A STUDY OF THE DISPROPORTIONALITY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES’ MATH ACHIEVEMENT AND DISCIPLINE IN MIDDLE SCHOOL

A Dissertation
Presented to
The Faculty of the Education Department
Carson - Newman University

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the
Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education
By
Sonya V. Johnson

April 2019
Dissertation Approval

Student Name: Sonya V. Johnson
Dissertation Title:

A STUDY OF THE DISPROPORTIONALITY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES’ MATH ACHIEVEMENT AND DISCIPLINE IN MIDDLE SCHOOL

This dissertation has been approved and accepted by the faculty of the Education Department, Carson-Newman University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree, Doctor of Education.

Dissertation Committee:
Signatures: (Print and Sign)

Mark Gonzales, Ed.D.
Dissertation Chair

P. Mark Taylor, Ph.D.
Methodologist Member

Debra Smith, Ph. D.
Content Member

Approved by the Dissertation Committee Date: __4/13/2019____
I hereby grant permission to the Education Department of Carson-Newman University to reproduce this research in part or in full for professional purposes, understanding that in no case will it be for financial profit to any person or institution.

-Sonya V. Johnson, April 2019
Abstract

This study examined the long-standing problem in the world of education of the achievement gap with African American male students and how discipline incidents impact math achievement. The reasons for these gaps include historical factors, cultural factors, the school-to-prison pipeline, and lack of community involvement in schools. There are significant implications for society if these gaps are allowed to continue and the implications include a significant increase in the school to prison pipeline. A qualitative methodology is utilized in this study, including an analysis of student historical and current math and discipline data. Specifically, this study examined existing research and perceptions of students and teachers with interviews, math classroom observations, along with an analysis of discipline data related to African American male students in middle school. This study found that African American male students have intrinsic and extrinsic motivators that directly impact achievement, specifically in math. Instruction designed with relevant content and engagement strategies gives African American males the best chance at academic success in math classrooms. The results of this study will hopefully influence educational leaders and politicians to look closer at the implications of academic outcomes and discipline incidents for African American male students in middle school.

Keywords: achievement gap, culturally responsive instruction, African American males
Acknowledgments

Along this journey there have been three individuals that had a significant role in this process:

Dr. Mark Gonzales; As my chair you kept me encouraged and focused. Your efforts and dedication are greatly appreciated. Dr. P. Mark Taylor; Our minds are analytical, and it helped that you understood my thoughts and I was able to take direction from you. Your passion for my topic gave me the strength to endure this task. Dr. Debra Smith; As an educator and like-minded mentor, your support has been amazing. Your commitment to children and teachers does not go unnoticed. I am grateful you were a part of my team.
Dedication

This study is dedicated to the late Charlie and Christine Wade. You always encouraged me to do and be my best at everything. My Mom, Josie Wade, has been with me every step of the way. Your baby girl strives to make you proud.

My core of sisters Pam Owens, Sonja Deloatch and Madelyn Scales Harris have seen me at my worst and my best. You are always there when I need you and I am grateful.

To all of my family, friends, peers, church family, and colleagues this project is dedicated to all the days we feel like our efforts are in vain. Keep going, the students we serve need us to continue to advocate for them. Believe that change is coming.
# Table of Contents

Abstract ............................................................................................................................................... v

Acknowledgments ................................................................................................................................. vi

Dedication ............................................................................................................................................... vii

Chapter One: Introduction and Background of the Study ................................................................. 1

Statement of the Problem .................................................................................................................. 1

Purpose and Significance of the Study ............................................................................................... 2

Theoretical Foundation ..................................................................................................................... 2

Research Questions ........................................................................................................................... 2

Limitations and Delimitations ............................................................................................................ 3

The Researcher .................................................................................................................................... 3

Definition of Terms ............................................................................................................................ 4

Chapter Two: Review of Literature ................................................................................................. 5

Background .......................................................................................................................................... 6

Discipline ............................................................................................................................................... 9

Obstacles to Achievement .................................................................................................................. 13

Discipline Practices ........................................................................................................................... 14

Achievement Gap Factors and Parental Involvement .................................................................... 18

Higher Education ............................................................................................................................. 20

Special Education ............................................................................................................................ 22

Discipline and School Environment ................................................................................................. 24

Disproportionality and Exclusion ....................................................................................................... 25

Zero Tolerance .................................................................................................................................... 25
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethics and Discipline</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policies and Practices</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management and Discipline</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Curriculum</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Three: Methods and Procedures</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population and Sample</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description of Instruments</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Procedures and Time Period of the Study</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Four: Findings</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample Selection</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description of Sample</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis for Research Question</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Data Information</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Math Backgrounds</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Classroom Observation</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Five: Implications, Conclusions, and Recommendations</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Future Research

Conclusions

References

Appendix

A: Informed Consent
List of tables, figures, and illustration

Table 4.1 Coding of Participants .................................................................55
Table 4.2 Demographic Profile of School ..................................................55
Table 4.3 Coding .........................................................................................60
Table 4.4 Discipline Incidents ...................................................................61
Table 4.5 Discipline Incidents Schoolwide 2018-2019 ..............................61
Table 4.6 Interviews ....................................................................................67
Table 4.7 Observation Coding ....................................................................76
CHAPTER ONE

Introduction and Background of the Study

This study examined a long-standing problem: the academic achievement gap between African American male students relative to other student populations, the reasons for those gaps, including the historical factors, the school-to-prison-pipeline, implications for our society if we allow this problem to continue. African American males receive more discipline referrals and out of school consequences than any other ethnic group. These factors impact student achievement, and, more specifically, impact the achievement of African American male students. More than 200 years of slavery has had a lasting, negative effect on African Americans that still exists today. This negative effect is especially seen among African American males. African American males in this country have encountered an experience, unlike any other immigrants, in that they were dehumanized and treated as inferior based solely on skin color. Because African Americans, in general, have been the direct beneficiaries of the ongoing stereotypes, stigmas, hatred, and oppression of slavery, several African American males have adopted and internalized these negative stereotypes about themselves, their looks, and their abilities. This cycle has to stop in order for the next generation to be successful in society, what needs to be put in place to help African American males feel valuable and know that what they think and feel matters and has a place in the world.

Statement of the Problem

While schools have continued to experience gains in academic achievement for majority students, one population continues to lag behind the rest: our African American male population. This problem is not new, nor is it confined to the educational arena. It is a social phenomenon
that has infiltrated the academic arena. Nevertheless, it cannot be left as is. It is crucial that this problem is adequately researched in order to be effectively addressed. The lack of academic achievement causes other, more severe problems. This problem is believed to begin early.

**Purpose and Significance of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine the disproportionality of achievement and discipline of African American males in middle school and how this impacts achievement as a school overall, especially when ethnic groups are compared to each other to determine if a school is making academic progress. The challenges of African American males in education are unique, and the consequences of their poor performance have a significant impact on the status of achievement in public schools.

**Theoretical Foundation**

This study utilized the Constructivist Learning Theory along with discipline practices and procedures in middle schools. The Constructivist learning theory allowed or new knowledge and comprehension based on prior knowledge and experience, based on how discipline is administered and given to African American males as it related to other ethnic groups in the same school. This framework provided a significant foundation for the study and illustrated the need to find a solution to decrease the achievement gap of African American males. Using diversity and cultural sensitivity best practices as a conceptual framework to train school staff on these practices will assist in achieving the goal of the practices are used with fidelity and consistency.

**Research Questions**

- What specific challenges do African American males encounter in middle school that undermines their academic success in math?
Is there a relationship between discipline incidents and achievement of African American males in middle school?

What are the perceived differences between achievement and discipline with African American males in middle school math?

What effects do teachers perceive about cultural sensitivity and diversity, that would help reduce discipline incidents of African American males and increase math achievement?

**Limitations and Delimitations**

Sampling was a delimitation to this study. While this group is in the majority of the student population, only studying a portion provided some insight into the problem. Sampling also limited the generalizations to schools with similar demographics. Time did not allow for an in-depth study of the topic and provide a solution for the entire school district.

**The Researcher**

The researcher has a B.S. Education (focus on middle grades), M.Ed. in Reading, Ed.S in Administration and Supervision, and an Ed.S in Educational Leadership. The researcher’s educational background included twenty-one years of experience in classroom instruction at the elementary level and middle school level as a math teacher, eleven years of teaching math in middle schools and ten years of academic coaching as a Numeracy coach in elementary and middle schools. The work experience with teaching and coaching has provided many opportunities to observe the effects of various types of math instruction, which have produced consistent results in student math achievement. The researcher’s role in the study included evaluation and comparison of specific math instructional methods, specifically culturally responsive teaching strategies. Each of the methods used in the study has been personally utilized by the researcher as an educator in several different school settings and cultures.
Definition of Terms

**Diversity**: The condition of having or being composed of differing elements.

**Cultural sensitivity**: The act of being aware that cultural differences and similarities between people exist without assigning them a value-positive or negative, better or worse, right or wrong.

**Disproportionality**: The process of being out of proportion in comparison to others.

**Culturally responsive teaching**: This is the ability to learn from and relate respectfully with people of a person’s own culture as well as those from other cultures.

**Zero tolerance task force**: A task force that recommends to reform zero tolerance or implement alternatives to zero tolerance.

**Quintile**: A quintile is a statistical value of a data set. This is a means of dividing student scores into groups to evaluate performance on standardized test.
CHAPTER TWO

Review of Literature

The purpose of this study was to analyze the academic achievement and discipline incidents of adolescent African American males in middle school. Overall the project utilized culturally relevant pedagogy and research based on historical and current data. The intent is to delve into the educational and social experiences of each African American male involved in the study to create a depiction of their educational journey through public education, their attitude toward their self-development and growth into manhood, and the patterns of achievement and engagement associated with their discipline incidences. The study was designed to provide practical knowledge surrounding the level of detail associated with the research and how the study addresses the research questions.

In examining the existence of the achievement gap between African American males’ relative to other subgroups, it was imperative to explore contributing factors to its longstanding existence in addition to its historical perspective. The longstanding nature of this achievement gap speaks to the complexity of the issue and the generational challenges that remain an attempt to make a change. The American education system has failed to adequately and fairly educate African American students, in general, and African American male students in particular (Cartledge, 2009). A review of our education system, from Plessy v. Ferguson, to Brown v. Board of Education, shows the overwhelming injustices African Americans have suffered historically (Garibaldi, 2007). Unfortunately, these historical injustices have residual effects that are lingering into the twenty-first century is an understatement. As a result of this, there still exists an element of dissatisfaction and mistrust of our nation’s school system by some African Americans. According to Townsend (2009), this longstanding history of discrimination and
mistrust has led to suspicion and a feeling by some African Americans that their children will not be educated and treated like White children. While these feelings are unfortunate, history has not proven them to be unfounded and has been repeated.

Background

Over the last few decades, there has been a growing body of research dedicated to the state of urban education in America. More specifically, research has delved into the experiences of African American male students with a focus on their socioeconomic disadvantage, disproportionality in the discipline and achievement gap, and the link between low achievement and involvement in the juvenile justice system. Throughout the literature, researchers agreed that a predictor of student success is the quality of the teacher-student relationship. Considering the importance of the teacher-student relationship, it is rather alarming that there is such a shortage of research on how teachers establish effective relationships with African American male students. This relationship is vital for African American males to be successful in their educational endeavors. The results of these failed relationships are the direct result of the achievement gap that continues to widen in schools across the nation (Toldson, 2011).

Consequences of the achievement gap for African American male youth is the risk of being funneled into what has been called the School-to-Prison Pipeline (Noguera, 2008). The School-to-Prison Pipeline refers to the trend in the United States (U.S.) educational systems of negative actions of at-risk students in schools with zero-tolerance discipline and school arrests, ultimately denying African American students access to education (Vannerman, 2009). Research has indicated that there has been a steady rise of young African American males in detention centers and prisons. African American males account for over 35% of the prison population; however, they comprise (Ford, 2010). Young Black men who drop out of school are incarcerated
eight times more than their college-educated counterparts, and one in 25 college-educated African American men were incarcerated as compared to one in three for African American dropouts (Gregory, 2007).

School counselors, educators, and scholars have a civic responsibility to be social justice advocates who are aware of the impact that systemic racism has had on the lived experiences of African American adolescent males (Gardner, 2007). Professional school counselors should seek to understand the unique challenges that African American adolescent males face and develop the skills to examine policies and procedures that may contribute to continuing the achievement gap. In order to effectively advocate for the closing of the achievement gap for African American males, professional school counselors may be generally guided by the American Counseling Association (ACA) Advocacy Competencies to advocate at the micro, meso, and macro levels (Miller, 2009). Also, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Model details clearly that professional school counselors should develop advocacy competence in working with students from historically marginalized groups. Although these ACA and ASCA advocacy competence documents exist, it is important to understand the lived experiences African American males themselves describe of the achievement gap, so that professional school counselors may refine their advocacy skills with these students in order to be most effective (Gherardi, 2009).

The vulnerability of the African American male population has been displayed throughout our nation’s history in the horrific murder of Emmit Till. Till was a 14-year-old Black male who was murdered by a mob in Mississippi in 1955 for allegedly flirting with a White woman while on vacation, and continues to be displayed in the twenty-first century in the 2012 senseless murder of Trayvon Benjamin Martin (Valencia, 2016). Trayvon was fatally shot
while walking to his father’s fiancée’s home and looking suspicious; he was young, black, and wore a hoodie. He died that evening, armed with a can of juice and a pack of Skittles. The man who killed him was acquitted of his murder the following year. (Noguera, 2012)

The vulnerability of African American males is especially noticeable in the educational arena. In many schools and districts in our country, there is an overrepresentation of African American and Latino males in educational categories that are associated with failure and less than academically successful performance (Ford, 2010). Likewise, in classes and programs that are typically associated with honors or high academic performance, African American and Latino males are grossly underrepresented (Noguera, 2012). In most indicators of academic performance, the subgroups above are most likely to have rankings at the bottom in academic subjects (Noguera, 2008). According to the research of Toldson (2011), these academic deficiencies are seen in middle-class Black males as they consistently lag behind their White male peers on standardized tests (Townsend, 2009). African American males fall behind their African American female counterparts in science and math when it comes to standardized tests and grade point averages. This is also the case when comparing them with their White male and female peers. Also, whether rural, urban, or suburban, African American males, across the country, are more likely to be identified with some learning disability or special education label, and are placed in special education more than any other student population.

According to Ford (2010), while Black male students have a greater likelihood of being identified as mentally retarded or suffering from some learning disability, they also are more likely to be excluded from honors and advanced placement classes. However, since there appears to be a disproportionate number of Black children is suffering from some learning disability, some of the research seems to explain at least a portion of these alleged.
According to Harry (2005), these disabilities are not biological, but can often be attributed to their socioeconomic status of poverty. Therefore, since children of poverty often lack access to preventive healthcare, some of their medical conditions, such as vision problems, are incorrectly diagnosed as reading problems. Consequently, large numbers of these students, usually Black males, are placed in remedial and special education programs (Harry, 2005).

While the African American male achievement gap problems may be disturbing, unfair, and appalling, it cannot be characterized as a crisis, for a crisis (although urgent) signals a temporary condition (Nettles, Schwartz, & Haijiang, 2012). Nevertheless, at some point, there must be a sense of urgency in addressing these issues. How can this problem be addressed effectively and with fidelity? Interventions must be comprehensive in order to meet a multitude of needs. One of the interventions must be disciplinary policies that are designed to address and correct inappropriate behaviors.

**Discipline**

Disciplinary policies should impose consequences that are suitable for the infractions that have occurred; they must not be solely punitive, but must also address underlying issues that cause the behaviors (Smith, 2011). Underlying causes of disciplinary issues are as follows: mental health, illness, family issues, academic standing, abuse, and neglect. While these are non-disciplinary issues, they manifest themselves as disciplinary issues causing students, African American male students, to behave in a manner often deemed unacceptable by the dominant culture.

These underlying causes led to limited access to higher paying jobs, better neighborhoods, and schools. Thus, the cycle is perpetuated and continues at a high rate of turnover for future generations. If, as Dewey argued, education is in fact life itself, then schools,
as presently structured, do little more than maintain the status quo, and the achievement gap is an opportunity gap. Therefore, not all students would be affected, but only those who are a part of the dominant culture, seen as the model minority, or who are often seen as an anomaly and a credit to their race (Taylor, 2014).

Complex issues have been discovered in the research on the achievement gap. These issues include poverty, peer pressure, home environments and expectations, teacher quality, inadequate school resources, and test bias. The United States Government’s attempt to address this issue has called for many changes and higher stakes testing. Regardless of how many may feel about the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), it did require schools to look at all groups of students. No longer can schools say that 90% of their students are proficient on the standardized testing and hide the fact that the other 10% African American, Latino, economically disadvantaged and Special Education students. It is clear that the achievement-discipline-access gap still exists. Key to the policies of NCLB and this work is teacher quality. (Valencia, 2016)

School districts who accept federal funds must now assure that a highly qualified teacher is standing before the children in the schools. Being highly qualified applies only to the content they teach and not to teach the students they are charged with educating. This policy needs some revision. Teachers that are not trained in diversity education struggle in schools that have high poverty and low achievement. (Blanchett, 2009)

Urban schools suffer from an absence of resources tied to their location in poor communities. In comparison to more affluent suburban schools, urban schools typically are underfunded and have significantly higher teacher-student ratios (Smith, 2011). As a result, Urban schools often have less-qualified teachers and high discipline rates (Valencia, 2016).
Toldson (2013) reported that urban schools further disadvantage their students because of the generally lower quality of their faculty and, compared to their counterparts who teach in more affluent communities, teachers in high-poverty schools are far more likely to be paid less and to work under conditions that undermine their efforts to teach effectively.

Young African American males receive greater percentages of discipline referrals and special education referrals. These students also receive fewer As and Bs and more Ds and Fs, fewer placements in honors classes, and increasing percentages of drop-outs. The research on the effect of the accumulation of missed instructional time is significant to the achievement gap for African American males (Garibaldi, 2007).

The power of peer pressure cannot be underestimated. It is believed that many African American males underachieve, academically and otherwise, because of how they will be perceived by their peers and family members. Since the perception is that African American males are to excel in sports, but not in math or science. When they do excel outside of the established norms, African American males become targets for scrutiny from their peers. In order to avoid that type of scrutiny for selling out, they may hold themselves back and underachieve in order to avoid being ostracized by their peers. Unfortunately, their peers are not the only problem. Often the very people who are responsible for helping these students are the ones who do the most damage (Noguera, 2008).

African American males are more likely to be criticized by their teachers than any other student group. In addition to facing constant criticism, they are also more likely to be coerced into marginal roles and discouraged from challenging themselves and being challenged by way of courses, curriculum, experiences, and opportunities. Adults, many of whom, in their ignorance, are well-meaning, continue to do more harm than good to the Black male student
population because they lack the training, experience, expertise, resources, and desire to serve in the best interest of the student. (Moore & Lewis, 2012)

African American males have developed a variety of ways to respond to this confusion about how they should act in school. Some have developed the ability to ignore or fight through these misperceptions and find academic success. This is often the case in schools that value them for who they are and not for what they are supposed to be. Others struggle daily as they move between the role of being an academically disinterested black male and being their true self. Others have acted out the role of the disinterested African American male for so long that it has become almost second nature to underperform in school. Unfortunately, as students have performed these roles, educators have failed to acknowledge that they have a responsibility to help students overcome these expectations of disinterest and low achievement (Miller, 2009).

Teacher behaviors are driven by the sum of the individual’s life experiences. Experiences that inform values, beliefs and cannot be held separate from their views of the world around them. Often these views of others, who they are different from ethnically, religiously, racially, and socioeconomically, do not manifest themselves on the conscious level. They are, however, very real in the dynamics of the classroom and the overall experience of African American male students. Negative racial stereotyping by teachers has a well-documented effect on student achievement and is seen in grading, discipline, and classroom management practices. The behaviors driven by misconceptions and expectations interact with student beliefs, behaviors, and work habits to perpetuate the African American -White Achievement gap (Whiting, 2009).

In schools in the United States, a gap exists between Caucasian and African American students. Most commonly, the gap between these groups of students refers to academic achievement in the form of grades and test scores; however, this gap can also be seen in
discipline occurrences and consequences for behavior seen as deviant by the dominant culture (Smith, 2011). African-American students attend the same school as Caucasian students every day. They have access and opportunity to the same material, curriculum, and computers. African-American students experience school differently from their Caucasian counterparts (Vannerman, 2009).

It has been documented that there is a high turnover rate for teachers in urban schools (Noguera, 2012). Teachers are the most important in-school resource, failure to invest in improving the teaching force and to equitably distribute this resource is contributing to the achievement gap for African American students (Banks & Banks, 2010). This is especially problematic because of the negative effects of turnover for academic achievement are greater for low-performing and African American students than for their higher performing, non-African American peers. High turnover rates have been linked to teachers being unprepared to deal with mismatches in cultural norms and the challenges that come with teaching in urban communities. This lack of preparation is probably because too few teachers are equipped with the skills necessary to effectively teach African American males (Gardner, 2007).

**Obstacles to Achievement**

While African Americans, in general, experienced a steady increase in college enrollment between 1973 and 1977, the National Research Council (1989), as cited by Noguera (2012), reported a sharp and continuous decline since 1977, especially among African American males. Their declining enrollment into college is not an indication of academic ability, or lack thereof (Noguera, 2012).

Understanding the African American male students’ idea of survival of the fittest was not the same as proposed by Charles Darwin as a means of explaining the evolution and changes that
have occurred in our surroundings over time (Lander & Hammons, 2010). In the African American community, the idea of playing it cool was and is still today a means of survival. Specifically, it is essential for African American males who understand that being cool is not a way of life for teenagers; it is life (Simek & Grum, 2010). African American males reared particularly in certain social and cultural environments, the personification of certain masculine traits associated with speech and dress is nonnegotiable to gain acceptance. This may be displayed with word choice or slang terminology as well as fashion statements that express male individuality. As a result of what is known as cool pose, African American males have adopted and cycled through various adoptions of a stylized dress and appearance, charismatic speech and language, and the perception that they can defend themselves. The act of surviving in a restricted society is a reality that for many African American males who have come to conclude over time that they have to create their voice and demeanor of expression to enjoy success. The need to both survive and conquer the dangers and hardships of the streets is what many African American males bring with them to the classroom each day. One must first seek to understand the characteristic constructs of the market that teachers and leaders are charged with educating. Specifically, there are unique aspects that make up the social and educational capital that is often tied to African American males (Simek & Grum, 2010).

**Discipline Practices**

Almost four decades have elapsed since the Children’s Defense Fund (1975) reported racial disproportionality in school disciplinary practices (Lander & Hammons, 2010). Despite criticisms that zero tolerance practices are: (a) ineffective in deterring school violence; (b) not well defined; (c) general in nature; and (4) often lead to varying interpretations of intent, context, and meaning of behaviors, widespread use of these punitive practices continue to be
implemented in schools across the United States (Lewin T., 2012). Findings from data collected by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights (2011) revealed that during the 2006 academic school year, 3.25 million or 7% of school-age students in K-12 were suspended at least one time and 102,077 were expelled (Losen D., 2013). Researchers have validated the use of office disciplinary referral (ODR) data as a reliable measure to evaluate the effectiveness of programs, make program-level decisions regarding interventions, and make informed decisions at the student, group, and system levels (Bradshaw, Mitchell, O’Brennan, & Leaf, 2010; Kaufman et al., 2010). ODR data has been used to predict future school behavior, but have been criticized by some researchers because the validity of the data is predetermined or impacted primarily by school administrators (Irving, 2008). Other concerns are the lack of consistency in implementing policies in the schools and teacher interpretations of policies/behaviors (Bradshaw et al., 2010). Despite issues surrounding the use of ODR data, this data provides an examination of institutional, school, and classroom behaviors to identify the extent to which these policies/practices contribute to overrepresentation and gaps in achievement. (Bradshaw et al., 2010)

School administrators justify using exclusionary practices as their primary method of maintaining order and control, even for minor infractions, based on several popular, but false, assumptions. The following are some of the assumptions (a) school violence is on the rise, (b) zero tolerance deters students from acting out, (c) zero tolerance provides students with a consistent message regarding expectations and consequences, (d) removing disruptive students creates a conducive learning environment for others, and (e) zero tolerance is supported by students, parents and people in the community (Cartledge, 2009). The underlying assumption that school violence is on the rise because of the rash of school shootings in rural districts justify
the widespread use of zero tolerance policies to keep student’s safe is false and lacks empirical support (Noguera, 2012). The presumption and regular practice of removing disruptive students from a school to create safer environments have also not been substantiated in the literature (Skiba, Arredondo, & Rausch, 2014). Data indicated the exact opposite. Overall, schools that implemented zero tolerance practices frequently had higher rates of suspensions and expulsions, more negative school climates, poorer school management structure, and spend a much greater portion of school time focused on discipline problems. More importantly, however, is the fact that research findings revealed that suspended students are more likely to be males who are academically at risk for failure, most likely receiving special education services, and typically from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Skiba, Arredondo, & Rausch, 2014).

The disparity in school discipline data typically points to how African American students misbehave more often and have more serious infractions than other students. Losen (2013), however, refuted this argument, showing research that African American students were more likely to be suspended for discretionary offenses than nondiscretionary offenses. White students were more likely than African American students to be suspended for weapons or drugs (Losen D., 2013).

Also, African American students were more likely to have longer suspensions for minor offenses such as having a cell phone. Matthews (2010) supported this position with research conducted on data from more than 19,000 students in 45 elementary schools. African American students still were more likely to have disciplinary reports, pointing to race as a key factor. Other studies reported similar findings, noting African Americans are referred to the office for minor offenses and for subjective reasons such as making noise, disrespectful behavior, and verbal
threats; whereas, White students were referred for clear violations, including smoking and vandalism (Matthews, 2010).

Findings also indicated that schools that report frequently utilizing zero tolerance policies and other one strike and you are out and practice have higher rates of referrals to both the office and juvenile court system. They also revealed that suspended students are tracked into lower-level courses, labeled as behavior problems, and referred to special education; they develop negative perceptions of school, become truant and eventually drop out (Skiba, Arredondo, & Rausch, 2014). For example, African American males, historically, received at least one suspension that led to missed instructional time and when exposed repeatedly to negative consequences, may potentially cement a cycle of academic failure and continued behavioral problems (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008). Generally, suspension results in students being denied access to instruction for one class period for up to ten days or more (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008).

The increasing numbers of White female teachers and students of color in the classroom create conditions for cultural discontinuities, particularly for African American males with and without disabilities. Often referred to as the diversity gap. Recent reports show that nearly one-half of the students attending public schools are from racially/ethnically diverse backgrounds, while more than 80 percent of the teachers are White (Holland, 2014). These differences point to the need for teachers to increase their cultural competence, particularly focusing on their socioeconomics and gender. Gay’s (2010) study of African American elementary males described the often-misguided efforts of young males to assert themselves for male dominance. Gay also noted the complicity of the schools in derailing these youth through inadequate instructional programs, uncaring attitudes, and excessive punishment. At the middle and high
school level, these students become most vulnerable and the schools become weaker and the justice system harsher. Instead of punishment and indifference, Gay questioned the beneficial effects of increased attention and school involvement.

Gregory (2007) found a significant association between teachers reported discipline approach and the behavior of African American high school students as reported both by teacher and student. There was an agreement between student and teacher on the approach used and its effects. The authors surmised that when students trust the teacher’s authority, the students are less likely to react negatively/aggressively to ambiguous teacher cues; probably more likely to give the teacher the benefit of the doubt. Another speculation, with some empirical support, was that a strong teacher-pupil relationship might play a protective role for African American [Black] children at risk for aggressive behavior. Gregory (2007) further suggested that relationship building may be especially important for students who differ from their teachers by socioeconomics and race. Strengthening student-teacher relationships may help teachers better understand student’s actions and their perceptions of discrimination and unfairness (Gregory J., 2007).

Achievement Gap Factors and Parental Involvement

The literature on the achievement gap is extensive in signifying factors that contributed to the achievement gap. Children from wealthy families may have an advantage over children from disadvantaged homes in terms of preparing for higher learning due to available resources. Human capital refers to one’s ability to be economically productive, i.e., knowledge, skills, health. Education is considered to be a form of human capital in that it is considered to be an important investment (Miller, 2009). It is said that parents who possess high measures of human capital are more likely to read to their children and provide intellectual stimulation within the
home. These parents are known to understand the process of schooling better and allow them to monitor what their children are being taught as well as manage their education (Lewin, 2012). The research suggested that well educated African American parents are less likely to transmit human capital when compared to White parents due to the historical legacy of racism and discrimination (Smith, 2011). This determination was determined due to a lack of resources in African American families. African Americans were not provided the opportunities to accumulate resources that were transmitted into human capital. Capitalism is considered the core value of the United States and possibly one of the foundations of the nation’s wealth. Historically African Americans were considered as capital and consequently were denied opportunities to gain capital. It is believed that capitalism is the underpinning cause of the lack of equality between African Americans and Whites (Smith, 2011).

Although there are many underlying theories and probable causes of the achievement gap between African Americans and Whites, the question remains as to why African American students do not perform as well as White American students in school? Many factors could contribute to this disproportionate issue, but there are few solutions to the problem (Simek & Grum, 2010).

In contrast, involuntary minorities were brought to America using enslavement or colonization. Involuntary minorities did not migrate to America with the expectation to succeed or improve their condition. They were incorporated into American society against their will, which enabled them to conclude that they fare poorly due to belonging to a disfavored group (Banks & Banks, 2010). Minorities have limited occupational opportunities which result in putting little effort into an academic engagement. Therefore, poor perceptions of occupational opportunities encourage academic disengagement. The attitudes and behaviors of involuntary
minorities possess ambivalent attitudes toward school. Involuntary minorities generally support academic success to enhance educational and employment opportunities. However, involuntary minorities have trouble with the dominant perception of education being the key to success due to previous experiences in dominant society and the failure of the school. Involuntary minorities (African Americans) are said to have a dual negative frame of reference. Therefore, parents of involuntary minorities often send mixed messages about education. These parents tend to encourage their children to work hard in school but also hold to the beliefs that the school system is not trustworthy. These parents place blame on the teachers when their children do not do well in school. Teachers are blamed for being discriminatory and not teaching their children properly (Wilson, 2004).

**Higher Education**

In 1993, 526,610 Black men were enrolled in our nation’s colleges while 842,002 Black women were enrolled, a difference of 315,392 (Garibaldi, 2007). In 2003, 686,615 Black men were enrolled in college while Black women accounted for 1,266,107 of the college enrollment, a difference of 579,492. According to Garibaldi the cumulative effect of those ten years was so significant that 54% more African American females than males enrolled in college in 2003 than in 1993. However, as indicated by the data, African American males have not experienced that same type of growth, thus widening the achievement gap within their ethnic group. While women have comprised a larger portion of college students than men attaining degrees, overall and within each racial/ethnic subgroup, the sex gap remains more pronounced within the Black population than any other group (Nettles, Schwartz, & Haijiang, 2012). The African American male achievement gap does not only exist outside of the African American community, but its existence is glaring within its race as well. This gap has significantly increased over time and has
resulted in low achievement as well as high discipline incidents for African American males in schools across the country.

In addressing the African American male achievement gap, the action must focus on factors external to schools, such as parental support, housing, crime, peer influences, and public health must be recognized, as they impact the development and academic success of African American males. Therefore, whatever support system that is developed must be holistic, and conducive to the success of African American males; and the issues confronting African American males cannot be treated as just a problem of the African American community. It must be treated as an American problem (Noguera, 2012). This will call for academic achievement to be reinforced at every level of society. All academic institutions, beginning at preschool, and, certainly, elementary grades, are where interventions must begin.

Children and adolescents whose parents are neglectful perform most poorly in all domains. In general, parental responsiveness predicts social competence and psychosocial functioning, whereas parental demandingness is associated with instrumental competence and behavioral control (i.e., academic performance and deviance). These findings indicate that children and adolescents from authoritarian families (high in demandingness, but low in responsiveness) tend to perform moderately well in school and are uninvolved in problem behavior, but they have poorer social skills, lower self-esteem, and higher levels of depression. Children and adolescents from permissive/indulgent homes are more likely to be involved in problem behavior and perform less well in school, but they have higher self-esteem, better social skills, and lower levels of depression (Simek & Grum, 2010).

Parental support is another important factor in encouraging the educational aspirations of high school students. Barton & Coley (2013) acknowledged the strong relationship between
socioeconomic variables and educational aspirations for students. Parental education and aspirations for their children may be two of the most significant predictors of student educational aspirations (Hines & Holcomb-McCoy, 2013). Parents have a strong influence in preparing and promoting college attendance. Parental encouragement is a two-fold process. Parents should have high educational expectations, and they must participate in school functions and discuss the importance of college attendance with their children. The millennial generation must be addressed to understand the influence of parents on current students. Parents of the millennial generation are said to be aggressively protective of their students, playing an active role in their children’s experience (Gardner, 2007). Urban low-income students often do not fit some of the profile of the millennial generation; they do not necessarily have helicopter parents looking out for their best interest and preparing them for college (Ford, 2013).

**Special Education**

Racial discrimination experienced by African American male students in special education continues to permeate, influence, and impede the screening, identification, placement, learning experiences, and life outcomes as a whole. As a result, these students are often misidentified and over-represented in subjectively defined categories of special education, such as emotional behavioral disorders and learning disabilities (Garibaldi, 2007). In a special education study, Cartledge (2009) found that decisions about placement in special education classes more closely reflect social categorizations (e.g., gender, socioeconomic status, race) than student performance data. The referral decisions to assess for a possible emotional and behavioral disorder (EBD) diagnosis relies heavily on the classroom teacher’s knowledge, perceptions, and assumptions. Such a practice is indeed troubling when we consider the fact that
the current teacher referral process that initiates special education classification and placement is fraught with inaccuracy (Harry, 2005).

Disparities in schooling outcomes for African Americans increased significantly following the Brown v Board of Education Supreme Court decision that to educate students separate from their White counterparts was inherently unequal. The practice of misdiagnosing African Americans as having disabilities led to an exponential increase in the size and scope of special education within segregated settings (Losen, 2013). In the years following the Brown decision, African Americans were regularly categorized as having mild mental retardation, emotional disturbance and specific learning disabilities (Nettles, Schwartz, & Haijiang, 2012). A significant number of African American males are not only over-represented in categories of emotional disturbance, intellectual disabilities, and specific learning disabilities; they are disproportionately subjected to more segregated settings than their peers with disabilities in other racial and ethnic groups combined (Roth, Assor, Kanat-Maymon, & Kaplan, 2007).

Proponents of closing the discipline and achievement gaps contend that closing one gap is interdependent on the other. Advocates for an equity-based and culturally responsive approach to teaching have identified student disengagement as a key reason for disciplinary referrals. To change this trend in outcomes, Toldson (2011) recommend providing African American male students with counseling, recreational therapy, and appropriate academic intervention for reading difficulties. These interventions will require teachers to monitor the disciplinary referral process as a whole carefully.

Sustained, rigorous, and focused inquiry-based intervention are critical and essential to helping educators assess and revise their interactions with learners. Others warn against quick fixes, even as they, too, promote other empirical instruments, such as Promoting Alternative
Thinking Strategies. Changing the current trend of outcomes for African American males with disabilities would require developing the capacity of all educators to adequately address the social and academic needs of their students, regardless of perceived differences. In light of this history, students who are taught by culturally responsive and skilled special educators who understand special education’s sociopolitical and socio-historical context can help to ensure that students do not suffer social isolation and lower self-esteem. When teachers listen to African American male students and their insights into what must be done to improve their schooling experience, this has the potential to change their outcomes (Valencia, 2016).

**Discipline and School Environment**

Another issue affecting the success of African American males is the rate of suspensions from school. African American males are more likely to be suspended from school than any other group. Suspensions lead to poor academic performance and disengagement from school. Thus, African American males lag academically behind Caucasian males and African American females (Jackson, Moore, & Leon, 2010).

An example of the obedience model of discipline is what is demonstrated in the movie *Lean on Me*. That biographical film depicts the efforts of Joe Clark, a principal in an East Coast urban high school, made to enforce discipline and create a safe learning environment for students in the school. His methods were focused on strict adherence to rules and harsh consequences when students did not adhere to the program. Students were suspended and ultimately expelled from school due to a wide variety of infractions that may not have seemed to warrant such a severe consequence. While this program was initially seen as successful in creating a safe school environment, like all obedience models, it did not teach students the skills needed to make responsible choices outside of the highly structured environment of that school (Todlson, 2011).
Disproportionality and Exclusion

Students of color are most likely to be disciplined in schools (Gregory, 2007). African American youth, in particular, are two to three times more likely to be suspended or expelled for school infractions when compared with Caucasian youth (Skiba et al., 2014). When schools suspend or expel for misbehavior, they miss the opportunity to educate the students about alternative behaviors that are more socially acceptable and instead create a situation where the student has neither learned the social skills needed nor the material that is covered in the classroom during the period of exclusion (Smith, 2011).

Zero Tolerance

There is evidence showing that preventing or treating delinquency and school failure is more cost-effective than doing nothing or paying the welfare and prison costs incurred by undereducated and alienated youth (Oswald & Coutinho, 2009). The term School-to-Prison Pipeline has emerged to describe when the juvenile justice system becomes involved in disciplinary matters for infractions that were once handled by schools (Losen, 2011). An American Psychological Association task force team conducted research and determined the efficacy of zero tolerance and found that the zero-tolerance movement is not appropriate because it conflicts with what is known to be true about adolescent development. The current policies that govern public education have become focused on ranking and sorting students rather than educating students. One of the original definitions of discipline was, to educate (Discipline, n.d.), yet policies, like zero tolerance, which determine how school administrators should handle student behaviors, focus only on punishment. This way of addressing student behavior in schools has predominantly affected students of color, particularly African American males, in the United States. Statistics demonstrate that students of color are disproportionately disciplined. They also
show that high school dropouts are overwhelmingly African American and male, as are the populations in our state and federal prisons (Laura, 2011). Zero tolerance in schools is any policy that calls for the removal of a student for any offense deemed to be dangerous to that student or anyone in the school. Practices include suspensions, expulsions, alternative educational settings, and dropping students from public schools (Wilson, 2004).

Zero tolerance did not originate in educational settings but with law enforcement and was first used by law enforcement agencies as a means of implementing automatic punishment for infractions of a stated rule, to eliminate undesirable conduct. Since the inception of this concept into educational discipline policy, the term has been used to criminalize students who act out in schools (Hirschfield, 2008). Educational policies and law enforcement policies are in complete contradiction to one another. Educational policies focus on the academic education of children with teaching at the center of importance in decision making. On the other hand, law enforcement policies are created to govern a society that should know how to make rational decisions. However, the use of a zero tolerance policy is widespread among our nation’s schools (Cartledge, 2009).

Zero tolerance discipline policies were adopted as a result of more stringent adult crime policy. Initially, zero tolerance policies focused on alcohol, drugs, and violence to make schools safer. Over time, schools have expanded the use of zero tolerance policies to also include a wide range of misbehavior, including over 48,900 educational school codes (Smith, 2011). This expansion allows for discipline to be based on how the education code is interpreted. The expanded use of zero tolerance policies has led to an increase in student exclusion from school. Instead of a place where teaching and learning occur, school is another place where students of color have to fight just to be treated equally to their Caucasian counterparts (Rights, 2014). More
than 30 years of research has consistently demonstrated the overrepresentation of youth of color, particularly African American males, in exclusion discipline consequences of suspension and expulsions (Simek & Grum, 2010). Researchers continue to add to the findings of exclusionary practices. There is a direct link between the connection of school policy and the path that leads to prison (Smith, 2011). Virtually all public schools in the United States are mandated, by federal law, to use a zero-tolerance policy for certain acts such as possession and use of drugs, weapons, and the use of violence (Moore & Lewis, 2012).

Zero tolerance policies were created to outline what was not acceptable for any reason in our public schools as far as safety is concerned. Available research suggests that policies that rely mainly on suspending and expelling students do not remedy student misbehavior (Roth, Assor, Kanat-Maymon, & Kaplan, 2007). In Race, Gender, and the School to Prison Pipeline, Morris (2012) explained that the findings of other investigations revealed a strong correlation between youth contact with the justice system and failing to complete school. A lot of the focus can be directed to the classroom; the more a teacher can get a student to engage in the lesson, the more the chances for student misbehavior and suspension go down (Losen, 2011). Recent school safety priorities have shifted from keeping schools free of weapons and drugs to punishing behaviors that pose the threat of violence from a law enforcement perspective (Noguera, 2011). Current evidence strongly suggests that the philosophy and practice of zero tolerance school discipline have failed as an educational intervention, yet the approach remains popular among administrators, educators, and political leaders (Taylor, 2014). Skiba (2014) linked the usage of zero tolerance to the perception that school violence is becoming more and more common and that school officials and stakeholders need to get tough on students that commit these crimes against the student population while on campus. The idea of stopping future misbehavior is
central to a philosophy of zero tolerance and the impact of consequence on future behavior is the defining characteristic of effective punishment (Smith, 2011). The key assumption of a zero-tolerance policy is removing students that are disruptive and defiant. This assumption is misrepresented because facts show that it has the opposite effect (Barton & Coley, 2013). There is evidence that zero tolerance has contributed to the increase in school discipline rates. Schools with higher rates of school suspension and expulsion have less satisfactory ratings of school climate. Rather than reducing the likelihood of disruption, school suspension creates higher rates of misbehavior and suspension among those students being suspended. The American Psychological Association, as part of its mission, to advance health, education, and human welfare commissioned the Zero Tolerance Task Force to examine the policies within the schools and review all data and evidence regarding exclusionary discipline on students of color and with disabilities (Harry, 2005).

The task force also looked at child development and the relationships between education and the juvenile justice system, students, families, and communities. This task force made recommendations for reforming zero-tolerance policies and implementing alternatives in practice, policy, and change. School exclusion policies enact harsh punishments for any violation of school rules, without exceptions and any consideration for mitigating circumstances. When these policies are enforced, there is little room to determine what may have led to the infraction. The idea that students must be expected to be obedient and compliant with all school rules is harsh because there are no explanations or exceptions allowed (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2014).

Since 1975, researchers have been trying to figure out why this trend continues to be the status quo, but an even more pertinent question is why has anything not been done to change this
phenomenon? Much research has been performed to determine the relationship between high dropout rates and socioeconomic statuses in urban areas. Findings show that less than two-thirds of students graduate from communities with high levels of racial and socioeconomic segregation. (Oswald & Coutinho, 2009). Data indicates that disproportional discipline is being given to students of color, especially African Americans (Tajalli & Garba, 2014). In the study conducted by Tajalli and Garba, they found that because more discipline was given to students of color that alternative methods needed to be explored to reduce the disproportional level of referrals given to these students. Suspension and expulsions occur at a higher rate than among other groups, ultimately causing higher dropout rates within those subgroups. This consistent pattern has a severe negative impact on their chances of graduating from high school.

**Ethics and Discipline**

Some researchers would contend that ethics are lacking in education. Cartledge (2009) described ethics as a caring attitude towards others and stated that perhaps the greatest ethical challenge confronting the teaching profession is the fair application of disciplinary measures for diverse student populations. Cartledge et al. (2001) conducted research that questioned the ethical side of student discipline. In the end, researchers concluded that teachers are not prepared for the ethical issues that arise in the classrooms. Perhaps the greatest ethical challenge confronting the teaching profession is the fair application of disciplinary measures. The heightened anxiety over school safety and the advent of zero tolerance regulations have created an environment in which there is a higher possibility to practice unethical and unfair practices for students that come from certain populations (Cartledge, 2009).

In just about any urban school district, one can find an alarming number of students who feel disconnected from society, frustrated by the educational system, and more than willing to
give up and drop out (Gregory, 2007). For students of color, this situation is all too common within the urban school districts. A person might wonder how the hope for a better life and the hope of becoming a contributing democratic citizen got to such a low level. The answer is complex and filled with a confusing mixture of history, policy, and practices (Blanchett, 2009). For the past three decades, much of the discussion about school reform has focused on racial inequality and how students of color, particularly African American males, have failed to achieve (Oswald & Coutinho, 2009). For years, students of color, especially African American students, have had to fight against a system designed to sort and rank students to take a particular place in society culturally. Students of color are routinely labeled at risk of failing, unsalvageable, or heading towards the School-to-Prison Pipeline path (Smith, 2011). Researchers concluded that education and students of color in urban school districts present a problem. This problem can be labeled as a cultural mismatch or lack of cultural synchronization (Losen, 2011). Cultural mismatch leads to discrepancies in education and socio-economic outcomes for certain groups in society.

Before schools were desegregated, African American youth were educated in schools taught by African American teachers. These teachers understood the backgrounds and culture of their students and prepared them to succeed despite racism and oppression. Blanchett (2009) explained that the struggle faced by students of color, particularly African American males, was the result of the structural change of education that was the result of school desegregation; African American students joined schools with predominantly Caucasian teachers who did not understand them. In the years following the decision of Brown vs. Board of Education, students of color, particularly African Americans, have continued to struggle both in the areas of academic achievement and with disproportionally harsh school discipline. The fight for
liberation seemed to lessen with the elimination of segregated all-black schools and the change of attitudes of students regarding the value of education. The cultural mismatch between teachers and students alienates students of color from schools and reduces their perception of the value of education.

The School-to-Prison Pipeline is a metaphor that attempts to capture the path in which students of color, particularly African American males, take on their way to entering the criminal justice system (Noguera, 2012). The focus of schools has changed; more focus is on controlling student behavior rather than educating them. The fear that educators have of certain students feeds the theory that schools criminalize students. The national trend of criminalizing rather than educating children in school is referred to more specifically as the School-to-Prison Pipeline. Noguera (2012) claimed that a school’s function is to sort, socialize, and maintain social control. In sorting students, schools place students on trajectories that influence their adult life, economic standing, and occupation they will assume. The socializing aspect serves to teach children values and norms that are critical to civil society and social order.

Regarding social control, Noguera claimed that schools act as a surrogate parent, exercising considerable authority over students and many of their basic civil rights. Within this level of sorting certain students can navigate the system and adjust to the rules and procedures that govern the system. In every system, there is a group that controls how the system is going to operate. This group usually creates policies for its members and procedures its members favor. Institutional racism occurs when these institutional policies and procedures operate to facilitate access to members of the dominant subculture while effectively and unjustifiably denying access to members of other ethnic or cultural groups.
Practices like this cause the School-to-Prison Pipeline policies the students of color cannot overcome due to many researched reasons. A shift in attention is needed to focus on school factors (e.g., school-wide discipline policies and practice) (Taylor, 2014). These are the policies that feed students to the juvenile justice system (Skiba, Arredondo, & Rausch, 2014). The focus has been on students of color in schools. Taylor (2014) claimed that African American and Latino students were perceived as a racial threat in predominantly large African American and Latino schools.

**Policies and Practices**

Educational discipline policy can be described as a pathway to the criminal justice system that punishes a student for the problems they created, especially when students are not held accountable for understanding the repercussions of what they did. Restorative justice is a process whereby all parties with a stake in a particular offense collectively come together to resolve how to deal with the aftermath of the offense and its implications for the future (Lewin, 2012). Scholars find the policies schools have adopted since the 1990s, including campus police, metal detectors, drug sweeps, and surveillance cameras, as a signal shift from discretionary student disciplinary framework to a crime control paradigm. This way of doing things is an exact copy of our criminal justice system that works in a top-down fashion. Why would anyone think that this model of doing things would work for education? Hardly ever, when issuing consequences for an offense committed at a school, does the accused have an opportunity to take a leading role or have a voice in resolving the problem. Discipline is about teaching, and zero tolerance does not allow for any significant teaching moments when consequences and punishments are applied.

The Effectiveness of Restorative Justice Practices: is an article that examined restorative justice practices and made a case for why techniques like these were more effective than the
conventional way of doing things (Howard, 2005). The researchers used criminal behavior as the basis of their analysis. For example, one of the studies looked at programs that used restorative justice and its role in reducing offender recidivism. The results revealed that the programs yielded reductions in re-offending. Another study showed that the victim’s satisfaction rate was higher when a restorative justice program was utilized (Holland, 2014). Proponents of restorative justice claim that the process is beneficial to victims and offenders by emphasizing recovery of the victim through redress, vindication, and healing and by encouraging recompense by the offender through reparation, fair treatment, and habilitation (Van Ness & Strong, 2013). Some steps need to be applied when implementing restorative justice techniques. The first is a non-adversarial and dialogue-based decision-making process that allows the affected victims to discuss the harm done to them. The second part is an agreement that all stakeholders find necessary to repair the damage done to the persons or community (Losen, 2013).

**Culture**

Clash of culture(s) plays a large role in the climate of a classroom. Whiting (2009) said it best by implying that if teachers are unaware or misunderstand and react to students’ cultural identity, it may lead to stereotype belief and ultimately school failure. White teachers may feel intimidated or threatened by an African American male student’s way of moving their body or loud vocalization due to the stereotype that African American males are violent and hostile (Smith, 2011). In a study led by Banks (2010), Black male participants said that they felt their teachers were prejudiced against them. Many students reported feeling like their teachers disliked them and that they did not believe they could succeed. Students must believe that they are part of a learning environment where their teacher believes they can succeed so that they can feel empowered to believe it themselves. Interestingly, research indicates that Black males
typically have the same educational goals as white males, yet the rate of achievement of these goals is much lower (Blanchett, 2009).

**Management and Discipline**

African American males are suspended at a higher rate than other groups of students. In 2007, the Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey revealed that 50% of Black students had been suspended at some point in their educational career while, in contrast, only 21% of whites had been suspended during their educational career. Interestingly, the particular study conducted by Horyna (2012) concluded that a number of suspension days for Black male students did not directly correlate with matriculation rates. In other words, high suspension rates were not always predictive of high school dropout. The reasoning behind these findings may be that students who are have historically been suspended more often throughout their years of schooling may be participants of intervention efforts that aim to keep students in school rather than suspend them. Classroom behavior management techniques and disciplinary responses seem to have a profound effect on Black male students. Positive teacher and student relationships are predictive of school engagement for African American male students; which, in return, are predictive of high school graduation rates. Classroom management styles that were found to be ineffective for African American male students and perpetuated classroom misbehavior included: teachers yelling, using sarcasm and holding a one-for-all perspective (Horyna & Bonds, 2012).

Use of these tactics put students in a defensive state. An effective form of discipline was using silent lunchtime as a consequence. The use of music and songs in the learning environment was determined to be a factor that deterred inappropriate behaviors. The students have expressed that the use of verbal warnings from teachers that were explicitly acting as a deterrent to inappropriate behavior (Horyna & Bonds, 2012).
Culturally responsive education, at its best, is liberating for both learners and educators (Gay, Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice, 2010). The term liberatory is used to mean the provisions (accommodations and modifications) made to empower students to resist oppression by engaging students in activities that help them to creatively utilize a variety of mechanisms to make sense of information and situations while providing them with practical strategies that prepare them to become more adept at engaging in one-to-one communication with others in a process of deliberative justice (Gherardi, 2009). Culture is used in this context to capture both the tangible aspects and the more important intangible filters that help people make sense of their world (Gay, 2010). In this sense, cultural differences account for the greatest variability among people. Very rarely is it taken directly into account beyond consideration of a student’s race and language in schools. Teachers who are cultural translators attend to their students and fully utilize relevant cultural referents as a starting point for learning. Culturally responsive education leads to higher order tasks, such as inquiry, critique and analysis and further raises students’ intellectual curiosity and subsequent academic potential (Gay, 2010). Gay asserts the power of culturally responsive education is demonstrated by educators’ capacity to not only care about but more importantly, to care for their students’ psychological, social, emotional and intellectual success. The latter proposes, manifests in teacher attitudes, expectations, and behaviors about students’ human value, intellectual capability, and performance responsibilities. A teacher treats students with integrity, holds them in high esteem, expects much from them, engages them in multilayered learning experiences, and creates opportunities for them to access and express themselves in ways that help them accomplish their goals. Teachers who care for their students not only have a thorough understanding of the sociocultural contexts within which they engage with students, they likewise possess the political
savvy needed to help students make connections between the social, personal, and moral behaviors with values from which they derive personal satisfaction needed to sustain public and ethical accountability.

Culturally responsive teaching recognizes that norms and expectations differ between cultures (Moore & Lewis, 2012). America’s education system is based on White American norms which do not meet the needs of students who have different behavior and cultural expectations. A sense of security within the student-teacher relationship is developed when Black culture is celebrated rather than dismissed or unacknowledged. Students may become offended when a teacher gives instructions or shares ideas that may go against their cultural norms and expectations. In a qualitative study conducted by Mundy (2014), African American male students voiced that they were able to recall supportive teachers as well as teachers who were not supportive. The students remarked that they were more engaged in school when a teacher used humor during instruction and facilitated learning in small groups. Mundy supported these remarks and concluded that African American males are most successful when working in groups and suggested that teachers be culturally responsive in their manner of teaching.

However, even if African Americans and Hispanics graduate from high school, they graduate with lower test scores and academic ability than White students. Students from urban low-income high schools are also at a higher risk for academic failure. Conversely, students attending affluent high schools are not at high risk for failure. This achievement gap continues to widen regarding postsecondary educational aspirations (Hines & Holcomb-McCoy, 2013).

School Curriculum

This responsibility of educating African American males does not merely rest with elementary and secondary schools. Colleges and universities must also do their part. Colleges
and universities must turn back the hands of time in attempts to revive successful pre-college programs in order to increase the number of African American students enrolled in the nation’s colleges. With the assistance of federally-funded weekend and summer pre-college programs during the 1960s and 1970s, the enrollment of African American students in colleges and universities increased significantly (Garibaldi, 2007). Funded through the U.S. Department of Education, programs such as Talent Search, Upward Bound, and other similar programs have been instrumental in exposing high school students to college experiences who may not otherwise have had that opportunity, especially those from low-income families (Garibaldi, 2007). The impact of these programs was especially experienced in 1976, the peak year for African American students attending college. The effect of the programs above continued to be experienced during the first decade of the twenty-first century, despite the continued underrepresentation of degree recipients among African Americans (Nettles et al., 2012). While Upward Bound and Talent Search have had to “plead their case for survival” in recent years to both Congress and the Executive Branch of the federal government, as they have faced potential elimination (Garibaldi, 2007) because of the aforementioned reasons that serve as some of the remedies for the ailment of this achievement gap, these programs must remain intact.

**Diversity**

According to the National Education Association (NCES, 2014), more than 90% of classroom teachers throughout the country are White, and more and more they are teaching children from cultural, racial, and class backgrounds different from their own, particularly in high-poverty urban areas where Black and Latino students make up 69% of the total enrollment. Furthermore, because of the underrepresentation of students of color in teacher education programs and the population growth in racially and ethnically diverse communities, it is safe to
assume that the racial, ethnic and socioeconomic divide between teachers and their students will continue to grow in the near future (Lewin T., 2012). These differences or mismatches have the potential to hinder efforts to create safe and responsive learning communities for all students (Gherardi, 2009). Some teachers may feel that they are not prepared for these students and, for the differences that come with cultural diversity.

Further, research has also demonstrated academic benefits when there is racial congruence between teachers and students. In a study conducted by Ford (2013), the results indicated that assignment to a teacher of the same race or ethnicity had a positive impact on reading achievement for Black students in addition to a significant impact on math achievement for Black students. Researchers also examined the effects of racial and ethnic matching by students’ prior performance level, and they found that lower-performing African American students appeared to benefit more from being assigned to a race-congruent teacher. Teacher-student racial congruence has also been found to influence discipline. Ford (2013) found that there are persistent racial/ethnic differences in the ratings of student behaviors and, teachers’ ratings tended to be consistent with stereotypes commonly associated with specific racial and ethnic groups when they were rating students’ externalizing behaviors. Results of their study indicated that African American students are more likely to be rated as exhibiting externalizing or problematic behaviors in school. However, if teachers were of the same racial or ethnic group as the student, the ratings were less consistent with expectations based on stereotypes.

Further, Ford presented evidence that teachers’ assessments of African-American students’ disruptive behavior are highly sensitive to the race of the teacher. African-American students who are exposed to more African-American teachers are less likely to receive an in- or out-of-school suspension. Moreover, student racial congruence is positively associated with job
satisfaction for both White and African American teachers. When the racial composition of students is equal to or exceeds 70% of the entire student population, and the teacher is of the same race as a majority of the students at the school, this racial congruency was positively associated with academic success.

There is research on effective teachers of Black student’s highlights that African American students’ potential will not be realized in classrooms where teachers view them from a deficit perspective (Milner, 2012). Most often associated with White teachers, this view of African American students does not take into account their potential. Instead, it promotes the belief that teachers need to compensate for what is assumed to be missing from the students’ backgrounds (Gay, 2010). Several scholars have reported that deficit thinking by White teachers is one of the most powerful forces working against African American students (Milner, 2012). Cartledge (2009) wrote extensively about teaching African American students, stating that inferior educational outcomes are tolerated for African American children day in and day out, in inner-city, suburban, and private school settings.

Further, some White teachers consistently believe that African American students should not be held to the same academic standards either because of their own beliefs or because of pressure from school officials (Gardner, 2007). Deficit thinking inhibits teachers from valuing the knowledge that African American students bring to the classroom. The teacher-student relationship has also been shown to be affected by attitudes and communications grounded in racial and ethnic differences. Decades of research has highlighted the importance of the teacher’s and student’s attitudes toward one another, yet much less is known about how the teacher-student relationship is established, particularly between teachers and African American male students (Hines & Holcomb-McCoy, 2013).
In the absence of consistent parenting, many ethnic minority students feel a need to have a personal connection with teachers (Gay, 2010). Based on empirical research examining the effect of teacher-student relationships in adolescence, high-quality teacher-student relationships may serve as a buffer between negative parenting and adolescents' psychological and behavioral adjustment (Harry, 2005). Similarly, research suggests that positive relationships with teachers may be particularly beneficial to those students who do not have secure relationships with their parents (Gay, 2010). Connectedness to adults in school was also found to moderate the association between low-income family relations and adolescent conduct problems (Harry, 2005). When adolescents are not strongly connected to the family, other contexts, such as school, may be able to provide the necessary relational experiences. By modeling caring and providing support, teachers can demonstrate that positive relationships with adults are possible. In this way, a teacher-student relationship may become a “corrective experience for youth who have experienced unsatisfactory relationships with parents or other caregivers (Lewin, 2012).

Therefore, it is no surprise that schools that are successful at educating African American male students have an administrative and teaching staff that includes a strong male presence that often provides alternate parental figures. Noguera (2012), in his research on successful urban schools, found that students at Eagle Academy and Urban Prep, both of which are urban schools with high graduation rates, reported that male staff members were regarded as father figures. The role of the man of the house is significant. Working class African American families have traditionally placed a high value on male authority. Generally, the man is seen as the head of the household. His role includes protecting the family from threats, at times putting his body in the line of fire on the street. He encourages his sons to do the same (Moore & Lewis, 2012).
Research has documented that the prevalence of low expectations for their performance may act as a self-fulfilling prophecy for African American male students (Gherardi, 2009). This highlights the importance of stereotype threat. Stereotype threat occurs when a student perceives that he could be viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype and lowers his academic engagement and performance. As a result found that people who belong to stigmatized groups, such as African American male students, may question whether their group is valued in mainstream settings, especially settings in which their group has been historically discriminated against or stereotyped (Gherardi, 2009).

African American males must also be exposed to college experiences early. In addition to being exposed to college experiences, while still in their formative years, African American male students (and all students) must be exposed to the right role models. Current college students can effectively serve in this capacity as mentors and role models to Black male adolescents. Those students currently in college can demonstrate to pre-college students the excitement of college life while sharing with them the benefits of pursuing a bachelor degree, career exploration, and life after college (Garibaldi, 2007).

Historical perspectives on educational aspirations will aid in understanding issues currently impacting African American males. It is important to look at the history of educational aspirations. In American education, student demographics have changed over the years. Originally, students who attended college were White, elitist, male, and single (Losen, 2013). The first three centuries of American higher education could, in fact, be described as predominantly private and Protestant, but the rise of public institutions from the mid-19th century on documented an increase in enrollment of students from all backgrounds, especially since World War II (Roth, Assor, Kanat-Maymon, & Kaplan, 2007). After the Civil War (1861-
1865), the Jim Crow laws, which mandated “separate but equal” status for African Americans, were put into effect in the South. These laws legalized segregation in all public entities, including schools and universities. From 1861-1870, the American Missionary Association founded seven Black colleges and 13 Normal Schools. These were the first Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU). Although this was seen as progress, HBCUs were originally neglected, and ill-equipped, and continue to be today (Miller, 2009).

**Summary**

There are two problems at the center of the academic achievement for students of color. These problems are discipline policies with zero tolerance language and cultural mismatches between students and teachers that lead to misunderstandings and ultimately disciplinary problems in schools. Student behavior success is closely linked with the ability to decode implicit teacher expectations and cues (Matthews, 2010). It is documented that Caucasian teachers often interpret culturally based behavior, such as talking loud and overlapping speech, as rude or offensive conduct. Problems like these lead to students being excluded from school. Zero tolerance policies that allow for exclusion because of actions like this should be reviewed and if possible change. This long-continued trend is referred to as the push-out factor and has started another phenomenon called the School-to-Prison Pipeline. The lack of transparency and disconnect between schools, teachers, parents, and students of color is due to policies, like zero tolerance. Research shows that the zero-tolerance approach conflicts with the developmental needs of adolescents (Smith, 2011). This conflict has caused great numbers of African American students to fail academically. This rift between schools and students of color contributes to the academic failures, disproportionate rates of suspension and expulsion, and the overrepresentation
of African American students, in particular, in special education programs and their underrepresentation in gifted programs (Day-Vines & Terriquez, 2012). There are remedies to problems that face our nation’s schools. The first suggested remedy would be to eliminate policies that seek to exclude students from the school. This practice is counterproductive to the whole purpose of education and does nothing but marginalize students that are already faced with the task of competing in an arena that was never designed with them in mind. Policies like restorative justice would be a good ideal because this practice replicates the community process of dealing with misunderstandings while at the same time holding people accountable for their actions. Restorative justice brings students together to resolve conflicts instead of using punitive measures and leaving the issues unresolved. (Gadzella, Masten, & Huang, 2009)

African American males must feel welcomed and valued within the school and classroom community in order to remain engaged. When African American male students begin to disengage, it can lead them to miss school or skip class more often, act out behaviorally or even lead them to drop out altogether. The suggestion that teacher expectations are higher for non-Black students than they are for Black students was a commonality in the research. Low expectations can lead to student disengagement that goes on to perpetuate the stereotype that Black males are unable or unwilling to learn (Welch, 2013). Clash of culture(s) plays a large role in the climate of a classroom. If teachers are unaware or misunderstand and react to students’ cultural identity, it may lead to stereotype belief and ultimately school failure. White teachers may feel intimidated or threatened by an African American male student’s way of moving their body or loud vocalization due to the stereotype that Black males are violent and hostile. African American male often feels their teachers were prejudiced against them. Many of them reported
feeling like their teachers disliked them and that they did not believe they could succeed (Roth, Assor, Kanat-Maymon, & Kaplan, 2007).

Students must believe that they are part of a learning environment where their teacher believes they can succeed so that they can feel empowered to believe it themselves. Interestingly, research shows that African American males typically have the same educational goals as white males, yet the rate of achievement of these goals is much lower (Nettles, Schwartz, & Haijiang, 2012).

The need to reduce the discipline gap and disproportionality of African American students both with and without disabilities is critical for the continued progress of our society. The fact that 20 years of research findings, collectively, contradict the assumption that zero tolerance policies keep schools safe, document correlations between schools that frequently utilize exclusionary practices by showing that they have higher rates of referrals and spend more time dealing with discipline problems (Valencia, 2016). However, educators and the court systems are slowly experiencing a paradigm shift that is integrated, culturally sensitive, and outcome oriented. The persistent gaps in both achievement and discipline result in negative academic, behavioral and post-school outcomes for CLD students, especially African American males with disabilities. African American males, including those with disabilities, have the poorest outcomes of all students in our schools. It is clear that we remain a nation at-risk due to the persistent disproportionate discipline and achievement outcomes experienced by students from diverse cultures. Therefore, the emphasis should be on proactive and positive interventions that consistently teach, reinforce, evaluate, and monitor the performance of expected behaviors. By using evidence-based practices, teachers can provide a higher delivery of quality instruction that has proven effective in producing desired outcomes. Evidenced-based interventions are
grounded in rigorously tested conceptual and theoretical models. Educators are increasingly being pressured to deliver high-quality instruction in an ever increasingly reduced amount of planning time along with limited materials and supports, while somehow producing student test scores that meet or exceed proficiency (Vannerman, 2009). Effective instruction alone will not resolve all the issues and challenges experienced by urban districts; however, as suggested by a growing number of researchers, sound practices combined with cultural awareness and culturally responsive teaching will aid immensely in the opportunity to close the gap in both discipline and achievement among students from diverse backgrounds, with and without disabilities.

A great deal of research has been done concerning the achievement gap between Black and Caucasian students, raising many questions about the origin of this gap. A review of the literature reveals several theories for the existence of the gap. It is important to note that teacher perception and its connection to classroom practices, student achievement, and how teachers allow negative stereotypes to guide their expectations of their students as well as classroom practices has a direct impact on the achievement of African American male students.
CHAPTER THREE

Methods and Procedures

The purpose of this study was to analyze the disciplinary policies and procedures influenced the discipline rates of African American males and the achievement gap in schools. A specific focus was placed on the disproportionality of discipline and achievement. A focus was placed on examining how school administrators utilize disciplinary procedures of inappropriate behaviors and how achievement is impacted as a result of discipline incidents. The goal was to examine how administrators and school districts determine how behavior should be addressed and the method of addressing the behavior of African American males, and looking at the impact on achievement. The study examined how administrators and school districts implement discipline incidents with fidelity and consistency. Also, the study sought to determine how African American males are affected by school discipline consequences. In addition to the examination of official district records, current and historical data, interviews and observations were used to study these issues and identify trends.

Population and Sample

The population for this study was focused on African American males in middle grades (6-8). A sample of the population of other ethnic groups as they have significance to the study may be used. The study intended to have at least 10 African American male students participating. Within the study of the participants, math academic achievement scores and discipline incidents were analyzed.
Description of Instruments

The instruments used for this study will be as follows:

- **Interviews**- using open, axial, and selective coding; audio recording and journaling (notetaking) - This process provided insight and informational trends on the topic and gave the perceptions of the interviewee.

- **Observations**- using open, axial, and selective coding; audio recording and journaling (notetaking) - This process provided insight and information on the topic, based on real applications and experiences.

- **School and District current and historical data** was reviewed, analyzed, and compared to qualitative data collected.

In addition to the above instruments, the study utilized qualitative theories of analysis of research to gather data to answer the research questions.

Research Procedure and Time Period of the Study

The study utilized the instruments of interviews, observations, and school and district current and historical data. Each of the instruments is listed below along with how to form the research questions, and how the data will be collected. These steps were also the procedure for research.

- **Interviews**- This instrument gathered knowledge, experience, insight, and data to the study. Data was collected from recorded interviews and also transcribed.

- **Observations**- This instrument provided contextual information to make sense of the data, and develop insights into the context of the study. The data was collected using a Google form with specific focus coding in each observation.

- **School and district current and historical data**- This instrument gathered information to answer research questions and represented values and knowledge to assist with
comprehension and disaggregation of the data. The data was collected from school and
district databases on achievement and discipline.

The period of the study was five weeks. This timeframe provided the researcher time to examine
data collected from the instruments and use the research to validate the significance of the study.

Week 1

This week was used to identify the participants and analyze data that shows whether the
participant fell within the parameters of the study. After the participants were identified the
researcher looked intensively at math data on each participant and discipline reports were
obtained for each participant. The data that was analyzed included historical math data for the
participant’s middle schools year’s grades 6-8, and discipline reports. The participants were in
grades six through eight so that the researcher had a span of at least two to three years of data to
analyze. This data included standardized math scores and discipline data that were recorded for
the participant. A profile was made for each participant by the researcher to keep track of the
data and changes as they occurred during the study. The researcher looked specifically at math
achievement and discipline incidents for each participant.

Weeks 2-4

This period was for interviews, classroom observations, follow up conferences at the end
of each week, and data collection. Each participant was observed at least three times in their
math class. The interviews and observations happened one time in week two, one time in week
three, and one time in week four. The initial interview took place during week two for each
participant. After each observation, a follow-up conference was with the participant to obtain
retention of the information that was presented to the student and if culturally responsive
strategies were effective. If the participant had any discipline incidents that impede learning
these were also be recorded and added to the participant profile. During the observations and interviews, the researcher recorded detailed notes on participant responses to questions and logged the activities of each observation. Each observation was a minimum of 20 minutes in length. The researcher also looked at participant work in the math class and assignments that have received a grade to determine if mastery has been achieved. Participant work was used to determine a baseline of achievement before the study and used as a comparison tool at the end of the study. The researcher provided the teacher with feedback on the observation of classroom instruction as it related to the participants in the study. It is expected for the teacher to use culturally responsive teaching strategies. The teachers were trained in culturally responsive strategies for teaching math. Each week during this time the researcher pulled reports of discipline data for the participants in the study. These reports were used for data comparisons and provided insight into the effects of discipline incidents for the participant as it related to their math achievement. There was an initial report that was used as a baseline to compare the data for each week of the study. Each participant was chosen specifically so that the data collected would be relevant and consistent with the significance of the study.

Weeks 5-6

During this time any information that was missed by student absence, teacher substitution, or further research was completed. Interviews were also conducted with the participants to obtain information on perceptions to the instruction received and discipline incidences that may have impeded the learning process. This provided time of reflection over the weeks of the study allowed the participant to indicate if achievement growth has been made in math. All information collected was categorized and coded for use in the formal paper.

**Methodology**
The interviews consisted of clear, simple questions with no jargon. Questions used for the interviews provided purpose to the participant and allowed the participant to ask questions. Each question was open-ended and allowed for an explanation from the researcher and the participant. The participant was able to ask clarifying questions to the researcher and comprehension checks were used throughout the study. Interviews were balanced with the participant responses and the responses of the researcher. Cultural sensitivity was especially important due to the nature of the study. Thus the participant was ensured that the information was treated confidentially and no identifying information was given as a result of participation in the study. The researcher refrained from using questions that can be answered with one word. Follow up questions for the post-study interview were probing in nature and specific so that the researcher obtained the information needed to complete the study and gain significance. These questions were based on the observations, interviews, and follow up conferences. Also, these questions were in direct relation to the research questions for this study.

Observations were used for the researcher to view the events, actions, and perspectives of the participants. The researcher served as an engaged advocate and interpreter of the information obtained from the observation. Ethnography was used as a method to develop and make sense of the culture. Observational objectivity was not the original goal of the researcher, as it was to produce knowledge and obtain significant information. All observations were conducted in a school setting that was natural for the participant and engaging. The setting will be the math classroom for each participant. The information obtained during observations was correlational for the research and will be ongoing throughout the study.

Qualitative data analysis for this study utilized a collection of historical data for each participant. The information collected was organized and categorized to help obtain insight into
the participants and determine the questions that will be effective for the study. The data was descriptive and captured relevant information. A deductive approach was used to develop the structure and framework for the research. All data collected were converted to a contextual format. The data collected was used in the findings of the research. The plan was for the data to be presented in a way that describes the process, methods, pros, cons, limitations, and delimitations of the study.

The study utilized sampling of African American males in middle school grades 6-8 in Davidson County Public Schools. This group of students tends to have high discipline incidents and low math achievement nationwide. The purpose of the study was to examine the data and try to find some similarities and differences to find an effective solution to the problem. Research and data analysis were used to test the hypotheses and provide solutions to the research questions. The researcher was specifically looking at trends in the data and significant variances in achievement and discipline.

**Peer Debrief**

The peer debriefer had access to the study to review and give feedback. This person was the Literacy Coach in the researcher's school facility. She helped with descriptions, kept the study fact-based disregarding bias views, reviewed documentation ongoing throughout the study, give feedback on interviews and observations, pointed out strengths and weakness in the research, gave information from her area of expertise, and challenged the researcher to go deeper and consider all information presented.

**Member Checks**

Throughout the process, member checks occurred to ensure fidelity and consistency. The checks were done by two of my numeracy coach peers. These checks ensured validity and valid
information from the researcher, provided feedback on research and ensured the study remained on track. Member checks helped the researcher find and correct any errors in the data collection. Member checks also helped to identify mutual understandings of the data and the process to ensure the study is valid and significant.

CHAPTER FOUR

Findings

Chapter Four presents findings, analyses, trends, and themes of data collected from observing and interviewing African American males in middle school. The material presented in this chapter came from historical data, current data, interview responses, and classroom
observations. This chapter also contains the results of the study grounded in qualitative methodology to address the research questions.

RQ1:
What specific challenges do African American males encounter in middle school that undermines their academic success?

RQ2:
Is there a relationship between discipline incidents and achievement of African American males in middle school?

RQ3:
What are the perceived differences between achievement and discipline with African American males in middle school?

RQ4:
What effects do teachers perceive about cultural sensitivity and diversity, that would help reduce discipline incidents of African American males and increase math achievement?

This chapter also includes the analysis of the methodology and how it directly related to the research questions. There were three levels of analysis: open, axial, and selective coding. Additionally, this chapter contains demographics, tables, and sample data to complement the research. At each level of analysis, a comparison was used to drill down the data, so that themes and trends could emerge from the data.

Sample Selection

The researcher and A1 identified approximately ten boys at the school who were in either the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades that could participate in the study. The researcher asked the
ten boys if they were interested in joining and gave them informed consent forms. Five of them returned the informed consent forms and expressed interest in the study. The researcher made a home contact to verify parental permission to participate in the study. The home contact involved making a telephone call to the mother/father or legal guardian. They were given an email address to contact the researcher if they had any questions regarding the study. The home contacts continued until five parents agreed to allow their eligible boys to participate in the study. The questions focused on the school-based materials that the boys had been reading during the summer. The interview questions prompted the boys to reflect on their past and current math experiences. They discussed their thoughts with the researcher. The researcher talked to the five boys two additional times. These informal talks were not audiotaped, but their comments and remarks were noted. The information obtained from interviews and observations is included in this chapter.

**Description of the Sample**

The notes from the interviews and observations were transcribed and coded, with each participant assigned a code for identification to help protect anonymity. The boys were named S1, S2, S3, S4, and S5. The teachers that participated were coded as MT1, MT2, and MT3. There was one administrator in the study, and they were coded as A1.

**Table 4.1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S1</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S3</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S4</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S5</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MT1</td>
<td>Math Teacher</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>W</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.2

Demographic Profile of the School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2018-2019 SY</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>860</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Enrollment</td>
<td>Black Students</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of White Students</td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student with Disabilities</td>
<td>26 %</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economically Disadvantaged</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Black Teachers</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of White Teachers</td>
<td>85</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certified Staff</td>
<td>72</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Analysis for Research Questions

The data analysis for this qualitative study entailed combining data from various sources of information including interviews, observations, and field notes, into a very graphic format that presented a meaningful and accurate description of the data collection process. The data analysis included coding and categorizing each participant’s interviews. The researcher analyzed the transcriptions to begin the coding procedure. After coding each interview and observation, the researcher started to group the students’ responses to determine patterns and trends among the transcribed data. The findings were grouped to address each of the research questions for the study.

The researcher used formal interviews, informal interviews, observations, and school data to triangulate the data collected. Denzin and Lincoln (2018) explained triangulation as — A way to approach social change, mitigate bias, and enhance reaching data saturation with multiple sources of data. Using triangulation in a qualitative study gives depth to the data collected.
(Fusch, Fusch, & Ness, 2018). Establishing trustworthiness was done by using member checking and peer debriefing. The researcher dialogued with the peer debriefer weekly to eliminate any biases inherent in the interpretation of the data. Through the establishment of trustworthiness, trust was established, and fidelity assurances were given that the data was reliable. The researchers’ goal was to identify patterns and trends that had significance in determining similarities in the students.

S1

African American Male

7th-grade student

Student with Disability (SWD)

Classified as Economically Disadvantaged (ED)

Enrolled in 13 schools since Kindergarten

The average attendance rate of 80%

Below Proficient in Math Q1(Quintile 1)

Year to date offenses (discipline referrals) 25

S&I (Support and Interventions) to date 134

Has received 15 OSS (out of school suspension days)

S1 is articulate and has a passion for sports and all things that make money. He has been in numerous schools since kindergarten. His family consists of grandparents and aunts. His father is incarcerated. He has seven siblings and is the oldest of all the children.

S1 has been labeled with a learning disability that causes low achievement without proper interventions. As an economically disadvantaged student, and below grade level proficiency in math, discipline incidents are imminent. The 25 referrals that the student has
received thus far have been the direct result of not being able to keep up academically with peers in class. The situation causes the student to act out, become defiant to adults, and non-compliant to school rules and procedures.

S2
African American Male
8th-grade student
SWD
Classified as ED
Enrolled in 7 schools since Kindergarten
The average attendance rate of 90%
Below Proficient in Math Q1(Quintile 1)
Year to date offenses (discipline referrals) 12
S&I (Support and Interventions) to date 96
Has received 2 OSS (out of school suspension days)
S2 lives with both parents. His father is a skilled labor worker that shows him how math is used in daily work. He was born prematurely has had some learning delays that cause his achievement to be in the low quartile. S2’s attendance rate is positive for him, but his low achievement and desire to act out in class causes discipline incidents that are often due to non-compliance, repeated violations, and disruption of school.

S3
African American Male
7th-grade student
SWD
S3 lives with his mom and aunt. He has an uncle that is an active part of his life, but it is not consistent. His disability is learning delayed and has significant achievement gaps.

Although his attendance rate is high, he is often put out of class as a result of non-compliance and repeated violations of school rules.

S4

African American Male

8th-grade student

SWD

Classified as ED

Enrolled in 7 schools since Kindergarten

The average attendance rate of 87%

Below Proficient in Math Q1(Quintile 1)

Year to date offenses (discipline referrals) 8

S&I (Support and Interventions) to date 104

Has received 2 OSS (out of school suspension days)
S4 lives with his grandmother and is also learning delayed. He has been enrolled in 7 schools since kindergarten as the result of the family having to move around the city for affordable housing. His low achievement is probably the result of inconsistencies and non-follow through on support and interventions offered by the school.

S5

African American Male

6th-grade student

SWD

Not Classified as ED

Enrolled in 6 schools since Kindergarten

The average attendance rate of 93%

Below Proficient in Math Q1(Quintile 1)

Year to date offenses (discipline referrals) 7

S&I (Support and Interventions) to date 56

Has received 1 OSS (out of school suspension days)

S5 has emotional and anger issues that are the root cause of his discipline incidents. His enrollment in 6 schools since kindergarten and learning disability have caused his achievement to fall below grade level. He does have a higher attendance rate but often is put out of class as a result of his inappropriate interactions with adults which have given him the 56 support and interventions thus far this school year.

Student Data Information

The student data information addresses RQ2. The data for each student participant shows the relationship between discipline incidents and achievement.
RQ2 – Is there a relationship between discipline incidents and achievement of African American males in middle school?

Student Data Information Coding Table

Table 4.3

Coding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Open Coding</th>
<th>Axial Coding</th>
<th>Selective Coding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American Male Student with Disability Economically Disadvantaged 6th-8th grade Average and above average attendance percentages Math Quartile 1 Achievement level Significant number of discipline incidents reported</td>
<td>Purposeful and intentional instruction strategies that directly address deficiencies Hands on math activities with manipulatives Enrichment math activities Technology and print rich classrooms Consistency Motivation Engagement Build positive relationships</td>
<td>Need for remediation, educator expertise and experience with cultural diversity and sensitivity for all learners</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This graph gives student information collected from school data, interviews, and observations. Each of the participants in the study was African American males in 6th through 8th grade. The data indicated a need for remediation as the result of the participants learning disability, economic status, and achievement level in math. Participants showed a different level of interest in math when the instruction was relevant to their real life and involved hands-on activities that helped with comprehension of the skills being taught.

Table 4.4
Discipline Incidents

Discipline Incidents Schoolwide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incidents</th>
<th>Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>690</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From this data, 90% of the incidents were from African American males, and 202 students of the 212 total were African American male students.

Table 4.5

Discipline Incidents School Wide August 2018-February 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Gender/ Ethnicity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disruption of school</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>5-8</td>
<td>BM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repeated Violation</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>5-8</td>
<td>BM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Compliance</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>5-8</td>
<td>BM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profane Language</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>5-8</td>
<td>BM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fighting</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>5-8</td>
<td>BM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inappropriate physical contact</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>5-8</td>
<td>BM</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table gives the top six discipline incidents that African American males received referrals for thus far. Repeated violations of school rules or multiple discipline referrals make up the largest percentage of the discipline incidents. African American males also make up the largest percentage school-wide of non-compliance. This is identified as a student refusing to comply with a directive from an authority figure in the school.

Participant Math Backgrounds

Each of the participants is classified in Quartile 1. This means they are at the lowest proficiency level on the scale of measuring progress in math. The math projection for S1 and S3 is Quartile 2 for the 2019 state test. These projections are based on past performance from the previous year’s math scores. The students are in math intervention daily at tier 3.
Interventions and supports are in place for each student for math achievement. There are also interventions implemented for student behavior. Restorative practices are in place for each to help improve discipline.

**Interviews**

The students participated in two interviews. The first interview was an informal interview introducing them to the study. The second interview was a formal interview with specific questions based on the math classroom environment and discipline incidents. Interview questions and responses address RQ1. The data gives challenges that are specific to African American males and how their academic success is undermined in math.

RQ1- What specific challenges do African American males encounter in middle school that undermines their academic success in math?

Interview question 1

Interview question 1: Describe various types of activities you enjoy that involve math?

S1: I like all things that involve money. I especially like counting my money and watching it grow.

S2: I enjoy working with equations and simplifying expressions. It is fun to make the numbers work on the problem.

S3: If I pick my favorite it would be using math to create games on my PlayStation. This would help me make new games for my friends and me to play.

S4: Math is the most fun for me when I can count up my prizes from winning a challenging or a game. I am also learning what to do to help my team win when we play games in class.
S5: I do not like any math activities, but if I had to choose one thing that involved math it would be how to make much money and keep up with it so I can buy the stuff I like. Also, to make sure no one was taking any of my money.

At the beginning of the first interview, the student was given a brief overview of the study and what the questions in the interview would ask of them. They were honest in their answers and expressed that they would try and be on their best behavior so that they could achieve better in math and receive fewer discipline referrals.

Interview question 2

How is math used at home with your family?

S1: I see math used to calculate paying the bills at home and buying food for the house.

S2: My parents use math in their jobs. I see the things they do for work that have math equations.

S3: My family uses math to buy groceries and pay the bills.

S4: I only see math at home as it relates to money and paying the bills. Sometimes I help my younger cousins with their math homework.

S5: We use math to go to our relative’s homes. Each house has a number that we have to know how to read. We also use math to pay bills, buy food and clothes.

Interview 2

There were four questions asked of each student. The items are listed below along with the summary of each student’s response. Each student was interviewed separately and allowed to elaborate or provide examples of their responses.

1. What motivates you to do well in school?

2. Do you enjoy math class? If yes, why and if no why?
3. Why do you believe that math is essential?

4. Do you receive referrals for your behavior?

S1

The motivation for student one to do well in math class is to be able to count his money and make sure he is not cheated out of any of his money. He especially likes place value because it related directly to money. This student enjoys math class when they are discussing money but chooses not to listen to other topics especially fractions. He stated that they have no use to him, and he does not know why he has to learn about parts when everything is a whole. In our discussion, the student stated that math is important because everyone needs to know how to count and make sure they are receiving the right amount of money. In his words, there is nothing worse than being cheated. There have been several behavior referrals for S1. He answered yes to the question and stated his teacher did not understand him and that is why he has behavior referrals.

S2

Motivation comes from within me to want to do well. His parents have taught him that he must do well in school to be able to provide for himself and his future family. Math is enjoyable to him because he desires to be an engineer and knows there is a lot of math that he needs to learn. Math is important because it is all over the world. All states and countries use
math, and they have to know how to do it right. During this school year, I have had some referrals, but they were not for big things, only small things.

S3

I am motivated to do well because my Mom told me that if I get in trouble at school, I will not be able to play on my gaming system. Sometimes when the Numeracy coach teaches our math class, it is fun and exciting. When it is my regular teacher, it is boring, and I find other things to do. Well, Math is important because everybody needs to know how to count and find out what half is. Yes, I do receive referrals and lots of them. When I do not want to do something, and the teacher tells me over and over to do it, and I do not, that is when I am written up. I do not think she understands that some days I am just not interested.

S4

I am motivated to do well in math because we get prizes and go on field trips when we do well in class. Math class is fun on the days we have rotations through stations, and we can build things. When the teacher is just talking to us explaining how to do the boring math, and I sometimes fall asleep or find something else to do. I know I should not, but sometimes it is hard not to do it. Yes, I do have discipline referrals. I try not to get them when it is close to a field trip or incentive days. Those days are fun, and I do not want to be left out.

S5

This student was motivated by coming to school to see his friends and his girlfriend. He stated he did not enjoy math class because he did not see the purpose and did not like for people to force things on him that he did not want to do. Math is not important in his opinion
unless it relates to money. Yes, he does have discipline referrals because he wants to do what he wants to do, and no one should try to tell him to do anything different.

Table 4.6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Raw Data</th>
<th>Open Coding</th>
<th>Axial Coding</th>
<th>Selective Coding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S1-Likes all things that relate to money</td>
<td>Creating and embracing math</td>
<td>Interest in math</td>
<td>As a survival skill</td>
<td>Intrinsic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Response</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2</td>
<td>Enjoys working with numbers, parents’ job involves math</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S3</td>
<td>Using math to create games on gaming systems, buying food and paying bills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S4</td>
<td>Prizes for games, paying bills and helping siblings with homework</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S5</td>
<td>No real interest in math, unless related to money, directions to get around the city, paying bills and buying food</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this table student responses to the interview questions are summarized. The participants were motivated by intrinsic and extrinsic factors that determined their interest level in math. The students’ related math to real world examples that they see daily, but did not view math as a career that could help them as a professional in the future.

**Post Classroom Observation**
Observations were conducted in three math classrooms with teachers of grades 6-8. Each teacher gave their thoughts on why African American males are struggling academically and receive large numbers of discipline referrals. The table below shows the teacher statements about African American males in their classes. Each classroom operates differently, as it relates to procedures and expectations. Some students are actively engaged, while others can not find a relationship to the subject matter being taught.

After each classroom observation, each participant was asked the question: What did you like and dislike about math class today? Although the responses varied based on the student, the overall response was “it was okay, but I wish my teacher understood when I asked for help.” The student perceptions are the teachers do not know how to answer their questions, and when they do ask questions in class, it makes the entire class laugh and say things about them. It was after this when the student lashes out and receives a discipline referral. Sometimes the owner of the actions is not realized until after the class is disrupted and a discipline referral has been issued. Each student has received discipline referrals in math class for disruptive behavior and refusal to comply with their directives. While there are variances with each teacher, there is a consistent pattern with this behavior especially with African American males in middle school. During discussions with the teachers, the perceptions and expectations were given.

Interview question 3
Interview question 3 and Interview 2 address RQ3. This data gives perceptions of
differences between achievement and discipline with African American males in middle school
math.

RQ3- What are the perceived differences between achievement and discipline with African
American males in middle school math?

Do you think it is cool to receive many discipline referrals for unacceptable behavior in
school?

S1: No, but sometimes it cannot be avoided. Teachers do not give us a chance to explain what
happened before writing us up.

S2: No, I try not to get written up.

S3: No, but it’s the only way the teacher can try to control the class.

S4: No, but sometimes we get written up for things that are not our fault, but the teacher will
not let us explain.

S5: No, it is not cool, but it happens all the time in our math class. The teacher cannot control
the class, so the write is what she uses to try and make us behave.

Interview 2

There were four questions asked of each student. The items are listed below along with the
summary of each student’s response. Each student was interviewed separately and allowed to
elaborate or provide examples of their responses.

1. What motivates you to do well in school?

2. Do you enjoy math class? If yes, why and if no why?

3. Why do you believe that math is essential?
4. Do you receive referrals for your behavior?

S1

The motivation for student one to do well in math class is to be able to count his money and make sure he is not cheated out of any of his money. He especially likes place value because it related directly to money. This student enjoys math class when they are discussing money but chooses not to listen to other topics especially fractions. He stated that they have no use to him, and he does not know why he has to learn about parts when everything is a whole. In our discussion, the student stated that math is important because everyone needs to know how to count and make sure they are receiving the right amount of money. In his words, there is nothing worse than being cheated. There have been several behavior referrals for S1. He answered yes to the question and stated his teacher did not understand him and that is why he has behavior referrals.

S2

Motivation comes from within me to want to do well. His parents have taught him that he must do well in school to be able to provide for himself and his future family. Math is enjoyable to him because he desires to be an engineer and knows there is a lot of math that he needs to learn. Math is important because it is all over the world. All states and countries use math, and they have to know how to do it right. During this school year, I have had some referrals, but they were not for big things, only small things.

S3
I am motivated to do well because my Mom told me that if I get in trouble at school, I will not be able to play on my gaming system. Sometimes when the Numeracy coach teaches our math class, it is fun and exciting. When it is my regular teacher, it is boring, and I find other things to do. Well, Math is important because everybody needs to know how to count and find out what half is. Yes, I do receive referrals and lots of them. When I do not want to do something, and the teacher tells me over and over to do it, and I do not, that is when I am written up. I do not think she understands that some days I am just not interested.

S4

I am motivated to do well in math because we get prizes and go on field trips when we do well in class. Math class is fun on the days we have rotations through stations, and we can build things. When the teacher is just talking to us explaining how to do the math that is boring, and I sometimes fall asleep or find something else to do. I know I should not, but sometimes it is hard not to do it. Yes, I do have discipline referrals. I try not to get them when it is close to a field trip or incentive days. Those days are fun, and I do not want to be left out.

S5

This student was motivated by coming to school to see his friends and his girlfriend. He stated he did not enjoy math class because he did not see the purpose and did not like for people to force things on him that he did not want to do. Math is not important in his opinion unless it relates to money. Yes, he does have discipline referrals because he wants to do what he wants to do, and no one should try to tell him to do anything different.
The discussion with the teachers addresses RQ4. In each of the responses, the perceptions about African American males and their math achievement regarding cultural sensitivity and diversity is evident.

RQ4- What effects do teachers perceive about cultural sensitivity and diversity that would help reduce discipline incidents of African American males and increase math achievement?

MT 1:

At the beginning of each class, the students are reminded of the expectations for the class and given the layout for the day. It is the expectation of the teacher for the student to behave in a manner that does not disrupt the class and allows learning to take place. Each learner has different needs and meeting each of those needs is challenging and sometimes seems to be an impossible task. There are more activities and lessons that the teacher wants to do with the students, but the behavior is a hindrance and causes the teacher to not take a chance on losing control of the classroom. Thus, the structure is "sit and get," and the students are not learning.

MT 2:

The African American males in the class are held to a higher standard than the other students in the class by this teacher. He expects them to behave and participate in the class and does not accept disruptive behaviors. Since the students know that the teacher does not tolerate the negative behaviors, they do not engage in anything other than the work that is given. This teacher has the full support of the parents of the students in his class, as he communicates
consistently with good and bad for each of his students. The procedures for the classroom was posted, and the students always knew what do next, and there is no time wasted in transitions from one task to the next. This teacher uses the strategies for culturally responsive teaching with fidelity.

MT 3

This teacher has a very empathetic and sympathetic heart for her students. She uses the student background and home environment as a means to give the students a pass on doing work and following the rules of the class. The students know this and take full advantage of the situation. Unfortunately, the most significant number of discipline referrals come from this class. When the teacher has had enough of the behavior, she writes multiple referrals for behaviors, and the students often do not understand why. In talking with the teacher, she stated that she knows she should change her practice, but she does not see the need when the students are not going to behave any better.

Five trends emerged from the data collected from the five African American Males. These trends provide support that they understand the importance of math and behaving in a manner that will not result in a discipline referral, but their math preferences differed.

Trend 1: The boys differed in their attitudes for math and its purpose in school and life. Two boys were generally in agreement that they need math only for money purposes. They understood the importance of math, but not beyond money principles. Student 1 and Student 4 stated that —Math should just be about money and decimals. Everybody uses money every day and understanding decimals will help with making sure it is counted correctly. | Student 2, 3, and five are all motivated by extrinsic things that give them a reward or satisfaction by seeing others
t school. Although this is not the ideal motivation that the educator would be pleased with, having a motivator at all is a step toward making the math meaningful and gaining the attention of the students.

Trend 2: Math is okay if it is the right material. The motivators for wanting to learn specific topics could be a lead into introducing them to related topics that may pique their interest and keep them from receiving discipline referrals. In each class observation, the level of engagement determined the atmosphere of the classroom. If the engagement was high, the students were involved in the learning and did not have time to misbehave. If the engagement was low and the teacher was at the center of attention the students looked for other things and people in the classroom to communicate within some form and thus were reprimanded and received some type of written discipline. Only MT 2 was able to hold the attention of all student for the entire class period. The math topics were presented in a way that piqued the interest of the students and made them want to know more. The boys universally did not like math assignments at school. They thought that the teacher should give the students some choice in the math assignments.

Trend 3: Lack of male role models in their lives. It is an unfortunate reality that urban school students do not have role models in their community that is successful in math-related careers. Having a strong, positive African American male role model who is an engineer, software developer, math teachers, scientists, or inventors are not found in these areas. S1’s father has been incarcerated for most of his life, and his aunt is raising him. S5’s father was killed in front of him, and he has anger that sometimes cannot be contained. S2’s father is a skilled labor worker that stays on top of him and his school work. He is supportive of the school and ensures that home and school communication are consistent. S3’s uncle is active in his life occasionally and tries to help where he can. His education stopped at the 6th grade and is limited in the
assistance he can provide. S4 is being raised by his grandmother and will only do things when there is a reward attached. The lack of positive role models who excel in math has had an adverse effect on their interest in math.

Trend 4: Proficiency in math can help an African American male stay out of jail. This trend was apparent throughout the interviews. The boys either had a male relative (father, uncle, or brother) had was either incarcerated at the time of the study or had been at some time. When they were told that men who were proficient in math skills were less likely to serve prison time, they all indicated that they were willing to try and do better in math to help them stay out of jail.

Trend 5. Encouraging the boys to want to learn math. They tried to control what they learned. Learning about fractions had no relevance to them until the researcher asked them what their favorite food was. Each of them named something that required a recipe with specific measurements.

S1, 2, and 3 stated their favorite food was chocolate chip cookies. The researcher pulled up a recipe and showed them the fractions in the method. They told me you just put the cookies in the oven from the package. The researcher explained that even the cookies you buy already made at the store required a recipe. They had no idea that they did not just magically happen without someone mixing up a recipe. S4 and 5 stated their favorite food was lasagna. They have seen someone make it but did not know that a recipe was required and had no idea fractions were involved. This was an experience that they indicated to me was useful information to have. From that point, fractions became real and not just something boring the teachers were making them learn.
### Table 4.7

**Observation coding**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Raw Data</th>
<th>Open Coding</th>
<th>Axial Coding</th>
<th>Selective Coding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student’s wish the teacher understood their need for help in the classroom; Teachers are not aware of the cultural barriers that directly impact student learning.</td>
<td>Cultural Sensitivity and Diversity Professional development</td>
<td>Classroom Climate and Culture needs to be culturally sensitive</td>
<td>Differentiation is needed based on the students in a classroom climate that is culturally sensitive and content that is relevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students are embarrassed when they ask questions in class, thus they shut down</td>
<td>Classroom culture and climate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation and engagement levels are varied in each classroom; Students do not view math outside the classroom, thus do not relate it to real life applications</td>
<td>Differentiated Instruction Real world Problem solving Hands on learning</td>
<td>Purposeful relevant classroom instruction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Summary

After meeting and talking with the students about math, discipline, and their lives in and out of school, the research gave succinct clarity as to why African American male achievement is decreasing, and discipline is increasing. Based on their responses, they want to have more voice and choice about their math instruction. They want math class to involve and include topics in
their real-life experiences. The research revealed that all of the students had very few role models in their lives that have made a positive impact on their education. The students’ that had parents or family member incarcerated were aware of what life looks like living minimally and not having everything they want or see their peers have in their homes. One of the students’ is goal oriented as a result of his parents’ participation in his education, and he knows that his education is the key to a prosperous future.
CHAPTER FIVE
Implications, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The collective thought was that African American males are underrepresented in achievement data especially math. The fact that African American males are not completing school and are the highest incarcerated group impacts the number of African-American male teachers and professionals. Community issues such as poverty, single parent homes (usually female), the devaluing of education in the African-American community, and the cycle of imprisonment are some of the significant issues that African American males encounter. The educational system has not intentionally withheld education from African American males. The educational world in terms of African-American male’s achievement in math cannot be fixed until the African-American community and families change for the betterment of the race and value education. Families need to stay committed, and stress education in the home and African American males must stay out of the juvenile and prison systems.

The purpose of this study was to determine specific challenges that African American males face in middle school that could be identified as contributing factors to high discipline incidents. The focus of this study was guided by the following questions:

RQ1:
What specific challenges do African American males encounter in middle school that undermines their academic success in math?

RQ2:
Is there a relationship between discipline incidents and achievement of African American males in middle school?
RQ3:

What are the perceived differences between achievement and discipline with African American males in middle school math?

RQ4:

What effects do teachers perceive about cultural sensitivity and diversity that would help reduce discipline incidents of African American males and increase math achievement?

Identifying and accepting problems of one's self is the foundation of the learning process. Every individual is dependent on their environment to act out what the expected outcome should be. African American males benefit from interaction and collaboration in the classroom. This is especially true in math classrooms. The interaction gives them a sense of belonging and ownership of their learning.

Educators need to provide the appropriate math strategies and concepts so that all learners, regardless of ethnicity, have the opportunity to experience success in the classroom. If they are defeated and deflated every time, they put forth any efforts to participate in the class they will eventually cease from trying. Teachers can make important differences in students’ math abilities with rich math experiences that have relevance and purpose in the culture of each student. Unfortunately, poor readers will encounter negative math and reading achievement that can sometimes be trounced. The African American male needs a classroom designed with him at the core.

According to Bodovsky & Youn (2012), African American male children enter life with little chance for success. African American boys have a 1 in 13 chance of going to prison at least once before dying; a 1 in 3 chance of becoming a felon; a 1 in 7 chance of never graduating from high school; a 1 in 6 chance of graduating from college; and a 50:50 chance of becoming a drug
abuser. African American male adolescents are 46 times more likely to be sent to a juvenile detention facility than Caucasian adolescents. According to Noguera (2012), African American males encounter hardships in society that are related to their educational attainment.

Third grade is the year that many African American male students begin experiencing failure for the first time. The curriculum in third grade becomes more focused and complex, with students expected to complete high-stakes standardized tests, teachers become more distant, and students are expected to become independent learners. Many African American male students are not ready for this transition. They often lack the reading skills needed to understand the math skills required for problem-solving. Gaining an understanding of which factors are contributing to African American male student deficiencies is essential, especially in determining if these factors are consistent across the population or are specific to the student. Once the factors are discovered, an immediate plan of remediation and intervention should be put into place to prevent any future loss of knowledge.

All of the students in the study made growth in their MAP assessment in February. This assessment measures growth from Fall to Winter/Spring. S1,3,4 all met their projected growth goal on the assessment. S2 and 3 made growth and just fell a few points below achieving the projected goal. Each of the students stated that they believed the support received from the teachers through the interventions were the reason they were able to meet these achievement goals in Math.
Discussion

Interviewing and observing the five students was edifying and sometimes disheartening. They were all excited and interested in participating in the project, but sometimes answered the question in a terse and succinct manner that did not provide details. They were not interested in making conversation about their responses until it was something that piqued their interest.

The students’ perceptions of math were not surprising. They all agreed that if math were presented in a way they understood, it would help them not get into trouble in class. Acting out and being non-compliant is their way of dealing with their deficiencies in math.

African American male students can benefit significantly from mentorship programs. These programs allow for students to be supported by adults who come from the same culture as them and are thriving as professionals in careers other than athletes or rappers. Fitzpatrick (2012) implied that a lack of role models contributes to lower grades, poor attendance, and increased behavioral challenges. Establishing an effective community-based mentorship program with mentors who are willing to serve as mentors to African American male students, can encourage relationships and foster interests in academics that will assist in alleviating some of the stressors that students experience.

It is evident from the findings that African American male achievement has been identified as a significant problem within the current education system and that some interventions have proven to be effective. Unfortunately, those interventions are not consistent. Teacher retention rates are low and thus impact programs that benefit African American male students. At this school, Social workers provide interventions to promote equitable education for all students.
The research indicates that positive relationships between teachers and students are highly correlated with better academic outcomes for African American male students. As an Instructional Coach, the researcher often serves as a mediator between teachers to engage in dialogue about the culture and needs of the student. These conversations help to strengthen the teacher-student relationship. Providing teachers with evidence-based suggestions of research-based culturally responsive teaching and behavior management techniques would help improve achievement and decrease discipline. Advocating for culturally responsive classrooms as a school-wide practice could have a profound effect on the academic success of African American male students.

The study also validates the need for behavior management techniques in all classrooms. Consistent practices that advocate for restorative justice for all students can change discipline incident trajectories. Taking the time to evaluate each incident will assist in African American male students responding defensively and ultimately shutting down or acting out when redirected by a teacher.

Taylor (2014) mentions the influence of teacher bias and prejudice against African American male students as being detrimental to the learning environment. School social workers can facilitate conversations that engage teachers to begin to think about ways that their preferences may be influencing their classroom practices. Joining school leadership committees and teams can be one catalyst in promoting school-wide change. However, teacher qualifications in high poverty schools are also an issue of concern that can be addressed on a macro level. Black male students are nearly four times more likely to attend high poverty schools (Holland, 2014) where teachers are more likely to have non-regular licenses than those in non-high poverty schools.
Based on the responses from the students who participated in the study, African American students have more issues to deal with than the average White student in the same community which affects their learning process. Breaking the cycle and understanding the students from poverty is a critical academic success. In order to increase student achievement, it is going to require more community involvement, especially from the African American leaders of the community.

**Future Research**

Future studies should include effective interventions for African American males in middle schools to increase achievement and graduation rates. Family communication and training should also be included. Interactions with family can be correlated to increase psychological well-being for African American males, which will have a direct effect on academic achievement (Noguera, 2009). Longitudinal studies on African American male mentors that take place over an extended period of time that follows students at all tiers (elementary, middle, and high school) would be effective in measuring achievement growth and decreasing discipline incidents.

As for accountability for student achievement increases, additional research is needed on African American male student’s identification with school and motivation for learning. They are specifically looking at the K-12 achievement gap and how family impacts their achievement. Looking back at the court case Brown v Board of Education, inferiority was the label given to minority children by segregating them from the majority of children. This was a hindrance to their development of equality and justice for all. Desegregation by way of busing was established, but at the cost of long bus rides to school that impacted learning negatively. Busing still exists today and students still experience that sense of inferiority to other students. A study
that looks specifically at the perceptions of students on bussing and separate but equal would be interesting from the student and teacher perspective.

**Conclusions**

Turning today's African American males into tomorrow's skilled workers, professionals, and innovators is critical to restoring growth and competitiveness in our society. Educators must address the gaping racial disparities in educational outcomes. The African American male achievement gap is a continuing cycle. It was evident from the responses of the participants that parent involvement and socioeconomic status are significant factors that impact student learning in which the school district does not have any control over. However, other factors are perceived to contribute to the achievement of African American male students.

The results of this study will hopefully influence educational leaders and politicians to look closer at the influence of academic outcomes for African American male students. As educators, it is vital that we implement programs that consistently employ home and school connections. African American male students have developed resilience and determination as a result of their sometimes-unfavorable circumstances. It is vital to their success that educators emphasize the value of education and how it directly influences life outcomes. Purposeful change lies within education reform, relationship, relevance, and rigor.

**References**


Appendix
Appendix A

Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form

TITLE OF STUDY

The Disproportionality of Achievement vs Discipline of African American Males in Middle School Math, with Culturally Responsive Instruction

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

Sonya V. Johnson

svjohnson@cn.edu

PURPOSE OF STUDY

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information.

The purpose of this study is to investigate achievement and discipline disproportionality with African American Males in Middle school math. This study intends to find solution strategies to assist in decreasing discipline incidents and increase achievement with African American Males.
STUDY PROCEDURES

The study will include interviews and classroom observations. The timeline for the study will be January 14- February 25, 2019 at Donelson Middle School. Each interview will be short and concise. Observations will take place during math class and will not interfere with instruction.

RISKS

There are not any risks involved in participation in this study.

You may decline to answer any or all questions, and you may terminate your involvement at any time if you choose.

BENEFITS

There will be no direct benefit to you for your participation in this study. However, we hope that the information obtained from this study may help you in your future educational experiences.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Your responses to interview questions will be anonymous. Every effort will be made by the researcher to preserve your confidentiality including the following:

- Assigning code names/numbers for participants that will be used on all research notes and documents
- Keeping notes, interview transcriptions, and any other identifying participant information in a secure location.
Participant data will be kept confidential except in cases where the researcher is legally obligated to report specific incidents. These incidents include, but may not be limited to, incidents of abuse and suicide risk.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions at any time about this study, or you experience adverse effects as the result of participating in this study, you may contact the researcher whose contact information is provided on the first page.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part in this study. If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign a consent form. After you sign the consent form, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. Withdrawing from this study will not affect the relationship you have, if any, with the researcher. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be destroyed.

CONSENT

I have read and I understand the provided information and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and without cost. I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.

Participant's signature ______________________________ Date __________
Investigator's signature _____________________________ Date __________