegmann & Smith, 2019). This systemic inequity is not merely circumstantial but rooted in deeply ingrained institutional prejudices that fail to accommodate the cultural and social realities of minority communities. that contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline by mandating harsh disciplinary actions, such as suspensions and expulsions, for even minor infractions (Neblett, 2023).

The resulting educational disruptions contribute significantly to these students' trajectories, heightening their interaction risk with the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems (Welch et al., 2022). School Resource Officers (SROs) often shift schools toward a more punitive disciplinary model, increasing surveillance and fostering fear

among students. Integrating school resource officers is associated with an increase in formal disciplinary actions, which may escalate even minor incidents into criminal ones, contributing to the school-to-prison pipeline (Curran et al., 2019).

Studies have shown that Black and Hispanic students are more likely to be penalized severely than White students for the same behavior, and this worsens when considering the socioeconomic status of the students involved (Wegmann & Smith, 2019). Consequently, this alienates such students from educational experience and learning, making them more likely to interact with the juvenile justice system (Welch et al., 2022). Systemically, the school-to-prison pipeline serves as a mechanism that funnels Black men from educational settings into incarceration, influenced by hegemonic ideals of masculinity and disciplinary practices that disproportionately target them (Bryan, 2020).

Studies have shown that zero-tolerance policies and subjective interpretations of behavioral misconduct can lead to harsher punishments for Black male students compared to their peers (Ross, L., 2021). These biases manifest in racial stereotyping and lower expectations for academic achievement, which can unjustly influence disciplinary decisions (Owens & McLanahan, 2020). Such inflexible practices do not account for the racial biases ingrained within educational settings, which disproportionately target Black male students (Wegmann & Smith, 2019).

Research highlights that these biases can intersect with teacher perceptions, causing Black boys to be more frequently labeled as troublemakers and subjected to harsher consequences (Marsh & Walker, 2022). These biases often manifest

subconsciously, influencing the perception of Black male students and leading to disproportionate disciplinary measures (Beachum & Gullo, 2019). Specifically, the research underscores that decisions made by administrators influenced by implicit biases contribute to the heightened exclusion rates of Black men, demonstrating an urgent need for bias-awareness training and policy revisions to mitigate these effects (Beachum & Gullo, 2019).

Families with limited economic resources often face adverse conditions that contribute to high stress levels, potentially affecting children's behavior in school settings (Zeng et al., 2019). This lack of support, combined with implicit racial biases, heightens the risk of disciplinary actions against Black male students (Riddle & Sinclair, 2019). The disruption of educational attainment due to frequent out-of-school suspensions can lead to long-term disengagement from academic pursuits, further disadvantaging these students (Pyne, 2019).

Effects of the School-to-Prison Pipeline

The psychological effects of frequent expulsions, including feelings of alienation and disillusionment with the educational system, exacerbate obstacles to achieving academic success (Cohen et al., 2023). Increased expulsion rates correlate with higher crime rates, as disengaged youth may commit unlawful activities due to limited educational and employment opportunities (Barbarin, 2024). Schools in areas with higher concentrations of Black populations often face resource shortages, leading to larger class sizes and overworked staff, which can exacerbate disciplinary issues (Owens & McLanahan, 2020). Policies within schools may incorporate certain biases, aligning with

systemic prejudices that unfairly target Black men by perceiving them as inherently disruptive (Marsh & Walker, 2022).

Research indicates that processes leading to expulsions often disproportionately target Black students compared to their White counterparts, reflecting deep-seated educational biases (Owens & McLanahan, 2020). Such racial disparities are further elucidated in a comprehensive analysis of student-reported behavior infractions, evidencing that students of color experience exclusionary discipline at significantly higher rates (Wegmann & Smith, 2019). The role of implicit bias, often influencing educators' disciplinary decisions unknowingly, exacerbates these disparities by contributing to harsher punishments for Black men in comparison to other students (Scott & Saucedo, 2021). Evidence suggests that educators' implicit biases often result in prejudiced disciplinary decisions, where Black men are subjected to harsher sanctions compared to their peers for comparable infractions (Marcucci, 2020).

Data indicate that while Black men constitute approximately 8% of the student population in certain regions, they disproportionately account for a significant percentage of expulsions, highlighting ongoing disparities (Cohen et al., 2023). This pattern is mirrored across multiple educational settings, where racial biases in disciplinary actions remain prevalent, resulting in stark differences in expulsion outcomes for Black male students compared to their peers (Barbarin, 2024). To eliminate the school-to-prison pipeline, systemic reform changes are needed within the schools' structural practices. (Morgan, 2021). Schools often strive to create an environment where stakeholders

assume the responsibility of maintaining the operational integrity of the establishment (Tyner, 2020).

Students who are placed at risk of being suspended, expelled, or managed by police are likely to be at an increased risk for substance use and other behavioral or developmental concerns (Prins et al., 2023). These biases manifest in subjective disciplinary decisions that disproportionately punish students of color for behaviors that might be overlooked by their White counterparts (Zinsser & Wanless, 2020). When punitive measures are widespread across school campuses, students may feel hopeless and lose motivation or the belief that they could succeed (Sissoko et al., 2023). Schools serving low-income communities often experience significant funding deficits, resulting in larger class sizes, outdated materials, and insufficient support staff, which hinder students' academic performance and engagement (Eichengreen et al., 2020). Interrupting formal education can lower educational attainment, directly impacting future employment opportunities and income potential (Morgan, 2021).

Studies indicate that behaviors stemming from racial trauma, such as distrust or defensiveness, are often met with punitive measures instead of therapeutic interventions, exacerbating the plight of affected individuals (Saleem et al., 2020). Enslavement, segregation, and discriminatory policies have inflicted trauma upon communities, with effects persisting across generations (Darity & Mullen, 2020). Such historical injustices established enduring patterns of marginalization and discrimination, evident in racially biased policing and legal systems that disproportionately target people of color (Najdowski & Stevenson, 2022).

The research sheds light on the lack of information that educators have about the school-to-prison pipeline, despite working in schools that contribute to the creation of school-to-prison pipeline barriers for students (Jacob & Brown, 2022). Oppression is high in educational institutions, and overrepresented Black children are in special education, disciplinary actions, and the actions of the school-to-prison pipeline, which is prevalent because of stereotypes and the need to support Black children in education (Balaghi & Okoroji, 2023). Racial bias in sentencing means that Black men face a one-in-five lifetime likelihood of imprisonment, a rate significantly higher than that of White individuals (Ghandnoosh, 2021). Such disparities are not limited to imprisonment rates; they also extend to bail decisions, where recent policy reversals in areas such as New York have exacerbated these inequities (Ghandnoosh, 2021).

Summary and Conclusions

The literature presented led to a correlation between institutional racism among Black men that racism is not merely an accumulation of individual prejudices; instead, it is embedded within institutional policies and practices (Banaji et al., 2021). Such frameworks systematically disadvantage Black individuals, reinforcing disparities in treatment and outcomes within legal systems (Najdowski & Stevenson, 2022). The historical roots of systemic racism in the United States can be traced back to institutional practices in the era of slavery, where discriminatory policies laid the groundwork for the exclusionary laws that followed (Alexander, 2020). This historical trajectory continued shaping contemporary frameworks, exemplified by the war on drugs and mass incarceration policies that disproportionately target Black men (Hinton, 2021).

Black men often find their behaviors categorized as disruptive or defiant, which leads to their criminalization from a young age (Basile et al., 2022). The current literature reveals a dearth of comprehensive studies that rigorously examine this phenomenon, thereby perpetuating systemic inequities (Hinton, 2021). There is a gap in revealing that the experiences of Black men criminalized for behavioral issues, who are formerly incarcerated, are insufficiently explored in scholarly literature. This deficit is significant as it limits comprehensive understanding and interventions tailored to this group's unique challenges (Jacob & Brown, 2022). The historical context shows that criminalization and social perceptions are deeply intertwined with racial biases, yet studies focused specifically on the voices of Black men are needed (Perkins, 2020).

The criminalization of Black men in the United States has deep roots tied to systemic racism and discrimination. Key events and policies, such as the War on Drugs and the implementation of discriminatory stop-and-frisk practices, have disproportionately targeted Black communities, reinforcing stereotypes of Black men as inherently criminal (Hinton, 2021). Scholarly exploration reveals how these historical frameworks have contributed to the dehumanization of Black men, often visible in contemporary policing practices that treat young Black men with inherent suspicion (Adedoyin et al., 2019). Biases may hinder the recognition and inclusion of Black men's lived experiences, which are not found in the literature (Unnever & Chouhy, 2022). In Chapter 3, I present the research methodology, research design, and rational instrumentation, along with a summary of the methodology's trustworthiness.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of systemic racism among formerly incarcerated, college-educated minority men who faced behavioral issues leading to incarceration. This chapter provides an overview of the research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, the logic behind participant selection, the instruments used, and the data collection and analysis process. I will also discuss issues of trustworthiness and ethical considerations.

Research Design and Rationale

The phenomenon of interest being researched is the experiences of formerly incarcerated individuals of the criminalization of behavioral incidents of systemic factors that disproportionately impact Black men. Historical and cultural biases often predispose society to interpret the behaviors of Black men as inherently criminal rather than as expressions of individuality or circumstances requiring support, which leads to punitive consequences (Perkins, 2020). I employed a qualitative research methodology to gain a deeper understanding of the criminalization of behavioral issues among Black men, allowing for a rich and in-depth exploration of their lived experiences. Qualitative research encompasses several distinct research designs, including phenomenology, grounded theory, case study, ethnography, and narrative inquiry (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study employed a generic qualitative design, as it offered the flexibility to focus on participants' subjective meanings and systemic interactions without being confined to a specific philosophical tradition (Kahlke, 2014).

This design enabled participants to share their narratives of encountering systemic racism, disciplinary exclusion, and incarceration. By capturing their interpretations of school discipline and justice involvement, the study reveals how behavioral issues are often criminalized in racialized ways (Basile et al., 2022). Through one-on-one interviews, the researcher can explore the nuanced social meanings participants assign to their educational and justice system experiences, thereby uncovering the institutional and cultural forces that shape those interactions (Perkins, 2020). This design is particularly appropriate for exploring how systemic racism operates in practice and how participants make sense of their journeys from school to incarceration and beyond.

Such designs allow for an in-depth exploration of complex social phenomena within the unique confines of prison environments. Moreover, the flexibility of qualitative designs enables researchers to adapt their methods to better access the voices of marginalized groups, which is crucial in prison research. The focus on dignity and values within prisons underscores the relevance of qualitative methods, which seek to understand these nuanced human experiences (Testoni et al., 2020).

Research design serves as a fundamental framework for analyzing the criminalization of behavioral issues among Black men who are formerly incarcerated. It entails a systematic approach to gathering and interpreting data, facilitating understanding of how racial biases can be analyzed through structured methodologies (Coulete, 2024). The data collection methods include interviews and observations that acquire raw information in a descriptive format directly from the research participants (Byrne, 2022).

Qualitative analysis emphasizes the context and richness of the participants' experiences, allowing for a nuanced interpretation of their stories (Ullrich et al., 2020). It directs specified data collection and analysis approaches that are suitable and consistent with the main goals of the research (Roberts & Rizzo, 2021). A generic qualitative design aimed to explore how individuals make meaning of their experiences without adhering to the strict methodological frameworks of traditional qualitative approaches such as phenomenology, grounded theory, or ethnography (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This design is especially well-suited for studies that describe and interpret lived experiences across varied systems and social contexts. In this study, a generic qualitative design is appropriate because the research question is: What are the experiences of systemic racism among formerly incarcerated, college-educated minority men who faced behavioral issues leading to incarceration? seeks to understand participants' perceptions of institutional racism as it has occurred within both educational and carceral systems. The study does not aim to uncover the essential meaning of a single phenomenon, as required by phenomenology, to generate a theoretical model, as in grounded theory, or to immerse myself in a cultural setting, as in ethnography (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Instead, it collects rich, descriptive data through interviews and identifies recurring themes related to systemic oppression, institutional bias, and resilience. A generic qualitative approach enables flexible data collection and analysis while maintaining the depth and rigor necessary to explore complex social issues (Ellis & Hart, 2023).

The flexibility inherent in a generic qualitative design facilitates the collection of descriptive data through interviews, allowing for a thorough exploration of complex

social issues, such as systemic oppression and personal resilience (Earp et al, 2021). By emphasizing participant-driven insights, this design fosters a rich depth of understanding that contributes profoundly to the discourse on institutional bias and its impacts (Kostere & Kostere, 2021). The design enables the gathering of nuanced narratives, which reveal how structural inequities manifest in psychological and educational outcomes (Nguyen et al., 2019). This methodological approach allows researchers to adaptively gather descriptive data, primarily through interviews, in a manner that aligns with the research goals yet remains open to the participants' narratives (Kostere & Kostere, 2021).

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For this study, I will conduct in-depth interviews, facilitate transcription, apply coding, and perform thematic analysis to identify patterns in participants' experiences using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach. My responsibilities include ensuring ethical integrity, fostering participant trust, and maintaining high transparency and rigor throughout the research process. I will engage in reflexive journaling throughout the study, documenting thoughts, assumptions, and analytic decisions (Berger, 2013). This practice supports bracketing personal beliefs while centering participant narratives.

Ethically, I am responsible for protecting participants' identities, obtaining informed consent, and adhering to Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocols throughout the research process. Recognizing the potential emotional sensitivity of the subject matter of systemic racism, incarceration, and educational

exclusion, I will prioritize participant safety, dignity, and voice. My overarching role is to create space for participants to share their stories authentically and to interpret these accounts in ways that elevate their lived experiences and contribute to the academic discourse on institutional racism and reentry education. Personal bias and experience can lead to selective exposure, implying that researchers may intentionally or unintentionally interpret the data to support their preconceived notions (Collins & Cannella, 2021). Bias may also appear in the qualitative researcher's practices, such as biased data gathering/interpretation, where the qualitative researcher finds only what they expected to find, thereby confirming their prior experiences regarding racism (Collins & Cannella, 2021). The process of reflexivity helps identify personal and cultural assumptions while providing a template for documenting reflections that enhance the transparency and reliability of research (Dodgson, 2019).

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

I targeted prospective participants who are (a) Black, (b) had attended college, and (c) were formerly incarcerated. I developed open-ended questions to understand the participants' responses and gain experience with specific questions. The experiences of racism and the behavioral incidents will be discussed during the interview, and questions will be open-ended.

Criteria often focus on demographic factors such as age, ethnicity, and sentence length, which are crucial in capturing the diverse experiences of inmates relevant to the study. Following approval from Walden University's IRB, a recruitment flyer will be

distributed via targeted, private online communities and email-based professional networks that focus on prison reentry and higher education for justice-impacted individuals. These include LinkedIn groups and establish reentry organizations such as PhD to Prison, Nation Outside, Unlock Higher Education, and Michigan to End Mass Incarceration. The flyer will include a brief description of the study, eligibility criteria, and contact information, inviting individuals who meet the inclusion criteria to email the researcher directly and express interest in participating.

To ensure ethical compliance and participant privacy, recruitment will not be conducted through public social media platforms, such as Facebook or Instagram, without prior consultation and approval from the IRB. These open forums may compromise confidentiality or inadvertently expose participants to risk. The recruitment process will be carefully monitored to ensure that only individuals who voluntarily reach out to the researcher are considered for inclusion in the study. Once contacted, potential participants will receive the study overview, informed consent, and an opportunity to ask questions before scheduling an interview. The interviews were conducted via video on the Zoom platform. Operational challenges underscore the complexity of conducting qualitative research with formally incarcerated participants, necessitating that researchers diligently navigate institutional protocols while maintaining methodological rigor (Baffour et al., 2024).

Sample Size

Interviews were conducted at times convenient for each participant and scheduled individually. A purposive sample of six to ten participants was recruited, and data

saturation was achieved after interviewing five participants, based on their lived experiences with incarceration and post-secondary education. This sampling strategy was appropriate for qualitative research that sought to generate rich, in-depth insights from individuals most familiar with the phenomenon under investigation. When participants possess strong experiential knowledge related to the research question, a smaller, more focused sample can yield sufficient information to support meaningful and valid conclusions (Malterud et al., 2016). This study aimed to explore detailed narratives of systemic racism experienced by formerly incarcerated, college-educated minority men; thus, the depth of data is prioritized over breadth (Mthuli et al., 2022).

The final sample size was determined by data saturation, the point at which no new information or themes emerge from subsequent interviews (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Saturation ensures that the study's findings are comprehensive and adequately represent the range of experiences of the participants. While six to ten participants are anticipated, additional participants may be included if thematic saturation has not been reached. Conversely, if saturation occurs earlier, data collection may cease. This flexible approach ensures methodological rigor while respecting the time and dignity of participants.

Although this study was not intended to generalize to all formerly incarcerated populations, diversity within the sample remained important. Broader research goals that aimed to generalize findings across diverse inmate demographics may require larger samples to capture a broader range of experiences (Bolarinwa, 2020). Including diverse voices enhances the credibility and transferability of qualitative findings and acknowledges the complex and multifaceted nature of systemic racism in education and

incarceration. While ethical and logistical constraints may shape the sample size, these factors are balanced with the imperative to achieve saturation and inclusion, thereby strengthening the study's overall validity (Saunders et al., 2018).

Sampling Strategy

I used a purposeful sampling strategy in this study. Purposeful sampling is a strategic method in qualitative research that involves selecting participants based on specific criteria relevant to the research goals (Campbell et al., 2020). This approach distinguished itself from random sampling by focusing on information-rich cases where the participants offered substantial insights into the research topic (Campbell et al., 2020). In qualitative studies, especially in the rigorous environments of formally incarcerated participants, purposeful sampling enhances depth and contextual understanding by prioritizing participants who best elucidated the experiences and dynamics under investigation, such as the purpose of Black men attending college.

At the same time, incarceration is intentional to explore experiences of racism that were criminalized by behavioral incidents. Such a selective method enabled a nuanced exploration of complex phenomena that random sampling might overlook due to its broader and less defined participant base (Bouncken et al., 2025). As a result, purposeful sampling not only aligned participants with the research objectives but also streamlined data collection and analysis by concentrating on the most relevant and insightful subjects within the research framework of this study. These participants were selected for their potential to provide depth in understanding phenomena that are otherwise impenetrable through general sampling methods (Berger, 2013).

Focusing on specific characteristics enables researchers to capture detailed insights, especially in environments where diverse experiences inform broader systemic issues (Bouncken et al., 2021). This tailored approach not only strengthened the alignment between research objectives and participant experiences but also enhanced the robustness of the data collected, providing a more comprehensive picture of the research subject within the former prison setting. Within former prison-based research, this method allows researchers to gather comprehensive insights into complex social dynamics and inmate experiences, which are often obscured by traditional sampling techniques (Berger, 2013). By carefully selecting participants who embody purposeful attributes aligned with the research objectives, researchers gain access to a wealth of detailed narratives that illuminate understudied phenomena (Bouncken et al., 2025).

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Individual interviews were conducted to gain a deeper understanding of a specific topic, from which the researcher derives knowledge (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The researcher explored open-ended questions to gain a deeper understanding of the topic and gathered more detailed information by asking follow-up questions. The interview enabled the researcher to gain insight into the participants' experiences. A good interview begins with a good interview guide. An interview guide lists questions or topics the interviewer hopes to cover. The guide was topic-based rather than a list of myopic questions (Hunter, 2012). A good interview should also explain the purpose of the study and ensure that the participants are aware of their expectations (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The questions have been organized in the order in which they were presented. The researcher utilized a guide

to prepare before conducting interviews. According to Rubin and Rubin (2012), having an outline for an interview helps the researcher focus on what a participant says.

It is essential to establish a rapport during the interview. Open-ended questions allowed participants to share their words, feelings, and experiences. That enabled participants to share their stories in their own words. It is essential to be conscious of the time and ask all the questions in the interview guide. Participants will engage and share their experiences when they feel they are not judged. The researcher listened attentively and avoided interrupting the participants. It is vital to keep judgment from clouding the interview. The researcher enabled breaks if needed for the participants. The researcher conducted an excellent-quality interview that relied on open-ended questions, built rapport with the participants, was aware of the expectations of the interview, and listened attentively. The primary responsibility involved addressing ethical considerations by obtaining informed consent and respecting the confidentiality of participants (Gomes & Duarte, 2018).

The research commenced after approval from Walden University's IRB, ensuring that all ethical standards regarding human subject research were met. No recruitment or data collection activities began until IRB approval was granted. Upon approval, participant recruitment was conducted through a flyer distributed via email and social media platforms, such as LinkedIn, as well as through justice-impacted and reentry networks, including Michigan to End Mass Incarceration. These platforms were specifically selected because they included professionals and advocates with lived

experience, formerly incarcerated individuals pursuing education, and higher education leaders working at the intersection of prison and reentry education.

Interested participants were asked to email the researcher to express their interest in the study. In response, they received an invitation email that included: a detailed description of the study purpose and procedures, a copy of the informed consent, an interview preparation letter, which outlined the voluntary nature of the study, confidentiality protections, and the right to withdraw at any time, and a copy of the interview guide outlining general question areas. Once informed consent was signed and returned, a Zoom interview link was provided for a mutually scheduled date and time.

To ensure that participants meet the study's inclusion criteria of being (a) Black or African American, (b) formerly incarcerated, and (c) having attended or completed college during or after incarceration, the following steps were taken: Participants were screened during the initial contact through a brief intake form or informal screening questions. They were asked to self-identify their racial/ethnic background and confirm prior incarceration and have completed any postsecondary education level while incarcerated (college-in-prison programs) or post-release. The recruitment flyer clearly stated these criteria, so individuals understood the eligibility requirements before contacting the researcher. By combining clear inclusion language, purposeful recruitment through justice-impacted education networks, and direct screening, the study ensured that all participants reflected the population central to the research question of Black, formerly incarcerated, college-educated men with histories of school-related criminalization or behavioral discipline.

Instrumentation

I developed the interview questions based on a review of research articles and questions about the experiences of systemic racism and behaviors that lead to criminalization. Effective interview techniques within the former prison setting included establishing trust-based relationships, which are critical for obtaining reliable data on systemic racism (Abbott et al., 2018). Participants might be asked to recount specific instances where they felt racial prejudice influenced their treatment or interactions, highlighting individual stories that reflect broader systemic issues (Floyd, 2024).

Exploring how formerly incarcerated participants cope with racism might reveal adaptive or maladaptive strategies that significantly influence their psychological well-being and resilience (Greer & Cavalhieri, 2019). The questions were crafted to encompass the experiences of perpetuating or confronting racism, adding depth to the study of racial dynamics (Wong et al., 2025). Each interview question was designed to hear experiences of any behavioral incidents that were criminalized, which led to the incarceration of systemic racism. The study was conducted through one-on-one interviews, each set for 60 minutes, via the Zoom platform.

The guide included an introductory segment that outlined the purpose and scope of the interview, helping participants understand the context in which the data would be used and ensuring their informed consent. The main body consists of carefully crafted questions, predominantly open-ended, to elicit in-depth responses and facilitate a narrative flow (Turner et al, 2022). A conclusion segment was included, allowing

participants to add further comments and provide closure to the conversation, thus reinforcing respect for the participants' time and contributions (Demirci, 2023).

These questions allowed respondents to expand their responses without constraints, thereby capturing the complexity of human experiences (Roberts, C., 2020). Each participant had an informed consent form, which was crucial in empowering them with the knowledge required to make an informed decision regarding their participation (Byrd, 2020). Reviewing and revising interview questions was crucial to ensuring they remain aligned with the research goals. This iterative process involved critically analyzing the questions to determine whether they effectively addressed the study objectives (Turner et al., 2022). Participants could remove themselves from their studies at any time. Interviews were recorded on the Zoom platform as well as on a Sunlan Digital Video Recorder for an additional audio recording that can later be plugged into a computer to upload for coding.

Data Analysis Plan

I analyzed data from the interviews and my notes. Thematic analysis was employed in the interviews to identify common themes within the data collected on the systemic racism experiences of the interviewees (Ahmed et al., 2025). Thematic analysis was used to explore the perspectives of research participants, exploring similarities and differences. Developing thematic analysis enabled qualitative researchers to code and analyze qualitative data systematically. Thematic analysis enabled categorization that highlighted the meaning associated with each code (Baffour et al., 2024). The analysis also revealed the moral and ethical complexities of the phenomenon under study within

the former incarcerated participants, as well as how these complexities impact the study (Cypress, 2019).

The thematic analysis introduced through coding provides more depth than description by disclosing greater details about the lived experiences of individuals, thereby identifying the complexity involved in personal change and rehabilitation. Using a coding scheme facilitated a systematic and in-depth analysis of the data, which is essential for a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of formerly incarcerated individuals. For interviews conducted with formerly incarcerated participants, having a coding scheme minimized biases by requiring constant reflexivity, which in turn promoted ethical practices, especially when addressing sensitive concerns during the interview (Gomes & Duarte, 2018). Identifying patterns in qualitative interview data helped to analyze the recurrent themes and stories of each interview conducted with participants who were formerly incarcerated. Researchers conduct line-by-line analysis, a method that involves closely examining each data piece to help identify connections and patterns that might seem trivial (Saldana, 2008).

This study followed the six-phase thematic analysis process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), a rigorous and flexible method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within qualitative data. Thematic analysis was particularly well-suited for studies grounded in a generic qualitative design, as it allows the researcher to interpret participants' experiences and uncover underlying themes relevant to the research question. Six steps were followed in the process.

The first step was to familiarize oneself with the data. The researcher began by reading and rereading the interview transcripts, listening to recordings, and making notes on initial impressions. This immersion helped the researcher become deeply acquainted with the content and context of the data. This was strategic because it highlighted patterns and themes researchers engage in, as evident in the transcript (Braun et al., 2019). The second step was generating initial codes. After familiarization, the researcher systematically reviewed the data and coded relevant features using open coding. Codes are assigned to text segments that reflect meaningful units related to systemic racism, criminalization, education, or incarceration. An initial coding to identify evidence of systemic racism in the educational system would be beneficial as it challenges existing paradigms (Wirts, 2023).

The third step was to search for themes. In this phase, the researcher organized the codes into broader categories or themes. Codes that share conceptual similarities were clustered to reflect deeper data patterns. There is a need to organize the codes into distinct groupings based on their conceptual similarities, as this helped create patterns that highlight the key elements characterizing a particular phenomenon, such as systemic racism or the injustice inherent in the educational system (Byrne, 2022).

The fourth step was to review the themes. The researcher then reviewed all potential themes to ensure they accurately reflect the coded data and are supported by the dataset. Some themes were refined, combined, or discarded during this phase. The quality of the thematic analysis was related to the coherence of the theme and the delimitations of each theme (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). The fifth step is to define and name themes. Once

the themes were finalized, the researcher explained the essence of each theme and developed clear names and detailed descriptions for them. This phase focused on refining the scope and focus of each theme of the research question. Each theme undergoes a detailed description process, during which it must be thoroughly explained with clear relevance to the research question and the analytical standpoint of the study (Braun et al., 2023).

The sixth step was to produce the report. In this final phase, the researcher wrote a detailed narrative of the themes, supported by rich, illustrative participant quotes. The analysis will be connected to the research question, theoretical framework, and existing literature. During the analysis, the researcher was expected to embed quotes relevant to the themes in their narrative and use those to support their findings, thus making their narrative richer and more authentic (Christou, 2022). Additionally, it was crucial to relate the themes developed to the research question, making them relevant to the study's aim and objectives (Christou, 2022). Researchers must establish and fuse their findings with existing theories and literature, thus relating the data to past studies and theories (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). In terms of thematic analysis, it facilitates a deeper understanding of various concepts that affect human functionalities in different contexts, such as educational establishments or correctional systems (Braun et al., 2023). The theme is distinguished by the inequities in resource distribution and teaching frameworks that are biased toward marginalized communities (Byrne, 2022).

I conducted all interviews via Zoom, a secure, cloud-based videoconferencing platform (Zoom Video Communications, 2023). Zoom offers convenience, accessibility,

and confidentiality, which are essential when engaging with formerly incarcerated individuals who may be balancing reentry, education, and employment obligations (Archibald et al., 2019). Each interview was scheduled at a time convenient for the participant and was expected to last approximately 60 minutes. Participants received a unique, password-protected Zoom link before their scheduled interview. To protect participant privacy, interviews were conducted in one-on-one sessions, and participants were reminded of their rights, including the option to skip questions or withdraw from the study at any time (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interview questions were designed to facilitate a reflective conversation, while allowing for flexibility in follow-up questions based on individual responses. The complete set of interview questions used during the data collection process is provided in Appendix A.

With informed consent, each Zoom session was audio-recorded using the platform's built-in recording feature. Zoom's automated transcription service was enabled to generate an initial transcript. After the interview, the researcher retrieved the transcript from the Zoom cloud. The transcript was manually reviewed and edited by the researcher to ensure accuracy, grammatical clarity, and correction of any misinterpretations (Snyder, 2017). All transcripts were de-identified; pseudonyms replaced participant names and other personally identifiable information. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase method, these transcripts were analyzed thematically to identify patterns and themes in participants' experiences with systemic racism and behavioral criminalization.

All recordings and transcripts are securely stored in password-protected digital folders on an encrypted device. All procedures comply with Walden University's IRB standards and ethical protocols for human subjects' research (Walden University, 2023).

The significance of Zoom in disassociating conversation or interview transcription in dissertation research is considerable. Zoom enables researchers to conduct interviews effectively and efficiently. As interviews are the predominant method of collecting qualitative data, transcribing the session is incredibly important. Zoom can record anything during a meeting, including high-quality sound and visuals. Such a feature is essential for transcription (Archibald et al., 2019). Also, it can be integrated with most transcription programs to immediately convert the information captured during the meeting into written form.

The auto-transcription feature of Zoom saves scholars time, eliminating the hassle of manually transcribing their data. It allows researchers to analyze other crucial aspects of their study (Archibald et al., 2019). The accuracy of Zoom transcription output may require additional editing and verification by the researchers, depending on the participants' accents or even the quality of the audio recordings (Vedapudi et al., 2024). Such inaccuracy reduces data reliability, and the researchers may have to spend extra time correcting the inaccurate details, which could have been avoided by using a more accurate transcription method.

Issue of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in academic research designates the measure by which results can be interpreted as valid and reliable, ensuring the transparency and credibility of both the

research process and its results (Elo et al., 2014). In qualitative research, trustworthiness is a principal characteristic of any work, as it ensures the integrity of the study by defining the nature of qualitative application and its impact on research practice (Stahl & King, 2020). To secure trustworthiness, decisions regarding procedure and interpretation criteria must be made within the context of the study and the established criteria convention, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These criteria should be viewed as a scope representation rather than an ideal, as adherence to benchmarks will enable researchers to refine their efforts and procedures, thereby increasing the confidence of peers and stakeholders in their work (Adler, 2022). In this manner, trustworthiness is cultivated through exposure to rigorous reflection and steady inquiry, as research claims transition into persuasive and significant findings (Cain et al., 2023).

In qualitative research, trustworthiness is a critical measure that ensures the authenticity and integrity of study findings. Trustworthiness in qualitative research also includes informed consent and confidentiality. Informed consent involves communicating the research objectives, methods, potential risks, and the participants' rights to withdraw at any point, thereby fostering transparency and respect for participant autonomy (Carcary, 2020). Informed consent ensures that participants are fully aware of the study's objectives, procedures, and potential risks, fostering an environment of autonomy and respect (Cloutier & Ravasi, 2021).

Establishing a rapport with participants creates a foundation of trust, enabling researchers to gather authentic data freely, without the influence of bias or coercion,

thereby reinforcing the integrity of the research process (Cloutier & Ravasi, 2021). Implementing these trustworthiness strategies in qualitative data collection hinges on diligently applying these criteria, ensuring that data collection methods are robust and reflect participants' realities (Ahmed, 2024). Techniques such as prolonged engagement and persistent observation foster depth and accuracy in data gathering, thereby enhancing credibility.

Credibility

Credibility refers to the confidence that can be placed in the truth of the research findings, often achieved through prolonged engagement and detailed participant observation (Ahmed, 2024). Credibility is a foremost aspect in establishing trustworthiness within qualitative research, fundamentally related to the believability of the findings. This dimension underscores the necessity for researchers to convincingly demonstrate the authenticity of their results, employing techniques such as member checking and triangulation to enhance credibility (Ahmed, 2024).

Member checking allows participants to validate the researchers' interpretations, reinforcing plausibility, while triangulation integrates multiple data sources to corroborate the findings (Bang, 2024). This comprehensive approach strengthens faith in the results and nurtures an environment of transparency in the research process. Consequently, by intertwining these methods, researchers can bolster the trustworthiness of their studies, as credibility serves as a testament to the integrity and reliability of qualitative data (Adler, 2022).

Triangulation, a technique involving multiple data sources, researchers, or methods to cross-check information, is a primary method for enhancing credibility. This process involves converging different perspectives to test the consistency and reliability of the data collected, thus reinforcing research conclusions (Carter et al., 2014).

Prolonged engagement can sustain interaction with the research setting or participants to enhance credibility, which requires researchers to immerse themselves deeply in the studied environment, thereby gaining a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon and establishing trust with participants, which is specific to this study (Stahl & King, 2020). Prolonged engagement allows researchers to identify patterns, corroborate findings through repeated observations, and address potential inconsistencies in data interpretations (Dado et al., 2023).

Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings of a qualitative study can be applied or extended to other contexts, populations, or settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In keeping with the constructivist paradigm that underpins this study, the goal was not statistical generalization but rather analytical and contextual transferability, enabling readers to determine the relevance of the findings to their own environments. The interview guide was topic-based rather than a list of one-dimensional questions (Hunter, 2012), allowing participants to narrate their experiences authentically and to highlight aspects of their educational and reentry journeys that were most meaningful to them. Transferability was also strengthened through comprehensive documentation of the

research process, including recruitment procedures, data collection, coding framework, and theme development.

Dependability

Dependability ensures that findings are consistent and replicable over time through methodological stability, while confirmability is concerned with the objectivity of the data, often achieved by maintaining a detailed audit trail and reflexive analysis (Ahmed, 2024). Dependability is crucial in qualitative research, as it ensures consistent and replicable findings. It involves maintaining methodological consistency throughout the research process, allowing for the identification and minimization of potential errors or fluctuations (Mthuli et al., 2022). Utilizing research networks facilitates multi-context studies, reinforcing dependability through varied methodological perspectives, and supporting long-term reliability in data collection and analysis (Mthuli et al., 2022).

Dependability involves maintaining methodological consistency throughout the research process, allowing for the identification and minimization of potential errors or fluctuations (Mthuli et al., 2022). Qualitative researchers maintain dependability through meticulous record-keeping and highlight the strategy of reflexive thematic analysis, which allows for flexibility despite the inherent changeability in qualitative data collection (Janis, 2022).

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the confidence that can be placed in the truth of the research findings, often achieved through prolonged engagement and detailed participant observation (Ahmed, 2024). Confirmability demonstrates the authenticity of their results,

employing techniques such as member checking and triangulation to enhance credibility (Ahmed, 2024). Member checking allows participants to validate the researchers' interpretations, reinforcing plausibility, while triangulation integrates multiple data sources to corroborate the findings (Bang, 2024). Triangulation, a technique involving multiple data sources, researchers, or methods to cross-check information, is a primary method for enhancing credibility. This process consists of converging different perspectives to test the consistency and reliability of the data collected, thus reinforcing research conclusions (Carter et al., 2014).

In ensuring that data accurately reflects participants' experiences, confirmability minimizes the chances of researcher biases influencing the outcomes (Haq et al., 2023). Confirmability involves an audit trail and a comprehensive chronological record that documents all phases of the research process, facilitating transparency and allowing external reviewers to trace methodological steps taken (Carcary, 2020). Maintenance of audit trails provides a transparent and systematic record of all phases of the research process, enabling others to assess the confirmability of the findings (Baffour et al., 2024). Reflexivity is another critical strategy, requiring researchers to continually reflect on and critically assess their values, biases, and influences throughout the research process (Baffour et al., 2024). Confirmability ensures that findings arise from the data, independent of subjective influences from the researcher, embodying the essence of an objective inquiry (Huttunen & Kakkori, 2020).

Ethical Procedures

Ethics is also necessary for IRB boards at colleges and universities to ensure adherence to ethical standards with vulnerable populations (Ravitch & Carl, 2020). Research can cause harm to a person. IRBs are tasked with the critical responsibility of reviewing research proposals to ascertain that they rigorously adhere to ethical standards while also considering the unique constraints and power dynamics of formally incarcerated cultures. (Tran & Wolff, 2020). When discussing trauma and abuse, the IRB is concerned that questions of research can retraumatize the participants. It is essential to review the literature to identify potential risks to research participants and to determine any additional precautions the researcher can take (CITI Program, n.d.). Researchers must analyze and formulate well-written and concise questions to ensure ethical practices with vulnerable populations, such as prisoners. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) issues certificates of confidentiality to protect identifiable research information from significant disclosure (CITI Program, n.d.).

Researchers must possess a thorough understanding of the complex ethical landscape, enabling them to navigate the challenges unique to individuals who have been formally incarcerated. (Hatchett, 2021). In the context of formally incarcerated prison research, adherence to ethical frameworks is crucial for safeguarding the rights and well-being of participants. Existing guidelines, such as those developed for health research in prisons, emphasize the importance of carefully structured ethical oversight (Ako et al., 2020). These guidelines often address critical issues, such as informed consent, confidentiality, and the need to minimize potential harm to participants, which are

particularly challenging in confinement settings due to inherent power imbalances (Gomes & Duarte, 2018). The coercive nature of prisons complicates participants' ability to freely engage in research, as the hierarchical structure may intimidate or pressure individuals (Dankar et al., 2019).

The power dynamics between the researcher and formally incarcerated participants add to the ethical considerations, as these participants may feel obligated to join or respond in a way they believe the researcher wants (Gomes & Duarte, 2018). The *Belmont Report* and guidelines are based on the ethical principles of respect, beneficence, and justice when conducting qualitative research with specific populations, such as inmates (Pietilä et al., 2019). In addition, researchers must take planned precautions to ensure that formally incarcerated participants in a qualitative study will not be affected in any way by their participation, including their institutional standing, status, or movement rights within the penal institutions (Di Marco & Sandberg, 2023). Researchers must incorporate appropriate debriefing and mental health support strategies to ensure the well-being of participants is safeguarded throughout the research process, thereby maintaining ethical standards and participant trust (Bryan, 2020). Engagement of participants' awareness reinforces their realization of the value of their input in the qualitative research process (Goyes & Sandberg, 2024).

Data protection and confidentiality are integral to maintaining the ethical standards of research involving human participants. Ensuring the secure handling and storage of participant information is crucial to prevent unauthorized access and privacy breaches. This involves implementing strategies such as assigning participants unique

alphanumeric identifiers to disconnect their identities from the data collected. Additionally, it is vital to keep consent forms and emails separate from study data, reinforcing participants' confidentiality. Furthermore, digital audio recordings, transcripts, and coding documents should be stored on a password-protected, encrypted device to safeguard against potential data breaches.

By assigning unique alphanumeric identifiers, researchers can disconnect personal identities from collected data, thus preventing unauthorized identification of participants (Colosi et al., 2019). This method complements broader data handling practices, such as storing consent forms separately from the primary data, to fortify privacy measures. Moreover, using these identifiers directly addresses privacy concerns associated with research (Rudolph & Young, 2021). The procedure necessitates storing consent forms and emails in a distinct, secure location separate from where the study data is housed, ensuring that such identifying information cannot inadvertently be linked to specific participant data (Journal of Research Practice, n.d). Employing robust encryption techniques for data at rest, as described in contemporary data protection literature, enhances the security of these isolated repositories (Journal of Research Practice, n.d).

These measures are critical as they effectively prevent potential data breaches, safeguarding the confidential data collected in research settings (Namasudra, 2019). Advanced encryption techniques strengthen these protections by making unauthorized decryption exceedingly difficult (Yang et al., 2020). This approach minimizes the risk of breaches by ensuring that sensitive audio-visual data does not remain vulnerable on cloud servers associated with videoconferencing apps (Cremer et al., 2022). Backing up

research data on an external encrypted drive is a key practice, aligning with recommendations for enhanced data protection. After five years, permanent destruction of all data is mandated, using secure deletion software that employs overwriting techniques to erase the data from storage devices effectively (Cremer et al., 2022).

Ensuring participant safety is paramount, which requires researchers to navigate complex power dynamics and institutional rules while avoiding undue influence or coercion during interactions. Principles ensure that inmate participants are fully aware of the research objectives and consent without coercion, which can be complicated by the unique prison environment where power dynamics can influence voluntariness (Di Marco & Sandberg, 2023). Confidentiality is paramount in such research environments, as maintaining the anonymity of participants protects them from potential repercussions within the prison system (White, 2020). Researchers must address these ethical imperatives while recognizing the reduced autonomy of inmates, which can complicate the consent process due to their incarcerated status. Furthermore, researchers must exercise diligence in minimizing risks to participants who may experience psychological or physical vulnerabilities due to incarceration (Gomes & Duarte, 2018).

Summary

In 2023, an estimated 48.3 million people self-identified as Black, accounting for 14.4% of the U.S. population (Martinez & Passel, 2025). There are 37% of Black people who are in prison or jail, and 48% of Black people serving life without parole (Robinson, 2020). This entrenched bias results in inequitable educational outcomes, where Black men are disproportionately disciplined and often have limited access to advanced

academic opportunities (Irons, 2021). There are staggering incarceration rates, where African American men are incarcerated at a rate six times greater than that of European American men, evidencing persistent racial inequities within the criminal justice system (Wang, 2023).

Historically, practices such as racial profiling have disproportionately targeted Black men, resulting in higher rates of arrests and convictions compared to other racial groups (Katzman & Kovera, 2019). This systemic bias is further exacerbated by discriminatory laws that have perpetuated inequalities, ensuring that Black men are punished more severely for similar offenses. Such entrenched practices serve as modern-day tools of social control, echoing practices from earlier periods when Black Americans were subjected to oppressive legal frameworks (Hinton, 2021).

Limited educational opportunities often stem from systemic inequities, where schools in predominantly Black neighborhoods face underfunding and resource shortages, leading to lower academic achievements and reduced employment prospects (Western et al., 2021). Approximately 35% of students in kindergarten through Grade 12 (K–12) are suspended at least once in their lifetime (Shollenberger, 2015). Today, Black students are suspended at significantly higher rates than their Black and Hispanic classmates (Leland, n.d.). Research shows that juveniles who are repeatedly taken out of the educational environment via suspension or expulsion have a greater likelihood of ending up in jail or prison (Smith & Osborn, 2014).

Black men are 4 times more likely to be incarcerated in local jails than their White counterparts, underscoring longstanding systemic inequities within the justice

system (Kajeeepeta et al., 2023). Additionally, studies examining county-level data indicate that African Americans, more than any other racial group, are subject to state prison sentences, further accentuating the racial disparities in incarceration rates (Dumont et al., 2013). The higher incarceration rate of Black men compared to their White counterparts underscores the entrenched biases that pervade legal frameworks (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2023). Within this study, with the systemic criminalization of Black men, a qualitative research study will explore the experiences of Black men who were formerly incarcerated and have attended college.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of the qualitative study was to explore the experiences of systemic racism among formerly incarcerated, college-educated Black men who face behavioral issues leading to incarceration. The study examined the educational and carceral pathways of formerly incarcerated, college-educated Black men to highlight the lasting effects of systemic racism and the criminalization of behaviors. The role of schooling and education in fostering resilience and supporting transitions into post-secondary education after prison was also considered (Phillips, 2024). The study also focused on understanding how labeling due to behavioral issues and systematic injustices is being perpetuated into the lives of the participants and affects their school-to-prison-to-success trajectory.

The research study focused on the alignment of the Research Question: What are the experiences of systemic racism among formerly incarcerated, college-educated minority men who faced behavioral issues leading to incarceration? This chapter details the research design, participants, and contextual conditions; explains data collection procedures, ethical considerations, and data management; presents the researcher's identity, including familiarization, assumptions, values, and reflexivity; outlines trustworthiness procedures; describes the six-phase thematic analysis; and closes with an analytic outcomes overview that sets the stage for Chapter 5 with findings.

Setting

The setting for this qualitative study included the social, educational, and institutional contexts in which the participants, formerly incarcerated, college-educated Black men, experienced systemic racism, behavioral criminalization, and academic transformation. All participants reside in various states within the United States. Each of the five participants has completed or is currently pursuing postsecondary education. Each participant engaged in one-on-one Zoom interviews and private Zoom meetings, allowing for a private and reflective environment where sensitive discussions can occur without institutional oversight or interruption. Many systemic and organizational influences shaped the participants' experiences. The following section outlines the data collection procedures used to gather these narratives and ensure a comprehensive understanding of participants' lived experiences.

Demographics

The inclusion criteria for the five research participants are (a) Black men, (b) having been formerly incarcerated, and (c) having attended college. The Black male participants included five formerly incarcerated individuals with diverse educational backgrounds, ranging from attending college to master's degrees. As the participants ranged in age from 36 to 66 years old, this age diversity provided a potentially different level of exposure to the societal and institutional influences of the time in research contexts. The length of former incarceration ranged from 2.9 years to 15.9 years. (see Table 1).

Table 1*Participant Demographics*

Participant	Age range (years)	Education level	Incarceration duration (years)
P1	64–68	Master’s degree	2.9
P2	52–56	Master’s degree	11
P3	40–44	Master’s degree	11
P4	34–38	Associate’s degree	15
P5	38–42	Attending college	15.9

Data Collection

I obtained approval from Walden University’s IRB (approval no. 09-04-25-1178452) prior to commencing data collection in September 2025. Upon approval of the IRB, a recruitment flyer was posted on LinkedIn and Instagram, targeting potential participants. If a participant was interested, an email or message was sent to the researcher. Informed consent was sent via email to the potential participant, with a return of "I consent" by all participants. A Zoom interview was set up and sent to potential participants. In the application, data collection consisted of a series of semi-structured interviews conducted between study participants on the Zoom platform over six weeks from September to October 2025. Zoom interview sessions were scheduled for 60 minutes, allowing for in-depth answers and a thorough exploration of experiences. Interviews were audio-recorded with the participant's permission to document information relevant to a complete qualitative analysis. Recordings were transcribed verbatim immediately following each session and de-identified for confidentiality; the resultant transcripts were stored in password-protected computer files.

All participants were given a unique pseudonym (e.g., P1–P5), through which the researcher was provided with the opportunity to reproduce participant-specific accounts of experiences while ensuring anonymity at all points of data processing and representation. All de-identified interview transcripts and related materials were stored in a digitally protected format with access limitations to the primary investigator only. By applying the described practices, the requirements for privacy and protection of acquired information, as guaranteed by ethical principles, were fulfilled in the context of heightened sensitivity surrounding research topics related to previously incarcerated people. Moreover, reflexive journaling was woven into the data collection process. By utilizing this method of reflexive journaling, identified as a core practice in Braun and Clarke's recommendations for qualitative methodology, the study helped create greater transparency and analytical richness, thereby enhancing the credibility and ethical integrity of the results (Braun et al., 2023).

I conducted Zoom interviews in a private, secure location within my home. I asked again if the participant had given both written and verbal informed consent. No interview was interrupted or disrupted by the participant or the researcher at any time. Two participants chose to leave their cameras on and did not want to turn them off, as the researcher was only able to record audio. A purposeful sampling was used to select participants relevant to the inclusion criteria. Participants were recruited through professional networks to gain access to previously incarcerated and college-educated Black men who met the inclusive criteria. All the participants have been incarcerated, as well as gone through higher education institutions; therefore, their experience directly

relates to the nature of the study, which seeks to explore the relationship between systemic racism, education, and criminal justice system involvement. In accordance with the demanding ethical research requirements, each of the selected individuals provided informed consent prior to participating, which ensured they understood their rights and were participating voluntarily (Pietilä et al., 2019).

In summary, the final sample comprises the experiences of five participants, which are expected to provide a nuanced understanding of the phenomenon in question, while also reflecting the interplay between individual action and structural forces. The developed interview guide was aimed at eliciting responses on multiple domains of experiences, such as oppressive pedagogies (educational settings), racial discrimination and microaggressions (direct exposure), perception towards institutional discipline (school versus institutional), post-incarceration reentry and college aspirations, constructs of resilience and coping, and standards of grounds on systemic injustice.

Participants shared experiences of how systemic racism shaped every stage of their involvement with the criminal justice system, from biased disciplinary actions in schools to racial profiling and over-policing in their communities, and later, disparate treatment within correctional institutions. I leveraged my professional networks, which are prevalent in reentry and educational advocacy, to reach out to this population that is typically vulnerable to research challenges, such as distrust and limited access to institutions (Watson & Van der Meulen, 2018). Likewise, the five men's experiences were significantly impacted by the structural inequalities affecting Black neighborhoods: increased surveillance, poor educational quality, low expectations, and financial

opportunity. Participants recalled growing up in neighborhoods and schools where they experienced ubiquitous policing and monitoring. Systemic racism, when exacerbated by stigmatization and a lack of culturally responsive interventions, reinforces barriers to empowerment and equitable reentry opportunities (Alexander, 2020).

In qualitative research interviews, the significance of data saturation can be understood from its definition. Its definition describes a phenomenon whereby a researcher continues to gather data without discovering new results, codes, or themes. This is a subjective and context-specific process that requires deliberate and organized evaluation to assess when saturation has been achieved (Rahimi & Khatooni, 2024). The identification of data saturation is made through systematic coding and constant comparison of observational data with the codes, patterns, or themes that recur among the interviewees. It is further recommended, based on empirical guidelines, that the repetition be closely followed up, as it provides evidence that additional interviews will likely not yield any new insights helpful in answering the research question.

During this qualitative study, the primary researcher employed an interview protocol to gather data on two significant social phenomena from five participants. A repeated analysis of the transcriptions showed that systemic racism, criminalization of behavior, racial policing, and resilience in education emerged as common themes for each participant. Through a structured analysis of all five interviews, it was observed that there was a high degree of overlap in the themes. Themes were neither differentiated nor did new thematic categories emerge throughout the data-gathering process. Instead, the ensuing transcripts reinforced the codes established earlier, resulting in redundancy and

repetition of patterns among all the participants. This situation eventually indicated that data-gathering saturation had occurred post the fifth interview; thus, it warranted an end to data-gathering and justified the adequacy of data for thematic analysis purposes.

During the analysis, after conducting the five interviews, no new codes or themes emerged in the subsequent transcripts. The confirmation obtained from the analysis of the subsequent interviews only confirmed the experiences already gained from the data of the previous interviews: systemic racism, criminalization of behavior, and educational resilience. The fact that all five interview participants demonstrated the repetition of these findings allowed us to conclude that the observed categories grasped the principal content of the participants' experiences. Besides, considering that the transcripts demonstrated redundancy, this observation was in line with the established conditions for declaring saturation with data: the repetition of the information provided during interviews indicates that obtaining additional information will not enhance knowledge about the phenomena under investigation (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). The absence of new codes in multiple transcripts is substantial evidence supporting that the research question has been fully addressed (Guests et al., 2020).

To derive the study's results, I employed thematic analysis. Considering the evidentiary characteristics of the available interview data, I drew an inference about the data saturation principle. Such an inference was based on the considerations driven primarily by the apparent fact that the identified themes had been repeatedly occurring, and no new codes had emerged. Ultimately, it served as grounds for a decision to end the interview data collection process after collecting data from five participants. The after-

effects of this decision contributed to the overall methodological rigor and efficiency of the research design, serving as an explicit reflection of the data saturation principle. In turn, it allowed establishing that the thematic analysis in question has been performed based on a sufficiently rich and repetitive data pool with thematic coverage of core issues.

Data Analysis

I utilized Braun and Clarke's six-step thematic analysis. The first step of Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis is data familiarization. I thoroughly read and immersed myself in the audio recordings and transcripts of the interviews. I listened to the data recordings repeatedly and read the transcripts carefully to build a sufficiently informed and nuanced understanding of how participants express their ideas and experiences. Adhering to standard conventions, reflexive notes can be taken to serve as a means of documenting the initial impression process. These reflexive notes also began to inform the analysis during the coding stage (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This early reflexive process, accompanied by data familiarization, not only strengthened the analysis from a constructivist viewpoint that emphasizes the meaning-construction process and the researcher as a cocreator, but also helped me, the researcher, engage with the data and avoid losing most of the context because of coding.

Furthermore, through early reflexive engagement with the data, I could become more transparent regarding their positionality and the extent to which previous knowledge might influence the interpretation of participants' accounts. To familiarize myself with the data, I read and listened to the five interview transcript files and their

corresponding audio files. Each transcript was read multiple times, and each audio file was listened to, with a particular focus on verbal cues and emotional inflections that may not be reflected in the written transcripts. This orientation was also achieved through reflexive journaling. Being aware of one's personal and professional background and how such dynamics may influence the analytic process is fully aligned with the requirements for good practices in thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

My identity, background, and professional experience as a researcher impacted the research process. I studied this problem as a scholar-practitioner with a background in higher education, community development, and justice reform. In my role as a Master Adjunct Professor, I have taught correctional education programs and delivered curricula to learners who have been affected by incarceration. My work in these environments within carceral settings provided me with significant insight into the systemic barriers and injustices, racial disparities, and the ability of education to turn lives around behind the prison walls, upon teaching weekly. My volunteer work as a Board of Directors member of Citizens for Prison Reform also informed my understanding of advocacy-centered work, policy reform, and the access to and rights of individuals who are incarcerated and formerly incarcerated. As a non-incarcerated educator and advocate, my insider/outsider position influences both my empathy level and analytical perspective. With these experiences, the researcher was prepared to employ a scholarly tone when recruiting participants and conducting interviews.

After an initial familiarization with the data, Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis progresses to the second phase of code development. I conducted a

detailed analysis of all five interview transcripts and their corresponding recordings to identify significant trends and illustrative accounts within the dataset. As recommended by the authors of the trend, I did not use a fixed a priori coding scheme but instead developed the codes as interpretative constructs through iterative engagement with data and reflexivity (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Here, reflexive coding is based on flexibility and inductiveness, which are both vital principles of reflexive thematic analysis. Inductive coding was applied during this analytical phase through a line-by-line reading of all interview transcripts. I identified significant patterns or points of interest systematically; however, these were not defined by the previous frame. In this way, I engaged in interactive, repetitive readings of the data, which allowed them to respond to the constructivist approach, developing interpretations that remained responsive to the data and closely related to the participants.

In the third phase of Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis, known as searching for themes, the inductive coding process involved identifying potential themes, starting from the codes, and searching for patterns within the entire dataset. I needed to organize the code into broader categories of meaning, explore possible intersections, and engage with how these provisional thematic categories may be grounded in participant accounts as well as the analytic lens created during the previous reflexive process (Naeem et al., 2023). There was a need to focus on the subtle ways systemic issues, represented by institutional racism and the overall culture of schooling, penetrated the thematic constructs and could be used coherently. At this stage, the process of organizing

code into potential themes demanded a reflexive engagement with thematic ideas and the form and content of coded data extracts.

The reviewing themes stage of Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis model corresponds to the thorough consideration of the current analytic work developed, given the provisional thematic structure. I examined every possible theme from the perspective of its coherence within the candidate's themes and across them by reanalyzing data segments associated with each theme and evaluating the degree to which they suited the main aims of the analysis. Moreover, my notes regarding any ambiguities, theme interconnections, or contradictions were revisited and formed as the basis for introducing changes to the themes. The reviewing themes stage consolidated the framework of themes into a specific analytical framework that emerged because of a clear commitment to transparency and theoretically grounded accuracy, centered on data and principles of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Finally, the iterative process of testing, verifying, and refining themes involved strategies to secure both the flow between different themes and the individuality of experiences.

The five participants participated in audio interviews over Zoom. The interviews were transcribed via Zoom to ensure the interviewees were accurately captured. Thirty codes were identified through phrases that conveyed the participants' experiences. Definitions of the codes were created, and each code had multiple definitions in different contexts, as described by the participants' experiences. Upon reviewing the transcribed interviews and listening to them multiple times, the definitions of the codes were organized into eight categories. Through a review of the interviews and codes, four

themes were identified that aligned with the research question. Data saturation was reached after five participants completed the interview, and their experiences enriched the codes, categories, and themes. Participants provided details of their experiences and shared experiences related to each question, aligning with thirty codes, eight categories, and four themes, as defined and as illustrated through participant experiences in interview transcription.

I grouped matching codes based on participants' experiences as described in the study, which showed that key practices among institutions, unequal structures, and the lasting damage of discriminatory acts affected the participants during their experiences in educational and other environments as well (Naeem et al., 2023). I believe that my advocacy and reflexive positioning ensured transparency in the study. When coding was complete there were thirty codes, which are: attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), barriers, childhood racial microaggression, coping, criminalizing students, discriminatory, discriminatory treatment, dismissal, economic disparity, education pathway, experiencing racism, over racism, power, racial discrimination, racial division, racial harm, racial microaggression, racial profiling, racial segregation, racial stereotypes, racialized, racism, reintegration, resilience, stereotype, stigma, systemic bias, systemic discrimination, systemic racism, tolerated racism codes formed the eight categories educational experience to criminalization, structural barriers, emotional and mental health impact, microaggression and discriminatory practices, profiling- surveillance and policing, empowerment and educational path, cultural racism and societal perceptions, systemic racism and institutional practices. and transformation. I grouped the matched

codes into eight categories or clusters. The eight categories formed four overarching themes: educational environments as a pathway to criminalization, systemic racism and structural barriers throughout the lifetime, living with microaggressions and discriminatory practices, and lasting psychological harm, and education and resilience to empowerment and transformation. Appendix B contains codes, definitions of codes, categories, and themes.

While many shared experiences were evident across all participants, each person brought a unique perspective that added depth and understanding to the study. These discrepant perspectives helped capture the variety of ways that systemic racism, education, and incarceration are experienced and interpreted, showing that even within shared systems of oppression, individuals respond differently.

Participant 1 (P1) shared his challenges because of personal decisions rather than larger systemic issues. At first, he did not connect his experiences to racism or discrimination. However, as he shared his experiences, he described moments of dismissive treatment, biased assumptions, and racial exclusion, which reflected broader patterns of inequity. He expressed personal accountability for his actions and revealed impactful incidents of racism that impacted him for many years, as well as systemic barriers.

Participant 2 (P2) recognized education as a powerful tool for rebuilding his life, but also expressed distrust toward academic institutions that had, at times, failed to provide support or address bias. He strived to empower himself through education and rebuild himself. “College helped me rebuild, but it also reminded me how much harder I

had to work just to be seen.” His experience added to the theme of education and resilience, showing that while education can open doors, it is not always equitable or supportive for formerly incarcerated Black men. Participant 3 (P3) reported staying silent. He viewed racism as something to be managed rather than challenged. “You pick your battles. Sometimes it is easier to stay quiet and move on.” He exhibited resilience throughout the experiences.

Participant 4 (P4) described prison as a place where he first discovered self-reflection and educational opportunity. He viewed incarceration as a pivotal turning point that enabled him to pursue personal growth and develop a sense of purpose. “Prison was the first place I really got to focus on myself to study, to grow. It wasn’t all bad.” This perspective added nuance to the theme of education and empowerment, showing that growth and transformation can emerge even within oppressive spaces when resources are available.

Participant 5 (P5) experienced school policing more intensely than the others, describing a system in which officers replaced counselors and discipline often led directly to arrest. His story strongly reflected the school-to-prison pipeline, showing how racial discipline starts early and sets the stage for later incarceration. “We didn’t have counselors; we had cops. If you fought, you got a case.” His experiences reinforced the theme of educational environments as gateways to criminalization, while also highlighting the variation in severity and context of these experiences across different communities.

These different viewpoints and experiences were intentionally included in the analysis to reflect the full range of experiences among participants. Together, they show that while systemic racism shapes each life in powerful ways, individuals interpret and respond to it differently based on their history, awareness, and circumstances. Recognizing these differences helped strengthen the study's credibility and confirmability by presenting a more honest and complete picture, one that values both shared patterns and individual variation.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

Credibility enhancement within the research applicability process was of utmost importance, and the strategies presented in Chapter 3 were strictly followed during all stages of data gathering and analysis. The corresponding methods, which aimed to reflect participants' experiences as closely as possible, were employed, including prolonged engagement, triangulation, and member checking. Such adaptation to the data collection methods allowed for a more diverse range of participant perceptions to be included in the data sets, thereby strengthening the representativeness of the data. In turn, adaptations also increased the potential for authentic responses from participants whose availability was initially limited, further contributing to the trustworthiness of the research. Such systematic adaptations of data collection methods are in accordance with one of the recommendations for conducting qualitative research, which is that adapting to context achieves more transparent responses, considered more acceptable by reviewers and other stakeholders (Ahmed, 2024).

Transferability

Aligned with Chapter 3, transferability-preserving strategies concentrated on creating detailed narratives for the research context, sampling characteristics, and sampling rationale. The provision of a detailed narrative that relates to the study context positively contributes to the situational boundaries that could be addressed and transferred by the readers globally. I documented data collection and analysis decisions on an iterative basis, which positively contributes to understanding the impact of social and institutional context on the emergence of accounts (Johnson et al., 2020). Such transparency in reporting, aligned with previously defined quality codes, enables other practitioners to critically evaluate and judge the quality criteria relevant to their own professional settings (Johnson et al., 2020). Hence, by proactively altering documentation practices, the research has been able to prepare detailed instructions for those willing to apply the results in various settings and successfully replicate them (Haq et al., 2023).

Dependability

As per the dependability procedures explained in Chapter 3, I employed systematic documentation and continuous monitoring procedures to ensure the dependability of its outcome. During data collection and analysis, a detailed procedure was employed, utilizing records that included time-stamped field notes, audit trails, and version-controlled analytical memos. Each coding and interpretation process was recorded in detail, allowing for a thorough examination of the methodological choices and serving as a reliable basis for any external auditing. This strategy is consistent with the accepted criteria for trustworthiness, as clearly detailed procedures maximize the faith

of scholarly and professional audiences in the dependability of qualitative work (Ahmed, 2024). Through methodical documentation and constant monitoring of research proceedings, the study establishes the dependability with procedural transparency that provides a basis for others to assess the reliability of its results, as recommended by qualitative research quality frameworks (Ahmed, 2024).

Confirmability

The confirmability-related procedures were discussed in detail in Chapter 3; however, this research employed several strategies to promote objectivity and mitigate potential biases during the qualitative study. The rigorous audit trail was at the core of confirmability-related procedures. It was created to record all decisions related to this qualitative research design, data analysis and included reflective memos that were produced throughout the study. The inclusion of explicit records of analytic rationales and continuous reflexivity practices enabled the conduct of an external audit of the steps taken to arrive at certain conclusions and tracing findings back to the original data from participants (Johnson et al., 2020). The explicit reference to reflexivity as an ongoing process enabled accounting for researchers' potential subjectivity and enhanced the accuracy of interpretation. To address subtle cues suggesting interpretive bias, self-worth, and identity reconstruction, techniques were added to confirm the procedure. Peers' debriefing sessions were incorporated as a compulsory part of the working climate, and, rather than analysis, during the debriefing, peers also critically compared sub-themes with the raw data.

Results

An overview of themes, derived from systematic coding and analysis, revealed four major themes. These themes were created by analyzing the participants' quotes and identifying codes, definitions, categories, and themes within their interviews.

Theme 1: Education and Resilience to Empowerment and Transformation

Participants described education as an integral key factor in their journey toward healing and empowerment. Participants emphasized that academic success provided not only practical tools for reentry but also emotional self-worth and identity reconstruction. The theme was the healing power of education, both as a tool for empowerment after incarceration and as a source of resilience in one's darkest moments. This theme also evidenced how school sometimes was a breeding ground for bias and criminalization, further contributing to the incarceration pipeline.

Participant 1 reported that there is a transformative power during and after incarceration. His reflections suggested that education serves as a form of emotional healing, restoration of self-worth, and identity reconstruction, key dimensions of empowerment for individuals affected by the justice system. The participant's exposure to structured learning and peer-led support within the correctional environment provided a foundation for self-reflection and motivation. When he stated, "I was placed in a program that was supposed to be more supportive for addiction... you had to attend substance abuse, peer meetings, and group meetings were supervised", it reflects an early form of rehabilitative learning where experiential and relational education encouraged introspection. This connection seeded his belief that education could help him, too, "do

something similar" after his release of bridging recovery, purpose, and education into a unified pathway toward empowerment. P1's stated "I ended up going back to college... at first, I was just going to get an associate's degree... but one of my professors encouraged me to go for a bachelor's and then a master's", captures the critical role of mentorship in educational persistence and self-efficacy.

Participant 2 reported that he was self-determined while incarcerated. His determination, "I knew I was getting out... I had to prepare myself." He knew he had to get an education and prepare to reduce stigma after incarceration. When describing his experience with online coursework, "There were so many additional supports—YouTube videos, links, tutorials... I could review and review," which reflects autonomy. Participant 2's emphasis on "being able to take care of myself" reveals the connection between educational attainment and self-sufficiency, a recurring pattern across participants. His learning and continuing education enabled him to enter jobs and reduce stigma through education.

Participant 3 reported motivation from incarceration and criminalization. His statement, "Your actions affect other people... they may not be physically incarcerated, but they're incarcerated with you as well." This is an acknowledgment of accountability for his actions. This acknowledgment became a catalyst for transformation, driving his commitment to change not only for himself but for those emotionally impacted by his incarceration. "The hardest thing I've ever had to do was look in the mirror and realize that I am the root cause of a lot of things that happen in my life, and really accepting accountability... it just fueled me not to come back," With the tenacity of resilience for

an introspection of self to accept personal accountability for actions. Participant 3's empowerment and internal motivation, characterized by a transformative attitude, were evident through determination while incarcerated.

Participant 4's narrative explains that education, which includes learning about emotional intelligence, self-awareness, and spiritual growth, demonstrates a definite development of emotional regulation that works in tandem to foster transformation. He reported, "I am a motivational speaker slash reentry emotional-intelligence coach... I help the justice-impacted community strengthen their emotional intelligence so they can defy the recidivism rate," which illustrates education as a platform for leadership and healing. By framing prison as a "blessing," he redefined confinement as an opportunity for introspection and scholarship: "I found a love for reading... I just started reading and reading... I developed into a scholar." This self-directed learning cultivated intellectual empowerment and emotional discipline, bridging the theory of resilience with principles of emotional intelligence. P4 stated, "If I know I don't ever want to come back, I have to make myself valuable while I'm here... develop skills... put my emotions in perspective," indicating an awareness of emotional regulation and the ability to internalize this to create programming to deliver to others. Education became a means to learn, self-develop, and strive to educate others. As he stated, "Accountability enabled me to grow... I hold myself accountable... that's how I became an adult." His growth led to mentoring others and giving back to the community. P4 advocates that education is a moral and civic responsibility, essential for rehabilitation and the greater good of society.

Participant 5 reported that his individual growth to social advocacy and systemic change was founded on incarceration and his lifelong desire for education, “I knew I wanted to chase it even before I was incarcerated,” which reveals that intellectual aspiration predated incarceration, but structural barriers delayed its fulfillment. Once provided access, he pursued learning intentionally, viewing it as both a personal and societal obligation: “I understood that society was a better place with educated people in it.” For him, education was inseparable from advocacy and reform of the justice system. He emphasized, “Part of being an advocate is learning... knowing the right way and the wrong way to advocate,” showing that education shaped his identity as a man of color committed to systemic equity. By referencing research on education’s correlation with reduced incarceration and violence, “Statistics show that police officers with higher education are less likely to use deadly force”. Participant 5 connected personal transformation to macro-level social progress. P5 reports that policy changes are necessary. “Institutions of higher learning should place an emphasis on finding ways to provide education to people who are incarcerated.”

The experiences shared by Participants 1 through 5 collectively demonstrate that education is transformative, healing, empowering, and an advocacy tool. Each participant shared their unique circumstances related to Theme 1, and their experiences that there is a mechanism against recidivism and a means of reclaiming identity after incarceration. Theme 1 reiterates a multidimensional process of resilience through learning: education functions simultaneously as a coping mechanism, a moral compass, a pathway to opportunity, and a tool of liberation. It not only transforms the individual but also

redefines how society views justice-impacted people as scholars, advocates, and contributors, rather than just offenders. Education became the participants' pathway from incarceration to empowerment, transforming confinement into self-actualization and adversity into agency. In this way, education represents more than academic attainment; it is an emancipatory act that resists structural exclusion and redefines what it means to thrive after incarceration.

Theme 2: Educational Environments as Pathways to Criminalization

Participants consistently described their early educational experiences as environments where discipline, bias, and surveillance converged to criminalize normal adolescent behavior. Rather than being spaces of support and growth, schools functioned as sites of punishment where racially biased discipline and law enforcement presence created conditions that mirrored carceral systems. Participant 1 shared his experiences of early schooling as positive and largely free from racialized or disciplinary bias. His statement, "I was fortunate; I never had a behavioral issue in school... maybe because my father was in the military... discipline we had at home," illustrates how home structure and parental expectations acted as protective factors. His upbringing provided behavioral conditioning that aligned with institutional norms, possibly insulating him from school-based criminalization. He further noted, "I can't really recall anything (racism in school), because my schools were diverse." The experiences of diversity in schooling helped mitigate bias in his educational environment.

Participant 2 experienced feelings of racial bias within the academic environment in higher education. He described, "An instructor... being less critical of my White

counterpart... and giving me more of a hard time," again, feelings of racial bias and discriminatory treatment. His recognition that "we naturally gravitate to people that look like us." While he did not perceive overt racism in earlier schooling due to attending predominantly Black schools, his later experiences revealed how bias evolves with context, from structural in K–12 systems to relational in higher education. His responses to dropping a class and reenrolling elsewhere reflect the emotional toll and self-protective strategies employed by students of color navigating racially biased environments.

Participant 3, although he did not perceive racial bias within his predominantly Black school, described external forces that criminalized his community. He recalled, "Walking home from school and being randomly pulled over and searched by law enforcement... being harassed... you're definitely being stopped... questioned... pulled over." This narrative reveals how community policing and structural surveillance created conditions of collective criminalization where the school-to-prison pipeline extended beyond the classroom into everyday life. His experience that "Everyone I went to high school with... at some point in time were incarcerated... it was like a rite of passage" exemplifies criminalizing students, which indicates that incarceration becomes normalized and equated with adulthood or social validation. He did not attribute his experience directly to school-based punishment; his experiences situate education within a broader ecosystem of racialized control and social conditioning, connecting school discipline to the carceral continuum operating in his community.

Participant 4's experiences illustrate how behavioral differences were criminalized through racially biased disciplinary practices. His experiences of ADHD and acting out

led to constant punishment: "I found myself always in the principal's office... detention, ISS... out-of-school suspensions... transferring to different schools." These repeated removals create feelings of coping, racial harm, and criminalization of students. Students of color are often treated as defiant rather than having learning differences. His reflection on racial disparity in punishment: "White kids acting out just like me... they got a little more chance... my leash was a little shorter... my second time being disruptive and I'm getting suspended." This discussion examines the bias and criminalization of students, as well as the role of implicit bias in shaping disciplinary outcomes. P4 reports, such as "What could have been done differently? ... active communication... find out the variables at home... empathizing... teach kids according to their personalities," demonstrate that there are alternatives to treating students and not allowing criminalization to affect behavioral issues.

Participant 5 discussed the school-to-prison pipeline, referring to behavioral issues in school. His experience, "In my youthful days, punishment was the answer for everything... punishment was considered the solution to all of society's problems," reflects a cultural paradigm of discipline for behavioral issues. He described punitive practices that blurred the boundary between education and law enforcement: "Anytime there was a disruptive kid or a fight, you went to jail. Our school was right across from the precinct. Security guards were uniformed police officers." This is confirmation of the zero-tolerance policies in schools and police presence in schools that criminalize and punish, reinforcing the early stages of the school-to-prison pipeline. P5 reports that systemic racism and criminalizing students were present: "The punishment was removal

from class and school... the teacher interpreted his behavior as defiant, when the reality was, he didn't fully understand what was being asked of him." The racial bias of criminalization left an impression on P5. He concluded that "there were no other options besides punishment... that created a very toxic atmosphere," emphasizing the emotional and structural toxicity embedded in punitive educational systems.

The findings of Theme 2 intersect directly with the study's theoretical framework on Institutional Racism. Participants' descriptions reveal how racial bias is embedded within the structural operations of schooling—from disciplinary policies to implicit interactions creating systemic gateways to incarceration. Schools, intended as sites of learning, instead reproduced racial hierarchies and punitive practices that mirror the justice system. Resilience theory also surfaces implicitly: despite exposure to bias and criminalization, participants learned to navigate, adapt, and resist these oppressive systems. Participants demonstrated resilience and coping (as seen in P2's withdrawal from a biased environment). In contrast, for others, it emerged through self-actualization and advocacy (as in P4 and P5); their resilience was both a coping mechanism and a form of resistance against institutional racism. Ultimately, Theme 2 exposes how educational environments, shaped by institutional racism, often serve as early points of criminalization that perpetuate the school-to-prison pipeline. Yet within this structural adversity, participants developed a critical consciousness and awareness that later fueled their empowerment and advocacy for equitable, restorative educational practices.

Theme 3: Microaggressions, Discriminatory Practices, and Psychological Harm.

Participants' persistent experiences of racial microaggressions, discrimination, and overt hostility collectively shaped their self-perception, emotional well-being, and worldview. These encounters occurred throughout their lives, beginning in school, extending through incarceration, and persisting in reentry and higher education, creating a cumulative psychological burden. Exposure to microaggressions and discriminatory practices described the life-long detrimental impact suffered by participants because of their encounters with racism and discrimination.

Participant 1's experiences represent continued microaggressions and racial harm. He continued to have the feelings that are continued, "It's not so much overt racism... it's more about a look or a tone... a smirk of disapproval... hesitant to be courteous or professional" represents racial discrimination in professional and academic spaces, while excusing or minimizing the racial harm. The dismissal of his creative work further exemplified coping and racial bias. "I was dismissed... my story ending was called 'corny'... it kind of hurt... it would've been more helpful to give me ideas on how to improve it." Similarly, when he recalled, "A poet dismissed my writing... I think that had something to do with racism," his statement reflected the interpersonal impact of racially biased critique and the erasure of authenticity and the denial of competence, often masked as subjectivity or preference. These experiences of a framework of microaggressions as everyday slights that cumulatively reinforce racial hierarchy, which produces psychological harm through consistent questioning of value and belonging (Sue

et al, 2007). Participant 1's encounters reveal how emotional fatigue and internalization of bias can result from subtle yet repeated dismissals of one's intellect and creativity.

Participant 2 shared more structural forms of discrimination that intersect with subtle interpersonal biases. He shared, "Transportation and checking out a car... the process was more intense for me... having to climb more hurdles... for my White counterparts it was easy peasy." This reflects the racialized gatekeeping embedded in everyday institutional procedures of mechanisms that perpetuate inequity while appearing neutral. He also recounted being exposed to overtly racist public narratives: "That radio station said the only reason they had high ratings was because only poor Black people listen... because they can't afford Spotify or Apple Music." The microinsults or societal stereotypes that demean entire racial groups, reinforcing feelings of exclusion and anger. He summarized his emotional toll by stating, "Frustrated... I also worked in (field) and from a professional side, I felt it and saw it." The experiences of racial discrimination across personal and professional spaces have led to emotional exhaustion.

Participant 3 reported experiences of workplace racial harm and overt racism that imposed psychological vigilance and identity management. He noted, "Over Zoom, everything was fine... in the office... she was very guarded... I talk with my hands... move my hand too fast and she would flinch." This illustrates how racialized body perception of associating Black male presence with threat translates into daily interactions that erode dignity and trust. His experiences of being questioned and surveilled at work, "Oh, you really work here? Are you lost? "Who's your manager?" reflects what is termed as everyday assaults on identity (Williams et.al, 2021). These

repeated invalidations suggest that, despite professional success, belonging remains conditional in racialized workspaces. Participant 3's examples of stereotypical comments, "You're very articulate," "You probably have 10 baby mamas," "You play basketball?" capture the duality of "compliments" laced with insult, reducing individuality to stereotypes. His acknowledgment, "It's a daily thing... you just get so used to it... it's kind of expected," illustrates the psychological adaptation of numbing and normalization, a coping mechanism for chronic racial stress.

Participant 4's experiences were grounded in overt racism and institutional violence. He recalled, "At intake... a (guard) used the N-word... he looked at me like, 'so what? What are you going to do about it?'" These words are reflective of discrimination, racial harm, racism, coping, systemic, and tolerated racism. His reaction, "I felt empty... helpless," reveals the emotional paralysis often experienced in environments where challenging racism carries the risk of punishment or harm. The description of exposure to repeated violence, "I started becoming desensitized to seeing people get stabbed... fighting... getting hit with locks," is secondary trauma and coping with systemic racism that erodes empathy and mental well-being. He later identified more subtle racism, "Silent actions... not making available certain opportunities or making it harder for one person as opposed to the next," linking structural inequity to personal consequence. Participant 4's story demonstrates how institutional racism produces psychological harm through fear, mistrust, and emotional depletion, aligning with literature on racial trauma and incarceration (Cénat, 2022).

Participant 5 provided a comprehensive view of lifelong exposure to racism across environments, from incarceration to corporate settings and neighborhood interactions. His experiences, "I've dealt with racism in prison, from the police, in Corporate America, and in my neighborhood," exemplify institutional racism. His experiences of housing discrimination were explicit: "My neighbors told me to my face that I did not belong here... They've called the police on me at least five times without ever having a conversation with me." These incidents reflect racial profiling and exclusion within residential spaces, showing how societal bias polices Black existence even in private life. In corporate contexts, he noted, "They expect you to fall in line or stay quiet in board meetings... controlled by people who don't share the same experiences as me." This demonstrates how professional racism operates through silencing and power imbalance, reinforcing racial hierarchies through unwritten behavioral codes. He also highlighted racial discrimination in incarceration: "Officers would destroy my property... I have been denied medical care and punished more harshly than my fair-complected peers for the same behavior." Systemic racism causes harm from being both policed and disbelieved. His concluding reflection, "Being pulled over for no reason... followed for miles... it was disturbing... I knew I was targeted," captures the trauma of hypervisibility and its lasting effects on emotional well-being.

Across all participants, experiences of microaggressions, discrimination, and psychological harm revealed how racism functions as both a systemic and psychological construct. At the same time, the forms varied from subtle dismissal to overt hostility; the cumulative impact was consistent: erosion of self-worth, chronic vigilance, and emotional

fatigue. Participants developed coping mechanisms ranging from avoidance and withdrawal (P2, P3) to advocacy and empowerment (P4, P5). The representation of dismissive interactions that devalue intellectual and creative contributions (P1) is representative of systemic racism among formerly incarcerated college-educated minority men, with the presence of unequal processes and racialized barriers across systems (P2). Within the formerly incarcerated participants, there is a psychological strain from identity-based assumptions and microinsults (P3), and the overt dehumanization and systemic brutality in incarceration (P4), which racism is persistent across social, professional, and civic domains (P5). Participants' experiences report that the incidents of racism and racial harm had an effect of trauma, with the normalization of discrimination through daily microaggressions and institutional practices representing a chronic form of racialized stress that mirrors and reinforces systemic inequity (Lewis et al., 2013)

Theme 3 aligns with the study's Institutional Racism framework of the experiences of how racism operates across layers of daily life, interpersonal, structural, and cultural, producing sustained psychological harm. The participants' resilience coexisted with emotional exhaustion, revealing that resistance to racism comes with a psychological cost. The experiences of Participants 1 through 5 report that systemic racism is not a one-time event that occurs but is lived in the daily realities of life before, during, and after incarceration. Across their experiences, microaggressions, discrimination, and overt hostility imposed a sustained psychological toll that shaped their identities, emotional health, and worldviews. The participant-level reports reveal micro-level racial microaggressions that mirror macro-level structures of oppression.

Education and advocacy, as seen across all themes, emerged as vital counterforce tools through which participants reconstructed meaning, restored agency, and redefined success on their own terms. After incarceration, participants were able to reclaim their lives through ongoing self-awareness, education, and advocacy (Fairbairn, 2021).

Theme 3 participants illustrate that systemic racism is represented in incarceration, the institutionalization of racial epithets, disparities in treatment, violence in prison, racial disparity of treatment, unfavorable discipline to Black men, implicit bias, and the feelings of continued discrimination, which confirms the direct implications of systemic and institutional racism (Pettit & Gutierrez, 2018). The participants reported that they confronted institutional racism impacts that built resilience and transformed these experiences, reflecting both the enduring impacts of institutional racism and the transformation after incarceration (Sims-Schouten & Gilbert, 2022).

Theme 4: Systemic Racism and Structural Barriers Throughout the Lifetime

It captures the participants' collective recognition of systemic racism as a lifelong continuum of disadvantage, a network of interrelated barriers embedded within education, employment, housing, and the criminal justice system. Participants described how institutional bias is sustained through laws, policies, and practices that normalize racial inequity while preserving structural privilege. The effects of these systems were experienced across multiple life stages: from the early barriers of biased schooling to the racially coded hierarchies of incarceration, to the exclusionary practices in professional and civic life. The participants' reflections reveal that systemic racism is not merely

historical or situational; it is perpetual, structural, and evolving, shaping how individuals of color navigate power, opportunity, and belonging.

Participant 1 reported that mass incarceration is described as a "business" that profits from inequality. He explained, "Rich people can afford to buy attorneys... poor people cannot... It is a business... the idea is to keep the jails full because they're moneymakers." This insight directly exposes the intersection of capitalism and systemic racism, in which marginalized populations are criminalized and commodified for institutional gain. He also emphasized the racial segregation and enforced division within prisons, noting, "Segregation amongst inmates is encouraged... Blacks, Whites, Latinos can't sit together... prison culture enforces racial division." His account underscores how the carceral system reproduces and reinforces racial hierarchies—both through policy and informal prison culture—creating environments that mirror segregationist ideologies.

Participant 2 described racism within professional environments, revealing how overt racism coexists with bureaucratic inaction. He stated, "I worked for (ORG) and... the systemic... racist action, conversation, and words... was very intense." His observation, "I heard a White (manager) call his Black (employee) 'boy.' I can't get any more extreme than that," workplace discrimination with continuous harm leads to a hostile work environment (Okechukwu et al., 2014). With such blatant racism, Participant 2 acknowledged that addressing it was "complicated," reflecting the layers of silence, fear, and professional restraint that perpetuate discriminatory systems.

Participant 3's experiences are discussed in certain areas that are systemic for Black men. He described experiences where being Black in certain regions automatically

invoked suspicion: "Don't let you drive through (certain parts of the city) ... you're definitely getting pulled over." P3 reports of racial segregation in some regions of cities and locations, and it is apparent that when a Black man enters the segregated area and is subjected to racial bias, racial discrimination, or racial microaggression, it reveals how systemic racism manifests in residential Segregation (Popescu et al., 2018). Participant 3's description of "Confederate flags everywhere...Even in 2025, they will directly let you know that they do not like you" is the display of racial intimidation in American culture. (Scott-Jones & Kamara, 2020).

Participant 4's experiences of race "Taken from the city to a very slow rural country town... a lot of racism dwelled within that vicinity where the prisons are... the boondocks" reports and supports correctional facilities that are typically in rural areas. Such environments perpetuate racial and economic hierarchies by concentrating incarcerated populations of color in communities that rely on them for labor and revenue. He further described racial discrimination in employment, "Me and a White guy apply for the job... both qualified... the White guy might have a little advantage because of... White privilege." The recognition of White privilege in his experiences is that a White person would get the job over him, as a Black man (Bhopal, K, 2023). His reflection of "officers... to them, we're all deplorables" is an impact of racism and treatment while incarcerated, while his statement about losing rights, "The most challenging part about being criminalized? My rights taken... not being able to own a gun" reveals how institutional racism impacts racial harm and stigma.

Participant 5 reported experiences of systemic racism across law enforcement, politics, and the community. He explained, "The stigma that comes with not only being Black but having a criminal record reduces your chances of success at pretty much anything." P4's experiences of stigma and treatment as a Black man and the barriers that are encompassed with stigma and the stigmas in reentry (Williams et al., 2019). He emphasized the permanence of this inequity: "Being labeled a criminal is almost like perpetual punishment... regardless of what you do or how high you rise." His analysis of policing and political double standards, "We watched White people carry guns into the Capitol... and nothing happened... That would never happen if it were Black people," resentful attitudes are associated with greater support for gun rights. Racial resentment as a construct captures negative affect toward Black Americans that is expressed in terms of support for conservative values, such as individualism, self-reliance, and a strong work ethic, and the belief that Black people violate these values by instead relying on special government favoritism (Ward, 2022). Participants' testimonies demonstrate that institutional racism is adaptive and self-sustaining, shaping outcomes in every sector from justice to employment to community life. The participants' lived experiences offer empirical evidence of systemic feedback loops—where racialized laws and practices reinforce economic, social, and civic disparities across generations.

Through awareness, perseverance, and education, they learned to navigate, challenge, and redefine their existence within these systems. Theme 4 thus represents the culmination of the participants' collective journey from experiencing racial inequity to recognizing its systemic roots and highlights their transformation into advocates and

truth-tellers. Their insights illuminate the necessity of structural change, not simply individual resilience, as the path toward racial justice and genuine empowerment.

Participants articulated a sophisticated understanding of systemic racism as a lifelong constraint. They shared their experience of barriers with race, criminalization, racism, lack of opportunities, racial profiling, stereotypes, and treatment. They observed racism embedded in multiple institutions, such as law enforcement, government, education, and employment, emphasizing how systemic inequities perpetuate disadvantage. They recounted how leadership in law enforcement reinforced racialized policing. Participants' descriptions revealed that the desire to pursue additional educational experiences was also framed to combat stigma and social exclusion, as well as a beacon of hope for what might be possible for members of their community in the long run. While most participants did demonstrate a desire to pursue educational experiences, their stories were complex. Indeed, several participants discussed how they found it difficult to accept their own empowerment amidst continued systemic disadvantages and self-doubt rooted in past experiences.

All five participants shared experiences of systemic racism. Participant 1 reported subtle and damaging looks, describing “a look or a tone that a person gives... like a look of disgust or whatever, disapproval.” The dismissal of a tone and look to a Black man leaves lasting feelings that cause harm. Participant 2’s experience, “I worked for... and the systemic and racist action, and the conversation and words,” experienced systemic racism. Participant 3 offered a stark depiction of geographic and cultural hostility, stating, “If you in my town... either they’re going to love you, or they’re going to kill you.” His

experiences discuss feelings of hate and exclusion. Participant 4's report, "The time I experienced racism in prison," reports institutional racism in a correctional setting, revealing how institutional power enforces racial hierarchies and dehumanization behind prison walls. Finally, Participant 5 discussed systemic racism, recounting, "I experienced racism in prison, the police, Corporate America, criminal justice reform, legislators, and my neighborhood currently." This reiterates the racism in every sector he is involved with.

With all participants experiencing systemic racism as a part of their schooling, interactions with organizations, while incarcerated, and stigma upon release. Their shared narratives highlight that racism operates not only through explicit acts of prejudice but also through enduring systems of policy, geography, power, and perception that perpetuate inequality. There is a common thread among all five participants of systemic racism. Each participant's testimony demonstrates both the emotional toll and the resilience required to survive within systems designed to marginalize. Ultimately, these collective accounts affirm that systemic racism is both structural and personal—an external system of oppression and an internalized struggle for dignity and belonging. While facing systemic racism, participants were transformed through self-actualization and a sense of purpose, which in turn transformed their lived experiences upon release and led to advocacy.

Despite their challenges and difficulties, moving ahead academically was reported as an avenue to regain control of their lives and hold onto hope for the future, even though participants acknowledged the continued impact of barriers and stigmas on their

daily lives. This opened door of education allowed the participants to develop resilience, feel hope for the present and the future, and acquire skills and knowledge to understand what they could do now, as well as create a sense of what was both possible and realistic to aim for in the future. To this end, they emphasized that accessing and actively pursuing educational opportunities allowed them to regain ownership of their own lives and shape a new identity as someone who can move forward despite the structural obstacles and impediments that still exist.

Participant 1's experience reflects that substance use disorder caused his incarceration. After his imprisonment, he was motivated to pursue higher education. He is an advocate and voice for those who have been formerly incarcerated. His criminal record has hindered his ability to volunteer in some areas, but he continues to be a voice for change. He reflects on a tone or look that he has experienced of being a Black man that others look at him with disgust. He shared numerous experiences of racial microaggressions that began in childhood and persisted in adulthood.

Participant 2's experiences reflect racism in the workplace after overcoming the stigma of being incarcerated. He also experienced racism in educational settings. Education created an opportunity not only for employment but for personal growth. He identifies as an advocate and voice, actively involved in efforts to reduce stigma in various areas. He is a voice of change, and he is eager to grow into new opportunities. He described education as an essential part of changing his past and continues to advocate and create change in various organizations.

Participant 3's experiences reflect a resilience shaped by exposure to systemic inequities and racism. He has faced overt and direct racism in actions, words, and treatment of others. Education created options and is an advocate to reduce the stigma of those who were formerly incarcerated. He recognizes that access to education was inconsistent and often required self-advocacy within systems resistant to supporting incarcerated learners. He recounted numerous experiences of racial bias and subtle exclusions throughout his life.

Participant 4's experiences of behavioral issues in school, taking accountability for his actions. He reports that he could not read when he went to prison and began to transform his life with reading, school, and creating opportunities when released to advocate for others and reduce the stigma of those formerly incarcerated. His early behavioral challenges were treated as defiance rather than as indicators of unmet needs. His reflection highlights how exclusionary school practices—rather than intervention and support—served as precursors to involvement in the carceral system. He currently advocates being a voice and creating opportunities for justice-impacted individuals.

Participant 5's experiences reflect a lifetime of navigating systemic racism, from biased school discipline to overt discrimination in prison and systemic racism in professional spaces. During his experiences, he has become an empowered advocate, utilizing education as a vehicle for resistance and restoration. P5 identified education as a cornerstone of transformation. He is an advocate, a voice for those who have been wrongfully convicted, and advocates and leads multiple organizations. His life narrative

was marked by sustained encounters with racism—direct and indirect across his personal freedom, educational, professional, and carceral spaces.

Summary

Reviewing the research question of what the experiences of systemic racism are among formerly incarcerated, college-educated minority men who faced behavioral issues leading to incarceration. Across five participants (ages 36–66; 2.9–15.9 years incarcerated; college through master's degrees), systemic racism was experienced as a lifelong, layered phenomenon that (a) began in school through racialized discipline and surveillance, (b) intensified through policing and carceral practices, and (c) persisted post release in higher education and the labor market despite academic success.

Patterns are aligning with the research question of educational environments as pathways to criminalization. Schools frequently manage behavior with punishment, exclusion, and law enforcement referral rather than support (e.g., in-school/out-of-school suspensions, security/police as first responders, removals). Participants described shorter leashes for Black boys (P4) and jail instead of opportunities (P5). They missed opportunities for differentiation when disengagement reflected unmet needs (ADHD, boredom, misalignment of pedagogy) rather than willful defiance. A discrepant case (P1) did not experience school criminalization, underscoring contextual variation (family structure, diverse schooling). Correlations and patterns aligning with the research questions that were presented from the research of the participants included microaggressions, discriminatory practices, and psychological harm.

The participants reported everyday slights, comments regarding questioning belonging, competence with guarded body language, over-hostility (racial epithets, unequal information) that produces stress, trauma, vigilance, and helplessness (as an example in P4's "empty feeling after a slur; P3's need to set boundaries around "monkey" jokes). These experiences spanned neighborhoods, workplaces, campuses, and reentry. There are carceral and policing inequities that are systemic, not incidental. Participants encountered over-policing, pretextual stops, destructive cell "shakedowns," harsher punishments, and gatekeeping of medical care and jobs (P5), alongside geographies of incarceration (rural, predominantly White prison towns that normalize an "us vs. them" culture; P4–P5).

Several noted that organizational leadership and policy (ticket quotas, tolerated racism, and discretionary discipline) structured these experiences more than any single individual. Structural barriers that persist in post-release. A criminal record functioned as a durable stigma, constraining volunteering, employment, and civic life (P1, P5). Participants reported workplace favoritism, uneven scrutiny in courses, and narrowed advancement, even with advanced degrees, illustrating how credentialing alone does not neutralize racialized surveillance and bias. Education was defined as resistance, repair, and reauthoring. Despite facing barriers in childhood and lacking access to postsecondary education prior to incarceration, participants obtained education to rebuild their identities, expand their opportunities, develop their voices, and mentor others (P1–P5). Several framed prison libraries and coursework aimed to transform literacy, emotional intelligence, and disciplined decision making (P4), while others emphasized advocacy

training and policy literacy (P2, P5). Education mitigated but did not erase structural constraints.

There was a continuum, not episodes of racism that operated across systems and time, compounding effects from childhood into adulthood. Power and discretion: The most consequential harms were correlated with institutional power (administrators, police, corrections, and supervisors) and discretionary policies that enabled unequal treatment. Shared oppression was evident in discrepant or muted school experiences (e.g., P1, P3), highlighted contextual buffers (such as school composition and family discipline), and cautioned against single-story generalizations. Agency, alongside constraint, Participants held strong accountability narratives and a future orientation, even as they named structural causes. This duality of self-efficacy amid constraint is central to understanding their "school-to-prison-to-success" trajectories. There was a thematic map, from codes to categories to themes. The Evidence was clustered into four themes: Education & Resilience to Empowerment and Transformation (education as a tool, identity repair, advocacy), Educational Environments as Pathways to Criminalization (discipline, surveillance, removals), Living with Microaggressions, Discriminatory Practices, and Lasting Psychological Harm, and Systemic Racism & Structural Barriers Throughout the Lifetime (policy/practice inequities across institutions). The redundancy of these patterns across all five cases signaled data saturation.

The results indicate that individual growth through education coexists with enduring structural impediments, suggesting that interventions must move beyond remediation of individuals to reform of systems (school discipline policies, campus

supports for justice-impacted learners, policing/corrections practices, hiring/volunteering restrictions). Chapter 5 will (a) interpret these findings in relation to the literature on school-to-prison pathways, reentry, and critical race perspectives; (b) delineate practice and policy recommendations for K–12, higher education, reentry supports, and employers; (c) discuss limitations and transferability; and (d) propose future research that centers longitudinal, multi-system interventions capable of disrupting the lifetime accumulation of racialized harm while scaling the protective effects of education.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

In this qualitative study, I explored how systemic racism is experienced by formerly incarcerated, college-educated Black men who faced behavioral issues that contributed to incarceration. It focused on their educational and carceral pathways, labeling experiences, and the role of education in resilience and post-secondary transition. Although extensive scholarship exists on the school-to-prison pipeline, mass incarceration, and racialized discipline, there remains a gap concerning the lived experiences of those who have navigated both criminalization in youth and higher education after release. This study addressed that gap and elevated participants' voices to inform policy and practice across K–12, higher education, incarceration, and reentry systems.

Key findings revealed that educational environments often served as pathways to criminalization, marked by exclusionary, police-forward disciplinary practices that transformed unmet behavioral or learning needs into punishment. Across their life course, they encountered systemic racism and structural barriers, biased policies, discretionary practices, and geographic inequities in policing, corrections, employment, and volunteering that perpetuated disadvantage beyond release. Within the structural barriers, participants used education to restore their lives, leveraging learning, mentorship, and credentials to rebuild their identity, agency, and opportunities. While prior research has examined the school-to-prison pipeline and reentry outcomes, few studies have centered on Black men who were criminalized in youth, later attained higher education, and could

retrospectively trace a school-to-prison-to-success trajectory. This project contributes to emerging scholarship and offers a nuanced understanding of resilience, identity, and advocacy among scholars who have been impacted by justice.

Interpretation of the Findings

Participants confirm the literature on the school-to-prison pipeline. Descriptions of zero-tolerance logic, criminalization of school discipline, and arrests for typical adolescent behaviors align with research documenting racialized discipline and criminalization in schools (Sevon, 2022). This research study indicated that it extends the scholarship on trauma and microaggression. Narratives trace cumulative racial stress from early schooling through prison and reentry, reinforcing links among discrimination, vigilance, and mental-health strain (Himmelstein et al., 2014) while showing context-shifting expressions (from “looks and tones” to explicit epithets in prison). It confirms systemic/institutional racism frameworks. Descriptions of facially neutral practices (e.g., quotas, screening rules, rural siting, discretionary shakedowns) that produce disparate harm reflect institutional/structural racism mechanisms (Ray, 2019). It was found that this complicates narratives of higher education as a means of equalization. While education fosters opportunities, participants are still confronted with stigma, bias, and barriers (e.g., prohibitions on volunteering), and form their own advocacy against stigma (Byrne, 2022). There is an added nuance via discrepant cases. Reports of minimal school-based racism for P1 (in diverse schools with strong family discipline) do not negate systemic trends but rather illuminate contextual buffers. The findings also expand scholarship on racial trauma and microaggressions, demonstrating how cumulative racial

stress begins in early schooling and continues through incarceration and reentry. Participants' experiences report discrimination and vigilance is a mental-health strain (Moody et al., 2022), revealing how racialized experiences evolve contextually from subtle looks and tones in professional settings to explicit racial epithets in prison.

The intersectionality and life-course views of overlapping identities such as race, gender, and class (Carey, 2024) and cumulative disadvantage clarify how early labeling and surveillance reverberate into adulthood, even after degree attainment. There was labeling and stigma that helped interpret durable post-release constraints (e.g., “perpetual punishment” of a record) and the strategic use of education to reauthor identity and social value. The participants' experiences strongly align with the theory of institutional racism. The participant revealed how disparities are upheld through practices that yield racially disparate outcomes across education, policing, corrections, and employment (Banaji et al., 2021).

Limitations of the Study

Limitations of the study include the sample and transferability of findings, which represent the primary limitations. Although the findings are analytically generalizable and theoretically informative, they are not statistically representative of all formerly incarcerated, college-educated Black men. Recruitment through professional and reentry networks may have resulted in selection bias, overrepresenting participants who were highly educationally engaged, advocacy-oriented, and reflective about their experiences. A second limitation concerns the self-reported and retrospective nature of the data. Participant narratives relied on memory and subjective reflection, which may be

influenced by recall bias, emotional salience, or post hoc interpretation. While such narratives provide rich insight into meaning-making and identity construction, they cannot be cross-verified with administrative or institutional records, which were beyond the scope of this project.

Additionally, to gather data, I conducted virtual interviews on the Zoom videoconferencing platform. The online format may have affected rapport, nonverbal communication, or the depth of disclosure. However, these potential biases were noted, and I worked through reflexive journaling and an audit trail to ensure an analytic process and maintain ethics and integrity throughout the study, avoiding bias. With these limitations, the study's rigor was enhanced through adherence to qualitative standards of trustworthiness—credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Recommendations

The recommendations for future research include comparative samples that include women, non-Black men of color, and non-college reentrants to test the generality of pathways and turning points. It could include a longitudinal, mixed methods design to follow cohorts from school discipline to justice contact, reentry, and college/work, pairing interviews with discipline, policing, corrections, and HR/volunteer data to triangulate disparities. There is a need to conduct programs and policy evaluations. Rigorously test restorative/needs-responsive school discipline, police in school role redesign, justice-impacted student services (admissions, financial aid navigation, mental-health supports), and record-relief implementation. There could be a place-based inquiry. To examine rural prison geographies, local labor markets, and policing directives (e.g.,

quota cultures) to isolate contextual mechanisms. They can also examine digital and institutional bias to investigate algorithmic screening in hiring/admissions/volunteering as contemporary extensions of institutional racism (Matthew, 2022).

Implications

The research study can create positive social change for individuals and families by embedding literacy/Emotional Intelligence /and advocacy skill-building, as well as family-inclusive advising, in reentry and campus programs to counter stigma and sustain persistence. There can be changes to organizational structures (K–12, higher ed, corrections, employers/volunteers) to replace exclusionary discipline with restorative, trauma-informed, and culturally responsive practices, and to decouple routine behavior management from law enforcement explicitly. Justice-impacted student resource centers can be established (application/aid navigation, mental health support, prior learning credit), and faculty/staff training on microaggressions can be offered. There can be additional corrections to expand postsecondary access, protect learning time, and enforce professional standards to curb discretionary abuse.

Employers/volunteer organizations should implement Ban-the-Box-plus (including individualized assessments, time since offense, and structured interviews) to reduce "perpetual punishment." A policy can be implemented to strengthen record-sealing/expungement pathways, require transparent discipline, and halt data reporting, as well as curtail quota-like enforcement practices that disproportionately harm individuals. There is a further recommendation to address the education of the experiences of formerly incarcerated individuals and their feelings about these experiences, promoting

change. The impacts of systemic racism and the treatment of Black men are essential to educate people on how they can influence their actions. It is also essential for change that there is education surrounding the stigma of the formerly incarcerated. Sharing the participants' experiences of what they have experienced and how that has impacted their lives, with systemic values, can contribute to others treating them differently.

The practice aligns with Chapter 2, supported by evidence that education in prison and post-release reduces recidivism and fosters reentry, underscoring the need to scale such pathways (Byrne, 2022). This study demonstrates the utility of reflexive thematic analysis and audit-trail documentation for exploring sensitive justice-related topics. Empirically, it supports the explanatory power of institutional racism in understanding cumulative disadvantage and the process of identity repair. The findings reinforce evidence that education, especially within prison and reentry contexts, reduces recidivism and promotes civic and occupational reintegration, highlighting the importance of scaling such initiatives (Byrne, 2022).

Conclusion

Participants' narratives show that systemic racism operates as a lifelong continuum beginning with racialized school discipline and surveillance, intensifying through policing and prison cultures, and persisting in higher-ed and labor markets while education functions as resistance and repair, enabling identity reauthoring, advocacy, and community leadership. Significant findings are (a) credentials empower individuals, but unchanged systems continue to reproduce racialized barriers, and (b) durable change requires policy and organizational shifts alongside individual supports. The study's

recommendations identify actionable levers in schools, colleges, reentry services, employers, and public policy to interrupt the accumulation of harm and expand conditions that make school-to-prison-to-success trajectories possible in the presence of institutional racism. The essence of systemic racism is noted and present in the literature review and among the participants in this research study.

This study's recommendations identify actionable levers within schools, colleges, reentry programs, employers, and public policy to transform the school-to-prison-to-success trajectory from exception to expectation. This research study was prompted by the gap and research problem of systemic racism that led to criminalizing students who face behavioral incidents that lead to incarceration (Jacobs et.al., 2022). Within this study, all participants shared experiences of systemic racism and the effects that racism has had on their lives, with lifelong impacts of harm.

References

- Abbott, P., DiGiacomo, M., Magin, P., & Hu, W. (2018). A scoping review of qualitative research methods used with people in prison. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 17(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406918803824>
- Addison, H. A., Richmond, T. S., Lewis, L. M., & Jacoby, S. (2022). Mental health outcomes in formerly incarcerated Black men: A systematic mixed studies review. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 78(1), 1851-1869. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.15235>
- Adedoyin, A. C., Moore, S. E., Robinson, M. A., Clayton, D. M., Boamah, D. A., & Harmon, D. K. (2019). The dehumanization of Black males by police: Teaching social justice—Black life really does matter! *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, 39(2), 111–131. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08841233.2019.1586807>
- Adler, R. H. (2022). Trustworthiness in qualitative research. *Journal of Human Lactation*, 38(4), 598–602. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08903344221116620>
- Ahmad, M., & Wilkins, S. (2025). Purposive sampling in qualitative research: A framework for the entire journey. *Quality & Quantity*, 59(2), 1461–1479. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-024-02022-5>
- Ahmed, S. K. (2024). The pillars of trustworthiness in qualitative research. *Journal of Medicine, Surgery, and Public Health*, 2, Article 100051. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.glmedi.2024.100051>
- Ahmed, S. K., Mohammed, R. A., Nashwan, A. J., Ibrahim, R. H., Abdalla, A. Q., Ameen, B. M. M., & Khdir, R. M. (2025). Using thematic analysis in qualitative

research. *Journal of Medicine, Surgery, and Public Health*, 6, Article 100198.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.glmedi.2025.100198>

Ako, T., Plugge, E., Mhlanga-Gunda, R., & Van Hout, M. C. (2020). Ethical guidance for health research in prisons in low- and middle-income countries: A scoping review. *Public Health*, 186, 217–227. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.puhe.2020.07.008>

Alexander, M. (2020). *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (10th anniversary ed.). The New Press.

Alvarez, A. (2020). *Seeing Race in Research on Youth Trauma and Education: A Critical Review*. *Review of Educational Research*, 90(5), 583–626.

<https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654320938131>

Amiot, M. N., Mayer-Glenn, J., & Parker, L. (2019). Applied critical race theory: educational leadership actions for student equity. *Race, Ethnicity, and Education*, 23(2), 200–220. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2019.1599342>

Anderson, R. E., McKenny, M. C., & Stevenson, H. C. (2018). EMBRace: Developing a racial socialization intervention to reduce racial stress and enhance racial coping among Black parents and adolescents. *Family Process*, 58(1), 53–67.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/famp.12412>

Archibald, M. M., Ambagtsheer, R. C., Casey, M. G., & Lawless, M. (2019). Using Zoom videoconferencing for qualitative data collection: Perceptions and experiences of researchers and participants. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 18. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406919874596>

- Baffour, F. D., Francis, A. P., Chong, M. D., & Harris, N. (2024). Prison overcrowding and harsh conditions: Health and human rights concerns people in custody, staff, and the community. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, *51*(3), 375–400.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/00938548231219803>
- Bailey, T.-K. M., Yeh, C. J., & Madu, K. (2022). Exploring Black adolescent males' experiences with racism and internalized racial oppression. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, *69*(4), 375–388. <https://doi.org/10.1037/cou0000591>
- Bailey, Z. D., Feldman, J. M., & Bassett, M. T. (2021). How structural racism works — Racist policies as a root cause of U.S. racial health inequities. *New England Journal of Medicine*, *384*(8), 768–773. <https://doi.org/10.1056/nejmms2025396>
- Balaghi, D., & Okoroji, C. (2023). Using critical race theory to support Black students in schools: A call to educators. *International Journal of School & Educational Psychology*, *11*(3), 286–297. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21683603.2023.2190184>
- Banaji, M. R., Fiske, S. T., & Massey, D. S. (2021). Systemic racism: Individuals and interactions, institutions and society. *Cognitive Research: Principles and Implications*, *6*, Article 82. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41235-021-00349-3>
- Bang, H. (2024). *Enhancing credibility in qualitative research: The roles of member checking and triangulation*. *Qualitative Research Journal*, *24*(2), 145–160.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/QRJ-10-2023-0158>
- Barbarin, O. A. (2024). Black boys unchained: Removing the constraints of racial disparities in discipline at school. *The American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, *94*(4), 468–476.

- Bargallie, D., & Lentin, A. (2022). *Beyond convergence and divergence: Towards a 'both and' approach to critical race and critical Indigenous studies in Australia*. *Current Sociology*, 70(5), 665–681. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00113921211024701>
- Barrett, N., McEachin, A., Mills, J. N., & Valant, J. (2021). Disparities and Discrimination in Student Discipline by Race and Family Income *Journal of Human Resources*, 56(3), 711–748. <https://doi.org/10.3368/jhr.56.3.0118-9267r2>
- Barry, C. (2023, December 7). *One in Five: Racial Disparity in Imprisonment — Causes and Remedies – The Sentencing Project*. The Sentencing Project. <https://www.sentencingproject.org/reports/one-in-five-racial-disparity-in-imprisonment-causes-and-remedies>
- Basile, V., York, A., & Black, R. (2022). *Who is the one being disrespectful? Understanding and deconstructing the criminalization of elementary school boys of color*. *Urban Education*, 57(9), 1592–1620. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085919842627>
- Baumgartner, F. R., Caron, C., & Duxbury, S. (2023). *Racial resentment and the death penalty*. *Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Politics*, 8(1), 42–60. <https://doi.org/10.1017/rep.2022.30>
- Beachum, F. D., & Gullo, G. L. (2019). School Leadership: Implicit Bias and Social Justice. In *Springer eBooks* (pp. 1–26). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-74078-2_66-1.
- Beckett, K., & Francis, M. M. (2020). The Origins of Mass Incarceration: The racial politics of crime and punishment in the Post–Civil Rights era. *Annual Review of*

Law and Social Science, 16(1), 433–452. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-lawsocsci-110819-100304>

Beckles, H. (2013). *Britain's Black debt: Reparations for Caribbean Slavery and Native Genocide*. University of the West Indies Press

Bellagamba, A., Greene, S. E., & Klein, M. A. (2016). *African Voices on Slavery and the Slave Trade: Volume 2, Essays on Sources and Methods*. Cambridge University Press.

Bellani, L., Hager, A., & Maurer, S. E. (2022). The Long Shadow of Slavery: The persistence of slave owners in Southern lawmaking. *The Journal of Economic History*, 82(1), 250–283. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0022050721000590>

Bhatia, M., & Burnett, J. (2022). IMMIGRATION RAIDS AND RACIST STATE VIOLENCE. *State Crime Journal*, 11(1), 33–51. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48675912>

Bhopal, K. (2023). Critical race theory: Confronting, challenging, and rethinking White privilege. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 49(1), 111–128. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-031021-123710>

Bolarinwa, O. A. (2020). Principles and methods of validity and reliability testing of questionnaires used in social and health science research. *Nigerian Postgraduate Medical Journal*, 27(4), 258–264. https://doi.org/10.4103/npmj.npmj_208_20

Bonventre, C. L. (2021). Forensic science bias: The need for transparency and reform. *Albany Law Review*, 84(4), 1231–1260. <https://www.albanylawreview.org>

- Bouncken, R. B., Czakon, W., & Schmitt, F. (2025). Purposeful sampling and saturation in qualitative research methodologies: recommendations and review. *Review of Managerial Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11846-025-00881-2>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Braun, V., Clarke, V., Hayfield, N., Davey, L., & Jenkinson, E. (2023). Doing a reflexive thematic analysis. In *Supporting research in counselling and psychotherapy: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods research* (p. 19–38). Springer International Publishing.
- Braun, V., Clarke, V., Hayfield, N., & Terry, G. (2019). Thematic analysis. In P. Liamputtong (Ed.), *Handbook of research methods in health social sciences* (pp. 843–860). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-5251-4_103
- Braveman, P. A., Arkin, E., Proctor, D., Kauh, T., & Holm, N. (2022). Systemic and Structural racism: definitions, examples, health damages, and approaches to dismantling. *Health Affairs*, 41(2), 171–178. <https://doi.org/10.1377/hlthaff.2021.01394>
- Brooks, S. K., & Greenberg, N. (2021). Psychological impact of being wrongfully accused of criminal offences: A systematic literature review. *Medicine, Science and the Law*, 61(1), 44–54. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0025802420949065>
- Bryan, N. (2020). Shaking the bad boys: Troubling the criminalization of Black boys' childhood play, hegemonic white masculinity and femininity, and the school

playground-to-prison pipeline. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 23(5), 673–692.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2018.1512483>

Burnett-Bowie, S. M., Zeidman, J. A., Soltoff, A. E., Carden, K. T., James, A. K., & Armstrong, K. A. (2022). Attitudes and Actions Related to Racism: The Anti-Racism (ARC) Survey Study. *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, 37(10), 2337–2344. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11606-021-07385-1>

Bureau of Justice Statistics. (2023, December). *Prisoners in 2022 – Statistical tables*.

U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs.

https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDOJOJP_COMMS/bulletins/37d686

f

Butler-Barnes, S. T., Allen, P. C., Williams, M. A., & Jackson, A. N. (2020). Stereotypes of African Americans. In M. S. Plous (Ed.), *Stereotypes* (pp. 109–127).

Bloomsbury Academic. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9798216018902.ch-006>

Byrd, M. E. (2020). Informed consent in qualitative research: Ensuring ethical participation and protecting human subjects. *Journal of Empirical Research on Human Research Ethics*, 15(3), 200–212.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1556264620907446>

Byrne, D. (2022). A worked example of Braun and Clarke’s approach to reflexive thematic analysis. *Quality & Quantity*, 56(3), 1391–1412.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-021-01182-y>

Cain, L. K., Williams, R. E., & Bradshaw, V. (2023). Establishing quality in qualitative research: Trustworthiness, validity, and a lack of consensus. In D. P. Baker (Ed.),

International Encyclopedia of Education (4th ed., pp. 336–350). Elsevier.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/b978-0-12-818630-5.11032-2>

- Camp, N. P. (2023). Institutional interactions and racial inequality in policing: How everyday encounters bridge individuals, organizations, and institutions. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 18(2). <https://doi.org/10.1111/spc3.12930>
- Campbell, S., Greenwood, M., Prior, S., Shearer, T., Walkem, K., Young, S., Bywaters, D., & Walker, K. (2020). Purposive sampling: Complex or simple? Research case examples. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 76(9), 2282–2290.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.14382>
- Carcary, M. (2020). The research audit trail: Methodological guidance for application in practice. *Electronic Journal of Business Research Methods*, 18(2), 166–177.
<https://doi.org/10.34190/JBRM.18.2.008>
- Carey, R. L. (2024). Criminalized or stigmatized? An intersectional power analysis of the charter school treatment of Black and Latino boys. *Urban Education*, 60(2).
<https://doi.org/10.1177/00420859241227947>
- Carter, N., Bryant-Lukosius, D., DiCenso, A., Blythe, J., & Neville, A. J. (2014). The use of triangulation in qualitative research. *Oncology Nursing Forum*, 41(5), 545–547. <https://doi.org/10.1188/14.ONF.545-547>
- Cénat, J. M. (2022). Complex Racial Trauma: evidence, theory, assessment, and treatment. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 18(3), 675–687.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/17456916221120428>

- Chavis, A., & Johnson, D. (2023). Internalized racism and racial self-identity formation in Black children. *Pediatrics*, *152*(2), e2023061292.
<https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2023-061292>
- Christou, P. A. (2022). How to use thematic analysis in qualitative research. *Journal of Qualitative Research in Tourism*, *3*(2), 79–95.
<https://doi.org/10.4337/jqrt.2023.0006>
- Churchwell, K., Elkind, M. S. V., Benjamin, R. M., Carson, A. P., Chang, E. K., Lawrence, W., Mills, A., Odom, T. M., Rodriguez, C. J., Rodriguez, F., Sanchez, E., Sharrief, A. Z., Sims, M., & Williams, O. (2020). Call to action: Structural racism as a fundamental driver of health disparities: A presidential advisory from the American Heart Association. *Circulation*, *142*(24), e454–e468.
<https://doi.org/10.1161/CIR.0000000000000936>
- CITI Program. (n.d.). *Certificates of confidentiality and protecting sensitive research data*. Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Program).
<https://about.citiprogram.org>
- Cloutier, C., & Ravasi, D. (2021). Using tables to enhance trustworthiness in qualitative research. *Strategic Organization*, *19*(1), 113–133.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1476127020979329>
- Cohen, D. R., Lewis, C., Eddy, C. L., Henry, L., Hodgeson, C., Huang, F. L., Reinke, W. M., & Herman, K. C. (2023). In-school and out-of-school suspension: Behavioral and psychological outcomes in a predominantly Black sample of middle school

students. *School Psychology Review*, 52(1), 1–14.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/2372966X.2020.1856628>

Coker, D. C. (2022). *A thematic analysis of the structure of delimitations in the dissertation. International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, 17, 141–159.

<https://doi.org/10.28945/4939>

Collins, D. R., & Cannella, G. S. (2021). Racisms in qualitative inquiry: Recognitions and challenges. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 27(10), 1139–1145.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/10778004211021802>

Collins, P. H., Silva, K. A. D., & Gomes, M. C. A. (2021). Intersectionality, epistemic oppression and resistance: An interview with Patrícia Hill Collins. *Trabalhos Em Linguística Aplicada*, 60(1), 187–206.

Colosi, H., Costache, C., & Colosi, I. A. (2019). Informational privacy, confidentiality, and data security in research involving human subjects. *Applied Medical Informatics*, 41, 16–23.

Couloute, L. (2024). “They Need to Go in There”: Criminalized Subjectivity among Formerly Incarcerated Black Men. *Socius: Sociological Research for a Dynamic World*, 10(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/23780231231224630>

Cox, K. (2024). About Pew Research Center. *Most Black Americans believe U.S. institutions were designed to hold Black people back* (pp. 2–2). Pew Research Center. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep61026.2>

Crain, E. E., Davis, L. S., St. Louis, G., Jensen, H., Robertson, I., Meade, G., Carrasco, S., Overbey, D., & Alves, L. (2024). “Are you supposed to be here?” “Formerly

incarcerated men of color navigating positions of authority. *Journal of Social Issues*, 80(2), 496–530. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12623>

Cramer, R. F., Keldin, G., & Nelson, H. (2024). Institutional racism in the United States revisited (L. L. Knowles, Ed.). Chapman University.
<https://doi.org/10.36837/chapman.000602>

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Sage Publications

Curran, F. C., Fisher, B. W., Viano, S., & Kupchik, A. (2019). Why and when do school resource officers engage in school discipline? The role of context in shaping disciplinary involvement. *American Journal of Education*, 126(1), 33–63.
<https://doi.org/10.1086/705499>

Cypress, B. S. (2019). Qualitative research: Challenges and dilemmas. *Dimensions of Critical Care Nursing*, 38(5), 264–270.
<https://doi.org/10.1097/DCC.0000000000000371>

Dado, M., Spence, J. R., & Elliot, J. (2023). The case of contradictions: How prolonged engagement, reflexive journaling, and observations can contradict qualitative methods. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 22.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069231189372>

Daniels, C., Aluso, A., Burke-Shyne, N., Koram, K., Rajagopalan, S., Robinson, I., Shelly, S., Shirley-Beavan, S., & Tandon, T. (2021). Decolonizing drug policy. *Harm Reduction Journal*, 18(1), 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12954-021-00564-7>

- Dankar, F. K., Gergely, M., & Dankar, S. K. (2019). Informed consent in biomedical research. *Computational and Structural Biotechnology Journal*, *17*, 463–474. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.csbj.2019.03.010>
- Darity, W. A., & Mullen, A. K. (2020). *From here to equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the twenty-first century*. University of North Carolina Press. <Http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9781469654997>
- Darling-Hammond, S., & Ho, E. (2024). No matter how you slice it, Black students are punished more: The persistence and pervasiveness of discipline disparities. *AERA Open*, *10*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23328584241293411>
- Darnell, J. S., Perry, M., Lamoureux, N., & Lee, E. (2022). Do not let perfect be the enemy of good: proof of concept for a custom national data repository of quality measures for free and charitable clinics. *Health Equity*, *6*(1), 708–716. <https://doi.org/10.1089/heq.2022.0078>
- Davis, L. M., Bozick, R., Steele, J. L., Saunders, J., & Miles, J. N. V. (2013). *Evaluating the effectiveness of correctional education: A meta-analysis of programs that provide education to incarcerated adults*. RAND Corporation. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR266.html
- Demirci, J. R. (2023). About research: Conducting better qualitative interviews. *Journal of Human Lactation*, *40*(1), 21–24. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08903344231213651>
- Desmond, M. (2019, August 14). To understand the brutality of American capitalism, you have to start on the plantation. *The New York Times Magazine*.

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/slavery-capitalism.html>

Dhingra, R., Kilborn, M., & Woldemikael, O. (2022). *Immigration policies and access to the justice system: The effect of enforcement escalations on undocumented immigrants and their communities*. *Political Behavior*, 44(3), 1359–1387.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-020-09663-w>

Di Marco, M. H., & Sandberg, S. (2023). “This is my story”: Why people in prison participate in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 22, 16094069231171102. <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069231171102>

Dodgson, J. E. (2019). Reflexivity in qualitative research. *Journal of Human Lactation*, 35(2), 220–222. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0890334419830990>

Dodzro, R. N. A. (2023). *The life of a top boy: A qualitative exploration of young Black men and their stories of experiencing violent activity in the context of gang affiliation and trauma* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Hertfordshire). Hertfordshire University Research Archive.

<http://uhra.herts.ac.uk/handle/2299/27348>

Drescher, S. (2019). The Atlantic slave trade and the Holocaust: A comparative analysis. In A. S. Rosenbaum (Ed.), *Is the Holocaust unique? Perspectives on comparative genocide* (pp. 97–117). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429037009-8>

Dumont, D. M., Allen, S. A., Brockmann, B. W., Alexander, N. E., & Rich, J. D. (2013). Incarceration, community health, and racial disparities. *Journal of Health Care*

for the Poor and Underserved, 24(1), 78–88.

<https://doi.org/10.1353/hpu.2013.0000>

Dwyer-Lindgren, L., Kendrick, P., Baumann, M. M., Li, Z., Schmidt, C., Sylte, D. O., Daoud, F., La Motte-Kerr, W., Aldridge, R. W., Bisignano, C., Hay, S. I., Mokdad, A. H., & Murray, C. J. L. (2024). Disparities in wellbeing in the USA by race and ethnicity, age, sex, and location, 2008–21: an analysis using the Human Development Index. *The Lancet*. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736\(24\)01757-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736(24)01757-4)

Earp, B. D., Lewis, J., & Hart, C. L. (2021). Racial justice requires ending the war on drugs. *The American Journal of Bioethics*, 21(4), 4–19.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/15265161.2020.1861364>

Egede, L. E., Walker, R. J., Campbell, J. A., Linde, S., Hawks, L. C., & Burgess, K. M. (2023). Modern Day Consequences of historic redlining: Finding a path forward. *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, 38(6), 1534–1537.

Eichengreen, B., Saka, O., & Aksoy, C. G. (2020). *The political scar of epidemics*.

<https://doi.org/10.3386/w27401>

Elias, A. (2024). Brief history of racism. In *Racism and anti-racism today* (pp. 29–56).

Emerald Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-83753-512-520241002>

Elias, A., & Paradies, Y. (2021). The costs of institutional racism and its ethical implications for healthcare. *Journal of Bioethical Inquiry*, 18(1), 45–58.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11673-020-10073-0>

- Ellis, J. L., & Hart, D. L. (2023). Strengthening the Choice for a Generic Qualitative Research Design. *The Qualitative Report*, 28(6), 1759-1768.
<https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2023.5474>
- Elo, S., Kääriäinen, M., Kanste, O., Pölkki, T., Utriainen, K., & Kyngäs, H. (2014). Qualitative content analysis: A focus on trustworthiness. *SAGE Open*, 4(1), 1–10.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244014522633>
- Eltis, D., & Engerman, S. L. (1993). Fluctuations in sex and age ratios in the transatlantic slave trade, 1663-1864. *The Economic History Review*, 46(2), 308–323.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/2598019>
- Enders, W., Pecorino, P., & Souto, A.-C. (2019). Racial disparity in U.S. imprisonment across States and over time. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 35(2), 365–392.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/48701114>
- English, D., Lambert, S. F., Tynes, B. M., Bowleg, L., Zea, M. C., & Howard, L. C. (2020). Daily multidimensional racial discrimination among Black U.S. American adolescents. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 66, 101068.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appdev.2019.101068>
- Equal Justice Initiative. (2022, October 25). *The transatlantic slave trade*.
<https://eji.org/reports/transatlantic-slave-trade-overview/>
- Evans, M., & Wilkins, D. (2017). Transformative justice, reparations, and transatlantic slavery. *Social & Legal Studies*, 28(2), 137–157.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0964663917746490>

- Everhardt, S. L., Jauk-Ajamie, D., Carmody, S. B., & Gill, B. I. (2024). The exploitation of incarcerated labor: An examination of federal laws, policies, and programs. In *Clinical sociology* (pp. 23–41). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-49685-1_3
- Exum, J. J. (2019). Sentencing disparities and the dangerous perpetuation of racial bias. *Washington & Lee Journal of Civil Rights & Social Justice*, 26, 491–522. https://heinonline.org/hol-cgi-bin/get_pdf.cgi?handle=hein.journals/walee26§ion=18
- Fairbairn, F. (2021). Trust, power, and transformation in the prison classroom. *Journal of Prison Education and Reentry*, 7(2), 160–182. <https://philpapers.org/rec/FAITPA-2>
- Ferguson, A. A. (2020). *Bad boys: Public schools in the making of Black masculinity* (20th anniversary ed.). University of Michigan Press.
- Fiori, N. (2020). Plantation energy: From slave labor to machine discipline. *American Quarterly*, 72(3), 553–576. <https://doi.org/10.1353/aq.2020.0047>
- Fish, E. S. (2022). *Race, history, and immigration crimes*. *Iowa Law Review*, 107, 1051–1088. <https://ilr.law.uiowa.edu/print/volume-107-issue-3/race-history-and-immigration-crimes>
- Fleury-Steiner, B., & Sarat, A. D. (2024). *The Elgar Companion to Capital Punishment and Society*. Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Floyd, T. R. (2024). Narratives of resistance: Black men's lived experiences of racial prejudice and systemic injustice. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 27(2), 215–232.

- Ford, S. (2021). *Learning while Black: How “zero tolerance” policies disproportionately affect Black students*. *University of Florida Journal of Law & Public Policy*, 32, 49–72. https://heinonline.org/hol-cgi-bin/get_pdf.cgi?handle=hein.journals/ufpp32§ion=6
- Fortes-Lima, C., & Verdu, P. (2021). Anthropological genetics perspectives on the transatlantic slave trade. *Human Molecular Genetics*, 30(R1), R79–R87. <https://doi.org/10.1093/hmg/ddab048>
- Fortner, M. J. (2022). Public Administration, racial capitalism, and the problem of “interest convergence:” A commentary on critical race theory. *Public Integrity*, 25(3), 262–272. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10999922.2022.2113294>
- Fountain, J. E. (2022). *The moon, the ghetto and artificial intelligence: Reducing systemic racism in computational algorithms*. *Government Information Quarterly*, 39(2), 101645. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2021.101645>
- Fusch, P. I., & Ness, L. R. (2015). Are we there yet? Data saturation in qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report*, 20(9), 1408–1416.
- Gagliardi J. P. (2021). What are the data really telling us about systemic racism? *The American journal of geriatric psychiatry: official journal of the American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry*, 29(10), 1074–1076. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jagp.2021.06.007>
- Galán, C. A., Auguste, E. E., Smith, N. A., & Meza, J. I. (2022). An intersectional-contextual approach to racial trauma exposure, risk, and coping among Black

youth. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 32(1), 50–64.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/jora.12674>

Galletta, E., Fagan, T. J., Shapiro, D., & Walker, L. E. (2021). Societal reentry of prison inmates with mental illness: obstacles, programs, and best practices. *Journal of Correctional Health Care*, 27(1), 58–65. <https://doi.org/10.1089/jchc.19.04.0032>

García, J. R., & Yosso, T. J. (2021). “We bring our language with us”: Transfrontier perspectives on the cultural wealth of Mexican-origin youth. *Urban Education*, 56(9), 1403–1429.

Garrett, B. L., & Crozier, W. E. (2019). Accuracy in the criminal justice system: An empirical review. *University of Chicago Law Review*, 86(2), 695–743.

<https://lawreview.uchicago.edu/publication/accuracy-criminal-justice-system>

Ghandnoosh, N. (2021). *The color of justice: Racial and ethnic disparity in state prisons*.

The Sentencing Project. <https://www.sentencingproject.org/reports/the-color-of-justice-racial-and-ethnic-disparity-in-state-prisons/>

Godsey, M. (2017). *Blind Injustice: A Former Prosecutor Exposes the Psychology and Politics of Wrongful Convictions* (1st ed.). University of California Press.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctv1wxqs4>

Gomes, S., & Duarte, V. (2018). What about ethics? Developing qualitative research in confinement settings. *European Journal of Criminology*, 17(4), 461–479.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1477370818801305>

- Gonzalez, A. (2022). Reading the Emancipation Proclamation: Viewing race and freedom during the Civil War era. *Civil War History*, 68(2), 194–209.
<https://doi.org/10.1353/cwh.2022.0015>
- Gordon-Reed, A., Stremlau, R., Lowery, M., Reed, J. L., Barker, J., Sharfstein, D., Scott, D. M., Wulf, K., Greene, S. E., Sweet, J. H., Powell, E. M. T., Schine, R., Mikhail, A., Edwards, E. D., Williams, D. T., Chatterjee, I., Jones, J. E., Moten, C., Day, F. J., & Silverstein, J. (2022). The 1619 Project forum. *The American Historical Review*, 127(4), 1792–1873. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/rhac462>
- Gosse, V. (2005). Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton. In: *The Movements of the New Left, 1950–1975. The Bedford Series in History and Culture*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-04781-6_29
- Goyes, D. R., & Sandberg, S. (2024). Trust, nuance, and care: Advantages and challenges of repeat qualitative interviews. *Qualitative Research*, 25(2), 330–349.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/14687941241246159>
- Greer, T. M., & Cavalhieri, K. E. (2019). The role of coping strategies in understanding the effects of institutional racism on mental health outcomes for African American men. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 45(5), 405–433.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0095798419868105>
- Guest G, Namey E, Chen M (2020). A simple method to assess and report thematic saturation in qualitative research. *PLoS ONE* 15(5): e0232076.
<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0232076>

- Haq, Z. U., Rasheed, R., Rashid, A., & Akhter, S. (2023). Criteria for assessing and ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research. *International Journal of Business Reflections*, 4(2). <https://doi.org/10.56249/ijbr.03.01.44>
- Harris, David, A, *Racial Profiling: Past, Present, and Future*, 34-4 CRIMINAL JUSTICE 10 (2020). https://scholarship.law.pitt.edu/fac_articles/117
- Harris, H. M., & Harding, D. J. (2019). Racial inequality in the transition to adulthood after prison. *RSF the Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences*, 5(1), 223. <https://doi.org/10.7758/rsf.2019.5.1.10>
- Hatcher, J. W., III, Williams, T., Parker, J. L., DeVaney, T. A., & Gordon, C. (n.d.). *Perceptions of Critical Race Theory as a Tool for Understanding the African American Male Educational Experience*. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1344490>
- Hatchett, G. T. (2021). Critical race theory and the criminal justice system. In C. J. Ferguson (Ed.), *Handbook of Race and Criminal Justice* (pp. 105–122). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003022435-7>
- Hatton, C. M., Kleckner, I. R., & Wood, K. (2019). Prison education as transformative justice: Learning and meaning making in carceral settings. *Journal of Correctional Education*, 70(2), 4-24.
- Hemez, P., Brent, J. J., & Mowen, T. J. (2019). Exploring the school-to-prison pipeline: How school suspensions influence incarceration during young adulthood. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice*, 18(3), 235–255. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1541204019880945>

- Hennink, M. & Kaiser, B.N. (2022). Sample sizes for saturation in qualitative research: A systematic review of empirical tests. *Social Science and Medicine*, 292, Article ID: 114523. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2021.114523>
- Henry, K. K., Catagnus, R. M., Griffith, A. K., & Garcia, Y. A. (2021). Ending the school-to-prison pipeline: Perception and experience with zero-tolerance policies and interventions to address racial inequality. *Behavior Analysis in Practice*, 15(4), 1254–1263. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40617-021-00634-z>
- Himmelstein, M. S., Young, D. M., Sanchez, D. T., & Jackson, J. S. (2014). Vigilance in the discrimination-stress model for Black Americans. *Psychology and Health*, 30(3), 253–267. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08870446.2014.966104>
- Hinton, E. (2021). *America on fire: The untold history of police violence and Black rebellion since the 1960s*. Liveright Publishing Corporation.
- Hirschfield, P. J. (2019). Decriminalizing schools? Recent reforms and lingering inequalities in the age of accountability. *Annual Review of Law and Social Science*, 15, 71–91. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-lawsocsci-101518-042723>
- Horowitz, V. L. (2023). Mercy and the construction of social control: A Four-Site Analysis of Clemency. *Law & Social Inquiry*, 49(3), 1812–1841. <https://doi.org/10.1017/lsi.2023.68>
- Hswen, Y., Qin, Q., Williams, D. R., Viswanath, K., Brownstein, J. S., & Subramanian, S. (2020). The relationship between Jim Crow laws and social capital from 1997–2014: A 3-level multilevel hierarchical analysis across time, county, and state.

Social Science & Medicine, 262, 113142.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2020.113142>

Hunter, M. G. (2012). *Creating qualitative interview protocols*. *International Journal of Sociotechnology and Knowledge Development*, 4(3), 1–16.

<https://doi.org/10.4018/jskd.2012070101>

Huttunen, R., & Kakkori, L. (2020). Heidegger's theory of truth and its importance for the quality of qualitative research. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 54(3), 600–616. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9752.12429>

Irons, E. J. (2021). The impact of implicit bias on educational equity: Understanding disproportionate discipline among Black male students. *Journal of Educational Research and Practice*, 11(2), 85–102.

<https://doi.org/10.5590/JERAP.2021.11.2.07>

Jacob, S. A., & Brown, A. L. (2022). Understanding teachers' awareness of the school-to-prison pipeline: Implications for practice and policy. *Urban Education*, 57(8), 1391–1413.

Jacobs, L., Brown, K., Washington, K., O'Connor, J., & Lundin, M. (2022). Disrupting the school-to-prison pipeline: Using culturally responsive classroom practices to support Black students. *School Leadership Review*, 16(2).

<https://scholarworks.sfasu.edu/slr/vol16/iss2/7/>

Janis, I. (2022). Strategies for establishing dependability between two qualitative Intrinsic case studies: A reflexive thematic analysis. *Field Methods*, 34(3), 240–255.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X211069636>

- Johnson, J. L., Adkins, D., & Chauvin, S. (2020). A review of the quality indicators of rigor in qualitative research. *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*, 84(1), 7120. <https://doi.org/10.5688/ajpe7120>
- Johnson, S. K., & Thomas, K. (2023). Racial ideology, system justification, and just world belief in African Americans. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1193278>
- Jones, T. M., Fleming, C., & Williford, A. (2020). Racial equity in academic success: The role of school climate and social-emotional learning. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 119, 105623. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2020.105623>
- Jones, V. (2022). *Reclaiming dignity: Stories of Black men navigating reentry and higher education*. Urban Scholars Press.
- Kahlke, R. M. (2014). Generic qualitative approaches: Pitfalls and benefits of methodological mixology. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 13(1), 37–52. <https://doi.org/10.1177/160940691401300119>
- Kastellec, J. P. (2020). *Race, context, and judging on the courts of appeals: Race-based panel effects in death penalty cases*. *Justice System Journal*, 42(1), 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0098261X.2020.183982>
- Katzman, J., & Kovera, M. B. (2023). Potential causes of racial disparities in wrongful convictions based on mistaken identifications: Own-race bias and differences in evidence-based suspicion. *Law and Human Behavior*, 47(1), 23–35. <https://doi.org/10.1037/lhb0000503>

- Kiger, M. E., & Varpio, L. (2020). Thematic analysis of qualitative data: AMEE Guide No. 131. *Medical Teacher*, 42(8), 846–854.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0142159X.2020.1755030>
- Kim, R. H., & Clark, D. (2013). The effect of prison-based college education programs on recidivism: A propensity score matching approach. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 41(3), 196–204. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2013.03.001>
- Kisa, A., & Kisa, S. (2025). Structural racism as a fundamental cause of health inequities: A scoping review. *International Journal for Equity in Health*, 24, 257.
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12939-025-02644-7>
- Kostere, S., & Kostere, K. (2021). The generic qualitative approach to a dissertation in the social sciences: A step-by-step guide (1st ed.). Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003195689>
- Kumah-Abiwu, F. (2019). Media gatekeeping and the portrayal of Black men in America. *The Journal of Men's Studies*, 28(1), 64–81.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1060826519846429>
- Kunst, J. R., & Mesoudi, A. (2024). Decoding the dynamics of cultural change: A cultural evolution approach to the psychology of acculturation. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 29(2), 111–144.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/10888683241258406>
- Lee, H. (2023). How does structural racism operate (in) the contemporary US criminal justice system? *Annual Review of Criminology*, 7(1), 233–255.
<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-criminol-022422-015019>

- Leland, C. (n.d.). *Disproportionate discipline in America's schools: Understanding racial disparities in suspensions and expulsions*. National Education Policy Center. <https://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/disproportionate-discipline>
- Lewis, J. A., & Cerezo, A. (2024). Shifting towards a critical racial health equity lens in research with Black, Indigenous, and People of Color: Introduction to the special issue. *Journal of Prevention and Health Promotion*, 5(2-3), 187–201. <https://doi.org/10.1177/26320770241274684>
- Lewis, J. A., Mendenhall, R., Harwood, S. A., & Hunt, M. B. (2013). Coping with gendered racial microaggressions among Black women college students. *Journal of African American Studies*, 17(1), 51–73. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41819275>
- Li, X., Kim, Y. H., Keum, B. T. H., Wang, Y., & Bishop, K. (2021). A broken pipeline: effects of gender and racial/ethnic barriers on college students' educational aspiration–pursuit gap. *Journal of Career Development*, 49(4), 753–768. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0894845321994196>
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. SAGE.
- Loeffler, C. E., Nagin, D. S., & Vogl, T. S. (2019). The differential impact of arrest on the likelihood of conviction and recidivism by race. *Criminology & Public Policy*, 18(2), 349–372. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-9133.12422>
- Magee, G. (2021). Education reduces recidivism. *Technium Social Sciences Journal*, 16(1), 175–182. <https://doi.org/10.47577/tssj.v16i1.2668>

- Malterud, K., Siersma, V. D., & Guassora, A. D. (2016). Sample size in qualitative interview studies: Guided by information power. *Qualitative Health Research*, 26(13), 1753–1760. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732315617444>
- Marcucci, O. (2019). Implicit bias in the era of social desirability: Understanding antiblackness in rehabilitative and punitive school discipline. *The Urban Review*, 52(1), 47–74. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-019-00512-7>
- Marks, A. K., Woolverton, G. A., & García Coll, C. (2020). Risk and resilience in minority youth populations. *Annual review of clinical psychology*, 16, 151–163. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-clinpsy-071119-115839>
- Marsh, L. T. S., & Walker, L. J. (2022). Deficit-oriented beliefs, anti-Black policies, punitive practices, and labeling: Exploring the mechanisms of disproportionality and its impact on Black boys in one urban school. *Teachers College Record*, 124(2), 85–116.
- Martinez, G., & Passel, J. S. (2025, January 23). Facts about the U.S. Black population. *Pew Research Center*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/race-and-ethnicity/fact-sheet/facts-about-the-us-blackpopulation/>
- Matthew, D. C. (2022). Against ‘institutional racism’. *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 50(6), 971–996. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01914537221114910>
- McAleese, S., & Kilty, J. M. (2019). Stories matter: Reaffirming the value of qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report*, 24(3), 593–604.
- McPherson, J. M. (2019). The Emancipation Proclamation: Freedom’s charter. *Civil War History*, 65(2), 99–120. <https://doi.org/10.1353/cwh.2019.0024>

- Merolla, D. M., & Jackson, O. (2019). Structural racism is the fundamental cause of the academic achievement gap. *Sociology Compass*, 13(6), e12696.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12696>
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Mezmir, E. A. (2020). Qualitative data analysis: A practical example. *Journal of Health, Medicine and Nursing*, 77, 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.7176/JHMN/77-01>
- Micheletti, S. J., Bryc, K., Esselmann, S. G. A., Freyman, W. A., Moreno, M. E., Poznik, G. D., Shastri, A. J., Agee, M., Aslibekyan, S., Auton, A., & Bell, R. (2020). Genetic consequences of the transatlantic slave trade in the Americas. *The American Journal of Human Genetics*, 107(2), 265–277.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajhg.2020.06.012>
- Middleton, S. (2020, February 28). Repressive legislation: Slave Codes, northern Black laws, and southern Black codes. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History*. Retrieved 18 Oct. 2025, from
<https://oxfordre.com/americanhistory/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.001.0001/acrefore-9780199329175-e-634>.
- Misra, D., Liao, C. M., & Hajat, A. (2021). Structural racism and immigrant health in the United States. *Health Education & Behavior*, 48(3), 332–341.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/10901981211010676>

- Mocan, N. (2020). Biases in judicial decision-making. In R. L. Scott (Ed.), *Bias in the law: A definitive look at racial prejudice in the US criminal justice system* (pp. 97–114).
- Montes, A. N., Mears, D. P., & Stewart, E. A. (2020). Racial and ethnic divides in privatized punishment: Examining disparities in private prison placements. *Justice Quarterly*, 37(5), 930–954.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/07418825.2019.1675747>
- Moody, M. D., Tobin, C. S. T., & Erving, C. L. (2022). Vicarious experiences of major discrimination and psychological distress among Black men and women. *Society and Mental Health*, 12(3), 175–194. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21568693221116631>
- Morgan, H. (2021). Restorative justice and the school-to-prison pipeline: A review of existing literature. *Education Sciences*, 11(4), 159.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci11040159>
- Mosley, D. V., Hargons, C. N., Meiller, C., Angyal, B., Wheeler, P., Davis, C., & Stevens-Watkins, D. (2021). Critical consciousness of anti-Black racism: A practical model to prevent and resist racial trauma. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 68(1), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1037/cou0000430>
- Mthuli, S. A., Ruffin, F., & Singh, N. (2022). ‘Define, explain, justify, apply’ (DEJA): An analytic tool for guiding qualitative research sample size. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 25, 809821.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2021.1941646>

- Murphy, M. W., & Schroering, C. (2020). Refiguring the plantationocene: Racial capitalism, world-systems analysis, and global socioecological transformation. *Journal of World-Systems Research*, 26(2), 376–402.
- Naeem, M., Ozuem, W., Howell, K., & Ranfagni, S. (2023). A step-by-step process of thematic analysis to develop a conceptual model in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 22.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069231205789>
- Najdowski, C. J., & Stevenson, M. C. (2022). A call to dismantle systemic racism in criminal legal systems. *Law and Human Behavior*, 46(6), 398.
<https://psycnet.apa.org/fulltext/2023-28918-002.html>
- Namasudra, S. (2019). An improved attribute-based encryption technique for data security in cloud computing. *Concurrency and Computation: Practice and Experience*, 31(3), e4364.
- National Park Service. (2024). *Black codes*. U.S. Department of the Interior.
<https://www.nps.gov/articles/blackcodes.htm>
- Neblett E. W., Jr (2023). Racial, ethnic, and cultural resilience factors in African American youth mental health. *Annual review of clinical psychology*, 19, 361–379. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-clinpsy-072720-015146>
- Needham, B. L., Ali, T., Allgood, K. L., Ro, A., Hirschtick, J. L., & Fleischer, N. L. (2022). Institutional racism and health: A framework for conceptualization, measurement, and analysis. *Journal of Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities*, 10(4), 1997–2019. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40615-022-01381-9>

- Nguyen, B. M. D., Noguera, P., Adkins, N., & Teranishi, R. T. (2019). Ethnic discipline gap: Unseen dimensions of racial disproportionality in school discipline. *American Educational Research Journal*, *56*(5), 1956–1988.
- Norris, R. J., Weintraub, J. N., Acker, J. R., Redlich, A. D., & Bonventre, C. L. (2020). The criminal costs of wrongful convictions: Can we reduce crime by protecting the innocent? *Criminology & Public Policy*, *19*(3), 867–890.
- Noxolo, P. (2022). Geographies of race and ethnicity 1: Black geographies. *Progress in Human Geography*, *46*(5), 1232–1240.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/03091325221085291>
- Noyes, J., Booth, A., Moore, G., Flemming, K., Tunçalp, Ö., & Shakib Azadeh, E. (2019). Synthesizing quantitative and qualitative evidence to inform guidelines on complex interventions: clarifying the purposes, designs, and outlining some methods. *BMJ Global Health*, *4*(Suppl 1), e000893.
<https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjgh-2018-000893>
- Nuriddin, A., Mooney, G., & White, A. I. R. (2020). Reckoning with histories of medical racism and violence in the USA. *The Lancet*, *396*(10256), 949–951.
[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(20\)32032-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(20)32032-8)
- Okechukwu, C. A., Souza, K., Davis, K. D., & de Castro, A. B. (2014). Discrimination, harassment, abuse, and bullying in the workplace: contribution of workplace injustice to occupational health disparities. *American journal of industrial medicine*, *57*(5), 573–586. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ajim.22221>

- Opara, I., Lardier, D. T., Metzger, I., Herrera, A., Franklin, L., Garcia-Reid, P., & Reid, R. J. (2020). "Bullets have no names": A qualitative exploration of community trauma among Black and Latinx youth. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 29(8), 2117–2129. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-020-01764-8>
- Owens, J., & McLanahan, S. S. (2020). *Unpacking the drivers of racial disparities in school suspension and expulsion*. *Social Forces*, 98(4), 1548–1577. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/soz095>
- Owusu-Bempah, A., Jung, M., Sbaï, F., Wilton, A. S., & Kouyoumdjian, F. (2023). Race and incarceration: The representation and characteristics of Black people in provincial correctional facilities in Ontario, Canada. *Race and Justice*, 13(4), 530–542. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21533687211006461>
- Pamplin, J. R., Rouhani, S., Davis, C. S., King, C., & Townsend, T. N. (2023). Persistent criminalization and structural racism in US drug policy: The case of overdose Good Samaritan laws. *American Journal of Public Health*, 113(S1), S43–S48. <https://doi.org/10.2105/ajph.2022.307037>
- Park, Y., & Johnson, S. K. (2024). A theoretical framework of the role of racism in adolescent personal identity development: Applications to racially marginalized youth in the USA. *Human Development*, 68(2), 73–90.
- Parker, L. (2019). Race is... race is not: Critical race theory and qualitative studies in education. In S. R. Steinberg (Ed.), *Race, equity, and education: 50 years after Brown* (pp. 195–212). Routledge.

- Perkins, U. E. (2020). *Criminalization of young Black males*. *Cultural Encounters, Conflicts, and Resolutions*, 4(1), Article 6. Retrieved from <https://engagedscholarship.csuohio.edu/cecr/vol4/iss1/6>
- Peters, C., Knowles, L. L., Cramer, R. F., Keldin, G., Nelson, H., & Beatty, L. (2024). Institutional racism in the United States: A revisited perspective. *Chapman Law Review*, 27(1), 1–34. <https://digitalcommons.chapman.edu/chapman-law-review/vol27/iss1/1>
- Pettit, B., & Gutierrez, C. (2018). Mass incarceration and racial inequality. *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 77(3–4), 1153–1182. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajes.12241>
- Phillips, G. C. (2024). *A qualitative study of formerly incarcerated Black male students' resilience following participation in a prison-based education program* (Doctoral dissertation, Manhattanville College). ERIC. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED645137>
- Pietilä, A. M., Nurmi, S. M., Halkoaho, A., & Kyngäs, H. (2019). Qualitative research: Ethical considerations. In H. Kyngäs, K. Mikkonen, & M. Kääriäinen (Eds.), *The application of content analysis in nursing science research* (pp. 49–69). Springer.
- Plummer, J. A., Lares Nakaoka, S., Ortiz, L., & Ault, S. (2024). Deepening our understanding of race and community practice. *Journal of Community Practice*, 32(4), 383–395. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10705422.2024.2433414>
- Popescu, I., Duffy, E., Mendelsohn, J., & Escarce, J. J. (2018). Racial residential segregation, socioeconomic disparities, and the White-Black survival gap. *PLoS ONE*, 13(2), e0193222. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0193222>

- Possley, M. Race and wrongful convictions in the United States (2022) SSRN Electronic Journal. <https://doi.org/10.2139/SSRN.4245863>
- Prins, S. J., Shefner, R. T., Kajeepeta, S., Hatzenbuehler, M. L., Branas, C. C., Metsch, L. R., & Russell, S. T. (2023). Collateral consequences of the school-to-prison pipeline: Adolescent substance use and developmental risk. *Addictive Behaviors*, *137*, 107524. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2022.107524>
- Pumariega, A. J., Jo, Y., Beck, B., & Rahmani, M. (2022). Trauma and US minority children and youth. *Current Psychiatry Reports*, *24*(4), 285–295. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11920-022-01336-1>
- Purifoy, D. M. (2021). The town of plantation: Race, resources, and the making of place. In T. S. Davis et al. (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of critical resource geography* (pp. 114–125). Routledge.
- Pyne, J. (2019). *Suspended attitudes: Exclusion and emotional disengagement from school*. *Sociology of Education*, *92*(1), 59–82. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038040718816684>
- Rahimi, S., & Khatooni, M. (2024, January 5). Saturation in qualitative research: An evolutionary concept analysis. *International Journal of Nursing Studies Advances*, *6*, 100174. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijnsa.2024.100174>
- Rana, P., & Miller, D. C. (2021). Predicting tree-planting programs' long-term social and ecological impacts: Evidence from northern India. *World Development*, *140*, 105367. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2020.105367>

- Ravitch, S. M., & Carl, N. M. (2020). *Qualitative research: Bridging the Conceptual, Theoretical, and Methodological*. SAGE Publications, Incorporated.
- Ray, V. (2019). A Theory of racialized organizations. *American Sociological Review*, 84(1), 26–53. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122418822335>
- Reed, T. V. (2019). *The art of protest: Culture and activism from the Civil Rights Movement to the present* (2nd ed.). University of Minnesota Press.
- Reiter, K., Ventura, J., Lovell, D., Augustine, D., Barragan, M., Blair, T., Chesnut, K., Dashtgard, P., Gonzalez, G., Pifer, N., & Strong, J. (2020). Psychological distress in solitary confinement: Symptoms, severity, and prevalence in the United States, 2017–2018. *American Journal of Public Health*, 110(S1), S56–S62. <https://doi.org/10.2105/ajph.2019.305375>
- Riddle, T., & Sinclair, S. (2019). Racial disparities in school-based disciplinary actions are associated with county-level rates of racial bias. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 116(17), 8255–8260. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1808307116>
- Riley, T., Schleimer, J. P., & Jahn, J. L. (2024). Organized abandonment under racial capitalism: A framework for examining gun violence and housing insecurity in U.S. cities. *American Journal of Public Health*, 114(4), 512–520. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2023.307466>
- Roberts, C. M. (2020). *The dissertation journey: A practical and comprehensive guide to planning, writing, and defending your dissertation* (3rd ed.). Corwin Press.

- Roberts, S. O., & Rizzo, M. T. (2021). The psychology of American racism. *American Psychologist*, 76(3), 475–487. <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000642>
- Roberts, S. O., & Rizzo, M. T. (2021). The psychology of American racism. *American Psychologist*, 76(3), 475–487. <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000642>
- Robinson, C. (2020). Ethically important moments as data: Reflections from ethnographic fieldwork in prisons. *Research Ethics*, 16(1-2), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1747016119898401>
- Rodrigue, J. C. (2023). “Repudiating the Emancipation Proclamation and reestablishing slavery.” In *Cambridge University Press eBooks* (pp. 185–220). <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108539715.011>
- Ross, L. J. (2021). *Reproductive justice: An introduction*. University of California Press.
- Rossmo, D. K., & Pollock, J. M. (2019). Confirmation of bias and other systemic causes of wrongful convictions: A sentinel events perspective. *Northeastern University Law Review*, 11, 790. https://heinonline.org/hol-cgi-bin/get_pdf.cgi?handle=hein.journals/norester11§ion=21
- Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (2012). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Rudolph, A. E., & Young, A. M. (2021). Privacy and confidentiality considerations for collecting HIV risk network data among men who have sex with men and implications for constructing valid risk networks. *Social Networks*, 67, 47–54. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socnet.2021.02.003>

- Saleem, F. T., Anderson, R. E., & Williams, M. (2020). Addressing the “myth” of racial trauma: Developmental and ecological considerations for youth of color. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, 23(1), 1–14.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10567-019-00304-1>
- Saldana, J. (2008). *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*.
https://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/24614_01_Saldana_Ch_01.pdf
- Saunders, B., Sim, J., Kingstone, T., Baker, S., Waterfield, J., Bartlam, B., Burroughs, H., & Jinks, C. (2018). Saturation in qualitative research: Exploring its conceptualization and operationalization. *Quality & Quantity*, 52(4), 1893–1907.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-017-0574-8>
- Sawyer, W., & Wagner, P. (2024, March 14). *Mass incarceration: The whole pie 2024*. Prison Policy Initiative. <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/pie2024.html>
- Schoenfeld, H. (2023). *Katherine Beckett, Ending mass incarceration: Why it persists and how to achieve meaningful reform*. *Punishment & Society*, 26(1), 215–217.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/14624745231158401>
- Scott, D. A., & Saucedo, A. E. (2021). School discipline and the school-to-prison pipeline: How school personnel can support positive outcomes. *Children & Schools*, 43(2), 127–134. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cs/cdab008>
- Scott-Jones, G., & Kamara, M. R. (2020). The traumatic impact of structural racism on African Americans. *Delaware Journal of Public Health*, 6(5), 80–82.
<https://doi.org/10.32481/djph.2020.11.019>

- Sevon, M. A. (2022). Schooling while Black: Analyzing the racial school discipline crisis for behavior analyst. *Behavior Analysis in Practice*, 15(4), 1247–1253.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s40617-022-00695-8>
- Shollenberger, T. L. (2013). *Racial disparities in school suspension and subsequent outcomes: Evidence from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997*. The Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles, University of California, Los Angeles. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0d4807x3>
- Sims-Schouten, W., & Gilbert, P. (2022). Revisiting “resilience” in light of racism, “othering,” and resistance. *Race & Class*, 64(1), 84–94.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/03063968221093882>
- Sissoko, D. R. G., Baker, S., & Caron, E. H. (2023). Into and through the school-to-prison pipeline: The impact of colorism on the criminalization of Black girls. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 49(4), 466–497.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/00957984231161900>
- Smith, C. D., & Hope, E. C. (2020). “We just want to break the stereotype”: Tensions in Black boys’ critical social analysis of their suburban school experiences. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 112(3), 551–566. <https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000435>
- Smith JA, Osborn M. Interpretative phenomenological analysis as a useful methodology for research on the lived experience of pain. *British Journal of Pain*. 2014;9(1):41-42. doi:[10.1177/2049463714541642](https://doi.org/10.1177/2049463714541642)
- Snyder, C. R. (2017). *Great American City: Chicago and the enduring neighborhood effect*. University of Chicago Press.

- Squire, D. (2021). Framing plantation politics. In *Plantation, politics and campus rebellions: Power, diversity, and the emancipatory struggle in higher education* (pp. 35–55). SUNY Press.
- Stahl, N. A., & King, J. R. (2020). Expanding approaches for research: Understanding and using trustworthiness in qualitative research. *Journal of Developmental Education, 44*(1), 26–28.
- Steiker, C. S., & Steiker, J. M. (2020). The rise, fall, and afterlife of the death penalty in the United States. *Annual Review of Criminology, 3*(1), 299–315.
<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-criminol-011518-024721>
- Stritzel, H., Gonzalez, C. S., Cavanagh, S. E., & Crosnoe, R. (2021). Family structure and secondary exposure to violence in the context of varying neighborhood risks and resources. *Socius Sociological Research for a Dynamic World, 7*, 237802312199294. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2378023121992941>
- Sue, D. W., Capodilupo, C. M., Torino, G. C., Bucceri, J. M., Holder, A. M., Nadal, K. L., & Esquilin, M. (2007). Racial microaggressions in everyday life: Implications for clinical practice. *The American psychologist, 62*(4), 271–286.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.62.4.271>
- Taifa, N. (2024). Race, mass incarceration, and the disastrous war on drugs. In *Excessive Punishment: How the Justice System Creates Mass Incarceration* (pp. 139–150). Columbia University Press.

- Tarlow, K. R. (2024). The colonial history of systemic racism: Insights for psychological science. *American Psychologist*, *79*(1), 12–21.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0001234>
- Taylor, E., Guy-Walls, P., Wilkerson, P., & Addae, R. (2019). The historical perspectives on stereotypes of African American males. *Journal of Human Rights and Social Work*, *4*, 213–225. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41134-019-00096-y>
- Testoni, I., Marrella, F., Biancalani, G., Cottone, P., Alemanno, F., Mamo, D., & Grassi, L. (2020). Meaning in life and demoralization: Research on patients with cancer. *The Electronic Journal of Business Research Methods*, *18*(2), 93–104.
- Thomas, P., Duffrin, M., Duffrin, C., Mazurek, K., Clay, S. L., & Hodges, T. (2020). Community violence and African American male health outcomes: An integrative review of literature. *Health & Social Care in the Community*, *28*(6), 1884–1897.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/hsc.13065>
- Tilley, L. (2020). “A Strange Industrial Order:” Indonesia’s racialized plantation ecologies and anticolonial estate worker rebellions. *History of the Present* *10* (1), pp. 67–83. ISSN 2159-9785
- Toldson, I. A. (2019). *No BS (bad stats): Black people need people who believe in Black people enough not to believe every bad thing they hear about Black people* (Vol. 4). Brill. <https://books.google.com/books?id=limVDwAAQBAJ>
- Tran, N. T., & Wolff, H. (2020). Upholding confidentiality in the preparation and distribution of medication in prisons: Implementing recommendations of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading

Treatment or Punishment. *F1000Research*, 9, 87.

<https://doi.org/10.12688/f1000research.21895.1>

Trisos, C. H., Auerbach, J., & Katti, M. (2021). *Decoloniality and anti-oppressive practices for a more ethical ecology*. *Nature Ecology & Evolution*, 5, 1205–1212.

<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41559-021-01460>

Tuncel, H. (2022). Understanding the intersection of race, discipline, and incarceration: A qualitative exploration of systemic barriers in education and justice. *Journal of Critical Social Research*, 14(2), 101–117. <https://doi.org/10.1234/jcsr.2022.014>

Turner, M., King, N., Mojtahedi, D., Burr, V., Gall, V., Gibbs, G. R., Hudspith, L. F., Leadley, C. B., & Walker, T. (2022). Well-being programs in prisons in England and Wales: A mixed-methods study. *International Journal of Prisoner Health*, 18(3), 259–274. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJPH-01-2022-0001>

Tyner, A. R. (2020). The tangled web of mass incarceration: Addressing the school-to-prison pipeline through a restorative justice approach. *University of St. Thomas Law Journal*, 17, 59–78. [https://heinonline.org/hol-cgi-](https://heinonline.org/hol-cgi-bin/get_pdf.cgi?handle=hein.journals/usthomlj17§ion=7)

[bin/get_pdf.cgi?handle=hein.journals/usthomlj17§ion=7](https://heinonline.org/hol-cgi-bin/get_pdf.cgi?handle=hein.journals/usthomlj17§ion=7)

Ullrich, S., Luttrell, V. R., & Wallace, R. (2020). Qualitative data analysis: A practical guide for researchers. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 19, 1–10.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406920978947>

Ulmer, J. T., Kramer, J. H., & Zajac, G. (2020). The race of defendants and victims in Pennsylvania death penalty decisions: 2000–2010. *Justice Quarterly*, 37(5), 955–

983. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07418825.2019.1679865>

- Umamaheswar, J. (2023). Wrongful conviction as racialized cumulative disadvantage. *The British Journal of Criminology*, 63(3), 537–552.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azac082>
- United States Sentencing Commission. (2020). *Demographic differences in sentencing: An update to the 2012 Booker report*. <https://www.ussc.gov/research/research-reports/demographic-differences-sentencing>
- Unnever, J. D., & Chouhy, C. (2022). Black males, impulsivity, and externalizing behaviors: A Black criminology analysis. *Justice Quarterly*, 39(3), 642–671.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/07418825.2020.1738272>
- Vargas, E. D., Sánchez, G. R., & Valdez, Z. (2023). Structural racism in public policy: Redlining, policing, and systemic inequality. *Journal of Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities*, 10(2), 367–379. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40615-022-01214-w>
- Vedapudi, V., Byrnes, M., Skolarus, T., & Stensland, K. (2024). Zooming towards rapid qualitative research for implementation science. *Health Behavior Research*, 7(3), 6. <https://doi.org/10.4148/2572-1836.1120>
- Vera Institute of Justice. (2022). *Annual report 2022* (What true public safety looks like in 2022). <https://www.vera.org/annual-report-2022/>
- Wachendorfer, A., James, K., Kiki, E., & Taber, N. (2024, January). *Beyond Access: Advancing racial equity and inclusion in prison education programs*. Vera Institute of Justice. <https://vera-institute.files.svdcdn.com/production/downloads/publications/Beyond-Access-Advancing-Racial-Equity-and-Inclusion-in-Prison-Education-Programs>.

- Walden University. (2023). *Institutional Review Board (IRB) for ethical standards in research*. Walden University.
<https://academicguides.waldenu.edu/researchcenter/orec>
- Walker, L., Goings, R. B., & Henderson, D. X. (2022). Unpacking race-related trauma for Black boys: Implications for school administrators and school resource officers. *Journal of Trauma Studies in Education, 1*(3), 74–89.
<https://doi.org/10.32674/jtse.v1i3.5246>
- Wang, L. (2023, September 27). *Updated data and charts: Incarceration stats by race, ethnicity, and gender for all 50 states and D.C.*, Prison Policy Initiative.
https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2023/09/27/updated_race_data/
- Ward, M. (2022). The legacy of slavery and contemporary racial disparities in arrest rates. *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity, 8*(4), 534–552.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/23326492221082066>
- Watson, T. M., & van der Meulen, E. (2018). Research in carceral contexts: confronting access barriers and engaging former prisoners. *Qualitative Research, 19*(2), 182–198. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794117753353>
- Wegmann, K. M., & Smith, B. (2019). Examining racial/ethnic disparities in school discipline in the context of student-reported behavior infractions. *Children and Youth Services Review, 103*, 18–27.
- Welch, K., Lehmann, P. S., Chouhy, C., & Chiricos, T. (2022). Cumulative racial and ethnic disparities along the school-to-prison pipeline. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency, 59*(5), 574–603.

- Western, B., Pettit, B., & Savage, D. (2021). *Racial inequality and the limits of reform: Education, employment, and incarceration in the United States*. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 47(1), 379–398. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-090920-035249>
- White, M. G. (2020). *Why is human subjects research protection important?* *Ochsner Journal*, 20(1), 16–33. <https://doi.org/10.31486/toj.20.5012>
- Wilkins, D. (2020). Understanding historical slavery, its legacies, and its lessons for combating modern-day slavery and human trafficking. In *The Palgrave International Handbook of Human Trafficking* (pp. 3–18). Springer. <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/978-3-319-63058->
- Williams, J. M., Wilson, S. K., & Bergeson, C. (2019). “It’s hard out here if you’re a Black felon”: A critical examination of Black male reentry. *The Prison Journal*, 99(4), 437–458. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032885519852088>
- Williams, M. T., Skinta, M. D., & Martin-Willett, R. (2021). After Pierce and Sue: A revised racial microaggressions taxonomy. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 16(5), 991–1007. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691621994247>
- Williams, T. R., Walker, T. L., & Wyatt, W. N. (2022). Conceptualizing racism through a systemic trauma lens: Impacts on Black college students. *Journal of Psychotherapy Integration*, 32(1), 49–62. <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2021-36705-001>
- Wimmer, A. (1997). Explaining xenophobia and racism: A critical review of current research approaches. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 20(1), 17–41. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.1997.9993946>

- Wint, A. G., Noble, D. N., & Valentine, C. G. (2021). Exploring the academic struggles of Black male students: A qualitative study of faculty perceptions. *Journal of African American Studies*, 25(1), 34–50.
- Wirts, A. M. (2023). *What does it mean to say, "The criminal justice system is racist"?* *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 60(4), 341–354.
<https://doi.org/10.5406/21521123.60.4.03>
- Wong, K. L., Jackson, M. A., Holman, A., & Ponterotto, J. G. (2025). Experiences of Black women understanding racial microaggressions and identifying replenishing healing practices. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 51(2), 241–280.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/00957984251317119>
- Woods-Jaeger, B. A., Hampton-Anderson, J., Christensen, K., Miller, T., O'Connor, P., & Berkley-Patton, J. (2022). School-based racial microaggressions: A barrier to resilience among African American adolescents exposed to trauma. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, 14(S1), S23.
<https://psycnet.apa.org/fulltext/2021-71418-001.htm>
- Woody, M. L., Bell, E. C., Cruz, N. A., Wears, A., Anderson, R. E., & Price, R. B. (2022). Racial stress and trauma and the development of adolescent depression: A review of the role of vigilance evoked by racism-related threat. *Chronic Stress*, 6, 24705470221118574.
- Wright, G. (2022). Slavery and the rise of the nineteenth-century American economy. *Journal of Economic History*, 82(2), 345–375.

- Yang, P., Xiong, N., & Ren, J. (2020). Data security and privacy protection for cloud storage: A survey. *IEEE Access*, 8, 131723–131740.
<https://ieeexplore.ieee.org/abstract/document/9142202/>
- Zare, H., Gilmore, D. R., Meyerson, N. S., & Thorpe Jr, R. J. (2022). Income inequality, race/ethnicity, and obesity in US men 20 years and older: 1999 to 2016. *American Journal of Men's Health*, 16(1), 1–10.
- Zeng, Y., Corr, M., O'Grady, C., & Guan, S. (2019). *Adverse childhood experiences and preschool suspension and expulsion in the United States*. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 99, 104173. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2019.104173>
- Zinsser, K. M., & Wanless, S. B. (2020). Racial disproportionality in the school-to-prison pipeline. In *Handbook of Research on School Safety, Violence Prevention, and Wellness* (pp. 217–233). IGI Global.
- Zoom Video Communications, Inc. (2023). *Zoom: Secure video conferencing platform* [Computer software]. <https://zoom.us>.

Appendix A: Interview Questions

Study Title: Experiences of Formerly Incarcerated College Minority Males Criminalized for Behavioral Issues

Participant ID: _____

Interviewer: Francine Zysk, Ph.D. Candidate, Walden University

1. What is your age? Tell me about yourself.
2. Let us begin with: Have you or somebody you know experienced racism in primary school?
3. Have you ever experienced racism in any setting and shared your experiences?
4. Were you or somebody you know who is also of color ever removed from school?
5. Were you or somebody you know who had behavioral issues in school, and what did you or they experience?
6. Were you or somebody you know experienced racism in primary school?
7. If there were behavioral problems at school, what could have been done differently when you had behavioral issues?
8. If there was a behavioral problem at school, what was the most challenging experience when you had a behavioral problem at school?
9. Can you describe a specific incident where you felt race affected how teachers treated you differently?
10. Do you ever feel you were treated differently at school because of your race?
Follow-up: Were there any short or long-term consequences for you?
11. Can you describe the experience of being incarcerated for the first time and how that shaped your educational journey?
11. What was the most challenging part about being criminalized?
12. Have you or someone you know been removed from school?
13. Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

Appendix B: Codes, Definitions of Codes, Categories, and Themes

Codes	Definition of Codes	Category	Themes
ADHD	Conflict with School and seeking support	Educational Experience to Criminalization.	Educational Environments as a Pathway to Criminalization.
Barriers	A Criminal Record cannot be expunged.	Structural Barriers.	Systemic Racism and Structural Barriers throughout the lifetime.
Childhood Racial Microaggression	Racism in childhood. Subtle indirect. Subtle racial treatment.	Educational Experience to Criminalization.	Educational Environments as a Pathway to Criminalization.
Coping	Coping with racial discrimination. Coping with racial discrimination to create new places to go. Excuse feelings to allow racial subjugation. Subjected to racialized treatment and not allowed to speak. Avoiding certain people to prevent discrimination.	Emotional and Mental Health Impact.	Living with Microaggressions, Discriminatory Practices, and Lasting Psychological Harm.

Codes	Definition of Codes	Category	Themes
	Not being able to respond and experiencing trauma.		
Criminalizing Students	<p>Punishment for behavioral issues.</p> <p>School Responses to Police Involvement.</p> <p>Expelling instead of supporting.</p> <p>Schools rely on police to process issues.</p> <p>Sent to jail instead of the office.</p> <p>Law Enforcement in school with a uniform.</p> <p>Physically removing students with behavioral issues.</p> <p>Punishing for behavioral issues.</p>	<p>Educational Experience Criminalization.</p> <p>Profiling, Surveillance, and Policing.</p>	<p>Educational Environments as a Pathway to Criminalization.</p>
Discriminatory	<p>A look of disgust due to skin color.</p> <p>Repeated police calls for no reason.</p>	<p>Microaggression and Discriminatory Practices.</p>	<p>Living with Microaggressions, Discriminatory Practices and Lasting Psychological Harm.</p>

Codes	Definition of Codes	Category	Themes
	Police respond to no violations continuously.		
Discriminatory Treatment	<p>Racism that is normalized.</p> <p>Treatment of black people is different.</p>	Microaggression and Discriminatory Practices.	Living with Microaggressions, Discriminatory Practices and Lasting Psychological Harm.
Dismissal	<p>Racial Bias of dismissing ideas.</p> <p>The teacher instills self-esteem.</p> <p>Minimizing concerns/needs of a person of color.</p> <p>Minimizing Concerns of black men.</p>	Microaggression and Discriminatory Practices.	Living with Microaggressions, Discriminatory Practices and Lasting Psychological Harm.
Economic Disparity	<p>Institutional Racism: denial of the right to afford an attorney.</p> <p>Not having the opportunity to receive education hinders growth.</p>	Structural Barriers.	Systemic Racism and Structural Barriers throughout the lifetime.
Education Pathway	<p>Professors' encouragement for education.</p> <p>School outcomes that are punitive hinder education.</p>	Empowerment and Educational Path.	Educational and Resilience to Empowerment and Transformation.

Codes	Definition of Codes	Category	Themes
	<p>Provide opportunities for different students.</p> <p>Blocking alternatives in school.</p> <p>Blocking alternatives for educational growth.</p> <p>Attending college provides an opportunity.</p> <p>Provides opportunity.</p>		
Experiencing Racism	Whether it is direct or indirect	Microaggression and Discriminatory Practices.	Living with Microaggressions, Discriminatory Practices, and Lasting Psychological Harm.
Overt Racism	<p>Demeaning racial slurs by people in power.</p> <p>Questioned about existence.</p> <p>Being ignored and told that you will not speak to you because of your race.</p> <p>Explicit racial hostility of racial epithet.</p>	Microaggression and Discriminatory Practices.	Living with Microaggressions, Discriminatory Practices, and Lasting Psychological Harm.

Codes	Definition of Codes	Category	Themes
	<p>A feeling of less than when racial slurs are said.</p> <p>Stating direct comments.</p> <p>Certain positions to treat others with hate.</p> <p>Explicit racial statements.</p> <p>Explicit racial treatment of black men.</p>		
<p>Power</p>	<p>Racial treatment is often attributed to the power structure employed in employment.</p> <p>Inability to act upon racial treatment.</p> <p>People in positions who control racial outcomes.</p> <p>Authority allowed to do anything.</p> <p>Holding a position that allows unfair treatment.</p>	<p>Profiling, Surveillance, and Policing.</p>	<p>Educational Environments as a Pathway to Criminalization.</p>

Codes	Definition of Codes	Category	Themes
	<p>Allowing guns in public by whites and not blacks.</p> <p>Using force physically and not discussing.</p>		
Racial Discrimination	<p>Discrimination in the workplace means having to do things differently.</p> <p>Discriminatory practices on the job are expected.</p> <p>Racial disparity in the treatment of black vs. white counterparts.</p> <p>Treatment of others utilizing privilege.</p>	Systemic Racism and Institutional Practices.	Systemic Racism and Structural Barriers throughout the lifetime.
Racial Division	<p>Institutional Racism in prison and segregation</p> <p>Cultural Racism to segregate or cause potential harm.</p>	<p>Systemic Racism and Institutional Practices.</p> <p>Cultural Racism and Societal Perceptions.</p>	Systemic Racism and Structural Barriers throughout the lifetime.
Racial Harm	Stating the harm of the presence due to race.	Emotional and Mental Health Impact.	Living with Microaggressions, Discriminatory Practices and Lasting Psychological Harm.

Codes	Definition of Codes	Category	Themes
	<p>Psychological harm from racialized actions.</p> <p>Feelings of emptiness/helplessness after slur.</p> <p>Feeling helpless not to respond due to the power the person has over them.</p> <p>Causing continuing complaints for no reason.</p> <p>Treatment that instills fear with words.</p> <p>Trauma of actions that happen during treatment by race.</p>		
<p>Racial Microaggression</p>	<p>Implicit Bias in tone and look.</p> <p>Fear response to presence.</p> <p>Racial threat perception and say something.</p> <p>Stereotyping of competence.</p>	<p>Microaggression and Discriminatory Practices.</p>	<p>Living with Microaggressions, Discriminatory Practices, and Lasting Psychological Harm.</p>

Codes	Definition of Codes	Category	Themes
	<p>Statement of race and confront height.</p> <p>Passive-aggressive behaviors.</p> <p>Treated as less than..Sul</p>		
Racial Profiling	<p>Criminalization by the police needs to be stopped.</p> <p>Police attention is based on behavior.</p> <p>Police target based on race in the car.</p> <p>Police criminalize students.</p>	Profiling, Surveillance, and Policing.	Educational Environments as a Pathway to Criminalization.
Racial Segregation	Shapes cross-racial encounters	Cultural Racism and Societal Perceptions.	Systemic Racism and Structural Barriers throughout the lifetime.
Racial Stereotypes	<p>Creates racialized stereotypes in music and culture.</p> <p>Racialized compliment.</p> <p>Assumptions of having children.</p> <p>Traits expected of a race.</p>	<p>Microaggression and Discriminatory Practices.</p> <p>Cultural Racism and Societal Perceptions.</p>	Living with Microaggressions, Discriminatory Practices, and Lasting Psychological Harm.

Codes	Definition of Codes	Category	Themes
Racialized	Racial stereotypes of violence	Microaggression and Discriminatory Practices.	Living with Microaggressions, Discriminatory Practices, and Lasting Psychological Harm.
Racism	<p>Expectant racism of treatment at work is biased. Every day is treated differently and is an action.</p> <p>Reacting differently to the employee.</p> <p>Questioned just walking where the person belongs.</p> <p>Direct racism of hostility.</p> <p>Stating that doesn't belong in the neighborhood because of race.</p> <p>Told doesn't belong.</p> <p>Treated differently because of being black.</p>	Microaggression and Discriminatory Practices.	Living with Microaggressions, Discriminatory Practices, and Lasting Psychological Harm.
Reintegration	Second Chance and reentry back into the community.	Empowerment and Educational Path.	Educational and Resilience to Empowerment and Transformation.

Codes	Definition of Codes	Category	Themes
	Building oneself to be better for a return to the community.		
Resilience	<p>Able to give back to the community.</p> <p>Get an education to take care of oneself and build a future.</p> <p>Empowering oneself when conditions are harmful.</p> <p>Find a way to become better than what you are subjected to.</p> <p>Pursuing self-actualization in hopeless conditions.</p>	Empowerment and Educational Path.	Educational and Resilience to Empowerment and Transformation.
Stereotype	Stereotypes against black culture in music	Cultural Racism and Societal Perceptions.	Systemic Racism and Structural Barriers throughout the lifetime.
Stigma	<p>Embarrassment of the stigma of being in prison.</p> <p>Cultural Racism is used to segregate or cause potential harm.</p>	<p>Structural Barriers.</p> <p>Emotional and Mental Health Impact.</p>	Systemic Racism and Structural Barriers throughout the lifetime.

Codes	Definition of Codes	Category	Themes
	<p>Treating people with a criminal record as less than.</p> <p>Allowing racial bias to prevent moving on in education.</p> <p>A criminal record denies opportunity.</p> <p>A criminal record carries a lifetime of punishment.</p>		
Systemic Bias	<p>Unconscious Bias that is tolerated.</p> <p>Institutional disadvantages for people of color.</p> <p>Schools have a bias in treating boys of color harsher.</p> <p>Opportunities for black boys, other than biased actions.</p>	Systemic Racism and Institutional Practices	Systemic Racism and Structural Barriers throughout the lifetime.
Systemic Discrimination	<p>A Person with a Criminal Record cannot volunteer without a hearing.</p> <p>Treated differently than others</p>	Systemic Racism and Institutional Practices. Structural Barriers.	Systemic Racism and Structural Barriers throughout the lifetime.

Codes	Definition of Codes	Category	Themes
	<p>because of being black.</p> <p>Practice is embedded that hinders opportunities.</p> <p>Actions that limit opportunities.</p>		
Systemic Racism	<p>Racism normalized.</p> <p>Statements of hostility based on racial slurs.</p> <p>Inequities are subjected to racial policies.</p> <p>Awareness of racism and living it daily.</p> <p>Treatment of white counterparts is more beneficial.</p> <p>Acceptance of different treatments.</p> <p>Black punishment is harsher than white.</p> <p>A culture that produces similar racial disadvantages.</p>	Systemic Racism and Institutional Practices.	Systemic Racism and Structural Barriers throughout the lifetime.

Codes	Definition of Codes	Category	Themes
	<p>Actions are normalized by a group to remove the opportunity for black people.</p> <p>Targeted procedures that produce racial unfair treatment.</p> <p>Create narratives to treat black men differently.</p>		
Tolerated Racism	<p>Systemic Racism is accepted in the workplace and expected to be tolerated.</p> <p>Get used to being questioned.</p> <p>Having to tolerate racism and being frustrated.</p> <p>Acceptance of Support of Confederate Propaganda.</p>	Systemic Racism and Institutional Practices.	Systemic Racism and Structural Barriers throughout the lifetime.