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Identity Crisis: Understanding How American Males' Self-Perception and Experiences Impact Their Educational Attainment

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IDENTITY CRISIS: UNDERSTANDING HOW AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES' EXPERIENCES INFLUENCE THEIR SELF-PERCEPTION AND EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

by

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ABSTRACT

IDENTITY CRISIS: UNDERSTANDING HOW AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES' EXPERIENCES INFLUENCE THEIR SELF-PERCEPTION AND EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

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May 2017

If you google African American males, the top results include the following words and phrases: poverty, incarceration, locked out of employment, struggle in the classroom, and high school incompletion. Likewise, research continues to show that disadvantages in education and in African American communities are responsible for many Black males' poor academic achievement and social outcomes. However, there is one key element missing from majority of the research on Black males, their perspectives.

This dissertation addresses how the personal and educational experiences of low-income African American males, who dropped out of school, influenced their self-perceptions and decision regarding their educational attainment. It brings awareness to conditions that have historically affected how Black males perceived themselves and their lack of educational attainment. Three major themes emerged from data collection: parental interaction, school climate and culture, and limited resources and opportunities for educational and social advancement.

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DEDICATION

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This dissertation is dedicated to my guardian angels, my grandmothers, Legusta Lee and Mary Huddleston, for inspiring me to be an educator; my aunt, Patricia Jenkins, for always believing in me; and my late niece, Kiana Jardae Hawkins.

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CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION

At the 24th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, Frederick Douglass (1886), a former slave, asserted "where justice is denied, where poverty is enforced, where ignorance prevails, and where any one class is made to feel that society is an organized conspiracy to oppress, rob, and degrade them, neither person, nor property will be safe" (p. 434). Douglass's expressions described the unbroken cycle of oppression that African Americans experienced before and after they gained freedom from slavery. Blacks, in particular, Black males have battled with freedom from incapacitating hardships and social constraints that often deterred their opportunities for educational and social advancement (Noguera, 1997). Even today, African Americans are victims of prejudice, poverty, and oppression, especially African American males (Alexander, 2010; Jenkins, 2006).

The public bases their perceptions of African American males on the fact that many of them come from environments shaped by drugs, crime, and academic failure (Fries-Britt, 1997). Black males have the lowest literacy rates compared to males from different ethnicity groups. They are overrepresented in special education programs, high school incompletion, and they are recurrently associated with high poverty, unemployment, and mass incarceration (Alexander, 2010; Blake & Darling, 1994; Jackson & Moore; Jenkins, 2006). In addition, educational reports consistently show a widening gap in African American males' educational performance when compared to their male counterparts from other ethnicities (U.S. Census, 2010; National Assessment of Education Progress, 2013; Schott Foundation, 2013). According to Wilson (2014) and Pettit and Western (2004), school failure and exclusion, negligible economic

opportunities, and unstable living conditions are strong predictors of poor life outcomes and the mass imprisonment of boys and many young men of color.

Given these points, it is not surprising that many African American males are already at a disadvantage and struggle with internalized conflict prior to entering a classroom (Jenkins, 2006). To explain, many Black males are inheritors of generational poverty, which places them at a social disadvantage and hinders them from flourishing in the classroom (Jenkins, 2006). Moreover, academic disidentification -a deficiency in the connection between self-esteem and academic outcomes- has also been noted to adversely affect their academic performance, cause withdrawal from school or dropping out of school, and/or delinquency (Osborne, 1999; Williamson, 2011). Living in impoverishment not only impacts African American males' academic success but also limits their opportunities for social advancement.

In fact, over the last two decades, the number of jailed or imprisoned, undereducated Black men has increased as a result of declining economic opportunities for unskilled workers (Alexander, 2010; Pettit &Western, 2004; Wilson, 2014). Moreover, there are more Black men in the criminal justice system than there were slaves prior to the Civil War, which places them at a greater disadvantage (Alexander, 2010). Alexander (2010) argued that strict federal drug laws and marginalization are responsible for disparate incarceration rates and the lack of social and educational advancement for many Black males: "once you're labeled a felon, the old forms of discrimination—employment discrimination, housing discrimination, denial of the right to vote, denial of educational opportunity, denial of food stamps and other public benefits, and exclusion from jury service—are suddenly legal" (p. 2). Furthermore, over 60% of imprisoned

Black men serving sentences for drug crimes have experienced joblessness, family instability, or worked for low wages as a result of inequity practices (Alexander, 2010; Pettit & Western, 2004). This is not to say that discriminatory practices lead to a life of crime for Black males; however, it does show how the insurmountable odds against them have become a multi-generational plight.

In an effort to push prison reform and reduce inmate housing expenditures, President Barack Obama recently put into action an initiative to narrow the opportunity gap for African American males. President Obama became more cognizant of disproportionate sentences for non-Whites convicted of non-violent crimes during a tour of a federal correctional institution. He learned from inmates that circumstances of socio-economic inequality and poor social structures made it impossible to avoid jail sentences (Abdullah, 2015). Respectively, he noted above average numbers of Black men imprisoned and that non-White males received unjust treatment. Obama (as cited in LoBianco, 2015) asserted, "in too many places, black boys and black men [sic]… Latino boys and Latino men experience being treated differently under the law. Mass incarceration makes our country worse off, and we need to do something about it" (para. 10). Furthermore, such social injustices weaken the opportunities men of color, as well as their self-perception (Whiting, 2009). Education is a prerequisite to lead a productive life in society. For that reason, it is essential to bridge academic and socio-economic gaps to improve the capacity of Black men (Hoag, 2011).

Historical Perspectives

It is important to understand the history of African American males before addressing their current plight (Patterson, 2011). African American males' oppressive

experiences and limited educational opportunities date back to slavery when Africans were forcibly transported to colonial America and enslaved (Candido, 2011; Post, 2015).

Slavery

Before Africans were involuntarily brought to colonial America in the early 1600s, they lived normal lives as members of the royal society, merchants, and as indentured servants on the African continent (Davidson, 1961). Africans, who worked as indentured servants, were permitted to marry and have families and homes (Davidson, 1961). However, their lives were violently uprooted when the need increased for cheap laborers to work plantations in the American colonies. Europeans began capturing and enslaving Africans, including those from royal families to supply the slave market and to reduce the cost of agricultural products (Soodalter, 2011). The colonization of the future United States caused a higher demand for slaves (Alexander, 2010).

From the 1600s to the mid-1800s, Africans from all over the continent of Africa were captured and involuntarily brought to America on overcrowded, disease-infested slave ships (Candido, 2011; Mustakeem, 2008; Soodalter, 2011). The journey to the colonial United States was horrific due to poor conditions on the ships and constant torture from slave owners: "slave ships represented a stressful and disease-filled environment for captives" (Soodalter, 2011, p. 490). On the ships, slaves were dehumanized; they were chained together and brutalized by slave owners to instill fear and prevent revolts. In addition to enduring the inhuman acts of the slave owners, slaves were deprived of basic human needs and medical treatment (Alexander, 2010; Candido, 2011; Mustakeem, 2008). Diseases such as yellow fever, smallpox, malaria, pneumonia, flux, and consumption were rampant amongst the slaves on the ship. These diseases

claimed the lives of many slaves. The slaves who survived the journey were stripped of their identities and transformed into human tools and property when they arrived.

Slavery was legal in the United States until 1863 when President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation releasing any persons being held as slaves from captivity (Dalton, 1991). Subsequently**,** the emancipation afforded Blacks civil liberties that had been promised to all other Americans almost one hundred years earlier when the United States gained independence from Great Britain (Dalton, 1991). The Emancipation Proclamation was acknowledged in most northern states; however, southern states continued to enforce slavery until 1865 when the 13th Amendment to the Constitution was passed making slavery unconstitutional (Araujo, 2015; Williams, 2015).

Post-Slavery

The destruction of slavery, in addition to African Americans' upward mobility in society, baffled many White southerners (Blackmon, 2008). With former slaves taking full advantage of their right to vote and to go to school, White plantation owners were at a loss (Alexander, 2010; Blackmon, 2008). According to Blackmon (2008), "Without former slaves and their steady expertise and cooperation in the fields- the white South was crippled" (p. 39). Not only did slave owners lose expert field workers, but they also lost the revenue that they generated from leasing slaves to industrial companies, which put the economy in ruins (Blackmon, 2008).

As a result, wealthy White southerners used their political influences to pass laws to oppress former slaves, in particular males, based on the premise that Black men were "menacing and dangerous" (Alexander, 2010, p. 16). For example, every southern state except Arkansas and Tennessee enacted laws outlawing vagrancy as a way to

intentionally incriminate jobless Blacks (Blackmon, 2008). In Mississippi, every African American worker was required to enter into a labor contract with White farmers annually to avoid being arrested. Other southern states ratified laws that made it difficult or unlawful for Blacks to change employers without permission (Blackmon, 2008). The Blacks, more so Black males who defied the laws, were arrested and then leased out as laborers to industrial companies and farmers. By the end of 1870s, leasing prisoners to private companies had become not only a lucrative practice in the South given that it generated much to the revenues of many counties, but also a new form of involuntary servitude almost identical to slavery in the 1850s (Blackmon, 2008).

Furthermore, Jim Crow laws were also enacted during the late 1800s to place strict limitations on Blacks in order to separate them from Whites and keep them "powerless and subservient" (Tichauser, 2001, p. 1). The laws varied from state to state; however, in most Southern states, it was illegal for Blacks and Whites to live in the same community, marry across strictly defined racial lines, and share public facilities, including but not limited to hospitals, transportation, restaurants, pools, and schools. Resultantly, Blacks were treated as inferior to Whites, who had ready access to all of the economic and social power, wealth, and privileges (Tichauser, 2001). During the Jim Crow Era, Blacks experienced "seemingly unending incidents of terror and humiliation, with hardly any freedom, very little wealth, and absolutely no justice," (Tichauser, 2001, p. 1) which also respectively mirrored the experiences of former slaves. Conversely, the 20th century brought forth new opportunities to further African Americans' social mobility.

Uplifting African Americans: The Philosophies of Washington and DuBois

At the start of the 1900s, Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois offered competing educational philosophies to uplift the African American race. Washington's philosophy supported industrial education (Washington, 1901). In 1881, he established the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, which provided training for teachers, farmers, and industrial workers (Washington, 1901). Washington encouraged Blacks to work within the Jim Crow systems of oppression to excel as dependable and experienced technical laborers, which he suggested would eventually allow for financial self-sufficiency (Johnson & Watson, 2004).

Whereas Washington advocated for African Americans to learn domestic and trade skills, DuBois (1903) contended that Blacks needed schools that promoted literacy, along with secondary schools that trained teachers to teach in primary schools. DuBois (1903) criticized Washington's educational principles, which he suggested encouraged Black people to accept lower level occupations and to give up their fight for civil rights and higher education. DuBois's theory was to train a small percentage of upper-class African Americans, the Talented Tenth, to educate others.

The copious expectations of Washington and DuBois for African American's social mobility by means of education were ineffective because they lacked attainable and realistic goals for the entire African American community (Johnson & Watson, 2004; Pfautz, 1963). In addition, their relentless efforts to uplift the Black community were overshadowed by "a period of disillusion and disenfranchisement" (Walsh, 2010, p.53) at the start of the 20th century. The beginning of the 20th century was described as a time where the relationship between Whites and Blacks was more brutal than ever (Lewis,

1994). With Blacks legally free, Whites used discriminatory laws and physical violence to maintain control of Blacks, in particular, Southern Blacks (Lewis, 1994).

The Great Migration

The start of World War I led to a shortage of laborers in United States' industrial factories. From 1910 to 1940, over 1 million African Americans from the South migrated to northern, mid-western, and western cities for social advancement and to take advantages of opportunities previously denied to them (Tolnay, 2003; Walsh, 2010). African Americans sought to enhance their quality of life and escape racial inferiority they knew in the South (Tolnay, 2003; Walsh, 2010). African Americans who migrated and settled in northern cities were identified as the "New Negro" (Locke, p. 1, 1927) because they exhibited renewed self-respect and self-dependence. These "New Negros" were successful in making several social and political advances, which caused a continuous influx of southern African American migrants in northern cities (Maloney, 2002).

As the number of African Americans in the North increased, so did racial tension (Maloney, 2002). Northern Whites began to use segregation practices to "draw sharper lines between themselves and the growing Black community" (Maloney, 2002, p. 10). The segregation practices of the North were often parallel to those of the South; they restricted Blacks to inequitable lifestyles (Walsh, 2010). Even so, African Americans continued to work relentlessly to make cultural changes to uplift their race through education, artistic and written expression, poetry, music, and photography (Higgins, 2007), yet the "basic formula of American Negro- white relations- white over black- could not be changed" (Pfautz, 1963, p. 360).

Brown v. Board of Education and Desegregation

The United States Supreme Court ruling in the 1954 landmark case, *Brown v. Board of Education*, overturned the "separate but equal" doctrine of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) and declared school segregation unconstitutional (Maloney, 2002). *Brown* was intended to give many African American students access to a higher-quality education by giving them access to schools better equipped with qualified teachers and rich resources (Maloney, 2002).

Although *Brown* promised a quality education for African Americans, scholars have often debated that it was "a broken promise or unfilled dream" (Armor, 2006, p. 40). Many children experienced psychological distress from being harassed at school; educators were not properly trained to teach students from diverse cultural backgrounds; and schools failed to close the persistent education gap between Black and White students (Atkinson, 2004; Barton, 2004; Hucks, 2011; Madyun, 2011; Maloney, 2002). At the end of the 20th century, many African Americans were still characterized as disadvantaged in terms of education, labor market achievement, and property ownership (Maloney, 2002). A combination of social oppression, poverty, and limited educational experiences have unfavorably shaped African Americans, in particular, African American males' behavior, self-perception, and educational attainment throughout history (Fries-Britt, 1997; Peterson, 2011). This study investigated African American males' personal and education experiences effect on their self-perceptions and lack of educational attainment.

Theoretical Frameworks

Ralph Ellison (1952) stated, "I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me" (p. 2). Feelings of being invisible often plague African American males because they are "members of the least understood and studied of all sex-race groups in the United States" (Blake & Darling, 1994, p. 402). Their cultural identity has been shaped by stereotyping labels throughout history: endangered species, incompetent, and lazy (Blake & Darling, 1994; Ferguson, 2001; Gibbs, 1998; Jenkins, 2006; Rolland, 2011). For this reason, African American males may place greater emphasis on being accepted by peers and adults who often misunderstand them rather than their education (Irving & Hudley, 2008). Harper and Davis (2012) noted that African American male students make considerable effort to be identified as well-liked or outgoing. In light of this information, the cool pose theory and culturally relevant pedagogy were used to examine African American males' self-perceptions and lack of educational attainment. These frameworks helped to explain the influence that African American males' personal and educational experiences have on their self-perceptions and decisions regarding their educational attainment.

Cool Pose

The premise of the cool pose theory is that African American males wear "masks" to hide inner turmoil and anxiety because exposing their emotional state had placed them at risk for psychological and physical brutality beginning as far back as the slavery era, in addition to social rejection and unemployment during the Jim Crow era (Major & Billson, 1992). According to Major and Billson (1992), "African American men mastered the art of concealment; his mask constructed innocence and ignorance, childishness and

humility, and obedience and deference" (p. 59). One masking behavior used by Black men to conceal their feelings was "shucking" referred to today as "roasting." "Shucking" helped African American men maintain their sanity and integrity by making jokes aimed at Whites and the conditions of Black oppression: "jokes allowed Blacks to feel superior and seize the upper hand, if only in words" (Major & Billson, 1992, p. 63).

The start of the 20th century was dominated by strict discriminatory practices and minstrel theaters where White men dressed as grotesque stereotypical characters to depict Black men were popular. For this reason, African American males started using stylish dressing, walking with rhythm, and the use of their own idiosyncratic verbal and nonverbal language to mask their inner feelings and to promote the perception that they were 'cool' and virile (Major & Billson, 1992). Behaviors and expressions that were once used to veil African American males' inner thoughts and masculinity have transformed into distinctive styles of coolness, cool pose, which help Black males show their masculinity and maintain self-confidence when they experience social or academic disconnection (Osbourne, 1999).

Cool pose, a phenomenon of coolness studied by Major and Billson (1992) is a two-dimensional model entailing behaviors, scripts, physical posturing, and expression management used by African American males as coping mechanisms. The first dimension of cool pose entails African American males bringing into play behaviors and physical performance to enhance their confidence. They learn to manage conflict and nervousness through self-control, strength, balance, and stability, which express their "coolness" and masculinity (Foster, 1992). Black males show their "coolness" or masculinity by physical expressiveness. For examples, males adopt styles that are unique

in dress and communication, perceived as being hip, and mimic people they perceive as important whom they encounter daily (Major & Billson, 1992; Werner, 1993).

The second dimension of cool pose is comparable to the masking practices that African American males used during slavery and Jim Crow. It is used to neutralize negative responses experienced at home and school (Werner, 1993). Male students tend to respond to negativity by joking, isolating themselves, or accentuating that they are "content, unmotivated, and unconcerned" (Werner, 1993, p. 144) to avoid showing emotional or vulnerability (Major & Billson, 1992).

The cool pose theory helps to explain the importance of the African American males' goal of acceptance in society and the basis of they're perceived lazy and nonchalant attitude (Major & Billson, 1992). Major and Billson (1992) described cool pose as a catalyst for success; conversely, it has also been suggested that cool pose can adversely affect students' success when a greater emphasis is placed on acceptance rather than students' "intellectual gift and the opportunity for academic achievement" (Hall, 2009, p. 534). The cool pose theory provides a lens to better understand racial achievement disparities between Black males and their male counterparts. The theory identifies societal elements that influence African American students', in particular, males', self-identification and how they perceive others; however, it does not suggest practices that can be used to improve academic achievement.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Culturally relevant pedagogy is an instructional approach that involves using culturally diverse teaching in the classroom to increase student achievement (Ladson-Billings, 1995). This particular pedagogy enhances students' conceptual understanding

and promotes academic growth through connecting students' lifestyles and cultural traditions with their learning experiences (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Culturally relevant teaching has been described as "good teaching" (Schmeichel, 2012, p. 212) because it requires teachers to attend to students' needs and have high expectations of students (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Culturally relevant teachers provide students with a curriculum that builds on their prior knowledge and cultural experiences to enhance their conceptual understanding and promote academic growth. Students are also encouraged to develop a "broader sociopolitical consciousness that allows them to critique the cultural norms, values, mores, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 162). Culturally relevant teaching promotes student success by increasing student engagement and making learning applicable to students' daily lives.

Both, the cool pose theory (Major & Billson, 1992) and culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) theories reveal that students' self-perception and their perceptions of school are often the factors that influence their academic achievement. For instance, these theories have proven that stereotypes and academic disconnection adversely affect students' perceptions of themselves and in some cases cause them to become disengaged from school (Major & Billson, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 1995). The cool pose theory and culturally relevant pedagogy were used in this study to understand how African American males' personal and educational experiences affect their self-perceptions and lack of educational attainment.

Statement of Problem

The underachievement of African Americans, in particular, African American males, is one of the most discussed and studied phenomena in education (Cokley, McClain, Jones, & Johnson, 2012). A significant population of African American males has been subjected to substandard outcomes such as imprisonment, unemployment, and poverty, which have weakened their potential, self-perception, and hindered their educational attainment (Hucks, 2011; Pettit & Western, 2004; Whiting, 2009; Wilson, 2014). Nationally, more than 50% of African American males do not graduate from high school (Schott Foundation, 2010). Likewise, The Schott Foundation for Public Education (2015) stated that Mississippi's graduation rate statewide for African American males during the 2011-2012 school year was 51% compared to 80% for White males.

Purpose of Study

This dissertation examines the personal and educational experiences that influenced self-perception and the decision to drop out of high school of African American males from Tulah (pseudonym), a small, impoverished county in the Mississippi Delta region. For decades, Tulah's predominantly African American population has experienced inadequate social advancement coupled with poverty and academic failure (Harlan, 2015). In the 1980s, Tulah was ranked as one of America's poorest counties and branded "America Ethiopia" (Harlan, 2015, para. 6) for its destitute neighborhoods and record high unemployment rates (Higgins, 2015). Now, Tulah remains one of the most impoverished counties in the United States with the exception to six other counties located in South Dakota, Alaska, and Virginia (Harlan, 2015). Nearly 40% of its population is living at or below poverty level with limited economic resources

(U.S. Census, 2014). This is not only alarming but also raises the question- where did the money go considering Tulah has raked in over $759 million dollars in revenue from the casino industry since the early1990s (Harlan, 2015).

Furthermore, the inescapable poverty that many of Tulah's residents experience has not only limited their opportunity for socio-economic advancement but has also made them more susceptible to academic failure. For the 2013-2014 school year, Tulah's school district's graduation rate was 59.7% compared to the 75.5% for the state of Mississippi (Mississippi Department of Education, 2014). The Mississippi Department of Education recently took over the Tulah County School District for the second time as a result of chronic academic failure and for violating several state and federal laws (Amy, 2015). In Mississippi, school districts are rated according to the percentage of students who are performing at minimum, basic, proficient, and advanced criterion levels, as well as based upon the degree to which student performance has improved over one academic school year (Mississippi Department of Education, 2014). The Tulah school district had not received a rating above a D for the past five years, which meant that the district was on academic watch, at risk of failing. In addition to poor student performance, the district was also in violation of 22 of 31 state accrediting standards (Amy, 2015; Mississippi Department of Education, 2014).

I interviewed and observed African American males, ages 18-25 from Tulah, with limited educational experiences due to quitting school. These interviews with the participants revealed how their personal and school experiences influenced their self-perceptions and lack of educational attainment. Understanding the experiences that adversely influenced their self-perceptions and academic disconnection is crucial to

African American male students' academic. The results of this study revealed a need to form school and community partnerships and modify current educational policies, leadership practices, and classroom instruction to increase African American males' educational achievement.

Justification

A critical perspective was taken on the lived experiences of African American males to understand factors that adversely affect their self-perception and academic achievement. I provided an in-depth description of their personal experiences, as well as identified significant structural elements that may have caused academic disconnection. Limited educational experiences have often been linked to poor life outcomes (e.g. poverty; home and environment) and mass incarceration for African American males (Pettit & Western, 2004). Black males make up the majority of prison populations across the United States, and about half enter prison without a high school diploma (Alexander, 2012; Pettit & Western, 2004; Wilson, 2014). However, more importantly, there is a lack of scholarship regarding the influence that African American males' personal experiences have on their self-perception and educational attainment. The Schott Foundation for Public Education (2015) stated that in Mississippi only 51.4% of Black males graduated during the 2011-2012 school year compared to 80% of White males. Additionally, in 2011 only 5.1% of 8th grade African American males in Mississippi met the reading proficiency target on the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP).

To better understand how self-perception and personal experiences impact the educational attainment of African American males, this study was conducted through voluntary participation of adult African American males from Tulah County who

dropped out of school. Tulah sits in a region rife with inadequate social change and academic underperformance (Harlan, 2015). By selecting participants from Tulah, I was able to obtain unique perspectives and experiences, as well as better understand how poverty, together with lived experiences, shape self-perception and contribute to educational attainment. It is my hope that the findings of this study will provide insight into how we might create personalized interventions for African American male students to improve educational attainment and life outcomes.

Research Question

What are the experiences and self-perceptions of adult African American males in Tulah, Mississippi who have dropped out of school, regarding their educational attainment?

Limitations

The limitations were the nature and structure of the study. The study is qualitative, which relies solely on narrative research from the participants' perspectives and experiences. The structure of the research study has been limited to African American males, ages 18-25, from a small city located in Mississippi who dropped out of high school.

Assumptions

The following assumptions were made prior to the onset of this study:

1. Each participant will respond openly and honestly.
2. Each participant will reflect and elaborate on personal experiences.
3. Each participant's interview will be completed under optimum conditions.

Definition of Terms

Academic disidentification - a disconnection between self-esteem and academic outcomes (Osborne, 1999).

Involuntary minoritie s- individuals who were involuntarily brought to America and enslaved (Ogbu & Simmons, 1998).

Mass incarceration - a form of racialized social control synonymous to Jim Crow laws, which restricts a lower caste of individuals from the mainstream society by enforcing strict laws and customs (Alexander, 2010).

Racial achievement gap - the difference in academic achievement between African Americans students and their counterparts (Armor, 2006).

Resegregation- the rebirth of racially segregated schools and neighborhoods due to White migration to racially homogeneous suburban neighborhoods (Ifill, 2014; Obiakor & Beachum, 2005).

Self-perception- a combination of how individuals view their own uniqueness and how they are perceived within society (DuBois, 1904).

Social mobility - transitioning from one social class to another (Gorski, 2007).

Social teasing - exposing underprivileged individuals to a life of wealth without providing adequate resources and social structures that can afford them similar privileges (Jenkins, 2006).

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I described a research study that will address the phenomenon of the underachievement of adult, African American males who dropped out of high school. The research study used a phenomenology approach to understand how African

American males' self-perception and experiences impact their educational attainment. The chapter provided historical and contextual background of the phenomenon, explained the problem being studied, and provided a research question that was used to guide the study. Furthermore, the chapter also imparted upon the lens through which the issue was examined. The next chapter will provide information from research literature surrounding this issue.

CHAPTER II – LITERATURE REVIEW

Research Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of this study is to understand how African American males' self-perception and experiences impact their educational attainment. This chapter will provide readers with a review of current and relevant literature that supports the guiding research question: What are the experiences and self-perceptions of adult African American males in Tulah, Mississippi who have dropped out of school, regarding their educational attainment? This study will investigate how African American males' personal experiences and self-perceptions impact their educational attainment. I explored the following elements to gain a better understanding of this issue: African American males' self-perception and their individual and educational experiences, as well as social and economic barriers.

Statement of the Problem

Genesis 4:9 states, "And the LORD said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother's keeper"? Cain's response can be used to reflect upon and bring attention to the plight of African American males. Historically, racial and social barriers have given rise to African American males' academic failure and poor life outcomes (Goldfard, 2014). Black males' "underachievement, lack of inclusion, and backward progression particularly within the educational arena" (Jenkins, 2006, p. 127) has become a persistent challenge. Moreover, African American males' underperformance and challenges in education are documented more than any other race (Barton, 2004), which is complex considering the continuous advances of African American females and their peers from other cultural backgrounds (Barton, 2004; Varner

& Mandara, 2013). The National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) 2013 National Report Card showed that only 17% of eighth grade Black students read at or above proficiency placing them in the lowest percentile when compared to other ethnicity groups. The report also revealed Black 12th grade students scored lower nationally in 2013 in reading and math than in 1992. The fact that many African American children, especially boys, constantly fall behind their White counterparts on standardized test raises the penetrating question: What are education policymakers, administrators, teachers, and community partners doing to keep our brothers? In other words, what interventions are being put in place to increase the potential opportunities for African American males not only in the educational arena but also in the community? I sought to investigate how African American males' self-perception together with their personal and educational experiences impact their educational attainment.

Historical Perspective

From time immemorial, African American males have been the beneficiaries of permanent bigotry in American society. The systems of racial control such as slavery, sharecropping, Jim Crow laws, disenfranchisement, and now an era of mass imprisonment have not only dehumanized Black males, but they also have deprived them of elementary civil rights and a quality education (Anderson, 1988; Bell, 2010; Graff, 2016; Wade, 1970). These discriminatory practices have impeded African American males' academic potential and social mobility (Bell, 2010). Respectively, within the educational pipeline, African American males continue to straggle behind their male counterparts from different ethnicity groups (Alexander, 2010; Blake & Darling, 2004; Jackson & Moore, 2006; Jenkins, 2006). Furthermore, African American males'

academic failure and exclusion have been linked to their lack of social progression and mass incarceration (Wilson, 2014). One may question, how is it still possible in the 21st century for African Americans, in particular, African American males to underperform when the opportunities for academic advancement seem to be far from few? However, to develop a conceptual understanding of the achievement gap between Black males and their male counterparts from other ethnic groups, one must understand the experiences that have impacted their mindset and handicapped their opportunities for educational and social progression in the United States.

Slavery

African Americans were involuntarily brought to the colonies in the 1600s as an inexpensive source of labor and later were socialized as an inferior race (Burrell & Walsh, 2001). As slaves, they were separated from their families, restricted from practicing their cultural traditions, and denied the opportunity to learn to read, which stripped them of their identity and disparaged their achievements (Burrell & Walsh, 2001). They were transformed into human tools and forced to work under atrocious conditions (Burrell & Walsh, 2001).

Although slavery practices varied between colonies, those of South Carolina influenced many colonies' slave laws feasible because it was the first state to pass all-inclusive slave codes (Loewen, 2011). Slave codes were laws that prohibited slaves from moving, assembling as a group, raising food, and making a certain amount of money (Jenkins, 2006; Rasmussen, 2010). In 1740, South Carolina amended existing slave codes in response to the Stono Rebellion (Jenkins, 2006; Rasmussen, 2010). The Stono Rebellion was a slave revolt that led to the death of more than 20 colonists and the

destruction of many buildings. The revised slave codes became known as the Negro Act, laws that made it illegal for slaves to assemble in groups and slave literacy (Rasmussen, 2010; Wade, 1970). Slave owners isolated slaves in rural areas and used anti-literacy laws as mechanisms of control for slaves (Douglass, 1845; Rasmussen, 2010). They feared that slaves would use their knowledge as a weapon to lead a revolt, which threatened the slave system: "learning would spoil the best nigger in the world… he would at once become unmanageable" (Douglass, 1845, p. 29). On the whole, the Negro Act furthered the oppression of slaves by keeping them disconnected from the world around them (Wade, 1970).

Roughly 30 years after South Carolina passed the Negro Act, the United States gained freedom as a nation and adopted the Declaration of Independence (Hines, Hines, & Harrold, 2011). The Declaration of Independence stated, "all men are created equal and that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights- Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness" (Jefferson, 1776, para. 2). This statement was true for all Americans, except Blacks. According to Hines et al. (2011), Blacks, especially northern Blacks who rallied in support of the nation's independence from the British believed that they would afford them the same rights as Whites; however, that was not so. Their freedom would not be addressed until decades later.

Although the institution of slavery was widespread in America, slavery in the North started to dissipate in the early 1800s and disappeared to a certain extent by 1840 (Wade, 1970). Many Northern Blacks were granted full civil rights, which allowed them to marry, have families, own property, and go to school (Wade, 1970). Because of this, southern states, including Mississippi, seceded from the Union. The southern states

believed that their means of support, based on slavery, was being jeopardized. They knew that the end of slavery would not only afford Blacks freedom but also lead to a potential financial crisis (Wade, 1970).

With this in mind, southern states formed the Confederates States of America and fought to maintain slavery, states' rights, and liberty for Whites (Wade, 1970). The tension between the North and South intensified and eventually led to the start of the American Civil War in 1861 (Wade, 1970). The Civil War lasted from 1861 until 1865; however, two years into the war in 1863, President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation freeing slaves from servitude (Dalton, 1991). It was only accepted in some northern states (Dalton, 1991). Many slaves remained in bondage until 1865 when the 13th Amendment to the Constitution was passed making slavery unconstitutional (Araujo, 2015; Williams, 2015).

Post-Slavery

In the mid-19th century, many African Americans' newly found freedom offered them a promising future (Maloney, 2002). According to Anderson (1988), "Blacks emerged from slavery with a strong belief in the desirability of learning to read and write" (p. 5). They viewed literacy as the way to independence and full citizenship (Dalton, 1991). Former slaves, particularly those in the South, fought relentlessly to secure schooling for themselves and their children. In the South, former slaves led grass-root movements to prove Blacks were also entitled to resources to build and operate schools (Anderson, 1988). Still and all, racial challenges and limited employment opportunities often obstructed their progress. Many Whites, poor and wealthy, were enraged about the liberation of African Americans. Poor White southerners feared they

would have to compete with Blacks for jobs (Alexander, 2010). Likewise, wealthy White southerners were furious because they lost their cheap sources of labor, which increased their farming production costs (Alexander, 2010). To regain control of African Americans, Whites used the idea that they were "menacing and dangerous" (Alexander, 2010, p.16), and passed laws to undermine the social mobility of African Americans. These laws not only illicitly incriminated Blacks to lease as laborers for financial gain but also made it difficult for Black farm workers to change jobs without being penalized (Blackmon, 2008).

Despite unjust practices, African Americans continued to fight for equality. Reconstruction, which began in 1865 and lasted until 1877, helped African Americans, especially southern African Americans regain control of their lives and become self-sufficient. It involved Northerners and Southerners working together to obtain universal education for Blacks, as well as, amend discriminatory laws that oppressed African Americans (Anderson, 1988). Reconstruction resulted in several Black leaders gaining political positions and working to uplift the African American race; however, African Americans' social, and political gains were short lived.

Many White southern plantation owners opposed universal schooling for African Americans because they viewed Black education as "a distinct threat to the racially qualified form of labor exploitation" (Anderson, 1988, p. 23) on which they depended. To explain, considering that many former slaves had basic literacy skills, planters could no longer manipulate and control Blacks using confusing labor contracts (Anderson, 1988). Consequently, the plantation owners created many challenges for Blacks to regain control of the laboring class. They fired Black parents whose children attended schools

and threatened to evict them from their homes (Anderson, 1988). Plantation owners also demanded that Black children work on plantations to help to meet the production demands, which left them very little time to learn to read and write (Anderson, 1988; Maloney, 2002). Moreover, when southern White legislatures regained control in Congress, they passed the Compromise of 1877, which forced African Americans into another cycle of oppression.

Jim Crow Laws

The birth of Jim Crow laws in the 1880s together with the *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) decision, in which the Supreme Court ruled racial segregation in public facilities constitutional as long as the facilities were "equal" to those provided for Whites, condemned Blacks to a subordinate status, as well as made them "powerless and subservient" (Tichauser, 2012, p. 1). Segregation or Jim Crow law separated the races "in restaurants, hotels, public transportation, and, most importantly in schools" (Cain, 1874, p. 99), which robbed African Americans of an equal opportunity to make a better life for themselves. The laws not only fueled the permanence of racial discrimination and simultaneously impeded the social mobility of many African American adults, but also hindered their children's progress toward social mobility.

Moreover, Blacks' experiences during the Jim Crow era emulated the experiences of former slaves (Daniel & Walker, 2014; Tichauser, 2012). Many African Americans were forced to return to work on farms as sharecroppers or as inexperienced laborers who barely made enough money to provide for their families, which reinstated Whites control over them comparable to African Americans' slave experiences. Resultantly, many of their children were pulled from school to work on plantations to help meet the crop

demands and to help their parents financially. This not only denied African American children assess to a formal education, but also hindered their social mobility (Maloney, 2002). Nevertheless, Blacks made a "valiant effort to mitigate poverty, illiteracy, racial discrimination, high mortality rates, and other desolate conditions that plagued many African Americans at the turn of the century" (Johnson & Watson, 2004, p. 65). The start of the 20th century brought forth new hopes for African Americans.

Uplifting African Americans: The Philosophies of Washington and DuBois

The ideologies of Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois became widely recognized by African Americans at the start of the 20th century. Although Washington's and DuBois's philosophical approaches were different; they presented ideas for educational and social advancement for African Americans (DuBois, 1903; Washington, 1901). Washington's (1901) philosophy promoted industrial education. He encouraged African Americans to work within the system of oppression to excel in vocational trade. His solution to the race problem was for Blacks to excel in the lower level of the occupation structure (Johnson & Watson, 2004). He used vocational education to train African Americans in domestic and trade skills because he felt that was the only way Blacks could become successful in America (Johnson & Watson, 2004).

W. E.B. DuBois's philosophy challenged Washington's educational principles. He argued that Washington's education program encouraged Black people to give up "political power, insistence on civil rights, and higher education for the youth" (DuBois, 1903, p. 42). DuBois (1903) argued that Blacks needed schools that could teach them to read and write, as well as secondary schools that could prepare teachers to teach at the primary schools (DuBois, 1903). DuBois's ideology was to train a small percentage of

upper-class African Americans, the Talented Tenth, and then have them train others. Despite their differences, neither Washington's nor DuBois's ideologies were successful in helping Blacks reach economic stability. Their hopes for African Americans to achieve social mobility by means of education were ineffective because they lacked attainable and realistic goals for the entire African American community (Johnson & Watson, 2004; Pfautz, 1963). To explain, Washington's ideology of vocational training was ineffective because it failed to prepare African Americans for upward mobility. It instead provided Blacks with training in various aspects of manual labor such as domestic and trade skills, which placed them at the lower end of the occupational structure (Johnson & Watson, 2004). Likewise, DuBois's plan to use the Talented Tenth to "lead masses of African Americans out of a retrograde circumstance" (Johnson & Watson, 2004, p. 69) failed because the task was far too great. It was not practical for such a small percentage of Blacks to not only lead, but also prevail over the insurmountable political, economic, and social challenges that inundated the African American race.

The New Negros

As it has been demonstrated time and time again, African Americans desired nothing more in the world than to be educated and free from racial and socio-economic oppression (DuBois, 1904; Tolnay, 2003; Walsh, 2010; Washington, 1901). With this in mind, it was not surprising that over one million African Americans migrated to the North between 1910-1940 when jobs became readily available during World War I. Blacks sought social advancement, and the opportunity to take advantage of jobs denied to them in the South (Tolnay, 2003; Walsh, 2010). Equally important, many African Americans gained a sense of identity and a status comparable to White Americans in the

North. They were able to marry, manage their own affairs, own property, and break employment barriers that restricted them to certain employment positions in the South (Higgins, 2007; Tolnay, 2003; Walsh, 2010). Blacks worked relentlessly to build racial pride and camaraderie as a community, and because of their great strides, they became known as the "New Negros" (Locke, 1927, p. 1).

The "New Negros" uplifted their race through education, artistic and written expression, poetry, music, and photography (Higgins, 2007; Maloney, 2002; Wade, 1970). For almost the first time in history, African Americans experienced economic growth and were recognized for their contributions to American society. For that reason, the period became known as the Harlem Renaissance, which was considered the rebirth of Black pride and expression (Higgins, 2007; Maloney, 2002; Wade, 1970). The Harlem Renaissance lasted for almost ten years, and when it ended in 1929 as a result of the stock market crash, so did Blacks' prominence in society. The 1929 stock market crash caused the worst economic downfall in the history of the United States, The Great Depression. Consequently, the Great Depression increased racial tension in the North, which brought Blacks to a "brink of desperation" (Wade, 1970, p. 116). Many African Americans lost their jobs and were excluded from job opportunities by Northern labor unions, which once again placed them in oppressive situations similar to their experiences in the South (Wade, 1970). Blacks were forced to live in ghettos, segregated slum neighborhoods, and had to rely heavily upon government assistance to survive (Wade, 1970). However, in the face of the depression and discrimination, African Americans continued to fight for equal rights (Wade, 1970).

Brown v. Board of Education and School Desegregation

In 1954, in the landmark case, *Brown v. Board of Education,* the Supreme Court held school segregation unconstitutional (Brown v. Board of Education, 1954). The plaintiffs, in this case, took a stand for African American children to have the same educational opportunities as Whites. They claimed that segregating public schools on the basis of race not only deprived Black children of equal educational opportunities but also denied them equal protection of the law guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment (Brown v. Board of Education, 1954). The opinion in *Brown v. Board of Education* provided many African Americans access to better educational resources in the hope that it would improve their learning outcomes.

Be that as it may, school desegregation has not fulfilled its promise of equal education for people of color (Barton, 2004). While the sole purpose of *Brown* was to give African Americans the same educational opportunities as their White counterparts, the majority of African American students still attend high- poverty, racially concentrated schools (Farinde, Adam, & Lewis, 2014). According to Farinde et al. (2014), "the pursuit of equity and social justice for African Americans with the American education system has been a long and arduous journey" (p. 182). For example, nearly a decade after court-ordered desegregation, many schools, particularly in the South, did very little to protect Black students who voluntarily integrated schools. African American students attended school in hostile educational environments where they experienced verbal and physical abuse from White students, their parents, and angry mobs (Atkinson, 2004; Hucks, 2011). In addition to the mistreatment by Whites, Black students were shunned in the classroom because many White educators lacked the skills to nurture students from different culture

backgrounds (Atkinson, 2004; Madyun, 2011). The experiences and treatment of Black students have greatly contributed to their psychological distress and lack of academic achievement (Atkinson, 2004; Farinde et al., 2014; Hucks, 2011).

More than 50 years after school segregation was ruled unconstitutional, the achievement gap continues to keep Blacks and their White counterparts' worlds apart. Armor (2006) suggested that various social science or civil rights doomsayers believe that "*Brown v. Board of Education* was a failure, a broken promise, or unfilled dream" (p. 40). *Brown* may have promised a bright future for African Americans' economic and educational growth; however, at the end of the 20th century Blacks were still characterized as "relatively disadvantaged in terms of education, labor market success, and home ownership" (Maloney, 2002, para. 10). Some scholars have asserted that desegregation has been "disastrous for our education system" (Ifill, 2014, p. 64). In 2013, the United States Department of Education asserted that 82% of African Americans were not performing at or above proficiency in reading, which poses a serious problem for educators and community stakeholders, as well as the African American community. This is not to say that continued school segregation would have produced better educational and life outcomes for African American students; however, their persistent academic underachievement does raise concerns about inequalities within the American education system.

A substantial amount of research has been conducted to examine the history of African American education to identify common factors that contribute to the underperformance of African American male students (Ford & Harris, 1996; Harper & Davis, 2012; Hucks, 2001). Many of the findings allude to causes of African American

students, specifically African American males' academic underperformance and provide interventions that can be used to improve student achievement; however, only gradual progress has been made in terms of African American students' achievement (Hucks, 2011). The present study contributes to research on Black males by concentrating on how their personal experiences and self-perception influence their educational attainment.

Theoretical Frameworks

Cool Pose

Relationships play an intricate role in developing and molding African American male youths. Harper and Davis (2012) suggested that Black male students make considerable effort to be identified by their peers as popular or cool. According to Mickelson and Green (2006), "several studies address the effects of peer bonding and influence on both achievement and anti-achievement behavior, particularly among African Americans" (p. 37). They maintained that the relationship between peer acceptance and high achievement is vital for African American students' success. The cool pose theory is a two- dimensional model that has unique characteristics and strengths that explain how African American males maintain their masculinity, as well as conceal their inner feelings (Major & Billson, 1992).

Cool pose proposes that African American males maintain a sense of "coolness" by adopting strategies to cope when they lack academic content knowledge, lack a connection with the teacher, or are rejected by their peers. Cool pose also entails Black males' "use of deliberate and conspicuous styles of demeanor, speech, gesture, walk, stance, and other physical gestures" (Hall, 2009, p. 532) to illustrate their self-pride, masculinity, and control. Foster (1992) asserted that being cool enhances African

American boys' confidence and helps them to manage conflict and nervousness through self-control, strength, balance, and stability. Cool pose also improves Black males' prominence among their peers because they develop a distinctive style that includes unique style in dress, communication, walk, and presentation of self, which is often perceived as being hip (Major & Billson, 1992; Werner, 1993).

The other dimension of cool pose involves neutralizing negative responses experienced at home and school (Werner, 1993). Male students tend to respond to negativity at school by using cool pose as a behavior response, which accentuates that they are "content, unmotivated, unconcerned, and have a bad attitude" (Werner, 1993, p. 144) because they do not show emotional affection. The males engage in masculinity through conspicuous style, speech, and gestures (Hall, 2009). Major and Billson (1992) claimed that cool pose becomes a catalyst for success because it builds unity among African American males. However, some scholars suggested that the need to be accepted and identified as cool leads to the academically talented boys underachieving because they think that being smart is not cool (Hall, 2009; Major & Billson, 1992; Werner, 1993).

Likewise, the acceptance of the cool pose image may lead to African American male students abandoning their intellectual gifts and opportunities for academic achievement, rather siding with "delinquency, lack of intelligence, and inferiority to whites" (Hall, 2009, p. 534). Many Black males' image and how they are perceived by others play an imperative role in who they are as individuals, which in part give reason for why they go through great lengths to be perceived as *cool* and *virile* (Bell, 2010; Campbell, Assanand, & DiPaula, 2003; DuBois, 1903; Johnson, 1960; Matrenec, 2001;

Ogbu & Simmon, 1998). Their willingness to underperform to be labeled as "cool" poses problems for educators because African American males' "coolness" not only unfavorably impacts their academic achievement, but it also increases disciplinary problems at school (Major & Billson, 1992). Major and Billson (1992) suggested that many Black males are disciplined for "strutting, rapping, woofing, playing the dozens, using slang, wearing hats or expressive clothing or wearing pants with loosened belts," (p. 14) behaviors used to show a sense of self-pride. Even so, these behaviors are perceived by most teachers as "negative, rude, arrogant, intimidating, sexually provocative, and threatening- and therefore not conducive to learning" (Major & Billson, 1992, p. 14). Many teachers misread Black males' expressiveness and "cool" behavior because they lack cultural awareness and the proper training and skills for teaching and understanding African American males (Major & Billson, 1992). Educational discrimination together with stereotypes negatively impact African American males' self-perception and their academic underachievement (Atkinson, 2004; Bell, 2010; Farinde et al., 2014; Hall, 2009; Madyun, 2011; Major & Billson, 1992). This partially explains why they may take on masking behaviors to show self-pride, self-discipline, and masculinity (Hall, 2009; Major & Billson, 1992).

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Culturally relevant pedagogy fosters a system of trust in the classroom by bridging a relationship between teachers, students, and the community (Flowers & Flowers, 2008). It is an instructional strategy that "empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, pp. 17-18). Culturally relevant pedagogy is

described as “good teaching” (Schmeichel, 2012, p. 212) because it requires teachers to work beyond curriculum restraints to provide opportunities for students to share their cultural traditions (Colvin & Tobler, 2013).

Ladson- Billing (1995) stated that culturally relevant teachers use students’ culture as a “vehicle for learning” (p. 161). They incorporate multi-cultural literature together with cultural traditions, like storytelling, to maximize student learning (Flowers & Flowers, 2008). Culturally relevant pedagogy has three criteria: “students must experience academic success, students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence, and students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of current social order” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 160). Students’ academic success rests on their active involvement in the lesson, which enhances their conceptual understanding of the task and promotes academic growth (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Integrating students’ culture in the curriculum is an asset to classroom instruction and student achievement because it allows students to make a cultural connection with learning through written and verbal communication (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Schmeichel, 2012).

The second criterion of culturally relevant pedagogy is cultural competence, which allows students to maintain their cultural integrity or to be themselves (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Ladson-Billings (1995) suggested that many African American students perceive school as a place where they cannot be themselves. Often students of color are reprimanded for wearing hats or baggy clothing, which they may consider as styling (Major & Billson, 1992). Ladson-Billings (1995) suggested that culturally relevant teachers use students’ culture, attitudes, and behaviors to drive class instruction. For

instance, Ladson-Billings provided an example of how a culturally relevant teacher allowed her students to bring in lyrics from a rap song to help their understanding of figurative language and enhance their classroom experience (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

In addition to the characteristics of academic success and cultural competence, it is essential for African American students to develop a critical consciousness, to engage in the world around them (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Having a critical consciousness requires students to develop a broader perspective, as well as allow them to "critique the cultural norms, values, morals, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 162) to attempt to resolve the problem. Culturally relevant pedagogy prepares students to be lifelong learners and trains them to examine the content of a text and decide necessary steps that should be taken (Ladson-Billings, 1995). It allows teachers to integrate students' culture in the curriculum and classroom instruction to not only increase student success, but also enhance students' perception of the school culture and improve their learning experiences (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Factors that Contribute to African American Males' Underperformance

In education, the prescription for students' academic success is ever changing due to the development of new policies, curriculums, and instructional practices. Nonetheless, there is one group of students, African American males, that has been unremittingly "misassessed" and treated with the wrong prescriptions (Obiakor & Beachum, 2005). African American males' academic underperformance has reached a crisis point. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in 2012, only 68% of African Americans graduated high school on time compared with 85% of White students. Nationwide African American male students continue to underperform across the K-12

educational pipeline and have lower college attendance and completion rates (Rowely & Bowman, 2009; Schott Foundation, 2010). Hucks (2011) posed the question: "why do African American males continue to be academically unsuccessful generation after generation?" (p. 339).

Several studies have identified the following factors as the roots of African American males' academic deficits: perceptions, home, environment, socioeconomics, educational experiences, and academic disconnection (Alexander, 2003; Ferguson, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Major & Billson, 1992; Ogbu, 1997; Osborne, 1999; Steele, 1992). Given these points, it is necessary to understand the underlying influences and personal experiences that shape African American males' self-perceptions and influence their K-12 educational experience. I will discuss how African American males' personal and educational experiences have a bearing on their self-perception and their educational opportunities.

African American Males' Self-Perceptions

Individuals' perceptions are often based on an accumulation of experiences of success and failure (Campbell et al., 2003). Taking this into consideration, it is not surprising that many African American males have developed negative perceptions of themselves. Historically, Black males have been the targets of "severe physical and psychological enslavement and elimination" (Madhubuti, 1990, p. 70). They have endured the grim experiences of slavery and second-class citizenship, and even today, they continue to be marginalized and excluded from American society (Ferguson, 2001; Irving & Hudley, 1994; Jenkins, 2006; Obiakor & Beachum, 2005). Moreover, the public consciousness depicts Black men as "immoral, lazy, violent, mentally deficient, and

rapacious criminals," (Blake & Darling, 1994, p. 402) which is the same demoralizing image that has been painted of Black males for over two hundred years (Jenkins, 2006; Rasmussen, 2010). Because of this, many African American males are troubled by negative stereotypes about themselves, their appearance, and their capabilities, which may well unfavorably affect their educational outcomes (Bell, 2010; Matrenec, 2001; Youdell, 2003). Furthermore, over the last century, scholarly attention has been given to the causes of African American males' identity crisis and their persistent academic failure (Bell, 2010; DuBois, 1903; Johnson, 1960; Matrenec, 2001; Ogbu & Simmon, 1998). The findings have made important contributions to the understanding of African American males' identity, in particular, the individualistic and educational experiences that impact their self-perceptions and educational attainment.

DuBois' Double Consciousness Philosophy

To begin with, DuBois (1903) argued: "the history of the American Negro is the history of this strife, longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better self" (p. 9). DuBois suggested that throughout history African American men have been troubled by their identity. They wrestle with who they are and what they stand for within their own community while fighting for acceptance and independence among peer groups, which is defined as double consciousness by DuBois.

> In *The Soul of Black Folks*, DuBois (1903) explained the double consciousness concept: The Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, —a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always

> looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity (p. 9).

DuBois (1903) suggested that Black males have a low sense of self because they measured their self-worth against the public's perceptions of them. According to DuBois (1903), this has not only distorted their self-perception but also hampered their ability to change for the better (p. 9). African American men desired to improve their quality of life; however, at no cost did they wish to sacrifice their heritage (DuBois, 1903). They simply wanted the right to be accepted as both Black and American with equal opportunities; however, this was realistically impossible (DuBois, 1903). Black men who strived to attain a "self-conscious manhood" were ridiculed by their contemporaries and excluded from opportunities for social advancement by Whites (DuBois, 1903, p. 2), which further encumbered their ability to break the inescapable cycle of oppression.

In addition to describing the double consciousness concept, DuBois (1903) also detailed his experiences as a Black man. In the same way, he was also conscientious and toiled over his existence in society, yet he refused to denounce his identity. He instead strived to sever the color line, a systematic barrier used to rob African Americans of work, culture, and liberty (DuBois, 1903). Moreover, DuBois fought to help Black men gain prominence in society. He asserted that Black men should not be excluded from political, industrial, and social life because they do not wear the same style of clothing, the same curl of hair or have the same color of skin (DuBois, 1903). In spite of his efforts, many African American males were subjected to identity crisis, coupled with public degradation and poverty (DuBois, 1903). They failed to prevail over the public's

scornful perception of them and also found it difficult to dismiss their culture in exchange for social promotion (DuBois, 1903).

James Weldon Johnson and Racial Passing

It is possible that DuBois' double consciousness influenced the latter works of Johnson because his works also recorded the many obstructions of African American male identity. Johnson's (1960) autobiography *The Autobiography of an Ex-coloured Man* detailed his experience as a biracial male. Johnson experienced his first identity crisis at the age of 11 when he learned that he was Black. The news of his identity shocked him because he had always perceived himself as White. Throughout the early years of his life, he stated that he struggled being an African American. Johnson stated that he had always looked at Blacks from a different perspective. He took thorough observations of the majority of the Blacks that he encountered when he traveled and noted their behavior based on their social classes. Johnson's description of the first class, the desperate class, mimics the image of men of color in today's society: "men worked in lumber and turpentine camps and were ex-convicts and bar-room loafers" (p. 78). He also added that Whites regarded this class of men as a "vicious mule, a thing to be worked, driven, and beaten, and killed for kicking" (p.78), which depicted the degrading experiences that men of color had to endure. Next, Johnson explained that the more prominent Blacks were, the more pleasure they got out of life; nonetheless, the question of race still weighed heavily on their consciousness. He noted that after visiting several cities in the South and observing the lives and class-caste system of African Americans, Johnson decided to revert back to his childhood identity and passed as a white man: "It's no disgrace to be black, but it's often very inconvenient" (p. 155). Johnson's

transformation disconnected him from his African American pedigree, yet presented more opportunities for advancement. Johnson stated that having White skin was all you needed to advance in life. At the end of the autobiography, he faced another identity crisis. Johnson noted the following:

> I was occupied in debating with myself the step which I had decided to take. I argued that to forsake one's race to better one's condition was no less worthy an action than to forsake one's country for the same purpose. I finally made up my mind that I would neither disclaim the black race nor claim the white race. (p. 190)

DuBois' (1903) and Johnson's (1960) personal accounts help one to make sense of African American males' identity crisis. They noted the obstacles that African American men face as human beings. The world's perception of their existence, as well as racist practices often placed Black males in compromising situations where they have to choose between their own identity and being accepted. Under those circumstances, African American males experience a disconnection with self, which may adversely impact their educational achievement and success in life (Major & Billson, 1992; Ogbu, 1991).

Societal Perceptions of African American Males

Black males have strived and longed for acceptance in society and in some cases passed as White for better opportunities, yet still, little progress has been made with regard to their prominence in American society (DuBois, 1903; Johnson, 1960). African American males continue to wrestle with who they are and what they stand for because their identities are shaped, molded, and developed by society's perception of them.

Ferguson (2001) asserted that in society, Black males are depicted as predators, a "threat to personal safety," (p. 78) which is the same demoralizing image that has been painted of Black males for over two hundred years (Jenkins, 2006; Rasmussen, 2010). The distorted image of males of color has become a "potent vehicle for the transmission of racial meanings that reproduce relations of difference, of division, and of power," (Ferguson, 2001, p.78). Given that the public consciousness drives racial discrimination and separation of races, men of color become powerless (Ferguson, 2001). Steele (1997) asserted that social structure and stereotypes shape the academic identities and performance outcomes of many members of society, in particular, African Americans. Seeing as many Black males internalize negative stereotypes, it is not surprising that their opportunities for advancement are deterred (Noguera, 1997; Steele, 1997). Their internalization of stereotypes about themselves, their looks, and their abilities may impede their academic potential.

Individual Experiences

Before examining African American males' educational experiences, it is important to look at the non-educational experiences that shape their self-perceptions and affect their educational attainment. Black males bring a multitude of social dilemmas with them when they enter school. They are subjected to "a life of poverty or some form of economic struggle and a generation of enraged and inadequately educated parents and elders" (Jenkins, 2006, p. 144). Resultantly, some African American males' home and community experiences together with poverty may annihilate them before they learn the fundamental educational skills needed to start school (Jenkins, 2006). Taking this into consideration, many African American males may not be prepared to begin school.

Home and Community

Throughout history, African American families have been characterized as strong, functional, and flexible (Sherin, 2002). They have continued to preserve through slavery practices that permanently separated loved ones and oppression triggered by social structural constraints and discrimination (Alexander, 2010; Jenkins, 2006; Rowley & Bowman, 2009). In spite of this, the African American family has also been described as one that is unstable and continues to repeat the cycle of poverty, which plays a part in negative outcomes of many Black children (Mizell, 1999; Rowley & Bowman, 2009). The family structure and stability of African American communities have been identified as challenges that affect Black students' K-12 performance and higher education participation (Rowley & Bowman, 2009). That being the case, it is important to evaluate factors that have contributed to the instability of African American families, as well as their community.

Moynihan (1965) described the Black family as one that has been "battered and harassed by discrimination, injustice, and uprooting" (as cited in Coates, 2015, p. 62). From time immemorial, Blacks have fought for equal rights and acceptance in society, and in some instances actually made political and social gains. However, as suggested by Moynihan (1965), the pressures of discrimination and injustice have a tendency to deracinate their lives. For instance, life for most African Americans changed for the better for a brief period of time following the Civil Rights era (Heath, 1994; O'Neil, 1991). The Civil Rights Acts enacted during the 1960s entitled African Americans to their constitutional rights that had been previously denied to them by unmerited practices. Blacks' right to vote was restored, and they were also guaranteed equal educational,

employment, and housing opportunities, which increased their chances for social mobility. For roughly 10 years, quite similar to the African Americans' experiences during the Reconstruction period and the New Negro Movement, many Blacks experienced a place in society with employment gains and progress in education and civil rights (Anderson, 1988; Heath, 1995; Maloney, 2002; Tolnay, 2003; Walsh, 2010). Nonetheless, many African Americans' social progress was once again disrupted during the late 1970s as a result of an economic and structural transformation caused by industrial globalization (Heath, 1995; O'Neil, 1991). The rise of global trade caused many factories in the United States to go out of business, which in turn limited employment opportunities for Blacks without a "formal education and specialized skills" (Heath, 1994, p. 117). Without a formal education, many Blacks, in particular, Black males, were either "restricted to the lowest paying and most menial jobs" (Noguera, 1997, p. 148) or unemployed. African American adult males had the highest unemployment rates and incarceration rates, which eventually resulted in many fathers being absent from the home. Thus, many African American mothers were forced to take on the roles of the primary custodian and the sole financial provider, which changed their family dynamics (O'Neil, 1991; Rowley & Bowman, 2009).

Since many mothers became the sole financial provider, they were obliged to work long hours or work multiple jobs to provide for their families. Resultantly, many children's home life changed to one with less mother-child interactions, fewer family dinners, less communication with parents, and some children caring for themselves after school, which adversely affected their academic achievement and self-efficacy (O'Neil, 1991; Shearin, 2002). This is not to say that African American mothers are negligent and

do not care about their children's academic success; however, it does draw attention to how racism and discrimination as social constructs hinder African Americans' upward mobility (DuBois; 1903; Moynihan, 1965). Parental involvement, support, and encouragement are important to maximize the full potential of children and positively influence their decisions (Obiakor &Beachum, 2005; Shearin, 2012).

Mass Incarceration

Since the abolition of slavery during the mid-19th century, unwarranted criminal practices have been used to imprison many African Americans, specifically males (Coates, 2015; Alexander, 2010). Coates (2015) explained that after slaves were freed from slavery, some antebellum states, like Alabama, found ways to unlawfully imprison unemployed Blacks so that they would not have to compete with them for jobs or for their women. Imprisoned men were then leased as laborers to their former slave owners and forced to work under slave-like conditions (Coates, 2015). Likewise, Alexander (2010) argued that mass incarceration is comparable to Jim Crow and slavery because networked systems of laws, policies, and customs operate together to ensure subordinate status of racial groups. For example, mass incarceration has had potentially overpowering effects on the instability of many African American families in the United States since urban deindustrialization, which was more than 40 years ago (Western & Wilderman, 2009). As mentioned, global industrialization resulted in joblessness for hundreds of thousands of African Americans, in particular, African American males with little education. Consequently, a decline in economic status became a crisis in many Black families and communities (Alexander, 2010; Coates, 2015). Because unemployment benefits were only temporary, the welfare system was ill-equipped to mass

unemployment; and there were limited social programs to retrain and assist men with finding new employment. Many African American communities had high rates of joblessness and crime together with flourishing street trades in illegal drugs (Alexander, 2010; Coates, 2015; Heath, 1995; O'Neil, 1991; Western & Wilderman, 2009).

Poverty and joblessness are not excusable reasons for crime; however, it is important to realize that maintaining conditions of extreme poverty and unemployment contributed to violence in the African American communities. Resultantly, during the early 1990s, President Bill Clinton signed a Bill that offered grants to states to build prisons and reduce parole as a war on crime and drugs in America (Coates, 2015). Consequently, the laws stipulated in the Bill, specifically the drug laws "did little to reduce crime, but a lot to normalize prison in black communities" (Coates, 2015, p. 74). Brown (2015) asserted, "the chance of a Black male serving time in prison has nearly tripled in three decades" (p. 325). In fact, there are now more Black men in the penal system than there were slaves during the transatlantic slave trade (Alexander, 2010). With that in mind, it is appalling that instead of investing in social reform programs to prevent continuous cycles of economic deprivation and joblessness in African American communities, public policies enlarged the role of the criminal justice system and started building prisons based on 4th grade literacy scores (Alexander, 2015; Kunjufu, 2007; Western & Wilderman, 2009). More importantly, the policies implemented tougher punitive sentences for drug offenses, parole violations, and repeated offenses; offenses that are closely related to the hyper incarceration of African American men (Coates, 2015; Western & Wilderman, 2009.

Above all, disproportionate rates of imprisonment due to strict criminal justice policies "have created a legacy of collateral impacts that last for generations and are felt most deeply by women, low-income families, and communities of color" (Powell, Schweidler, Walters, & Azadeh, 2015, p. 7). Western and Wilderman (2009) asserted that mass incarceration affects Black women and their families "more substantially than others, deepening inequities and societal divides that have pushed many into the criminal justice system in the first place" (p. 9). As a matter of fact, more than 1 million Black children have a father who is incarcerated and "roughly half of those fathers were living in the same household as their kids when they were locked up" (Coates, 2015, p. 66). Through incarceration, the absenteeism of the African American fathers from the home not only causes financial strain, but it also affects the life outcome of their children, in particular, their sons. Similarly, research has shown that Black boys whose father is incarcerated tend to have low academic performance, behavior problems, and delinquency (Coates, 2015; Rowley& Bowman, 1999).

Gendered Socialization. Aforementioned, many African American children are raised in communities of concentrated poverty with limited parental involvement, which has been linked to their academic underperformance and limited opportunities for success (O'Neil, 1999, Shearin 2002). Although the negative outcomes relate to all African American children, they are more rampant in African American males. To start with, Varner and Mandara (2013) stated that "African American females outperform African American males at every stage of the educational pipeline, with females having higher grade point averages, and high school graduation rates" (p. 875). Secondly, Black males are expelled or drop out of school at much higher rates than not only African American

females, but also their counterparts from other cultural backgrounds (Obiakor & Beachum, 2005). Given these points, researchers argued that the disparities in the academic performance and life outcomes of African American males and females stem from gendered socialization, which is having different rearing practices and expectations for males and females (Kunjufu, 1985; Noguera, 1997; Varner & Mandara, 2013). To explain, Noguera (1997) stated, "from household chores to child rearing, and from domestic violence to providing support for children, men experience privileges that guarantee them less stress and responsibility" (p. 160). Likewise, Kunjufu (1985) stated that in many African American female-headed homes, mothers tend to have different expectations of their male and female children. That being the case, males may be raised with limited or no household responsibilities and have lower academic expectations compared to females, which place them at-risk of failure not only in society but also in school (Kunjufu, 1985; Varner & Mandara, 2013).

Although it may appear that African American mothers are to blame for their sons' poor educational and life outcomes, which is not the case. Moynihan (1965) argued that White oppression by means of discrimination, limited job opportunities, and mass incarceration have forced the Black community into a matriarchal structure, as well as robbed many Black males of place in the family and in society. In society, men of color are "branded criminals or felons at early ages… are denied basic civil and human rights for life," (Alexander, 2015, para. 3). Moreover, in the public consciousness Black manhood is seen as "criminal, anti-school, and hardcore" (Givens et al., 2016, p. 167), which imposes on the way that they perceive themselves daily (Givens et al., 2016). Given the facts, it is not surprising that many Black mothers lower their expectations, in

particular, educational expectations of their sons to protect them and give them a source of pride (Noguera, 1997; Varner & Mandara, 2013). Seaton, Caldewelle, Sellers, and Jackson (2008) and Varner and Mandara (2013) suggested that Black males experience more racism and discrimination than Black females. They experience discrimination in schools, in classrooms, and in neighborhoods (Swanson et al., 2003; Varner & Mandara, 2013), which have been said to negatively affect their academic achievement and success in life. In essence, the racial socialization and discriminatory experiences of African American males partially explain the differences in African American mothers' expectations of sons and daughters and childrearing practices (Varner & Mandara, 2013).

Community

Throughout history and even today, many neighborhoods within the United States remain racially segregated. However, it is important to realize that racially concentrated communities exist primarily due to racial prejudice and discriminatory practices that have been used to deny Blacks equal access to housing opportunities (Daniel & Walker, 2014; Rothstein, 2014; Shapiro, 2004, Tischauser, 2014). To explain, the end of segregation gave Blacks the rights to live in the same communities as Whites. Blacks who could afford to relocate moved into White communities for better living conditions, higher-quality schools, and more opportunities for social advancement. On the contrary, many Whites did not like the idea of Blacks living in their communities and playing with their children, so they took their resources and fled to the suburbs (Kunjufu, 2007; Rothstein, 2014). Furthermore, namely community zoning laws and discriminatory housing practices, such as racial redlining and racialized ceiling were put in place to keep Blacks out of White communities. Racial redlining and racialized ceiling consisted of financial

institutions denying mortgage loans and inflating property values based on race and ethnicity (Shapiro, 2004).

According to Rothstein (2014) and Shapiro (2004), unfair housing policies contribute to racially segregated communities and fewer homeownership opportunities for African Americans. For instance, financial institutions use racial redlining to deny individuals, in particular, Blacks homeownership based on their race, ethnicity, and limited access to credit (Shapiro, 2004). Similarly, racialized ceilings determine the value of homes in African Americans' communities on the basis that middle-class Whites will not choose to live there (Shapiro, 2004). To explain, some banks and mortgage companies overpriced homes in certain neighborhoods to make it difficult for Blacks to sell their property and relocate to better communities. Resultantly, this not only reduces the value of homes and the amount of accrued home equity but also confines Blacks to poor, racially concentrated neighborhoods, which limits their opportunities for social and educational advancement (Gaines, 2007; Rothstein, 2014).

To elaborate, Hopson, Lee, and Tang (2014) concurred that racial discrimination and isolation negatively impact Black children's youth development and educational outcomes. Black children from poverty-stricken neighborhoods are exposed to more crime and stress that interferes with their learning (Rothstein, 2014). Rothstein (2014) also asserted that children from disadvantaged communities have greater absenteeism, less literate parents, read less frequently and are exposed less frequently to complex language at home. More importantly, they are more likely to attend high-poverty segregated schools with limited resources and less rigorous curriculums (Hopson et al., 2014).

The current crisis in many African Americans communities is perhaps mind-boggling for those who do not understand or choose to ignore the hidden rules of poverty (Payne, 2005). Society perceived Blacks as lazy and simple because they are still at the bottom of the economic ladder (Jenkins, 2006; Majors & Billson, 1992); however, there are still academic disparities between Black and White students' performance, as well as a large number of racially segregated schools in the United States more than 50 years after *Brown*. *Brown* embraced the idea of an equal and free education for all children; however, Rothstein (2014) argued, "desegregation efforts are impermissible if students are racially isolated…because of societal discrimination, economic characteristics, or any number of innocent private decisions, including housing choices" (p. 52). Moreover, in *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* report, Moynihan (1965) noted that as long as a sizeable number of African Americans remain unskilled and poorly educated, the cycle of poverty and disadvantage is inescapable. More that 50 years after Moynhiam wrote the report, the vast majority of Black children continue to reside in racially segregated communities with scarce economic resources, joblessness, and limited opportunities for educational advancement (Coates, 2105; Obiakor & Beachum, 2005; Rothstein, 2014).

Socio-Economic Status

Most research on African American students' academic performance has clearly identified poverty as a leading contributor to their lack of social mobility and academic attainment. The fact that many African Americans do not have direct access to the proper tools and resources not only make it difficult to escape poverty but also limits their opportunities for educational advancement (Payne, 2005). The opportunity gap in

education is a contributing factor to African Americans' academic failure (Carter & Welner, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2006). Black children who attend low-income, racially segregated schools are most likely to experience inequalities in access to schools with highly qualified teachers, rigorous curriculums, and essential resources, which lead to the achievement gap in education (Carter & Welner, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2006). Furthermore, Western and Wilderman (2009) reported that being raised in poverty increases children's risk of school failure, poor health, and delinquency, which often place Black students at a disadvantage when compared to their counterparts from other ethnicity groups.

Society has embraced the notion that African Americans, specifically, African American males from poverty-stricken communities, do not value education based on their persistent academic underperformance (Hucks, 2011). The truth is that many African American children from impoverished communities do value education. There are systematic barriers that exclude them from mainstream society (Alexander, 2010; Hucks, 2011; Major & Billson, 1992). Major and Billson (1992) emphasized that for generations stereotypes about Blacks have "fed into their systematic exclusion from most fundamental opportunity structures that stand at the heart of the American way: education, homeownership, and upward mobility" (p. 58). Likewise, Kunjufu (2007) explains that the reason Black poverty is easily detected in society is because the majority of the Black community live together in concentrated, low-income neighborhoods with limited employment opportunities and resources.

Payne (2005) stated that underprivileged persons perceive the world differently from middle and wealthy class individuals. For instance, she explained that persons of

poverty see the world from a local perspective, which potentially hinders their success because they cannot see life outside of their community. This is contrary to individuals from the middle class who may see the world from their learning and traveling experiences. In short, Payne maintained that education is the key for "getting out of and staying out of generational poverty" (p. 61), which is also noted in philosophies of W.E. B. Dubois and Booker T. Washington.

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Gorski's views on poverty. Gorski (2008) addressed several myths about underprivileged people: Poor people are unmotivated to learn and have weak work ethics; poor people are uninvolved in their children's learning because they do not value education; poor people are linguistically deficient, and poor people tend to abuse drugs and alcohol. The truth of the matter is that poor people are motivated to learn and are hard workers; however, there are some constraints that contribute to them obtaining a basic education (Gorski & Pothini, 2014). Gorski (2008) also noted that 83% of children from low-income families have at least one parent that is employed, which supports the idea that they are hard workers. He also confirmed that low-income parents

do care about their children's success; however, many of them cannot be actively involved in their child's education because they are not successful themselves and may feel a sense of inadequacy when talking to the teachers. Moreover, many parents have to work multiple low-end jobs to provide for their families, which also make it difficult for them to be actively involved in the school community. Gorski also dismissed the myth that poor people are linguistically deficient by suggesting that they do not have language barriers, but rather they speak using their cultural vernacular. Gorski asserted that socio-economic status is not a significant factor in drug and alcohol dependence.

Both Payne (2005) and Gorski (2008) have provided different explanations for the causes of the continuous cycle of poverty and academic failure in many underprivileged communities. Payne (2005) suggested that many impoverished individuals, particularly African Americans, do not believe societal rules for self-advancement work for them in the same manner as members from different racial backgrounds. On the other hand, Gorski and Pothini (2014) contested Payne's view by asserting that poor people value education and work hard to instill the importance of education in their children; however, societal barriers weigh heavily on their families and in turn adversely impact their children's academic performance. Disproportionate social and economic resources together with discriminatory housing policies and opportunity gaps in education hinder the opportunities of many individuals from poverty-stricken communities, especially African American males (Carter & Welner, 2013; Ford & Harris, 1996; Shapiro, 2005). As a result, Black males who undergo discrimination and economic deprivation may develop an oppositional identity, leading them to believe that hard work, effort, and academic success will not benefit their future career (Ford & Harris, 1996). However,

they must become conscious that a Black man without an education faces limited opportunities for social mobility and runs the risk of experiencing poverty, joblessness, and imprisonment (Alexander, 2015; DuBois, 1903; Kunjufu, 2007; Moynihan, 1965; Western & Wilderman, 2009; Wilson, 2014). Be that as it may, regardless of the adversities that African American males face in society, education is important to improve their image and social position (Blake & Darling, 1994).

Educational Experiences

Huck (2011) suggested, "African American boys are caught between a school system that holds low expectations and negative perceptions of their academic abilities and a society that often mirrors and distorts these images" (p. 340). Society has embraced the notion that Black males from poverty-stricken communities do not value education because of their persistent academic underperformance and low literacy scores; however, that is far from the truth. The truth is that the lack of culturally relevant curricula and teachers, alongside quantifiable disparities in school resources, academic disconnection and stereotypes account for their negative self-image and poor academic performance (Harper & Davis, 2012; Hucks, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Tatum, 2006).

Perception of School

The experiences of individuals from different cultural backgrounds influence their perceptions and decision-making processes with regard to education. To elaborate, Ogbu and Simmons (1998) discussed two types of minority groups, voluntary and involuntary, and their perceptions of school. Comparably, individuals from both the voluntary and involuntary minority groups have experienced cultural barriers and challenges, yet their points of view concerning the importance of education may be worlds apart (Ogbu &

Simons, 1998). Voluntary minority groups or immigrants either come to the United States as refugees or to have access to a better educational experience, find jobs, and to enhance their quality of life (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). In contrast, involuntary migrants, namely Blacks, were brought to the United States against their will and enslaved (Burrell &Walsh, 2001; Ogbu & Simmons, 1998). Resultantly, members of involuntary minority groups may feel bitter and frustrated about the loss of their birthrights and have no hopes of a better future (Ogbu, 1990).

Many Black adults believe that their efforts are often not rewarded and are overlooked when compared to Whites (Blake & Darling, 1994; Horvat & Lewis, 2003), similar to the mental degradation that slaves experienced. Subsequently, their perceptions of their unfair experiences in the United States influence the beliefs of some of their children and adversely have an effect on their achievement (Ogbu & Simmons, 1998). Major and Billson (1992), explained "although most minority groups experience and have suffered racism and discrimination to some extent, Blacks in America have endured a far more pervasive and long-lasting oppression…" (p. 58). Societal structures driven by racism and discrimination account for African Americans' long-lasting oppression and justify how their personal experiences may negatively affect their self-perception and perception of school. For instance, African Americans, in particular, males, tend to denounce education based on the notion they are already viewed as inferior beings, and education will only lead to further oppression. Moreover, considering the fact that schools in the United States were not designed with the interests of Blacks in mind, many Blacks criticize the education system and perceive school as a white institution (Ogbu & Simmons, 1998). Furthermore, in school, many African American students' values,

personal traits, behavior, and vernacular often counter those of mainstream society, which may make them feel uncomfortable. Because some educators lack cultural awareness, many African American students' temperament may be perceived as having negative attitudes and may be made worse by poor experiences in school and negative stereotypes about their intellectual abilities (Ladson-Billings, 2005; Major & Billson, 1992; Ogbu & Simmons, 1998). To Blacks, education may be merely a system of control initiated by Whites to maintain socio-economic oppression (Ogbu & Fordham, 1986).

Curriculum

Tatum (2006) stated that over the past ten years several instructional strategies have been proposed to increase African American males' performance and reading ability: culturally responsive literacy instruction, character development programs, rites-of-passage programs, comprehensive literacy programs, and academically oriented remedial programs. In spite of this, he added that revising the curriculum has not positively affected the African American male's literacy. Literacy is "the ability to read, view, write, design, speak and listen in a way that allows you to communicate effectively" (Neilson, 2014, para. 1). Tatum (2006) insinuated that Black males continue to wrestle with processing, communicating, and applying information, which contribute to their low literacy rates. Comparable to Tatum's views on literacy, Gadsden (1992) asserted, "For African American learners, in particular, literacy has been an especially tenuous struggle, from outright denial during slavery, to limited access in the early 1900s, to segregated schools with often outdated textbooks… too many might argue-marginal acceptance of their culture and capacity as learners…" (p. 275). Inequalities in education have often deterred African American males' literacy development and academic

success. Taking this into consideration, it is important that the curricula and classroom instruction is culturally relevant and closely aligned to Black males' educational needs (Harper & Davis, 2012).

Tatum (2009) boldly asserted, "African American males do not receive an education that helps them define and shape a positive existence within the world in which they find themselves," (p. xxi). This suggests the need to expose students to culturally relevant instruction. Flowers and Flowers (2008) stated that it is vital that educators are taught the importance of "honoring and respecting student culture" to increase student achievement (p. 166). Tatum (2009) suggested that core of the curriculum should consist of meaningful texts in an effort to not only close the reading achievement gap but also the life outcome gap. Learning for African American males should engage them in reading and responding to texts that "pay attention to their multiple identities- academic, cultural, economic, gendered, personal, and social" (Tatum, 2009, p. 14). Tatum (2009) also noted that if texts were not used effectively to nurture the multiple identities of males, they would remain in "economically oppressive conditions" (p. 14).

Literary texts need to stimulate the interests of African American males. Muhammad (2012) and Tatum (2009) proposed that this can be done by close reading, which involves activating the student's prior knowledge to develop an analysis of the text, introducing and teaching new vocabulary prior to reading the text, incorporating reading strategies, maintaining the student's attention, as well as, keeping them actively engaged throughout the text. To promote academic achievement and increase the literacy levels of Black males, it is vital that educators select culturally relevant curricula with complementing literary texts.

Culturally relevant curricula allow students to make cultural connections between home and school by importing knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Ladson-Billings, 1994). More importantly, it empowers student learning by promoting academic excellences for all students, fostering cultural competence, and helping students to develop a critical social consciousness (Scherff & Spector, 2010), which not only provides students rich learning experiences but may well also prevent academic disidentification.

Likewise, Paris (2012) stated that students also need exposure to culturally sustaining instruction. He did acknowledge the culturally relevant instruction has been used for over a decade to build students' cultural competence and promotes student learning by ensuring that learning is relevant and responsive. However, he argued that culturally relevant instruction does not guarantee that all students' cultures will be personified during the lesson. Paris claimed that students need instruction that sustain their culture through music and cultural practices and traditions daily to make learning more responsive to their cultural practices and experiences.

Academic Disidentification. Academic disidentification is a deficiency in the connection between self-esteem and academic outcomes, which has been known to have a negative effect on students' academic performance, cause withdrawal from school or dropping out of school, or delinquency (Osborne, 1999; Williamson, 2011). Academic disidentification has "emerged as an important contribution to the racial achievement gap" (Osborne, 1999, p. 556). Osborne (1999) stated, "African American students, boys, in particular, have lower levels of identification with academics" (p. 559). Blacks feel out of place in a general education program because of negative factors such as

disconnection with the curriculum, lack of culturally appropriate instruction, invalid assessments, and identification labels (Obiakor & Beachum, 2005).

African American students' disconnection with academics has been noted to start around adolescence, thus by the sixth grade, the achievement gap has widened by as much as two grade levels between White and African American students (Osborne, 1997/1999). Major and Schmader (1998) pointed out that academic disidentification is a result of lack of interest in the curriculum. Over the last decade, the results of the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) have repetitively illustrated that African American students score lower than other ethnic groups in math and reading. Lack of identification with academics has been shown to cause or contribute to "poorer performance" (Osborne, 1999, p. 556). Osborne (1999) stated, "Students who are identified with academics should be more motivated to succeed and persist longer in the face of failure because their self-esteem is more strongly influenced by academic performance" (p. 557). In fact, researchers (e.g., Harper & Davis, 2012; Kujufu, 2005) noted that around the 4th grade that some African American boys lose interest in school because teachers stop nurturing and promoting achievement, which "result in apathy and disengagement" among those students (Harper & Davis, 2012, p.104). Black males are very self-conscious and long to be accepted by their teachers and peers, which explains the need for incessant nurturing and motivation (Harper & Davis, 2012; Kujufu, 2005). Academic identification has been shown to prospectively predict important academic outcomes such as grades (Cokley, McClain, Jones, & Johnson, 2012; Osborne, 1997). For that reason, it is important that African American males are self-confident and are able to

make connections with the curriculum during the learning process to increase their academic achievement (Osborne, 1997).

African American male students need constant exposure to instruction in which they can identify with their culture and that is relevant to their lives in order to be successful (Alexander, 2003; Jenkins, 2006; Ogbu, 1991, Tatum, 2005, Vann & Kunjufu, 1990). Thus, when they are deprived of relevant and meaningful learning opportunities or lack content knowledge, they become disconnected from the instruction, which have been often perceived as devaluing education (Major & Billson, 1992; Obiakor & Beachum, 2005).

Educational Values

Prior to entering a classroom, students of color, especially males, are already at a disadvantage and struggle with internalized conflict that prohibits them from flourishing in the classroom (Jenkins, 2006). Jenkins (2006) boldly claimed:

> He brings with him… a life of poverty or some form of economic struggle… a generation enraged by inadequately educated parents and elders, and the beginnings of deep psychological and esteem issues that take root with his first engagement in society. (p. 144)

African American males' response to internalized conflicts adversely affects their academic performance and could be perceived as academic devaluation. Obiakor and Beachum (2005) asserted, "African Americans fall into the mode of self-fulfilling prophecy or learned helplessness because of negative encounters such as misidentification, misassessment, miscategorization, misplacement, and misinstruction" (p. 20), which have contributed to overrepresentation of African American males in

special education (Kunjufu, 1995). Obiakor and Beachum (2005) suggested that if appropriate measures are not taken to ensure that African American students are on the appropriate learning path, students might be misidentified and misplaced, which could have an adverse effect on their self-esteem. This does not suggest that students with learning disabilities devalue education; nonetheless, it has been noted that individuals who are negatively labeled for a long period of time develop long-term feelings of inadequacy (Steele, 1997).

Valuing education. Whereas research has shown that African American males show a lack of interest in education due to their rates of educational attainment and academic underperformance, there is evidence that suggest that they value education (Cokley & Chapman 2008; Harper & Davis, 2012). Smith, Hung, and Franklin (2011) expressed that historically, Black males have viewed education as a means to gain social, economic, and political independence: "Education was such an important value for Blacks that many would relocate their entire families just for the promise or hope of what education can provide in human and social capital terms" (p. 65). Likewise, the findings of a study conducted by Harper and Davis (2012) stated that Black males reported that they do value education and that it is the school that does not care about them. African American males value education and also view it as a means to escape a life of destitution; however, societal barriers (e.g. racism, discrimination, and poverty) often stand in their way of success (DuBois, 1903; Gorski, 2008; Smith et al., 2010; Walsh, 2010).

Approaches to Improving African American Males' Educational Outcomes

African American males face an unparalleled crisis because "it is difficult for them to acquire self-confidence and self-esteem within the chaos of modern economic and social life" (Blake & Darling, 1994, p. 412). Educational research continues to reveal African Americans, in particular, African American males' lack of academic progression (Alexander, 2010; Jenkins, 2006; Schott Foundation, 2013; Tatum, 2009). Only about half of African American males complete high school (Lewis, 2006), which explains why African American males are associated with lower rates of educational achievement, disproportionate unemployment, and criminal activity (Hoag, 2011). Moreover, Jenkins (2006) asserted that the lack of financial resources frustrates Black males and drives them to a "level of desperation where they are willing to do anything to make money" (p. 144). When some Black males are denied sufficient opportunities for advancement, they may take actions that place them in hostile situations to get what they need or want.

Education is imperative to improve African American men's life outcomes and break them out of a "vicious cycle of crime and unemployment" (Derrick Johnson, cited in Hoag, 2011, para.1). Having said that, it is important that school leaders not only foster relationships with parents and community stakeholders, but are also "directly involved in the design and implementation of curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices" (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2004, p. 49). Moreover, school leaders should advocate for the school to all stakeholders, be responsive to the needs of students and parents, and provide instructional support to teachers, which are elements that have been linked to higher levels of student achievement (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2004).

Increasing Community Involvement

The African American community can be compared to an extended family; it includes African American children's immediate and extended family, neighbors, community partners, and the school staff. While many African American communities are close-knitted, they continue to encounter challenges resulting from the lack of social and economic resources available in their Black community. To improve the educational opportunities and life outcomes of African American children, it is important that school leaders bridge relationships with community partners. For instance, the school leader can work with community stakeholders to start and educate students about social programs and initiatives like My Brother's Keeper and Barber Shop Books. Social programs and initiatives can help to rebuild a sense of pride and dignity within African American males, as well as, improve their academic achievement and life outcomes.

Barbershop Books. With a similar purpose to the My Brother's Keeper initiative, Barbershop Books, a community-based literacy program seeks to combat the low literacy rates of Blacks males and improve their educational attainment and life outcomes (Wogan, 2015). The founder of the program, Alvin Irby, is a New York City teacher who started the program to increase Black males' reading ability by providing grade appropriate, engaging culturally relevant books for them to read while they are at the barbershop (Wogan, 2015). The program entails stocking barber shops located in low-income neighborhoods with a wooden bookcase and 15 culturally relevant, age appropriate, and gender responsive books that can be read while adolescent males await a haircut in efforts to increase African American males' reading proficiency scores (Wogan, 2015). Irby noted the persistent academic achievement gap between African

American males and their peers in his initiative. He has already started to stock barbershops in Brooklyn and Harlem with books. Irby's ultimate goal is to partner with community stakeholders to stock more than 250 barber shops with books within the next seven years (Wogan, 2015).

Schools

Malcolm X (1964) stated, "Education is an important element in the struggle for human rights. It is the means to help our children and our people rediscover their identity and thereby increase their self- respect. Education is our passport to the future…" (para. 30). Education plays an important role in maximizing the potential of low-income African American students, in particular, African American males. It is through positive educational experiences that children are given the opportunity to improve their self-perception and grow intellectually (Haberman, 1994; Kunjufu, 1984; Ladson-Billings, 1994). It is important that the educational leader provides teachers with material and instructional support to teach diverse students successfully and execute their job (Brown & Beckett, 2007; Waters, Marzano, McNulty, 2004). Relatedly, African American males need positive learning experiences; therefore, it is vital that teachers can successfully incorporate instructional practices that help "students not only achieve academic success but also achieve success while maintaining their positive identity as African Americans" (Ladson-Billson, 1994, p. 13).

Classroom Teachers

The classroom teacher is the leading factor in determining students' success. Kunjufu (1986) boldly asserted that before a teacher can teach a child, they must bond with the child, "which results from love, respect, and understanding" (p. 32). African

American students' relationships with their teachers can have a positive effect on their achievement because teacher and student interactions affect how students perceive and perform at school (Ford & Harris, 1996; Kenyatta, 2012). Ford and Harris (1996) stated, "African American students' attitudes toward school and achievement influence their achievement behavior and motivation" (p. 143). In the classroom, students should feel like there is nothing else more important than them and their academic achievement (Nodding, 1992). However, once students are given the impression that they are not valued in the classroom or that the teacher simply does not care, they may take on a *cool pose* or isolate themselves (Kunjufu, 1986; Major & Billson, 1992).

It is vital for teachers to establish a caring relationship with their students. Noddings (2012) stated that the classroom climate should "best meet individual needs, impart knowledge, and encourage the development of moral people" (p. 777). Likewise, Edwards and McMillion (2002) found learning environments that offered encouragement and an opportunity for accomplishment are essential to the academic achievement of African American males. Once African American males experience learning environments that are nurturing and have high expectations for learning, they feel successful, their self-perception positively changes, and they are willing to continue to strive for academic excellence (Edwards & McMillion, 2002; Noddings, 2012).

Teaching practices also impact students' success in the classroom. It is important that teachers incorporate teaching practices that capture students' attention and provide meaningful learning experiences. Lam, Tse, Lam, and Loh (2010) conducted a study to evaluate student achievement based on the gender of the teacher. The data concluded that students taught by women score significantly higher on reading assessments than those

taught by men. Both, girls and boys taught by female teachers developed a passion for reading; however, students taught by male teachers failed to develop enthusiasm for reading (Lam et al., 2010). Lam et al. (2010) noted that the students of male teachers were unable to make a connection with literary texts for the following reasons: lack of differentiation, failure to make reading appealing like the women teachers, more structured classrooms, and unwavering routines. Although the findings of the study did not specifically focus on the race of students, it did support the relationship that nurturing learning environments and encouraging teacher-student relationships have a positive impact on student achievement.

Curriculum and Instructional Practices

Osborne (1999) stated that to edify students from diverse cultural backgrounds, particularly African American boys, it is important that they can make a connection with the academic content. He recommended that schools adopt multicultural curricula that recognize the contributions of individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds throughout the school curriculum instead of designating separate days or months to celebrate their accomplishments (e.g. Black History Month, National Hispanic Heritage Month, Dr. Martin Luther King Day). Also, he added that to help Black male students become more connected with the curriculum, character traits should be embedded within the curriculum: "cooperation, mutual respect, commitment, and love of family, race, community, and nation from the perspective of Black's self-interest" (p. 562). Incorporating character traits reduces students' use of self -protective strategies such as *cool pose* when they feel anxious and overwhelmed (Osborne, 1999). Males' standoffish behavior may be perceived as academic devaluation and leads to their academic

underperformance (Blake & Darling, 1994; Jenkins, 2006; Major & Billson, 1992). Osborne noted that the curricular recommendations could be implemented to foster and strengthen African American males' identity and identification with academics.

Instructional Practices

In addition to adopting and implementing a multicultural curriculum to boost students' academic success, Osborne (1999) asserted that replacing remedial interventions with challenging assignments in a "supportive, collaborative environment" (p. 562) promotes the success of students academically and socially. Similarly, Noddings (1992) emphasized that classroom instructional practices should include opportunities for students to collaborate so that students can flourish. Moreover, Wilson-Jones and Caston (2003) revealed that there is a relationship between cooperative learning strategies and academic achievement of students of color. Wilson-Jones and Caston used a qualitative approach to collect data from 16 elementary African American males about their preferred classroom practice. Wilson-Jones and Caston reported that cooperative learning was African American males' most preferred method of classroom instruction. The participants suggested that they learned best when working on class projects and assignments with their peers in cooperative learning teams. Working in cooperative learning groups builds Black males' confidence and gives them a feeling of accomplishment (Justice, Lindsey, & Morrow, 1999).

Culturally relevant literature. Research findings have depicted that African American males' inability to culturally connect with curricula has an adversative effect on their academic achievement (Husband, 2012; Obiakor & Beachum, 2005; Osborne, 1999; Tatum, 2006). Husband (2012) noted that although the 2006 and 2010 reading

NAEP assessments indicate reading achievement gaps between African American males, and males and females from different cultural backgrounds, the problem is not illiteracy but rather lack of access to culturally relevant literature. According to Husband, "Black boys probably aren't reading as much at school… because they don't have access to text that appeal to boys in general, which is one factor contributing to reading underachievement" (p. 24).

Husband (2012) presented steps that schools and teachers can take to improve African American males' academic identification and reading achievement. Husband suggested that schools and teachers should invest in culturally relevant texts that speak to the African American boys' global and local interests, experiences, and background; adopt culturally responsive literacy approaches; use engaging teaching methods; offer positive views of students' cultural backgrounds, and have high expectations of their students.

Comprehensive support model. For many African Americans, namely African American males, negative stereotypes, discriminatory practices, together with inequitable lifestyles have been linked to their poor self-perception and educational attainment (Alexander, 2010; DuBois, 1904; Jenkins, 2006; Majors & Billson, 1992; Obiakor & Beachum, 2005). In response to Blacks' education crisis, Obiakor and Beachum (2005) suggested that educators could use the Comprehensive Support Model (CSM) as an intervention to shape students' identity, build their confidence, as well as maximize their learning experiences and academic performance. The authors stated, "Although poverty, poor living conditions, drug-infested neighborhoods, single-parent homes… are endemic

societal problems that can have devastating effects on these students, the elements of the Comprehensive Support Model can have positive effects" (p. 25).

Obiakor and Beachum (2005) noted the pedagogical principles of CSM that must be realized to promote students' success:

1. African American students must know who they are. They must engage in self-valuation and self-responsibility.
2. Although some educators form negative perceptions about African American students, the perception that these students have of themselves can also affect learning.
3. Misidentification, misassessment, miscategorization of African American students can negatively affect how they interpret their strengths and weaknesses.
4. Good role modeling can influence the self-awareness of African American students.
5. Expectations of teachers and practitioners can affect how African American students empower themselves.
6. Poverty is a myth that can be made real when teachers and service providers misuse it to victimize African American students. Generally, it does not mean poor intelligence or poor ability to succeed in life. (p. 25)

Improving Low-Income Students' Achievement

The majority of children of poverty live in racially segregated neighborhoods, attend high-poverty schools, have limited exposure to life outside of their community, and bring problems from their homes and community to school with them on a daily

basis (Haberman, 1995; Kunjufu, 1984; Payne, 2005). They also are less likely to have a wide array of learning resources and human resources outside of schools, which causes them to not only experience academic disconnection, but also sets them apart from their middle-class counterparts (Haberman, 1995; Husband, 2012; Obiakor & Beachum, 2005; Osborne, 1999; Tatum, 2006). In the 2010 Presidential State of the Union Address, President Obama asserted, "the best anti-poverty program is world-class education," (para. 49) which suggests that effective educational programs can be antidotes for poverty. The findings of Douglas Reeves's (2009) 90/90/90 study and Jensen's (2009) views on teaching children of poverty support the idea that students of poverty can compete in a large educational arena when they are exposed to strong curricula and instructional practices.

Douglas Reeves' 90/90/90 Study

Reeves' (2009) 90/90/90 study was originally conducted in 2004 in Wisconsin. Reeves observed the common educational practices of schools that produced high-achieving students regardless of their socioeconomic state. The characteristics of the schools were: 90% or more of the students participated in the free and reduced lunch program, 90% or more of the students were members of ethnic minority groups, and 90% or more of the students met district or state academic standards on subject area assessments. The 90/90/90 schools all shared common practices to drive students' academic achievement: centered classroom practices on data and posted student work samples; had clear curriculum choices; administered frequent progress monitoring assessments, and provided multiple opportunities for improvement; and placed an

emphasis on informational writing and performance-based assessments, and worked collaboratively to score student work (Reeves, 2009).

Reeves (2009) stated the results of his original study and those of similar studies that he had conducted with schools that were high poverty/high achievement were consistent. He expressed that high poverty/ high success schools have a focus on student achievement and a commitment to success that extends far beyond demographic determinism that characterizes so many schools. Reeves (2009) asserted, "These schools are willing to be astonishingly flexible on matters of time, flexibility, and assessment – but they are equally inflexible on expectations and unremitting requirements for success of the children" (para. 14). The findings of Reeve's original 90/90/90 study and studies alike confirmed that poor students of color have the ability to reach proficiency and above when schools set clear, consistent, and high expectations of their staff and students.

Jensen and Teaching with Poverty in Mind

Jensen (2009) suggested that to improve the academic achievement of economically disadvantaged students, educators must embrace change. He stated, "Kids raised in poverty need more than just content, they need capacity" (p. 54). Educators have spent a great deal of time feeding students contextual information to ensure they introduce every standard that will be assessed on standardized assessments; however, this common practice has yet to be linked to student achievement. Instructional skills that are recommended for teaching economically disadvantaged children are confidence, deferred gratification, sustained effort, processing skills, the ability to engage, focus, and disengage, short and working memory capacity, the order of processing, and a champion mindset (Jensen, 2009, p. 54). A champion mindset is described as having an attitude of

success and embracing change: “I can change, and I can learn new behaviors” (Jensen, 2009, p. 55). Jensen stated, “When children gain a sense of mastery of their environment, they are more likely to develop feelings of self-worth, confidence, and independence” (p. 17).

Chapter Summary

Jensen (2009) suggested that to improve the academic achievement of economically disadvantaged students, educators must embrace change. He stated, “Kids raised in poverty need more than just content, they need capacity” (p. 54). Educators have spent a great deal of time feeding students contextual information to ensure they introduce every standard that will be assessed on standardized assessments; however, this common practice has yet to be linked to student achievement. Instructional skills that are recommended for teaching economically disadvantaged children are confidence, deferred gratification, sustained effort, processing skills, the ability to engage, focus, and disengage, short and working memory capacity, the order of processing, and a champion mindset (Jensen, 2009, p. 54). A champion mindset is described as having an attitude of success and embracing change: “I can change, and I can learn new behaviors” (Jensen, 2009, p. 55). Jensen stated, “When children gain a sense of mastery of their environment, they are more likely to develop feelings of self-worth, confidence, and independence” (p. 17).

CHAPTER III - METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

To better understand the phenomenon, the lack of educational attainment of African American males, a qualitative, phenomenological research design was used to study the phenomenon. The intentions of this study were to explore the depth of experiences that manifest in African American males' lives impacting how they perceive themselves, as well as their academic attainment There have been insights into the contributing factors that impede Black males' academic success and educational attainment; however, this study adds to the literature on African American males' achievement and educational attainment in that it allows adult, low-income African American males, who dropped out of high school to share their personal stories and experiences and how those experiences impacted their self-perception and lack of educational attainment. It is my hope that this study will bring awareness to how those circumstances influence African American males' self-perceptions and their decisions with regard to their educational attainment. Being cognizant of how African American males' personal experiences affect their self-perception and educational attainment may provide teachers and administrators insight into better interventions to increase their educational opportunities forthwith improving their social and economic mobility.

In this chapter, I will explain the purpose, research question, and methodology, which guided this study. I will also detail the procedures used for participant selection, data collection, and data analysis. At the end of the chapter, I will discuss the methods that were used to establish trustworthiness and maintain the integrity of qualitative research findings.

Methodology

Phenomenological methodology is the best method for this type of study because it allows me to understand how the lived experiences of African American males impact their self-perceptions and educational attainment (Groenewald, 2004). A qualitative, phenomenology inquiry is essential in this study to not only see the uniqueness of the African American males who dropped out of high school in the study but to also hear their stories to gain an in-depth understanding of the issues being studied. Moreover, qualitative inquiry allows the researcher to study the phenomena in the participants' natural setting, namely their homes or a location where they feel comfortable. It is important to study the phenomena in the participants' natural setting because it allows you to see and understand their realities as a whole rather than in isolation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Creswell (2007) stated that talking directly to the participants and observing how they act and behave in their context will help the researcher to make sense of their experiences and the issues being studied. In addition, in qualitative inquiry, the researcher serves as the human instrument to observe, gather, and evaluate each participant's responses and interactions during semi- structured interview sessions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I used semi-structured interviews because they are less structured and allow for flexibility in the nature of the interview (Merrian, 2009). For this study, I served as the researcher or primary instrument. I conducted interviews and recorded observations, reviewed data, and observation notes, and organized the data into conceptual units of information to help make meaning of the how the participants' experiences adversely affected their self-perceptions and lack of educational attainment (Creswell, 2007).

This study was conducted in Tulah, Mississippi (pseudonym). I assured privacy and concealed the identity of the participants by substituting their given name with pseudonyms. I also used pseudonyms for the city where data collection took place. My position as a former resident of Tulah County allows me a unique vantage point as an observer. Being well-informed of the setting afforded me the opportunity to both record observations and gain the trust of my participants. Along with observations, data for this study were collected from individual, semi-structured interviews with the participants. The use of multiple approaches of inquiry allowed me to gain a "complex, detailed understanding of the issue" under study (Creswell, 2007, p. 40). These methods will be discussed in detail in the data collection section of this chapter.

Theoretical Frameworks

This phenomenological study drew upon the cool pose theory and culturally relevant pedagogy. Cool pose states that African American males adopt cool behaviors, such as emotionless, fearless, standoffishness, and machismo as coping mechanisms to show that they are in control and to prove their masculinity (Major & Billings, 1992). I used the cool pose theory to gain insight on the perceptions and experiences of adult, African American males from low-income communities, who dropped out of high school. In addition to cool pose theory, I drew upon culturally relevant pedagogy to guide this study. Culturally relevant pedagogy helped me to understand the effect that culturally relevant instructional practices and curricula have on the men's educational experiences and their academic attainment. These frameworks were also used to create the interview protocol and identify themes in the data.

Context/ The Study Site: Tulah, Mississippi

I chose Tulah for this study based on educational and practical considerations. First, with regard to educational concerns, this area is located in the Mississippi Delta, a region plagued by poverty and known for the persistent cycle of underachievement and social marginalization of African American males. Second, regarding practical concerns, I chose Tulah because of my connection to the community and with the phenomenon. As a former resident of Tulah, I bring an insider's knowledge of the community and many of the barriers to success, including cyclical poverty and academic underachievement of African American males in the region.

To understand the problem at hand in Tulah, it is important to understand the social dynamics of the Mississippi Delta. Doyle (2000) stated that the Delta is "the most fertile place on the Earth, yet the people there are among the poorest in the country" (para. 4). Poverty in the Mississippi Delta can be traced back to the early 19th century when thousands of slaves were transported there to work on over 300 newly developed cotton plantations as a source of cheap labor (Doyle, 2000). After slavery was ruled unconstitutional, there was an influx of uneducated African Americans in the area. Some former slaves could afford to purchase small amounts of land for farming purposes; however, many Blacks had to either rent land from plantation owners as sharecroppers or work as farm laborers. Plantation owners used the fact that there was a paucity of resources for Blacks to gain economic and social control over them. They paid laborers the most minuscule wages and cheated sharecroppers out of the profit from their sale of their crops (Doyle, 2000; Duncan, 2014). Moreover, when manufacturing companies sought to bring their businesses to the Delta region, the plantation owners objected.

Industrializing the Delta posed a serious threat to the planters because they would have had to compete with the industries for Black unskilled workers. With this is mind it is not a surprise that Blacks from counties seated in the Mississippi Delta region have "fared worse than other black majority counties" (Doyle, 2000, para. 2). This has created a subjugated position for African Americans along with limited opportunities for advancement and low educational achievement (Doyle, 2000, para. 2).

Comparatively, with the exception to the gaming industry and pipe plant in Tulah, there is not a significant difference between Tulah and the other counties in the Delta region. For decades, Tulah, whose population is predominantly African American, has experienced inadequate social advancement coupled with poverty and academic failure (Harlan, 2015). In the 1980s, it was ranked as one of America's poorest counties and branded "American Ethiopia" (Harlan, 2015, para.6) for its destitute neighborhoods and record high unemployment rates (Higgins, 2015). At the present time, Tulah remains one of the most impoverished counties in the United States (Harlan, 2015). Nearly 40% of its population is living at or below poverty level with limited economic resources (Duncan, 2014).

Moreover, despite funding from the gaming revenue, in addition to state and federal assistance, Tulah's school district is and has been a failing school district for years (Harlan, 2015). For the 2013-2014 school year, Tulah's graduation rate was 59.7% compared to the state figure of 75.5% (Mississippi Department of Education, 2014). The Mississippi Department of Education recently took over the Tulah County School District for the second time because of chronic academic failure and for violating several state and federal laws (Amy, 2015). The school district has not received a rating above a D for

the past five years and was in violation of 22 of 31 state accrediting standards (Amy, 2015). Describing the setting and circumstances of the study site, Tulah County, Mississippi, together with a larger context of the Mississippi Delta will be meaningful in gaining a deeper awareness of the whole.

Participants and Data Source

I studied adult, African American males from Tulah County who dropped out of high school. I chose to focus on this group because high school incompletion together with poverty have been linked to a continuous life of poverty and mass imprisonment for many African American males. I want to gain a deeper understanding of this phenomenon, specifically.

The participants were invited to participate in the study according to predefined criteria that are relevant to the research questions. These criteria include African American males, ages 18-25 years, from the low socio-economic city, Tulah, Mississippi, and have a limited educational experience due to leaving high school prior to graduating. The selection criteria helped me find participants who were mature and inclined to share intimate details about their life and personal experiences. I hoped that the participants would provide detailed interpretations of personal and educational experiences that contributed to the development of their self-perception and influenced their limited educational attainment.

To identify participants fitting these criteria, I used purposive sampling to select participants who could purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and phenomenon in the study (Creswell, 2007). However, after several failed attempts at locating participants even with the assistance of a prominent community advocate,

thereafter, I used the snowball method. The snowball method involves asking one participant to recommend other individuals who meet the criteria to participate in the study (Crabtree & Miller, 1992; Jones, Steeves, & Williams, 2009). The participants recommended former classmates and individuals from their neighborhood who met the study criteria. Prior to data collection, I introduced myself and discussed the purpose of the study with each participant. It is a vital step in the research process to gain and establish rapport with participants to generate good qualitative data (Creswell, 2007 Then, I presented them with a long-form consent which outlined the study and participation criteria. Participants was required to give consent to be a part of the study. Since each participant was over 18 years of age, no parent consent was needed.

The participants provided descriptive accounts of their individual and educational experiences to best inform the phenomenon of African American males' lack of educational attainment. I sought to interview 10-15 participants; however, the point of saturation was achieved when interview data was collected from 12 interviews.

Table 1

Overview of Participants

Description	Number of Participants Out of 12
Single-Parent Female-Head Homes	12
Received Graduate Equivalency Diploma	3
Incarcerated During High School	3
Denied Graduation Because of Test Scores	6

Involved in Extra Curricular at the Start of High School	4
Currently Employed	3
Have at Least One Child	6

Table 1summarizes descriptive information about the participants based on categories.

Data Collection

The primary method used for data collection was semi-structured individual interviews with the adult participants. Semi-structured individual interviews were appropriate for this study because participants were asked less-structured questions, which gave them the leeway to freely reflect on their self-perceptions and experiences and allowed for dialogue and possible unanticipated findings (Merriam, 2009). Semi-structured interviews were conducted using open-ended questions to generate descriptive data about the phenomenon and so that the participants could freely share their personal beliefs and experiences (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). Although I anticipated each interview session lasting at least one hour, most of the interviews last between 25-30 minutes. I asked probing questions and follow-up questions to gather additional information needed to understand their feelings and lived experiences; however, many of the participants still had little to say. I believe that most participants masked their individual feelings to avoid being perceived as vulnerable their friends, who may have been watching them from the outside, and me. Maintaining an image of "coolness" and masculinity is important to most of these men because in many instances that is all that they have.

In addition to semi-structured interviews, I used other methods of data collection to obtain a clear understanding of the phenomenon, including reflective journaling by the

researcher and observations. A reflective journal was used to record field notes and journal information and organize data. I also conducted observations of each participant's neighborhood after each interview to take into account their point of view of their personal context.

The interviews were conducted at the participants' homes and at a popular hangout spot (home) within their neighborhood. Interviews were conducted in the participants' natural setting to make sure that they were comfortable and because their realities cannot be understood when they are isolated from their environment (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Interview data was audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. One 45-minute observation of three neighborhoods was conducted at the completion of the interviews to observe the dynamic of the neighborhood and how it impacts the issue being studied, their lack of educational attainment (Creswell, 2007).

Data Analysis

In qualitative inquiry, data analysis is used to respond to the research questions. The interview data and the content from the interview notes, observation notes, and my personal research journal were all subjected to the analytical procedures. I started the data analysis process when full transcriptions of the interviews were available. I read the transcripts of the interviews and observation notes several times in order to identify significant statements and the meaning of the statements based on the participants' responses (Creswell, 2007).

The initial step of the data analysis process was open coding. I used opening coding to identify and categorize segments into units of data that respond to the research questions and describes the phenomenon (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Then, I sorted the

units based on concepts that responded to the research question. For each unit, I determined whether it identified experiences related to their self-perceptions or lack of educational attainment. The units were then placed into categories based on the main topic or themes. Subcategories were also formed and analyzed to take into account different variations (Creswell, 2007). To explain, a large theme or category such as, "Parental Interaction" had smaller subthemes within it. In addition to using open coding to analyze data, I used axial coding to connect and categorize concepts. I identified the relationship between the open codes and themes that evolved from my conceptual framework perspectives, cool pose theory, and culturally relevant pedagogy. The coding started with the themes identified in the framework such as perceptions and academic disconnection. After identifying additional themes and subthemes, I looked at themes inclusively to identify how they may or may have been connected.

Thus, the analytic methods used in this study allowed me to compare the participants' experiences and self-perceptions. Throughout the interview, the participants described how their personal and educational experiences influenced their self-perceptions and lack of educational attainment. While this study does not provide a conclusive answer for stopping African American males from quitting school, it does provide an in-depth understanding of experiences that manifest in their lives, in turn influencing their self-perceptions and decisions relating to their education attainment.

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of a research study evaluates its worth and confirms that there is a fit between its purpose and findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I establish trustworthiness by establishing the credibility, which makes certain that qualitative

results are precise and told from participant's perspective (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, several techniques were used to establish credibility; these include member checking, triangulation, and peer debriefing. Member checking was used to determine the authenticity of the participant's account (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I conducted member checking throughout the interview process to provide each participant the opportunity to correct errors and add additional information. I asked the participants a question, listened to their response, summarized the findings, and then gave them the opportunity to correct any errors or misunderstandings (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

In addition to member checking, I used triangulation to increase the credibility of this study. Triangulation entails using multiple data sources to help the researcher develop a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For this study, measures of triangulation included field notes, observations, recorded interviews, a comparison of participants' accounts, and my personal reflective journal. Various forms of data collection allowed me to check my findings against one another and make sure that each personal account was content-rich, comprehensive, and well-developed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Moreover, I met with my advisor often to peer debrief. Peer debriefing sessions helped to uncover any biases, perspectives, and assumptions regarding data and interpretation that I may have as the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

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Ethical Consideration

In order to ensure ethical research, I obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at my university to conduct this research. I secured informed consent from all participants in the study before collecting any data. Bailey (1996) suggested including the following items on the informed consent agreement to gain the participants' consent:

1. The participants are participating in research
2. The purpose of the research
3. The procedures of the research
4. The voluntary nature of research participation
5. The participant's right to stop the research at any time
6. The procedures used to protect confidentiality

Following securing inform consent, I ensured that all participants understood that their participation in the study was completely voluntary. Additionally, as stated earlier, I maintained confidentiality by assigning pseudonyms to all participants, the city where the

study was conducted, and school district. Pseudonyms were also used in all study records and notes.

Researcher Subjectivity Statement

I am an African American middle-class woman. Like the participants in this study, I was born and reared in Tulah, Mississippi. Moreover, the participants and I share connections, such as, our hometown, schools, and race, which give me a unique vantage point and make me well-positioned to conduct this research. I would like to acknowledge that there are also some differences between me and the participants, for instance, gender, social demographics, and educational level. Though there were differences between me and the participants, I was confident that I would be able to develop a relationship with them considering that my high school boyfriend of two years shared similar characteristics with the participants in this study. Just as the participants in this study, my high school boyfriend dropped out of school. He started to lose interest in school in the 10^{th} grade. At the beginning, he came to school and only attended the classes that he considered fun. Eventually, he came to school only to be marked present so that his mother would not be notified of his absence. By the end of our junior year, his attendance was sporadic. Unfortunately, he did not complete high school because he was arrested and sentenced to three years in prison. I have yet to figure out what led to his loss of interest in school considering that he was once an average student and actively involved in extracurricular activities. However, my experiences as an educator have led me to conclude that some of his personal and educational experiences may have led to his academic disengagement.

In addition, my knowledge and experience as an educator also make me the best person to conduct this study. As a classroom teacher, I have worked with Black males, who struggle academically and also reside in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty. I have witnessed many of their persistent battles with internal and external conflicts. The conflicts have often had an adverse effect on their academic achievement. This led me to want to investigate African Americans males' individual and school experiences, and specifically the factors that influence their self-concept and impede their educational attainment.

I am biased in several instances. I am aware that poverty significantly impacts the academic attainment of low-income, African American males. However, I believe that all individuals can learn and be successful regardless of their circumstances. I am also aware of society's hidden agenda, which has restricted African Americans, in particular, African American males' social and economic mobility for centuries. Nonetheless, I sometimes feel that African American males are not given more opportunities because they do not take full advantages of the opportunities that they do have. For example, the majority of all low-income Black male students in Mississippi attend school for free and are eligible for free or reduced lunch. With taking their social demographics into consideration, these students mostly likely attend schools that receive additional federal funding to help increase academic achievement. However, some of their negative behaviors and attitudes, whether it's to portray their "coolness" or because there is a lack of academic interest continue to put them at risk of failure.

Furthermore, it has been my experience that some African American male students come to school on almost a daily basis with nonchalant attitudes toward

learning. Some of them tend to rush through their assignments or simply not complete the work, even with ready assistance from the teacher or peer, computer lessons, or technology integration. Therefore, I find it frustrating that students, who are capable of doing the work if they tried, choose not to complete their task. It seems to me that the only time that they take pride in their assignments is when they are rewarded. Barton stated, "most successful men have not achieved their distinction by having some new talent or opportunity presented to them. They have developed the opportunity that was at hand." I trust that if African American males take pride in their work and take advantage of the resources that they do have at school and within the community even though they may be limited, they can achieve educational and social mobility.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I explained the purpose for using the qualitative research methodology and methods that I will use to both gather and analyze the data as it relates to the research question guiding this study. I provided a description of the study context and the participants, as well as a detailed discussion of the procedures for selecting participants, data collection, and data analysis. I also outlined how I established trustworthiness and ensured ethical standards were maintained throughout the study.

CHAPTER IV – FINDINGS

This chapter reviews the purpose of this inquiry, the research question, the methodology, and then presents the key findings. This chapter provides a brief description of the participants. This chapter concludes with a summary of the emergent themes.

Review of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to understand how African American males' individual and educational experiences influence their self-perceptions and their decisions regarding their lack of educational attainment. Through the participants' stories of their experiences, the study identified elements that influenced African American male students' self-perceptions and partial high school completion. I believed that a better understanding of this phenomenon will provide policy makers, educators, and community stakeholders with a more informed perspective of factors that not only influence how African American male students perceived themselves but also their decision to drop out of school.

Research Question

Roughly twenty years ago, African American males were the least understood and studied of all sex and ethnicity groups in the United States (Blake & Darling, 1994). Since then, there has been many studies on African American males; however, one fact remains the same, they are misunderstood. African American males are associated with low academic performance and educational attainment, as well as high rates of joblessness, crime, and incarceration. It was my intention to examine the effect that low-income African American males', who dropped out of high school, personal and educational experiences

had on their self-perceptions and their educational decisions. The research question used to guide this study was: What are the self-perceptions and experiences of African American males in Tulah, who have dropped out of school, regarding their educational attainment.

Methodology

A phenomenological approach was used to present the lived experiences of adult, African American males who dropped out of high school. Data was collected from individual semi-structured interviews, observations, and field notes. The interviews were conducted at the participants' homes and at a popular hangout spot (home) within their neighborhood. One 45-minute observation of three neighborhoods was conducted at the completion of the interviews to observe the dynamics of the neighborhoods. The observations aided in developing a better understanding of the participants' perceptions of their environment. Likewise, field notes were also collected after each interview to give meaning and understanding to the data. I used open coding to identify themes in the data that directly related to the research question. Axil coding was then used to identify the relationships between the themes. The emerging themes will be discussed later in this chapter.

The Participants

To develop an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon, I captured the personal stories of 12, adult African American males, ages 18-25 years old, who did not complete high school. All 12 were living in a low-income city seated in the Mississippi Delta. Selecting adult participants allowed their anthropomorphism to be impacted by experiences and maturity. Likewise, selecting a contextual site with a persistently failing high school and that has been plagued by poverty for decades bring the participants'

personal and educational experiences to light. Their personal accounts revealed discriminatory systems within their school and community that influenced their self-perceptions and in turn affected their educational attainment.

Initially, I intended to use purposeful sampling to select participants who could purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and phenomenon in the study (Creswell, 2007); however, it was not as easy as I thought to locate participants even with the help of a community gatekeeper. The community gatekeeper suggested two small neighborhoods in the city where I would be sure to find prospective participants for the study. However, after introducing myself and explaining the purpose of the study, they stated that they could not participate because they were high school graduates. While I was glad that they said that they had graduated from high school, I truly believed that some of them were not being totally honest with me. I questioned if it was my approach or if I had said the wrong thing in my introduction. I had to go back to the drawing board. I contacted a family friend who was younger than the gatekeeper to see if he knew anyone personally who would fit the criteria of the study. In fact, he did.

I realized from my first encounter with the potential participants that I may have to change my approach and style of dress to appear less intimidating. I decided to wear joggers, tennis shoes, and faint make up. This time when I introduced myself to the first participant, I referenced family, specifically, my dad and nephew, who is close in age with the participants, which seemed to help the participants relax. Thereafter, I used the snowball method to select participants. The participants recommended former classmates and individuals from their neighborhood who met the study criteria. These participants

provided rich descriptions of their lived experiences to best inform the phenomenon, African American males' lack of educational attainment.

The participants of this study stated that they dropped out of high school for one of the following two reasons: multiple failed attempts at the Mississippi Subject Area Testing Program (SATP), which kept them from graduating or because they felt compelled to do so by unfair school's policies and procedures. Three of the twelve participants have since received a high school equivalency diploma. The men participating in this study fit in one of the following categories: have one or more children, currently unemployed, and/or have been involved in the criminal justice system. Moreover, all participants were raised in single-parent, female headed homes. All participants had at least one parent to drop out of school, in most cases their fathers. A brief description of each participant follows:

Al Patton is 24 years old. He reported losing interest in school in the 9th grade because he did not find the work challenging. Thus, he started skipping school to sleep in and play video games during the day. Al described himself as a self-educated man. He takes pride in the fact that he could pass all the state graduation assessments even though that he rarely attended school. He decided to drop out school in the 11th grade after being failed for excessive absenteeism.

Jamison Hardy's desire to make some quick cash landed him in a place he is still struggling to break away from. At the age of 23, he finds it difficult to find a good paying job. One he does not have a formal education and secondly because he has been incarcerated twice. Jamison was arrested and served a one-year prison sentence for burglarizing a home when he was in the 10th grade. After serving a one-year sentence, he

returned to school with a new goal- to graduate; however, he found that things were quite different. He was still in the 10th grade, and his chance to participate in extracurricular activities, specifically football, had been taken away because he was a felon. With the cards already stacked against him, Jamison transformed his positive energy into negative energy. He stopped completing his work: "I started acting crazy and getting suspended from school," which eventually led to him quit school altogether in the 10th grade. Since then, he has been arrested and is currently on probation. He now has a decent paying job at a factory about 30 minutes from his home.

Roman Harris is a 21 years old music entrepreneur. Roman describes himself as loyal. However, for Roman, his loyalty to his friends often landed him in troubling situations. At school, he was the typical teenager. He loved playing sports, his friends, and girls; nonetheless, idle time at home and a desire for fast money led him to hanging out with the wrong crowd and landed him in jail during his 11th grade school year. Upon his release, Roman returned to school and earned the required number of credits to graduate. While he had the credits, he did not graduate because he failed three of the four state graduation assessment. Roman decided to drop out of school after several failed attempts and to try something else, music. He is now an entry level traveling music artist.

Casey Sampson viewed school as a place for learning, yet it was also a place to shine. Casey enjoyed making the class laugh and standing up for his friends which caused him to be suspended from school regularly. Even with his frequent absenteeism, he managed to advance to the 12th grade. Still, there was one problem that stood in his way. He could not pass the English portion of the state graduation assessment. Casey took the state graduation assessment as many times as he could to meet graduation requirements,

but he was still unable to pass. Rather than go back to school simply because he could not pass a test, he quit. Casey has since received a high school equivalent diploma. He is currently employed and the father of a little girl.

Ross Rednose is 25 years old. He is the father of three children, ages 6 months, two, and three. He admits to taking the road most traveled by his peers, which has taken him to a place where he feels he cannot escape. Ross was expelled from school in the 12th grade for gang affiliated activities. From high school until now, Ross has been in and out of jail for crimes associated with gang activity. Although he has become deeply entangled in the gang life and has a face filled with various tattoos to prove it, Ross expressed that he wants to further his education, but he cannot afford to miss money from the street.

Harry Herding is 20 years old. Harry's highest level of education is the 11th grade. As a student, he struggled with controlling his anger and disrespected authority. He expressed that during school, he did not like himself. Because of his anger and low self-perception, Harry was involved in several fights and eventually expelled from school for the remainder of his 11th grade school year. He chose not to back to school, but rather try to enroll in a Job Corps program.

Taylor Burts has been perceived as "cool" or "fly" by his peers since the moment that he started school. However, popularity brought problems for Taylor. He expressed that he was often targeted and labeled as a "trouble kid" because of the way he dressed and his friends. Taylor was forced to quit school in the 11th grade when he was expelled for being involved in a gang fight at school. Since high school, Taylor has been arrested several times and has not tried to get his high school equivalent diploma. Taylor is 24 years old. He has one daughter.

Joseph Minor is 24 years old. As a student, he valued education. He worked hard to keep his grades up in school although he found school boring. Although he did not find school interesting, John wanted to graduate and had worked hard to meet graduation requirements. However, he was expelled in the 12th grade for fighting.

Wilson Davis decided to quit school in the 10th grade after it became hard for him to juggle life at school and life on the streets. Wilson, who is now 24 years old voiced that he always liked school, especially reading. However, going to school did not compare to the amount of money he made on the streets hustling. Wilson stated that he is ready for a change in life so that he can be a better person and father to his six years old daughter. He asserted that he wants to change, but fears that people will be frightened by him or judge him because his face and arms are covered with tattoos, which he states are symbolic for the pain and struggles that he has experienced in life.

John Hill loved playing the drums in his school band. His communicated that band was his only positive experience in school; being that he spent the rest of his time defending himself from bullies. John shared that he was bullied throughout his high school experience, and the fact the principals did nothing to try to help him set him off on a war path. Even though John had satisfied nearly all the requirements for graduation except for one state graduation assessment, he was pushed out of school in the 12th grade for excessive suspensions and physical altercations. John is 20 years old. Now, he is enrolled in a high school equivalent diploma program and works a full-time job.

Marcus Wilson is 22 years old. He has a four-year- old daughter that he finds it hard to provide for daily because he is undereducated, unemployed, and has a criminal record. Marcus decided not to return to school in the 11th grade after a two-day

suspension for fighting. Around the same time that he quit school, Marcus was sent to prison for three years. Since his release, he has been arrested once for gang related activities.

Quinten Gold is 25 years old, and he always had his eyes on the prize. Quinten dropped out of school in the 9th grade. Whilst he valued education, it could not afford him the things that he wanted right then in life, so he started hustling. As an adult, Quinten shared that his focus is still money, especially now that he has six children, ages ranging from 4-7 years old and several warrants for his arrest.

Emergent Themes

Three major themes emerged from data collected during individual, semi-structured interviews with the participants. The emerging themes answered the research question by revealing the participants' lived experiences that influenced their self-perceptions and educational attainment. The first theme was parental interaction. The second theme was a negative and unproductive school climate and culture. The third emergent theme was limited resources and opportunities in their community for educational and social advancement.

Parental Interaction

The first emergent theme was parental interaction. The participants expressed that their parents or guardians made sure that they were prepared for school and stressed the importance of education, yet they were often not responsive to their emotional needs. Several subthemes emerged relating to parenting styles. These included single- parent female-headed homes, partial high school completion for parents, and limited to no accountability for their actions.

Nurturing and being present. Participants were asked to describe their home life and experiences as adolescents and how it influenced their attitude towards learning and educational values. All the participants were reared in single parent female headed homes where, in most cases, they had little or no support from their fathers. Being that their mothers were the sole financial providers, they had to take whatever jobs that were available, which either required them to travel at least 45 minutes to an hour to work or work hours that often left their children at home without supervision. Most participants shared that since no adult was home to hold them responsible for their actions or provide directional support, they were forced to make their own decisions. At the same time, they did not realize that their freedoms not only came with adult responsibilities and decisions that they were not mature enough to carry out but would also significantly impact their self-perceptions and educational attainment.

To start with, most participants' attitudes and behaviors were influenced by home experiences stemming from limited parental interaction. One participant, Wilson, shared that he often felt alone and that no one at home cared about him. He stated that his mother worked all the time, therefore, she was not available to provide the nurturing and support that he needed. Moreover, Wilson shared that his mother did not play a role in his academic success. Wilson stated that he felt his academic performance "probably really didn't matter" to his mother. When I asked Wilson to elaborate on his response, he voluntarily chose not to answer and ask to skip any questions that referenced his home environment. However, he did suggest that his loneliness at home affected his self-perception and his behavior. He stated that he was angry and developed a hostile attitude, which caused him to be involved in quite a few physical altercations at school. Although

he demonstrated negative behaviors, one of his English teacher encouraged him to stay in school because he was an advance student and she saw his potential. Nonetheless, he instead joined a gang.

Relatedly, Marcus blamed his parents, more so his mother, for his partial high school completion and poor life outcomes: “She neglected me. I was the only boy, and she really didn’t care nothing about me so that is what got me like this”. Although Marcus believed that his mother “fed him to the wolves,” most participants expressed that they knew that their mothers expected them to go to school, do their best, graduate, and make something of themselves; however, to them, those were just expectations without reinforcement. Limited boundaries and accountability at home caused many participants to perceive themselves as superior to authority figures at home and school, and in some cases, even their mothers. Many of the participants agreed with Al:

> I set my own rules and expectations because my mom wasn’t at home. I pretty much was by myself, and if there was somebody here with me they couldn’t tell me nothing. I was going to do what I wanted to do anyway.

The participants reported that they skipped classes and school altogether because they knew that there would not be any consequences at home. Harry shared that his mother did not force him to go to school. If he wanted to stay home because he felt angry or did not want to go, she would let him stay at home. Harry also stated that when he told his mother that he did not want to go back to school after being expelled for the rest of the school year, she supported his decision. While she did encourage him to sign up for Job Corp, she did not push him to leave when he decided not to go.

The lack of nurturing and parental monitoring at home may well have influenced the participants' self-perceptions. Although there was not a direct implication that limited parental interaction influenced the participants' self-perception, it did influence their attitudes towards authority, which contributed to their lack of educational attainment.

Father figures and role models. Most participants shared that their fathers had little involvement in their daily lives. There were a few, however, who shared that at times their fathers talked to them about the importance of education and making good choices. Nonetheless, they did not see their fathers as role models because they dropped out of high school prior to graduation and had made little social and education progress in life. Because the males did not have a father figure nor role model at home, many of them looked up to older boys and men from their community, as well as television personas who they perceived as hip and successful.

Giving that there was no male figure to spend time with them and teach them how to be a man, several participants admitted that they joined gangs. Being a part of a gang not only gave them clout, but also made them feel safe, important, and cared for; emotions that they were often denied at home. Moreover, the gangs were controlled by "old heads," leaders, who happily embraced them like they were family. Accordingly, several participants have various tattoos representing their gangs on their face, neck, and/ or arms, which suggest that they were proud to be a part of something.

Additionally, some participants also reported that their self-perceptions were influenced by television personas and males from their community who they perceived as cool and successful. Their perceived role models were masculine, had plenty of money, drove nice cars with big rims and dressed nicely. For that reason, they changed their

attitudes and behavior to have a reputation and material possessions like their role models. However, there were two factors that they overlooked. One was that their local role models' fame would most likely be short lived considering that their money came from illegal activities. The other factor was that they shaped their self-perceptions based on what they perceived as their television role model's reality, which may well have been disingenuous. Resultantly, about half of the participants in this study stated that they were arrested or served prison sentences in high school for crimes associated with drugs, robbery, and gang violence. The absenteeism of fathers and male role models in these participants' daily lives caused some to alter their attitudes and behaviors to be perceived as cool and feel like they were a part of a familial group.

Educational Attainment

The lack of parental interaction at home not only influenced the participants' self-perceptions but also had an adverse effect on their behavior in school and academic achievement. Most of the participants functioned as adults at home, so it was natural for them to act the same at school. They disregarded authority at school seeing as that they were used to making their own decisions at home without accountability. Nearly all of them agreed with Joseph who shared:

> I didn't want nobody at school to say nothing to me. I didn't want nobody to tell me anything to do. I thought that I was grown because my parents didn't tell me what to do or how to do it, so I didn't want nobody else to tell me what to do or how to do it.

Limited restrictions and accountability, in addition to, inadequate insight on making knowledgeable life and educational decisions significantly influenced the

participants' self-perceptions and educational attainment. These men's self-perceptions were influenced by personal circumstances and observations of men who they perceived as "with it" and well off. Respectively, they lost sight of who they were as individuals, as well as the importance of education, which had some bearing on their partial high school completion.

School Climate and Culture

The second theme emerging was negative school climate and culture. Subthemes relating to this theme were discipline policies, relationships with the teachers, and class instruction. The participants described the school climate and culture as hostile and unconstructive. A normal day on their high school campus was chaotic. It consisted of students skipping class to socialize and smoke on campus, classroom disruption by the class clown, and standoff fights with rivals. All participants shared that they were frequently suspended from school and, in some cases, arrested for fighting. More importantly, six of the participants were expelled from school for their behavior, specifically gang fights. Harry and John expressed that they never wanted to quit school, and the only reason that they did not get a high school diploma was they were kicked out. Al, who had little positive to say about his school experience, talked about how he felt the school attendance policy was unfair: "How can they fail me when I passed all of my test barely coming to school, and there are students who cannot pass their test and come to school every day?"

Like Al, most of the participants' negative experiences outweighed their positive experiences. Many of their positive experiences in school were not related to their classroom experiences, but rather to extracurricular activities, such as band and sports

activities. However, eventually, those participants were not allowed to participate in those programs because of their behavior.

None of the males provided any specific insight about their school administrators; however, they did describe their classroom experiences and teacher and student relationship, as well as teachers' expectations. Some participants shared that there were some veteran teachers with more than twenty years of experience, who inspired and motivated them to do their work and provided assistance on assignments when needed. However, several of the participants communicated that they did not feel that their teachers cared about them because they let them do what they wanted to do and did not have high academic and behavior expectations of them.

> Casey shared: There were only three of my teachers that I took serious. I am not going to tell you no story, I took my other teachers as a joke. The other teachers just let me skip their class and everything and still pass.
>
> Ross stated: This is not really the right place to get no education. They show favoritism.
>
> Taylor explained: I had too many negative experiences. Teachers, bad teachers. Teachers around here. They would just give you the assignment without explaining and expect you to do it. If we had better teachers, I believe I would still have been in school.
>
> Harry said: When I finished my work, I would leave class and go do what I wanted to do.

Classroom instruction was another element that the participants noted to have contributed to their academic disengagement and partial high school completion. The

participants explained that that the instructional content was mind-numbing and not relevant to their daily lives.

> Roman stated: Math was the only subject that I found relevant and common sense because I came from the street. I didn't see the relevance in those reading passages and biology and stuff.
>
> Al said: I didn't care too much for school. It was boring because I knew most of the stuff that they were teaching. The school system sucks. We are so far behind.
>
> John stated: School was boring. I felt like I kinda knew everything. I just wanted to go to class, do my work, and leave.
>
> Quinten expressed: School was not relevant to my life. I was looking at what is going to help my everyday situation or what is going to help put money in my pocket. Like what is going to better my financial situation. That stuff is not going to do anything for me.

Four of the participants expressed that the instructional content was not properly aligned to the state graduation assessment, which caused them to persistently fail the test even after taking tutoring classes. Most of the participants had a similar opinion as Roman:

> They really didn't teach us nothing on the state tests. You had to luck up and pass those tests. That is why when I took the test, I was like some of this stuff wasn't even in the booklet. The things that they did go over with us wasn't even on the test.

Given that most participants in this study could not pass the test, they could not graduate even though they had all of course credits. Their only option was to repeat the

12th grade and continue to retake the test until they passed, which they were not willing to do. Returning to school was not only embarrassing but also unattainable considering that after multiple attempts at passing the test, they were still unsuccessful. A non-conducive school culture and climate contributed to some participants being pessimistic and decisions to quit school.

Limited Resources and Opportunities

The final emerging theme identified the participants' perceptions of limited resources and opportunities in their community. The participants shared that there were scant resources and opportunities for social and educational advancement in their community. Nearly all the participants stated that as teens the only thing they had to look forward to was graduating from high school and working at the casino. Although they expressed that they were clueless about their career choices, they knew was that they wanted to make 'real money' and to be in a better financial situation.

Most of the men stated that they were oblivious to the world outside of their immediate community. Some expressed that they learned some things watching television. However, many reported that they learned and were exposed to more when they started hanging with older boys and men from their neighborhood. They were introduced to alcohol and marijuana, gangs, selling drugs, and criminal activity with theft. Their drug and alcohol abuse together with involvement in illegal activities contributed to most of their limited educational experiences. Half of the participants stated they were arrested and served time in jail prior to their 18th birthday.

Furthermore, only three of the 12 participants are currently employed. Two of them work at a factory that is 30 minutes from their homes, and the other participant is a

traveling music artist. The other participants stated that it is difficult to find a job close to home because most of the jobs that are available require you to have at least a high school diploma and be drug-free. They also noted that having drug related or robbery felonies is grounds for not being hired or being overworked on low-end jobs for minimal wages. Moreover, some of the participants even shared that they have a desire to enroll in a high school equivalent diploma program; however, most of the class are during the day, which means that they may miss out on money making opportunities from their street hustle. In addition, some participants stated that there was not a local high school equivalent diploma program; however, I was recently informed that high school equivalent diploma preparation courses are currently being offered at two locations in their hometown. Having been said, I question if the information is being properly communicated to this population of men. Scarce resources and opportunities for social and education mobility related to these participants' low self-perceptions and academic attainment.

Discussion of the Findings

"It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men"

- Frederick Douglass

Parental Interaction

Limited parental interaction has been linked to the academic underachievement and poor life outcomes of African American children (O'Neil, 1999; Shearin, 2002). After listening to the lived experiences of the male participants in this study, it is evident that the lack of parental supervision, accountability, and positive role models influenced their perceptions and educational attainment. Parental guidance is important to help

children develop a definition of self and their psychological well-being (Ellison, 1990). Being that most participants were reared in home environments with limited to no parental guidance and accountability, they were not prepared to make good decisions, take on challenging tasks, and cope with failure, which have, in many circumstances, left them broken. To explain, all participants shared that they were not conditioned to deal with failure. Therefore, when they experienced failed attempts at success at school and were criticized by their teachers or peers, they used hypermasculine coping styles (Thomas & Stevenson, 2009). Hypermasculine coping styles are used by many African American males to evoke respect and ensure their personal safety when they feel rejected or ineffective at completing a task (Noguera, 2003; Swanson et al., 2003). This manifested as invincibility, noncompliance, insubordination, and direct physical aggression (Majors &Billson, 1992; Noguera, 2003) in the participants. All participants shared that they were noncompliant at school and that they were often involved in physical altercations, which heavily influenced their lack of educational attainment.

Moreover, limited parental interaction denied the participants the nurturing, discipline, and boundaries that many of them needed to be successful in school and in life. Whereas most participants did not directly state that their parents, specifically their mothers were responsible for poor educational decisions, research has suggested that that family background is one of the primary indicators that a student will drop out of school (Fitzpatrick and Yoels, 1992). Limited parental support and structure at home often denied them the opportunity to learn discipline, self- respect, and self-control, all of which they needed to be successful in life. Moreover, several participants expressed that as adults; they struggle with taking responsibility for their actions, following orders, and

adhering to policies, which partial explains why they persist to be undereducated and unemployed. The findings of this study support previous studies views on the effect parental interaction has on African American males' behavior and academic achievement (Noguera, 2003; Shearin, 2002); however, additional research is needed to further explore how limited parental interaction influence African American males' self-perceptions.

Gendered Socialization

In a different way, it has been suggested that many African American mothers have lower academic expectations and responsibilities around their house for their sons to protect them from additional stressors. These mothers believe that requiring less of their sons will give them a source of pride so that will be in a better position to defuse failure and reduce the effect of conflict (Kunjufu, 1985; Noguera, 1997; Varner & Mandara, 2012). However, those findings were not completely supported in this study. Like prior research, the participants' mother did have expectations of their sons, high expectations in most cases; however, they placed more emphasis on protecting their sons from failure and discrimination. The findings of this study revealed that the participants' mothers did not hold them accountable for not following through on expectations. That being said, the participants made their own decisions regarding their education.

School Climate and Culture

Each participant stated that their high school's culture and climate were not conducive to student learning for the following reasons: school policies, teacher and student relationships, and instructional content. First, many of the participants in this study dropped out of school because school policies made it impossible to graduate, namely, expulsion, absentee, and graduation requirements. None of the participants

mentioned any positive behavior interventions being implemented by school administrators and teachers to encourage positive behavior and academic success. Instead, many them talked about how they were frequently suspended for fighting on school campus. Taylor added that he was sent to an alternative educational setting after being involved in a group fight; however, he stated that it was worse than his high school, so he dropped out of school.

Duncan (1999) conducted a qualitative study on persistent poverty in rural communities located in the Appalachian and Mississippi Delta. One of the communities that she chose to focus on was Tulah. In her research, she described how poverty together with systematic barriers and limited opportunities persistently crippled Blacks in Tulah social and educational mobility. The findings of this study remain consistent with Duncan's findings especially regarding Tulah's schools culture and climate. Duncan described the school environment as "chaotic" (Duncan, 1999, p. 77). To explain, she noted that students had food fights in the cafeteria, habitually cut class and laid out on the benches all day long, and some even admitted to coming to school high and drunk. Most participants in this study admitted to skipping class; however, Taylor was the only participant to admit that he came to school high. Moreover, Duncan stated that some administrators tried to enforce discipline to control student behavior. However, it is possible that some of the discipline policies and procedures put in place were harsh and ineffective. At least half of the participants in this study reported that they were kicked out of school for their behavior, specifically fighting. A non-conducive school culture and climate contributed to these participants' lack of educational attainment.

Secondly, lack of nurturing relationships with their teachers tainted their academic behavior and motivation to learn. Most participants believed that their teachers did not care about them or their academic success. Being that the participants were often disciplined for negative behaviors and/or had served time in jail as students, they were labeled as a "troublemaker" or "criminal," which made them feel like a moving target. They reported that teachers harped on any negative behavior they demonstrated and sometimes intentionally tried to irritate them to get a negative reaction so they would be sent to the office. This finding is supported by research conducted by Butler, Joubert, and Lewis (2009), which argues that Black males have become targets of harsh discipline punishments for subjectively defined infractions. Teachers' negative attitudes toward many of these participants made them feel hopeless, which eventually led to academic failure and them quitting school. To promote academic success, it is important that students feel valued and like there is nothing more important than their academic success (Nodding, 1992).

Furthermore, the lack of culturally relevant instruction was also an element that had a negative effect on the school's culture and climate. Many African American students' values, personal traits, behavior, often counter those of mainstream society (Ogbu & Simmons, 1998), which is one leading reasons that Black male students need to be exposed to instruction and texts that spark their global and local interests, experiences, and cultural backgrounds (Husband, 2012). This research supports Husband's idea that students need to be exposed to instruction that is relevant and applicable to their daily lives. Quite a few of the male participants revealed that the course content was boring and not relevant to their daily lives resulting in academic disconnection. Likewise,

several of them also suggested that the course material was not aligned to state graduation assessments, which is what contributed the most to their academic failure. Osborne (1999) state that to promote academic excellence, students should be challenged and provided the opportunity to complete complex tasks in collaborative groups. Schools are not designed with the interest of Black students in mind (Ogbu & Simmons, 1998).

The school's culture and climate did not have a direct influence on the participants' self-perceptions. It, however, was the negative scrutiny that they felt because of their academic failure, stereotypes, and unfair discipline practices that influenced their self-perceptions and their decision to drop out of school.

Limited Resources and Opportunities

Chico Harlen (2015), a journalist from the Washington Post, did a three-part story on the Mississippi Delta region, including Tulah. In one of his stories, he reported that Mississippi had the lowest average income in the United States and the second-highest incarceration rate. He also added that you could drive about two hours in any direction from the Delta region and find that the unemployment rate is far from that nation's average. Thus, Mike Sayer stated that in Mississippi "the effort to provide programs for students most in need are being suffocated" (as cited in Harlen, 2015, para. 37). Harlen's stories echoed the personal accounts of the participants in this study. The participants described the influence that limited resources and opportunities at school and within their community had on their self-perceptions and educational attainment. Though all the participants stated that they valued education and looked at education as an escape from poverty to a productive life, many of them did not see a way to make their visions a reality. To put it another way, to most of these men, seeing was believing. They needed

direct compensation for their labor and an expeditious way to move up the economic ladder, which seemed impossible with a persistent failing school and a city with scarce resources. Even today, as young adults, they expressed that there remain no local programs to help young men, especially undereducated men with building character, parenting skills, drug and alcohol abuse, and career training. Furthermore, they shared that job opportunities are even sparser due to employment screening assessments and limited jobs due to a decline in revenues from the gaming industry.

On the other hand, one participant, Roman suggested that the community does not have an ailing effect on individuals' ability to have positive life outcomes; their success or failures are based on their own decisions. He asserted:

> It is not really the community. It is like do they want to be somebody. You can put a thousand things here for someone to do; you can give them a thousand jobs, but they have to be focused to work.

Whereas Roman feels that individuals can pull themselves up by the bootstrap, it may be a difficult task for others. Unlike the other participants, he was fortunate to have two role models to help him after he was released from jail. He gave them credit for taking him under their wings and showing him how to be responsible and how to make an honest living. Through networking, Roman was also able to connect with the right people to get a recording deal. He is now a traveling musical artist, and he takes pride in the fact that at the age of 21 years old, he has already visited 20 states. One may consider Roman lucky because there are many men from his city and surrounding cities who are not as fortunate.

Theoretical Frameworks

Majors' and Billson's cool pose theory (1992) and Ladson-Billings' (1995) culturally relevant pedagogy were used to contextualize the study of the phenomenon, understanding how African American males' personal and educational experiences influence their self-perception and educational attainment. The cool pose theory suggests that African American males take on a cool persona to neutralize negative stereotypes and responses experienced within their communities and school. Likewise, the culturally relevant pedagogy posits that students need to be exposed to curricula and teaching practices that builds on their prior knowledge and cultural experiences to enhance their understanding and promote academic growth. Both, the cool pose theory (Majors & Billson, 1992) and culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) reveal the consciousness behind African American males' academic disconnection and academic underachievement.

Cool Pose

This study was viewed through the lens of the cool pose theory. The cool pose theory was an appropriate conceptual framework for this study because it takes into consideration societal elements that influence African American males' self-perception and academic success. It helps one to understand why Black males place a greater emphasis on acceptance rather than their academic success. This theory highlights factors, namely, social rejection and stereotypes that heavily influence the way African American males perceive themselves and their educational experiences.

The findings of this study supported the cool pose theory (1992). The results indicated that internal and external factors influence the self-perceptions and educational

attainment of African American males. Participants in this study reported that they took on images as teens that consisted of stylish dressing, walking with rhythm, and using unconventional verbal and nonverbal language be perceived as being masculine and hip, as well as to mimic people they perceive as important, similar to the aspects of the cool pose theory (Majors and Billson, 1992). A small number of participants' responses were consistent with Jamison who changed his personality and started burglarizing homes to have money to fit in with people he perceived as hip and 'with it' even though he knew it was not the right thing to do. Jamison stated:

> I was raised right; it was just me. I see how people in the streets was and I wanted to live like them. They kept a pocket full of money and stuff like that. Had big rims, cars, and all that. It just made me change.

While most participants acknowledged they changed their style and personality as high school students, only three admitted to changing their style to be perceived as cool or masculine. The other participants stated that they were already perceived as 'cool' or 'that guy' by others and that their change was a personal choice. However, their responses did not register with me because some of them shared that they had been incarcerated for committing petty crimes and selling drugs to not only have money in their pockets but also to purchase the latest trending shoes and clothing that their parents could not afford to buy.

It was also startling to discover that several of the participants referred to themselves as the class clown. They relished in the laughter of their classmates. Corresponding, these same participants shared that they dropped out of school in the 12th grade because they could not master skills on the state's subject area testing. This made

me question if they acted out in class because they were embarrassed or did not understand the course content. Cool pose suggests that African American male students tend to become jokesters or withdrawn to conceal their feelings when they feel inferior, which explains their behavior. Likewise, social rejection and negative stereotypes associated with many African American males cause them to alter their behavior for acceptance and popularity, which result in persistent academic failure and inadequacy (Bell, 2010; DuBois, 1903; Matrenec, 2001, Majors & Billson, 1992).

Culturally Relevant Teaching

This study was also viewed through the lens of the culturally relevant pedagogy. Ladson-Billson's culturally relevant pedagogy was applicable to this study because it highlighted the importance of implementing culturally relevant instruction, which builds on students' cultural experiences to enhance their conceptual understanding and increase their academic achievement. The participants in this study shared that they did not find their classroom instruction culturally relevant or applicable to their daily lives, which caused academic disconnection, and in many instances, them to skip class altogether. Culturally relevant pedagogy suggests that teachers incorporate instructional practices that actively involves Black male students in the lesson and allow them to maintain their cultural integrity (Ladson-Billson, 1994). Moreover, it is important for teachers to allow African American male students to impart their own cultural knowledge in class because this helps them to see themselves as competent (Barbarin, 2012), which has a positive effect on their self-perceptions and academic success.

The participants also shared that their teachers taught directly from test preparation materials the entire school year, which was not only boring but also

ineffective considering that nearly all participants struggled to pass one or more of state graduation exams. While I understand the logic behind the teachers' decision to use test preparation material, the use of the material daily was not an effective instructional practice considering that it caused students' academic disconnection and failure. Moreover, their academic disconnection was sometimes perceived as disrespect, noncompliance, and insubordination by their teachers. To elaborate, Taylor shared that his academic disconnection was due to the fact that most of the time teachers assigned classwork from the workbooks without modeling the expectations or providing additional assistance. Being that he did not understand, he just sat in class and did nothing. He expressed that instead of the teachers providing help, they stereotyped him based on the way that he dressed and his perceived attitude, which correlates with the cool pose theory.

In order to promote student success, culturally relevant pedagogy advises teachers to be culturally responsive to their students' needs. Many African American male students, comes from home environments like the participants in this study. With that being said, teachers must learn as much as they can about their students' interests, cultures, and community so that they can not only utilize students' background information to drive instruction (Ladson-Billson, 1995), but to also provide appropriate learning interventions to promote student success.

The cool pose theory (Majors & Billson, 1992) and culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billson, 1995) were valuable to this research in that they helped me to reflect on the participants' experiences and provided insight into how educational policies and

instructional practices at low-income schools impact African American males' self-perceptions and educational attainment.

Chapter Summary

A detailed analysis of interview transcripts, observations, and field notes identified four themes from the data: parental interaction, ineffective school climate and culture, limited resources and opportunities, and self-perception. All participants admitted that they valued education; however, their personal and educational experiences were factors that contributed to their lack of educational attainment.

The lack of structure at home and unmerited policies and practices at school influenced the participants' self-perceptions and educational decisions. Most the participants took pride in the fact that were men who could hold up for themselves; however, at the same time, there were grave looks on their faces when they described their home life and experiences at school. Whilst three participants have since attended a high school equivalent diploma program and received a high school equivalency diploma, there are still nine of the participants who wants to better themselves, but do not see how they can. Yes, education is always an option, but now that they are adults, they need money and transportation, which they do not have ready access to. These men and many others from their community often fail to achieve because they have goals with no ambition. What is more important is that the lack of ambition does not come from laziness, but rather distorted perceptions and limited resources.

Chapter V will describe policy and practical implications. It will also discuss the limitations of this study and recommendations for future research, in addition to my personal thoughts and reflections.

CHAPTER V – CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter, I provide a summary of the research and discuss the implications for policy, practice, and future research on African American male students. I also impart my personal response and reflection, in addition to final thoughts regarding this study.

Review of the Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological inquiry was to explore the lived experiences and self-perceptions of low-income, African American males who dropped out of school. The research question used to guide this study was: What are the self-perceptions and experiences of African American males in Tulah, who have dropped out of school, regarding their educational achievement?

I focused on African American males ages 18-25 from a small city in the Mississippi Delta region that has been plagued by poverty and destitution for decades. My focal point, however, was on those who had a partial high school education due to dropping out. I used a phenomenological approach to gain insight into African American males' perceptions and lived experiences relevant to their lack of educational attainment. Data was collected through individual semi-structured interviews, observations, and personal notes. Semi-structured interviews allowed for flexible, conversational style interviews, which helped the participants to feel at ease when sharing their perspectives of their own experiences. Similarly, observations of the participants' communities helped me to make sense of their perspectives of their environments.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings from this study unveiled dynamics that influenced the perceptions and educational attainment of African American males. This study yielded three major contributors that affected the African American male students' self-perceptions and high school incompletion. The first finding was uninvolved parenting. All participants were reared in female-headed single parent homes with limited to no boundaries. They expressed that their mothers often verbalized rules and expectations; however, they were hardly ever reinforced. The participants stated that being that there were not any 'real' consequences for their rebellious behavior, they could do what they wanted to do. In the absence of a parental figure, the participants underwent an identity makeover to match their feeling of superiority. They modeled themselves after role models on television and within their community who they perceived as fashionable and well-off. The second finding was a negative school's culture and climate. According to all of the participants, their school culture and climate also wreaked havoc on their self-perceptions, academic success and educational attainment. One participants literally said that going to school was a joke. To them, it was a place for everything except learning, which contributed to their academic failure. Their academic underperformance stripped away their confidence and denied them access to graduation. The third finding was limited resources and opportunities for success. Most participants expressed that they valued education; however, many of them believed that education could not bring them instant gratification. For instance, they assumed that they would probably still be 'broke' and jobless after graduation because of inadequate opportunities for professional progression, which is the leading reason many of them started street hustling. Although money from street hustling

was not promising, to them it came a lot faster and easier than money earned at a job. These men accepted it as true that education is the key to a lucrative career; however, limited to no support at home alongside failed attempts at academic success and no money made social advancement by means of education far from their reality.

Figure 1 shows graphically how I believe these males' perceptions were shaped, which resultantly contributed to their failure to graduate from high school. Nearly all participants stated that their experiences as pre-teens were diminutive compared to their experiences as teenagers. Based on their stories, I speculated that the young men were not mature enough to made decisions for themselves or to handle the freedoms that they experienced at home and the flexible boundaries of high school resulting in irrational decision- making. Regrettably, for many of the participants' experiences resulted in them being nonfunctional young adults.

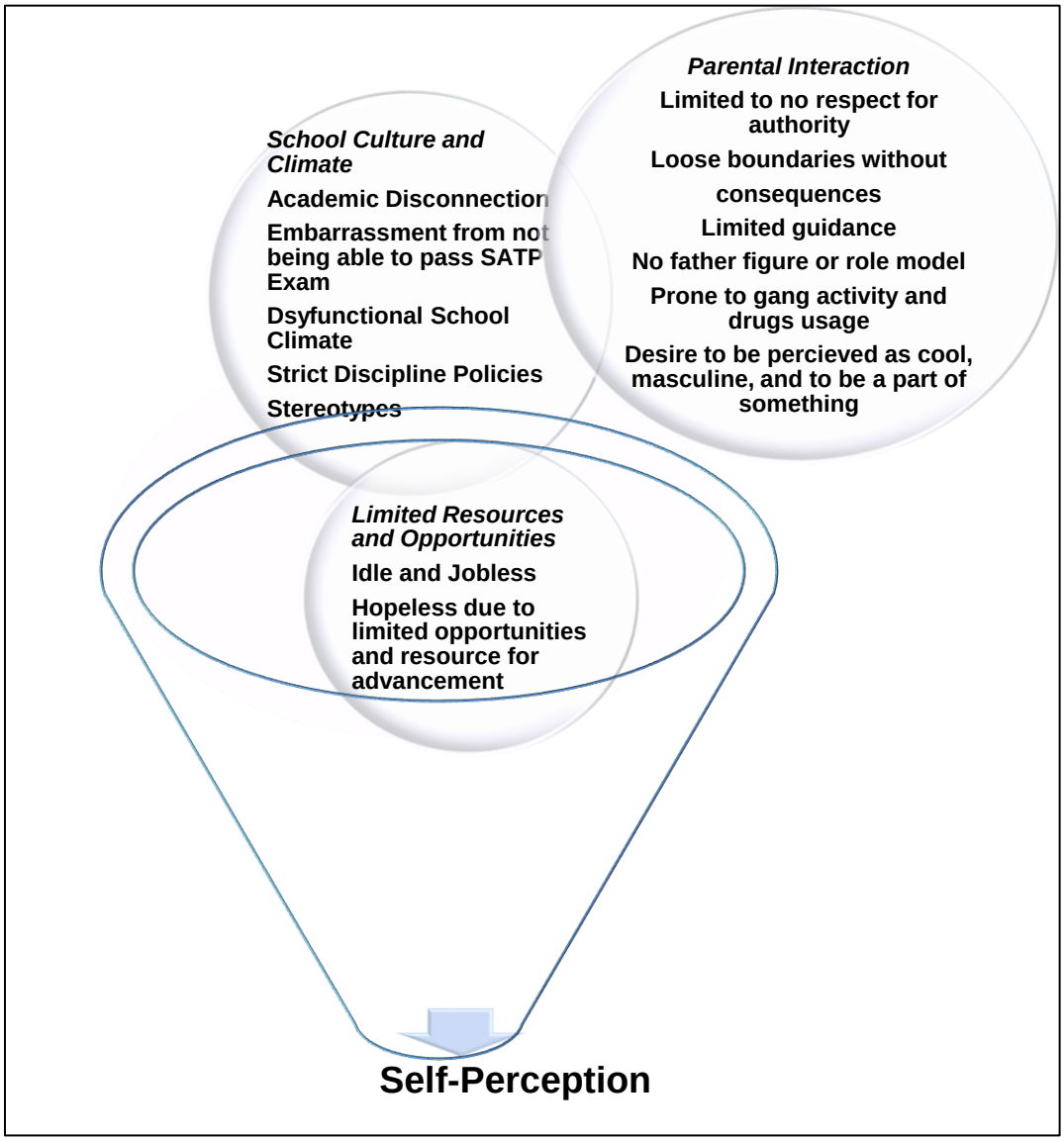

Figure 1. Self-Perception.

This figure illustrates personal and educational experiences that influenced African American males' in Tulah self-perceptions and decision to quit school.

Following the graphic, one can see the grim effect that limited parental involvement at home and school along with school policies have on underprivileged African American males' self-perceptions and social and educational mobility. Unveiling the reality behind the participants' lived experiences brings awareness to the need to

address the plight of African American males' holistically to improve their perceptions of themselves and their academic abilities.

Implications

There has been a plethora of research on underlining factors that adversely influence African American males' academic performance and life outcomes, and there is also research on their perceptions of school and factors that push them out of school. However, there is very little information on how their lived experiences influence their self-perceptions and decisions regarding their educational attainment. This study contributes to literature on the academic success of African American males by revealing the influence impoverished, African American males' experiences have on their self-concept and educational attainment. In many instances, these participants experienced double consciousness. Dubois (1903) described double consciousness as one person with two souls, two thoughts, and two unreconciled striving struggling to stay as one. The participants in this study valued education and desired to be productive members of society, but on the other hand, inequitable systems within the school and community often left them doomed to failure. These men focused on elevating themselves based on what they perceived as success, which did not always require a formal education. More emphasis was placed on being cool and getting money, rather than their education, which resulted in them being often suspended for fighting their rivals at school together with selling drugs and committing petty crimes for money. Eventually, a few of them dropped out of school because they could not balance the street life and school; however, most participants dropped out of school because they could not pass one or more of the graduation exiting exams or for consequences related to the school's discipline and

attendance. These participants' experiences at home and at school adversely influenced their self-perceptions. In addition, because many of them felt that no one cared about them or their success, they made permanent decisions based on their emotions, which continue to impede most of their social and economic mobility even today.

This study is important in showing that whilst many African American males' home experiences have a considerable influence on their self-perceptions and educational attainment, educational policies and practices are responsible for most of their lack of educational attainment. Policies and practices in education related to testing programs and discipline disproportionately impact many low-income Black male students' academic achievement and push them out of school. Being cognizant of how these educational policies and practices affect African American male students from underprivileged communities will help educational policy makers, educators, and community stakeholders to see the importance of working collaboratively to make the most informed decisions for this population of students and those who may be at risk of failure. In addition, the findings also revealed the need for school administrators and teachers to take creative and individual approaches to promote learning and academic achievement for all students, specifically referring to African American male students.

Implications for Educational Policy

The lived experiences of African American men in this study not only influenced their self-perceptions but also their decisions relating to their educational attainment. Their stories exposed the importance of parental guidance and support, structured and culturally responsive educational settings, and more financial resources and opportunities for educational and social advancement. There is little that educational policies can do in

terms of social change; however, educational policies pertaining to student assessment and discipline should be explored to potentially improve the educational attainment of underprivileged African American male students.

Academic Attainment

Research suggests that many African American students, specifically, African American males, are misidentified, misassessed, and misinstructed in education in terms of their academic abilities (Obiakor & Beachum, 2005). One reason is that these students are expected to compete academically on the same level as other students throughout the nation without adequate resources and instructional training. Furthermore, their underachievement is unique to other students in their schools, namely, females because of they are already at a risk of failure and struggle with internalized conflict prior to entering a classroom (Jenkins, 2006). This study revealed that misalignment between standardized assessments and classroom instruction contributed to several of the participants' lack of education attainment. Recently, revisions were made to the state graduation assessment accountability policy, which resulted in increasing graduation rates for Tulah and throughout the state of Mississippi. The new policy, released spring of 2015, provided high school students who struggle with passing one or more subject area (e.g. English, algebra, biology, and U.S. history) state graduation assessments alternative options for graduation. For example, one option is that a percentage of their state graduation assessment score can be factored with their course grades to determine graduation eligibility (Mississippi Department of Education, 2014). Some of the other options were to obtain at least a score of 17 in the specific subject area on the ACT or earn a C or higher in an entry-level college credit course (Mississippi Department of Education,

2014). Sadly, these options were not available for the participants in this study, particular those of whom satisfied their course requirement, but could not pass the test.

Walker, Fergus, and Tsoi-A-Fat Bryant (2012) asserted that to improve African American male students' educational attainment, education policymakers and school administrators must change their focus from deficiencies in the students to opportunities within the system: "Both education policymakers and school leaders must play a role in reframing how boys of color are perceived and served in the education system" (p. 238). Based on my professional knowledge and expertise as a classroom educator, I recommend the following implication for revising and developing school assessment policies to improve African American males' educational attainment. I recommend that all high schools add the ACT WorkKeys assessment to their testing policy.

The WorkKeys measures workplace skills and identifies careers that students are qualified for based on their applied math skills and their abilities to locate and read for information (ACT, 2017). In addition, students can earn the National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC) upon successful completion of the assessment, which they can present to employers to verify jobs that they can perform successfully based on their score. This assessment is typical administered to students in the 12th grade to ensure educators that they are prepared for workforce; however, I recommend that is administered to all incoming 9th-grade students, specifically, African American male students at-risk of failing. Having students to take this assessment in the 9th grade opposed to the 12th grade, will allow educators the opportunity to work with students to create individualized learning paths based on their career focus.

Furthermore, many African American male students will benefit from taking this assessment, in particular, those from racially concentrated, high poverty communities because the results not only show their strengths and weakness as it pertains to the workforce but can also be used to customize their learning, which will hopefully increase their educational attainment. Moreover, upon the successful completion of all three assessments, they will be certified to gain employment based on their score (Bronze, Silver, gold, Platinum). The opportunity to earn job certification prior to graduating high school will hopefully help individuals similar to the participants in this study see education as rewarding.

Additionally, the WorkKeys assessment is one of the alternate assessments that students in Mississippi can take in place of the state graduation assessment. Students who score level 4 (Silver) on the test in the 9th grade are already qualified for at least 69% of the jobs profiled on the WorkKeys assessment and will have already begun to satisfy their graduation requirements. For Black male students, this test offers opportunities for success at school and in the workforces, which are opportunities that have been previously denied in low-income cities like Tulah.

Discipline

School policies, namely, discipline policies were also responsible for over half of the participants dropping out of school. Based on the participants' personal stories and educational experiences, limited resources and support systems mired their academic performance. Whereas many of the school administrators and policymakers were natives of Tulah, it was clear that they did not have a true understanding the personal circumstances that impact students' success. Respectively, a dysfunctional school climate

together with inflexible school policies and limited behavior interventions, basically drove participants out of school into the criminal justice system, in some cases.

School leaders must be firm and high expectations of their students, yet and still, they should take creative approaches when determining discipline policies. I recommend the following policy implications for school discipline based on the findings of this study. I suggest categorizing the discipline policy into two sections: safety and behavior. Examples of safety infractions would be physical altercations, bringing weapons on campus, throwing items, and physical and cyber bullying (on campus). While zero-tolerance policies are appropriate for bringing weapons on campus being that student safety is the ultimate goal, students involved in physical altercations and situations involving bullying will be disciplined based on the level of severity, which should already be predetermined by a school safety committee consisting of the administrator, teachers, parents, and community stakeholders.

Moreover, discipline policies for behaviors, namely, talking back, noncompliance, and insubordination should be less severe. It is important that schools have positive behavior interventions in place to alleviate negative student behavior. Students should not lose instructional time for behaviors that can be addressed by the teacher. However, if the behavior hinders the individual and other students' success, pull out sessions with the school counselor may be needed. Butler et al. (2009) stated that "excluding students from school for two days or two-month increase the odds of academic failure and dropping out" (p. 39). Smith-Evans (2012) stated that discipline procedures should not rely on punishment as a means of social control. School discipline practices should shift from punitive methods based on adult control to peer-focused, positive behavior interventions.

It is important that creative discipline approaches are put in place to increase all students, specifically, Black male students' academic success and educational attainment. Research suggests that when Black males are pushed out of school and classrooms, their opportunities for social and academic mobility are lessened as their exposure to drug use, criminal activity, and dropping out increases (Smith-Evans, 2015). Future policies must focus all-inclusively on the students' academic success and include all stakeholders. I mean, policies must take into consideration social constructs, students' home environments, the school climate, as well as curriculum and instruction.

Implications for Practice

There are several schools throughout the nation where African American males are climbing the ladder in academic performance. Then again, there are many Black males, like the participants in this study who are failing. The reality behind their academic failure is that they reside in communities with high concentrations of poverty where they are likely to be impacted by drugs, gangs, and other social problems drawing them onto the path of delinquency (Majors and Billson, 1992; Noguera, 2012). There are two main subject matters that should be explored that may improve African American males' educational attainment. The first subject is school culture and climate, and the second is community partnerships. The findings of this study revealed that the culture and climate of Tulah High School influenced the self-perceptions of African American male students and contributed to their partial high school completion.

Improving the school culture and climates starts with the school leader, teachers, and the school staff working together to make sure that school is welcoming and promotes high expectations for all students. It is also important for the entire school staff

including, the principal, teachers, administrative assistants, and custodians, to build and maintain relationships with the students and their parents.

Based on the findings of this study and my experience as a classroom teachers, parental involvement is scarce. Many parents from low-income communities work odd hours and in some cases, do not have transportation to get the school, which makes it difficult for them to be actively involved. With that in mind, school leaders must be resourceful and think outside of the box. I suggest that before the first day of school, the school staff conduct home visits to meet parents and learn about their students and their home environment. This knowledge help to reduce bias and encourage school leaders and teachers to take students' cultures into consideration when making decisions relating to school discipline policies, the curriculum, and instructional practices. Furthermore, some participants reported that teacher and student relationships were also incongruous to student learning and success. Visiting students' homes allows teachers to learn additional information about their students, which helps them to be culturally aware of their students' needs. Additionally, it will help teachers to have a better understanding of students' cultures so that they can effectively bridge it into the instruction through conversations and use of culturally relevant texts, which increases students' academic performance (Ladson-Billson, 1995; Majors & Billings, 1992).

In addition, Walker, Fergus, and Tsoi-A-Fatt-Bryant (2012) also recommended some strategies for school leaders to use to develop and sustain a school culture that is conducive to students' academic success, in particular, boys of color

1. Ensure that school staff are appropriately trained and held to the highest professional standards for educating boys of color

2. Use curricula and assessments that focus on the developmental, academic, and cultural relevance for all students, and particularly males of color
3. Create an inclusive school environment that embraces student, family, and community involvement to support student achievement (p. 238-239).

The findings of my research supported Walker et al.'s recommendations. I discovered that the adult African American men who participated in this study could have substantially benefitted from high expectations, culturally relevant curricula and instruction, community support, and a welcoming school environment as high school students. Although some of the participants shared that they snubbed authority, I believe that a structured learning environment coupled with high educational standards would have yielded better behavior and academic performance on standardized assessments.

Additionally, Barbarin (2012) added that healthy and safe school environments can help African American male students to deal with internalized stressors and nurture academic success. Research suggests that many African American males' experiences adversely affect their adjustment to school: poverty, abuse or neglect, family and community violence, substance abuse, and physical deprivation (Barbarin, 2012). Their overwhelming experiences impair their emotional development, lead to feelings of grief, anger, depression, and cause them to be hypersensitivity to insults and irritability in social situations (Barbarin, 2012), which is in relation with the findings of this study. Only two participants mentioned emotional disorders and low self-perceptions; however, the other participants' aggressive behaviors and desire to maintain a cool image suggested that they may also have some emotional ailments. Most of the participants

stated that they were often involved in physical altercations at school because someone looked at them or one of their friends wrongly or made a statement that they did not like.

Being that most African American boys' experiences have some bearing on their self-perceptions and educational attainment, it is important that they have an accumulation of positive experiences at school to increase their academic success. That is, school leaders and teachers should work collectively to establish strong relationships with students. Moreover, school leaders should make certain their staff is culturally responsive to the needs of all students, in particular, Black male students. It is also important that males of color have opportunities to express themselves and bridge their home and school experiences in the classroom.

Community Partnerships. Being that I am a former resident of Tulah and that I also graduated from Tulah High School, I can make some practical recommendations about community partnerships based on my experiences. The following suggestions will help to create effective service learning experiences for African American male students by means of community partnerships.

The findings of this study support research that states that many African American males experience an academic disconnection as early as the 4th grade, and by the 9th grade approximately 1/3 of them drop out of school (Council for Greater City Schools, 2012; Kunjufu, 1995). With this in mind, school administrators must be creative when designing and choosing curricula and activities for young, African American males. Smith (2012) suggested that collaborating with community partners to provide males of color out of school time learning, namely, practicums, is advantageous to their success. Out of school learning time provides African American males students skills that they

need to close the opportunity gap and prosper in the twenty-first century through "stimulating learning environments that enhances their academic skills and personal development" (Smith, 2012, p. 17). For instance, although there are only two major industries in Tulah, there are several small businesses (e.g. law firms, restaurants, plumbing, electrical, furniture, mechanics, farming, etc.) where students can work half a day after completing their core class (e.g. English, math, science, and history) to earn intern hours. Black male students, specifically high school students from low-income communities, need alternate learning experiences that are based on their interests and that may also provide apprenticeships or certification prior to graduation to make education more appealing to them.

Moreover, forging partnerships with community members can also bring in additional human capital as tutors, hall monitors, and mentors to help build character. Mentors are greatly needed in Tulah and communities alike considering that many African American children, specifically, African American boys come from home environments that has limited parental interaction and role models. These partnerships are essential to encompass the intellectual, socioemotional, and physical development of African American males (Smith, 2012). Likewise, some community partners may well bring with them a wealth of knowledge and expertise. Smith (2012) asserted, "Providing youth with productive exposure to an array of learning and developmental opportunities, knowledgeable adults outside their families, and motivated peers can result in very different levels of student development and achievement" (p. 250). Community partnerships not only open the doors for educational training outside of the school

environment, but also allow community stakeholders to help make decisions about students' learning and serve as support staff, tutors, and mentors.

It is paramount that educators work hard to develop a holistic understanding of elements that influence African American males' self-perceptions and educational attainment. Understanding the plight of many males of color will help educators to take creative approaches to make sure that the school culture and climate is welcoming, supportive, and offers students differentiated opportunities for success.

Limitations of the Study

Although there were protocols in place to guarantee that the research was conducted comprehensively, there were some limitation to this study. One limitation was based on the nature of this study. The study was qualitative, which relies solely on narrative research from the participants' perspectives and experiences. I assume that the participants spoke openly and straightforwardly about their personal and educational experiences. However, some of the participants may have given exaggerated accounts to be perceived as "cooler" than they were as high school students.

Another limitation was the structure of the research study. It was limited to 12 African American males, ages 18-25, who dropped out of high school from a small city located in northern Mississippi. This study only embodied the perspectives of adult, African American males who dropped out of school over the last four years. Current African American male high school students in this area may not have the same or similar experiences as the participants in this study. In addition, Black males in northern Mississippi may come from different home environments, be effected by different

societal and educational barriers, and display different behaviors from males from other Mississippi regions and throughout the nation.

The final limitation is research bias. In my researcher subjectivity statement, I acknowledged that the may be researcher bias. For this research, bias was defined as my attitude towards limited parental interaction at home and school. To concentrate on this limitation, I used member checking, triangulation, and peer debriefing. Member checking was conducted throughout the semi-structured interview process. There were five different sections of questions. After each section, I summarized the findings and gave the participants the opportunity to correct any discrepancies or misunderstandings. I then used measures of triangulation including field notes, observations, recorded interviews, a comparison of participants' accounts, and my personal reflective journal to provide substantiating support of my findings. Peer debriefing sessions with my committee chairperson and a fellow cohort were also conducted to do an external check on the research process. They asked me questions about my research methods, the meaning of the data collected, and my interpretations of the findings (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Implications for Future Research

Further extensive research is needed in improving African American males' self-perceptions and educational attainment. Initiatives comparable to My Brother's Keepers and Barber Shop Books have been designed to improve African American males' opportunities for success and literacy; however, very few of these initiatives are available to males of color living in the southern part of the United States, specifically in the state of Mississippi. Although Many students in Mississippi remain at risk of failure because

of inflexible education policies, inconsistent assessments, limited resources, and the absence of high-quality employment opportunities. There is modest research on underprivileged African American males' self-perception relating to their educational attainment. This study will contribute to the body of literature on how men of color's perceptions of themselves influence their educational attainment.

A concept not investigated in this study that needs additional research is the parents' perspectives of their sons' lack of educational attainment. Most participants alluded that as high school students they made their own decisions about life and their education. More in-depth research about the parents', specifically, the mothers' parenting style should be considered. This will to help to better understand the parents' point of view on their child-rearing practices in regards to their son's self-perceptions and their partial high school completion. In addition to parenting style, the parents' level of education and educational values generally impact low-income African American males' academic performance. All participants stated that their fathers did not complete high school, and in some cases their mothers, as well. How do parents' lack of educational attainment together with their educational values influence African American males' educational decisions? This is an area that should also be taken into consideration because children often imitate their parents' behaviors.

The next area that should be explored is current interventions and resources that educators and community stakeholders (e.g school board members and the county board members) have in place to help at-risk African American male students. Research conducted by Duncan (1999) described Tulah as a place that still functions under a caste system. There are very few opportunities for advancement unless you come from a

prominent family and have access to money for extracurricular activities and college. Likewise, Harlen (2015) stated that African American male high school graduates from cities with similar demographics as Tulah have expressed that they have very little to look forward to after graduation because they have no money for college and employment opportunities are few. Moreover, the fact that males with a high school diploma struggle to find opportunities for social advancement after graduation do not leave high school dropouts much hope. Would these young males have a different perspective of education if they were confident it would lead them to success? All participants in this study expressed the need for equality, extracurricular activities for the youth, and more opportunities for success in Tulah.

Future research should also compare African American males from single parent female-headed homes who graduated from high school to those who dropped out. How were their experiences at home and school alike and different? Did their fathers or other male figures play an influential role in shaping their attitudes and decisions toward their personal actions and education? Interestingly, though not intentionally, all participants in this study shared that that they were raised in single-parent female-headed homes. Likewise, research should be conducted on the difference between African American females' and African American males', from low-income, female-head homes, self-perceptions and educational attainment. What is the difference between Black males' and females' individual experiences at home and school? How do these experiences influence their self-perceptions and decisions relating their educational attainment? It would be worth noting if and how African American males' and females' personal and educational experiences affect their self-perceptions and educational attainment similarly.

The plight of young African American males continues to escalate, especially since many males do not have a clear depiction of success. Being that many Black fathers are absent from homes, their sons tend to develop their self-perceptions based on people in their community who they perceive as cool or television icons, namely, athletes and rappers whose success did not come solely from their academic abilities, but rather their individual talents. Further research in the areas mentioned is valuable to develop a full understanding of elements that influence African American males' self-perceptions as youth so that early interventions can be implemented to not only help them cope with their experiences but also improve their academic performance and their educational attainment.

Summary and Conclusion

The objective of this study was to examine the depth of African American males' personal and educational experiences and how they influence their self-perceptions and decisions regarding their educational attainment. A qualitative, phenomenological research design was used to study the phenomenon, African American males' lack of educational attainment. A phenomenological approach afforded me the opportunity to study the participants' experiences and gain perceptiveness of their actions and decisions to quit school.

Data analysis revealed three major findings contributing to African American males' self-perceptions and partial high school completion. The findings were parental interaction, destructive school culture, and climate, and limited resources and opportunities for success The findings suggested that nurturing and structured home and learning environments, stimulating school climates that embrace culture, and sufficient

financial resources and opportunities for advancement are compulsory to increase low-income African American males' educational attainment and positive life outcomes.

While reflecting on the process of completing this study and its findings, I realize that I should have asked more questions about the participants' emotional feelings concerning their home and school experiences. This information may well have helped me gain a better understanding of how their experiences influenced their self-perceptions. Many participants shared their experiences, but they did not share how they made them feel as men. Did they feel inadequate or as if they were useless? One day, I would like to conduct follow-up interviews with the participants of this study to see if their circumstances have changed and if their children's educational experiences within the same school district are more positive.

APPENDIX A – Long Form Consent

ORI | Office of Research Integrity

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
LONG FORM CONSENT

LONG FORM CONSENT PROCEDURES

This completed document must be signed by each consenting research participant.

- The Project Information and Research Description sections of this form should be completed by the Principal Investigator before submitting this form for IRB approval.
- Signed copies of the long form consent should be provided to all participants.

Last Edited August 28th, 2014

Today's date:		
PROJECT INFORMATION		
Project Title: IDENTITY CRISIS: UNDERSTANDING HOW AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES' SELF-PERCEPTION AND EXPERIENCES IMPACT THEIR EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT		
Principal Investigator: Joyarketta Hawkins	Phone: 662-671-3438	Email: joyarketta.hawkins @usm.edu
College: University of Southern Mississippi	Department: Educational Research and Administration	

RESEARCH DESCRIPTION

1. **Purpose**:

The purpose of this study is to explore the depth of experiences that manifest in African American males' lives impacting how they perceive themselves, as well as their educational attainment. This study will add to the literature on African American males' achievement in that it will allow adult African American males from a low-income community, who dropped out of high school, to share their personal stories and experiences and how they influenced their self-perceptions and decisions relating to their educational attainment.

It is my hopes that this study will bring awareness to how African American males' experiences influence their self-perceptions and their decisions with regards to their educational attainment. Being cognizant of how African American males' personal and educational experiences affect their self-perception and educational attainment may provide teachers, administrators, and community stakeholders insight into better interventions to increase

APPENDIX B Interview Protocol

Individual Protocol

I. Gathering General Information

a. How old are you? Do you have any children?
b. Were you born and raised in Tulah County? If not, how long have you lived here? Were your parents and grandparents born and raised here?
c. What is your highest level of education? What is your parents' highest level of education?

II. Thoughts on Home and Environment

a. Describe your home life as an adolescent.
b. What roles did your parents play in your ability to achieve academic success?
c. Do you feel that your family's financial status, educational background, and educational values influenced your attitude toward learning? How so?
d. What roles did your peers and people from your community play in your ability to achieve academic success?

III. Thoughts on Education

a. Please describe some of your positive experiences as a student.
b. Please describe some of your negative experiences as a student.
c. What experience(s) led to you quitting school?

IV. Thoughts about Self-Perception and Others' Perception of You

a. As a student, where there times when you changed your image or behavior to fit in or to be perceived as cool or masculine?
b. Were there any personal experiences that contributed to the development of your identity and your self-perception?
c. Please describe in what ways is your self-perception different now from how you perceived yourself in school?
d. Have others' perceptions of you affected you mentally and/or hindered your success? If so, How?

V. Additional Thoughts

a. Discuss other factors that may have impacted your self-perception and educational outcomes?
b. Do you think that education is the solution to escaping poverty?
c. What improvement do you think could made to strengthen your community in efforts to improve the African American males' opportunities for success?

APPENDIX C – IRB Approval Letter

THE UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
118 College Drive #5147 | Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001
Phone: 601.266.5997 | Fax: 601.266.4377 | www.usm.edu/research/institutional.review.board

NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months.
  Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 16101402
PROJECT TITLE: Identity Crisis: Understanding How African American Males' Self Perceptions and Experiences Impact their Educational Attainment
PROJECT TYPE: New Project
RESEARCHER(S): Joyarketta Hawkins-Jones
COLLEGE/DIVISION: College of Education and Psychology
DEPARTMENT: Educational Leadership
FUNDING AGENCY/SPONSOR: N/A
IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Exempt Review Approval
PERIOD OF APPROVAL: 10/26/2016 to 10/25/2017
Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board

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