A PHENOMENOLOGICAL CASE STUDY OF FOUR BLACK MALES EXPOSED TO
CUMULATIVE TRAUMA THAT ATTENDED A
'NO EXCUSES' CHARTER SCHOOL

By

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ABSTRACT

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL CASE STUDY OF FOUR BLACK MALES EXPOSED TO CUMULATIVE TRAUMA THAT ATTENDED A 'NO EXCUSES' CHARTER SCHOOL

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Zero tolerance discipline policies like 'No Excuses' have been scrupulously crafted, packaged and sold to low income people of color as the prescription for academic proficiency, social and emotional consciousness and career excellence by staunch urban education reformers. However, there has been heavy backlash regarding its efficacy from former 'No Excuses' school teachers, parents and educational researchers. Researchers contend that the policies are racist, discriminatory, harsh, ineffective, and closely linked to the prison pipeline. Ironically, many of the students who attend schools with strict zero tolerance discipline policies like 'No Excuses' happen to be young Black males who have faced or are facing an inordinate amount of cumulative trauma. Yet, few research studies exist questioning if the sophisticated discipline structure carries not only intellectual and ethnic identity related hazards, but psychological and emotional ones as well. These lines of inquiry are significant and urgent, especially for historically hyper-racialized and over criminalized populations like Black boys. Therefore, this manuscript is dedicated to examining how prolonged exposure to cumulative trauma impacts the ways in which Black males navigate schools that utilize 'No Excuses' discipline policies and whether that exposure inhibits or enhances their ability to achieve academically in school.

First, I discuss my personal narrative and interdisciplinary career experiences that provide significant background for which this dissertation study emanated. After that, I critically analyze research on the history of zero tolerance discipline policies in K-12 schools, keeping in mind

how administrators (e.g., deans of students, principals, superintendents) and government officials contribute to the formulation of legislation and implementation of these policies. Then, I contextualize the 'No Excuses' charter school culture by reviewing the literature from the perspectives of school discipline, student outcomes and long-standing media debates, mostly from highly regarded charter management organizations (CMOs), like Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP). Next, I discuss the varied effects of cumulative trauma on Black males and how 'No Excuses' school cultures might unconsciously trigger and exacerbate some symptoms of trauma, consequently stymieing normal adolescent development.

Afterwards, I detail why qualitative research and specifically, a phenomenological case study method helped me to sustain the integrity of the participants' sensitive data (Glesne, 2011), and uphold the individual insight of participants as it related to the phenomenon of cumulative trauma and not a regurgitated account from a divergent perspective (Smith & Osborn, 2007). The case study approach provided me ample space to inspect the cumulative trauma phenomenon through various lenses. Once I thoroughly explain the methodologies that undergird this very sensitive study, I critically highlight Black males' perceptions of traumas and stressors, 'No Excuses' school culture and discipline, and whether the 'No Excuses' environment prepared them for college careers and successful lives. I also conduct a cross case analysis and break the findings into five emergent themes: (a) adaptation, comprehension and exposure to trauma, (b) preparation for prison, (c) triggers, identities and masculinities, (d) shell shocked, and (e) posterity. Last, I proffer a discussion of the key findings and how they contribute to various bodies of literature and provide recommendations and implications for both policy and practice in rethinking 'No Excuses' discipline policies.

This dissertation is dedicated to my older brother, Ajohnte Jamal "Tay" Griffin, who tragically lost his life on February 10, 2017 (located in Appendix L). It is also dedicated to those individuals who have endured cumulative trauma throughout their lifespan as well as those who suffer silently.

To the perseverant young men who entrusted me with their stories, I will never forget you. Your courage and fortitude enlightened me and gave me strength. Thank you for allowing me to share your stories with the world. I appreciate all of you for being vulnerable and paving the way for more individuals to share their personal narratives. Always forward, Never backwards!

As a Spartan, I would like to dedicate this literary work to the heroic survivors of sexual assault and sexual abuse at MSU as well as in the Greater Lansing, MI community. I write this work in your honor and to create consciousness regarding your plight.

Lastly, I want to devote this dissertation to my former students (located in Appendix M), both those who have lost their lives tragically (Edward, Kentrell, George, Skye, Kayla, Shane, Sheldon) and those who are still hustling notwithstanding the daunting odds and circumstances they face. Mr. Griffin loves you.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Soul Work: Personal Narrative

I was raised in a small poverty-stricken town called Ford Heights, IL, a place historically known as the one of the stops on the underground railroad frequented by thousands of slaves seeking liberation in the 1840's and 50's (Wiley Sr., 2011; McCall, 2017). Due to this significance, one would think that the small town would be destined for everlasting greatness. However, somewhat like the underground railroad, the path has been severely beaten and filled with many discouraging winding roads, not without hope, but far from freedom, tranquility and stability (Zito, 2017; Bowean, 2009). Located just twenty-eight miles south of Chicago, Ford Heights was also historically considered the poorest suburb in the United States of America in the 1980's, with an average yearly income per household of $4,943 (Hayes, 1987; McCarron, 1989). Within the next decade though, three out of four families in the economically depressed village made more than $10,000 annually (Zimmermann & Kowalczyk, 2003). While that dollar amount increased by close to five thousand dollars for some families, a more nuanced look into those numbers provided an even more daunting reality about the perceived upward mobility of Ford Heights, IL. Out of 3,400 residents, over half of individuals above the age of sixteen were unemployed and a whopping 34% of the homes in Ford Heights were led by single mothers, a figure that led the entire U.S. in the early 2000's (Zimmermann & Kowalczyk, 2003).

Growing up, I had little access to grocery stores, recreational parks, libraries, banks or bookstores (Kadner, 2015; Zimmermann & Kowalczyk, 2003). My hometown had two mini convenient stores, four liquor stores, a bevy of churches and endless abandoned fields, alley ways and cut throughs (Zimmermann & Kowalczyk, 2003; Zito, 2017). Two out of the three schools I attended during adolescence were either on the "Academic Early Warning List" created

by the Illinois School Board of Education (ISBE), or close to being on the list for posting poor

Illinois Goal Assessment Program (IGAP) standardized test results for consecutive years (Bils &

Martinez, 1997). While I can remember having loving and caring teachers throughout my

childhood, the fact remained that I was massively underserved educationally.

Making matters worse, Ford Heights was overwhelmed with rampant community

violence and police corruption as well (Zito, 2017; Holt, 1990). When you were not hearing

gunshots outside of the window or listening to the stories of people being victimized at school or

in the community itself, you were experiencing it personally. I witnessed people get shot,

stabbed, mugged and severely beaten before the age of ten. When I was twelve, my mother was

robbed and physically assaulted by her attacker walking out of a local currency exchange. My

brother was pushed in front of a semi-truck by local gang members nearly costing him his life

around the same age. I lost my closest childhood friend to an accidental drowning at age thirteen.

I lost dozens of childhood classmates and relatives to gun violence and drugs before I graduated

from high school.

Many times, it was not safe to walk to or from school because of the violent conditions

(Ridder, 1995). Men were literally slaughtered in broad day-light and even worse, burned alive

and left to die on the streets (Ridder, 1995; Taylor, 1999). Ford Heights, IL was and still is nearly

100% racially and ethnically homogenous. In the 1980's and 1990's, merely visiting and being

anything other than Black spelled harm and for some, death (Taylor, 1999; Prasad, 1999). With

three low-income housing projects, two of which were famously dubbed the "Bronx," and the

"Vietnam," for their war-like tendencies, Ford Heights was a frightening place to reside as a

child (Bush, 2003). One journalist chronicling the history of Ford Heights remarked, "It is

difficult not to be moved by the blight and sorrow of this town; impoverished, bypassed by the

world, it is a part of America that is dying in plain sight. The people who live here are no different than their Appalachian cousins who are watching their own ways of life decay" (Zito, 2017, p. 2).

Yet, the poverty, fear, exposure to violence and unsafe conditions did not culminate when I arrived home. I could easily make the argument that by seventh grade, I was dying in plain sight somatically. My father verbally and emotionally abused my mother daily. Many times, my siblings and I were on the receiving end of the abuse. I lived in a constant state of terror psychologically and emotionally and felt like no one truly understood the pain and anguish I endured. As I entered adolescence though, things worsened. The varied forms of abuse began to more closely resemble chronic neglect. Even though my mother provided a tireless picture of consistency, hard work, dedication and selflessness, my siblings and I were nutritionally and intellectually undernourished and affectionally and emotionally under-nurtured. We went to bed hungry many nights because there was little food in the house for all of us. We were never affirmed and recognized by our parents in the forms and dialects we desired. Nor, were we told that we were loved, appreciated or cared for by our primary caregivers. Thus, we also felt undervalued. We truly felt abandoned by both of our parents in many respects.

Due to my mother working long nights and my father's vices, we were constantly left unsupervised as well. Therefore, my siblings and I were thrust into adult lifestyles as children, hell-bent on experimenting, surviving and coping with the pain the best way we knew how. We practically raised ourselves with little interference from adults, but our efforts to beat poverty and the temptations that came along with it were thwarted the more curious we became. We made illogical, unethical and foolish decisions at times. We engaged in underage drinking, premarital sex and drug use. The reckless behavior and carelessness eventually caught up with

my older brother and younger sister when he was expelled from high school after being accused of selling drugs at age sixteen and when she became pregnant twice at ages thirteen and seventeen, ultimately choosing not to mother either child.

I was suspended from school a handful of times, but I was never considered an outlier. In fact, I did just enough to acquiesce to the formal structure of schooling to maintain a low profile, but I was suffering silently. The effects of severe poverty and cumulative trauma affected me on the inside. Instead of exhibiting outward behaviors that would shine a negative light on my family as both of my siblings did, I did the majority of my protesting internally. I began developing symptoms and exhibiting the behaviors of a disorder that emanated from feeling perpetually unsafe, undesired and unloved. I developed self-confidence, self-concept and anxiety issues. Rest, relaxation and sleep were seldom recuperative. I was like a zombie at times. I obsessed over putting forth a spotless self-image to disguise my pain and hidden truths. I agonized in silence because I felt alone, unheard and unseen by the people that I came home to everyday. I even became bitterly angry, disgusted and filled with hatred towards certain people in my family. However, I masked it very well and hurriedly silenced the negative self-talk each time it emerged. I found our familial and communal circumstances to be repugnant and deplorable at times. I loathed the way my father engaged with and took advantage of my mother. Certainly, I hated the way he treated my siblings and me. Most of all, I absolutely hated being poor.

I suffered from Psychological Maltreatment (PM). PM is defined as the continuous or inescapable hampering of a child's fundamental needs, which includes acts by the caretakers that may be designated as injurious to typical child development (Barnett, Manly & Cicchetti, 1993). PM is considered the most difficult form of child abuse and neglect to detect because many of

the wounds are unseen by the naked eye (Hibbard et al., 2012). The symptomatology of experiencing PM includes pervasive internalization of behaviors, self-confidence issues, explosive anger problems and compulsive behaviors like having uncontrolled fits, self-deprecative behaviors, apathetic episodes, and long periods of isolation (Egeland, Sroufe, & Erickson, 1983).

These internal struggles, along with the external chaos constantly revolving around my being, caused me to develop depressive symptoms and anger issues. However, I never discussed being depressed, angry or anxious with anyone because I did not know how to articulate and name my feelings. Nor, did I know how my thoughts and reflections would be received and digested by loved ones, especially if they were not aware that they were guilty of abusing, malnourishing, mal-nurturing and neglecting me. I was also terrified of perceived retributive abuse from my father if I did speak out. We were taught to keep personal ordeals in house at all costs. After suppressing my thoughts and emotions for years, I began to feel that every environment I navigated felt chaotic and dangerous in their own unique ways, even if they were not. I often experienced peculiar transferences with people and places. I was on high alert when others were calm and collected. I was irritable during joyous times and emotionless during times of stress and conflict. At one point during late adolescence, I became completely numb to it all and totally closed off to accepting additional pain into my life.

When I became a young adult, after a few years of varied educational and career experiences, I was finally ready to name my pain. I reflected upon the decades of transgenerational and historical trauma that had permeated my being, my family, as well as my community. In doing so, I became saddened all over again. While seemingly beating the odds and surviving tough childhood circumstances relatively unscathed compared to some of my

peers, I realized that I had perpetuated many of the troubling pitfalls related to trauma that I experienced. The way that I communicated my narrative across many venues was deficit-based and, at the time, positioned abnormally.

The truth was that beyond the disgust and fear, as a youth, I never thought that I was a victim of prolonged emotional abuse, household dysfunction and community violence. Nor, did I believe that my siblings and I were victims of neglect either. Not once did I believe that we were 'victims' of traumatic, abnormal backgrounds. Honestly, I never heard one person use the word traumatic to describe our experiences growing up. I believed that having a parent swear at you, humiliate you, push or shove you, or act in ways that were so frightening that you thought you would be physically hurt, was consistent with what most children around the country experienced during childhood (ACEs, 2018). I believed that children were supposed to stay in their places when communicating and engaging with adults or risk emotional and physical harm as consequences. Raised in a small industrial rural town of about 3,000 people, I also thought that rampant crime, blight, poverty and corruption were normal too because I did not experience anything else. There were two sides of Ford Heights and both mirrored each other. I truly believed that our lives were normal depictions of the typical childhood and adolescent experience. I could not distinguish which parts of my upbringing were healthy and appropriate. Nor, could I tell if my childhood was socially and emotionally suitable. I had a singular experience that traveled everywhere with me, as did my relatives and peers. I did not know a binary existed.

As I began to realize the impact of my disposition regarding the abnormality of my childhood experiences, I understood that some nuance existed. I learned that experiences like mine happened daily and were not just pervasive in places where there was concentrated poverty,

but that experiences with neglect, abuse and household dysfunction were prevalent in more middle class and affluent communities as well. The experiences might have differed in the frequency, gravity and nature compared to places like Ford Heights, but they did exist. In a peculiar fashion, I found comfort in understanding that we did not suffer alone. In hindsight, another distinction focused on my definitions of normal vs. abnormal. What I gleaned more than anything was that my experience was normal to me, regardless of what it might have felt like to other people, even those close to me. As hard as it is to state, poverty, blight, chaos, fear, violence, self-deprivation, anxiety and depression resembled normality in my eyes. Thus, these concepts became the lens through which I experienced life on all levels.

The familiarity and singularity of my childhood and adolescent experiences were two of the reasons why I never considered them traumatic. Additionally, the word trauma had always taken a very negative and foreign connation with me. From my vantage point, it was the very definition of "othering" because the term was always used to describe war veterans, prisoners of war or refugees when I was growing up. I had never met a war veteran, prisoner of war or refugee, nor was I interested. It was almost as if I began to reject the idea that I could be a victim of trauma – mostly because I had mastered resiliency and perseverance and felt that being labeled a survivor of trauma would not only tarnish my hard-earned accomplishments, but my image as a strong Black male as well. After all, it was normal for African Americans growing up in extreme poverty to struggle and attempt to beat the odds. It was not normal to be likened to a prisoner of war or a refugee from another country. I did not approve of that designation either.

These somewhat conflicting and contradictory thoughts led me to become more vocal about my own experiences with others. I also sought advice and answers from medical professionals about the symptoms I had been exhibiting since childhood. In particular, I desired

to know more about the psychological and physiological manifestations and ramifications of living in poverty-stricken communities like Ford Heights, IL. What I discovered completely altered the way I view the world now as well as my understandings of what risks are associated with growing up in poverty. After a thorough clinical examination at age thirty, I was told that all of the symptoms I possessed during childhood stemmed directly from experiencing cumulative trauma. Cumulative trauma is defined as "experienc[ing] multiple, chronic, and prolonged, developmentally adverse traumatic events like sexual abuse, physical abuse, neglect, community violence and domestic violence" (NCTSN, 2016, p. 1). Due to my symptomatology being so complex and varied, I was also diagnosed with a Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) as well as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), two debilitating disorders that have beleaguered millions worldwide, including the prisoners of war and refugees I referenced earlier.

About ten years ago, the brother that I mentioned was pushed in front of a semi-truck as an adolescent and also expelled from high school a few years after, began to display signs of PTSD as well. He possessed a depressive affect, frequent mood swings and avoidance of certain spaces due to trauma reminders. In addition to his childhood experiences, he was also the victim of a workplace violence ordeal that caused him significant agony over a two-year span in his mid-20's. Unfortunately, his condition progressively worsened and he was diagnosed with Paranoid Schizophrenia shortly thereafter. Surprisingly, my sister has not complained about nor exhibited any symptoms of a disorder emanating from our childhood experiences. She was suspended from middle and high school multiple times for fighting and other aggressive behavioral incidents like directed profanity towards teachers, but she seems to be living a healthy and productive life. Since experiencing trauma is "personal," every individual reacts differently.

This is most likely the best explanation for my sister's persistence through tumultuous times, unless she happens to also be suffering silently like I did and has yet to name her pain.

Due to the diversity of behaviors and manifestations of symptoms between my siblings, I discussed past traumatic experiences and current diagnoses with both of my parents. Both were attentive and emotional while relaying their sincerest condolences for any harm they may have intentionally or unintentionally inflicted on us. They revealed that they too felt abandoned, unsafe, unloved and alone at points during their childhood and adolescent years as well and admitted regret for not proactively preventing the problematic cycle of transgenerational trauma with us (Castelloe, 2012). This unlikely and unnatural communication with my parents about this sensitive topic provided tremendous fodder for me in initiating closure to one of the most pernicious and cognitively distressing chapters of my short life. I felt like I had been set free from all of the inner turmoil I held onto for years after communicating with them for a few hours. More importantly, I was able to express forgiveness and speak words of affection regarding my love for them.

Today, I am thankful for the numerous systems of support, critical friends, communities of hope, wisdom and mentorship, and coping mechanisms. These symbols of strength have empowered me to leverage my story as a representation of courage and inspiration for young people enduring similar circumstances. I am overjoyed to communicate that I am healthier and happier than I have ever been and that I finally have a true sense of tranquility that guides the moves that I choose to make in this life. I am remarkably resilient. Cumulative trauma had a profound impact on the first three decades of my life, but it did not define my life. However, experiencing cumulative trauma may end up defining the lives of individuals who are not able to adequately name their pain, will not live long enough to understand their circumstances or those

who may not have healthy attachments and strong support systems. For those individuals, I serve as a model of hope and emancipation. For them, I lead a life of advocacy, servanthood, engagement and fearlessness. For them, I relish all opportunities to prove that roses are indeed still cultivated in the harshest terrain (Duncan-Andrade, 2009). For them, I fight against injustices of all kind and pray for understanding, grace and guidance. For they deserve it.

Research is Me-Search

My life experience as a Black male, raised in extreme poverty and exposed to widespread cumulative trauma is part of the impetus for the study I conducted. The other half emanated from previous experiences and careers as a law student, sociologist, juvenile corrections officer, program coordinator, teacher's assistant and dean of students at an urban 'No Excuses' charter school. Those collective experiences greatly impacted my interactions with children, particularly with other Black males from poverty-stricken areas. They were especially powerful in my role as middle school dean, a role that I had several epiphanies and reflections about when I departed. One of those realizations was how I might have been racially positioned and gender favored by administration to take over the discipline reigns and the other was how my own exposure to cumulative trauma affected the way that I viewed my job responsibilities, interactions with teachers and staff, parents, community stakeholders and ultimately, my disciplinary decision-making with the students of color who identified as overwhelmingly Black/African American. These comprehensions occurred a few years after leaving the school, but before receiving my diagnosis and have remained steady since.

Throughout my journey as a practitioner, I noticed that the majority of students disciplined harshly (detention, suspension, and counseling out) were Black males who had experienced or were experiencing significant difficulties at home as well as in their communities.

This is not to dismiss the Black girls that faced significant challenges with the disciplinary practices in schools where I was employed, but to say that they were the antithesis to the types of discipline that the boys faced as well the frequencies in which they faced the discipline at the schools. Their unstable and unpredictable circumstances outside of the school campus trickled into the school in ways that we were not prepared for as faculty. Many of them were visibly uncomfortable accepting feedback and taking directions from adults. They were also extremely tentative about conforming to the rigid disciplinary and socialization practices that the school offered, and these sentiments were shared often from their parents and caregivers as well. They seemed irritable and even fearful most times upon stepping into the schoolhouse doors. Each day, students would walk inside the school and be checked from head to toe by staff members to make sure that they "looked" appropriate for learning as stipulated in the student handbook and cultural blueprint. The students that did not meet the standard of appropriateness were sent to a segregated room in the back of the school or sent to my office until I could call their parents for additional clothing and paraphernalia.

Every movement that students made that was antithetical to what was prescribed or scripted by school personnel received a critical response, often warranting some form of disciplinary action. For some students, the very sight of certain teachers prompted anger and caused them to be passive participants in their own education throughout the remainder of the school day. When given a behavior mark for "getting out their seats" without permission or talking out of turn, some students threw temper tantrums and physically threatened teachers. If they were told to walk silently on lines with their hands to their sides, some students cursed repeatedly at staff members, blatantly refused and demanded explanations for such orders. Sadly, instead of being attentive to their observable anguish, and reflecting and listening to their

concerns, we used the powers we possessed and punished them for displaying outwards behaviors when given directives we presumed were simple and harmless.

As a staff member, we were relentless about the discipline code and would infringe upon students' personal space to show them that we meant business. At times, the louder we had to speak and repeat expectations to students, the more upset we became and the more privileges were taken away. Our wrath reverberated throughout the classroom or cafeteria when children refused to comply with directives. We always had the last word. There was absolutely no excuse for students to push back, be critical or be inquisitive about what was transpiring. Attempts to do so were met with more behavior demerits under the guise that they were being argumentative and insubordinate and that was not allowed under any circumstances. When students deviated from the structure, we provided swift consequences. For a select few, the behavior infractions were so ubiquitous and continuous that they caused a distraction for other learners. Thus, they were counseled out of the school to make room for students who were more malleable, tolerant and acquiescent.

Most of the students who experienced this treatment were Black males between the ages of nine and seventeen. Instead of the school serving as a safe haven to young people presumably afflicted by trauma and other stressors, it was another place they considered dangerous, stressful and terrorizing. We misconstrued their cries for help as aggressive, deviant and unmitigated rebellious behaviors and even casted unfair aspersions on their families because of their behaviors. Some of their cultural ways of knowing and learning, identities, ideologies, knowledges and values were forgotten, and they were required to adopt specially crafted ones to navigate the space successfully. At times, I intervened and deviated from the strict policies as a form of protest to highlight solidarity with the students and families. However, my efforts were

not enough, and I was constantly beseeched to punish more each time a referral was given to me. The 'No Excuses' approach to discipline was always the fallback for some educators in that space. Thus, my role became too onerous, overbearing and less gratifying the more time I spent wondering what was happening to the students when they were not in school. Already working close to 70 hours a week and severely burned out, I decided to resign in the middle of the school year to preserve the little psychological health I still possessed.

One year after leaving the school, I ruminated about my experience as a dean, mostly about the Black boys who never acclimated to the 'No Excuses' environment and were counseled out because of it. I also wondered about the ones who did acclimate to the environment for whatever reason and how they were coping in that system. As urban educators, I came to the conclusion that we failed to understand them and their plights. I thought deeply about my role and positionality as a Black man in that space, one who repetitively disciplined and socialized Black children to conform to the 'No Excuses' culture and to limit their inquisitions about its purposes and goals. For a brief moment, I blamed myself and felt culpable for some of their failures. I imagined what their experiences would have been like if I would have pushed back against the system harder and more vigorously. Would it have made a difference? Would it have saved lives?

After a year of metacognition, I ceased looking inwards regarding my role in that space and decided to go back to school to become better equipped to make a more transformative impact on school systems in the future. During my first year of graduate study, I learned that three of the Black males that I engaged with, disciplined multiple times and attempted to socialize, were murdered in cold blood and two others were facing thirty years to life in federal prison for attempted murder, armed robbery and aggravated rape respectively. Unfortunately,

one of those young men was counseled out of the school for repeated behavioral offenses. Since then, there have been at least four others who have lost their lives to senseless violence and many more who have either been shot or have committed felonious crimes. Filled with grief, again I reflected about the impact that cumulative trauma had on their lives before they ever stepped foot into our school. Most importantly, I reflected about what we could have done to serve them better when they were physically present.

Herein lies my dissertation study. It is imperative for educators to understand how early traumatic experiences might affect students academically, psychologically and emotionally in school, but particularly within a structure like 'No Excuses' that does not account for the effects of living in poverty among other serious considerations. Thus, I conducted in-depth interviews with four Black males who attended a 'No Excuses' charter school in New Orleans, LA. All of the Black males that were recruited for the study were between the ages of eighteen and twenty-three years old. However, the four Black males that participated in the study were between the ages of twenty-two and twenty-three years old. It is important to note that the interviews transpired when these young men were young adults reflecting back on their earlier experiences as adolescents. Therefore, at the time of the interviews, each participant was no more than four years separated from the 'No Excuses' environment.

I studied how Black males interpreted 'No Excuses' discipline methods as well as how they perceived their realities in charter schools. I also examined if their experiences with cumulative trauma affected their ability to achieve academically in the 'No Excuses' space as well as what their understandings of healthy social and emotional development looked like at home and in the 'No Excuses' environment. I believe that by investigating the phenomenon of cumulative trauma on a deeper level, this research study has the potential to transform the

educational sector for Black males in urban and rural environments coping with traumatic histories, and it may possibly have significant ramifications on national discipline statistics as well as the school-to-prison pipeline. Before exploring these topics further, I frame why the positionality of Black males in this country is so imperative for not just urban educators, but all educators to grasp.

<div align="center">**Why Focus on Black Males and Trauma?**</div>

An estimated 70-100% of all African-American children living in poverty are exposed to at least one form of trauma, such as community violence, neglect, physical abuse, household dysfunction, verbal abuse or sexual abuse (Dempsey, Overstreet, & Moely, 2000; Reiss & Price, 1996). At the point of exposure, research suggests that between 23-29% of these children will exhibit symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Hughes & Shin, 2011). Further complicating this narrative, data also demonstrate that between 81-98% of all adults who had at least one adverse childhood experience (ACE) will likely report experiencing at least one other adverse experience that can be considered traumatic throughout their lifespan (Dong et al., 2004). The concept Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) is another way to help classify the many different types of trauma one might endure before age eighteen (Cronholm et al., 2015). The term was coined in the mid 1990's by medical researchers who engaged in an unprecedented and highly ambitious study that examined whether childhood traumatic experiences with different forms of abuse and neglect could potentially impact the long-term health of an individual (Cronholm et al., 2015). Researchers have continually found that experiencing ACEs puts individuals in danger of developing substance abuse habits, alcoholism, teenage pregnancy (CDC, 2018), as well as early death that stems from psychological and cardiovascular issues (Brown et al., 2010).

Growing evidence of these realities spawned new insights regarding young Black males and their propensity to experience childhood traumas earlier and more frequently than their White counterparts because of the communities they reside in and the families they belong to (Kiser, 2007). Widespread exposure to traumas in early adolescence intensifies these problematic and unfortunate realities and can be life altering for these young men (Redwood et al., 2010; Evans & English, 2002). This is especially troubling in light of the perpetual targets that young Black males constantly have on their backs in this country (Devega, 2015). Justified or unjustified, a legitimate case can be made that young Black males are confronted with challenges that no other group of young people in the United States of America has to face.

Black males are repeatedly branded as problems to their nations, to their local environments, to their schools, to Black communities, and to Blacks themselves (Collins, 2004). Too often, the academic success of Black males is stymied by stereotypical notions of race that ultimately place them at a considerable disadvantage in school spaces (Howard, 2008). They are unfairly portrayed as inherently violent and delinquent in the media (Dorfman, 2001) and in society as a whole without reference to the many structural, institutional and societal barriers that prevent some of them from reaching their full potential (Devega, 2015; Millner, 2014; Kiser, 2007). They are under siege in most statistical categories that matter in America as well, from school drop-outs and special education to disproportionate sentencing and incarceration rates to being gunned down by police officers (NAACP, 2016; Millner, 2014; Black Male Statistics, 2016).

For Black males, their extreme, sometimes chaotic environmental and household conditions make life more daunting to navigate than it might typically be for other demographic groups (Millner, 2014; Black Males Statistics, 2014). The troubling circumstances they endure

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are often compounded by more severe traumatic circumstances that make survival difficult and somewhat costly. Still, there is an unadulterated disregard for the positionality of Black males as over-racialized, hyper-criminalized human beings in what is thought to be Post-Racial America. Historically, America's greatest institutions have failed Black males, and urban schools today have proven to be no different (Harper & Davis, 2012). Urban schools around the nation educate hundreds of thousands of Black males each year with below average results (Harper & Davis, 2012; Reckdahl, 2015). National statistics on discipline state that large numbers of Black males are unequally disciplined, suspended and expelled more often from schools every year compared to other demographic groups (Giroux, 2015; UDCR, 2014; Millner, 2014). Subsequent to their departure from urban schools, many Black males enter the department of corrections as well. Unfortunately, school-to-prison pipeline literature suggests that many of these schools are indeed complicit in their arrival at penal institutions (Raible & Irizarry, 2010; ACLU, 2015; Fowler, 2011; Boyd, 2009; Hirschfield, 2008). Simply put, these ubiquitous and disturbing narratives have to change soon for Black males to thrive and have a chance at achieving the American Dream.

Ripe Opportunities

Plainly, this issue can be viewed as a matter of life and death for Black males. Urban schools utilizing 'No Excuses' disciplinary and socialization practices have the ideal opportunity to redeem themselves and fulfill their promises to serve Black males to the best of their abilities. Instead of battling controversy regarding harsh discipline and the school-to-prison pipeline data, urban schools have the opportunity to forge a more refreshing and inclusive path towards educating Black males. This path might include requiring educators to be proficient in disciplines like psychology, ecology and sociology that explain how individuals interact with and respond to

their respective environments (e.g. home, community, school). It may also include a more holistic approach to urban schooling as well, one where educators must develop fundamental understandings of the risk factors that continuously plague students academically, emotionally and psychologically in urban contexts.

Some Black males who are exposed to cumulative trauma happen to be extremely resilient and resourceful individuals, but they still need champions to view them as assets and not liabilities. The same goes for those Black males exposed to similar environmental and communal threats that do not possess intrinsic qualities like perseverance and fortitude; they too need champions and individuals who will recognize them for more than their circumstances. This is only one prism that urban educators who utilize 'No Excuses' methods could glance through to take steps towards transforming the academic and life success of Black males exposed to cumulative trauma. However, through this process, some urban educators may further their appreciation of Black males and not only initiate the repair of relationships broken by historical discrimination, mistrust and subjugation in this country, but also begin the restoration process of healing their own past histories with trauma that might be impacting the trajectory of those relationships (Devega, 2015; Healey & O'Brien, 2015).

Significance of This Study

This study is needed because there are legitimate concerns that discipline policies, socialization practices and aligned behavioral norms at schools that utilize zero tolerance policies like 'No Excuses' could potentially trigger traumas that were suffered by Black males previously. It is also significant because it purposely hoists the psychological and emotional health of urban families to the center of educational and community discourses. Historically, mental health and trauma within families of color were not discussed with outsiders and worse,

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deemed as taboo. There is a harmful stigma associated with attending to mental health issues in communities of color as well as issues of hypermasculinity in men when it comes to seeking assistance from medical professionals. Therefore, positioning these topics as pertinent to the holistic education of Black males could spark a national debate about how to serve these young men more effectively. It might also lessen the stigma and normalize help seeking behaviors. Additionally, having a robust policy dialogue about these issues can be transformative for healing in urban communities overwhelmed by chronic trauma. It can also shed light on the cultural and ethnic values used to cultivate trust and belonging within these populations. Last, it may serve as the impetus for relationships between urban educators and families of color to flourish, yielding wide ranging achievement outcomes and critical knowledges for these groups.

Research Questions

Within this sensitive topic, I pursued three major lines of inquiry with two sub-questions:

a) What were Black males' perceptions of trauma and where did they experience the greatest amount of stress during their childhood and adolescence?

b) How did Black males exposed to cumulative trauma perceive the 'No Excuses' school culture and disciplinary practices?

   o What types of interactions at 'No Excuses' schools have the potential to trigger previous traumas in Black males?

c) Did Black males exposed to cumulative trauma believe that the 'No Excuses' school culture prepared them for college, careers and successful lives?

   o What coping mechanisms have assisted Black males enduring chronic traumatic stress and how have they impacted their abilities to be resilient despite their circumstances?

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Definitions and Key Terms

The following terms are used and defined as follows in this study:

Trauma

The American Psychiatric Association (1994) describes "traumas as stressors involving threats to life or physical integrity, which subsequently causes terror, helplessness or disorganized behavior in children." Slightly nuanced, the Center for Nonviolence and Social Justice defines trauma as "experiences or situations that are emotionally painful and distressing, and that overwhelm people's ability to cope, leaving them powerless" (CNSJ, 2016, p. 1).

Cumulative trauma

Cumulative Trauma exposure refers to the simultaneous or sequential occurrences of child maltreatment—including emotional abuse and neglect, sexual abuse, physical abuse, and witnessing domestic violence—that are chronic and begin in early childhood" (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2016).

Charter Schools

Given their autonomous state, charter schools are public schools that possess the freedom to "implement policies and create structures that [they believe] maximize academic achievement and student motivation" (Griffin et al., 2015, p. 332). They have greater flexibility and less oversight from local school boards of education.

'No Excuses' Charter Schools

The policies and structures that some charter schools implement are called 'No Excuses.' Basically, "the idea is that strict guidelines for how students should behave in and out of class, enforced consistently over time, provide the basis for academic progress and can help close the

achievement gap. Without them, [educators in these schools] believe that the school [will] become chaotic" (Disare, 2016, p. 2).

Zero Tolerance

Zero Tolerance policies are aimed at keeping schools safe and maintaining a disciplined learning environment. Most zero tolerance policies "mandate predetermined consequences or punishments for specific offenses" (Curtis, 2014, p. 1253).

Phenomenology

"Phenomenology is the study of human experience and of the ways things present themselves to us in and through such experience" (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 2).

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

History of Zero Tolerance Policies in America

There are conflicting reports about the etiology of zero tolerance policies, but not many question what they were created to accomplish (American Psychological Association, 2008; Skiba 2004). The term "zero tolerance" has been used in American education for nearly 60 years. One of the first signs of zero tolerance policies emerged during the Civil Rights Movement. It surfaced as reports of violence and civil disobedience permeated the school integration of Blacks in the South (Kafka, 2011; Sojoyner, 2013). Zero tolerance prominently re-emerged several years later as a deterrent to school-aged children during the "Just Say No To Drugs" advertising campaign championed by First Lady Nancy Reagan (Skiba & Peterson, 1999; Skiba & Rausch, 2006). With the United States deeply entrenched in a war on drugs in urban communities, the phrase zero tolerance became a national rallying cry against perpetrators, both users and sellers of narcotics (Stamm, 2012; Skiba & Rausch, 2006). The United States government levied robust and life changing zero tolerance sanctions against individuals who violated new laws (Schuppe, 2016; Stamm, 2012). In the drug reform efforts, violators were severely punished with longer mandatory minimum prison sentences for smaller amounts of drugs (Schuppe, 2016; Stamm, 2012). The likelihood of reoffending was significantly decreased with more prison time and less opportunities for parole (NPR, 2013).

It is more than vital to denote that at the time of these sanctions, drug use in the United States was no longer a stylish fad like the it was in the 70's (Robison, 2002). It became a hazardous social problem to be reckoned with (Ciment, 2015). The conundrum with zero tolerance policies aimed at reducing drug related deaths and cracking down on vigilantes pretending to be above the law was not regarded as an issue. In fact, most red-blooded

Americans, democrats and republicans alike, joined forces to support the idea (Schuppe, 2016; Robison, 2002). The problem with the zero tolerance policies and the War on Drugs itself was that they were nationally and internationally reported as only being issues in majority minority communities, specifically communities where African Americans resided (Hanson, 2017; Stamm, 2012). Thus, police engaged African Americans from high poverty areas in preventive detention, a "means of crime control that relie[d] on detaining and isolating potentially dangerous offenders" (Casella, 2003, p. 55). From then on, minorities not only became the face of the U.S. War on Drugs, but the zero-tolerance movement as a whole (Lopez, 2016).

Due to a spike in school violence during the drug epidemic, the American government implemented several initiatives to protect citizens from individuals they deemed "dangerous," as well as to improve schools and keep students safe. One of the most transformative and longstanding pieces of legislation passed by Congress during this period was the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 (Cramer et al., 2014). In order to receive Title 1 funding under the Act, states were required to pass and apply laws that mandated public schools to use zero tolerance and to expel any student that brought a weapon to school for a year or more (20 U.S.C., 2006). Widely regarded as sacred institutions, public schools, serving innocent children, adopted policies like the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 to preserve the sanctity of all pupils and school stakeholders.

The proliferation of this legislation was so massive that 94% of the nation's schools had already implemented zero tolerance discipline policies for firearms by the 1996-1997 school year (Wallace Jr., et al., 2008). However, in 1999, only five years after those mandates and adoptions took shape nationally, fifteen people were shot and killed, including the two gunmen, and twenty others were wounded at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado (Kohn, 2001). In 2012,

twenty first graders and six adults were shot and killed and two others were wounded by a gunman at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut (Barron, 2012). Between 1999 and 2016, there were 270 school shootings in the United States, both in K-12 settings and on college campuses (Pearle, 2016). Based on new information gathered by a gun control advocacy organization, Everytown for Gun Safety, in the first six weeks of 2018, eighteen school shootings had already occurred in several geographic locations across the United States (Keneally, 2018). That amount eclipsed the total amount of school shootings that occurred the previous year by twice as much (Keneally, 2018). The most recent attack of school gun violence happened in Parkland, Florida on February 14, 2018 at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School (Keneally, 2018). The deadly Valentine's day massacre claimed the lives of seventeen innocent human beings and hospitalized fourteen others, accumulating the second most fatalities in a school since the Sandy Hook tragedy (Keneally, 2018; Rozsa et al., 2018).

After the shooting, President Donald J. Trump tweeted that "no child, teacher or anyone else should ever feel unsafe in an American school" (Trump, 2018). While President Trump is correct in his assertion and his words were expressed in the most poignant and comforting fashion, the reality is that school violence perpetrated by guns is an American normality even in face of zero tolerance. In fact, a great majority of the most affective and premediated exterminations of human life in recent years have transpired on American school grounds (Keneally, 2018). Children, teachers and school stakeholders alike have felt unsafe for decades now. A report by the Washington Post confirmed that "since the 1999 Columbine shooting in Colorado, more than 150,000 students attending at least 170 schools have experienced campus shootings (Swenson & Schmidt, 2018, p. 2). Patel (2018) wrote that there have been over 400 people shot in more than 200 school shootings since Sandy Hook. In response to the mayhem

and to create better structures to keep students safe, legislation was passed in 32 states requiring

schools to regularly conduct school lockdown drills (Campbell, 2018). Six states doubled down

on those requirements and began mandating school administrators to conduct several "active

shooter" drills each year (Campbell, 2018).

Weapons related violence on school campuses have led to doubt, discontentment

bewilderment and agony amongst students, parents, school administrators and board members as

well. Shortly after the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting, one unfazed student

pointedly stated that she was "not really shocked," and that "school shootings happen[ed] all the

time, and then the news just forgets about them" (Swenson & Schmidt, 2018, p. 2). One parent

expressed disbelief that a Columbine-like tragedy took place right across the street from his

home (Swenson & Schmidt, 2018). In response to the ubiquitous debate on gun control and

public-school safety, Donna Korn, a board member of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School,

commented that "we've got the people prepared, we have prepared the campuses, but sometimes

people still find a way to let these horrific things happen" (Rozsa et al., 2018, p. 2). Korn is

referring to the multiple variations of lockdown drills and "active shooter trainings" that the

school engaged before the Valentine's day massacre (Cummings, 2018, p. 1). For law makers

and school administrators though, it is almost as if passing zero tolerance legislation, persistently

training school personnel to adhere to specific guidelines about student safety and hiring more

armed security in schools is enough to remedy the school violence conundrum. Simply, that

approach has not curbed school violence in American schools like the Gun-Free Schools Act

sought to accomplish and thus far, it has failed to prevent mass shootings as well.

One of the reasons that zero tolerances policies like the Gun-Free Schools Act has not

achieved its full potential is that it is devoid of cultural humility and competence, racial and

ethnic awareness and trauma responsive understandings of students its being used with. While the policy itself has its limitations, the school personnel implementing the policies might maintain similar limitations and deficits towards certain populations as well. Put differently, the zero tolerance policies passed and implemented on school grounds were created to punish offenders without regard for their mental and emotional health, or a thorough and empathic understanding of who they are as people. One could argue that had those important concepts been considered before and during the outset of the Gun Free Schools Act of 1994, not only would it have provided the offenders of zero tolerance policies much needed assistance, but it could have probably saved lives in the process as well.

Although this dissertation is not studying gun violence, it is studying the lives of four young men who experienced cumulative trauma and were enrolled in a school that utilized zero tolerance discipline policies. Furthermore, each of the Black males that participated in this study had a close friend or family member that suffered gun violence while they were adolescents. Each of the participants in this study were bullied themselves or had close friends who were bullied. Two of the participants failed a grade and all of them considered themselves academically deficient at numerous points during their school journeys. One of the participants was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia as a child, another battled suicidal ideations, a third had debilitating anger issues and the last one suffered depression. The participants stories will be elucidated more thoroughly in the findings chapter of this manuscript. However, it was important to provide a brief snippet about them here to describe how similar their experiences are to those of Nikolas Cruz. This is especially critical in a dissertation study that aims to understand the psychological, emotional and physiological ramifications of enduring multiple experiences with trauma before age eighteen. Thus, dissecting the life experiences of Nikolas Cruz as stimulating

fodder for what might transpire when policies are not responsive and ill-suited for the populations they serve as well as what might occur when the threshold of stress tolerance is breached.

Nikolas Cruz, the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School mass murderer and rumored white supremacist (Allen et al., 2018), was orphaned as an infant and transient throughout most of his adolescence (Rozsa et al., 2018). He was a troubled, distressed and depressed young man, taking several medications to manage his emotional and psychological incapacities (Schuppe, 2018). He spent substantial time in mental health care facilities receiving treatments for those illnesses (Schuppe, 2018). He was expelled from two private schools at one point in his school journey and had been held back twice in different schools as well (Schuppe, 2018). He was described by former classmates as being "erratic and a little weird" (Rozsa et al., 2018, p. 2). Some students said that they wanted to stay away from him because he looked dangerous and no good (Schuppe, 2018). It was reported that he exhibited disturbing behaviors daily at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. The behavioral offenses ranged from acts like "fighting and cursing at teachers," (Schuppe, 2018, p. 3) to "selling knives out of a lunchbox [and] posting on Instagram about guns and killing animals," (Rozsa et al., 2018, p. 2) to kicking out school windows and bringing bullets to school (Schuppe, 2018).

For these behaviors, as well as a litany of others, Nikolas Cruz found himself expelled from Stoneman Douglas High School, the third school expulsion of his life. A year later, Cruz returned to the same school that expelled him and brutally murdered seventeen people and wounded several others (Rozsa et al., 2018). The crime he committed was not only one of the most heinous and murderous acts of violence on school grounds, but in modern American history. Making matters worse, he committed these unforgivable acts in Parkland, Florida, which

was voted Florida's safest city in 2017 according to a study conducted by the National Council for Home Safety and Security (Sanchez, 2018).

Although Cruz had documented mental health struggles, adverse childhood experiences and known behavioral issues at multiple checkpoints throughout his adolescence, he still seemed to be extremely misunderstood by the very people that spent the most time with him. The family he moved in with after the death of his mother described him as "depressed and quirky," but nothing that would hint the magnitude of violence he unleashed at Stoneman Douglas High School (Rozsa et al., 2018, p. 4). The math teacher that taught him just one year before the murders categorized him "as a regular high school kid," and one that "didn't act up in class [and] wasn't loud or boisterous" (Rozsa et al., 2018, p. 3). School administrators and mental health facilities alike admitted that they missed several warning signs along the way with him (Schuppe, 2018). The FBI also received an anonymous tip about Cruz's plan to kill people and failed to act on it (Suarez Sang, 2018). Now, due to his egregious transgressions, he will spend the rest of his natural born life in the penitentiary, unless a jury decides otherwise.

Nikolas Cruz's story is an important one to tell in relation to the participants' stories that will be emphasized later in the manuscript. However, Cruz's narrative is also significant when discussing and analyzing zero-tolerance policies and debates regarding gun-violence as well. It exposed the limitations and loopholes of one size fits all policies as well as how seemingly established protocols failed to protect the very people they were designed to keep safe, victims of bullying and students with disabilities, like Cruz (Brown, 2018). It also highlighted how the individuals who created and implemented these policies were universally fixated on safety and routine but seemed to conveniently neglect and devalue mental and emotional health while instituting the policies on school campuses. One can only wonder whether Cruz's mental and

emotional health were comprehensively considered by school administration when he enrolled, and was subsequently bullied, mocked, suspended and expelled from school, year after year. Was it the third expulsion from school that triggered his rage and set him on a path to destruction, psychologically and emotionally? Was it the death of his mother and father early on in his life? Or, was it an accumulation of his failures to acclimate in school, struggles with rampant transiency, abuse and neglect, family fragmentation and psychological troubles that contributed to his demise? Is the school, the FBI or the mental health facilities he frequented culpable in any way for what transpired after each one of them admitted missing his signs of terror (Suarez Sang, 2018)?

This is not an attempt to remove or lessen the responsibility for Cruz's actions. He is a confessed mass murderer and rumored white supremacist. Additionally, out of respect for the victims in this case as well as individuals who have been gunned down in other capacities where the perpetrators life histories and extenuating circumstances were never strategically placed under microscopes like Cruz's has, my purpose is not to make him a sympathetic figure. The intention here is to ask critical questions and present a divergent viewpoint about how historically zero tolerance policies have impacted some demographic groups more than others, as well as how seldom they consider the cultural, emotional and psychosocial elements that could contribute mightily to their overall efficacy. Due to these unfortunate oversights, the laborious efforts of law makers and school administrators have been relegated to mere reactionary and not proactive responsiveness to mass shootings and other forms of gun violence on school campuses.

Broken Windows Theory Zero Tolerance

Opposed to creating policies preventing weapons on school campuses, some schools created more refined and strategic zero tolerance discipline policies that focused on managing

and controlling student behavior as a proxy for safety. This is not to state that weapons were not a huge focus of newer regimes who had implemented zero tolerance policies, because they were. However, there was a philosophical shift towards the *Broken Windows* theory (1982) approach to discipline, which held that being strict and firm with smaller offenses, would prevent larger, more serious ones from occurring. Put differently, faithful zero tolerance advocates believed that punishing students for things that were considered harmless under normal circumstances or removing perceived unruly students from the classroom altogether would trigger compliance (Ewing, 2000) and produce a more positive school atmosphere for the students that remained in the classroom (Public Agenda Foundation, 2004). These policies were designed to curb more school related issues such as absenteeism, truancy and fighting, all the way down to the more trivial issues, like excessive talking, dress-code violations, not following directions, being insubordinate and disrespectful (Wallace Jr., et al., 2008; Hirschfield, 2008). It is these types of zero tolerance discipline policies that I have chosen to highlight throughout the rest of this manuscript.

In most schools that utilized these types of zero tolerance policies, there were "mandated predetermined consequences or punishments for specific offenses" (Curtis, 2014, p. 1253). However, evidence confirmed that this approach was only partly accurate. The other portion of the evidence seemed to yield that there were mandated predetermined consequences for specific populations of students as well. One researcher stated that schools that utilized zero tolerance discipline policies singled out students of color, who were said to already be perceived as defiant limit pushers before the adoption of zero tolerance (Casella, 2003). They also maintained that students of color had a higher probability to experience crime and bring neighborhood violence onto school grounds more than any other demographic group (Casella, 2001). Researchers who

analyzed the association between childhood poverty and academic achievement argued that most students from impoverished communities were 2.2 times more likely to experience violent crime than other demographic groups that were not poor (Duncan & Brooks-Gun, 2000). Hence, the pervasive need for proponents of zero tolerance policies to advocate for systems that monitor and control these populations more. Those ideologies remained true despite research that proved public schools were very safe nationally amongst all demographics (Fowler, 2011).

Critics of zero tolerance blamed teachers for lacking robust behavior management and de-escalation skills in the classroom, especially when educating minorities (Nelson, 2008; Vavrus & Cole, 2002). One researcher claimed that most disciplinary issues resulted from cultural differences between teachers and students (Delpit, 1995). In a 2004 national survey of middle and high school teachers, 76% cited disciplinary problems as the reason that they were ineffective in the classroom (Brownstein, 2010). Other studies showed that teacher subjectivity was one of the main culprits as to why African American students were treated harsher than their White counterparts who committed similar offenses (Skiba, 2004; ACLU, 2008). A study conducted by the U. S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights found that White students were disciplined at a much larger rate than students of color for behaviors like "smoking, vandalism, obscene language and leaving without permission" (Brownstein, 2010, p. 26). However, Black students received a much larger amount of behavior referrals than White students for offenses like not following instructions, excessive talking, blatant disrespect, not tracking the teacher, being off task or loitering (Brownstein, 2010; Vandiver, 2003; Wun, 2014). The behavior referrals from some of these teachers claimed that minority children were dangerous, academically deficient, and incapable of conducting themselves without pervasive monitoring.

Black boys in particular were widely thought to be much older than they actually were and were often assumed guilty until proven innocent (Wun, 2014). Historically, Wun (2014) noted that Blacks were "structurally positioned in opposition to normality and all of its signifiers including demonstrations of civility, respectability and obedience" (p. 4). In this situation, teacher subjectivity created and reified pedagogies of oppression, compliance and assimilation. Wun's narrative isn't new though, as African Americans both educated and undereducated, rich or poor, have all battled racial injustices for centuries (Vandiver, 2003). Some scholars of color have posited that even in the 21st century, many still believe that mere Blackness mirrors delinquency (James, 1996). That notion is not so dissimilar from what some highly educated individuals once thought about Black Americans a century earlier. In 1860, Dr. Van Evrie described an educated Negro as "unnatural and repulsive," and believed him to be a "social monstrosity" (Baynton, 2001, p. 38). With this type of vile disregard for even the most educated of negroes, what might be said or done in school spaces to those negroes who are undereducated or poor?

Wun (2014) also depicted zero tolerance policies as Anti-Black racist practices that were created to preserve order, protect citizens, prevent crime and empower young people to make safe life choices, but that they ended up having the opposite effect on those groups. Giroux (2015) argued, "Children were being punished instead of educated in U.S. schools" and that harmful zero tolerance policies contributed to that belief (p. 2). The punishment that Giroux eluded to also included students being handcuffed, body slammed, verbally assaulted and persistently isolated within school spaces as well (Ward, 2014). Still, some school administrators contended that zero tolerance policies had been effective in helping them apply sound judgment to discipline in their buildings (Eckland, 1999). They reported that zero tolerance served as the

ultimate deterrent for students considering school violence (Casella, 2003; Eckland, 1999). However, data analyzing the efficacy of zero tolerance policies painted a different picture than the one described by some school administrators. Supplementary research suggested that schools that utilized zero tolerance policies were not only responsible for pushing students of color out of school, but also possessed higher rates of suspensions overall as well as poorer school climates for students of color (Cramer et al., 2014).

It was also reported that African American students were 3.5 times more likely to be suspended than their White counterparts were in schools that utilized zero tolerance discipline methods (Cramer et al., 2014). In addition to this data, the New York Civil Liberties Union (2011) conveyed that students who had disabilities were four times more likely to be suspended than students who did not possess disabilities in zero tolerance schools. Further perpetuating this disturbing trend, students who were repeatedly suspended from these schools often ended up interacting with the juvenile justice system at one point during their adolescence (Cerrone, 1999). According to the Civil Rights Data Collection, "Black students represent[ed] 16% of student enrollment, [but] they represent[ed] 27% of students referred to law enforcement and 31% of students subjected to a school-related arrest" (Duncan & Lhamon, 2014, p. 1). So, it is not implausible to believe that the zero tolerance disciplinary tactics utilized with this population not only leads to more school dropouts, but future recidivism among juvenile offenders as well (Ward, 2014; Bowditch, 1993; Raffeaele-Mendez, 2003; Tobin et al, 1996; National Center on Secondary Education & Transition, 2012). The Public Policy Research Institute at Texas A & M University clarified the presupposition by claiming, "The single greatest predictor of future involvement in the juvenile [justice] system [was] a history of disciplinary referrals at school" (Fowler, 2011, p. 16).

Minority students were not the only stakeholders affected by zero tolerance policies though. In the 2004 national survey of middle and high school teachers mentioned earlier, those who attempted to enforce zero tolerance policies often felt pushed out and abandoned by school leadership (Brownstein, 2010). A few teachers were even stripped of their disciplinary roles and reported feeling powerless, exhausted, and hopeless afterwards (Brownstein, 2010). The Broken Windows (1982) theoretical approach to zero tolerance has not only caused many highly qualified teachers to leave the classroom over the past few decades but seems to have also contributed to more students being suspended and expelled from school. Sadly, the more stringent focus on punishing smaller, more nebulous classroom behaviors has affected and alienated the nation's most vulnerable populations. Those populations include students with disabilities, linguistically diverse students, and minority students. The evidence also showed that African American students have been impacted the greatest by the use of zero tolerance policies and behavior referrals, with a large percentage of them forecasted to spend time at correctional facilities at some point during their lives.

Overall, the constant inconsistencies in implementation, biased teacher subjectivities, widespread misapplication and failure to properly follow protocols has caused many critics to question if zero tolerance policies have actually created safe and positive school environments for all children at any point since the passage of the Gun-Free Schools Act. A study by the American Psychological Association (2008) claimed that zero tolerance policies had proven not to be effective deterrents in reducing school violence (Graves & Mirsky, 2007; Brownstein, 2010; Ward, 2014). This finding is supported by the uptick in school shootings over the past twenty years, but especially due to having eighteen school shootings in the span of forty-five days on grounds that were supposed to be sacred (Aiello, 2018).

Even President Donald J. Trump announced that he would "get rid of gun-free zones on schools," albeit under the guise to reduce restrictions on second amendment rights for gun-carrying Americans (Barondes, 2017, p. 1). His review of the embattled legislation unearthed the perilous double standard that in certain states, common people with licenses, not law enforcement, can tote weapons on school grounds without reprimand (Giffords Law Center, 2017). Loopholes like these not only complicate the effectiveness of the maligned zero tolerance policy, but it further endangers thousands of vulnerable students as well (Giffords Law Center, 2017; Barondes, 2017). The cumulative evidence in this chapter provides significant caution as well as verified reasonable doubts regarding the efficacy of zero tolerance policies, regardless of whether they attempted to outlaw guns like the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 or punish students for smaller offenses hoping that they would prevent larger ones like the Broken Windows approach. Either way, the results have not been successful. Therefore, schools attempting to construct responsive school environments that reduce school violence and maintain student safety should look to more culturally responsive, trauma-informed and restorative justice policies as opposed to zero tolerance ones (Graves & Mirsky, 2007). Schools should also dedicate more time to creating policies that leverage mental and emotional health and those that are responsive to the communities that they serve.

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'No Excuses' Charter Schools

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According to recent data collected in 2016-2017 by the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, the United States of America had over 6,900 charter schools that enrolled over three million students nationwide ("Estimated Charter," 2017). Charter schools are public schools that create structures they feel will maximize academic achievement as well as school culture and climate. These schools tend to possess greater flexibility and less oversight from

local school boards too (Griffin et al., 2015). Despite research regarding the wide-ranging misuse and injurious effects of zero tolerance policies on urban youth as well as urban educators themselves, many charter schools developed similar ones. The most popular method of discipline and socialization derived from zero tolerances policies used in charter management organizations (CMOs) is called 'No Excuses'. The etiology of the term 'No Excuses' is said to have been created by Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) founders David Levin and Michael Feinberg in 1994 (Lack, 2009). The 'No Excuses' slogan is rooted in the belief that every child can achieve academic greatness (Lack, 2009). Thus, KIPP schools across the nation leverage the mantra "there are no shortcuts to success" (Lack, 2009, p. 128; KIPP Foundation, 2006a). Although the 'No Excuses' method was heavily steeped in charter schools during the early 2000s, it gained tremendous notoriety from Thernstrom & Thernstrom's book, *No Excuses: Closing the Racial Gap in Learning* (Cheng et al., 2017). Disare (2016) summarized, "The [basic] idea [behind 'No Excuses'] is that strict guidelines for how students should behave in and out of class, enforced consistently over time, provide the basis for academic progress and can help close the achievement gap" (p. 2). Devoid of these mandates and regimented socialization habits, educators believed that the school would be out of control (Disare, 2016). When Success Academy CEO Eva Moskowitz was asked why her network held firm to their 'No Excuses' practices and belief systems, she expressed in a Wall Street Journal op-ed, "The answer is that Success Academy's 34 principals and I deeply believe that if we lessened our standards for student comportment, the education of the 11,000 children in our schools would profoundly suffer" (Disare, 2016, p. 2).

Most, if not all charters employing 'No Excuses' practices target high-poverty urban areas to plant their roots. Minority students who reside in high-poverty urban areas across the

country have been traditionally underserved by their school systems. Thus, their local schools'

past failures and current struggles created a breeding ground for charter schools to compete for

the opportunity to serve families who were desperately seeking better educational options for

their children. Unfortunately, there is no data that explicitly explains how many of the 6,900

charter schools in the U.S. actually utilize zero tolerance policies like 'No Excuses'. However,

there is evidence that charters that might be unconsciously utilizing 'No Excuses' methods that

masquerade under different nomenclature. Most charter schools, not just those that subscribe to

'No Excuses' methodologies, tend to have flamboyant mission statements that are highly

distinguishable depending on their vision for students (Lake & Hill, 2006). Their commitment to

rigorously educate traditionally underserved children from urban areas encourages mission and

value-focused leaders from various locales to rally around a common purpose. At most American

charter schools, the common purpose likely revolves around preparing all students for college,

careers and successful lives (Baer & Strawn, 2017). To accomplish these audacious objectives,

CMOs institute longer school days and school years, Saturday classes, data driven instruction

methods, college preparatory curricula, cultures of high aspiration and strict disciplinary codes of

conduct (Palmaffy, 1998; Lack, 2009; Sondel et al., 2014; Boyd et al., 2014; Goodman, 2013;

Bean, 2013).

Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) founders, David Levin and Mike Feinberg,

conveyed that applying these criteria effectively bolstered their ability to eliminate excuses most

commonly used when educating children from urban areas (Lack, 2009; Tough, 2011). So,

schools like KIPP spent almost 20,000 hours in school each year, which is 8,000 hours more than

traditional public schools spent educating urban students (Lack, 2009). Evidence claimed that

KIPP educators dedicated 700 more hours towards instruction each year as well (Lack, 2009).

The "Work Hard, Be Nice" mentality exhibited by KIPP teachers drew glowing remarks from founder Mike Feinberg. In 2005, Feinberg claimed that the KIPP experience was equivalent to "receiving five years' worth of education in only three years" (Lack, 2009, p. 129).

'No Excuses' Charter School Culture and Student Outcomes

'No Excuses' schools like KIPP received prominent commendation when Oprah Winfrey, the billionaire and multitalented celebrity, said that their academic environments can "dramatically turn students' lives around" (Lack, 2009, p. 128). Her analysis was prompted by the recent success of charters nationally, as well as their fervent belief that all children can learn and matriculate to college (Lack, 2009; Carter, 2000). To date, there has not been much longitudinal data collected beyond the K-12 experience for students of color who were enrolled in 'No Excuses' schools. However, KIPP boasted that the mere enrollment of students of color in their schools dramatically increased the likelihood that they will get to and get through college (Boyd et al., 2014). Current research compiled by Mathematica Policy showed that KIPP schools around the country outperformed traditional public schools that instructed similar populations in reading and math (Boyd et al., 2014; Goodman, 2013; Ferguson et al., 2011). Studies from Stanford's Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) reported similar results from KIPP schools when compared to their counterparts (Boyd et al., 2014; Lack, 2009).

Other successes educating students from high-poverty areas included the Bruce Randolph School of Denver and the Urban Prep Academy of Chicago, which both former President Barack Obama and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan spoke highly about (Tough, 2011). Both schools graduated a very high percentage of seniors using 'No Excuses' discipline methods (Tough, 2011). In 2010, the Bruce Randolph School of Denver graduated 72.4% of its students (Asmar, 2011), and Urban Prep Academy boasted a 70% four-year graduation rate as well as an

87% five-year graduation rate for its students in 2016 (Illinois Report Card, 2016). Wesley

Elementary, in the high poverty Acres Homes area, made national waves using approaches with

students of color in the 80s and late 90s that are now considered 'No Excuses' methods

(Palmaffy, 1998). On the Stanford achievement assessments, Dr. Thaddeus Lott had Wesley

Elementary, located in one of the poorest neighborhoods in Houston, ranked twelfth out one

hundred eighty-two schools (Chaddock, 1999). This accomplishment marked a major feat for Dr.

Lott and his staff and was thought to be unheard of at the time, especially with the populations

they served. What made his accolades even more profound as the school leader, was prior to him

implementing his culture of high expectations model at Wesley Elementary in 1975, only a

dismal eighteen percent of Dr. Lott's third graders achieved at or above grade level in reading

comprehension on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (Palmaffy, 1998).

However, by 1980, 85% of students at Wesley Elementary were meeting or exceeding

their grade level expectations (Palmaffy, 1998). By 1996 though, all of Dr. Lott's third graders

passed the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) in reading proficiency tests (Palmaffy,

1998). This was a tremendous success because throughout the entire state of Texas, less than

70% of all third graders in schools serving students of colors passed (Palmaffy, 1998). Dr. Lott

and his staff accomplished these goals by investing in computer technology, career development

programs and parental engagement workshops (Palmaffy, 1998). Lott also instituted popular

practices that mirrored 'No Excuses' ones like arduous teacher trainings, firm disciplinary

systems, maintaining high expectations for all stakeholders as well as having a foundational

belief that every child can achieve (Palmaffy, 1998). He stated that novice teachers did not come

prepared to instruct, so they had to be trained (Palmaffy, 1998). Lott's culture of high

expectations model, which commenced in 1975 was strikingly similar to the model that KIPP

founders created in 1994 in their work with urban children.

A few other triumphs by 'No Excuses' charters were thoroughly critiqued though. One

study conducted by New American Schools (NAS) examined the achievement of fifth graders

across three KIPP schools and juxtaposed the results using similar variables with students from

traditional public schools (Lack, 2009). The outcomes stated that KIPP students excelled more

academically than students enrolled at traditional public schools, but that the outcomes needed to

be unpacked (Lack, 2009). A researcher who analyzed the NAS study commented that even

though it looked like KIPP students excelled more, that there was still reason to be skeptical

(Lack, 2009). Case in point, if traditional public-school students spent 45,000 more minutes

learning than KIPPsters, there is a large possibility that they would have achieved more and

performed substantially greater on performance tests as well. Thus, while the results showed

tremendous progress for KIPPsters, it is reasonable to assume that some might argue that the

conclusions were too difficult to justify.

A mixed methods KIPP study that analyzed school culture and academic performance

also found that students enrolled in their schools performed significantly better than similar

students attending other schools on 66% of fifth grade assessments (Ross et al., 2005). Similarly,

a study conducted by the Education Policy Institute (EPI) yielded that KIPPsters displayed a

"dramatic increase well above normal growth rates in reading, language and mathematics"

examining 24 fifth-grade groups (EPI, 2015, p. 12). However, in both studies, some researchers

have questioned the legitimacy of the results given the substantial time advantage that KIPP

schools have in relation to others educational institutions (Lack, 2009). Other studies regarding

KIPP have shown that students regressed at specific grade levels in reading all over the country,

albeit a slight drop. In 2005, at KIPP Los Angeles, sixth graders fell one percentage point from 40% to 39% in reading and a similar dip occurred at a KIPP school in Atlanta around the same time from 44% to 38% (Lack, 2009). Nevertheless, the academic achievements of some 'No Excuses' charter schools should be recognized as valuable and legitimate, even with the significant benefit of having 45,000 more minutes per school year than traditional public schools do. Some charter networks do exceedingly impressive work with poverty-stricken children of color despite the "by any means necessary" paths they take to get there.

'No Excuses' Charter Schools and Discipline

'No Excuses' discipline is a heavily scrutinized mechanism primarily implemented with children of color under the guise of closing the achievement gap and developing critically conscious human beings. Due to this interpretation, many CMOs have distanced themselves from the 'No Excuses' method of discipline and socialization, referring to it as a false dichotomy (Altman, 2016). Put differently, CMOs were trying to communicate that just because they utilize zero tolerance discipline policies, have strict guidelines for behavior and high expectations for academics does not mean that they are 'No Excuses' charter schools and would rather not be called such. Still, a large majority of networks believe that the practices are indeed necessary when educating children of color in urban and rural communities. Most 'No Excuses' schools operate with a "by any means necessary" attitude that they believe justifies their actions (Lack, 2009). However, the enrollment practices at 'No Excuses' schools provide more clarity into their mentalities. The aforementioned ideology that merely enrolling into 'No Excuses' schools gives students of color head starts on college preparation is questionable. It begets the question of what price students have to pay to achieve academically in those spaces. Critics of the practice maintain that the price is costly. In a book chapter that discussed the racial opportunity costs

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(ROCs) of charter schools and parent involvement, Griffin and colleagues (2015) stated that the ROCs for students of color were continuous and harsh and that more often than not students were disciplined for not conforming to the prescribed roles that were selected for them.

Enrollees of 'No Excuses' schools must submit and conform to the 'No Excuses' structure to remain enrolled there. For years, 'No Excuses' schools like KIPP only accepted students who agreed to sign *Commitment to Excellence* contracts (Lack, 2009; Goodman, 2009). These contracts may be titled differently depending on the network, and the students are not the only stakeholders who have to sign these contracts. The parents, guardians, staff members and even the teachers have to commit to the previously written and largely administrative collaborated rules and guidelines. At minimum however, students must comply with over a dozen responsibilities that are linked to school values before becoming an official KIPP student. The full *Student Commitment to Excellence* contract can be found in Appendix A at the end of this manuscript, but an excerpt from a student contract at KIPP S.T.A.R. (2006) is located below:

Table 1: Excerpt from KIPP S.T.A.R. Contract.

Responsibility -- We take responsibility for our actions, for the success of our team, for the achievement of our school, and for the strength of our community.
- I will arrive at school by 7:25 A.M. and remain at school until 5:00 P.M. (Monday-Friday.)   - I will come to school at 9:00 A.M. on appropriate Saturdays and remain at school until 1:00 P.M.   - I will attend school in the summer.   - I will follow the KIPP S.T.A.R. dress code.   - I will strive to take care of my personal belongings, my classroom, my school building and my community.

Table 1 (cont'd).

Enthusiasm -- We welcome each day and learning experience with a positive attitude. We seek new experiences and remain flexible and optimistic.
• I will come to school each day with a positive attitude, ready to learn. I welcome new learning experiences and promise to remain flexible and optimistic.
I understand that failure to adhere to these commitments can cause me to lose various KIPP S.T.A.R. privileges and can ultimately lead to my returning to my home school.

After reading a small part of the student contract, the "by any means necessary" mentality seems to be evident throughout. Noticeably, the contract stipulates that students *will* do all of these things or they will lose their privileges and possibly be kicked out of the school. The privileges that could be lost might include opportunities to go to recess, go on field trips or participate in enrichment activities and other extracurricular activities on school grounds (KIPP S.T.A.R., 2006). It is important to note that some students enrolling into 'No Excuses' schools lack the capacity to fulfill all of the responsibilities in the contract. Students who have never been taught how to be responsible and/or respectful, or those exposed to cumulative trauma who have nothing to be enthusiastic and positive about, may have difficulties adapting within the 'No Excuses' space. This is why critics contended that most 'No Excuses' schools sought to punish first and teach second. The hidden curriculum might be too tough for certain groups of students to grasp, further increasing their odds of losing earned privileges and being kicked out of school. Therefore, it behooves educators at 'No Excuses' schools to, as Tyack (1974) stated, "teach social and moral obligations," not just merely expect students to oblige to them (p. 49).

This inadequacy within the 'No Excuses' structure seemed to have affected its credibility with stakeholders and critics alike. Touting a "whatever it takes" motto to close the achievement gap with urban children, while simultaneously denigrating and threatening them to conform to

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guidelines that have not been explained or taught, can damage some children emotionally as well as complicate trust. These realities are exacerbated when students are faced with the dilemma to conform or be sent back to the schools in which they came from. Although Cambridge College professor Jim Horn confessed that he had never been inside a KIPP school, he candidly refers to KIPP environments as a "New Age eugenics intervention at best, and a concentration camp at worst," (Boyd et al., 2014, p. 1). This inflammatory explanation of the 'No Excuses' environment derives from a belief that these structures force students to dis-identify with their own cultures and negotiate new ones as they try to attain success (Boyd et al., 2014). Practices that have the ability to affect students in these ways have been widely discouraged by developmental psychologists like William Glasser (1998) and Becky Bailey (2000) as well.

For example, KIPP schools not only require students to sign *Commitment to Excellence* contracts, but they re-socialize them in an indoctrination process called KIPPnotizing (KIPP S.T.A.R., 2006). During the KIPPnotizing process, they teach children what it means to be a KIPPster, how they should behave and live up to the KIPP name as well as how to look like a KIPPster in and out of the classroom (KIPP S.T.A.R., 2006). K-12 students are re-taught simple behaviors like walking in straight lines, sharpening pencils, sitting down, hanging book sacks, getting tissue and asking to use the restrooms (holding up two fingers crossed, silently until the teacher notices) (Firstline Schools, 2010; Smith, 2015). Students with severe disabilities are also re-socialized, if they are able to enroll and gain access to the regimented structure. However, some students with disabilities do not live up to the high expectations of 'No Excuses' schools. In a study that examined the racial opportunity costs of navigating charter schools, Griffin and colleagues (2015) illustrated how a disabled student could not walk on a straight line to the satisfaction of a 'No Excuses' teacher and he was vilified and disciplined for it (Griffin et al.,

2015). Based on various reports, some 'No Excuses' schools seemed to have a reputation for serving very small percentages of students with disabilities and not serving them in proportion to the rest of the students enrolled when they did (Sondel, 2014).

Goodman analyzed four of the most popular methods that 'No Excuses' charter management organizations use: "pervasive adult monitoring of students, targeting behaviors tangential to learning, attributing independent agency to children who deviate, and student derogation by adults" (Goodman, 2013, p. 89). She found that 'No Excuses' educators justified their practices like the one mentioned above with disabled students by claiming that no second of the school day can be squandered when educating poor urban children (Goodman, 2013). Goodman also found that students of color were disciplined for minor offenses such as talking, laughing and making jokes at 'No Excuses' charters (Goodman, 2013; Firstline Schools, 2010). Her analysis also revealed that the entire 'No Excuses' environment was regulated with each stakeholder playing a pre-scripted role (Goodman, 2013). Students were told to shake hands with teachers and to look them directly in the eyes as they entered class (Goodman, 2013; KIPP STAR, 2006). Other common practices that were prevalent at 'No Excuses' schools included breakfast and lunch being completely silent until students were told to speak (Goodman, 2013). In some schools, students were only allowed to have one pass for the bathroom per day (Goodman, 2013). Based on the evidence and depictions provided thus far, a reasonable argument can be made that basic humanity, dignity and respect could be lost in the process for youth attending these schools.

These environments not only have a tremendous impact on students, but teachers and parents as well. Each stakeholder is required to complete a contract that resembles the *Commitment to Excellence* contract mandated for students (located in Appendix B). Teachers are

on the front line at 'No Excuses' schools and must be prepared to conform as well (Goodman, 2013). Teachers who do not conform or are not seen as a culture fit might be encouraged to leave (Smith, 2015). In a study by Smith (2015) of the Match Teacher Residency and the Relay Graduate School of Education, two programs that utilize 'No Excuses' methods, he found that teachers were told if "You want to teach, but don't want to teach in a No Excuses style, [then] our program isn't right for you" (p. 2). An exploratory study that examined teacher burnout in 'No Excuses' schools suggested that there were massive efficacy concerns for teachers due to mental and emotional exhaustion (Torres, 2015). For example, most, if not all, KIPP teachers were 'on call' after the school day culminated for parents and students to assist with school related matters (Lack, 2009; Feinberg, 2000; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003). Those that do stay end up finding other employment once they run out of steam, either due to culture fit issues or simply being overworked (Torres, 2015; Goodman, 2013; Chaddock, 1999). Those teachers who align with the vision are tasked with making sure that students present themselves in acceptable ways in order to appear ready to learn. Since students are susceptible to the "categories through which they are recognized and judged" (Davies et al., 2013, p. 682), teachers never allow them to enter a classroom if their uniform shirts, pants, shoes, socks, undershirts, haircuts, wristbands, jewelry, or hair-colors violate school policies (Firstline Schools, 2010; Griffin, 2014; KIPP Philadelphia, 2011). Griffin (2014) described philosophy detailing how he followed young men in the hallways to make sure that their hair wasn't styled naturally and how he punished young people for not having items the school leaders knew their families couldn't afford. He depicted an environment where "looking appropriate" wasn't determined by the parents or guardians, but by school personnel (Griffin, 2014; WDSU News, 2015).

Teachers are well trained to stand firm by their convictions and to never pause to wait on children (Goodman, 2013). All students must demonstrate "100% compliance, 100% of the time," and in the allotted time given for acquiescence (Canter, 2010). There are 'No Excuses' because the people who "chose" to navigate the environment fully understand what they have signed up for (Smith, 2015). One of the founders of North Star, a charter network of 'No Excuses' schools had this to say for students who failed to live up to the 'No Excuses' expectations: "This school is all about choice. . . . See that back door? See any locks on it? Is this a prison? Am I forcing you to be here? . . . If you cannot live by our rules, if you cannot adapt to this place, I can show you the back door" (Smith, 2015, p. 3).

Media and National Debates on 'No Excuses' Charter School Discipline

Charters who utilize 'No Excuses' methodologies have also been criticized in the media. There have been numerous civil rights complaints and lawsuits regarding 'No Excuses' discipline filed in New Orleans over the last two years. One complaint alleged that "zero tolerance policies like the 'No Excuses' model employed [at] Collegiate Academies [did] not target violent or majorly disruptive behaviors, but more often than not push[ed] students out of school for very minor infractions" (Calhoun, Lellelid, & Quigley, 2014, p. 4). Some of those minor infractions included high schoolers refusing to walk on straight lines silently with their hands to their sides. The frustration with 'No Excuses' practices caused nearly one hundred students at Collegiate Academies to abruptly leave the school in 2013 (Simons, 2014). The following day, a little under two dozen students left in the middle of the day to protest what they called prejudicial discipline policies (Simons, 2014). A month later, the same students delivered a list of criticisms about Collegiate Academies to the board of directors (Simons, 2014). Their complaints were "we have no textbooks to review when we study, we get disciplined for

anything and everything, and we want hot meals and healthy food with taste" (Simons, 2014, p. 2).

At nearby Joseph S. Clark Preparatory High School in New Orleans, students "staged a sit-in" and refused to participate in the 'No Excuses' culture and climate after one of their favorite teachers was terminated (Simons, 2014, p. 2). The school was forced to cancel all classes for eleventh graders on that day and the principal ended up being fired days later (Simons, 2014). Parents, critics and researchers are convinced that 'No Excuses' methods may not only cause students to walk out purposely but might actually push them out of school and into the prison pipeline as well (Griffin et al., 2015). Some students of color who attend 'No Excuses' schools like Collegiate Academies have lived with anger for being portrayed as victims and perpetrators, and it did not help that the schools also viewed them as such (Goodman, 2013). There were reports about students at 'No Excuses' schools being treated like criminals in the penitentiary (WDSU News, 2013). They remarked that they were tired of being sent to the Time Out Center, (T.O.C.) or to some other secluded room for minor misbehaviors (Griffin, 2014; Williams, 2011). Many parents viewed holding areas like the Time Out Center (T.O.C.) as New Age Departments of Corrections (D.O.C.). After hearing about her child being held in one of those secluded areas, one passionate parent exclaimed, "You lock dogs up. You don't lock humans up!" (Williams, 2011, p. 3). The persistent isolation, supervision and conformity led one parent to claim that the children in these schools reminded her of "slaves on an auction block" (WDSU News, 2013).

Another prevalently discussed concern amongst parents and students enrolled in 'No Excuses' schools is the propensity and desire for CMOs to hire young, energetic white teachers who are largely foreign to the populations they instruct (Sullivan, 2014). In 2014, an article

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written by a student in New Orleans, protested that his school hired majority white teachers and staff and that the teachers did not know anything about him or his classmates racially, culturally or ethnically (Sullivan, 2014). Along the same lines, one high school teacher who pushed back on the 'No Excuses' methodology claimed that "their fundamental assumptions about student and community cultures [were] misguided at best and at worst [were] hopelessly mired in racist, classist, [and] deficit view[s]" (Smith, 2015). Other critics of 'No Excuses' schools believe that their philosophies are tied to social Darwinism (Well, Lopez, Scott, & Holme, 1999). Put differently, they believe that the environments are primed for the academically savvy and elite to remain and the non-conformists to be sent back to the schools they came from.

Debates regarding student discipline, voice and freedom in these environments have propelled some interesting dialogue too. Mike Feinberg, co-founder of KIPP, was interviewed about these claims among others and he stated that if critics were to actually situate themselves in the environment, then they would sense the joy beyond the structure and discipline (Lack, 2009). Other discussions highlighted that 'No Excuses' schools claimed to "have a program guaranteed to work with children" (Chaddock, 1999, p. 2). However, a recent research study challenged these notions. Goodman (2013) conducted a survey study of fifty-six high school seniors that examined the connection between regimented structures like 'No Excuses' and ideas of self-confidence, self-love and emotional consciousness. The study found that not only did the children enrolled in 'No Excuses' schools possess little to no voice or freedom to negotiate, but that the students belittled themselves and refused to lean on their own judgment even when presented with opportunities to do so (Goodman, 2013).

One conversation in the Goodman article with a 'No Excuses' student revealed that he thought that "freedom in schools was a bad thing," and that students were not supposed to come

to school expecting to have it (Goodman, 2013, p. 94). His depiction and understanding of freedom is revealing and might be emblematic of the expectations that people have for him in school as well as in other environments too. The idea that school can be a place for self-reflection, introspection, self-expression, taking risks, and identity building seemed to be less of a priority in the school this student was enrolled in (Goodman, 2013). Furthering this notion, research suggested that students who lacked freedom and voice in schools usually suffered silently from "low self-esteem, hopelessness, and depressed affect" (Harter, 1998, p. 582). Thus, more opportunities for freedom, student voice and empowerment could be beneficial to students of color enrolled at 'No Excuses' schools.

For these reasons, this topic must be critically analyzed by the highly educated and talented educators that work in these schools. The lack of inquiry and pushback from intelligent professionals regarding the socialization practices and disciplinary policies at 'No Excuses' schools is worrisome (Griffin, 2016). In an Open Letter to 'No Excuses' Teachers and Staff published in The Washington Post, Griffin (2016) questioned why students of color were questionably socialized and punished for the same minor infractions that some of their teachers were probably reared and encouraged to value. He stated that back when teachers were students, "they were probably given the freedom and voice to be critical, take risks, disagree, not conform, ask for clarity, push back, show emotion and be relentless about finding their own truth" (Griffin, 2016, p. 1).

Griffin beleaguered the point by adding that some teachers and administrators at 'No Excuses' schools were probably raising and encouraging their own children to value these things in the present day. If this line of thinking is indeed accurate, the more important follow-up question is how the same highly educated and talented educators remained content with

motivating students of color to conform to structures that not only encourage culture dis-identification, but ones that asks them to submit without conflict (Griffin, 2016). He argued that the debate has to shift to why there are 'No Excuses' for some racial ethnic groups, but not for all (Griffin, 2016). From there, the discourse must rapidly move to why education is done *to* the poor and not *with* the poor (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). Smith (2015) boldly proclaimed that 'No Excuses' education is prodigiously targeted at and experimented on poor students of color from high population density communities.

Many critics of schools that employ 'No Excuses' discipline methods claimed that the environments reminded them of the Scientific Management Theory, better known as, Taylorism. Taylorism is solely focused on economic efficiency, mainly as it relates to labor productivity in organizations (Smith, 2007; Smith, 2015). Lipman had a similar account when she discussed social stratification, race and ethnicity in inner city Chicago. She argued that the education policies in Chicago schools "serve[d] to regulate and control African American and Latino youth, in particular, and sort[ed] and discipline[d] them for differentiated roles in the economy and the city" (Lipman, 2003, p. 331). This begets the question about the purposes of education at 'No Excuses' schools and why school administrators utilize compliance-driven methods that seemingly routinize and serve as structuration for young people to function accordingly within their school organizations (Conley & Enomoto, 2009). Should 'No Excuses' school organizations be considered social centers of communities (Dewey, 1902) and sites for building democratic societies (Labaree, 1997) or should they be purely thought of as camouflaged forms of colonial hegemony, developing workers who lack critical consciousness (Freire, 1973)?

These inquiries must be taken seriously. Urban educators in these spaces must be more vigilant when instructing vulnerable populations like students of color. More comprehensive

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alternatives to discipline must be proffered because, as Giroux (2015) argued, the reality is that "schools are not prisons, teachers are not a security detail and students are not criminals" (p. 7). However, many students and critics claimed that 'No Excuses' environments felt like correctional facilities. Due to these profound and sobering realities, a thorough examination of the effects of 'No Excuses' practices are warranted to determine if there are not only intellectual and identity perils, but psychological and emotional costs associated with navigating these types of school climates. This is especially significant for students who might already be exposed to cumulative trauma due to their experiences with abuse, neglect or household dysfunction. The emotional and psychological anguish that some students of color might experience from those situations might be grueling. As noted in the zero-tolerance policy section, strict disciplinary codes of conduct like 'No Excuses' can cause significant damage to children if administered inappropriately. A child's mental health is strongly aligned to their life outcomes. However, it can also be predictive of their school behavior, grades and test scores as well as their ability to construct and sustain relationships in school.

Black Males Exposed to Cumulative Trauma

What is Trauma?

Much research suggests that students of color from urban environments experience widespread trauma throughout their lifespan (Dempsey, Overstreet, & Moely, 2000). Coincidentally, many of the students plagued by trauma in these communities are Black males who happen to be enrolled in 'No Excuses' charter schools. As mentioned throughout this manuscript, these environments can be particularly stressful for most students, but might have especially harmful impacts on Black males. So, a more comprehensive reform of urban education must begin with a critical lesson on trauma itself, the divergent behaviors of trauma

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and the manifestation of symptoms in individuals experiencing one form of trauma compared to those experiencing multiple forms.

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition (DSM IV; American Psychiatric Association, 1994) defined traumatic stressors as:

> events involving direct personal experience of an event that involves actual or threatened death or serious injury, or other threat to one's physical integrity; or witnessing an event that involves death, injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of another person, or learning about unexpected or violent death, serious harm, or threat of death or injury experienced by a family member or other close associate. (p. 424)

Slightly nuanced, the Center for Nonviolence and Social Justice (CNSJ) defined trauma as "experiences or situations that are emotionally painful and distressing, and that overwhelm people's ability to cope, leaving them powerless" (CNSJ, 2016, p. 1). Regardless of how trauma is defined and conceptualized, it can have a dangerous impact on children. Every person will not *experience* trauma similarly. The greater the exposure to trauma, the greater the risk of developing devastating symptoms from it. This is especially true for those children living in high population density urban areas but could be true for those living in rural communities too. Yet, surprisingly, trauma in America is still a very obscure concept outside of the psychiatric, psychological and social work disciplines. Trauma and its impacts are also a mystery to those who are disproportionately exposed to it as well as to their caregivers, such as parents, guardians, and educators (Dealing with Trauma, 2012). It is either narrowly defined or relegated to a specific event(s) or experience that brought about few symptoms. Conversely, trauma is commonly discussed as events that are not particularly normal. While this may be the case for some individuals who have been exposed to trauma, it is definitely not indicative for all of them.

For many urban youth, experiencing trauma is not a random, once in a lifetime occurrence. It is a normal everyday occurrence that in most cases has devastating effects (Sered, 2014; Millner, 2014). The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) highlighted over a dozen forms of trauma that any one individual can experience simultaneously during their adolescence and throughout their lifespan. They include community violence, complex trauma, child abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, domestic violence, school violence, early childhood trauma, medical trauma, refugee trauma and traumatic grief (NCTSN, 2016). The symptomatology of these traumas is different, and they manifest in extremely nuanced ways, but they are especially complex in Black children residing in poverty-stricken areas.

The Perils of Poverty

Research from the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) showed that 41% of children living in the U.S. were considered low income and about 19% of all children living in the U.S. were residing in households that were considered below the poverty line (Koball & Jiang, 2018). However, Census Bureau poverty data collected in 2016 revealed that only 15.6% of America's children were living below the poverty line (Shapiro & Trisi, 2017). Even though the rate for some groups has declined significantly, the same cannot be said for African American children. For example, the poverty rate steadily decreased for White, Hispanic and Asian children, but the poverty rate for Black children only slightly decreased from 39% to 38.3% during a three-year period (Patten & Krogstad, 2015). From 2010 to 2013, the poverty rate for Hispanic children dropped from 34.9% to 30.4%, from 14.4% to 10.1% for Asian children and from 12.3% to 10.7% for White children (Patten & Krogstad, 2015).

In 2013, it was reported that Black children had almost four times the chance to be living in poverty than their White or Asian counterparts and had much greater odds than Hispanic

children as well (Patten & Krogstad, 2015). Therefore, it is plausible to conclude that Black

children have a greater risk of being exposed to chronic environmental stressors like household

dysfunction, drug infested communities, human-trafficking, violent crimes and environmental

toxins (Okundaye, 2004; Rawles, 2010). These traumatic stressors may also predispose them to

problematic public health concerns like hypertension as well as other infectious diseases that

cripple urban areas (Berton & Stabb, 1996; McCloskey & Walker, 2000; van der Kolk, 2005;

Public Health, 2016).

Coupled with these alarming realities in urban communities, Black families tend to have

higher rates of female-led households, infant mortalities, under-aged drug and alcohol usage,

pre-marital pregnancies and gun violence deaths (Evans & Kim 2007). Due to the prevalence of

these occurrences, Black families often lack the social, political and economic capital needed to

obtain access to quality networks and resources that aid in sustaining comfortable and healthy

lifestyles. Thus, survival in these communities takes shape and looks differently than it does in

more prosperous, less trauma afflicted ones (Evans & English, 2002). For example, in many

female-led households in poor communities, adolescent Black males are thrust into surrogate

father-figure roles (Anderson, 2015; Rawles, 2010). Some may be responsible for protecting the

family, while others may be tasked with the more burdensome duty of providing financially,

even though they may not be old enough to legally work (Anderson, 2015).

Simultaneously, young Black males may also be charged with supervising, nurturing,

feeding and clothing their siblings while their parent works throughout the night (Mott, 1993;

Anderson, 2015). Unfortunately, they are informally asked and sometimes required to "act" as

adults during their adolescence. Their holistic needs are either forgotten or considered last

priorities for the greater good of the family (Mott, 1993; Anderson, 2015). The additional

accountabilities derived from the daily struggles of urban poverty may put adolescent children at risk of being abused and neglected by their caretakers as well. Child abuse and neglect is a common form of trauma that is dominant in the early years of a child's life and prevalent in urban communities (Gilles, 1999). The Child Welfare Information Gateway (CWIG) defined child abuse and neglect as "any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation; or an act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm" (CWIG, 2016, p. 1).

While this definition of child abuse and neglect provides great detail, another form of child abuse and neglect called psychological maltreatment is more reminiscent of the example aforementioned regarding the role of young Black males in high poverty contexts. Psychological maltreatment (PM) is defined as the continuous or inescapable hampering of a child's fundamental needs, which includes acts by the caretakers that may be designated as injurious to typical child development (Barnett, Manly & Cicchetti, 1993). The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) referred to PM as the most difficult form of child abuse and neglect to detect (Hibbard et al., 2012). This is mostly because it can be easily overlooked by people who are not trained in what abuse and neglect looks like or by those who have a limited understanding of the nomenclature altogether.

Specifically, child abuse and/or neglect is not always blatant. Many times, there are no physical scars to prove that abuse, neglect or psychological maltreatment have taken place (Teicher, 2002). It is often unseen and sometimes guardians may not realize that their acts constitute abuse or maltreatment. For example, as explained earlier in the manuscript, my parents were not aware of the psychological maltreatment I endured as a child. However, regardless of the intent by the guardian or caretaker, overexposure to any form of abuse and neglect can have

catastrophic ramifications on the neurological developmental of children and can also predispose them to psychological diseases and emotional impairments (Evans & Kim, 2007). The psychological and emotional scars inflicted from child abuse and neglect have the potential to live forever and may impact regular daily functioning (Teicher, 2002).

These existing wounds proliferate as children are exposed to chronic community violence. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network defines community violence as "exposure to intentional acts of interpersonal violence committed in public areas by individuals who are not intimately related to the victim" (NCTSN, 2016, p. 1). Data claimed that urban youth who are victims of violence have a 70% chance to develop Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Berton & Stabb, 1996; McCloskey & Walker, 2000). Problematizing this development, a research study by Kessler et al. (1995) determined that people diagnosed with PTSD were 8 times more at risk of possessing at least three or more additional diagnoses than people with other mental health conditions who were less exposed to violence.

As unsettling as this evidence is, it does not get better when considering the plights of Black males in high poverty areas. On any given day in America, young Black males can be the targets of gun violence. Research shows that young Black men who live in poverty-stricken neighborhoods are more likely to experience deviance as a victim and/or as a perpetrator (Paxton, 2004; Okundaye, 2004). More specifically, the children who suffer abuse or other forms of psychological and emotional harm are more likely to victimize other people in the future (Finkel, Ormrod, & Turner, 2007). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported, "Young black men have a higher rate of both fatal and non-fatal violence than any other group" (Rich, 2009, p. ix). Homicide remains the number one cause of death for Black

males between the ages of 15 and 34 (Rich, 2009). In 2009, the murder rate for Black males was more than 19 times higher than it was for White males (Rich, 2009).

In the book *Children in Danger*, Garbarino et al. (1992) compared urban crime in Chicago and Washington D.C. perpetrated by and against Black males, to community violence in international war zones like Beirut, Palestine, Iraq and Mozambique. They claimed that in all of the aforementioned places, young children are reared with direct and in-depth understandings of terror and violence (Garbarino et al., 1992). Today, Chicago is known as "Chi-Raq" after the Middle Eastern country, Iraq, which is widely known for its war zone mentality and traumatic history (Jones, 2014). In 2015, there were 78 gun-related homicides in Chi-Raq over a three-month period (Gorner, 2015; DeSilver, 2014). Twelve of those victims were 18 years old or younger, and all but a few were Black males (Gorner, 2015; Allen, 2016). Like Chicago, many urban cities in America are plagued with extensive community violence and a large majority of the victims are young Black males. Sadly, there seems to be little solutions-driven dialogue geared towards curbing the disastrous epidemic, leading some activists to ruminate whether the slow response to Black males being slaughtered on America's streets is as deeply rooted in "institutionalized poverty, racism and oppression" as urban schooling for Black males (Jones, 2007, p. 126).

These sobering narratives only provide a snapshot into the circumstances that young Black males in urban poverty have had to endure. There is danger at every turn for these young men, and the nightmare never seems to culminate (Rawles, 2010). Garbarino et al. (1992), asked, "But, what does living in chronic danger do to [a] child's experience of exploration, growth and development?" (p. 1). Relatedly, how does it affect a young Black male's idea of critical consciousness, self-esteem and identity in the formative years? The answer to both questions is

that overexposure to trauma has the power to singlehandedly stymie a young person's overall

development and worse, cause early death. Every stressful or traumatic experience they have

heightens their awareness as well as their stress levels (Kiser et al., 1993).

As those traumatic stress experiences accumulate, children can develop stressor pileup

and other serious stress disorders (McCubbin & Patterson, 1982). Stressor pileup is the

cumulative effect of all the stressors a person experiences (Bailey, 2009). They typically include

daily life hassles like losing a job, caring for obnoxious younger siblings, getting bad grades or

having a vehicle repossessed. These experiences accrue rapidly and can cause extreme stress

ranging from tiredness and muscle tension to feeling anxious and temperamental (Bailey, 2009).

Stressor pileup is considered normal and most effects subside rather quickly. Depending on the

individual though, some symptoms can last abnormally long in the absence of support networks.

The cumulative effects of experiencing prolonged trauma includes the symptoms above, but can

be fatal in rare cases (McFarlane, 2010; Public Health, 2016). Thus, the impact of cumulative

trauma on the overall development of Black males in urban environments deserves a thorough

investigation.

Cumulative Trauma: Symptoms and Manifestations

The overexposure to traumatic events that Black males endure is considered cumulative

trauma. Cumulative trauma is defined as "experienc[ing] multiple, chronic, and prolonged,

developmentally adverse traumatic events like sexual abuse, physical abuse, neglect, community

violence and domestic violence" (NCTSN, 2016, p. 1). Noteworthy, cumulative trauma is

operationalized in the literature as the complete number of diverse types of interpersonal trauma

that an individual experiences (Briere, Hodges, & Godbout, 2010; Cloitre et al., 2009). Based on

the evidence provided thus far, it is reasonable to assume that young Black males in high poverty

areas have a greater risk to experience a large number of these interpersonal traumas throughout

their childhoods than some other demographic groups (Herrenkohl, Sousa, Tajima, Herrenkohl &

Moylan 2008; Pynoos et al., 2009). Experiencing numerous interpersonal traumas during

childhood can severely alter development, behavior, and the ability to comprehend and perform

simple tasks (Stubblefield-Tave et al., 2005). This is critical for 'No Excuses' schools that may

not specifically teach moral and social responsibilities in a culturally responsive manner but

expect students to conform to policies that may not be logical to them based on their experiences.

Two new studies on the effects of cumulative trauma suggested that the more divergent

interpersonal traumas a person experiences, the more complex the symptomatology is (Briere,

Kaltman, & 2008; Cloitre et al., 2009). These symptoms included everything from having

personal identity conflicts, emotional issues and hazardous relationships with loved ones (Briere

& Rickards, 2007; van der Kolk et al., 1996), to cutting one's skin and contemplating suicide

(Zlotnick et al., 1997; Briere, 2002), to having various anxieties and depressive episodes,

cognitive malfunctions and somatization disorders (Briere, 2004: Friedman et al., 2007). Despite

the complexity and breadth of these symptoms, it is important to make clear that all cumulative

trauma sufferers will not develop all of the above-mentioned symptoms. Some individuals may

only battle depression and emotional difficulties, while others might have more problems

managing personal relationships and family issues. Many of these symptoms, though, happen to

overlap in a pretty significant way that might beget other symptomatic challenges in the future.

For example, experiences from trauma that bring about personal identity issues can cause

emotional and cognitive turmoil as well as harmful somatic conditions and vice versa. Without

the appropriate care and support mechanisms while battling these conditions, one can experience

self-mutilation tendencies and even suicidal ideations (Zlotnick et al., 1997; Briere, 2002).

To help illustrate trauma's complex symptomatology in another way, we revisit the case of Nikolas Cruz that was introduced in the zero tolerance policies gun violence section. Cruz is the nineteen-year-old, rumored white supremacist who killed seventeen people in the mass school shooting in Florida on February 14, 2018 (Allen et al., 2018). Although he is not a Black male or minority, his experiences can be used as a case example to examine trauma. While much of his personal feelings regarding his childhood circumstances have not been self-reported, we can analyze the experiences and information that have been shared about his life that can be considered traumatic. He was orphaned as an infant and had been transient throughout most of his childhood, adolescence and young adult life (Rozsa et al., 2018). He was said to be a troubled, distressed and depressed young man, taking several medications to manage his emotional and psychological incapacities (Schuppe, 2018). He spent substantial time in mental health care facilities receiving treatments for those illnesses (Schuppe, 2018). He had been expelled from two private schools at one point in his school journey before being expelled for the third time from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School and also had been held back twice in different schools as well (Schuppe, 2018).

He was described by former classmates as being "erratic and a little weird" (Rozsa et al., 2018, p. 2). Some students said that they wanted to stay away from him because he looked dangerous and no good (Schuppe, 2018). Others clowned around about him possibly shooting up the school one day (Ma, 2018). The behavioral incidents at Marjory Stoneman Douglas ranged from acts like "fighting and cursing at teachers," (Schuppe, 2018, p. 3), to "selling knives out of a lunchbox [and] posting on Instagram about guns and killing animals," (Rozsa et al., 2018, p. 2), to kicking out school windows and bringing bullets to school (Schuppe, 2018).

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When using a trauma lens to interrogate Cruz's life on the surface, he seems to fit the mold of an individual who probably experienced cumulative trauma. First, to lose both parents at different points in his short life and be labeled as an orphan can be tremendously traumatic for any young person (Cluver, Fincham, & Seedat, 2009). Then, to be kicked out of 3 schools and held back in two grade levels over a short period of time can induce more stress. Cruz was also said to be bullied, teased and taunted repeatedly by his former classmates causing him humiliation and anger (Brown, 2018). He was considered an outcast by most people he came across due to his unorthodox behaviors (Brown, 2018). His home life was filled with chaos as police were called more than thirty times over a seven-year period by his mother (Brown, 2018). Cruz's mother was alleged to have abused him and another sibling as well which prompted an investigation from the Florida Department of Children and Families (Brown, 2018). This is not to mention the additional chaos that might have ensued when he bounced around from family to family trying to find stability, comfort and safety after her death. It is plausible to surmise that Cruz may have felt that the school and his surrogate families abandoned him in some way. The bullying that he underwent in school during his childhood and adolescence suggests that he did not feel safe there and may have feared for his life at certain points.

These experiences alone can bring about anxieties, confusion as well as emotional struggles while trying to weave through the nebulousness and anguish of it all. Black (2010) stated that abandoned children reared with pervasive loss can develop immense pain and began to co-opt fear and shame. She also mentioned that when children feel insecure psychological and emotional attachments to caregivers, that the shame already experienced becomes compounded (Black, 2010). It sends a clear message to the child that their emotions, thoughts and actions are not valid or legitimate (Black, 2010). Studies suggest that orphaned youth are more susceptible

to enduring additional traumatic experiences as they matriculate through life due to the dearth of protection from loved ones or perceived dearth of protection that they might feel (Ahmad et al., 2005).

Based on what was reported from the Florida Department of Children and Families, Cruz might have perceived that there was a lack of protection and safety at home as well. The reports indicated that he might have also agonized from psychological maltreatment as his mother was being examined for inadequate and inappropriate supervision (Brown, 2018). PM is defined as the continuous or inescapable hampering of a child's fundamental needs, which includes acts by the caretakers that may be designated as injurious to typical child development (Barnett, Manly & Cicchetti, 1993). As mentioned in previous sections, PM is considered the most difficult form of child abuse and neglect to detect because many of the wounds are unseen by the naked eye (Hibbard et al., 2012). The symptomatology of experiencing PM includes pervasive internalization of behaviors, self-confidence issues, explosive anger problems and compulsive behaviors like having uncontrolled fits, self-deprecating behaviors, apathetic episodes, loneliness and involuntary bodily movements that can cause embarrassment (Egeland, Sroufe, & Erickson, 1983).

The fact that Cruz traversed multiple mental health facilities during his childhood for various psychological and physiological conditions, such as the neurological disorder autism and attention deficit disorder, suggests that his bouts with depression might have stemmed from these childhood circumstances in some way (Brown, 2018). There is no evidence to support which specific circumstances actually contributed to his institutionalization, but it has been proven that childhood exposure to trauma can be linked to several developmental disorders and psychological disorders including but not limited to anxiety, depression and maladaptive social

behaviors (Koenig, Doll, O'Leary, & Pequegnat, 2004). Cruz was clinically diagnosed with the aforementioned disorders by trained medical professionals who feared that his depression was disintegrating rapidly (Brown, 2018). However, due to trauma being an experience that is undertaken individually, it is not a 100% fact that he would consider all of his childhood experiences or experiences being institutionalized as being traumatic.

There is evidence of cumulative trauma present in that he experienced various interpersonal traumas over time, like household dysfunction, abuse, neglect, early childhood trauma and violence from bullying (NCTSN, 2016,). Yet, his personal understandings of what happened to him are critical to confirm traumatization. Did he indeed feel overwhelmed cognitively, psychologically and emotionally due to his upbringing? If so, and those cumulative experiences caused him to feel powerless, immensely fearful or distressed for long periods of time, which most of the data suggests, then he could have suffered PTSD as well (Lyon, 2014). Those childhood and adolescent experiences might have also aided in his reported erratic and volatile behavior, non-emotive affect, depressive episodes, cognitive disruptions in school, emotional issues as well as his identity formation troubles. It is not exactly clear what triggered Cruz's motives and actions, especially because the neurological disorder autism is a social communication disorder, not one that would bring about the gravity of violence he unleashed (Brown, 2018). However, the evidence does make a compelling case that his seemingly traumatic experiences likely did play a major role in what transpired on February 14, 2018. On the other hand, it is crystal clear that many of the survivors of Cruz's reign of terror, will likely develop symptoms of PTSD and other life-threatening co-occurring psychological disorders throughout their lifespan (Brinkley, 2018; National Center for PTSD, 2018).

Cruz's case example is a classic depiction of how elusive and complex trauma can be, as well as how personalized and diverse its symptomatology can be. Trauma as a concept tends to be extremely difficult to understand for various reasons. Just because an individual experiences situations or events that most individuals consider traumatic, does not necessarily mean that they will identify in the same manner. In the Soul Work, Personal Narrative section of this manuscript, I stated that my siblings and I endured similar traumatic experiences. Yet, only two of us complained of symptoms, which were both divergent from one another and both of us were diagnosed different disorders as well. My sister seemingly developed a more resilient reaction to the trauma she experienced early on, more so than we did during adolescence (Center for Substance Abuse, 2014). However, her strong response was antithetical to what the literature revealed about gender differences when exposed to various traumas (NCCD, 2010).

A research report from the National Council on Crime and Delinquency about juvenile justice involved youth claimed that observing traumatic events had much more of a damaging effect on young girls than they had on young men (NCCD, 2010). These examples are why trauma is so profoundly difficult to grasp. The way that trauma affects people hinges on the specific "characteristics of the individual, the type and characteristics of the event(s), the developmental processes, the meaning of the trauma, and sociocultural factors" (Center for Substance Abuse, 2014, p. 1). Therefore, trying to differentiate the behaviors and manifestation of trauma symptoms in individuals experiencing a single trauma, compared to those experiencing cumulative trauma, can be somewhat ambiguous. Again, this is because each individual is affected by trauma differently, even when dealing with like circumstances and childhoods (Center for Substance Abuse, 2014).

A better example of the differentiation happens in chaotic environments, like war zones. War veterans develop combat stress reactions from fear of losing their lives on the battlefield. Combat stress reactions (CSR), also known as posttraumatic stress injuries, are apprehension responses that occur at the time of battle or shortly after (Center for Substance Abuse, 2014). They are typical responses of anxiety for individuals engaged in life-threatening combat. However, all war veterans will not experience these reactions. People suffering from combat stress reactions may exhibit similar symptoms as those experiencing cumulative trauma and they may last for several years as well. If CSR victims have healthy attachments, quality support systems and access to medical resources, though, they can make full recoveries and learn to cope with their anxiety in a productive way (Center for Substance Abuse, 2014).

Keeping the same example with war veterans, we can examine Acute Stress Disorders. Acute stress disorders (ASD), like combat stress reactions, are also considered standard reactions to trauma, but there are substantial differences in the manifestation of symptoms. ASD is widely known as a disorder that results from experiencing only one form of trauma rather than multiple, chronic forms of interpersonal trauma like most of the examples above (Center for Substance Abuse, 2014). People experiencing ASD are completely consumed by the traumatic event they suffered and often display paranoia, nervousness, forgetfulness and more avoidance behaviors that may force them to relive the traumatic event. It is important to point out that ASD symptoms are usually present within four weeks after the initial trauma and usually culminate during that time period as well (Center for Substance Abuse, 2014). ASD, unlike PTSD, generally ends and people go back to living healthy productive lives. However, recent evidence suggested that some people experiencing ASD might be at risk of developing PTSD, if they somehow underestimated the disorder and failed to confront it proactively (Center for Substance Abuse, 2014).

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People exposed to cumulative trauma, like Black males in urban environments, are more likely to develop symptoms of PTSD, as evidenced by the statistics mentioned earlier in the manuscript. Like ASD, the symptoms of PTSD include having disturbing thoughts about the traumatic experience(s) and being on high alert daily. However, individuals who develop PTSD as opposed to ASD, have symptoms that are persisting and last much longer than four weeks (McFarlane, 2010). They can possibly last a lifetime in some individuals. With this debilitating disorder, individuals can be triggered instantly by certain stimuli that may remind them of the traumatic experience (Chambers, 2010). The important idea to take from this discussion is that exposure to trauma can be quick or extended and individuals can experience single or multiple forms of it, but responses to it are extremely widespread and divergent.

As indicated with people experiencing stressor pileup and combat stress reactions, those who have strong foundations can respond well to traumatic stress and have very little problems functioning throughout life. Those who lack strong support systems and healthy attachments often struggle to cope. Many times, individuals already predisposed to trauma in urban environments lack these much-needed structures and nurturing relationships. This reality further problematizes the necessity to evaluate and build onto the emotional, physical, cognitive, behavioral, social, and developmental domains that are supreme in the early years of life for adolescents. A large majority of these domains should be primed and cultivated in schools. However, this does not always occur. There is evidence that these critical domains may be threatened in charter schools that subscribe to the 'No Excuses' method of discipline and socialization or at public schools that heavily rely on zero tolerance policies to indoctrinate children. Both of these options can be especially devastating to Black males already overexposed

to trauma and in search of a loving and warm school environment that provides safety and room to evolve.

Black Males Exposed to Cumulative Trauma in 'No Excuses' Charter Schools

Due to decades of poor educational results in urban environments, the federal charter school program of 1994 was passed to create the opportunity for CMOs to serve America's most vulnerable populations more comprehensively (O'Leary, 2016; Chapman & Donnor, 2015). Today, these specialized, mission-oriented schools outnumber traditional public schools in some urban cities (Lack, 2009; Duxbury, 2006). Thus, often-traumatized Black males who grow up in these areas wind up attending charters and some of them happen to utilize zero tolerance policies like 'No Excuses'. The missions and goals of charters' who utilize 'No Excuses' methods are not thoroughly inspected in this manuscript. However, the rigid disciplinary and socialization practices that they employ with minority children are. There is appropriate fear that 'No Excuses' practices may wrongfully trigger already overexposed Black males whether they are implemented delicately and appropriately or not and by individuals who have already constructed firm attachments with them.

Any school culture predicated on getting 100% compliance, 100% of the time (Goodman, 2013), in the context it desires from children exposed to chronic traumatic stress may not yield positive results. In fact, the results may be rather explosive because important psychosocial and sociocultural factors were not considered before implementation. Children who live in constant danger in their respective communities may consider their school environments to be dangerous as well. This kind of stress reaction could cause them to be overly aggressive, rebellious, hypervigilant and non-compliant to simple or complex instructions, regardless of how calm the school environment might actually be (Black & Krishnakumar, 1998). Or, how serene school

personnel might think it is for that matter. Their perception of what the environment is or should be to students who have been exposed to robust trauma is not as significant as the students who are personally experiencing those environments themselves. Research on brain development in children revealed that in the beginning stages of trauma, the brain's neurotransmitters (e.g., cortisol, norepinephrine, dopamine) are compromised and can cause the body to produce more stress hormones when threatened (Heim et al., 2008; Teicher, 2002).

Children whose neurotransmitters are altered through exposure to inordinate amounts of trauma constantly feel under attack and can experience psychological and physiological responses that beget PTSD symptoms called trauma reminders (Pynoos, Steinberg & Piacentini, 1999). Trauma reminders are particularly powerful because they provoke harmful thoughts about previous traumatic experiences and can even beget perilous actions (Pynoos et al., 2004). Thus, educators at 'No Excuses' schools must understand that overexposure to trauma can determine how some children perceive their lives, how they conduct themselves in various situations and more importantly, how they react to conflict or stress (Osofsky et al., 2005). The smallest trigger can cause major school disruptions in 'No Excuses' schools. Such triggers can include particular noises, distinct smells, certain temperatures, or the details of a particular scene (Center for Substance Abuse, 2014). It can also be as simple as asking a child to walk a straight line, make constant eye contact, shake hands firmly, speak loudly in public or remain silent in the hallways. A few developmental psychologists (Glasser, 1998; Bailey, 2000) were privy to these triggers years ago and vocally discouraged educators at 'No Excuses' schools from disciplining and socializing urban youth in the way that they did. They encouraged schools to use less intimidating and psychologically damaging discipline methods that often times perpetuated disruptiveness and led to increased behavior problems. In return, they suggested implementing

and sustaining a more student needs driven and unified school going culture that was more attentive to why behavior problems happened opposed to simply responding to what behaviors were exhibited (Glasser, 1998; Bailey, 2000).

Cognition is heavily altered during trauma as well. Schools that fail to nurture who students are culturally, ethnically and linguistically risk adding stress to their lives. Their understanding and idea of self, identity, affirmation and recognition and cognitive ruminations may become skewed as well. These misconceptions might make it difficult to comply with and conform to rules that they may not agree with or that they feel might put them in danger (Rawles, 2010, p. 4). Depending on the individual and the traumatic event, the abilities to rationalize, articulate and develop clear thought patterns significantly decrease too. According to Beck et al. (1979), trauma affects one's perception of themselves as well as their perceptions of other people. Thus, some 'No Excuses' educators may remind students of individuals who have victimized them in the past. This declaration is crucial for educators utilizing these practices with children who have experienced cumulative trauma. Trauma that alters cognition also has the power to make groups who have been traditionally considered incompetent, worthless and shiftless, like Black males in America, actually feel like they are. As an already "othered" group in this country, they may become defiant out of anger that few people can relate to their circumstances and struggle, especially under intense provocation.

This is imperative in 'No Excuses' schools because a large number of the teachers and administrators do not live in the same communities as Black males, nor do they share similar racial or ethnic features (Sullivan, 2014). So, racially conscious Black males can become easily agitated and more distrustful of a system they feel may be racist and biased towards them as well as one that desires for them to assimilate to the status quo. Black males, especially those who

have been historically scolded by trauma from living in urban poverty, are already on edge as they navigate these schools. They already feel unsafe before they arrive at the school door but may never voice their concerns of agitation or mistrust to school personnel. Nor, will they ever make a scene. The illusion of compliance in 'No Excuses' schools may look like silence at times. However, the actual cause of the silence is more telling than the silence itself.

Children enrolled in these schools may not be outwardly defiant because of their current or past experiences. It is important for 'No Excuses' educators to note that traumatic stress begets two emotional responses in people: on one hand, people feel completely overwhelmed and on the other hand they feel absolutely nothing (Center for Substance Abuse, 2014). Thus, children who have not been shown how to appropriately display their feelings or deal with their emotions in an intentional and productive way, may shield and hide them. They may present compliance by not expressing their feelings vocally, but they may be numbing their emotions out of fear in remembrance of similar traumatic experiences. There is a chance that growing up in danger not only made them feel unsafe, but also unheard and undesired. Nevertheless, this constant numbing of their emotions usually leads to dysregulation. The process of pervasive affect dysregulation is especially true for children (Roth, Pelcovitz & Mandel, 1997). It is difficult to create interventions and respond appropriately to children who are emotionally detached. These children should be watched carefully as one seldom knows what to make of them, and they can fly under the radar at 'No Excuses' schools easily due to the focus on curbing more outward behaviors that tend to disrupt the learning environment.

In 'No Excuses' schools, students are punished more frequently for exhibiting outward behaviors like fighting, excessive non-compliance, talking loudly, being reckless, explosive, defiant, using profanity and a whole host of behaviors that usually warrant immediate attention

(Nebbitt, Lombe & Williams, 2008; Giroux, 2015). These behaviors are generally considered

aggressive and unsafe for other children, leading to suspensions and sometimes expulsions

(Calhoun, 2014; Giroux, 2015). At times, students may perceive the discipline and socialization

at 'No Excuses' schools, to be reminiscent of the abuse and neglect that they have experienced in

their own homes or communities. Thus, I challenge 'No Excuses' schools to consider the many

narratives that have been put forth in this manuscript and to use them along with critical

metacognition as instruments of transformation in these spaces. I urge them to cogitate deeply

about the behaviors deemed punishable in their schools and how the behaviors may actually

emanate from the school environment itself being unsafe and unsupportive. Or, more

importantly, I need educators to consider how the explosive and perceived defiant behaviors

from students might actually stem from other environments that were traumatic to them in the

past. Most children, irrespective of their home environments, social classes and racial groups,

seldom "act out" and engage in dangerous, defiant or high-risk behaviors without cause.

Something happened to them personally or vicariously that caused them to behave in ways that

are conventionally inappropriate.

'No Excuses' educators must remember that their students' brains and neurological

systems are still maturing (Perry, 1999). This constant development in adolescence makes it

increasingly difficult for youth to rationalize what is transpiring in their lives. It is critical for

'No Excuses' educators to grasp that "children reflect the world in which they are raised" (Perry,

1999, p. 3) So, whether they are over-analyzing the punishment that they are currently receiving,

or having a flashback about a terrible experience, it is vital to understand that children exposed to

trauma can be mighty unpredictable. Therefore, to keep students safe so that all stakeholders can

learn, 'No Excuses' educators must begin to purposely evaluate the children that they are serving

from a more historical, racial, psychosocial and sociocultural context. Understanding how to approach and respond to these critical dilemmas, educators at these schools can help children cope and potentially navigate their space stress-free. The answers in 'No Excuses' schools cannot not be more rigid discipline and swift vilification. Educators must possess comprehensive, responsive and robust knowledge of their students' essential, yet complex needs as children. Then, they must create structures to meet those needs.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the *individual* experiences of cumulative trauma from the perspectives of Black males who were reared in high poverty areas. Specifically, I was interested in the perceptions of adult Black males reflecting back on their experiences with cumulative trauma as children and adolescents as well as their experiences navigating the 'No Excuses' structure. I anticipated that the 'No Excuses' policy itself would be a main focus of participants, but I was not necessarily interested in analyzing the entire structure. The emphasis was placed on understanding their experiences with cumulative trauma first. Then, I wanted them to reflect back and take into consideration how they responded, interacted, engaged and learned within the 'No Excuses' structure and most importantly, how it affected them. During the research study, I aimed to address three sensitive lines of inquiry:

a) **What were Black males' perceptions of trauma and where did they experience the greatest amount of stress during their childhood and adolescence?** Here, I wanted know how Black males conceptualized trauma and how they perceived experiences they deemed traumatic. I was also interested in understanding the places and spaces that they endured the most stress.

b) **How did Black males exposed to cumulative trauma perceive the 'No Excuses' school culture and disciplinary practices?** I sought to answer this question because zero tolerance discipline policies like 'No Excuses' have been celebrated, packaged and sold to low income people of color as the prescription for academic proficiency, career excellence and critical consciousness. I wanted to learn and comprehend the adult perceptions and lived experiences of Black males as they reflected back on their time navigating the 'No Excuses' school culture.

a. **What types of interactions at 'No Excuses' schools have the potential to trigger previous traumas in Black males?** Here, I desired to understand if exchanges between certain school stakeholders, different locations in the school environment, or parts of the socializations practices created flashbacks or trauma reminders for Black males.

c) **Did Black males exposed to cumulative trauma believe that the 'No Excuses' school culture prepared them for college, careers and successful lives?** I asked this question to get an understanding of whether Black males truly believed that they were prepared for life after 'No Excuses,' especially because most charters have mission statements that stipulate what students will be prepared for in life as a result of navigating their environments.

a. **What coping mechanisms have assisted Black males enduring chronic traumatic stress and how have they impacted their abilities to be resilient despite their circumstances?** Here, I hoped to learn what types of coping mechanisms existed for Black males, both adaptive and maladaptive, as well as how they believed engaging in those behaviors have positively or negatively affected their abilities to persevere.

In this chapter, I discuss the rationale for using a qualitative methodology as well as provide a clear rationale for utilizing a case study method. I provide an introduction to the study participants and a justification for the sample I chose, as well as document the sample procedures that were used in the study. I also explain how I collected my data, the data analysis, and offer any threats to validity that might have emerged. Lastly, I proffer my positioning as a researcher and detail considerations and limitations of the study.

Rationale for a Qualitative Study

Qualitative research aims to sustain the integrity of the participant's sensitive data and to offer data that is contextually vigorous (Glesne, 2011). Qualitative researchers often pursue

opportunities to make meaning of participant's stories and understandings, as well as how they might connect with each other (Glesne, 2011). Researchers who utilize qualitative methods often contend they are the only individuals equipped to understand and learn about society (Lave & Kvale 1995). Charmaz (2011) contends that the methodology entices individuals who personally believe that their scholarly contributions will be transformative. Personally, I was to drawn to qualitative methods because the research that I conduct will never be copied. This simply means that the research is personal and narrative based (Dewey, 1928; Dewey, 1938). Sure, researchers may come behind me and try to reproduce my study, but they will never be able to do it exactly the way that I did it. The lens that I glanced through my whole life, the knowledges and perspectives I hold, as well as the unique participants that were selected for the study cannot be duplicated. This study will be one of a kind, and I believe that only a qualitative method can deliver that type of result. The value of this understanding is knowing that the research produced will be more meaningful to the larger society (Burgess, 1984) due to the connection and relationship of the researcher and the individuals being investigated. The fundamental underpinnings of qualitative research are significant as the researcher is able to examine phenomena and construct groupings while asking one of the most important questions about the data, "why" (Glesne, 2011). To provide the audience of this study with a full and vivid picture of the experiences of Black males exposed to cumulative trauma at 'No Excuses' schools, I decided that qualitative research was the best option.

Rationale for Interpretative Phenomenology

A phenomenological approach focuses on the commonalities that each participant experiences as it relates to a specific phenomenon (i.e. pain, pleasure, grief, trauma) (Creswell, 2006). Similarly, an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is focused on individual

insight as it relates to a phenomenon and not a regurgitated account of what transpired from another's perspective (Smith & Osborn, 2007). Thus, the selection of this approach was key because it not only highlighted the participants' experiences with trauma, but it assisted in helping them to unpack and describe the very nature of trauma itself (van Manen, 1990). Through phenomenology, I was able to better understand the *textual description* (what) of their experiences with trauma as well as the *structural description* (how) of their experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

As it relates to studying trauma, a phenomenological approach allowed me to accomplish what no other framework could. It provided me the ability to critically "understand" the phenomena (cumulative trauma & 'No Excuses') being studied and from the perspectives of the individuals affected. A positivist (predict), critical (emancipate), or poststructuralism (deconstruct) framework did not align with the way I chose to go about this particular study (Glesne, 2011). Because the nomenclature of trauma is so complex, many of the individuals who experience trauma fail to realize that they have actually experienced something traumatic. Many of those individuals also believe that those experiences were completely normal. Therefore, while race is a major component of this study, the direction could not be to liberate, predict or deconstruct. It is beyond important to first "understand" what we are experiencing before we can attempt to free it, forecast it or analyze it.

Additionally, unlike the other approaches that have singular foci in specific areas of exploration, the phenomenological approach allows me to be malleable. It is a communicative process, and it reverberates throughout each mode of study (research problem, research questions, phenomena, data collection, analysis, verification and reporting) (Bechhofer, 1974). The relationship between theory and research in a phenomenological study is not pristine; it is a

disorganized collaboration with the experiential realm, inference and initiation happening simultaneously (Bechhofer, 1974). Therefore, it made sense to use this framework to conduct the study.

Rationale for Case Study

Coincidentally, when determining the appropriateness of using a case study versus another approach, similar questions about "how" and "why" something was occurring seemed to be the essential components being analyzed (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The case study approach provided me ample space to inspect the cumulative trauma phenomenon through various lenses. Therefore, three different types of case studies were used. Since one of the goals of this research study problematized the impact of cumulative trauma on Black males, it also contended that more studies should be done to investigate these realities further with similar populations. Thus, it was an exploratory case study ("Understanding the Different Types," (n.d.)). Since the study was not only focused on the phenomenon being investigated in the study (cumulative trauma), but also the Black males who were experiencing it, the case study is considered an intrinsic one ("Understanding the Different Types," (n.d.)). Because I purposefully used the case to understand cumulative trauma, the case study was also considered instrumental ("Understanding the Different Types," (n.d.)).

Baxter and Jack (2008) stated that researchers used case studies when they could not dictate the mannerisms and actions of the subjects, when the descriptive and circumstantial information that was related to the phenomenon under investigation was crucial and when there was a slight risk of inadvertently crossing boundaries with research subjects. Again, the phenomenon to be better understood in this study was cumulative trauma. The case study that was interrogated was Black males exposed to cumulative trauma. The phenomenon could not be

examined without robust context. These descriptive contexts included the discipline policies at 'No Excuses' charters, the socialization practices, the communities that the participants were from as well as the home environments they lived in.

I understood that the case had to have some sort of bounded context that described exactly what I was trying to understand better about the phenomenon as well (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, I aimed to understand the *individual* experiences of cumulative trauma from the perspective of Black males who were reared in high poverty areas. Based on those experiences, I hoped to learn how those same Black males *experienced* the 'No Excuses' school culture and climate. The importance was placed on their experiences with cumulative trauma first. Then, I desired to comprehend how they responded, interacted, engaged and learned within the 'No Excuses' structure and most importantly, how it affected them. Choosing the case study method also helped me to avoid selecting my former students to participate in this study. I did not want my existing relationships with them to interfere with the research in any way. Thus, the case study selection provided an additional buffer around these concerns.

It is important to note that narrative inquiry would have allowed me to do a similar case study on trauma with these stakeholders. Specifically, an oral history narrative approach could have been implemented to examine their experiences. The oral history narrative process would have included "gathering personal reflections of events and their causes and effects" (Creswell, 2013, p. 73). Essentially, this is what occurred with the interpretative phenomenology single case study method, although there were philosophical underpinnings associated. Ultimately, I decided against the narrative inquiry approach for two reasons. The first reason is that in narrative inquiry research, it is important to verify the memories, not necessarily the truth (Wang, 2015). It is

concerned about telling a good story, and more specifically about "knowledge from the past and not necessarily knowledge about the past" (Bochner, 2007, p. 203) which is a very important distinction.

The second reason is that oral histories are mostly done with very small samples (1-2 people) to preserve the integrity of the stories (Creswell, 2006). By using the interpretative phenomenological single case study method, I was able to slightly increase my sample size and still preserve the quality and diversity of the narratives shared about trauma. Most importantly, I was able to dig deep with my participants about their lived experiences as well as their past histories with trauma. I was not concerned about re-telling salacious stories for consumers of this research product. It was a collaborative effort during the research process to gain truthful narratives regarding their exposure to trauma and how it affected them in 'No Excuses' schools.

Research Site

Data collection for this dissertation study commenced in New Orleans, Louisiana. I selected the research site due to the large number of students who were enrolled in public charter schools in the urban metropolis, the national percentages of Black students who were enrolled in charters, as well as the high number of males that were enrolled (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). According to a report from the National Center for Education Statistics (2017) (NCES), charter school enrollment proliferated to 2.7 million students in 2014, from 0.9 million ten years earlier. In regards to the racial and ethnic makeup, 27% of the students who were enrolled in charter schools in 2014 were Black, a 4% decrease from 2004 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). The United States Department of Education published a report that claimed that, between 1999 and 2011, 49.6% of the students enrolled in charter schools nationally were males (United States Department of Education, 2011). A study from the Center

for Research on Education Outcomes (2013) (CREDO) that gauged the percentages of high

poverty, low-income students maintained that 54% of students from low-income households

were enrolled in charter schools.

After Hurricane Katrina in 2005, top state officials from the Department of Education in

Louisiana totally revamped the New Orleans public educational school system (Uberti, 2015).

Some called the move a "heist" and several others called it a "hostile takeover" (Uberti, 2015).

According to the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 79% of students living in the city

of New Orleans were enrolled in a charter school by the year 2012 (Layton, 2013). This amount

was almost 30% more than students enrolled in charters in Detroit and 40% more than students

enrolled in charters in D.C. at that time (Layton, 2013). In a 2010-2011 study on race and

ethnicity in charter schools, it was found that 27,728 students were enrolled in charter schools in

New Orleans and 85.6% were Black (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2011). The

local and national demographic composition of charter school enrollment provided here assisted

me with selecting New Orleans, Louisiana as the research site.

Participation Criteria

In order for participants to have qualified for the research study, they had to meet a few

criteria. There was a limitation on gender and race in this study, but not class or ethnicity. First,

all participants had to identify as Black males. Second, they were required to be between the ages

of eighteen and twenty-three years old. Third, they had to have read the participant information

packet and determined that they did identify with experiencing some form(s) of trauma. The

amount(s) of trauma were not discussed during recruitment and neither were the types of trauma

that were experienced. Although, it was not required of participants, if they managed to meet the

criteria to participate, each of them was going to be asked to complete the Adverse Childhood

Experiences (ACEs) assessment. It is a ten-question survey about traumatic experiences endured before the age of eighteen. Next, the Black males that were recruited for the study must have been currently enrolled at 'No Excuses' charter schools or previously enrolled at some point in their scholastic journey in a school that utilized zero tolerance discipline policies. Black males who met these criteria also needed to have experienced the 'No Excuses' or similar environment for six months or more to be fully eligible to participate. Black males that met all of the criteria but were enrolled in the schools for six months or less were considered on a case by case basis.

Rationale for Selection Criteria

The limitation of age for recruits was an important consideration while out in the field of research. The rationalization behind prohibiting all Black males twenty-four years or older from participating was that persons removed for periods of four years or more might have been too far removed to provide substantive commentary about what the evolving 'No Excuses' environment looked and felt like present day. Participants for the study were required to be at least eighteen years old because of IRB concerns regarding the appropriateness of inquiring about the traumatic histories of minors. Thus, the legal age of consent at eighteen years old was chosen as the limit.

Understanding that a large majority of students graduate from high school by age seventeen, I prepared for the caveat that some students might have still been enrolled in schools between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two. If they were still enrolled at these ages, I thought that there would be a possibly to recruit a handful of these students. Ultimately, I desired to recruit students who had just graduated from these schools and were between the ages of eighteen and twenty-three. In my opinion, there was a good chance that the 'No Excuses' nomenclature would have still been very fresh on their minds between that period.

The reasoning and appropriate fear that undergirded the decision to prevent Black males from participating if they weren't enrolled in 'No Excuses' schools longer than six months was that any time between zero and six months might not have been long enough. I rationalized that between zero and six months that they probably would not have been able to truly name their feelings, define the structure and describe how it might have impacted them. However, when I stepped back from that narrow-minded analysis, I realized that the fear might have excluded a small sample of Black males who were adeptly able to define the 'No Excuses' structure as well as how it impacted them within days or months of being exposed to it. That decision was re-thought and credited to the phenomenon and complex nomenclature of trauma. Since trauma is a personalized experienced, it could have affected one of the Black males that I originally excluded differently and might have manifested in a more nuanced way as well.

Thus, I chose to be open minded about potential participants that experienced the 'No Excuses' environment for six months or less. I felt that their experiences could have been invaluable and should not have merited an automatic disqualification from the study as a whole. I desired to interview the best candidates for the study understanding that some participants might have had more or less expertise than others navigating 'No Excuses' type climates. However, neither of the final four participants that qualified for the study presented the aforementioned dilemmas, so no additional justifications needed to be made. Finally, Black males who could not identify with experiencing trauma in any way was not an issue in the study either.

Participant Recruitment Process

When I proposed the study, I desired a sample of seven participants. To increase the likelihood of attaining my ideal sample size, I distributed more than a dozen participant

information packets (located in Appendix H) electronically and personally to prospective

subjects. At that time, Black males were going to be conveniently sampled and recruited through

the formal and informal networks that I constructed through speaking and writing the past few

years. I had already discussed the research opportunity with a few community leaders who knew

Black males that might have fit the specific criteria I sought. I posted the study on social

networks like Facebook and Twitter to gain interest as well. However, through all of these

efforts, there was still only lukewarm interest from a few potential participants. Three of the

potential subjects that did respond with palpable interest had family obligations or work-related

issues whenever we attempted to schedule the interviews.

However, during the research proposal stage, I developed an alternative agenda to rethink

or re-open the sample due to lack of interest, emergencies or unforeseen issues. One of the plans

involved recruiting more individuals whose parents enrolled them into 'No Excuses' school

spaces for shorter periods than I had originally desired for study qualification purposes. The

other involved me canvassing local neighborhoods, talking to parents, and visiting more charter

networks in the area to explain the study in the hopes of landing additional leads. I spoke with

individuals at local community centers as well as passed out business cards and participant

information packets that detailed the significance of the study. I also considered the fact that I

was a former dean of students and teacher in two urban charter schools that employed 'No

Excuses' discipline methods and still maintained relationships with several students from those

schools, but most were not eighteen years old by the time of the study. Additionally, because of

the magnitude of this sensitive topic, the personal relationships that existed as well as my own

personal experiences with trauma, I sought to avoid potential conflicts of interests with the few

that did qualify for the study. Thus, I decided that the Black males who did participate in the study were not going to be conveniently sampled.

After using more of a grassroots initiative to recruit participants, I was contacted and forwarded the information of a young man who might have been interested in participating in the study. After speaking with him about the study over the phone and meeting him in person, he mentioned that three of his former classmates were interested in participating as well. I sat down with them at a local community center and discussed the purpose of the study as well my positionality and former work as a 'No Excuses' dean of students at a charter school in the area. Upon completion of our meeting, all four young men expressed interest in being study participants. They were initially interested because they had already begun their own educational advocacy work in response to their educational experiences in their respective community. Then, through more robust conversation, it was revealed that we shared a few professional acquaintances from previous educational networks. This revelation further strengthened their interest in the study, brokered critical trust and facilitated a sense of safety and vulnerability between the potential research participants and me.

With the important insight that the prospective participants provided regarding our shared networks, I carefully checked my study criteria to make sure that they all qualified based on the protocols I selected. Each one of them were between the ages of eighteen and twenty-three and had been enrolled in a high school for four years that utilized very strict zero tolerance discipline policies. After confirming how the literature operationalized and defined the terms 'No Excuses' discipline and cumulative trauma, each of the prospective participants agreed that their former school used the same methods and admitted to experiencing numerous forms of trauma as well. Although, these young men were not a part of my original recruitment strategy, they fit the

criteria that I needed perfectly. The opportunity to meet and interview them happened quite serendipitously. Even though they attended and graduated from the same 'No Excuses' school in the same year and were still really close friends, I made a judgment decision to interview each of them individually.

I submitted a proposal for dissertation research funds and was awarded a grant through the College of Education at Michigan State University. Because of this award, I was able to offer each one of them $15 gift cards for participating in the study. Participants were not cognizant of the gift card award prior to engaging in the research interview. Surprisingly, the four study participants were much more manageable than the seven participants I had originally planned for. After critically listening to the interview data collected from the four young men, I determined that it was incredibly substantive and robust. I was satisfied with the final number of participants because of how comprehensive the narratives and experiences were. I did not feel that recruiting more participants was necessary. Thus, the sample size was not increased.

Sample Procedures

Purposeful Sampling

In this qualitative, interpretative phenomenological single case study, I employed a one sampling procedure that featured several different subgroups ranging from snowball sampling to expert sampling. First, I used purposeful sampling (McMillan, 2008), which is a method used frequently when conducting phenomenological studies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Patton, 2002). Purposeful sampling was utilized because I conducted this study with a specific *purpose* in mind, understanding the individual experiences of cumulative trauma from the unique perspectives of Black males. Purposeful sampling, a "*criterion-based selection,*" (Lecompte & Preissle, 1993, p. 69) is a "strategy in which particular settings, persons, or activities are selected deliberately in

order to provide information that can't be gotten as well from other choices" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 88). The selection criteria for this study was very thorough, yet super specific. A simple convenience sample would not have justified the study criteria because its focus would have been too narrow. The accessibility features in a convenience sample work well, but accessibility was only one of the metrics that had to be met. For this study on trauma, not just any Black male or Black male that attended a charter school would have qualified. Thus, a convenience sample was not chosen.

Homogenous Purposeful Sample

Since this case study is examining the experiences of Black males with one specific phenomenon, cumulative trauma, and I sampled four Black males, the sample is considered a homogenous purposeful sample based on race and other similar features. A homogenous purposeful sample is a sample that possesses a similar feature or trait or sets of features or traits (Crossman, 2017).

Snowball Sampling

Snowball sampling is also a non-probability method used with research participants. This method usually materializes when research subjects already participating in a study encourage other individuals they deem suitable to join as well (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Snowball samples are extremely useful with difficult research studies where the criteria might be rigid and purposeful (Patton, 2014). This method played a major role in landing the three additional Black males that participated in the study.

Modal Sampling

Based on the evidence that I have provided throughout the manuscript, it could be argued that studying Black males exposed to cumulative trauma in high poverty areas is a modal

sampling approach (McMillan, 2008) because they are the "typical" individuals considered to be more at risk of being afflicted with trauma, attending schools with zero tolerance disciplinary policies like 'No Excuses' and being disproportionately disciplined as compared to their White peers as the literature suggested. This argument was reasoned well but flawed in that there were many racial ethnic groups that lived in poverty-stricken conditions that were exposed to inordinate amounts of trauma. Those groups, both male and female, attended schools with zero tolerance like 'No Excuses' schools as well. Their experiences could have been deemed as "typical" (Trochim, et al., 2015) too. Black males just happened to be one of the more polarized and scrutinized groups that had these characteristics, which is ultimately one of the reasons why they were chosen.

Expert Sampling

The Black males that were sampled in this study were considered to be experts in their own respective ways regarding their lived experiences. All of them had tremendous experiences navigating tough terrain, building fortitude where needed and overcoming the obstacles that were stacked against them. However, this is not a universal truth. This is not to say that all of their lived experiences were similar, or that all were successful building structures of perseverance and grit in every area of their lives. In fact, a few commented how unsuccessful they were battling some impediments as well as how they succumbed and failed to overcome them. Overarchingly speaking though, they did identify as being resilient and successful when faced with daunting odds.

Expert sampling methods are used in cases where subjects are expected to possess skills or robust knowledge about something (Trochim et al., 2015). There was one caveat with the expert sample for Black males that I was conscious of. I was not expecting for them to be experts

on trauma. It was not the expectation that they would have been able to recite the types of trauma designated on the National Child Traumatic Stress Network website. Nor, was it expected that they would have been able to "operationalize" trauma and be able to discuss the symptomatology of experiencing one traumatic experience as opposed to enduring several traumatic experiences. However, I did feel that they would be experts about their own life experiences and would be able to chronicle how those experiences made them feel. Due to this notion, I also felt that they would have been able to communicate and describe their experiences navigating the 'No Excuses' space too. Ultimately, my hope was that after the study, they would have become more knowledgeable about how trauma manifested and impacted their lives at these schools as well as in the community at large.

Cautions in Purposeful Sampling

A common mistake amongst researchers using a purposeful sample is that they tend to use the results of samples to represent greater populations of people, rather than just the one individual they sampled (Glesne, 2011). I cannot sensationalize one Black male's experience with trauma or his perspective on 'No Excuses' discipline and then generalize it as the "typical" Black male experience in these schools. This was why the only limitations were based on gender and race, but not class or ethnicity which includes language, nationality, culture, ancestry and any other factors that might have contributed to a biased sample. This common mishap was critical to understand as the phenomenon of trauma is experienced differently by every person. Thus, I did not engage in generalities when employing the purposeful sampling method that I chose. One research subject's experience is his own and no one else's. I was innately aware of this potential bias, and I attended to it constantly through the data collection and data analysis portion of this dissertation study to prevent it from interfering with the objectivity of the work.

Introduction of Study Participants

CJ

       CJ is the second oldest of four children. He was raised in low-income housing in New Orleans, LA and had never maintained a relationship with his biological father. Between the ages of eight and nine, he was diagnosed with schizophrenia after being exposed to lead paint. His exposure to poisonous toxins as well as his unstable living conditions caused him to have anxiety attacks, sleeping problems and abandonment issues. Many people, including individuals within his own family, wrote him off as becoming another statistic that would probably end up in prison. He was mocked and bullied in most of the schools he attended, which caused him to pervasively fear for his own safety. His family was also displaced due to the devastation of Hurricane Katrina in August of 2005. During that period of his life, his family was transient for a few years before becoming stable again. Due to the cumulative stressors, they experienced a tremendous amount of dysfunction in the home, including his brother being kicked out and him failing the seventh grade. At the time of the interview for this study, CJ was twenty-three years old.

Mista

       Mista is the youngest of three boys. He was also raised in low-income housing in New Orleans, LA. His biological father was not present during his childhood, but his stepfather was active in his household. As a young man, Mista experienced household dysfunction and community violence. One of his brothers was kicked out of the home very early on in his adolescence and as a result became homeless for a few years. His oldest brother was incarcerated for several years for crimes that his family said that he did not commit. In August of 2005, his family was stranded in the New Orleans area after Hurricane Katrina ravaged the city. Because his family did not evacuate before the devastation, they experienced it up close and personal.

They walked through five feet of water to the convention center and the superdome trying to reach safety, supplies and basic resources. He saw people gravely ill and heard about people being killed and raped in the aftermath of Katrina. His family relocated several times before returning to the New Orleans area in 2006-2007. Although he witnessed and endured these seemingly traumatic experiences, Mista communicated that they did not affect him as much as they affected other people. At the time of the interview for this study, Mista was twenty-three years old.

Benjamin

Benjamin was not the oldest child born to his parents, but he felt that he was responsible for protecting and taking care of his siblings. Both of his biological parents were active in his development until late adolescence when his father was incarcerated for first-degree murder. Benjamin could not read or write until age six placing him at a considerable disadvantage both academically and cognitively. After fleeing Hurricane Katrina, his family settled in Georgia for a few years before returning to New Orleans for his eighth-grade school year. He faced identity conflicts while attending the school because he did not feel a sense of belonging. His sense of safety was also compromised in that space, when he had to go through metal detectors every morning and when the military police that patrolled the school pointed their guns at him and other classmates. Due to the chaotic and unsafe school environment he navigated that year, Benjamin did not do well academically and had to attend summer school. During this challenging period, his parents also faced trouble financially maintaining the household and one of his friends was tragically killed in a car accident. Because of these cumulative experiences, Benjamin battled anger issues and exhibited behaviors he considered destructive at times, both at home and in school. He had also been emotionally distraught in the past and had suffered severe

sleeping issues as well. At the time of the interview for this study, Benjamin was twenty-two

years old.

Tink

Tink was the first of two children in his family. He grew up the in the New Orleans area,

but attended a religious private school in another parish for elementary school. Tink maintained a

close-knit relationship with both of his parents during the early stages of his childhood. His

father attended school in another state and traveled frequently while his mother was a local

nurse. One night, when his father had left for school, Tink woke up out of his sleep and found his

mother unresponsive in bed. Home alone at seven years old, Tink looked at his mother's lifeless

body and immediately knew that something was not right. He precipitously ran across the street

knocking on doors until someone answered and he communicated to the neighbors what he had

witnessed. Dazed and confused, Tink thought that what he had experienced with his mother was

all a dream. The next morning, his aunt expressed to him that his mother suffered a brain

aneurysm and had died in her sleep. Tink experienced widespread traumatic grief from finding

his mother alone at such a young age, and he felt like he was never able to express those

emotions to anybody. He battled anger issues because of this grief and felt misunderstood by

many people during his adolescence, both at home and at school. Tink also navigated a

tumultuous relationship with his stepmother because he felt unheard and unseen by her. His

family evacuated to Houston during Hurricane Katrina and was also displaced there for a short

period traveling to nearby Galveston due to Hurricane Rita in 2005. At the time of the interview

for this study, Tink was twenty-three years old.

Important School Contextual Factors

The 'No Excuses' school that CJ, Mista, Benjamin and Tink attended served elementary,

middle and high school students. The school enrolled approximately six hundred students each

year from several divergent areas around New Orleans. It is believed that CJ, Mista and Tink were all fifteen years old when they started their ninth-grade year at the school and Benjamin is believed to have been fourteen years of age. At the time of the interviews, CJ, Mista and Tink were all twenty-three years old and Benjamin was twenty-two years of age. Thus, all participants had been removed from the 'No Excuses' environment for almost four years. Each one of them started their educational journey at the school at the same time. Unless stipulated otherwise, it is important to note that the findings below are a representation of how these young men perceived their schooling experiences in retrospect and may not depict how they felt at the time of their enrollment.

Data Collection

Interviews

Interview Location

I did not have a specific location, meeting place or typical "research site" location for this study. Once the established criteria were met and the informed consent form was agreed to and signed, I left the meeting place open for each participant to decide. When discussing a topic as sensitive as trauma, it was important to gauge the places that they felt most comfortable physically, emotionally and psychologically to prevent trauma reminders. Because of this understanding, the interview location remained "flexible." I communicated to participants that I was open to meeting at schools, homes as well as coffee shops. Ultimately, one interview took place at a local community center in a back room with a closed door. The last three interviews were conducted at the participants' personal residences. These locations were chosen by the participants based on comfortability and convenience.

These locations were also key for observations, especially in a phenomenological study. According to Starks and Trinidad (2007), the researcher should aim to conduct interviews in the settings where the phenomenon (cumulative trauma) was experienced by the participant. I am sure that this happened for three of interviews that took place in the participants' living areas. Based on the data provided, there is a strong possibility that the other participant experienced trauma in the local neighborhood and larger community contexts. Thus, all four participants were interviewed in a place where there was a strong likelihood of cumulative trauma taking place.

Interview Strategies

The strategies of data collection implemented in the study were: face-to-face, audio recorded, semi-structured interviews with participants (1 interview between 60-90 min for each stakeholder), personal-familial-social anecdotes (e.g. childhood stories, tragedies and transformative learning experiences), and the ACEs tool. Participants were not encouraged to be prepared to discuss personal and familial anecdotes, they emerged organically. Participants were asked to complete the ACEs survey to provide additional background information regarding their traumatic histories as children and adolescents.

The Adverse Childhood Experiences assessment tool (ACEs) (located in Appendix E), better known as the "Resilience Score," is a tabulation of multiple different types of abuse, maltreatment, household dysfunction and other examples of a disadvantaged upbringing (Starecheski, 2015). This tool was used as a mechanism to understand the types of childhood experiences that were considered adverse or traumatic before the age of eighteen years as determined by the assessment. Research has proven that adverse childhood experiences can affect one's health and well-being (Finkelhor et al., 2013) as well as their ability to learn, engage and cooperate with those who have experienced their own adverse childhood experiences. Often,

people who have had challenging childhoods have trouble naming their pain, coping with

traumatic stress and traversing environments that might remind them of a previous trauma

(Pynoos et al., 1999). Thus, I felt that using the ACEs assessment would provide me with critical

background information about their childhood experiences before we started the interview.

The ACEs assessment tool includes 10 questions that range from having a parent with

mental illness, to being physically and sexually abused, to witnessing domestic violence and

having a household member go to prison. A few example questions are listed below:

Table 2: Example ACEs Questions.

While you were growing up, during your first 18 years of life:
1. Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often… Swear at you, insult you, put you down, or humiliate you? or Act in a way that made you afraid that you might be physically hurt?
2. Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often… Push, grab, slap, or throw something at you? or Ever hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured?
3. Did an adult or person at least 5 years older than you ever… Touch or fondle you or have you touch their body in a sexual way? or Attempt or actually have oral, anal, or vaginal intercourse with you?
4. Did you often or very often feel that … No one in your family loved you or thought you were important or special? or Your family didn't look out for each other, feel close to each other, or support each other?
5. Did you often or very often feel that … You didn't have enough to eat, had to wear dirty clothes, and had no one to protect you? or Your parents were too drunk or high to take care of you or take you to the doctor if you needed it?

The ACEs survey was given to each participant five minutes before the interview commenced. Although the ACEs survey can be considered intrusive, I communicated to each participant the purpose of the ACEs tool as it related to the study and provided a few sample questions to confirm that they were comfortable with completing the assessment. It is also important to note that each participant had the opportunity to view and read the ACEs questions prior to the interviews as well. After the ACEs assessment was completed, we did not speak about it immediately. I simply accepted the assessments from the participants and placed them in a folder. Then, I started the interviews by thanking them for their participation and by communicating the purpose of the interview again while the audio was recording. I also mentioned that they were free to pause or stop the interviews altogether at any point if they felt uncomfortable. Each participant agreed that they felt comfortable enough to continue the interview process.

Interviews utilized semi-structured interview protocols. The focus of the interview was to learn and understand their childhood and adolescent experiences. I hoped that by discussing those experiences first, that conversing about their experiences with trauma and the ACEs assessment would prove to be easier when we got to that part of the interview. Ultimately, my assessment was correct. Based on their body language and facial expressions, it appeared that the participants found it easier to discuss the ACEs assessment as well as any other traumatic experiences they endured after first having a robust dialogue about everything else. I made sure to define any nebulous or unknown concepts or terminology to the participants as well. Specifically, each one of the participants asked me what 'No Excuses' discipline was before and during the interviews for additional clarification. They had an idea of what zero tolerance policies were but they were not as familiar with the term 'No Excuses'. They also asked about

the definitions of different forms of trauma during the interviews. I kept a list of definitions handy during the process and the information was also provided to them in the participant information packets too. The aforementioned data collection strategies were all completed in a collaborative spirit with the subjects that honored the basic assumptions of qualitative research by increasing the understanding of their subjective experiences (Glesne, 2011).

As I alluded to above, I chose to bracket the interview into three sections. The first part detailed their school history and personal experiences. The second part discussed their experiences at 'No Excuses' schools. The third part of the interview specifically and exclusively focused on their experiences with trauma as well as what was tabulated on the ACEs assessment. Because many of the interview protocols were of a sensitive nature, they were piloted before the research interviews. A few examples of the questions that were asked during the semi-structured interviews were "tell me about your childhood," and "discuss an experience from your childhood that you would consider traumatic." In regards to the No Excuses environment, questions like "describe parts of the socialization process and/or discipline policies at 'No Excuses' charters that promoted resiliency and healthy attachments for students," and "can you describe any part(s) of the socialization process and/or discipline policies at 'No Excuses' charters that triggered or could possibly trigger Black males to relive previous traumatic experiences?" I carefully watched each participant as they attempted to answer the interview protocols and some questions evoked noticeable body movements, alterations in posture, differences in mannerisms and changes in their tones of voice. There were also many times where the participants continuously rubbed their hands together while speaking, tapped their feet repeatedly or rubbed their heads. During these periods, I made sure to speak in an even tone while clearly thanking them for participating.

I was patient with them during the process and allowed them to decide whether to move forward or not. A full list of interview protocols can be found in Appendix D.

I also reflected about the possibility of participants using journals to jot down their thoughts and feelings as we conducted the interview, but I decided against it. I did not want to unnecessarily complicate things understanding the sensitivity of discussing cumulative trauma. I wanted to create an environment that was less rigid and more relaxed where the participants were able to make informative decisions regarding what information they wanted to share and most importantly, how they were going to share it. Resting periods were offered throughout the interview, and each participant was precipitously thanked for their participation after the interview culminated. Understanding that past and present wounds were opened up during the interview process, it would not have been responsible to simply thank them without checking on them afterwards and providing connections to resources if they needed them. Thus, each participant was contacted by phone a few times after the interviews to discuss their overall feelings and well-being.

Personal-family-social anecdotes were shared throughout the interviews too. For instance, each participant detailed their experiences with Hurricane Katrina and chronicled their family's transient journeys in multiple cities around the U.S. These narratives proved to be extremely emotional for the participants as they created vivid imaginative pictures of what their experiences were throughout that life changing event. Following interview data collection with each of the participants, I returned to the Air BnB that I rented or sat at a local coffee shop listening to the data or typing notes about the interviews. All of the audio recorded information was transcribed at a later date when I left the research site. By transcribing the data, I was able to highlight the research as both a listener and a questioner. The interviews were more like

conversations more so than formal interviews. The following summary of interview questions

allowed me to answer each of the research questions in this study:

Table 3: Summary of Research Questions and Aligned Interview Protocols.

Research Question 1
What were Black males' perceptions of trauma and where did they experience the greatest amount of stress during their childhood and adolescence?
Aligned Interview Protocols
How would you define trauma?
Can you describe a traumatic experience or two that you have endured? What made you define the experience as traumatic?
Where do you experience the greatest amount of stress (Home, School, Community, Elsewhere?)
How do you typically respond to stressful situations?

Research Question 2
How did Black males exposed to cumulative trauma perceive the 'No Excuses' school culture and disciplinary practices?
Aligned Interview Protocols
Describe the school cultures and climates to the best of your ability.
How did they look and feel?
If you had disciplinary referrals, what behaviors were you punished for?
How often were you disciplined?
Did you have a suspension record? If so, describe the offenses that you were suspended for?
Describe how receiving consequences made you feel.
Were there teachers that disciplined you more than others?

Table 3 (cont'd).

Why do you feel that certain teachers disciplined you more than others did?
Do you believe that you were disciplined fairly?
Were your experiences at home with adults and children different from your experiences at school?
Describe what you perceive your role at school and at home to be?
Did experiencing trauma/cumulative trauma affect you in any other ways at "No Excuses" Charters, both positive and negative?
What support structures did your school use to comprehensively educate you?
What did these structures look like in practice? How did they make you feel?
Describe parts of the socialization process and/or discipline policies at 'No Excuses' Charters that promote(d) resiliency and healthy attachments for students.

Research Question 2A
What types of interactions at 'No Excuses' schools have the potential to trigger previous traumas in Black males?
Aligned Interview Protocols
Describe the school cultures and climates to the best of your ability.
How did they look and feel?
If you had disciplinary referrals, what behaviors were you punished for?
How often were you disciplined?
Did you have a suspension record? If so, describe the offenses that you were suspended for?
Describe how receiving consequences made you feel.
Were there teachers that disciplined you more than others?
Why do you feel that certain teachers disciplined you more than others did?

Table 3 (cont'd).

Do you believe that you were disciplined fairly?
Can you describe any part(s) of the socialization process and/or discipline policies at 'No Excuses' Charters that triggered or could possibly trigger Black males to relive previous traumatic experiences?
Did you struggle academically in that space and when did you notice it?
Were your academic struggles noticed by others as well (Parent, Sibling, Teacher, Someone Else)?
Do you believe that your experiences with trauma/cumulative trauma affected your ability to achieve academically at 'No Excuses' charter schools?
Did experiencing trauma/cumulative trauma affect you in any other ways at 'No Excuses' Charters, both positive and negative?

Research Question 3
Did Black males exposed to cumulative trauma believe that the 'No Excuses' school culture prepared them for college, careers and successful lives?
Aligned Interview Protocols
Do you believe that 'No Excuses' discipline models have been celebrated, packaged and sold to people of color as the prescription for academic proficiency and career excellence with students of color?
What support structures did your school use to comprehensively educate you?
What did these structures look like in practice? How did they make you feel?
Describe parts of the socialization process and/or discipline policies at 'No Excuses' Charters that promote(d) resiliency and healthy attachments for students.
Were there teachers that disciplined you more than others?
Why do you feel that certain teachers disciplined you more than others did?
Do you believe that you were disciplined fairly?

Table 3 (cont'd).

Were your experiences at home with adults and children different from your experiences at school?
Describe how you have succeeded in both spaces.
Describe what you perceive your role at school and at home to be?
If so, describe the resilient responses that you have displayed in this environment.
Did experiencing trauma/cumulative trauma affect you in any other ways at "No Excuses" Charters, both positive and negative?
Describe the reasons you felt comfortable following rules in this space or why you felt uncomfortable following rules in this space.
How would you suggest making the 'No Excuses' environment more of a safe haven for children who have experienced trauma?

Research Question 3A
What coping mechanisms have assisted Black males enduring chronic traumatic stress and how have they impacted their abilities to be resilient despite their circumstances?
Aligned Interview Protocols
Do you possess any coping mechanisms and have your school encouraged any specific coping strategies? If so, what were the results?
Describe parts of the socialization process and/or discipline policies at 'No Excuses' Charters that promote(d) resiliency and healthy attachments for students.
Do you believe that 'No Excuses' discipline models have been celebrated, packaged and sold to people of color as the prescription for academic proficiency and career excellence with students of color?
What support structures did your school use to comprehensively educate you?
What did these structures look like in practice? How did they make you feel?
Describe parts of the socialization process and/or discipline policies at 'No Excuses' Charters that promote(d) resiliency and healthy attachments for students.

Table 3 (cont'd).

Were there teachers that disciplined you more than others?
Why do you feel that certain teachers disciplined you more than others did?
Do you believe that you were disciplined fairly?
Were your experiences at home with adults and children different from your experiences at school?
Describe how you have succeeded in both spaces.
Describe what you perceive your role at school and at home to be?
If so, describe the resilient responses that you have displayed in this environment.
Did experiencing trauma/cumulative trauma affect you in any other ways at "No Excuses" Charters, both positive and negative?
Describe the reasons you felt comfortable following rules in this space or why you felt uncomfortable following rules in this space.
How would you suggest making the 'No Excuses' environment more of a safe haven for children who have experienced trauma?

Due to the research study being emotionally and psychologically rigorous, I took it upon myself to engage in the art of metacognition daily. Metacognitive practices can be thought of as those that "include a critical awareness of (a) one's thinking and learning and (b) oneself as a thinker and learner" (Mcdaniel, 1970). A report by the Child Mind Institute claimed that using metacognition was also a powerful mechanism for self-regulation and monitoring the harmful self-talk that we might have experienced as a result of our past experiences, dispositions or situations (Jacobsen, n.d.). I classified these activities as "identity memos," which are succinct comments that question the inner self and how that inner self influences the critical work being done (Maxwell, 1996). Furthermore, "researchers undertaking qualitative research, and

particularly qualitative research on sensitive topics, need to be able to make an assessment of the impact of the research on both the participants and themselves" (Dickson-Swift et al., 2007, p. 3).

I wanted to help maintain the participants' humanity while upholding my own. As a qualitative researcher, the best thing that I could endeavor to do was to be transparent with them during the interview process and transparent with myself during the data collection and analysis process. I shared my personal story with them so that it was not a one-sided experience. I was not simply a taker of information in that space. I was purposefully transparent, giving and vulnerable. Consequently, a different kind of exchange took place during the data collection process between me and those young men.

Table 4: Critical Introspection and Metacognition and Table 5: Critical Self Talk and Journaling served as critical inquiries, restorative reminders and positive affirmations that kept me level headed, fair and emotionally stable during the data collection and data analysis processes.

Table 4: Critical Introspection and Metacognition (During Data Collection).

How will you handle self-care?	Will you keep a personal journal about your experiences while interviewing?
Who will support me emotionally and psychologically?	Don't be afraid to put yourself on the table.
Will you take breaks after the interviews?	Who is the researcher?
If so, what will they look like?	Can I look into the mirror and find my soul?
What is the relationship between the researcher and what is being researched?	How do you determine when to disclose personal information and when is the appropriate time to do so?

Table 4 (cont'd).

How does this relationship affect the contents, methods and stance of the project?	You can draw on the strengths you have based on your experiences to help you ask better questions, get better answers.
What does it mean to have a research subject?	What emotions are evoked in you during the interviews?
What have you learned about yourself through this process of stories and how has it affected the way you view the persons in the study?	How do you manage your emotions?
How do you avoid researcher exhaustion?	What does fidelity look like and how are you maintaining boundaries with the participant?

Table 5: Critical Self Talk and Journaling (During Data Collection & Data Analysis).

Make sure to take out time for yourself. There are a lot of bruised people doing this work. **Take care of yourself.**	Be responsive and proactive.
Be open to how the research is affecting you psychologically, emotionally and physically.	Avoid positioning participants.
Get help in the research. It can be taxing on your body and your mind. Be **careful**.	In this research, you must truly examine every single word you are using, especially considering the group you are studying.
How I see myself is most likely how I will see others.	Refrain from **deficitizing** the Black community regarding exposure to trauma in high poverty areas.
You are a **vulnerable observer**.	Be purposefully eclectic and self-reflective during this process.
Don't be **overly critical** of yourself.	Decrease the **"othering"** process.
When participants assume you know their stories because you are similar-you can question them and make them explain more.	Can you keep your hat on as a researcher during the interviews, but then take that hat off and offer resources or support after the interviews as a friend/confidant?

Table 5 (cont'd).

You are **constantly becoming** as you listen and as you write. Make sure that the same **"self"** that collects the data, transcribes and analyzes it as well.	Remember that all research starts and ends with the self. You **make sense** of the research by first making sense of yourself.
This is **sensitive, emotional, difficult research**, but you are more than qualified to handle its contents.	Be consistent. **Trust** yourself.

It is a well-known fact that pursuing and shepherding research studies that have personal ties can be psychologically draining and have unspeakable ramifications if the appropriate systems of care are not in place (Rager, 2014). Thus, the strategies above were used as self-care mechanisms (Rager, 2014). Researchers have spoken freely regarding the need and reception for scholars that emotionally connect to the qualitative research that they conduct (deMarrais, 2004). Sciarra (1999) stated that "because entering the meaning-making world of another require[d] empathy, [that it was] inconceivable how the qualitative researcher would accomplish [his] goal by distancing [himself] from emotions" (p. 44).

Data Analysis

Because I analyzed the data using both interpretative phenomenology and hermeneutic constructivism approaches, it allowed me to fully understand the participants' positionalities from their perspectives (Glesne, 2011). This proved to be significant in examining the data because it gave me the ability to ask three important questions about the phenomenon being studied--- why, what and how? Together, both frameworks allowed me to ponder which categories and themes explained the participants' experiences better. It also created a space for me to categorize and name the phenomenon, while maintaining a close connection to the overall meaning of the study (Creswell, 2006). Within these frameworks, the phenomenon of interest

(cumulative trauma) was personal to the researcher and one that many would classify of the utmost importance (van Manen, 1990). Thus, the sensitive intersectionalities that I possessed, along with my personal beliefs and experiences, could not be completely expelled during the research process (Fouquier, 2009). While using a phenomenological framework, the researcher must choose the appropriate time to introduce his prejudices into the study and when to put them to the side (Creswell, 2006). My positionality on this subject as a Black male exposed to cumulative trauma and a former dean of students and teacher at two 'No Excuses' charter schools has been clear throughout this manuscript. However, I did place safeguards like member checking around my work to accommodate for this shortcoming.

Member Checking

Member checking is a process in which the researcher validates and verifies the accuracy of the research findings and themes with the participants (Creswell, 2014). This process can also include going back to the participants to discuss the methodology used to create the themes as well as requesting follow up interviews with the participants to clarify any ambiguous terminology (Creswell, 2014). In some cases, it can also mean discussing the actual interview transcripts with the participants for validation purposes (Creswell, 2014). During the informed consent stage of data collection, each participant stated that they desired to have their sensitive information sent back to them for their records. During and after data collection, each participant was asked to verify several of the claims and stories that were communicated during the face-to-face interviews for legitimacy reasons.

A few months after the interviews were completed and all data was transcribed, each participant was emailed their unabridged interview transcripts and audio recordings for verification purposes. Themes and preliminary findings were also discussed at this time to give

the participants the opportunity to comment on the data that was collected. I was not able to conduct in-person follow-up interviews with the participants due to distance, but each participant was encouraged to reach out to me regarding the information that was discussed and shared. Ultimately, due to the gravity of the study, after providing these analyses, I cautioned myself against continually prodding participants to discuss the findings out of fear of trauma reminders and re-experiencing traumatic symptoms. I felt that enough due diligence was done to verify the accounts that were recorded and left an open door for additional discourse should the need present itself.

Data Interpretation

After all data was transcribed, journaling notes were compiled and other research data was sorted and categorized, I began to get a true feel of what the data were saying. Then, I began to code the data. As Creswell (2014) notes, "Coding is the process of organizing the data by bracketing chunks (or text or image segments) and writing a word representing a category in the margins" (pp. 197-198). To accomplish this task, I used Tesch's eight coding considerations for assistance:

Table 6: Tesch's Eight Coding Considerations.

Step 1: The researcher ought to read the entire transcript carefully to obtain a sense of the whole and to jot down some ideas.
Step 2: The researcher selects one case, asks "what is this about?" and thinks about the underlying meaning in the information. The researcher's thoughts can be written in the margin.
Step 3: A list is made of all the themes or topics. Similar themes or topics are clustered together.
Step 4: The researcher applies the list of themes or topics to the data. The themes or topics are abbreviated as codes, which are written next to the appropriate segments of the transcripts. The researcher tries out this preliminary organizing scheme to see whether new categories and codes emerge.

Step 5: The researcher finds the most descriptive wording for the themes or topics and categorizes them. Lines are drawn between categories to show the relationships.
Step 6: The researcher makes a final decision on the abbreviation for each category and alphabetizes the codes.
Step 7: The data material belonging to each category is assembled and a preliminary analysis is performed.
Step 8: The researcher recodes existing material if necessary.

(De Vos, 1998, pp. 343-344).

This eight-step process was the roadmap that allowed me to specify what each individual

interview was about, to create topic groupings based on the types of data that emerged and to

relate the labeled data to other participant data as well as existing research (Creswell, 2014).

NVivo, a qualitative software system was utilized to assist in developing and highlighting themes

in the data (NVivo, 2018). The overall strategic purpose in creating a coding mechanism was to

orchestrate ultimate understanding and lucidity within the data that was collected (Creswell,

2014). Data was organized and labeled ideologically, conceptually and philosophically in

relation to what participants reported regarding their lived experiences (Creswell, 2014).

These codes were entered into a master list after (a) documenting the propensity of reoccurring

themes, (b) consistently denoting the credibility of the data and (c) bracketing my own

preconceived ideas about what the data yielded (Cohen et al., 2000).

Throughout this entire process, I continued to revisit the field notes that were highlighted

in the data collection section under Table 5: Critical Self Talk and Journaling. These points of

inference were key during the data analysis stage because they brought a humanizing aspect to

the work. It provoked the interplay between believing that I understood what the research

participant meant in his elucidation of an issue merely by sharing specific demographic or

cultural attributes and consistently challenging my own ideological beliefs to find deeper

meaning in the narratives being communicated. Many times, it proved to be a cathartic

experience. I challenged myself to read the transcripts multiple times and I listened to the audio

over and over again to glean true understanding and to code appropriately. I repeatedly attended

to these tasks because constructivists "describe research as oriented toward lived experience

(phenomenology) and hermeneutics interpret the 'texts of life' (van Manen, 1990, p. 4). It was

my duty to ensure that I engaged in the "epistemological reflexivity" process where I

consistently posed questions to myself regarding the efficacy of the methodology (Dowling,

2008, p. 747).

Both premediated coding strategies and developing thematic strategies were used in the

study (Creswell, 2014). I decided that this approach was best because there were numerous

topics that were considered unusual (Creswell, 2014), or antithetical to what I perceived would

emerge as codes from the data. For example, considering that the phenomenon in the study was

cumulative trauma, I did not foresee themes like perceptions of love, masculinity or religious

affiliation emerging as much as they did. Because constructivists also believe that reality is

subjective and personal (Baxter & Jack, 2008), the insight concerning the prevalence of unusual

coding themes prompted me to stay even closer to the participants sensitive data. It behooved of

me to create a textual and organizational description that situated the case study in its proper

context (Creswell, 2014). Description can be defined as "a detailed rendering of information

about people, places, or events in a setting" (Creswell, 2014, p. 199). In an effort to advance the

data, I chose a descriptive and personal narrative method to disseminate the findings (Creswell,

2014).

The findings memo that was distributed to my dissertation committee after conducting the study initially consisted of sixteen understandings. After a more thorough investigation and exploration of the participants' data, not only were the sixteen findings shortened, but my research questions were also revised. Most of the pertinent findings were combined with others based on the top six emergent themes and a few of the common understandings from the participants did not answer my research questions. Thus, while they were intriguing findings and could have provided another potential theme to an already robust study, I did not feel that I had enough data to support the arguments I desired to make in this dissertation. Therefore, I chose to mention them in the future research directions section in the discussion chapter of this manuscript.

The same process took place when I decided to revise my research questions to align more with the data I actually received from participants. For example, before I revised the three research questions, they read:

a) How do Black males exposed to cumulative trauma perceive 'No Excuses' socialization and discipline?

b) Does exposure to cumulative trauma affect the academic achievement of Black males who are/were enrolled at 'No Excuses' charter schools?

c) How do Black males exposed to cumulative trauma perceive healthy social and emotional development?

In a dissertation that utilizes a phenomenological approach to understand the adult perceptions of Black males reflecting back on their experiences with cumulative trauma as children and adolescents, I realized that the three research questions mentioned above did not account for these perceptions in any way. Yet, I did inquire about these understandings from participants

during the interviews as stipulated in the interview protocols (located in Appendix D). Therefore, I replaced the first research with a question that asked Black males about their perceptions of trauma and where they experienced the greatest amount of stress during their childhood and adolescence. The research question that simply asked about their perceptions of 'No Excuses' socialization and discipline was slightly modified to ask a more comprehensive question about the school culture as well as what interactions might have triggered Black males in that environment. It was also important to get an understanding of what coping strategies these young men utilized during their journeys and although it did not replace a research question, the participants' interview data on this topic yielded powerful comprehensions about the psychological rigors it took to manage their cumulative stressors. Lastly, because the former research questions asked whether their experiences with trauma affected them academically and the 'No Excuses' school culture is predicated upon not only preparing students for college but life success, I felt that a more specific research question that focused on perceptions of "preparedness" and "success" bolded better. So, I updated the question to ask Black males whether they believed the 'No Excuses' school culture prepared them for college, careers and successful lives. Comprehensively, I thought that these modifications to the research questions effectively replaced those that I began with and helped me to create a fuller picture of their experiences in multiple spaces.

Threats to Validity

According to Creswell (2013), appraising a research study for validity necessitates and begets a question of fidelity and dependability. In qualitative research, the researcher examines validity by utilizing specific procedures to confirm that the findings are precise (Creswell, 2014). Creswell mentioned several terms that addressed the accuracy of data, with a few being

"trustworthiness, authenticity and credibility" (Creswell, 2014, p. 201). I employed these validation strategies during the analyses of transcription data, but especially during the memoing process. Some of my metacognitive notes are stipulated in the tables above, but during the memoing activities I focused more on what the research data was saying to me relationally and theoretically (Given, 2008; Glaser 1998; Maxwell, 1996). Put differently, each time I handled the recorded and written memos, I interrogated my own societal, racial and political assumptions (Dowling, 2008) while contextualizing and interpreting the participants' lived experiences.

Throughout the process of validation, the participants' voices were given the fair and proper consideration they deserved. I also provided a transparent vision of how the research would contribute to the educational outcomes of all children enduring traumatic experiences in high poverty areas, not just Black males. This information is located in the discussion section of the manuscript. The research questions were understood within the context of how likely they were to occur with the specific population being study, rather than with universality or absolutism. Efforts to continue validation involved having profound intelligence about the topic as well as competences from other individuals who have conducted similar studies with similar populations (Creswell, 2013).

These methods are similar to Lincoln and Guba's validation approaches described in Creswell (2013) that discussed topics like researcher positioning and the opportunity for prolonged exposure. Along with the theories that undergirded the methods like phenomenology and constructivism, the ability to maintain prolonged exposure with the data helped me to gain a better understanding of the participants' subjective experiences. I will not use transferability in the study because it involves taking the research findings and utilizing them within other contexts with comparable circumstances and demographics. Because I did not generalize the

findings based on the minute sample size, transferability was not an option. However, peer debriefing was utilized in the study to assist with validity. Peer debriefing is having another person act as a "devil's advocate" by assessing the researcher's understandings and perceptions of the data (Creswell, 2014). A person who has extensive knowledge about my lived experienced was asked to play this role in my study.

Data Management

Lastly, I kept the data I collected confidential. I understood that I was responsible for all of the data that was collected from the participants including audio recordings, notes, consent forms and research materials with identifying information. I made sure that it was safeguarded at all times. Information that was written down was immediately typed at the interview site or another secured area and precipitously shredded at the nearest shredder. I backed up all data on password encrypted drives and private servers to maintain privacy as well.

Researcher Positioning

Due to the personal nature of qualitative methodologies, it was extremely difficult and somewhat impossible to preclude presuppositions from impacting the work (Creswell, 2013). However, it behooved me to "bracket" previous ideas and thoughts and to be more vulnerable and flexible to new insight. This was especially critically when the new insight proved to be diametrically or philosophically divergent from my own understandings (Creswell, 2013). Before conducting this study, I anticipated that the limitations would revolve around time constraints inherent to the dissertation process and meeting program deadlines. However, I was wrong. The mental energy it took to be consistently mindful of my positioning proved to be quite challenging, but I took an ethical oath to report the data in a fair, professional, responsible and equitable manner. Member checking was a huge part of my data collection and analysis because

it allowed me to verify the findings so that my own interpretations were not leveraged (Creswell, 2014). Throughout the process, I tried my best to keep the participants' narratives as close to their own words as possible to reduce impartial disconnectedness (Creswell, 2013, p.21). The hermeneutic constructivism and interpretative phenomenology frameworks kept me grounded and as close to the participants' subjective experiences as possible.

One important consideration that I did not ruminate on enough was the psychological toll that the research process and interviews would have on me. While I had a few mechanisms for reprieve, including critical metacognition, journaling after each interview and numerous therapy sessions with a psychologist, the harsh realities of this work and the participants' struggles with trauma affected me greatly. Some of the personal struggles that were highlighted in the Soul Work, Personal Narrative portion of this manuscript emerged a bit as well, and I was forced to take a step back from the data. I did not know how great the toll was initially, until I had no desire to listen to the audio and no desire to write. Listening to their experiences served as trauma reminders in my psyche, and I did not want to relive their narratives through my work. Maguen et al. (2008) stated that these types reoccurrences can significantly reduce one's ability to manage and could make them more susceptible to adopting harmful behaviors instead of more helpful ones to cope. The scariest part was understanding that the psychosomatic responses to these situations could beget previous anxieties from traumatic experiences endured years earlier (Pynoos, Steinberg, & Piacentini, 1999). What further exacerbated these issues was that I had to undergo major surgery two weeks after I finished collecting data for the dissertation. In addition to enduring trauma reminders about the data, I began to have them about the eight-hour surgery I went through under general anesthesia as well.

As soon as I felt capable and strong enough physically and mentally to return to the dissertation study, I was thwarted again. On a cold day in February of 2017, I received a text message that my older brother, Ajohnte Jamal "Tay" Griffin Sr., had been murdered in East Chicago, Indiana. This proved to be a breaking point for me as I had experienced cumulative trauma throughout my lifespan, but I had never lost a sibling. Again, cumulative trauma is defined as "experienc[ing] multiple, chronic, and prolonged, developmentally adverse traumatic events like sexual abuse, physical abuse, neglect, community violence and domestic violence" (NCTSN, 2016).

I battled depression for a few months after his death and did not have the energy or mental acuity to get anything done. I devoted most of my time to being a support system for my family as well as focusing on my psychological health. After a short period of rest, relaxation and emotional detoxing, I became more interested in returning to the work. With ample meditation and prayers for understanding, I possessed a new-found perspective on life. In a peculiar way, Ajohnte's death helped me to re-calibrate my focus on why the trauma work was so significant in the first place. His peace gave me renewed strength, courage and a sense of energy and purpose around the work. It also provided me an even clearer lens to glance through while representing this sensitive data and shepherding the trauma responsive movement with Black males. Ultimately, this important life experience served as an opportunity to ethically interpret and highlight the true implications of this research study for students of color as a whole.

Limitations & Considerations

Limitations

All four of the participants attended the same charter school in New Orleans. Thus, I was very limited in what I could state across the 'No Excuses' environment as a whole. Their collective experiences and individual experiences highlighted what occurred in their school, but they are not emblematic of the 'No Excuses' structure overall. The ACEs tool presented some limitations as well including, how to properly tabulate or redact traumas experienced after age eighteen because all four participants were between the ages of twenty and twenty-three at the time of data collection. My central inquiries revolved around how I should account for those traumas experienced after age eighteen and if I needed to spend time unpacking ambiguous questions like six and ten. Specifically, in question six, if the participants' parents were never together or married throughout their childhood and adolescent years, they could not answer yes on the ACEs tool even though the experience of not having a parent in their homes affected them similarly and was an adverse childhood experience. The fact that their parents were not legally married and subsequently separated or divorced should not have precluded what actually occurred or the ramifications of the occurrences. From my perspective as the researcher, in some ways, it marginalized their experiences to not be able to tabulate what they felt was indeed a separation because the parent was never present. It begets the question of what does separation truly signify and who defines it?

Question ten on the ACEs tool asked if a household member went to prison? Two participants answered yes, but one participant could not answer because of the word "go" and "household" member. What length of time establishes residency? Do transient household members count? How long should one live in a place to be considered a "household member?"

Along the same lines, if an established household member, like a mother or a father, was in prison before the participants were born, does that qualify? What are the qualifications for circumstances like these? More specifically, does the individual completing the assessment have the right to decide those qualifications? Participants were confused about this question and communicated that regardless of whether the ACEs assessment tabulated these issues as adverse experiences or not, they felt like they were. However, only Mista and Benjamin had relatives that lived with them actually go to prison during their first eighteen years of life.

A legitimate concern that has been documented in the literature is that the retroactive nature of the ACEs tool makes it difficult to gauge life outcomes. Put differently, to improve the overall efficacy of the ACEs tool, individuals should be assessed as children to determine what future health outcomes could look like instead of assessing them several years after childhood (Finkelhor, 2013). This slight limitation did not greatly hinder the results of this case study because the participants were only two to three years from age eighteen opposed to some studies that assessed participants thirty to forty years after childhood and adolescence (Finkelhor, 2013). Still, it is a major concern and should be investigated further in the future for individuals seeking to conduct similar studies.

Another possible limitation in this study was although there was power in the art of reflection and maturation on behalf of the participants, it was responsible to note that attempting to understand the retrospective perceptions of the participants after almost four years of being removed from the 'No Excuses' environment did come with risks. Those risks included, but are not limited to, participants' misinterpreting situations and interactions that occurred in the 'No Excuses' space as being something that they were not, maligning an environment or specific stakeholder for personal gain or affirmation, or just simply not remembering correctly how they

might have felt during an interaction and what the intended stakeholder might have meant. There was also understood caution in retrospectively positioning what occurred at the school as adolescents as somehow being culpable for their adult life choices and decisions that beget negative outcomes as well as how those experiences might have contributed to their current psychological well-being. So, while gathering data from participants years after an experience is a crucial way to understand developed and well-reasoned perspectives, there were slight limitations having to depend on their reflections about experiences and not knowing their exact perceptions and feelings when the events actually transpired. Moreover, I trusted that the participants' reflective stories were valid, and I presented them the way they were given to me during the interviews.

The final limitation in this study was determining how to unpack whether the participants' exposure to cumulative trauma in their homes and communities solely affected their ability to achieve and their perceptions of the 'No Excuses' school culture or whether them being triggered in the environment and thus retraumatized contributed to their lack of academic prowess and unfavorable perceptions of the environment. Ultimately, I found that it was too difficult to specifically identify and tease apart which traumas stymied their holistic development in the 'No Excuses' environment. It was clear that all of the participants suffered various divergent traumas before they became students at the school. It was also clear that each of them was positively triggered in the 'No Excuses' environment and reminded of previous traumas they endured.

Considerations

An ethical consideration in this study was maintaining the confidentiality of the participants due to their unique circumstances. I had frank conversations with the participants

about the information they wanted to include in the study as well as the information they wanted to leave out. I masked the information carefully to make sure that none of the data could be linked back to the school they attended or the participants. Although I discussed the possibility of re-traumatization with the participants during the data collection process, I was not 100% sure if revisiting their traumatic histories would cause them to be triggered in some way. I attempted to avoid leading questions and was very meticulous in the interview protocol construction process. I remained cognizant that all of the participants faced traumatic experiences, so being vigilant about the questions posed to them was of the utmost importance. I was aware of the tone that I used when conveying the information and every effort and precaution was taken out of deep respect and admiration for them.

Another important consideration of the study was to make sure to avoid operating from a heteronormative, cisgendered perspective when it came to enrolling participants. Participants were not intentionally asked during the recruitment process how they identified with gender, race, ethnicity and sexuality. It was presupposed that after reading the recruitment materials that discussed the need to understand Black males' perspectives about cumulative trauma within the context of 'No Excuses' schools that they identified as such. In further studies, I will be sure to offer a space where participants can specifically discuss these critical identity markers from their own perspectives.

Conclusion

All four of the Black males that participated in this study attended a 'No Excuses' charter school in New Orleans. They brought rich knowledges and understandings to a dissertation surveying the phenomenon of cumulative trauma. Their diverse life narratives and positionalities reflecting back on their experiences illuminated the ways they made sense of their roles as school

stakeholders, but also as trauma sufferers. The forthcoming evidence in the findings chapter

provided sound insight into what the participants negotiated in each space they navigated as well

as how their roles were leveraged to cope with each individual experience effectively.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of this dissertation study was to understand the participants' childhood and adolescent experiences of cumulative trauma. Due to the nomenclature of trauma being fairly ambiguous and difficult to define by populations who consider their experiences to be more normal than traumatic, I wanted to know how adult Black males reflecting back on their experiences perceived the concept of trauma and where they felt they experienced the most stress during their first eighteen years of life. After vocalizing their perceptions of trauma and experiences they considered traumatic, I desired to comprehend how those circumstances impacted their abilities to navigate the 'No Excuses' structure. Thus, I was not only interested in their reflective perceptions of the 'No Excuses' environment but also whether previous traumas were triggered there and if they felt prepared of college and life as a result of attending the school. Lastly, I hoped to gain a better understanding of the coping mechanisms, both adaptive and maladaptive that helped them to persist throughout their lifespan. In this chapter, I provide four divergent diagrams that depict critical events and moments from the participants' lives, ages five through twenty-three. Subsequent the participants' personal stories, I present summary statistics on their responses to the ACEs questionnaire to give readers insight into the types of experiences they endured, where they scored in comparison to one another and also what survey items they considered worthy of scoring juxtaposed to those items they did not deem worthy of scoring. Then, I outline each research question and present the findings for each of the cases separately. I conclude the chapter by presenting six cross-case findings that constitute the key findings from the four participants collectively.

As told in Figure 1: Diagram of CJ's life story from ages 5-23, CJ experienced a great deal of stress and was diagnosed with serious conditions in the first ten years of his life. He was

diagnosed as schizophrenic as a child due to lead poisoning, was impacted tremendously by the devastation of Hurricane Katrina and experienced massive anxiety attacks that were triggered by Black men in authoritative positions. CJ's distrust and perceptions of Black men stemmed from him not having a relationship with his biological father. These cumulative experiences played a major role in how he navigated all spaces as well as how he processed those experiences.
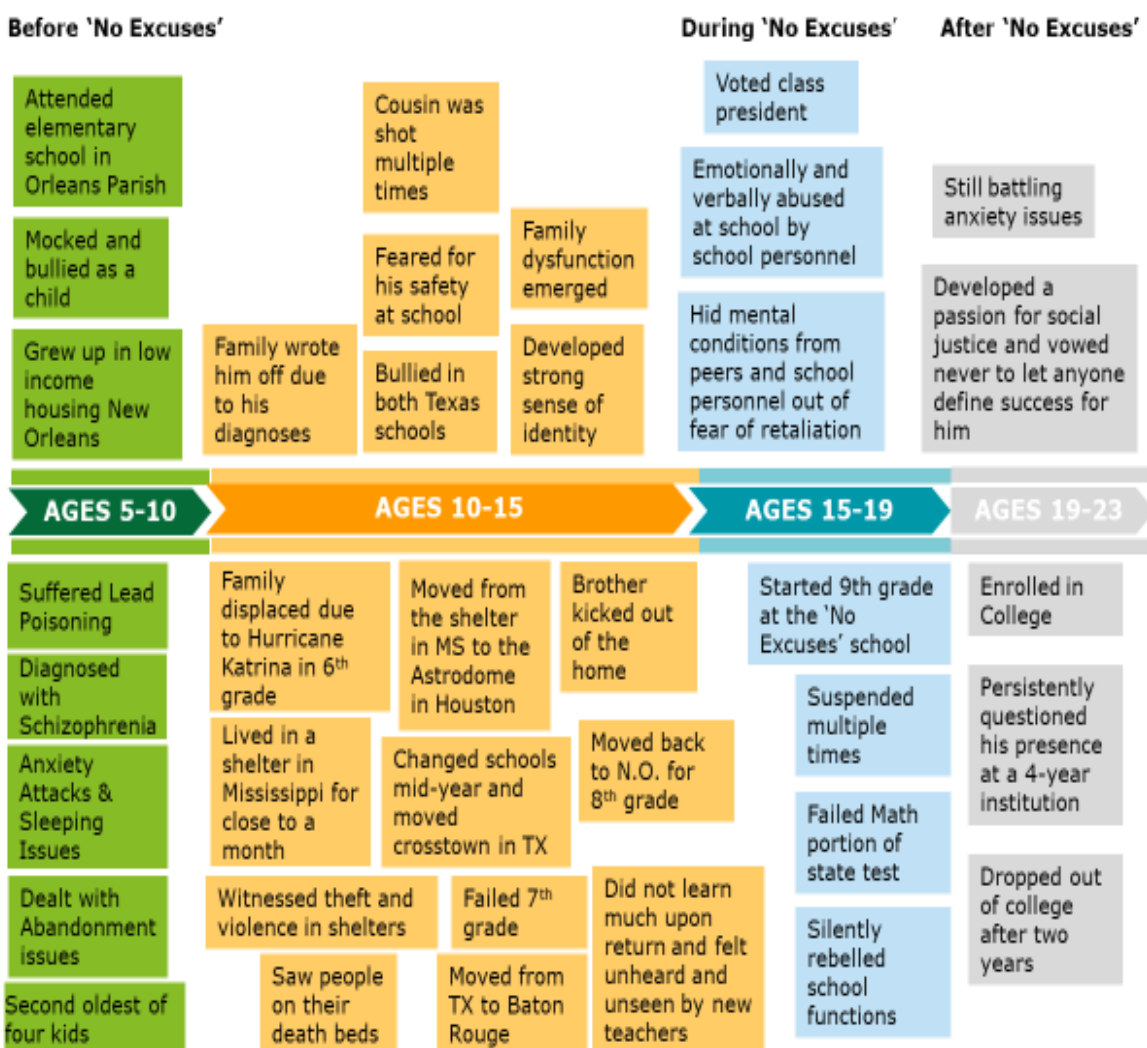
The Story of CJ

Figure 1: Diagram of CJ's life story from ages 5-23.

As told in Figure 2: Diagram of Mista's life story from ages 5-23, Mista also experienced a great deal of stress, enduring community violence and household dysfunction before the age of ten. Mista was bullied constantly throughout his childhood and adolescence, contemplated suicide due to the pervasive tormenting and was almost expelled from high school. These experiences impacted the way Mista conceptualized trauma, processed situations and detached from events that most people would consider traumatic.

The Story of Mista
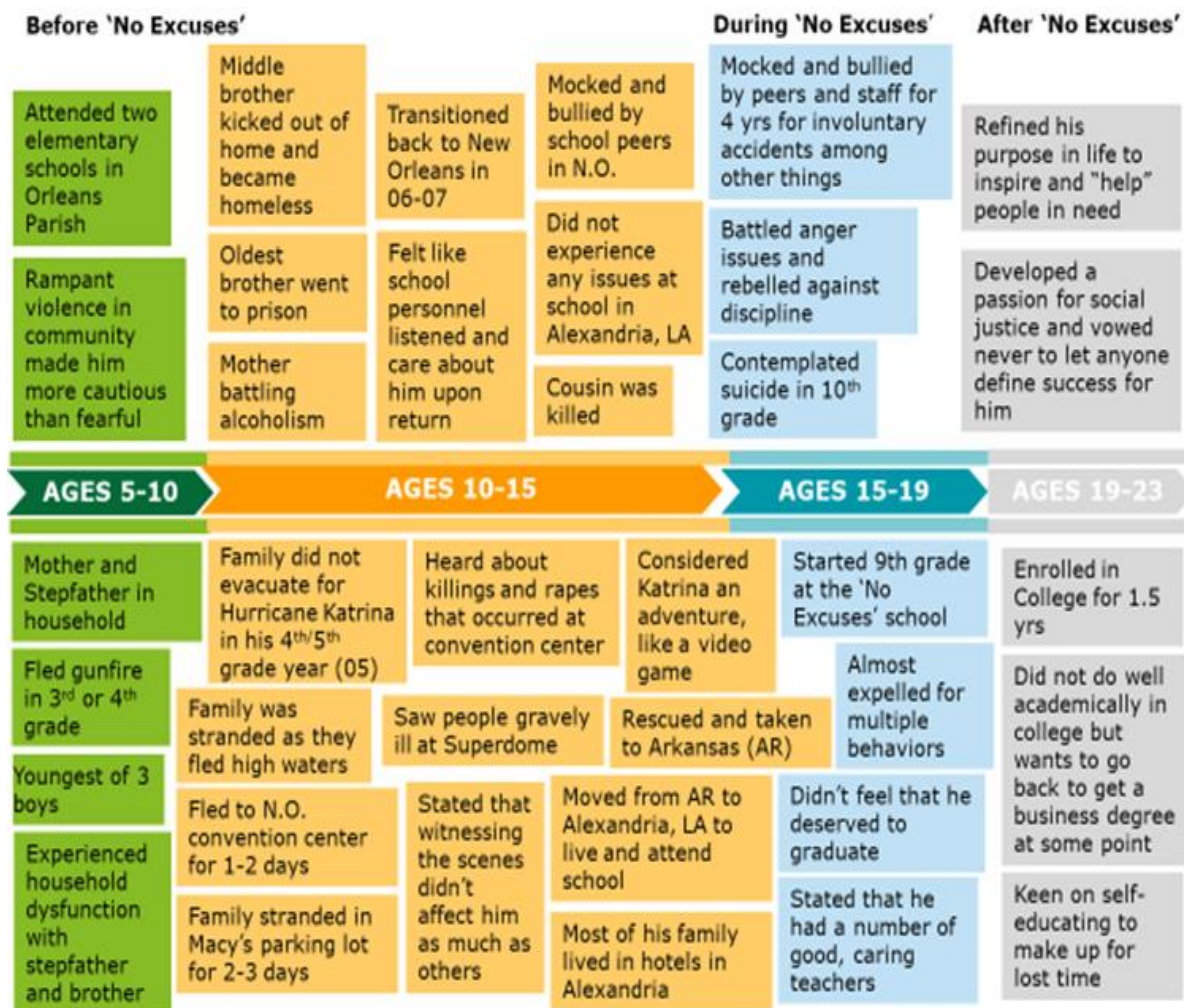
Figure 2: Diagram of Mista's life story from ages 5-23.

As told in Figure 3: Diagram of Benjamin's life story from ages 5-22, Benjamin began to endure most of his stressors after the age of ten. Between the ages of ten and eighteen, Benjamin suffered extremely challenging circumstances, both in school and at home that caused him to juggle different identities and silently rebel. These experiences include him losing several classmates to gun violence and other felonious crimes as well as his father going to prison for murder while he was in high school. Most of Benjamin's ACEs most likely occurred right before Hurricane Katrina and remained throughout his adolescence.

The Story of Benjamin
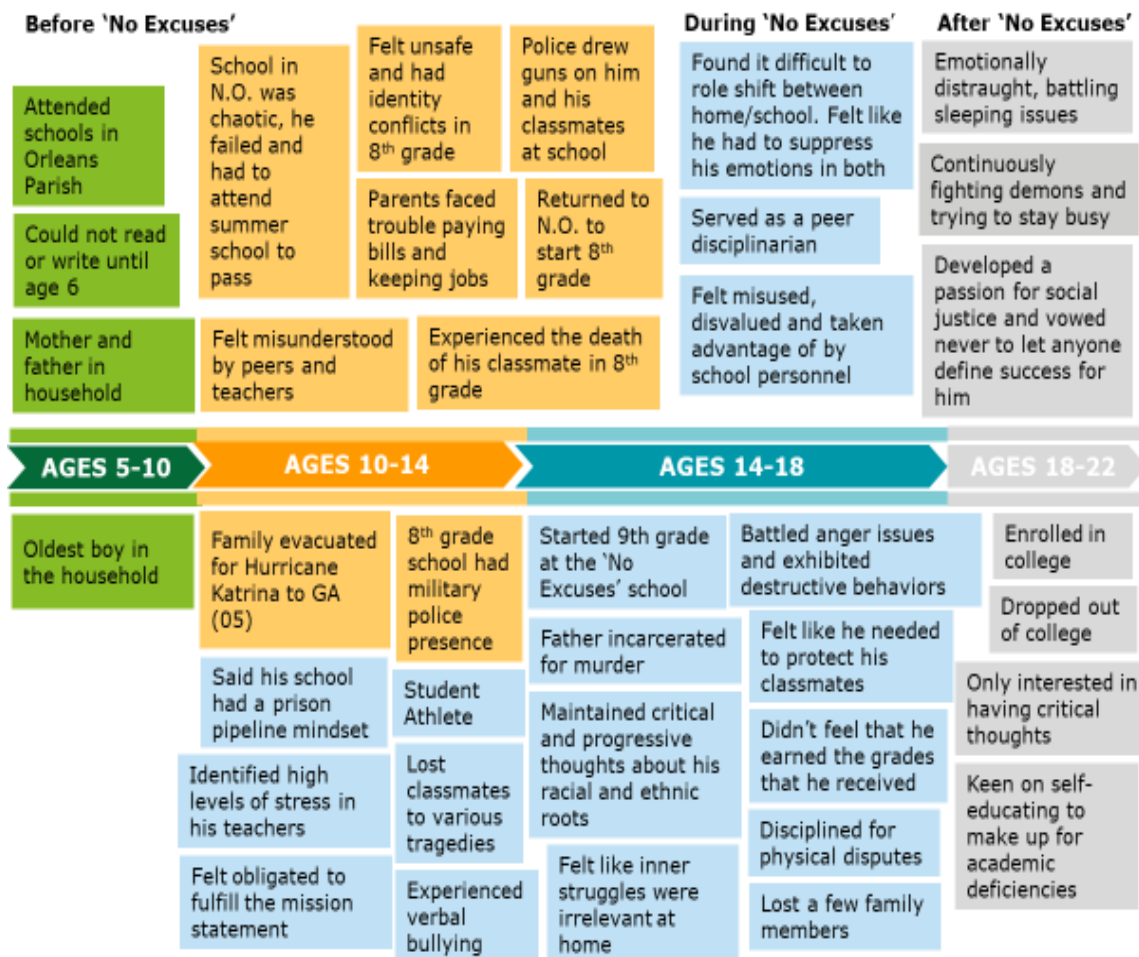
Figure 3: Diagram of Benjamin's life story from ages 5-22.

As told in Figure 4: Diagram of Tink's life story from ages 5-23, Tink endured the death of his mother at the tender age of seven. More than any other event in his life, witnessing his mother die of a brain aneurysm and not feeling supported afterwards impacted every other experience he had throughout childhood and adolescence. It caused him to develop anger issues and question his religion because he felt that no seven-year-old should have had to endure that experience alone. Thus, he suppressed most of his emotions from that experience for over a decade.

The Story of Tink

Before 'No Excuses'

Attended religious private elementary school in another parish in LA

Transient during both childhood and adolescence

First of two children

Felt safer in private school vs. public school

Schooled with racially diverse populations

Transitioned from private school to public school for middle school

During 'No Excuses'

Was not considered a behavior problem

Still battling anger issues

After 'No Excuses'

Younger brother was robbed and shot to death by another Black man

Developed a passion for social justice and vowed never to let anyone define success for him

AGES 5-10 | **AGES 10-15** | **AGES 15-19** | **AGES 19-23**

Witnessed his mother die at 7 of a brain aneurysm

Experienced traumatic grief from finding his mother alone

Was never able to express his feelings about her death so he held it inside

Battled anger issues and felt misunderstood as a child

Endured household dysfunction due to friction with his stepmother

Family displaced due to Hurricane Katrina in 5th grade

Evacuated to Houston for Hurricane Katrina in August 2005

Changed schools mid-year and relocated back to Louisiana after Rita

Evacuated to Galveston for Hurricane Rita in Sept 2005

Started 9th grade at the 'No Excuses' school

Schooled with predominantly Black students

Suspended once after a fight with a teacher

C student in high school

Enrolled in College

Experienced seizures for 2-3 yrs after enduring chronic stress

Dropped out of college

Figure 4: Diagram of Tink's life story from ages 5-23.

Black Males Perceptions of Trauma and Stressors

The first research question sought to understand the participants' perceptions of trauma and in what environments they experienced the most stress. Across the sample of participants, there was clear evidence that their perceptions of trauma were tangible and specific, thoughtful and more developed than I anticipated when constructing the study. Although each participant had a different explanation or understanding of trauma, most of their perceptions aligned with research literature. There was a clear difference in the ways that similar traumas affected each participant. For example, each participant and their families were affected by the devastation of Hurricane Katrina in various ways. However, CJ had the strongest reaction to the natural disaster while Mista communicated that the experience was more like an adventure or a "video game" to him. All of the participants experienced stress in multiple places, but Tink might have experienced more stress at home than he did at school.

When asked what his definition of trauma was, CJ said, "I just think it's events or situations, circumstances that can bring out vulnerabilities in a person. You know, just maximum exposure." He considered trauma to be lasting experiences that remained with an individual even after the traumatic event was over. CJ commented, "It's like that's something that's always gonna stay with you. Stuff you never gonna forget and it's just like, it's engrained in you, it's a part of you." The interview data showed that there were a few major traumas that CJ highlighted as "lasting experiences" that had the potential to remain in one's psyche. One of these experiences happened when CJ was twelve years old. His family was uprooted due to the devastation of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans. This catastrophe was not just considered one of the worst traumatic experiences CJ had ever faced, it was also deemed the costliest natural disaster to ever hit the United States (Stapleton, 2015).

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CJ expressed how fragmented his family became as a result of Katrina and how the remnants of the dysfunction during such a crisis affected his disposition, identity and the way he viewed the world. When CJ was asked to speak more about Katrina, he said, "It was terrible. Hurricane Katrina was one of the worst things that I've experienced just because it just showed me how, in moments, how divided my family was during that whole experience and how we had to be close during that situation." This particular understanding of his familial outlook days after being displaced with no real clue as to when life would become normalized again was interesting when put into context. Less than four years prior, CJ had been diagnosed with schizophrenia after playing with and possibly digesting lead paint in their apartment. He mentioned telling his mother that he had visualized images that were not there and that members of his family had written him off due to his condition. He recalled:

> I did have like mental conditions growing up cuz I grew up in the projects and I had lead poisoning which attributed to anxiety. I was diagnosed with schizophrenia about eight or nine or something. When I was young, I just remember telling my mom I could see things that were supposed to not be there. Like I see things coming out of the TV. I remember seeing this clown, TV clown was coming towards me and I just remember telling her all those different things and then I guess I got tested or whatever. A lot of stuff that was going on, me and my household so my family kinda had approach towards me whereas I probably wasn't going to amount to too much. But my family, I always looked at as one of the kids who wasn't gonna really do too much with his life. You know, who's probably destined to go to jail or something.

CJ did not mention if and when his hallucinations ceased, but he did state that his issues with anxiety and insomnia have been pervasive throughout his life. Coupled with those experiences, CJ also faced bullying at school due to his conditions. He shared, "I got picked on a lot because of it in school. Not in high school though because I didn't want it to follow me in high school and I didn't want people to know about it." These cumulative symptoms and experiences were magnified after experiencing an event like Hurricane Katrina.

In his recollection, CJ detailed graphic stories about living in crowded shelters for weeks at a time and seeing elderly people suffering to stay alive. He said, "We in shelters and stuff, so I'm seeing like elderly people, like people of age, like literally on their deathbeds, as a young kid, can't breathe and stuff and just like everybody all cluttered together." Thus, Hurricane Katrina was not a one or two-day event for CJ and his family. They were transient for almost a month where they migrated from the New Orleans Superdome, to a shelter in Mississippi, to the Astrodome in Houston living in unimaginable conditions. When his family finally settled in Texas, he spoke about how hurtful and disrespectful it was to be called the word "refugee." He stated, "everybody including teachers call you refugees and you're thinking, I tell people all the time, I didn't know what a refugee was, but I thought that's what it meant, when natural disaster happening, you gotta leave your hometown." CJ also discussed the terror that he faced being "jumped" and beaten up by multiple people in Texas simply because he was from New Orleans. He also felt silenced by teachers who desired for him to forget about what he and his family had endured during Hurricane Katrina as well. He recalled, "A lot of teachers, got tired of hearing the whole Katrina thing. Felt like we felt sorry for ourselves. So, it's kinda almost like taboo to even talk about Hurricane Katrina for me when I was in Texas because people was like get over it basically. So it was a real bad experience, that whole Katrina thing. Yeah, real bad for me." While CJ communicated this narrative, he was visibly upset and paused several times to gather his thoughts. To endure what he did in New Orleans and be forced to vacate the only place he called home must have been difficult. However, to re-experience being mocked and bullied and silenced by adults in an entirely different state proved to be even more damaging. His family relocated mid-year to another part of the city and because of the constant stress at school and previous psychological rigors, CJ failed the seventh grade.

Shortly after, CJ experienced what he considered the second most traumatic event that occurred in his life. He described discovering that his older brother was homosexual was a traumatic experience for his family and added that living in the south amplified and perpetuated a negative stereotype about sexuality. CJ commented, "So besides Hurricane Katrina, my older brother is homosexual. So, we live in the South. Everybody do not accept that and I personally watched what he went through." Due to these internal and societal pressures, his brother wrote a letter to his mother that explained his identity and decided to run away from home. After returning home for a short period, CJ's brother was found with his companion in their home and their mother kicked him out for his perceived transgressions. CJ stated that his mother refused to accept his brother's identity. When reflecting about the situation CJ said, "I was asleep and his boyfriend or something, I don't know, he tried to sneak him in or whatever happened. I'm in the 7th grade. I'm just sitting in the room, just watching her, just go off on him. Pack your bag. This is my mom. I never thought I'd hear her say just kicking him out about him being homosexual and about her not accepting him and stuff." Upon further reflection, CJ admitted to grappling with his own emotions about the situation. He said, "I'm wondering, first of all, why he did what he did. When I found out what he did… Making sure I don't hate him. You know, don't wanta adopt no hatred toward my brother, especially for being homosexual. And I just felt like, it was so, everything was different when he was gone."

This experience affected him tremendously because he had shared a room with his brother for most of his life and his family forbid him from discussing anything about it for a long time. Thus, he felt silenced again. CJ said in relation to his brother's revelation, "It's almost taboo to even talk about it today. We're not even supposed to... If he overhear someone saying anything dealing with gay, homosexual, you can hear a fork drop." This experience played a

major part in his development because they shared a strong personal relationship and brotherly bond during times where he felt abandoned by most other people. It also played a significant role in his understanding of identities and masculinities. So, while he had to reconcile how his brother's absence further fragmented CJ's family, he also had to settle the newfound rumblings that emerged in his psyche. Due to the trauma he endured, CJ developed issues with organized religion:

> I'm not religious at all. Me not being religious is part of that experience, watching what he went through as a gay man. You know, being a homosexual man and watching the treatment he got and people going to Jesus about it. I'm like I don't wanta worship, if that's what you worship, I'm not doing that. So, he plays a big reason into why I'm not religious to this day.

> CJ's family was very religious and he did not like that they denigrated and vilified his

brother simply because of his sexual orientation. He said that the entire ordeal traumatized him and triggered him in a profound manner. He recalled, "I've been around a lot of people, some friends and stuff who talk about gay people, homosexuals and the person I instantly think of is my brother. Think about that situation that happened with my brother. But I don't really say too much. Even though it triggers something in me, I don't really speak too much on it because I know how emotional that situation can get." This understanding was huge because he seemed to be vicariously traumatized through an experience that did not personally involve him. Although, the way that he perceived it, it did happen to him because it happened to one of his closest family members. What could not be understood from this study was how his brother perceived his treatment and if he indeed thought that it was traumatic as well.

Additionally, CJ and his family had to grapple with the trauma that was caused by his cousin being influenced by gang activity. CJ reflected, "My cousin being involved in the gang life, you know, always going to the hospital, seeing him being shot up, shot in his eye and in a wheelchair. He in prison right now." These experiences affected CJ tremendously. The everyday

stress of these circumstances proved to be a major burden for his family as well. After evaluating

CJ's experiences, it seemed that he endured stress in several areas of his life during his childhood

and adolescence and that it was not solely confined to one specific area (Refer to Figure 1:

Diagram of CJ's life story from ages 5-23 for more details).

When asked how he defined trauma, Mista said, "Drinking in the house, my mom, she

still does it. It's scary, she drinks and driving and all that. Something always happen to her. That,

my brother, oldest brother went to jail for something that he didn't do." As he spoke about his

brother's incarceration during the interview, he rubbed his hands feverishly while articulating

how unwell he looked when he and his mother went to visit him. He believed that his brother's

incarceration led his mother to drink excessively at times. The pain that these two experiences

caused Mista was unbearable and he maintained that they were also the culprits for his behavior

problems in school. Mista said the following about his brother's imprisonment:

> That was one of the reasons I was acting out [in school] as well, cuz he's in jail, don't
> know what's going on. We'd go see him, you know. He has very sensitive skin so in jail.
> He have rings around his eyes and all that. My mom, she, my mom, she down about it,
> gonna cry cuz she got a baby in jail.

What emerged as a fascinating fact during Mista's interview was that when he was asked

to describe a few traumatic experiences that he endured, Hurricane Katrina was not mentioned

(Refer to Figure 2: Diagram of Mista's life story from ages 5-23 for more details). His family did

not evacuate for Hurricane Katrina and therefore had to sift through murky Mississippi river

water for hours trying to find safety and higher ground. Mista recalled, "We actually got caught

in the hurricane, we was in Magnolia projects at the time so water came rushing up. We wasn't

expecting it. Power went off for so long and once the water started coming up, you know. Okay,

people was like, okay, maybe it's time for us to go." They wound up staying at the New Orleans

Convention Center for a few days before transitioning to the Macy's parking lot for the same

amount of time. Mista discussed seeing people gravely ill near the Superdome and even heard

stories from close friends about seeing dead animals and alligators in the flood waters as they

fled. He also heard stories about killings and rapes that occurred only a few hundred feet from

where he and his family were at the Superdome. When asked to unpack his experience, Mista

remarked, "We was at the convention center for at least a good day or two. Killings happening in

there. And rapes happening in there, things like that. The armory would come by, throw us food

and water. Had to find a place to use a restroom. If you go to the 2nd floor, smell was very bad.

Nobody was able to wipe their self. You hear about a girl getting raped and her neck got slit,

some stuff like that, so I don't know." After being rescued from those circumstances, Mista and

his family were transient in three different cities before returning to New Orleans in 2006-2007.

When asked how experiencing these graphic situations affected him, Mista said:

> A family friend of mine, she was scared. I was kinda joking around at the time, look at
> the dead bird and that sort of stuff. I can honestly say it didn't affect me as much as it
> affected others but at the same time, it was still a horrible, horrible situation that we've
> been through and that I've seen. And I haven't even witnessed things that other people
> witnessed. Like, if you watch the video that they made of Katrina, finding dead bodies
> and the bodies just swelling up, sitting on top of a car. Heard about alligators swimming
> through the water, stuff like that, from the aquarium and all that stuff and the zoo so that
> a lot of things. It was, I guess, like an adventure to me, like playing a game or something.
> Just getting out of a horrible situation.

> The most insightful finding about Mista's articulation of Hurricane Katrina was that he

compared it to playing a video game as if the experience was not real to him. However, for many

people close to him as well as those who walked through thigh-high water with him, it was

probably one of the most traumatic experiences they had ever endured. Because trauma is a

highly individualized experience, it was plausible that Mista did not specifically designate

Katrina as traumatic to him like many others did, even after having onsite access to the

definitions of trauma. He may have also disassociated himself from the experience as a form of

coping and self-protection. One experience that Mista had as a child that might have provided

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much fodder for the way he experienced and conceptualized Katrina was a playground shooting

he escaped:

> As a kid, killings going on all the time. One time, my mom just grabbed me. I knew when I started, she was choking me but she wasn't meaning to do it but she just grabbed me and, you know, tried to run with me. It was scary, scary thing to be around. Gunshots and kids, you know, young, scared, you hear some sort of loud sound go off and you just run. We're all holding each other like what's going on. Like we all right? We good? What's up?

When Mista was asked how he felt about the playground shooting experience, he

responded, "At the time? Let me see. How did I feel about that situation? I mean, I was scared,

you know, hearing gunshots. I was still going around, playing. It never stopped me from playing

and all that but it made me look a little bit more." Thus, like Hurricane Katrina, experiencing

community violence was considered scary, but it did not deter him from returning to the place

where he experienced the threat to his safety. Whereas some people who have lived through

neighborhood shootings are frightened to return to spaces that created the initial stimuli, Mista

positioned his experiences with various stressors as normal. Thus, he either seemingly detached

himself from them or attempted to do so by adopting a more cautious, vigilant and mindful affect

whenever he was faced with stress opposed to a more fearful one. It was discovered after further

questioning that Mista was bothered by the death of relatives and he struggled detaching himself

from those realities. What made his revelation intriguing was that he did not have to know the

relative or possess any form of a relationship with the family member for him to be devastated.

So, one of the explanations for Mista's detached affect in response to Katrina and the playground

shooting was that although other families suffered harm and people died, in neither tragedy did

one of his relatives lose their lives. This was a powerful understanding into Mista's disposition

and thought processes.

Additionally, since Mista was the youngest of three boys, he aspired to have a younger sibling that he could protect and give care and unconditional love to. Mista said, "I always felt like I wanted to be a big brother. Just have somebody under my wing. Be somebody's protection, I always did feel like that." However, when his mother had a miscarriage, the pain that he witnessed his mother struggle through reverberated through him as well. It affected his already fragile psychological well-being because he was not only tired of seeing his mother grapple with alcoholism and other stressors, but he was also weary of feeling alone and only being responsible for himself in the household. During this time, Mista experienced issues with his stepfather too and commented about how the miscommunications with him added another heavy burden to his psyche. His middle brother's transiency and homelessness affected the family structure as well and caused his mind to race persistently regarding the numerous problems he felt his family was faced with. The stress that Mista experienced during his childhood and adolescence emerged in multiple places and was not confined to any specific area (Refer to Figure 2: Diagram of Mista's life story from ages 5-23 for more details).

Benjamin defined traumas "as situations in an adolescent's life where they can be completely destroyed on an innocence basis." He described the tragic death of his classmate in eighth grade, the many deaths of his classmates throughout high school and the incarceration of his father during his senior year as the most traumatic experiences he had to endure. Benjamin was visibly shaken while discussing these situations and spoke passionately about how they affected him. At the time of the interview, it was not entirely clear whether Benjamin felt that his own innocence had been completely destroyed from the experiences he underwent. However, as the interview and ACEs data were analyzed, Benjamin did allude to multiple experiences that

could have destroyed his innocence. He scored an eight out of a maximum of ten on the ACEs

survey, the highest among the study participants.

When Benjamin elucidated the details of his traumatic experiences, he revealed

astonishment and disbelief that some of his classmates were capable of committing mass

murders, suicides and other felonious crimes where people were gravely hurt. Benjamin clarified

his experiences more fluidly:

> We would stretch together. And to know that he was able to commit a murder, 19 people, at a [holiday] parade, you know what I'm saying? And having friends that committed suicide. Having friends that, that it's just killed. Numerous amounts of people have committed numerous amounts of crimes cuz they felt like that's the only thing they could do. And to just have the pain that I have in seeing and being involved myself in things I felt like I had to do and things that had to happen. Especially when my daddy went in. This understanding from Benjamin was intriguing because he mentioned that during his

eighth-grade school year he felt perpetually unsafe due to students possessing "machine guns"

and being involved in criminal activities. This threat to safety caused him to have an identity

conflict where he felt as if he did not fit in because he did not engage in similar behaviors.

Benjamin communicated, "I couldn't be in that classroom with those type of kids because that

made me feel like, man, I don't fit in here. This is no place for me, being with these types of kids

because they'll never be able to relate to me or see me as a peer to help." The physical

environment as well as type of student might have changed once he enrolled in the 'No Excuses'

school in ninth grade, but data revealed that there were some students that exhibited similar

harmful behaviors as the ones he went to school with in eighth grade. Thus, the intrigue was

housed in the feelings of shock that his classmates from the 'No Excuses' environment were also

capable of such acts. When discussing his father's incarceration for murder, Benjamin did not

express surprise because the situation seemed to have stemmed from ongoing household

dysfunction that spilled into the community. He voiced that his father's absence would beget

lifelong ramifications for his entire family as well as his own family one day. In response to his

father's absence, Benjamin said:

> That was rough but, yet again, that was something I shook off and just became harder. You know what I'm saying? I became more vigilant, became even more paranoid about a lot of situations, you know what I'm saying? Cuz that was something that started in the house, left out of the house and hit the street. I feel like knowing that I want children. I don't want to sit down with my daughters and my sons and share that same pain that me and my father shared.

Benjamin experienced stress in multiple areas of his life and could not identify one specific place

where the stress in one place outweighed the other (Refer to Figure 3: Diagram of Benjamin's

life story from ages 5-22 for more details).

Tink perceived traumas as "devastating, affective, traumatic, just bad unforgettable

moments." The most traumatic experience that Tink endured occurred at the tender age of seven

when he witnessed his mother die of a brain aneurysm. What made the experience more

traumatic for Tink was that he discovered his mother's unresponsive body alone. His father had

driven to Florida to attend school and Tink was thrust into a manhood role very quickly with no

assistance. Tink recalled his experiences that day, he said:

> My dad was going to school in Florida. He told me to take care of your mother. I'm seven years old. Ain't that much I could do but I get the idea. And when he went to Florida, my mom was like, you ain't gotta stay here. Go outside, play with your friends. So, I go do that, come back home. Ate spaghetti, took a shower. I'm seven years old. I was scared to sleep in my own room so I slept in her room. And I remember telling her good night. Went to sleep, woke up, 12:00 that morning, I wake up and my mother laying in bed but her eyes rolled back to the back of her head. Unresponsive. Green fluid coming out her mouth. I'm seven years old waking up to this stuff. There ain't nobody here. What to do? So, I go to my neighbor house, can't find a phone in the house. Go to my neighbor's house, knocking on the door, he don't answer. Go to my other neighbor house, he answers, told him what I seen and I just remember me crying myself to sleep, man.

When his father returned after hearing the news about his wife, Tink expressed how confounded

he was to see his father crying uncontrollably. Tink communicated, "You know, my dad never

showed emotion growing up so I never seen a grown man cry so I thought when a man reached a

certain age, it's impossible for him to cry." Therefore, experiencing that traumatic moment with

his father not only revealed the power of human emotion for him, but it also decimated his idea

of what masculinity looked like as a whole and in times of traumatic grief and sorrow.

As Tink and his father planned the funeral arrangements for his mother, Tink realized

how permanent the situation was and remained despondent due to finding his mother the way

that he did. He contended:

> That's the kind of stuff that really, really affected me because nobody was there. Nobody knew what I seen. Nobody witnessed that but me. Know what I'm saying? So, it took a toll on me. It still takes a toll on me to this day. Mother's Day is the hardest holiday for me to go through.

The feelings that Tink experienced after his mother's death were exacerbated precipitously when

his father remarried. He expressed that he was often disciplined inappropriately, treated

differently, and felt emotionally and psychologically neglected by his stepmother. Tink said:

> I was that stepchild. I felt like her kids and her grandchildren, she treated them really different. When I was disciplined and whipped and stuff like that, she went overboard with it. Like whipping me in my face with a belt. Like get welts in the eyes and stuff like that. That kinda stuff, I feel like stepparents shouldn't do and once my dad found out that happened, that disciplinary actions that she was giving died.

Due to these traumatic experiences, Tink developed issues with anger and stress. He felt unseen

by his stepmother and largely unheard by his dad and it caused him to feel that his voice did not

matter. Thus, he kept his feelings to himself. Tink did experience a great deal of traumatic grief

from his mother's death, but it was not known whether he struggled with feelings of guilt as

well. However, what was known about the incident was that he did place a tremendous amount

of pressure on himself during and after the event.

Tink also communicated that his young brother being tragically murdered, shot in the

back when he was trying to escape a robbery was the second most traumatic experience he had

ever endured in his short twenty-three years of life. When Tink was asked to unpack the

situation, he said:

> My little brother was killed by these three dudes. He was an innocent man. He was killed and he was killed for no reason. He was looking for something and these guys told him to go to this apartment and things happened, they told him to get out of the car or he was already outside the car waiting on these dudes and they just pulled up and shot him and robbed him. Shot him one time in the back as if he was trying to run and it came out the heart and he just, he suffered on the scene.

At the time of the interview, Tink was still grappling with his brother's death that had occurred

just five months earlier. When discussing his brother's murder, Tink seemed to not only

legitimize his death as being unfortunate, but that him being gunned down by another Black man

made it even harder to fathom. Moreover, Tink responded to the inquiries about his brother from

a position of strength and introspection. He repeatedly stated that he did not hold any "beef" with

the men who ambushed and murdered his brother. Tink even mentioned his desire to pray for the

individuals because their families were affected too. Tink experienced more stress in and around

his home life than he did at school or in any other area of his life (Refer to Figure 4: Diagram of

Tink's life story from ages 5-23 for more details).

Across the four cases, the participants understandings of trauma nomenclature as well as

the graphic and gripping depictions of traumatic experiences they shared were fascinating. Their

stories and perceptions of trauma demonstrated that they endured stressful experiences daily and

that the majority of them were knowledgeable about how those experiences affected them.

Black Males Perceptions of 'No Excuses' School Culture & Discipline

The second research question focused on understanding the participants' perceptions of

the 'No Excuses' school culture and disciplinary practices. Across the sample of participants, it

was very clear that they perceived the 'No excuses' environment as a "prison" where educators

did everything in their power to control them. All of the participants mentioned prison

preparation, walking on lines, having silent lunches and silent days as well as being punished for typical adolescent behaviors like talking and laughing. Mista and CJ were considered behavior outliers while Benjamin and Tink were only disciplined a handful of times due to physical altercations with students and staff. Mista was the only student bullied by peers and school staff while CJ felt bullied by school staff only. Each participant also claimed that the 'No Excuses' environment taught them how to be obedient and programmed them to be submissive and divisive towards other individuals that looked like them.

CJ adamantly proclaimed that navigating the 'No Excuses' school culture "taught [him] how to be real obedient to like authoritative figures." He said, "I just seen like how much the school controlled my life and I was like, man, I know I'm better than this." CJ described the 'No Excuses' school culture and discipline code as one that stymied his ability to have critical thoughts. CJ was suspended from school numerous times for what he explained to be petty non-violent offenses like talking, running and not walking in the cafeteria, sagging his pants, and cracking jokes in class. He portrayed an environment that was atypical for Black males in high school where being forced to walk on lines and be silent in the hallways with teachers standing beside him was a common occurrence. CJ remarked, "Walking in a line with a teacher beside you, being quiet in the hallway, going to your class. You can't talk, can't say nothing." He stated that teachers and administrators used their power over students by enforcing rules that were not in proportion to the student body. For example, he mentioned that, "If a principal or teacher walked into the cafeteria and raise[d] their hand up, that meant to shut up. You didn't shut up, you went home."

CJ also depicted the 'No Excuses' culture as one that caused students to develop a keen hatred for one another based on the favoritism that was leveraged for certain students by

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administration. CJ clarified the following statement about school leadership at the 'No Excuses' school, "They weeded out the students who can help promote their school and they provided them with certain resources and opportunities." He communicated that because of this perceived favoritism, students rarely came to the rescue of others out of fear of being ostracized or singled out. He purposely hid his mental conditions of schizophrenia and anxiety from peers and school personnel out of fear of bullying or retaliation in some form (Refer to Figure 1: Diagram of CJ's life story from ages 5-23 for more details). CJ also felt like he was emotionally abused by school personnel at various junctures during his time there. Despite his fears and troubles in that space, CJ was very popular amongst his peers. He was even voted class president much to the chagrin of school personnel whom he felt labeled him as a troublemaker. He said, "I just was like one of the rebellious ones. I silently rebelled because I knew I'd get suspended if I tried something."

His perceptions of the 'No Excuses' school are not so different from the way he felt at other points during his life. It could be argued that other students were favorited over him in the schools he attended in Texas and that his ability to express critical thoughts had been thwarted for years in school and at home. His role in both spaces seemed consistent regarding these two issues. Another thing that also appeared steady across many of his experiences was the intentional concealing of parts of his identity and prior diagnoses. However, during the last few years of his journey in the 'No Excuses' climate, CJ tapped into his inner resiliency and proved a lot of people wrong by being unanimously voted as one of the leaders at the school. His network of friends served as a support structure for CJ and made him feel like success. They heard his ideas, listened to his deepest thoughts and he earned their respect. These relationships were the ultimate factor in why he was able to persevere through his struggles, and they positively impacted his life in transformative ways. After looking back on his experience there, CJ

contended, "I really came to the conclusion I wasn't no longer, this wasn't school to me. This was something else. You know, this wasn't school. This was something totally different." CJ also said of the 'No Excuses' environment, "It always, always, always will resemble a prison to [him], always, always." What was not well understood about CJ's prison reference was if the physical features and regimented practices of the school environment solely reminded him of a penal institution due to him having family members who had navigated such facilities, or whether he explained that the environment and practices made him a prisoner of his own mind considering that he had lived a life of being encouraged and somewhat forced to shrink.

Mista wasted no time vividly describing the 'No Excuses' school culture as a prison. He mentioned that it looked and felt like the inside of a prison due to the strict supervision and perceived lack of freedom students possessed. Specifically, Mista said:

> I'd say we felt like it was like a prison. Inside of a prison. Your warden, of course, was __, teachers, certain teachers were the guards. You know, they walk us out of class and you gotta stand in one straight line. Tape here, the wall here, you gotta stay between that. If you get out, you suspended. Detention, if you get out of line. You gotta walk real quiet while you going to class instead of us free roaming.

He stated that students were not allowed to roam free on campus or in the hallways and always had to be accompanied by an adult. He expressed that failure to walk on the tape in the hallways warranted an automatic detention and a possible suspension for some students. Many times, he said that these punishments would be handed down based on the principal's personal disposition or mood on that day. For example, Mista explained that around lunch time, "If the principal was feeling bad, he walked up and put his hand up. We all had to shut up or something like that. If you didn't shut up, you got suspended. You weren't quiet, you talking, you had to go." What was fascinating about Mista's articulation of the school environment was how he graphically described the behaviors and roles of each stakeholder and what punishments were handed down

if those stakeholders were not complaint. Here, it was difficult to discern whether Mista's prison epiphany was a retroactive awakening after years of being removed, or whether it was something that manifested while he was a student in the 'No Excuses' space considering that his family visited his older brother in multiple prisons in Louisiana. The context that he provided was striking and really communicated a powerful understanding of his experience.

Mista also described the 'No Excuses' climate as one where students were harshly disciplined for frivolous adolescent matters like "simply being a teenager, talking excessively" or making jokes about each other. He complained that the rules were unfair because some students were not punished as harshly as he was for more serious matters like bringing weapons to the school. He was considered by the school leadership as one of the outliers and was suspended multiple times from school. He explained that due to his anger issues, he would chew on objects to take his mind off of the pain and stress that he was experiencing. He recalled one experience where he was almost expelled for chewing on a piece of plasticware. After being called to the classroom for what the teacher communicated was a disturbance, Mista described:

> The co-principal, was like, what's going on? What'd he do now? Yeah, get his ass out of here. Like he really said that. It was just a lot. I was suspended indefinitely, for five days basically, then had to come back the next week, that Monday for an expulsion hearing.

He communicated that before the situation escalated that he explained to the teacher why he chewing on the spoon. He said, "She didn't care. She told me, just do what I said," or I am "gonna get you outta here, get you expelled." Chewing on plastic was a coping mechanism that Mista utilized at home and in school and one he classified as being harmless and non-intrusive. However, what he felt was an adaptive way to soothe himself from the anguish he dealt with continuously, seemed like a maladaptive disturbance that the school felt required discipline.

Mista's perceptions of the 'No Excuses' environment continued when he claimed that the

school also perpetuated a culture of embarrassment and humiliation for certain students. He

mentioned one instance where he was singled out by the principal in the cafeteria, Mista said:

> He would just go around picking random people, just talking about them. Not always bad
> but some people were bad. And I'm just sitting there. I'm just chilling. Had on my badge,
> looking around, looking at him, like talking. He just pointed at me, ain't gonna be
> nothing when he gets older. Ain't gonna be nothing but a garbage man when you grow
> up.

The embarrassment that he felt during that moment caused him to run out of the cafeteria in

disgust. Unfortunately, he said that that was not the only time he was singled out and humiliated

by school personnel in the 'No Excuses' environment. As a result, Mista began to flirt with

rebellion due to the unwanted negative attention and recognition:

> I guess I was rebellious. Cuz certain things, I felt like they shouldn't've suspended me for
> or even called to the office for. I talked back. I tried to explain myself or a situation. Of
> course, you can't always explain yourself to elders or that principal. But, I felt like I was
> getting suspended, detention for simple things I shouldn't even be talked to about.
> Sometimes, they pointed me out when they knew who the person was. Yet, they still
> pointed me out.

Much like his prior experiences, Mista felt that he was wrongly accused of wrongdoing on

multiple occasions and had no one to protect him. Thus, he perpetually remained cautious around

certain people when similar situations occurred. When asked if he communicated the unfair

disciplinary habits, perceived targeted microaggressions, and blatant bullying and humiliation to

his mother, Mista felt that it was not a viable option to stop the hurtful treatment. He added that

the school would probably make up a lie about him anyway, so he chose not to bother wasting

his time and energy. His response yielded an understanding that he most likely felt

misunderstood and helpless when communicating to adults and that his voice would not be taken

seriously. The idea that his voice would not be taken seriously is evidenced in his "you can't

always explain yourself to elders" comment. Other the other hand, his response also jogged up

and further clarified why he always wanted to have a younger sibling that he could care for, impress upon and mold in his image. The link to his desire for a younger sibling is that he felt incessantly unprotected, unheard and not supported throughout his life. So, he wanted that type of relationship where he was the elder to be able to protect, nurture, provide guidance and counsel to someone that looked up to him.

Although Benjamin was suspended a few times for fighting, he did not have an extensive behavior record. He perceived the 'No Excuses' environment as "not being conducive to the growth of a young Black man in our society today." One of the reasons he felt this way was because his school hired a great deal of young Caucasian women whom he felt knew nothing about him, his plight or his culture and ethnicity. He said that they lacked the "proper psychological, cultural and teacher management training" to be teaching urban youth. More importantly, he mentioned that the environment was not conducive to the growth of young Black men because he believed that the teachers were afraid of the students and only punished them because of their deficit mindsets about them. He suggested that many times, their over punishing methods backfired and that the students would often refuse to comply. Benjamin stated that these occurrences were so widespread throughout the school that some teachers began experiencing meltdowns and breakdowns. He said, "I vividly remember identifying high stress levels in my teachers as a student. I vividly remember, looking at my teacher, being able to have a conversation like, 'Are you all right? You straight? Like are you okay?'" Having to console his teachers at school while also grappling with his own personal stress did not sit well with him. In his mind, it perpetuated what he thought was wrong with the school all along, which was that he saw an "hierarchy of manipulation and misunderstanding" happening in classrooms with Black bodies that went largely uninterrogated or challenged.

There was an interesting intersection between Benjamin's perceptions of the 'No Excuses' space and his role at home. Although Benjamin was not the oldest child in his home, he was one of the caretakers and had ample responsibilities there. Thus, his ability to not only come to the rescue of teachers that were only a few years older than him, but to have been able to recognize stress and communicate help-seeking behaviors to others spoke volumes about the adaptive strategies he maintained growing up. Benjamin also detailed how all students had to endure silent lunches and sometimes silent days if some students refused to walk on the black tape or refrain from talking in the hallways. He stated that the inside of the school "looked and felt like a mini Angola," which is a maximum state penitentiary in Louisiana. Benjamin said, "That discipline foundation and the way we carried out our daily life at that school was a sure prison pipeline system." He went as far as saying that when people from the community visited the school, many referred to it the same way that he did. When asked to explain why he felt that his school reminded him of the notorious prison, Benjamin said the following:

> I mean, walking on straight lines. Going by rotation of a bell. Having a teacher direct you wherever you needed to go. Having a teacher literally walk inch by inch, making sure you was in a straight line, making sure your head was forward. The disciplinary actions sought out after every situation were extreme. And also, the animosity as well as the favoritism put us in a bind to where a lot of us were against each other. And a lot of us did have these learned practices of hate through frustration, of hate through the misconception of what things needed to be and what they shouldn't be.

Interestingly, his lucid depiction of the school, especially the reference about prison was telling. Benjamin commented that his father was incarcerated for murder during his last years of high school. Thus, it was plausible to assume that he had robust context when drawing parallels between the features of his school and the features of a maximum state penitentiary like Angola. Additionally, considering that Benjamin was not a behavior problem at the school in any way, his articulation did not come off as one offered in spite. He also remarked that being schooled in the 'No Excuses' environment made him feel like he was in a "third-world country." When

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Benjamin was asked to expound on this, he said, "It really made me feel like I was in a third world country. It made me feel like I was trying to be detained and controlled and manipulated by these different faces and these, all these different angles of education, all these different angles of understanding, to just keep me confused and keep my [classmates] confused." He expressed pervasive feelings of regulation, manipulation and imprisonment both emotionally and psychologically.

He also discussed that there was disproportionate discipline from administrators and teachers based on where students ranked on standardized tests as well as where students resided in the city. He clarified, "Your suspensions depended on the disciplinarian feeling at the time. I've seen students get suspended on average three days for talking. And the hierarchy of students was established by your grade on the standardized tests." Because of this blatant segregation, Benjamin expressed that many students maintained a strong sense of hate for one another that caused them to fight daily and to bully each other. Put differently, Benjamin said, "You had a lot of 'he not like me, I'm not like him' divide. You'd see it in the cafeteria, a lot of social divide."

He also felt that the 'No Excuses' environment thwarted his upward mobility in some ways and violated the personal morals that his family taught him as a youth. He commented that after having conversations with administration about the practices that he felt dumbfounded and dejected. After Benjamin was beseeched to explain what he meant by these encounters with school administration, he remarked, "The situations between the administration and the students as far as discipline went against a lot of values that my family brought me up on, especially when you're talking to someone. A lot of it had an undermining and condescending tone. You would feel somewhat disadvantaged at the end of the conversation instead of having critical or progressive thoughts." Benjamin's notion that what happened in the school environment went

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against how he was raised was eye-opening. Although Benjamin professed that he did not learn to read or write until he was six years old, he maintained that he caught up quickly to his peers and simultaneously developed critical consciousness competencies as well. This experience alone displayed his hunger for learning and potential academic prowess. He seemed to have been raised with specific values and cherished hard work and integrity. However, he felt that the school environment shackled his desire for personal growth in certain areas.

At home, Benjamin wore multiple hats and had to help out around the house because his parents worked multiple jobs to keep the lights on. So, Benjamin felt that his personal battles or needs were irrelevant in the grand scheme, but it was not clear if he ever made mention of them in the home or whether he silenced himself to focus attention on issues he considered more pressing. These thoughts were examined because he clearly communicated his concerns and desires to school personnel and felt psychologically trapped. This caused him to be voluntarily rebellious about his own personal well-being at home juxtaposed to communicating his feelings and being shut down at school.

Tink was not considered a behavior problem at the school although he was suspended once for fighting. Tink perceived the 'No Excuses' environment as a place where you only got privileges if you scored high on standardized tests or if you could play sports. He said that students who did not test well or who exhibited behaviors that were antithetical to the 'No Excuses' discipline code were treated poorly. Specifically, Tink called the students who did not test well "scrap metal" to school administration and portrayed the ones who did test well as "trophies." When asked to dig deeper and elucidate his points more thoroughly here, Tink added:

> They categorize[d] us based off test grades, behavior and stuff like that. So, if you test well, you were the face of the school. You got certain privileges. You were able to leave campus when you wanted to. They had relationships with the teachers and the principals and they were able to drive their cars, some of them. The ones who didn't test well, the

ones who had behavioral problems got treated like shit, you know what I'm saying? I felt like that was, that was a slap in the face right there cuz it's supposed to be, we all supposed to be [in this together] and we're not getting treated the same. So, you know, I feel like they knew what they was doing. You know, so compared to the [religious] school, it was totally different, man. It was, it was, it was eye opening.

Tink's explanation of the 'No Excuses' environment immediately made me think about how he felt at home with his stepmother. He mentioned how "othered" he felt in her presence and how their relationship was troubling from the very beginning. He said that he maintained a C average in school, so it was not clear if he considered himself to be a piece of scrap metal or one of the trophies. However, the distinction between those two objects is significant. Tink also maintained, "We never had freedom. We could never walk from class to class without our teachers walking with us, you know what I'm saying?" Tink felt like the way that he was socialized and taught was totally different than his religious elementary school upbringing where he felt safer. He blatantly stated that he felt like the school was preparing him for the penitentiary. Tink explained, "We had that prison-to-pipeline mentality in high school when as soon as we'd get off the bus, we shaking the principal's hand. Grown men! If we didn't shake his hand, we got penalized." He also commented that the school environment reminded him of a prison yard due to its high number of security guards, metal detectors and prevalence of intense pat downs and searches.

Tink did not have a relative that lived in his home go to prison during his childhood or adolescence. Thus, his articulation of the prison pipeline was striking and seemed to be either a topic that students at the school discussed prevalently when they were enrolled or was a comparison that emerged after he left the 'No Excuses' space. Either way, his depiction of the school as a prison is troubling. One thing about the environment that was helpful for Tink was the camaraderie he shared with certain students. He gravitated towards students who thought and

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looked like him as well as those who felt like their voices were not heard. He leveraged these relationships as mechanisms for resiliency and used them as sounding boards to cope with many of his stressors as well. Most of the relationships made in the 'No Excuses' space, Tink has maintained since his departure.

Potential Triggers

In this question, I wanted to understand if previous traumas experienced by participants were triggered by certain people and during certain interactions in the 'No Excuses' space. The data showed that each of the participants were triggered divergently from previous experiences that impacted their perceptions of identities and masculinities. For example, because CJ did not have a relationship with his father and his siblings did have relationships with their biological fathers, CJ grappled with constantly being the "odd man out." The displeasure and rage he felt about this situation caused him to be distrustful and fearful around Black men he felt only came around to take advantage of others. Thus, he was triggered by most Black men but definitely triggered by Black men he considered to be aggressive. Across the sample of participants, triggers involving tone of voice, proximity, bullying, sexuality and demeaning behaviors were identified.

Due to his childhood and adolescent experiences prior to enrolling in the 'No Excuses' school, CJ's sensory modes were hyperactive and remained in a constant state of awareness. When he was disciplined and socialized at school, CJ experienced more fear, anxiety, self-doubt and confidence issues. Constantly, he thought to himself, "I know I'm better than this." CJ felt that after multiple behavior interventions, he attempted to modify his behaviors and further acclimate to the identity the school constructed for him. Still, he felt stymied and never recognized for evolving in the 'No Excuses' environment. This was only one of the reasons he

chose to silently rebel, but it also seemed to be the reason that angered him greatly and caused

him to be massively disillusioned. He rationalized his experiences by saying:

> Everything that was happening, I thought was supposed to happen. I thought this was
> how schools was supposed to be ran so I never really challenged it. Like I said, I started
> to really have some ill will my 11th, 12th grade year, but before that, I never challenged.

CJ's line of thinking was insightful and gave credence to the thought that many times

people perceive traumatic experiences as things that are supposed to be happening to them

because they are so normalized in their lives. What was also interesting about CJ's perspective

was that it showed how much he grappled with the conditions internally as well as how he

questioned his own abilities for not being mentally strong enough to fight back. He struggled

mightily with the pressures to conform in the 'No Excuses' environment, only to acquiesce and

discover that there was no proverbial light of hope at the end of the tunnel. Even after forming

"ill will" for what he perceived the structure had done to him, CJ still silently rebelled because he

pervasively feared being suspended and expelled from school altogether.

CJ knew that a call home for behavior problems would not only trigger a response in him,

but in his mother as well. Because of all of the stressors that had impacted his family in the past,

he communicated that he did not desire to bring any more unnecessary stress to his household.

The strength and courage that it took for him to unselfishly disregard his own feelings, to protect

and preserve the sanctity in his home should not be understated. For example, CJ stated this

about his mother:

> My mother was like borderline depressed. I had her smoking and stuff. Because I was
> always, quote/unquote, in trouble for stuff. Like at a certain point, you can't keep coming
> home and saying, like ma, it wasn't my fault. If it keep happening to you, nobody's
> gonna believe you. So, she didn't know what to do with me. She used to cry, you know,
> and stuff like that. I used to really, she used to really be affected by it because she didn't
> know, like she felt like I was going down a certain path and it was nothing she could do.
> You know, I couldn't pass the little state test and stuff, particularly the math part. I never
> could pass that part of the test. She just, you know, felt like I was proving a lot of people

right and I was always in trouble and stuff like that so she, you know, she used to be real upset, cry a lot, stuff like that.

This data also showed that the further he got away from the system, the safer and more comfortable he became in his own understanding about the type of structure he was actually navigating. However, the silent rebellion and constant suppression of his emotions did have some unfortunate costs for CJ. He refrained from participating in all school related matters even after being voted class president. CJ said, "I was real unhappy at the school and I just silently protested. I didn't go on senior trip. I didn't go to prom. I just didn't participate in nothing. I just feel like for what? Like the school not doing nothing for me."

CJ's decision to boycott school events might have emerged as one of the only ways that he felt comfortable pushing back where he did not have to be confronted by school personnel. Still, the plan to hide himself took a toll on him as well. His anxiety began to emerge in uncontrolled ways. CJ mentioned:

> Any time [the administrators] came around, especially in the disciplinarian type approach, I always tensed up. My anxiety always kicked in. I was always afraid, sweating and stuff, man, cuz, those two people really terrified me. Like I felt like they could do, like they dictated so much. They could just take, I felt like my life was basically in their hands and I used to really be terrified to be around them, especially when they was coming with that approach. I didn't respect them at all though.

Due to these continuous experiences, CJ developed a disdain for the administrators of the school and felt distressed whenever he was in their presence. CJ stated, "I really came to the conclusion that this wasn't school to me. This was something else. You know, this wasn't school. This was something totally different."

CJ not having his biological father in his life served as critical context for why he was triggered in the 'No Excuses' environment. He had only met his biological father twice and even though his stepfather had been around since his third-grade school year, he struggled to reconcile with his father's absence. Coupled with his hurt, each one of CJ's three siblings all maintained

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some form of a relationship with their biological fathers. There were several times during his childhood and adolescent years where his siblings would visit their fathers and CJ would be the "odd man out" at home alone with his mother. Even though CJ's younger brother was in the home with CJ when two of his other siblings visited their fathers, he still felt "othered" and maintained a lonesome identity. In his mind, his stepfather was his younger brother's dad and was not responsible for or obligated to him in any way and could leave at any time. Even with his stepfather being in the picture as a support, CJ could never bring himself to call him "Dad." When pressed to unpack his thoughts about this, CJ said:

> I didn't know what to do. I was supposed to call him Dad. That's the hardest word for me to say. I don't, you know, stepdad been around all my life. I feel like if anybody, I should call him dad but, I call him by his name. That's just a real hard word for me to say, man. It's like a lot of love and stuff I feel like coming from that word but it's a lot of anger, too. Sitting on the porch waiting for the man to come and man don't come. And then watching your stepdad and his real son outside flying a kite. Used to be like, eh, and I gotta chill with mom during the summer while everybody else doing their thing. So just had a little effect on you and stuff.

CJ's estranged relationship and lack of attention from his biological father greatly affected the way he viewed men altogether. CJ dealt with issues of abandonment, neglect and pervasive disappointment from the man he felt was supposed to love him. These feelings later turned into anger issues after years of being sold a dream by his father. During the interview, the raw emotion and hostility towards his father was palpable as he spoke. These experiences tremendously impacted his ability to trust people, but especially Black men. It can be presupposed CJ later found himself being extremely hypervigilant around Black men and their promises due to his experiences or lack thereof with his father. Therefore, he did not trust them because there was always a possibility that they might neglect him. However, what was interesting about his hypervigilance around Black men was that he maintained hope with them and tried to emulate them at certain points in his adolescence:

When men, especially men of color came around, Black men, like I always just watched [them] and observed because I used to try to model myself after people I respected but it'd always depend on the situation and like what type of relationship we was building. But I used to be a little reserved, man. _ trying to invest __ trying to get to have a strong relationship with people who walk out. Man, I don't like that stuff.

The data showed that there was a good chance that the experiences that CJ had with men during his upbringing affected his ability to navigate the 'No Excuses' school structure. CJ was very self-aware and conscious of how and when his conditions would be exacerbated and with whom they might be exacerbated by. He felt that his anxiety was not just triggered around Black men in general, but with Black men in authority positions. Whenever these individuals were in his general vicinity, CJ mentioned that he would experience somatic symptoms:

Usually when I'm uncomfortable, so usually when I'm around a real aggressive person in an authority position, that's when my stuff start to kick in, like if I'm in a situation where I really can't control, like if I'm in a situation somebody else can manipulate is when stuff [gets] real bad and I found, usually it affects me sleeping, of course so usually those type situations.

He felt like his symptoms were aggravated because he was very hopeful that his school would be different and thus put some of his fears and anxieties to rest regarding the intentions of Black men and other authority figures. However, CJ said that he had been neglected and taken advantage of by one of the school leaders:

My principal was a Black man. I refuse to let the people under me or anybody have to model themselves after people like that. People who just only in it for the money. Always want a tangible reward. It's never about intangibles with people like that and sad to say but it's a lot of Black men who come around and take advantage. And it's just, [I] just be real cautious about that.

In addition to CJ being triggered by interactions with Black men, he was also triggered when individuals spoke negatively about the LGBTQ community. CJ said:

I've been around a lot of people, some friends and stuff who talk about gay people, homosexuals and the person I instantly think of is my brother. Think about that situation that happened, you know, with my brother. But I don't really say too much. Even though it triggers something in me, I don't really speak too much on it because I know how emotional that situation can get.

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While thinking about the current state of his life at that time, CJ referenced how being stopped

by the police triggered reminders about how he was socialized at the 'No Excuses' school. CJ

mentioned that the experience with police made him think about the principals he felt held his

entire life in their hands. When CJ was beseeched to comment further about this powerful

understanding, he stated "If I get stopped by the police or stuff like that, you're thinking about

these principals who, when they raise their hand, that means shut up. You know, don't do

nothing. So, I'm thinking be obedient in a situation."

During the interview, CJ began rubbing his hands and rocking back and forth when he

detailed his experiences with the police. It was evident that this was an issue that he was still

trying to reconcile within himself as well regarding not only the ubiquitous presence of police in

urban communities, but also how omnipresent his triggers appeared to be. It provoked a

fascinating battle within himself where he felt compelled to hash these perceptions and

conundrums out during the interview:

> Like, it's like they all look alike [when referring to police officers]. You have this image
> when you think about this stuff already and that's like you're talking about triggers. You
> go to school and you go back into your community and the police, they be trying to help.
> You're already like hands up because you came from the school that's so strict. And
> these principals, you know that they just have so much control over everything. All they
> gotta do is say five days, indefinite, expulsion. You gone. Like that. And then you got
> these police officers who, you know, pretty much at their discretion, too, man. You know,
> like it's just like a lot of stuff, man, with people I know, go through what I've been
> through, a lot of stuff that triggers stuff. That's why I kinda, I be cautious. You gotta
> watch yourself.

To see him wrestle with these concepts and ideas was one of the most powerful moments

in the interview because it seemed as if he had been awakened by something that he himself

conjured up. It might have affirmed some of the thoughts he previously held about the structure

as well.

Lastly, CJ made reference to a fascinating discovery that triggered him while he was

enrolled in the school as well as when he departed the 'No Excuses' space. While his anxiety, fear and self-confidence suffered at points while attending the school because of the strict rules, lack of freedom and focus on obedience rather than critical thinking, CJ felt even more betrayed when he perceived that the rigid methods of socialization did not assist and prepare him to navigate college on his own. CJ said angrily:

> You walk on tape in high school, get to college and get a schedule, you damn near expect your teacher to walk, come out, the professor to come out of the class and walk you to your classroom. Does something to you psychologically and people don't think about that. I had a teacher walking alongside me for four years, you know, to my classroom and I'm getting to college and I was like, oh, you're on your own. Good luck. So, two years and like a good percentage of us dropped out, out of high school. I meant out of College.

It was interesting to hear how CJ tied in the psychological aspects and supposed costs of the 'No Excuses' structure. It was as if he communicated that he was not able to think on his own and needed the assistance of an adult at every turn once he got to college.

Compared to CJ's experiences at home and in the 'No Excuses' environment, Mista's experiences were equally unsettling. Mista experienced a great deal of bullying as a child in addition to household dysfunction, the transiency of one of his brothers and the imprisonment of the other. His mother's drinking habits were traumatic for him and he always desired to have someone to protect and look after. In response to his experiences with bullying, Mista said, "I was the main one who would be picked on. I was big. I was dark skinned. Stuff like that, big and dark, that would be the easier target." These occurrences with bullying increased when he experienced embarrassment from two instances of incontinence at school. What made the situations worse for Mista was that the people that he considered friends made fun of him as well when he felt that they should have sheltered him from the humiliation.

So, when he became a student at the 'No Excuses' school, it was reasonable for him to conclude that the zero-tolerance environment would provide a buffer from microaggressive,

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atmospheric verbal assaults from both students and staff. However, the bullying episodes seemed

to be a constant for Mista almost the entire time he was enrolled at the school. Mista said that

amongst his peers, "I'd be the joke of the day. Like every day, so I'd retaliate and that's

why some of the times, I'd get in trouble." He also talked about getting into trouble with his

mother because teachers would intentionally lie on him. He detailed one experience when

prompted to explain what he meant:

> Like one time, math teacher, I was laughing at a joke that they made about him and he
> looked at me and he said, "Oh, you laughing huh? I'll call your mama, get you in trouble
> right now." He really called my mama and said I was doing something in class that I
> wasn't supposed to do. My mama got on the phone and started blowing on me. I'm like,
> "You serious, ma?" That's what happened. I mean, nothing happened when I got home
> but still, I got blowed on, for nothing.

His intolerance with people misusing their authority, bullying others and being misunderstood

seemed to positively trigger his heroism at school. Mista mentioned one experience where he

became the ally of another young man whom he said was bullied for being gay. When Mista was

asked to unpack this, he said:

> You know, people always picked on him. He was a real cool dude. I felt like, you know,
> there was no reason to pick on him but by him being gay, people picked on him. So, I
> kinda took him, took him under my wing as a little brother. Helped him out. I told him,
> dude, I know exactly how you feel, people talk about me. I peed on myself, pooed on
> myself. People always talked about me from that. He was kinda suicidal as well. He told
> me he hated life. He hated people that was in his life and sometimes he just felt like he
> wishes he could just escape.

This anecdote, while captivating and brave, was a major risk for Mista to take. To have the

gumption to step up for another classmate who was tormented because of his sexual orientation,

understanding his own experiences not fully being able to protect himself from bullying, was a

transformative moment in Mista's life. On its face, it was also reminiscent of how brave Mista

had been during past experiences as well while taking risks and maintaining a certain amount of

caution. It also reflected his desire to have someone to protect and "have under his wing." This

unlikely bond that Mista created was also the impetus for him to divulge his own experiences with suicidal ideations:

> I felt suicidal a few times as well. Actually, I sent out a message to those whose number I had when I was in school. Probably 10th grade, 11th grade year and people gave me words of encouragement. That was probably another thing that made me wanta help as well. Like made me wanta keep helping. Like as you go through things, you might get down and, you know, somebody's word of encouragement and you remember why you live. Maybe that's my purpose, to help. Helping people, not just financially but advice. Just talk to them. Some days, you just need somebody to talk to.

Surprisingly, out of his despair emerged a keen sense of purpose that focused on helping people that were less fortunate as well as those individuals who could not stick up for themselves. Mista's ability to resolve all of those feelings served as an important resiliency marker for him while enrolled in the 'No Excuses' structure. However, when the principal humiliated him in front of one hundred of his peers by saying that he was going to be a garbage man, when he grew up, it triggered the intense feelings of shame, anger, aggression and retaliation that were so prevalent at other points during his childhood. Mista always felt that he was not treated fairly at school and was constantly belittled. He also felt that he could not communicate his true feelings to his mother out of fear that she would not believe him. Mista provided an example of this realization when he and his mother attended the expulsion hearing days after he was sent out of class for chewing a spoon:

> When I was explaining it, of course, you hear something that's not true, it gets you mad. You start frowning up and making faces. My mom looked at me, smacked me hard, like a really backhanded slap. Like, that really made me mad because I feel like if you know this isn't true, you seeing me getting mad, I'm not getting mad for nothing. This is not true. You backhand slap me, that made it even worse. She always thought even if they telling the truth or not, don't, you know, don't frown up and all that. If you know you didn't do it, then what's all this for?

Mista seemed trapped. If he denied to his mother the existence of what was occurring, he felt unheard and still would be punished. Additionally, he had an even harder time communicating that most of his behaviors were in retaliation against harm that he felt was done to him.

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Therefore, Mista thought that it was best to silently rebel. He figured that his mother had enough to deal with already and the thought of him being expelled from school triggered her anger towards him. However, it also caused him to feel more misunderstood and decreased the voice that he had worked so hard to develop. It triggered him internally because he felt pervasively unprotected even by the people that were closest to him.

Compared to Mista and CJ, Benjamin's triggers looked very different but were still unnerving. Even though Benjamin was not the oldest child in his family, he maintained that he was responsible for protecting his siblings. He played a different role at home than he did at school and admittedly struggled trying to navigate both identities. His parents lived together in the same household until his family was fragmented due to his father's incarceration. After his father's incarceration late in his high school journey, his roles and responsibilities increased significantly at home. When Benjamin was asked to breakdown how his roles shifted, he said, "My role at home was basically stepping into my father's shoes. I'm the oldest boy. I'm not the oldest child but I basically took care of my little sister when she was an infant. My baby brother when he was an infant too, helping out my oldest sister when it came to taking care of the household, you know, while mama out there working." These experiences made Benjamin very wise and developed for his age. He was required to accept the role of a man as a youth and had to think differently than many of his peers did who may have only been responsible for themselves. What was striking in the interview with Benjamin was the emphasis that he placed on being the oldest boy. There seemed to be a great deal of weight placed on his shoulders in anticipation of becoming a man and everything that manhood was supposed to entail for him.

His experiences with leadership at home provided additional ammunition for the role that he played at school as well. Benjamin was given a leadership role at the 'No Excuses' school as

a peer disciplinarian and mentor because he was responsible, well-spoken, intellectual and gregarious. In the beginning, he enjoyed consulting his fellow classmates about disciplinary issues while encouraging them to stay focused. After a while, Benjamin started to become concerned about how he was being taught, led and socialized in the 'No Excuses' space as well as how some of his classmates were being treated. Benjamin said that he felt hampered psychologically and it triggered emotions that made him think about his upbringing. As mentioned previously, he stated:

> The situations between the administration and the students as far as discipline went against a lot of values that my family brought me up on, especially when you're talking to someone. A lot of it had an undermining and condescending tone. You would feel somewhat disadvantaged at the end of the conversation instead of having critical or progressive thoughts.

Benjamin's role at the school was particularly complex, especially as a student who came into the school managing multiple responsibilities and being looked upon for guidance or progressive ways of thinking to accomplish the varied tasks in his household. Benjamin also felt that his school's continuous supervision and controlling methods caused him to be overprotective of his classmates in his peer disciplinarian role. He said that every day he was charged with making sure that his classmates were not in the target area of discipline because in New Orleans, "if you get sent to alternative school, its just like you getting sent to jail." He also felt that the school's methods made him relive a situation that had occurred in his community previously. He mentioned a situation that happened revolving around gun violence during his ninth-grade year and that he got into an argument with a White teacher whom he felt spoke to him in a biased tone. It prompted him to say, "I gotta watch out for him or I gotta make sure I ain't doing this, that and the third around him or I might really get in trouble. He might just really throw me under the bus." He communicated that he had to be vigilant around White people because of his previous experiences with them. There were times where Benjamin wanted to argue his points

and be heard, but he remembered that doing so might have made the situation worse than it was before and he did not want to face those battles. He learned that lesson at home as well as in school. Unfortunately, he felt that his inner struggles were irrelevant at home due to the "criticalness" of the stressors that had already existed. Thus, to avoid reprimand and further complication, he suppressed his emotions many times at the behest of adults in both spaces.

Unlink the rest of the participants, Tink's triggers seemed to all emanate from the traumatic grief he experienced as a result of his mother's death. Tink finding his mother alone after having a brain aneurysm provided much fodder for the way he approached his academic journey. He felt that no one could identify with what he experienced emotionally and psychologically. He also felt that he could not articulate these feelings to anyone because he felt that no one saw what he saw, so he suppressed them for years. These feelings were amplified after his father remarried and he developed pervasive feelings of abuse and neglect towards his stepmother. Tink said:

> My stepmother. I feel like I hated her. I ain't gonna lie to you, I hated her growing up. I just, I tried my best to get along with her and I just felt like I was the stepchild that was getting treated like that stepchild and I didn't want that. I wasn't used to that. I had a mother who spoiled me, who I used to get in trouble at school, she'd come pick me up and then bring me to McDonald's the same day. Just for the toys and not tell my dad I got in trouble. You know what I'm saying? So that kind of stuff, that's what I was used to and when she passed, all that was gone.

Tink developed a strong dislike for his stepmother not only because she treated him unfairly, but because she did not care for him like his biological mother did. It also pained him that his father chose to favor his stepmother over him in many cases. Throughout his academic journey, Tink maintained these deep-seated feelings of anger and abandonment. However, Tink was never a behavior problem in any of the schools he attended. Therefore, most of his struggles were stored internally. When Tink navigated the 'No Excuses' environment, he was not triggered by the policies themselves; he was triggered when students talked about his mother. Tink stated,

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When the students knew my mom passed, your mama jokes was the best thing to do. So, the mama joke was big and when somebody said your mama or something like that, I just snapped. I just automatically wanted to fight. I wasn't a fighter but once your mama and stuff came about, then that's when I really just clicked and snapped on whoever or whenever.

Tink almost got into a physical confrontation with a female teacher when he was in the ninth grade for circumstances regarding his mother as well. He said that the teacher referenced his mother in a way that did not sit well with him. Tink recalled, "I can't remember what she said but it pissed me off and I really wanted to like put my hands on this lady. And everybody in the classroom had to hold me back. It got, it got real bad." Fortunately, Tink did not get suspended for his behavior during the aforementioned incident because it was a misunderstanding. However, he referenced another incident in the 'No Excuses' space where he was suspended. This time, Tink got into a physical confrontation with a male employee at the school. Although these circumstances were not related to his mother in any way, they did involve him being physically aggressive because his personal space had been violated. This understanding was critical and might have triggered his defense mechanisms from the abuse he received from his stepmother at home.

It was clear that the participants were triggered in different ways and by multiple stimuli. Across the four cases, previous traumas were triggered in the 'No Excuses' environment by interactions with Black men that were considered aggressive, school staff who maintained unsafe proximities and boundaries to participants, bullying and humiliation tactics as well as disparaging language. In some ways, these triggers not only caused participants stress and anxiety but also helped them to reframe and reimagine their identities and thoughts about masculinity.

Prepared for College, Careers and Successful Lives

In this research question, I was interested in trying to understand whether the participants felt they were prepared for college, careers and life after navigating the 'No Excuses' environment. By and large, all of the participants reported that they were not academically prepared for college and two of them reported not being psychologically prepared for college either.

CJ's perceptions about whether the school prepared him for college, careers and a successful life showed that he was extremely disappointed with his experience:

> When I first walked into the space, I thought they was serious. I put the [uniform] on and I felt like I was in the process of really becoming somebody. And all I had to do was think how they wanted, think the way they told me to think and stuff like that. They had this great mission statement. We let them define what success looked like for us, what process we had to go through, man, and it was all about making a dollar. It was never about our education. It was about them making money.

CJ felt that he was behind academically throughout his high school experience and therefore needed to self-educate to catch up. When asked to unpack the term self-educate, CJ said:

> I had to self-educate because, like for instance, like algebra and stuff like that, man, these are not classes that I was supposed to be passing. To be honest with you, I was not getting that information. I didn't earn those grades. They gave me those grades so I can get out of that school. So, they can have [a high] graduation rate. So, those parents could see we graduate all your students and we got your students into college, too. The [colleges] waived ACT scores and all that other stuff. Promised scholarships that we didn't get. People had to drop out.

He also did not feel that he could express himself critically because he feared retribution from school staff. So, he followed the process that was created for the students in that space and he felt that it stymied his ability to think for himself. He commented that the 'No Excuses' space prepared him to follow the rules more than it built his capacities to create the rules or challenge them. These realizations became ever-present when he enrolled in college. CJ did not feel that he was adequately prepared for college due to the way he was taught to conform and think as well

as what he felt he was not taught. He mentioned one particular example that illustrated his emotions during that period, "I'm here and you sit in this classroom and these men talking about humanities and you hear them talking about Socrates and Aristotle and you're just like where am I? I'm not ready."

It was intriguing to hear CJ classify going to college and discovering that things were not what he thought they would be as traumatic. He mentioned that he was so overwhelmed and frustrated while in college that he constantly asked himself, "What am I doing here? And who am I trying to impress by coming here?" He also discussed displeasure that the 'No Excuses' school did not provide alternative curricula and options for students who possessed divergent life missions and personal goals that were dissimilar from the institution's. CJ said, "That was always a part of the goal, for us to go to college. Wasn't prepare for the workforce or nothing like that. It was like college or nothing. For everybody. It was really intimidating." His experiences with this type of school preparation not only caused him to believe that he was not properly prepared for college, but it also caused him to question whether he belonged in that environment as well as whether he was worthy enough to exist in a collegial setting.

Partially as a result, CJ dropped out of college after two years. While reflecting upon all of CJ's data, it was apparent that his prior experiences with routinization made situations more predictable for him. Even though he was silenced at home, distrusted men and considered his scholastic experiences to be emotionally and psychologically damaging, there seemed to be some consistency among all three with what he was expected to do and how he was expected to act. Going to college and not having his support structures or the rigid rules that defined his movements for years might have rendered him helpless and more traumatized. It was not entirely

clear how his previous diagnosis of schizophrenia affected him, but it was plausible to assume

that the symptoms of the disorder might have emerged at some point during his experience.

On a more positive note, CJ's mentality and perspective regarding what he learned about

himself after the college experience was interesting. Even though he did not have a great

experience and did not finish college, he saw himself being more successful at the time of the

interview than he would have been had he finished college. He began a career in education

advocacy after his college experience. He gained robust critical competencies as a Black man

and fully understands his positionality and intersectionalities. When asked to unravel this

transformative finding, CJ said:

> I do believe one thing that school taught me is never let nobody define what success look like. Never. Never. If [I] have to go a conference and it's all Black, a young men of color conference and you telling me what I have to wear, do not book me for that conference. People can call it what they want. People respect it. You really have no choice. I mean, you just have to respect who the person is, respect their craft.

Unlike CJ's strong feelings about his college experience, Mista maintained mixed

feelings about whether he believed that the school prepared him for college, careers and a

successful life. He appreciated the passion that some of his teachers brought to the school but

was continuously disappointed when they abruptly left or were terminated for not conforming to

school rules. In regards to the academic environment, Mista said, "They didn't really teach us

nothing. Like it was all bad. Like they passed us along literally, came in while we were taking

big tests, gave us the answers. Like that one B, that one A, stuff like that and all those things

were going on." Thus, Mista felt that he did not learn much at the school, but he glowed about

the relationships he constructed while there. The support structures and resiliency networks that

were created on school grounds greatly impacted the things that he did learn there and has

continued to learn since. When asked to elucidate more about this topic, Mista commented,

"When I was at school, it made things better, just being around people at school. Like I said, we

built wonderful relationships inside that school. That was one of the best things we could've got

out of that school. And we learned from each other. We didn't always learn from the teacher, but

we learned from each other."

After spending four years in the 'No Excuses' structure, Benjamin did not feel that the

school lived up to their mission statement of preparing him to not only get to college, but to

successfully graduate from college and get a job afterwards. He believed that there were

supportive teachers that had good intentions and a few impacted his life in a profound way, but

ultimately, he felt that the school missed its mark in terms of preparing students for college and

life. Benjamin had this to say when asked to explain what he meant by the school missed its

mark:

> I feel like the mission statement was misused. I feel like the mission statement wasn't
> carried out in a professional or honorable manner. As an adult, I realized quickly that the
> education didn't help me once it came to college and it led to me leaving college on that
> basis as well as others and basically, it brought me to a critical realization on my
> knowledge and, it turned me into making myself a genius for me. So even though I'm not
> in college, I do access the libraries and I do make public orders for a lot of the
> information that I missed out on and a lot of information that intrigues me on.

Because Benjamin felt that the education he received did not fully prepare him for college, he

sought to make himself a success by self-educating. Although, his experiences at the school did

not make him successful by their standards, he felt that he learned critical life lessons that have

made him a success by his standards. The cumulative experiences he endured in the 'No

Excuses' space in addition to those in college taught him how to be true to himself and to always

make the best out of his circumstances. His experiences also informed his perceptions of trust,

leadership, accountability and advocacy.

Compared to the other participants, Tink did share several gratitudes from his experience

at the 'No Excuses' school in addition to the disheartening experiences he had. He contended

that even though the school did not live up to the mission statement and that ultimately, they were preparing him for prison more than college, he felt that the environment helped him build lasting relationships with friends he considers relatives. Tink mentioned, "They did a good job at selling the dream but they didn't do a good job at educating us or properly, appropriately educating us." He shared that while he attended college, he did not feel prepared when he got there because he did not learn much when he was at school. When Tink was asked about his academic struggles, he replied, "I feel like we were given the grades. I don't feel like we really earned them. I feel like we weren't prepared to go to college. Psychologically nor academically." Tink referenced a point that he made earlier in the 'No Excuses' perceptions section where he claimed they never had freedom, were always accompanied by an adult and had to walk on straight lines until they turned nineteen years old and graduated. He added:

> Now we go to college, and we're like, okay, where our teacher at now? Our professor's not gonna be knocking on our door saying you gotta get ready for class. So, it was traumatic because we wanted to go to college and we thought we were ready but when we got there, we was like, man, this ain't.

Tink communicated that his struggles were not antithetical to the rest of the people he graduated with. He said that less than ten students from his graduating class persisted all the way through college and the rest dropped out for one reason or another. Even though his academic experiences at the 'No Excuses' school and in college did not beget the outcome he hoped for, Tink communicated that he held no ill will towards the school:

> They had good intentions man. They really wanted us to go to college, or at least experience it, so I can't really talk bad about that. It's how they handled it. They could've did it different. But they really had good intentions, man. Like I said, I don't regret going, they gave us opportunities, man. They gave us opportunities.

Tink voiced his gratitude to the school personnel for a multitude of reasons and he genuinely felt that they provided students with opportunities that they probably would not have had if they had enrolled elsewhere. From that perspective, Tink believed that they kept their promises and had to

have cared in some way to follow through on them. Tink also mentioned how impactful some of his teachers were and how he is still connected to some of them. Although he was a never a behavior problem, Tink mentioned that if he would not have gone to the 'No Excuses' school, he does not know what would have happened to him. Crediting his religious upbringing and tight bond with his fellow classmates, Tink emotionally stated, "God puts certain people in our lives for a reason and I feel like if I never went to [that school], I never would've met them."

Tink's experiences at the 'No Excuses' school prompted him to engage in outreach work that will create better opportunities for future children who navigate similar terrain. He had a powerful quote regarding his inspiration for change:

> I don't want the same actions that happened with us, happening to my nephews or their cousins, their little brothers and stuff like that. And we want our youth and the next generation to have hope of better opportunities than us. Better education. So, they can be prepared to go to college and graduate on time and finish, not just to go and drop out.

It was not clear from his story whether he saw himself fully engaging in advocacy work while enrolled at the 'No Excuses' school, but it was clear that his experiences there definitely contributed to his passion for education advocacy. Thus, it can be presupposed that he ultimately felt that his experience prepared him to be successful in his own right.

Across the four cases, it was clear that although Tink shared many displeasures about his school experience, he seemed to be the sole participant to actively speak positively at different points about the opportunities he was afforded because of his enrollment at the 'No Excuses' school. Tink and CJ also scolded the school for not adequately preparing them academically. Overall, there was a general understanding that the participants felt less prepared during their college journey and partially blamed their experiences at the 'No Excuses' school as the reason why they did not finish college.

Coping Mechanisms and Resiliency

In this final research question, I sought to identify the many coping mechanisms held by participants, both adaptive and maladaptive. I was particularly interested in how participants leveraged their different coping strategies throughout their lifespans and which ones fueled their abilities to be persistent. Across the four cases, participants were able to speak to mechanisms that might have been considered "not appropriate" for some spaces but worked out perfectly for them to take their minds off of the stressors they were experiencing. For example, Mista "chewed plastic objects" as a way to de-stress and he was punished in school for his actions. Every other participant enjoyed traditional strategies like active sports and volunteering. However, a few participants coped by suppressing their emotions and fighting.

CJ felt that he was able to cope with his life and school experiences better when he tapped into his cultural, racial and ethnic identity. Developing a critical consciousness helped him to rebuild his self-confidence and he discovered unparalleled authenticity in the process. He found that defining his own success was a liberating process. Identifying these key understandings greatly assisted him in reducing his stress levels. Because of the self-examination work he committed to doing, he found himself prospering rapidly in advocacy work. When reflecting back about how his experience at the 'No Excuses' school shaped him and inspired the work he does, CJ said:

> That's why I do the work I do today. It did help me become very resilient, very, very, very resilient, and like I said, I really could care less who the audience is that I'm speaking with, I tell people all the time, I let people come in my life and define what success looked like and what that process was for me. And through, you know, going through what I go through, I know that success looks different for everybody. And that's what I promote. So [uniforms] not really my thing no more. Don't do that, you know. I don't disrespect the space but you gone get [100% me], hate me for who I am. That's what [I] promote. Anybody. Be yourself. Define your own success. Don't let people define it for you. And that's just how I'm coming.

He found solace in deeply understanding himself after years of feeling misunderstood. He found his purpose in life and it seemed to helped him assist other people with finding their passions as well.

CJ added that the ability to persevere as an adult came from the agency that he possessed to make his own decisions and truly be bound to no one but himself. He felt that when he was able to create his own unique niche, maintain control of his own destiny and forge his own path that he was most likely to be at his best. The ability to not be beholden by someone else's structure for his life has helped him spread his wings. Although he maintained his medical diagnoses of schizophrenia and anxiety, the work that he does has not been impacted in the slightest. He mentioned that his anxiety would re-emerge if he was ever confronted by a "real aggressive person in an authority position," or by having to construct close relationships with Black men he sensed had the potential to take advantage of him. During these situations, CJ said that he would remove himself from the environment where the stimuli was located so as to not be impacted as greatly. In past experiences, because CJ felt that he had no other recourse, he retreated and suffered silently. In his explanation here, CJ seemed to have intentionally thought about the circumstances that have caused him stress in the past and created realistic strategies to soothe his psyche and find safety. When his mind continues to race due to the impact of chronic stressors, CJ takes medication to help him sleep. He eloquently stated that life is not about what types or how much trauma one has endured throughout their lifespan, rather life is about what that individual does with the trauma that matters.

Compared to CJ, Mista's coping mechanisms were considered extreme. Mista coped with his anger issues during childhood by chewing on plastic objects. He communicated, "Chewing on a spoon, was one of the ways of relaxing myself, either chewing on gum or chewing on

anything. Most of the time it'd be plastic though." Although chewing on plastic got him in trouble in school, Mista felt that it was one of the only ways he was able to calm down. Another way that Mista coped with his pain was by talking to people because it helped him process his thoughts. The stress that he and his family underwent while his brother was incarcerated affected him greatly, but once he was able to visit him to see that he was being taken care of while locked up, he coped better with his stress. Coupled with these stressful experiences, after years of being bullied and tormented by other students, Mista actually contemplated taking his own life as a way to end his suffering. He said that he was exhausted of always letting things go and feeling forced to suppress his frustrations in life.

Mista's resiliency helped him develop a keen sense of generosity and selflessness. Ironically, his ability to take risks, be vulnerable and re-imagine what happened to him not only contributed to him persevering throughout high school, but also to his personal mission of paying it forward. He protected other students who were bullied while he was being bullied himself and it helped him regain a sense of control over his own life. Due to the adaptive coping strategies he developed and gratification he received from helping others cope, Mista had these powerful words of wisdom for people wanting to make a difference:

> They may not listen but don't give up. If they say they don't need your help or nothing, don't just give up on them. That's one thing I learned, no matter how many people may deny they need help, they still need it. So just cuz they're saying, no, don't stop. Just cuz they're saying they don't need you, don't give up. Find ways to actually try to break through their shell. And get to them.

Compared to Mista and CJ, Benjamin seemed to possess a thorough mix of adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies. He maintained numerous coping mechanisms that helped him navigate the stress he endured during his childhood and adolescence. As a former athlete, he would go on runs and go workout at the gym to blow off steam. He enjoyed playing basketball, reading and acquiring different knowledges. He also tried to maintain his spiritual relationship

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with God and fully believed in the power of prayer. He said, "I try my best to keep my spiritual connections high and get them deeper to where I can see more and be receptive to more things in my environment." He also spoke candidly regarding the way he was raised and mentioned how his upbringing helped him battle through some of the hurt he experienced. However, there were times when Benjamin struggled coping with his experiences at home and in school. During these times, Benjamin thought that it was best that he coped with his issues alone and desired that individuals respected his personal space and feelings. Most times, it did not go the way that Benjamin had planned and when asked to expound further about this issue, he said:

> I would distance myself, I would go whole days without speaking and it was just one morning where you know, somebody just insisted to hear my voice while I was trying to settle down and gather myself to be able to learn. And I couldn't balance it anymore, I couldn't keep a lid on it anymore and I wound up flipping my desk.

Benjamin mentioned that after the incident happened, school personnel made sure to keep an eye on him. They monitored him closely by paying attention to the tone of his voice and by watching the facial expressions he made when he communicated at school. These occurrences angered Benjamin because they reminded him of what transpired when he had trouble coping with stressors at home. He said that his family exhibited similar behaviors towards him and he felt patronized and always to blame for what might have happened:

> It made me feel like something was wrong with me. It made me feel like I'm always the dynamite stick that everybody needs to stay away from and that made me wanta stay away. You know what I'm saying? That made me wanta forget talking to everybody today or this week. I'm just gonna chill, Just be quiet.

When Benjamin's father went to prison, he stated that while it was rough, he maintained his composure. He managed by moving forward the best way he knew how, but he admitted that it created a tougher shell for people to crack. While analyzing this data, it was difficult to not think about the position that Benjamin had been put in even before his father was incarcerated. It also made me ponder about the many times he had purposely put his emotions and needs on the

shelf in favor of his family's. The data did not reflect a period where Benjamin was truly allowed

to navigate his home as a child and even in the schoolhouse, he maintained a leadership position.

Thus, the expectations for the ways that he needed to conduct himself might have been

disproportionate to where he actually was emotionally even with all of the responsibilities with

which he was entrusted. It was not surprising that he exploded after years of suppressing his

deepest, most intimate emotions. Benjamin said that constantly experiencing pain in his life

made him hard as well as emotionally distraught:

> I have a lot of situations where I have to really take a second and ask myself, like am I really okay? And you know, can I really get through this? I have a lot of, a lot of times where I have a cruise control setting about myself. I really just commit to going through the motions, to keep my work consistent and to keep my work focused and just basically fight my demons at a mental and spiritual level.

> Benjamin also discussed how self-aware he was regarding his size and strength and did

not want to live in fear of himself. Nor, did he want to harm others. When asked to talk more

about this, Benjamin reflected back and said:

> I've reduced a lot of my weight as of now but when I was in high school, I was real big, you know what I'm saying? About 360 pounds, you know what I'm saying? Real flat, Real solid, wide, you know what I'm saying? And it was times where I would be very destructive.

These realizations and critical thoughts wound up being ruminated persistently by Benjamin. He

communicated that what he was experiencing were not "hissy fits; it was pure anger." He said. "I

was truly experiencing 100% pure aggression. I would be very destructive at times, like

punching walls." His inner pain was so deep that Benjamin would be angry for the entire day and

there was little that anybody could do to bring him down. He profoundly remarked, "I realized at

a young age that the anger I was experiencing and a lot of aggression I was experiencing was

beyond that of a child's comprehension and beyond that of a child's spirit."

Thankfully, in school, there were support structures that provided a safe space for Benjamin to cope and be himself. He leaned on a few teachers that he respected as well as those who saw through the tough exterior he put forth. Benjamin said of one teacher, "He was able to identify my hardness and he was able to identify, you know, how I need to come clean with myself to be able to realize the storm that I'm in." Another teacher, who was a Muslim also impacted Benjamin's school experience because he was a huge fan of Malcolm X. These few teachers at the 'No Excuses' school proved to be important for Benjamin to persevere through his struggles because he felt heard and seen by them. They definitely played a major role in him graduating from the school. Most importantly, he felt that he was able to trust them and that his issues were not irrelevant to them like they were at home.

After finding his niche in high school as a peer disciplinarian and mentor, he dedicated his life to youth advocacy. Supporting, listening and leading other students of color provided him with the ability to give back and provide wisdom to young people. This work gave him peace, divine purpose and helped him fight his demons when his life became complicated, nebulous and too difficult to bear. When asked how he was able to be resilient after everything he faced in life, Benjamin said:

> I feel like knowing that I want children. You'd be surprised at how much pain, you know what I'm saying, me and my father shared. And I don't want to sit down with my daughters and my sons and share that same pain. I don't want my children, I don't want the generation behind me, my brothers, my little baby brothers and sisters to experience that same pain so I'm forever changed.

Benjamin maintained that because of everything that he has experienced in life, he is not only "extremely fearless," but he only has critical thoughts and is "willing to die over his thought processes."

Like Benjamin, Tink suppressed many of his emotions and coped in isolated spaces, but occasionally dabbled with sports as a way to blow off steam. Based on the stressors that Tink

experienced, he held most of his deepest thoughts and feelings inside. When his mother passed

suddenly, he suppressed his emotions because he felt as if no one desired to listen. Losing his

mother was difficult for Tink for many reasons, but especially because he discovered her alone.

Due to his religious background, it was also difficult for Tink to reconcile his relationship with

God although he admitted that his spiritual relationship grew after the tragedy. Moments after

finding his mother deceased, Tink reflected and shared a few of his immediate thoughts:

> I was walking to my neighbor's house, I wasn't running. I was walking. And just like
> questioning God, like really, like why me? You know what I'm saying? Why me? Ain't
> nobody here. Why should a seven-year-old by himself go through this kind of thing so
> I'm questioning God and stuff like that. And it, like I said, it just took its toll on me
> through these years.

Tink maintained that his mother's death was the reason that he succeeded in life thus far. He

said, "Her dying motivated me to become the person I am today. It did build character. I wish it

would've happened a different kind of way but it didn't so… It still motivated me to become the

person I am today and is a huge factor in my everyday life." His struggles with her death

permeated every area of his life. It also caused him to have a few blow-ups at school where he

got into fights. However, as stated previously, Tink was not a major behavior problem at the

school and he held most of his emotions inside. Tink stated that he mainly remained neutral in

school and tried to keep a low profile because of his temper. He resorted to playing sports to

keep his mind off of the challenges that existed at home and in the community.

However, during Tink's first year of college, he suffered a seizure due to the stress of not

being academically or psychologically prepared and the rigors of a new domestic partnership. He

stated that he had a few more seizures after the first one that were stress related as well. It was

also clear that Tink's seizures were a result of suppressing the cumulative stressors he endured

during childhood and adolescence. He said that since the seizures happened, his friends and

family has been a huge support system and stress reliever because he was not properly taking

care of himself. "My surroundings, my clique, my crew. They bring out the best in me. They talk

to me. They nurture me. You know, they're the voice of reason with me and getting through my

problems and stuff like this. So, I really praise and thank them for helping me to calm my anger

down." The "crew" that Tink is referring to is made up mostly of individuals that attended the

'No Excuses' school with him. They have remained close and built lasting relationships with one

another which he claimed throughout his interview were vital to his success and outlook on life.

He contended that they were the main reason why he had been able to be resilient during his

struggles.

<div align="center">**Five Main Themes & Cross Case Analysis**</div>

From the findings presented above, five major themes emerged across the four cases:

Table 7: Five Main Findings Themes.

1) Adaptation, Comprehension, Exposure (ACE)
2) Angola Bound
3) Triggers, Identities & Masculinities
4) Shell Shocked
5) Posterity

The first cross-case theme about adaptation, comprehension and exposure aligns with the

first research question regarding the participants' perceptions of trauma and environments where

they experienced the most stress. The second cross-case theme, Angola bound, emerged from the

second research question regarding the participants' perceptions of the 'No Excuses' space. As

mentioned in the findings, participants largely described the environment as one that was

preparing them for prison. The third cross-case theme, triggers, identities and masculinities are

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connected to the second sub-research question that asks about previous traumas being triggered in the school environment. Since identities and masculinities seemed to be connected to the triggers participants faced, it was added into the theme. The fourth cross-case theme, shell shocked was tied to the third research question about whether the 'No Excuses' environment prepared the participants for college, careers and successful lives. All participants stated that they were unprepared academically for the college environment, but two participants spoke clearly about how the 'No Excuses' training handicapped them in the real world because they were controlled and taught to be dependent in high school. However, college was a place that required them to be independent and the psychological rigor of maintaining both academic focus and sanity without regimented structures and adult monitoring in that environment caused two participants tremendous stress and shell shock. The fifth cross-case theme is not specifically tied to a research question, but if it had to, it could fit into the question that asks whether participants were prepared for college, careers and successful lives, serving as its juxtaposition. One of the most intriguing findings in the data was that although the 'No Excuses' environment caused participants a great deal of stress and agony, the experience also helped them to find their life passions, become more critically conscious and better catalysts for change. Therefore, it enhanced their humanitarian advocacy efforts and propelled them on journeys to serve future generations of youth in multiple capacities.

Adaptation, Comprehension, Exposure (ACE)

The first cross-case theme discusses three divergent interrelated concepts: adaptation to trauma, comprehension of trauma and exposure to trauma based on the ACEs data. Across the four cases, it was clear that each one of the participants maintained both adaptive and maladaptive ways of coping with their stressors. When CJ commented that he would "never let

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anybody define success for him again" or when he referenced that he would refuse to attend a conference where people mandated a specific dress code, he illustrated that he had not only developed a critical consciousness as a way of coping, but that he had a profound sense of his triggers and created a buffer to protect himself from harm. This paled in contrast from the silent rebellion, fear and anxiety that CJ displayed early on in his life when he seemed to be grappling with and trying to understand what was happening to him. Like CJ's silent rebellion, Mista's admissions of "chewing on plastic" and having suicidal ideations were largely considered as maladaptive ways to deal with his pain. However, Mista's ability to take risks, provide protection, and offer counsel and assistance for other classmates served as powerful and possibly life changing strategies for him.

Benjamin and Tink used sports and religion as mechanisms to cope with their stress and though neither were considered behavior problems at school like CJ and Mista were, fighting and exhibiting aggressive behaviors were a few of the ways that both young men released some of their stress. All four participants revealed that they adapted to their life circumstances by silently rebelling in some way. All four participants communicated that they were able to cope better because of the relationships they had with each other and certain teachers. CJ, Mista, Benjamin and Tink also developed a passion for helping others, mentoring youth and advocacy work that helped them manage their stress.

Across the four cases, the participants' articulation and comprehension of trauma nomenclature as well as their robust perceptions of traumatic experiences were descriptive and much more detailed than I had expected. When asked about trauma, CJ mentioned "lasting experiences that bring out maximum vulnerabilities in a person." So, when CJ talked about his experiences with Hurricane Katrina or his brother being tormented due to his sexuality, these

situations might have brought out maximum vulnerabilities in him. Benjamin stated that traumas were "situations in an adolescent's life that could destroy their innocence." When Benjamin unpacked his trauma, he mentioned the death of his classmates and the incarceration of his father. His story indicated that his innocence might have been destroyed in the process of these experiences. Similarly, Tink said that traumas were "devastating, affective, unforgettable moments." Tink descriptively spoke about his mother's death and his younger brother's murder when discussing trauma. The findings showed that these two experiences greatly impacted his life as well. Mista detailed his mother's alcoholism and his brother's imprisonment as traumatic and the psychological rigors of dealing with both experiences caused him significant harm too. What was not comprehensively understood from the participants was how much collective and transgenerational trauma they had already cumulatively experienced throughout their lifespan.

Each interview began with participants completing the ACEs questionnaire. The Adverse Childhood Experiences questionnaire (ACEs) (located in Appendix E), better known as the "Resilience Score," is a tabulation of multiple different types of abuse, maltreatment, household dysfunction and other examples of a disadvantaged upbringing (Starecheski, 2015). This allowed me to understand the types of childhood and adolescent experiences participants considered adverse or traumatic before age eighteen. Research claimed that students who experienced multiple ACEs were: (a) three times more likely to have serious employment problems, (b) three times more likely to experience depression, (c) four times more likely to become an alcoholic and (d) fifteen times more likely to commit suicide (NCTSN, 2016). As shown in Table 5 below, all of the participants experienced at least three ACEs before the age of eighteen, with Benjamin scoring an eight out of ten. Looking across participants, it is clear that the research regarding depression and suicide was confirmed. It is also clear that three out of the four participants were

exposed to alcoholism or drug use in their homes and all four participants experienced the

separation or divorce of their parents. A surprising finding across the cases was that neither

participant felt unloved or that their families were not supportive or close even though there is

interview data that contradicts this finding.

Table 8: Participants' responses to the ACES questionnaire.

While you were growing up, during your first 18 years of life:	CJ	MISTA	BENJAMIN	TINK
1. Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often… Swear at you, insult you, put you down, or humiliate you? or Act in a way that made you afraid that you might be physically hurt?	1	0	1	1
2. Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often… Push, grab, slap, or throw something at you? or Ever hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured?	1	0	1	1
3. Did an adult or person at least 5 years older than you ever… Touch or fondle you or have you touch their body in a sexual way? or Attempt or actually have oral, anal, or vaginal intercourse with you?	0	0	0	0
4. Did you often or very often feel that … No one in your family loved you or thought you were important or special? or Your family didn't look out for each other, feel close to each other, or support each other?	0	0	0	0
5. Did you often or very often feel that … You didn't have enough to eat, had to wear dirty clothes, and had no one to protect you? or Your parents were too drunk or high to take care of you or take you to the doctor if you needed it?	0	0	1	0
6. Were your parents ever separated or divorced?	1	1	1	1
7. Was your mother or stepmother: Often or very often pushed, grabbed, slapped, or had something thrown at her? or Sometimes, often, or very often kicked, bitten, hit with a fist, or hit with something hard? or Ever repeatedly hit at least a few minutes or threatened with a gun or knife?	0	0	1	0
8. Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic or who used street drugs?	1	1	1	0

Table 8 (cont'd).

9. Was a household member depressed or mentally ill, or did a household member attempt suicide?	0	0	1	0
10. Did a household member go to prison?	0	1	1	0
Participant ACEs Scores	**4**	**3**	**8**	**3**

When examining the ACEs data a bit deeper from the four cases, a few questions emerged based on how certain participants answered the survey questions compared to what they communicated during the interviews. The first inquiry revolved around Mista not scoring ACEs questions one and two which asked, "During your first eighteen years of life:"

> Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often… Swear at you, insult you, put you down, or humiliate you? or Act in a way that made you afraid that you might be physically hurt?

> Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often… Push, grab, slap, or throw something at you? or Ever hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured?

The question emanated because Mista's behavior record was extensive and he was almost expelled from school. When Mista told the story of being lied on by his teacher, he mentioned that his mother "got on the phone and started blowing on him" and although nothing happened when he got home, he said that she still "blowed on him for nothing." He also discussed the time that his mother "backslapped" him during the expulsion hearing. Because Mista's mother also endured tremendous stress, had been physically aggressive with Mista previously, had "blowed on him" in the past and had been contacted several times by the school due to Mista's behavior, it made me question a few things. The first thing it made me question was: (a) whether his mother's actions were isolated behaviors that did not occur often or very often and did not make him fearful of being physically hurt, or if the question was somehow misread, and (b) whether Mista's understanding of being humiliated and insulted were somehow associated with his

psychological affect regarding the playground shooting that he escaped or his classification of

Hurricane Katrina as a video game experience and not something that greatly impacted him.

Another intriguing understanding based on the ACEs data was that although CJ, Mista,

Benjamin and Tink all experienced household dysfunction, abuse in some form or fashion and

the separation or divorce of their parents at one point during their childhood, neither one of them

felt unloved, unimportant or that their families were unsupportive and not close. Benjamin was

the only participant to tabulate ACEs question number five which asked:

> Did you often or very often feel that … You didn't have enough to eat, had to wear dirty
> clothes, and had no one to protect you? or Your parents were too drunk or high to take
> care of you or take you to the doctor if you needed it?

However, the data showed that Mista might have felt perpetually unprotected, especially after

being bullied for most of his educational journey. His experiences led to him silently rebelling,

retaliating, contemplating suicide, exhibiting heroic tendencies as well as desiring to have a

younger sibling to protect. Mista was on the record saying, "I always wanted to have somebody

under my wing. Be somebody's protection." Thus, it was not completely understood why Mista

left this question unchecked. The same lack of protection argument could be made for CJ's

experiences being "jumped" and beaten up by other children in Texas simply because he was

from New Orleans. He commented how unsafe and terrifying those conditions were for him.

Therefore, it was not clear why CJ did not tabulate this question either.

Lastly, the way that participants answered ACEs question number nine was fascinating.

The question reads during your first eighteen years of life, "Was a household member depressed

or mentally ill, or did a household member attempt suicide?" Benjamin was the only participant

that responded affirmatively and although his story is well documented throughout the findings,

it was not totally clear whether he was referring to his own bouts with depression or if someone

else in his household suffered from depression, was mentally ill or had attempted suicide. CJ was

diagnosed with schizophrenia and battled anxiety attacks and other symptoms and did not score this item. However, CJ did admit that he hid his mental conditions in the past to prevent retaliation, so that might be an explanation. When Mista helped a former classmate, who was suicidal and bullied for being gay, he said that one of the reasons that he assisted him was that "[he too] felt suicidal a few times." Therefore, it was confusing as to why Mista did not score this item on the survey. It was tough to determine if Tink battled depression or another mental illness, but his silent rebellion and anger issues were well documented.

Angola Bound

The second cross-case theme is Angola Bound, which is a code for Angola Louisiana State Penitentiary. Across the four cases, it was clear that the participants thought that the 'No Excuses' environment was preparing them for prison. It taught them how to be obedient and programmed them to be submissive and divisive towards other individuals that looked like them. Mista provided the graphic reflection "that the warden was one of the school leaders and that certain teachers were the guards." Benjamin shared the story about "walking on straight lines, going by rotation of a bell, having a teacher literally walk inch by inch making sure you was in a straight line and making sure your head was forward." Benjamin was also the one to specifically state that the school was like "a mini Angola." Similarly, Tink commented that "they had that prison pipeline mentality where as soon as they'd get off the bus, they'd be shaking the principal's hand." When trying to understand the structure he was socialized and taught in, CJ powerfully commented, "I really came to the conclusion this wasn't school to me. This was something else. This was something totally different." Ultimately, CJ's perception of the school environment mirrored the others and he also thought that the school resembled a prison.

It was not completely clear for CJ and Tink where their prison context derived from to make such comparisons. However, CJ did mention having relatives who were in prison like the story he told about his cousin who was shot several times and subsequently confined to a wheelchair. Mista's brother was incarcerated and he visited him multiple times. Thus, his graphic comparison made sense. Even though Benjamin's father was incarcerated when he was in high school, he maintained that community members who visited the school also said that the school reminded them of Angola. Either way, both understandings have the potential to justify his prison assessment.

Triggers, Identities & Masculinities

The third cross-case theme centers on the relationships among participants' triggers, identities and ideas of masculinities. The data showed that each of the participants encountered triggers in the 'No Excuses' space from previous experiences that impacted their perceptions of identity and masculinities. When CJ discussed his stepfather and grappled with his father's absence, the disappointment and anger he felt paved the way for how distrustful and fearful he was around Black men who "always wanted to take advantage." CJ also conversed about being stopped by the police and precipitously being reminded of the principals at the 'No Excuses' school that "controlled everything," taught him how to be obedient and "held his life in their hands." Additionally, when people spoke negatively about LGBTQ issues, even his family members, CJ said emotionally, "The person I instantly think of is my brother." CJ commented that "watching the treatment he got and people going to Jesus about it" provoked him to refuse to adopt Christianity as an identity marker. These notions clearly link to CJ's sense of himself as he gained renewed purpose through his life's struggle that also fueled his advocacy work for vulnerable populations. His views of masculinity come through as he is more cautious, delicate

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and thoughtful when having discussions about homosexuality because of his brother's tumultuous and traumatizing journey.

Mista's experiences with bullying were triggered in the 'No Excuses' space and were perpetuated against him by students, teachers and school leaders. It has been documented that Mista's internal turmoil from battling these attacks provided significant fodder for him to find his purpose in life as a mentor and education enthusiast. Through reframing his experiences and reshaping his identity, Mista transformed from the abused to the protector. He was able to provide support and empathy to a fellow classmate who was bullied for being gay, which is considered antithetical to masculinity in many communities. However, simply supporting another male classmate is not considered antithetical to masculinity.

Benjamin was triggered by the "condescending tone" of school personnel and felt that a great deal of what was happening at the school went against the morals and values that he was raised to believe in. The trigger in some part seemed to stem from his robust responsibilities at home having to "step into his father's shoes" and be the man of the house very early in his adolescence. Through juggling both identities as a leader and provider at home and at school, Benjamin had to peak very early and battled a tremendous amount of pressure in both spaces while simultaneously attempting to reconcile whether he needed to be "the man" or "the child" in certain situations.

Tink was triggered by school personnel who violated his personal space which might have emanated from the abuse he suffered at the hands of his stepmother. Tink was also triggered by petty jokes about his mother's death that could have occurred in any school space, not just a 'No Excuses' one. He credited his mother's death as the motivation for who he is today and says that 'it built character." One story that impacted Tink's identity and his idea of what

masculinity looked like happened with his father in the aftermath of his mother's death. Tink said:

> "I thought when a man reached a certain age, he stopped crying. Like it's impossible for him to cry cuz my dad never showed emotion, so when the doorbell rang and I saw it was him, and he had tears in his eyes and he just welcomed me with open arms and we just cried for hours."

It was not clear how much this situation affected Tink, but it was clear that his perception of manhood was reconstructed at an early age due to this event.

Shell Shocked

The fourth cross-case theme is shell shocked. Being shell shocked is a response that derives from powerful environmental and atmospheric assaults that form a dependence. Shell shock usually presents itself in panic, fear, anxiety and an inability to think logically (Hochschild, 2012). When examining the four cases, it was clear that once CJ and Tink graduated from the 'No Excuses' school, they felt handicapped from being taught what to do, what to say and how to act for four years. Thus, they communicated that they felt incapable, intimidated and unprepared for college and it shocked them to some extent. CJ chronicled a story that said:

> I wasn't properly prepared academically and I asked myself what am I doing here? Who am I trying to impress by coming here because that was always a part of the goal, was for us to go to college. It was really intimidating. You walk on tape in high school, get to college and get a schedule, you damn near expect your professor to come out of the class and walk you to your classroom.

Tink shared similar sentiments about his college experience when he said. "I feel like we weren't prepared to go to college. Psychologically nor academically." Furthering this point, Tink commented:

> Our professor's not gonna be knocking on our door saying you gotta get ready for class, stuff like that. So, it was, it was, it was traumatic because we wanted to go to college and we thought we were ready but when we got there, was like, man, this ain't.

Tink also faced a tremendous amount of stress and anxiety during his freshman year that led to him having a seizure. These examples represent shell shock because they were trained and conditioned in the 'No Excuses' space to follow orders and to keep their opinions to themselves or potentially suffer the consequences. In college, it was the total opposite. They felt unprepared to be independent and to think critically in the college environment and it triggered stress responses in their bodies when they realized that it was nothing like the 'No Excuses' school. Tink and CJ both communicated that they were thwarted psychologically to the point that their stress not only caused anxieties, but it also crippled their thoughts about themselves causing self-confidence issues as well as heightening their realities about the knowledge they may have lacked while there.

When Benjamin commented about his college experiences, it did not seem that he shared the same shell shock that Tink and CJ explained. Benjamin articulated, "As an adult, I realized quickly that it didn't help me once it came to college and it led to me leaving college on that basis and brought me to a critical realization on my knowledge." Therefore, it seemed that Benjamin's epiphany about college mainly focused on being deficient academically and not that he experienced psychological distress to the extent that it caused physical symptoms. While Mista did attend college for a year and a half before being declared academically ineligible, there was not enough data to stipulate (a) what his college experiences were, (b) if his experiences at the 'No Excuses' school contributed to him failing in college, (c) if the practices utilized at the 'No Excuses' school caused him to be shell shocked when he got to college like Tink and CJ.

It did not seem that all four of the participants were shell shocked. In fact, there is only strong evidence of CJ and Tink being shell shocked. Benjamin and Mista discussed struggling academically but did not stipulate their emotional and psychological status while enrolled in

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college. However, CJ and Tink's understandings about not be prepared "psychologically or academically" and Benjamin's "critical realization on [his] own knowledge" were important enough to consider shell shock as one of the key themes, especially when the participants were under the tutelage of educators that promoted preparing all students for college.

Posterity

The fifth cross-case theme is posterity. Across the four cases, it was clear that being enrolled in the 'No Excuses' environment pushed the participants to define their own standards of success, to develop forms of critical consciousness and to use advocacy as a mechanism to inspire future generations. Posterity means "succeeding or future generations" or "the people who will exist in the future" (Dictionary, 2018). When CJ discussed the story that "he let people come into his life and define success for him," and when he doubled back and said "if there is a conference where people are telling me what to wear, don't book me for it," it illustrated his frustration with oppressive customs and sparked him to gain a deeper understanding of himself as well as the change he wanted to see in the world. Similarly, when Benjamin was asked how he became so resilient, he commented that:

> I feel like knowing that I want children. I don't want to sit down with my daughters and my sons and share that same pain. I don't want my children, I don't want the generation behind me, my brothers, my little baby brothers and sisters to experience that same pain.

Mista's desire to mold and protect someone is well documented throughout the manuscript but is heavily related to the passion he has for helping people. When referring to his dedication to advocacy work, he advised, "Talk to them, they may not listen, but don't give up. If they say they don't need your help or nothing, don't just give up on them. That's one thing I learned, no matter how many people may deny they need help, they still need it." Tink had a similar testimony as the others where he shared that:

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"I don't want the same actions that happened with us, happening to my nephews or their cousins, their little brothers and stuff like that. And we want our youth and the next generation to have hope of better opportunities than us. Better education. So, they can be prepared to go to college and graduate on time and finish, not just to go and drop out.

It was clear that each one of the participants have dedicated their lives to causes that affect the next generation of learners, thinkers and leaders.

Conclusion

Across these five themes, there is evidence that the themes not only align with the research questions, but they answer the research questions. When faced with inordinate amounts of stress at home and in the school environment, participants utilized both adaptive and maladaptive coping mechanisms for reprieve. While their knowledges and perceptions of trauma and trauma exposure varied, they maintained deep understandings of how of each of their experiences impacted them throughout their lifespan. All of the participants faced chronic stressors and endured cumulative trauma prior to their enrollment in the 'No Excuses' environment. When participants were asked to reflect about their experiences, it was revealed that the 'No Excuses' environment triggered them in divergent ways and did lead to increased anxiety, fear, silent rebellion and re-traumatization. Because participants felt controlled, perpetually supervised and socialized to be dependent, they not only compared the 'No Excuses' environment to a penitentiary, but they believed the methods academically and psychologically handicapped them in college as well. However, as participants have aged and matured, those perceptions and understandings of trauma, the 'No Excuses' structure and their realizations about self, identities and masculinities have become more developed as well. From silent rebellion, exhibiting aggressive behaviors and eating inanimate objects to building critical friend networks, mentoring and youth advocacy, the participants transformed from being self-critical, shell shocked and not prepared academically in college to being critically conscious leaders whose

purposes and ideals are centered around posterity and fulfillment. The 'No Excuses' environment that they felt stripped them of their identity, prepared them for prison and caused them tremendous psychological anguish also strangely served as the motivating force to create their own standards of success, reconcile and nurture their critical introspections and foster their individual life agendas. These critical understandings are the catalyst for the discussion, recommendations and implications that are highlighted in the chapter to come.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the perceptions of adult Black males reflecting back on their experiences with cumulative trauma as children and adolescents as well as their experiences navigating the 'No Excuses' structure. Due to their exposure to cumulative trauma, I sought to understand how they perceived the 'No Excuses' school culture and disciplinary practices. I wanted to learn what types of interactions triggered previous traumas for them and whether the 'No Excuses' school culture prepared them for college, careers and successful lives. I was also interested in understanding what coping mechanisms assisted them and how those coping mechanisms impacted their abilities to be resilient throughout their lifespan. This study revealed that while the participants' perceptions of trauma were thoughtful and more developed than I anticipated, trauma and its widespread impacts were still somewhat of a mystery to them (Dealing with Trauma, 2012), and were largely considered normal everyday occurrences (Sered, 2014; Millner, 2014). The study also showed that the participants not only perceived the 'No Excuses' environment as one that taught them how to be obedient and dependent (Goodman, 2013), but as one that treated them like inmates and set them on a trajectory to enter the prison pipeline (WDSU News, 2013). It was found that the 'No Excuses' school did not prepare them for the academic and psychological rigors of college, causing them to drop out, shell shocked and disillusioned. However, the data proved that even though participants suffered in their own unique ways in the 'No Excuses' structure, they indirectly learned crucial coping mechanisms, built critical peer networks, and developed a spirit of posterity and divine purpose that has ultimately prepared them for life. In this chapter, I provide a short summary of the key findings and then I discuss which findings are connected to existing literature. After, I offer practical recommendations and implications for various stakeholders that

not only educate Black males afflicted by trauma, but those that serve them in a multitude of capacities as well. Then, I give directions for future research and proffer several imminent research questions that should be considered. Last, I beleaguer the importance of this research before concluding the manuscript.

Summary of Findings

All of the participants understood and adapted to their experiences with trauma in various ways. There was much nuance in the ways that they communicated their experiences as well as how they coped with those experiences. For example, Mista considered his mother's alcoholism and his brother's incarceration as traumatic and the way that he coped with the pain from those experiences was by "chewing plastic," whereas Tink's definition of trauma was "devastating, affective and unforgettable moments," and he ended up coping with witnessing his mother's death by suppressing many of his emotions and dealing with them internally. CJ defined trauma as "lasting experiences that bring out maximum vulnerabilities in a person," and Benjamin said that traumas were "situations in an adolescent's life that could destroy their innocence." CJ developed debilitating anxiety and Benjamin battled raging anger and both coped by silently rebelling at home and at school. All of the participants' conditions manifested in divergent and complex ways. The participants' definitions of trauma and explanations of traumatic experiences aligned with what the literature stipulated in some ways. However, it was powerful and even more telling to get a sense of the experiences participants "normalized" and perceived were supposed to happen to them as well as those experiences they did not classify as traumatic during the interviews and the ACEs assessment.

The data provides a clear picture that the participants perceived the 'No Excuses' environment as one where they often felt humiliated and isolated as well as one that programmed

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and constructed compliant, submissive and reliant adolescents. Reflecting back on their experiences as high schoolers at the 'No Excuses' school, the participants described an environment where they often endured "silent lunches and silent days," and were instructed to "walk on lines" facing forward with a teacher right beside them at all times. Participants claimed that stepping off of the line warranted immediate punishment from school personnel. All of the participants communicated that they were academically deficient upon graduating from the school and due to constantly being surveilled by adults, they likened their experience at the 'No Excuses' school to the penitentiary. Benjamin referred to the school as a "mini Angola," and Mista contended that one of the school leaders was the "warden and certain teachers were the guards." Tink said that all the students had "that prison pipeline mentality," and CJ mentioned that looking back, the school will "always resemble" a prison to him.

The 'No Excuses' culture was created and is implemented in schools to bring about structure, consistency, discipline, organization and timeliness, which most proponents feel should bring the school community closer towards achieving its goals (Sondel et al., 2014; Boyd et al., 2014; Goodman, 2013). Success Academy CEO Eva Moskowitz said that if her network "lessened [their] standards for student comportment, the education of the 11,000 children in [their] schools would profoundly suffer" (Disare, 2016, p. 2). Even though the participants in this study did not attend Success Academy, the data here suggest that their education did "profoundly suffer" with similar ideologies for stricter behavior standards. Data showed that the 'No Excuses' culture actually created a culture of stress, bullying, belittling, disproportionate discipline, fear, envy and favoritism. Ultimately, this culture bred division amongst the students and caused them to feel more abandoned than they already were. CJ had already been diagnosed with schizophrenia as a child and had issues with anxiety before navigating the 'No Excuses' structure

but communicated that his treatment at the school caused him to silently rebel and "sweat" when administration came near him. Although Mista had a history of being bullied before he enrolled at the school, his issues with bullying by students, teachers and school administration at the 'No Excuses' school not only caused him to face incontinence, but to also have suicidal ideations. While neither Benjamin nor Tink were considered behaviors problems at the school, Benjamin admitted to feeling "somewhat disadvantaged" after conversing with school staff and Tink almost got into a physical confrontation with a teacher that hurled an unsavory remark about his mother that "pissed him off."

All four participants families were fragmented in some way, either by a parent dying like in Tink's position, a parent going to prison like Benjamin or having brothers kicked out of their homes like Mista and CJ. Each participant reported that in their first eighteen years of life, their parents were either separated or divorced at some point as well. There was a common theme across all four participants that revolved around issues with men, manhood and identity, whether it was the anger, hostility, distrust and hypervigilance around dealings with men because of their propensity to come and go like in CJ's case, or Mista's quarrels with bullying and the household dysfunction he endured with his stepfather, or Benjamin "stepping into his father's shoes" after his incarceration or Tink feeling under-supported by his father after his mother's death and believing that men stopped crying at a certain age. In any case, the data revealed that interactions with the men who were in their lives as well as those who were absent served as triggers in the 'No Excuses' space and also shaped their perceptions of identity and masculinity to a great extent. The participants' previous experiences with men before they navigated the 'No Excuses' environment tremendously impacted the ways they responded to peer and adult redirection, built trust, learned from one another and developed relationships while enrolled there.

The data also showed that the participants experienced a few forms of shell shock: (a) the shell shock that emerged when they were disciplined and previous traumas were triggered in the 'No Excuses' space, and (b) the shell shock that took place while the participants were enrolled in college. Experiencing shell shocked is a physiological response that emanates from atmospheric threats and usually presents itself in panic, fear, anxiety and an inability to think logically (Hochschild, 2012). A compelling argument could be made that the participants experienced shell shock in other environments before ever navigating the 'No Excuses' environment and that those experiences greatly contributed to their stress and hypervigilance while enrolled there. In Benjamin's case though, he seemed to face some sort of identity clash between what was expected of him at home and what was expected of him at the 'No Excuses' school. In his respective domain, he exhibited leadership, responsibility and accountability by taking care of his younger siblings and keeping the home safe while his parents and older sister worked. However, even with the peer disciplinarian distinction at school, he still felt that he was spoken to in a "condescending tone" by school staff that not only left him feeling defeated and unprogressive afterwards, but that also went against the morals and customs he was raised to value. Thus, he faced internal struggles with the imposter syndrome as he attempted to juggle divergent identities between who his family taught him to be and who the school wanted him to be.

In the cases of CJ and Tink, the shell shock that emerged during their freshmen years of college were probably more impactful than their experiences with silent rebellion while enrolled at the 'No Excuses' school. Both participants reported not being "academically or psychologically" prepared to attend college. Due to being controlled, heavily conditioned and socialized to be dependent on adults, they were not able to thrive on their own. Tink called the

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college experience "traumatic" and said that the professor was not going to walk them to class like their teachers at the 'No Excuses' school did. CJ said that the college environment made him question what he was doing there as well as who was he trying to impress by going. Based on the data, it was not clear whether Mista and Benjamin seemed "shell shocked" psychologically like Tink and CJ were. Benjamin reported that while in college, he came to a "critical realization" about his knowledge base and have devoted a great deal of his time since "making himself into a genius" for him and not anyone else. However, all four participants did express that they did not learn much academically in the 'No Excuses' environment and that their academic deficiencies were one of the reasons they dropped out of college or were told to leave.

Lastly, the data showed that despite the participants' cumulative experiences with trauma and triggers from various interactions in the 'No Excuses' space, they all established a sense of advocacy, responsibility, devotion and stewardship. The physiological, psychological and scholastic impediments they faced ended up lighting a fire in their spirits to create better opportunities for the young people that will navigate similar environments in the future. Their comprehensive experiences at the 'No Excuses' school as well as their shortcomings pushed them to be authentically purposeful leaders and critically conscious men of color who are rulers of their own destinies and successes and creators of their own villages of care that stand to nurture their convictions of posterity.

Connecting Findings with Existing Literature and New Insights

Below, I highlight two themes, connect existing literature to what was found in this dissertation study and provide new insights and considerations.

Comprehension of Trauma and Exposure to Trauma

The Center for Nonviolence and Social Justice (CNSJ) defined trauma as "experiences or situations that are emotionally painful and distressing, and that overwhelm people's ability to cope, leaving them powerless" (CNSJ, 2016, p. 1). Typically, stressful or traumatic experiences amplify the consciousness and stress levels of children (Kiser et al., 1993), and when traumatic stress experiences accrue precipitously, children can develop stressor pileup (McCubbin & Patterson, 1982). Stressor pileup is the collective effect of all the stressors a person experiences (Bailey, 2009). Although stressor pileup is largely considered normal and side effects should diminish quickly after the stressful event ends, in some cases, the event remains in the psyche of the person and the symptoms are prolonged for months and even years contingent on the person (McFarlane, 2010; Public Health, 2016). In Griffin's (2018) dissertation study, which explicitly sought to understand Black males' perceptions and experiences with trauma, all of their characterizations aligned with the way the literature discussed trauma. Additionally, all of their understandings denoted that they exceeded the stressor pileup threshold and were still battling the symptoms of the traumatic experiences they had faced.

The overexposure to traumatic events that children experience is called cumulative trauma. Cumulative trauma is defined as "experienc[ing] multiple, chronic, and prolonged, developmentally adverse traumatic events like sexual abuse, physical abuse, neglect, community violence and domestic violence" (NCTSN, 2016, p. 1). It is operationalized in the literature as the complete number of diverse types of interpersonal trauma that an individual experiences (Briere, Hodges, & Godbout, 2010; Cloitre et al., 2009). One of the mechanisms used in the present study to gauge whether the participant's experiences fit the cumulative trauma categorization was the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) assessment tool (located in

Appendix E). The ACEs, better known as the "Resilience Score," is a brief survey that asks ten

questions about different types of abuse, maltreatment, household dysfunction and other

examples of deprived childhoods that occur before age eighteen (Starecheski, 2015). Over the

years, much research has established that experiencing multiple ACEs can affect one's health

and well-being (Finkelhor et al., 2013) as well as one's ability to comprehend and develop in

various environments.

Tink and Mista scored threes, CJ scored a four and Benjamin scored an eight out of ten

on the ACEs assessment. While the ACEs data was great baseline information, there was only so

much I could discern regarding their experiences with cumulative trauma. It was clear that the

participants endured different forms of trauma based on the assessment data, but without a full

picture of their holistic experiences before age eighteen, I could not confirm that the experiences

were chronic and prolonged. This is because trauma affects people based on the specific

"characteristics of the individual, the type and characteristics of the event(s), the developmental

processes, the meaning of the trauma, and sociocultural factors" (Center for Substance Abuse,

2014, p. 1). More specifically, because Tink and Mista's ACEs scores were relatively average,

some might question whether their experiences were singular events and not different types of

trauma or circumstances that occurred over a prolonged period of time. However, that

understanding could not be further from the truth based on their documented experiences

highlighted in the findings graphics at the beginning of chapter 4.

Tink witnessed his mother's death at age seven, endured traumatic grief for over a decade

after the experience, was abused by his stepmother early on and felt emotionally neglected by

those closest to him. Mista experienced community violence in elementary school, household

dysfunction, bullying, the imprisonment of one of his brothers and the homelessness of another

as well as a myriad of other adverse circumstances that persisted throughout his childhood and adolescence. All of the participants were displaced due to the devastation of Hurricane Katrina and each one of them had a different experience. While natural disasters like Hurricane Katrina are considered types of trauma (NCTSN, 2016), what makes an event traumatic is more about "how" and "what" an individual experiences during these circumstances. To illustrate this point, we can examine the cases of CJ and Mista. It is important to note that before Hurricane Katrina, CJ had been medically diagnosed with schizophrenia at age seven from repeated exposure to lead paint. He was also mocked and bullied in schools, written off by his family and dealt with abandonment issues due to being raised without his biological father. He had trouble with hallucinations, anxiety and sleeping during this period as well. A few of Mista's experiences have already been chronicled throughout this passage and therefore do not need to be rehashed.

CJ and Mista's experiences were similar in that both of their families were stranded in New Orleans after the Hurricane, both saw gravely ill people struggling to get resources to live and both heard about people being killed and raped in the convention center and the superdome. Unlike CJ, Mista's family had to walk through close to five feet of flood waters filled with unknown objects and other hazardous contaminants to reach assistance after the devastation. CJ had the strongest response to Katrina and personally considered it to be one of the worst experiences he had ever been through. Mista, on the other hand, said that the experience did not affect him the way that it affected other people and classified the experience as a more like "video game" or a fantasy. It can be presupposed that Mista might not have been affected by the natural disaster due to prior experiences with trauma, his developmental state at the time of the event and other unknown sociocultural factors that contributed to his ability to emotionally detach from what affected thousands of other people. There is also credence to the idea that

because Mista was disassociated from the experience that he might not have understood how traumatic it actually was. This is only one example of why trying to differentiate the "experience" of traumas, behaviors and manifestations of trauma symptoms in individuals experiencing a single trauma, compared to those experiencing cumulative trauma, can be somewhat ambiguous. Most people who endured Hurricane Katrina in any way, processed and perceived the experience to be traumatic. I processed the experience as traumatic when I was a senior at Dillard University in 2005. The same cannot be said for Mista. Again, this is because each individual is affected by trauma differently, even when dealing with similar circumstances and childhoods like CJ and Mista (Center for Substance Abuse, 2014). What has remained undisputed is that the greater the exposure to trauma, the greater the risk of developing devastating symptoms from it.

With all things considered, it was determined that the four participants all experienced cumulative trauma before the age of eighteen even with the disparity in ACEs scores. This finding confirmed the notion that an estimated 70-100% of all African-American children living in poverty are exposed to at least one form of trauma, such as community violence, neglect, physical abuse and household dysfunction (Dempsey et al., 2000; Reiss & Price, 1996). It was concluded from the data that each participant in this study might have been exposed to trauma for the first time between the ages of five and ten. There were questions that participants did not account for on the ACEs assessment, but their interview data communicated a different story. This might also be attributed to the participants' personal characteristics, developmental state, understandings of trauma, understandings of the questions on the ACEs tool and how those experiences affected them emotionally and physiologically.

The efficacy of the ACEs assessment has been challenged in recent years because individuals are generally assessed several years after childhood. Thus, to improve the overall value of the ACEs tool, individuals should be assessed as children to determine what future health outcomes might look like (Finkelhor, 2013). It is also my belief that the original ACEs tool does not account for many of the troubling experiences that urban youth in particular face during their upbringing. However, the Philadelphia Urban ACEs does account for many of these experiences (Philadelphia Urban Aces). Even though Benjamin's ACEs score of eight was double each of the other participants in this study, an argument could be made that all of their individual scores would have increased had they been evaluated with a more culturally responsive tool that tabulated their experiences holistically.

The idea that Black families tended to have higher rates of female-led households and gun violence deaths was true in the study as well (Evans & Kim 2007). Even though CJ and Mista had stepfathers, they were primarily raised by their mothers. It is arguable whether Benjamin perceived his household as female-led after his father's incarceration because he had already assumed a large majority of the household duties and responsibilities before the event transpired. Thus, when his father departed, Benjamin maintained that he simply "stepped into his father's shoes." In Benjamin's case, this was a critical finding because of the role he played at home as an adolescent juxtaposed to the role he was asked to play in the 'No Excuses' environment. Research confirms that in many female-led households in poor communities, adolescent Black males are thrust into surrogate father-figure roles (Anderson, 2015; Rawles, 2010). Some Black males are responsible for protecting the family, supervising the household, feeding and clothing their siblings while their parent works (Mott, 1993; Anderson, 2015). Unfortunately, when these young men are faced with multiple stressors and required to "act" as

adults during their adolescence, their emotional and psychological needs are either forgotten or considered last priorities for the greater good of the family (Mott, 1993; Anderson, 2015).

It was not clear if CJ and Mista felt this way regarding their roles in female-led households, but it was very clear in Benjamin's case. Due to the "criticalness" of the stressors that existed at home, Benjamin felt that his needs and issues were "irrelevant." The increased responsibilities not just for himself, but for his family members may have put him in jeopardy of being neglected by his guardians. Even though the data revealed that his treatment was not intentional, Benjamin seemed to suffer from psychological maltreatment (PM) due to his experiences during adolescence. PM is defined as the unceasing or inescapable hindering of a child's fundamental needs, which includes acts by the caretakers that may be designated as injurious to typical child development (Barnett, Manly & Cicchetti, 1993). The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) stated that PM is the most difficult form of child abuse and neglect to detect because there are no physical scars to prove that abuse, neglect or psychological maltreatment have taken place (Hibbard et al., 2012; Teicher, 2002). Thus, it can be easily overlooked by people who are not trained to notice the behaviors and symptoms that are displayed, including caretakers and school personnel.

The symptomatology of experiencing PM includes persistent internalization of behaviors, explosive anger problems and compulsive behaviors like having uncontrolled fits, self-deprecating behaviors, apathetic episodes, loneliness and involuntary bodily movements that can cause embarrassment (Egeland, Sroufe, & Erickson, 1983). So, when Benjamin detailed that because of his stress load, he would: a) go whole days without speaking, b) feel like something was wrong with him, c) need to settle down and gather himself to be able to learn, d) ask himself if he was really okay and could he really get through this and e) explode into 100% pure

aggression and exhibit destructive behaviors, he was not only experiencing ruminations that are connected to a host of psychological disorders, he was also screaming for help and he was seldom heard. Both at home and at school, he felt like he was "always the dynamite stick" that everyone needed to avoid. Occurrences like these and being spoken to in a "condescending tone" triggered Benjamin in the 'No Excuses' space and ultimately led to him silently rebelling at school. Benjamin lacked the proper support structures needed to assist him and when he felt that there was an insecure psychological and emotional attachment with his caregivers at home and personnel at school, the shame and self-blame he cogitated became compounded (Black, 2010). Even though he suppressed his own emotions for the good of his family, it sent a clear message that his emotions and feelings were not valid or legitimate (Black, 2010).

The psychological and emotional scars imposed from PM might not only impact regular daily functioning, as they did in Benjamin's case, but they can have catastrophic ramifications on the neurological developmental of youth and increase their chances of developing psychological diseases and emotional impairments (Evans & Kim, 2007). The data across the four cases revealed that all of the participants endured PM at some point during their adolescence. When this powerful understanding is taken into consideration along with their experiences with cumulative trauma, their symptomatology becomes even more complex (Briere, Kaltman, & 2008; Cloitre et al., 2009). These symptoms include everything ranging from personal identity conflicts, emotional issues and volatile relationships with loved ones (Briere & Rickards, 2007; van der Kolk et al., 1996), to contemplating suicide (Zlotnick et al., 1997; Briere, 2002), to having various apprehensions and depressive episodes, cognitive breakdowns and somatization disorders (Briere, 2004: Friedman et al., 2007). It is vital to mention that despite the complexity and breadth of these symptoms; all cumulative trauma sufferers will not develop all of the above-

mentioned symptoms. This comprehension remained affirmative for the participants in this study as well. Based on the findings, all of the participants experienced at least two of these symptoms, with CJ, Benjamin and Mista experiencing at least five of the aforementioned symptoms during childhood and adolescence.

Prior research has linked childhood exposure to trauma to several developmental disorders and mental illnesses including but not limited to anxiety, depression, maladaptive social behaviors (Koenig et al., 2004), as well as problematic public health concerns like hypertension and other communicable diseases that stymie individual development (van der Kolk, 2005; Public Health, 2016). Unfortunately, this research was confirmed as well based on the data from the participants. As stipulated throughout the document, CJ was diagnosed with schizophrenia as a child and battled anxiety as an adolescent. Although Mista did not explicitly state that he battled depression or anxiety from his stressors during the interview or on the ACEs assessment, he did contemplate suicide (Briere, 2002), experience incontinence twice at school (Briere, 2004) and cope with his stressors by chewing on plastic objects. Benjamin communicated throughout the interview his struggles with depressed affect and anger and coped mostly by isolating himself. Tink did not specifically claim to have struggled with any developmental disorders and psychological disorders. However, it was clear that he suppressed his emotions and anger for years, battled traumatic grief due to witnessing his mother's death and suffered multiple seizures during his first year in college.

The research claims that when youth are first exposed to trauma between 23-29% of them will exhibit symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Hughes & Shin, 2011). Based on the data collected from the participants, this notion was not conclusive, nor am I qualified to make those types of determinations and diagnoses. However, the life stressor checklist that

assesses symptoms of PTSD is located in Appendix N for future research pursuits. If I had to make a determination about whether the participants in this study exhibited symptoms of PTSD, then I would say that there was a really good chance that at least three of the participants did, if not all of them. Additionally, research data that found between 81-98% of all adults who had at least one ACE would probably report experiencing at least one other traumatic experience later in life was confirmed as well (Dong et al., 2004). Overall, it was surprising to see how much the research on cumulative trauma actually connected to the participants' life experiences. From definitions of trauma, to perceptions of traumatic experiences and trauma symptomatology, the data showed that participants were very knowledgeable and understood how different forms of trauma affected them. However, the data also demonstrated that some of their experiences with trauma were considered normal, everyday occurrences that caused them stress but were not recognized as traumatic experiences.

Perceptions of 'No Excuses' School Culture/Preparation for Prison

Much peer-reviewed research and other literature corroborated what was found in this study in regards to the 'No Excuses' school culture. For example, Goodman (2013) conducted a study of CMOs that examined four of the most popular methods that 'No Excuses' charter schools use: "pervasive adult monitoring of students, targeting behaviors tangential to learning, attributing independent agency to children who deviate, and student derogation by adults" (p. 89). In short, her analysis revealed the following about the 'No Excuses' school culture: a) educators had a designated pre-scripted role and students were depicted as victims and wrongdoers, b) students lacked freedom and perceived having freedom as a bad thing, c) silent breakfasts and lunches were prevalent, d) students were harshly punished for non-violent behaviors like talking and not following directions, e) there was a mission driven focus on

preparing students for college and f) students were surveilled persistently by adults and were required to walk in straight lines with their hands placed in specific positions (Goodman, 2013). Research studies by Lamboy and Lu (2017) and Smith (2015) found similar trends when they explored the disciplinary practices of 'No Excuses' schools. In a survey study of fifty-six high school seniors that examined the connection between the socialization practices at 'No Excuses' schools and ideas of self-assurance, self-love and emotional consciousness, students demeaned themselves, lacked self-confidence, possessed little voice and seldom used critical judgments to make decisions (Goodman, 2013). School as a site for self-reflection, self-examination, self-expression, taking risks, and identity formation was not prioritized in the 'No Excuses' space (Goodman, 2013).

There have also been countless news reports claiming that students at 'No Excuses' schools have been treated like criminals in the penitentiary and "slaves on an auction block" (WDSU News, 2013). A high school student from New Orleans wrote an article in the local newspaper protesting his school's tendency to hire white teachers he felt did not comprehend his race, culture or ethnicity (Sullivan, 2014). Another criticism alleged that a 'No Excuses' school in New Orleans was culpable for pushing students out of the school for trivial offenses more than they did for serious issues (Calhoun, Lellelid, & Quigley, 2014).

The aforementioned disapprovals from researchers and various media outlets were shared widely by the participants in this study as well. The data regarding their perceptions of the 'No Excuses' environment is chronicled throughout this manuscript. There is no shortage or dearth of literature regarding 'No Excuses' socialization practices and disciplinary habits and while much literature draws a connection between high numbers of discipline referrals in schools and future involvement in the juvenile justice system (Fowler, 2011; Cerrone, 1999), a paucity exists in

research that specifically investigates Black males' perceptions about whether 'No Excuses'

schools actually perpetuate a school to prison pipeline culture more than a college going culture

for their demographic. When outsiders like Cambridge College professor Jim Horn refers to

KIPP environments as "New Age eugenics intervention[s] at best, and concentration camp[s] at

worst" (Boyd et al., 2014, p. 1), the 'No Excuses' school culture has to be put under a

microscope to determine what actually happens to the students that graduate or are pushed out of

these schools. The findings in this study stipulate that Jim Horn's assessment might be

something to take into serious consideration.

It is undisputed that young Black males have targets on their backs in this country

(Devega, 2015), and are unequally disciplined, suspended and expelled more often from schools

every year compared to other demographic groups (Giroux, 2015; UDCR, 2014; Millner, 2014).

It is also undisputed that when Black males are pushed out of schools across the country, many

of them enter the department of corrections, and school-to-prison pipeline research suggests that

schools are liable in the arrival of Black males at penal institutions (Raible & Irizarry, 2010;

ACLU, 2015). In the present study, Mista and CJ had extensive behavior records at the school

including numerous suspensions. Mista was on the verge of expulsion. He mentioned that the

principal of the 'No Excuses' school played the role of "warden" and that "certain teachers were

the guards." Benjamin, CJ and Mista had relatives in prison and therefore were able to

contextualize how the environment made them feel. For all of the participants to classify the

environment as a prison spoke volumes. I thought deeply about whether their retrospective

prison comparison was something that was said in spite based on experiences at the school. After

almost four years removed from the space, it was difficult to reconcile that the participants would

purposely claim feelings that were illegitimate. There had to be robust contextual understanding

behind their perceptions of the 'No Excuses' school, especially considering that several community stakeholders referred to it in that manner as well.

While the focus on prison was unearthed from the findings and not an idea that I went into the study expecting to emerge, I would like to understand the thought processes behind the perceptions and how participants concluded that a prison was the correct comparison to make. Lastly, when CJ said that the school will "always resemble a prison" to him, I questioned whether he was referring to an actual penitentiary or was he saying that he was prisoner in his own mind due to be silenced, controlled and monitored. Much research suggests that experiencing numerous interpersonal traumas during childhood can severely alter development, brain function, behavior, and the ability to comprehend (Stubblefield-Tave et al., 2005). Therefore, I was grappling with what he perceived the environment to be and why. In either case, these understandings provide tremendous fodder for a larger study surveying Black male perceptions about whether 'No Excuses' schools place students on a prison pipeline trajectory.

A Critical Race Theory Perspective

Although phenomenology was the main framework I used to understand the participants' experiences in this study, I noted many points relevant to critical race theory (CRT) after compiling the findings. Therefore, I give a brief explanation of CRT and discuss a few of the main intersections here. Critical race theory emerged out of critical legal studies by scholars who challenged the accepted racial beliefs within the legal arena (Delgado, 1995; Matsuda et al, 1993). According to Delgado and Stefancic (2000), the CRT movement is a collection of activists and scholars interested in studying and altering the relationships among race, racism, and power in America. The aspects of CRT that align most with the participants' experiences are: (a) the permanence of racism, (b) whiteness as property and (c) counter-storytelling. CRT

proponents argue that racism is and has been one of the most important structures in American life, law and culture (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). Therefore, only through the race lens can CRT challenge racial oppression and suppression in legal, institutional and educational domains (Howard, 2008). Whiteness as property is a CRT tenet that demonstrates how racism itself is not just relegated to discrimination, bigotry and having control; it is also tangibly present in the fabric of various industries that favor whites opposed to minoritized people (Brown et al., 2003; Lipsitz, 1995). Delgado and Stefancic (2001) claim counter stories can identify a specific type of discrimination and when it is named, it can then be combated. For if race is constructed, then racism and prejudice should be capable of deconstructing it (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

Racialized History of Schooling and Implications for Black males

CRT as a framework stipulates that racism is ordinary and endemic to society (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012). Too often, Black males are stymied by stereotypical notions of race that ultimately place them at a considerable disadvantage in schools (Howard, 2008). Howard (2008) elucidated that the social construction of the Black image over the last four centuries discloses an extremely problematic depiction ranging from the submissive or befuddled servant, to the overly sexualized male and many other embarrassing racial projects. CRT defines racial projects as illuminations, representations, or accounts of racial dynamics (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

These illustrations are prevalent in schools today and based on the experiences of the participants in this study and in much research, one can argue two things: (a) problematic Black representations are prevalent in 'No Excuses' schools and (b) racism is normal and embedded in the fabric of 'No Excuses' schools. Benjamin remarked that the 'No Excuses' environment was not advantageous to the plight of young Black men in society today due to the large amount of young, white and female teachers who worked there as well as the socialization practices. A

compelling argument can be made that 'No Excuses' policies were designed to target populations like Black males. 'No Excuses' policies have racial undertones and there has been a documented history of pervasive emasculation and the overcriminalization of minor behaviors for Black males (Holloway, 2016). Historically, educational systems have not been designed for Black males to thrive. There is evidence of the permanence of racism in the harsh discipline in schools that leads some Black males to prison, others to special education and many more to drop out of school altogether.

There is also tremendous evidence in sustaining whiteness as property as well. For decades, Black males have been considered problems to their communities, problems to their schools and also problems to themselves (Collins, 2004). Each day, educators have the opportunity to change that narrative. However, some educators blame Black males for not learning, not caring, not being engaged, and for giving up. In the intense struggle for power and dominion, some educators forget to teach, forgive, love, mold, and nurture Black males. Kirkland (2013) argues that a "deficit drug has been peddled throughout our schools; we are feeding Black males poison every day and are shocked when they refuse to digest it" (personal communication). Educators tell Black males to abandon who they are culturally, ethnically, socially and politically before they enter the school doors. Consequently, in regimented spaces like 'No Excuses,' when young Black men express themselves creatively and attempt to flaunt their heritage through traditional garb or native language, many are punished and usually perform more poorly because of it. Yet, we remain stunned when we see that Black males are living up to the expectations we set forth for them. We focus more on their deficiencies than their proficiencies at school. Like CJ's experience in college, we teach about Shakespeare, Socrates and Aristotle and we fail to leverage students' local knowledges and understandings. We refuse

to incorporate culturally relevant information in lessons from the artists and entertainers' they might learn from like Tupac, Lil Wayne or Drake (Kirkland, 2013). Instead, we choose comfortability to sustain our privileges, hide behind our deficits and insecurities and teach in ways we desire in place of the ways Black males learn and engage the most. Yet, again, we are surprised when Black males are at the "bottom of every category we don't want to see them at - literacy, special education, drop-out rates, and crime" (Kirkland, 2013, personal communication).

Regardless of the negative narratives and harsh realities about Black males and education, the permanence of racism and whiteness as property, the counter-story is that they wanted to learn. If this dissertation study found anything about Black males, it is these two things: (a) Black males have never needed to be fixed, are not docile, are not incapable of learning, are not problems or pieces of property, are not "unnatural and repulsive," or "social monstrosit[ies]," (Baynton, 2001, p. 38) and (b) Black males yearn to be at school, want to be challenged academically, want to be pushed intellectually, want to be engaged critically and want to be taught comprehensively by teachers. In the process however, they do not also desire to be controlled, subjugated or thought to be inept by 'No Excuses' educators. As thoroughly documented throughout this manuscript, CJ and Mista were targeted heavily by the discipline policies, but all of the participants fell prey to socialization methods at the school. They were conditioned so thoroughly in the 'No Excuses' environment after four years that it contributed to all of them leaving college early. Unfortunately, the participants' reflective epiphanies about college reminded me of a painful truth uttered by one of the most profound African American historians of our time, Dr. Carter G. Woodson. In the *Mis-Education of the Negro*, Woodson (2006) said:

> When you control a man's thinking you do not have to worry about his actions. You do not have to tell him not to stand here or go yonder. He will find his 'proper place' and will

stay in it. You do not need to send him to the back door. He will go without being told. In fact, if there is no back door, he will cut one for his special benefit. His education makes it necessary. (p. viiii)

Woodson's quote is an appropriate representation of a few of the participants' experiences at the 'No Excuses' school. However, we will examine one. When reflecting about how he walked alongside a teacher every day for four years, Tink said this about his college experience:

Now we go to college, and we're like, okay, where our teacher at now? Our professor's not gonna be knocking on our door saying you gotta get ready for class. So, it was traumatic because we wanted to go to college and we thought we were ready but when we got there, we was like, man, this ain't.

Tink's actions had been controlled by adults for years in the 'No Excuses' space. He knew exactly how to walk, where to wait for his teacher, where to go and at what time he was expected to go. The regiment became a lifestyle that he believed would be duplicated outside of the school. As Woodson alluded, his education made it so that he was not able to thrive outside of the structure, "academically or psychologically." Therefore, when faced with the difficult challenge of breaking the psychological chain of command he endured at the 'No Excuses' school, he ended up taking the back door to escape more psychosocial torment.

This is an important story for Black males navigating 'No Excuses' spaces and all educational spaces to learn from. As Biko (2002) asserted, "The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed" (p. 92). Historically, these forms of mental and emotional domination occur because whites typically maintain the power to construct the knowledge that is disseminated in schools. They create and leverage the types of aligned behavioral norms that students and families will follow as well as the cultural knowledges school stakeholders will learn to navigate those spaces successfully (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Sadly, like the participants in this study, many Black males are largely innocent bystanders in their own educations. They generally have no voice about school practices and procedures and

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are usually relegated to taking orders and following someone else's plan for their academic endeavors. Their local funds of knowledge are rarely considered within curricula, many teachers have low academic and behavioral expectations of them and the schools they attend lack the critical resources needed to foster their academic success.

Thus, I urge Black males who feel subjugated, demeaned, belittled and controlled to seek allies in their struggles and to find appropriate outlets and ways to push back against systems and people they consider racist and oppressive. These processes might look differently for Black males with divergent identities and life experiences, but the spirit of the protest should be similar. Black males who are battling stress, discrimination, hyper-discipline, humiliation and bullying in educational structures that were designed to keep them in bondage should first communicate the perceived abuses to loved ones. Black males who are targeted and labeled behavioral outliers in schools but are socially aware, racially consciousness and politically adept should share their counter-stories widely to trusted representatives who will listen. They should also attempt to convene committees of students who share similar dilemmas to speak with school administration about their issues. Then, they might try petitioning community members' support to facilitate their needs to school systems if they feel their voices are not being heard by school personnel. It might also look like Black males writing their narratives and sharing their stories with education activists and local media outlets to create awareness about their struggles. Black males have enough worries in society already, the last thing they should have to stress about is enduring hazardous academic conditions permeated with racism that criminalize their behaviors, micro-aggress them and see them as mere properties to showcase leisurely to the masses when they "test well" and dispose of them like "scrap metal" when they do not. As demonstrated in this dissertation study, Black males' psychological and emotional health depend on their abilities

to share their counter-stories, reframe their experiences for emotional growth as well as to create critical networks of support and care. In the future, a more thorough study on the experiences of Black males in 'No Excuses' charter schools can be done using a CRT approach.

Implications for Stakeholders

Implications for School Leaders

Current school administrators at 'No Excuses' schools as well as school leaders who wish to open new charter schools utilizing these practices with vulnerable populations must keep in mind that the 'No Excuses' structures are only as important as the individuals who navigate them and implement them. Plainly, disciplinary practices and policies can be altered, renewed and reformed to meet the needs of vulnerable students. School leaders in these spaces must began to intentionally address sensitive issues like mental and emotional health, race, class and social stratification. They must begin to hire more teachers that not only mirror the students, but that can also relate to their circumstances as well (Sullivan, 2014; Edmonds, 1979). This keen attention to detail and socialization can help inform school culture, teaching practices, disciplinary practices, student-teacher relationships and academic achievement for all students.

School leaders at 'No Excuses' schools cannot be satisfied with these meager alterations though. They must strive for complete transformation of the urban education sector and those gains might begin with them personally revisiting their own traumatic histories. Educators who are grappling with their own trauma and grief from stressor pileup might be liabilities to children who are also fragile and need to be handled with care. Therefore, school leaders must implement daily wellness checks with school staff and provide mechanisms of self-care for educators to develop and maintain coping strategies to deal with their own stress. There is an old saying that "hurt people hurt people" and there is too much to lose in a space where all stakeholders are

perpetually stressed from having to conform and when there are Black lives at stake. School

leaders should require teachers to learn preventative de-escalation strategies, mindfulness and

meditation techniques, psychological first aid, relational discipline and restorative practices that

are culturally, ethnically and linguistically relatable.

Instead of training staff to teach order and compliance at 'No Excuses' schools, they

might try teaching life skills like perseverance, self-discipline, curiosity, awareness, fortitude and

self-love (Tough, 2012). Instead of telling families that poverty itself and the remnants of

poverty are not excuses for students to not have homework or uniforms, have their heads down,

want to walk on straight lines or shake educators' hands, school leaders should train staff to be

more understanding to students' circumstances and attempt to be empathetic to their plights. For

example, children who are transient like all of the study participants were after being displaced

by Hurricane Katrina or homeless like Mista's brother have legitimate excuses not be in proper

uniform and not to want to shake anyone's hand. Children who possess multiple roles and

identities and have to "step into their father's shoes" like Benjamin did because his father went to

prison should not simply be told, "If you cannot live by our rules, if you cannot adapt to this

place, I can show you the back door" (Smith, 2015, p. 3). Tink witnessed his mother dying of a

brain aneurysm at seven years old, the same age of some students currently navigating 'No

Excuses' schools, and he suffered silently with anger issues for over a decade because he did not

feel heard. Students like him should not be told to "suck it up" and move on because there are

'No Excuses.'

By no means does this mean that school leaders should cultivate environments where

educators lower their expectations for students who have experienced trauma, but it does mean

that school leaders should encourage staff to listen to students more, affirm more, love more and

encourage more. The students who are hurting the most need nurturing and affirmation and not to be denigrated because of their circumstances and definitely not due to missing a homework assignment. Educators at 'No Excuses' schools must pay close attention to the words they speak, the tone they use as well as the proximity they maintain between a child while speaking to them. These interactions can trigger previous traumas and create a stress reaction that could cause students to become overly aggressive, rebellious and even more non-compliant regardless of how calm the school environment might actually be (Black & Krishnakumar, 1998). As we saw in Tink's case, he almost got into two physical altercations because of proximity and tone from interactions with educators at school. Outside of tone and proximity however, small triggers like noises, certain smells, familiar environments and even temperatures may bring about a specific trauma reminder (Center for Substance Abuse, 2014). Therefore, school leaders must equip educators with integral competencies about how to identify triggers in these spaces. School leaders must also encourage staff to use caution, mindfulness and attempt to "sweat the small stuff" in an emotionally intelligent and trauma-informed manner instead of a 'No Excuses' one.

It is a well-known fact that trauma cannot be undone. As CJ said, traumas are "lasting experiences that bring out maximum vulnerabilities in a person." So, instead of using language that dismisses their experiences, school leaders might advocate for counselors and social work staff in 'No Excuses' spaces to try helping youth reframe their experiences with trauma in narrative form. Trained counselors and social workers could use a process called post-traumatic growth (PTG) to accomplish this. PTG is a framework that integrates social, emotional and intellectual reasoning processes to help trauma survivors reframe their understandings and perceptions of traumatic experiences (McElheran et al., 2011). Research by McElheran and colleagues (2011) suggests that by utilizing the framework below with children who have been

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afflicted by trauma that they can begin to witness positive changes and outlooks after stressful events.

Traumatic Experiences

Appraisals, Rumination & Cognitive Reprocessing
- Recurrent event-related thoughts to help understand, resolve, & make sense of trauma-related events

Narrative Supports
- Encourage emotional expression & discussion of problems
- Provide validation & help when needed

Self-System Functioning
- Competency beliefs regarding one's handling/coping with problems
- Perceived self-efficacy; perceived competencies; future expectations/hope/optimism

Post-traumatic Growth

Figure 5: Model of post-traumatic growth in children and adolescents.

Although the model above is only part of the actual model that is presented in the literature, the components in it are an important start to help visualize what PTG might look like in practice. The results of the PTG study maintained that by using narrative to re-imagine their experiences, children stand to gain increased self-confidence, a firmer sense of belonging, potential mastery over the traumatic events as well as an emergent sense of self-responsibility (McElheran et al., 2011). These recommendations can prove to be life-changing for students who are exposed to trauma. However, the results could prove to be feeble as well if students are triggered by educators due to mistrust, irreparable past harms and fear of retribution from harsh discipline. As mentioned above, it is highly recommended that educators in these spaces be trained in the nomenclature of trauma and be psychologically well themselves before initiating

the PTG process out of fear of re-traumatization. To help a student appraise traumatic experiences, use metacognition, re-process, provide validation and affirmation, first that student has to evaluate and process whether they feel safe enough to share their innermost sensitivities with educators. In addition to the PTG training for counselors and social work staff, I recommend school leaders mandate that each person that has individual contact with children in these environments be trained and evaluated in cultural competency and cultural humility as well as the psychological, sociological and ecological factors that may inhibit typical adolescent development in urban children.

These recommendations are not too grandiose to endorse considering that some students at 'No Excuses' schools have protested not having enough teachers of color, nor enough teachers who understood their cultures, identities and ethnicities (Sullivan, 2014). Furthermore, many educators in 'No Excuses' environments probably attended schools that are the antithesis of the places they are now teaching students to conform. In fact, many educators in 'No Excuses' environments may be raising and socializing their own children differently about what it takes to get to college than they are socializing youth of color in 'No Excuses' environments about what it takes. We have to even the odds and simply treat students and families enrolled in these schools like we would want educators to treat our own children, with dignity and integrity. For school leaders to continue implementing 'No Excuses' methods under the guise of decreasing the achievement gap and giving minority children a better chance at going to college and succeeding in life, without also providing opportunities for growth, deeply examining related issues of race, historical trauma and the psychological side effects that 'No Excuses' practices might beget can be considered flippant, irresponsible and disrespectful to the families that put their faith in the missions of these schools.

As previously stated in the findings, the participants in this study were first exposed to trauma between the ages of five and ten. We know that sociocultural and developmental factors weigh heavily in determining experiences with trauma during childhood (Center for Substance Abuse, 2014) and that these experiences can severely alter comprehension (Stubblefield-Tave et al., 2005). This is to say that although this study suggests the participants comprehended experiencing trauma as early as five years of age, it does not mean experiences prior to age five were not traumatic or stressful to the point that maladaptive behaviors were adopted in response to them. This is dangerous territory because 'No Excuses' practices are being used with children as early as kindergarten. These policies have to be re-thought and urban schools utilizing 'No Excuses' practices have the ripe opportunity to forge a more refreshing, more humanizing and inclusive path towards educating Black males and other low-income students of color. The evidence in this study, albeit a small sample, has demonstrated the need for change to happen sooner rather than later.

Implications for Teachers

This research has significant implications for teachers as well. Although this study only examined the experiences of four Black males reflecting back on their journeys in a 'No Excuses' environment, it successfully presented a narrative that has not yet been heard as well as one that might be difficult for teachers in these spaces to digest. Albeit a small amount, there is evidence that during and after navigating the 'No Excuses' environment, the psychological and emotional health of the four Black males in this study worsened and contributed to their silent rebellion. We know from the research on psychological maltreatment that the silent rebellion of a child who feels abused is particularly difficult to observe because there are no visible signs of damage, harm or scars on the body. This is a critical understanding for 'No Excuses' teachers

who persistently surveil and punish students for non-violent offenses (Goodman, 2013). In environments that are predicated upon teachers' excessively "sweating the small stuff," (Whitman, 2008) and mandating "predetermined consequences or punishments for specific offenses" (Curtis, 2014, p. 1253), most silent rebellions are unfortunately overlooked. This can easily occur with 'No Excuses' teachers who are highly trained in militaristic fashions like those found in the Smith (2015) study that examined the Match Teacher Residency program and Relay Graduate School of Education where teachers were told, "If you want to teach, but don't want to teach in a No Excuses style, [then] our program isn't right for you" (p. 2).

Additionally, teachers battling their own issues with stressor pileup, working under stressful binary circumstances with vulnerable populations who have also endured stress is a recipe for disaster. More often than not, in these situations, unfair aspersions are cast onto families of color that "need" to be controlled to achieve academically instead of simply being respected, understood and educated comprehensively like more affluent demographics do. More often than not, students' cries for help are misinterpreted by teachers as violent, deviant and unmitigated disobedient behaviors. Teachers who use these methods not only need to consider their own psychological well-being but also need to be trained in the nomenclature of trauma before implementing these methods in schools due to the potential ramifications. An argument could be made that the emotional, psychological and racial opportunity costs (Venzant-Chambers, 2014) of continuing to implement these methods outweigh the rewards. I believe that after teachers are trained in trauma-responsive practices that 'No Excuses' practices might not only be rethought but replaced due to adeptly understanding the risks.

Mike Feinberg, co-founder of KIPP, stated that if critics of 'No Excuses' actually situated themselves in the environment, they would sense the joy beyond the structure and discipline

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(Lack, 2009). Yet, the Black males that were studied in this dissertation did not sense the happiness beyond the structure. They perceived the structure as a "prison," as "not being conducive to the growth of a young Black man in our society today," and as one where teachers treated students with good test scores like "trophies" and those that did not test well like pieces of "scrap metal." Furthermore, in an environment focused on preparing students for college, careers and successful lives, participants in this study reported being shell shocked, unprepared academically and felt they did not belong in a college environment. Even though there is little to no research on the longitudinal outcomes and perceptions of students who graduate from 'No Excuses' schools based on their college preparedness, this study provides a small bit of evidence that suggests the school environment might actually prepare them for a different, more frightening type of environment.

More specifically, there is credence to the idea that students might be more prepared to navigate prisons more than college. This determination cannot solely be made from examining the perceptions of four Black males in a case study, although their stories are compelling and serve as fodder to continue a discussion about these claims. This premise can be made due to the disproportionate national statistics regarding student discipline (suspensions and expulsions), especially as it relates to Black males in low-income communities, but also because there is unquestionable evidence concerning the problematic implications of the discipline statistics (UDCR, 2014; Millner, 2014). As mentioned earlier in this manuscript, the Public Policy Research Institute at Texas A & M University claims, "The single greatest predictor of future involvement in the juvenile [justice] system is a history of disciplinary referrals at school" (Fowler, 2011, p. 16). Two of the participants in this study were not only disciplined excessively almost to the point of expulsion, but three of the participants had close relatives currently serving

prison sentences so it was safe to assume that they had knowledge about prison culture. The

participants' perceptions of the 'No Excuses' environment and the national discipline data is

valuable and has tremendous implications for the work that teachers do because while the school

culture may be created by school leaders, teachers are largely responsible for: (a) implementing

school polices, (b) teaching students and preparing them to meet or exceed grade level standards,

(c) classroom management and writing discipline referrals and (d) nurturing students'

knowledges, building character and fostering students' understandings of school.

Another important reason that all teachers and school stakeholders should care about this

issue is that 'No Excuses' school platforms do not exist in traditionally affluent homogenous

communities. Due to this alarming fact, they must ask themselves why this is a reality for some

children and not even considered a thought for others. The conversations in these spaces must

transcend typical explanations about time, structure, having high expectations and families

maintaining a choice to send their children to the schools and I challenge teachers to lead these

critical dialogues. The discourse must move to examining what children of color have to

negotiate to be successful in these environments like cultural knowledges, languages, values and

identities. It is clear that the "See that back door? See any locks on it? Is this a prison? Am I

forcing you to be here?. . . If you cannot live by our rules, if you cannot adapt to this place, I can

show you the back door" (Smith, 2015, p. 3) type of school culture is only experimented upon

with low-income children, most of whom are Black and Brown children. Historically, there is

evidence that students of color must be willing to dis-identify with their "Blackness" and adopt

white tendencies to successfully navigate school environments (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986) and the

same can be argued for 'No Excuses' environments. Based on the language above about adapting

or being kicked out, there is also evidence that these schools duplicate social inequalities by

elevating certain forms of class-specific cultural knowledge as well (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977).

In addition to the tensions of negotiating identities and abiding by ultimatums in school, Black males have more stressful concerns to ruminate. Black males have a greater risk of being shot and killed by the police, placed in special education, expelled from school, sent to prison and being unemployed (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Brownstein, 2010). These alarming statistics are higher for Black males than they are for any other racial or ethnic group in America (Black Male Statistics, 2016; NAACP, 2016). This is not just overwhelming evidence of an education crisis, but of a major public health crisis as well. It is critically relevant for every institution educating Black males from poverty-stricken environments, but especially so for charter schools that subscribe to the 'No Excuses' method of discipline and socialization to understand the significance of this issue. This subject can be viewed as a matter of life and death and teachers have a front row seat. I sincerely hope that they utilize their voices to mobilize the educators in their buildings and communities to rally for change.

Implications for Colleges of Education

Some teachers trained in colleges of education lack foundational knowledges about the populations they serve in urban communities. Even after student teaching in urban settings, some teachers still report being stressed early in their careers and feeling unprepared and bogged down by the rigors of teaching traditionally marginalized populations as well as the challenges the students might bring. Since the research explicitly states that most children living in poverty will be exposed to trauma in some way, it behooves teachers to be more prepared to serve them and their complex needs. In order to do accomplish this feat however, it is critical for colleges of education to help bridge the gap. So, I am challenging colleges of education nationally to

develop more comprehensive and interdisciplinary curricula that align more effectively with the circumstances educators will experience on the ground. I urge teacher education, urban education and educational administration departments to work bilaterally with social work departments, counseling departments as well as psychology departments to create realistic goals, objectives and teaching focuses for educators that will be benefit them throughout their teaching careers. Understanding subject content will help teachers get jobs and might help them make a difference in a child's life. However, critically understanding a child's circumstances, nurturing them, being empathetic, building trust and encouraging them to learn in their unique modalities will not only help teachers keep jobs, but be remembered and revered by students in the process. Therefore, I hope colleges of education will do more to make sure this bridge across disciplines is built so teachers will be equipped with a multitude of critical knowledges that will enhance their teaching practice for years to come.

Implications for Parents

There are serious considerations for parents who have children enrolled at 'No Excuses' schools as well as those who wish to enroll their children in 'No Excuses' schools. First, parents should think about the potential emotional costs brought up here in this study. There is an understanding that 'No Excuses' school cultures are packaged and sold to low-income families as the prescription for academic proficiency and life success. There is also an understanding that families might not have to be sold on the school culture or convinced about the curriculum either for that matter. The school is simply closest to their geographic location and is the most convenient option to service their child's educational needs. In either case, it is vitally important that parents become more active in these spaces as liaisons, outreach specialists and as advocates for their children's holistic education and wellness. I urge parents to critically inquire more about the policies and practices that are being used at any schools they enroll their children and to also

discuss the purposes for maintaining them with such vulnerable populations. Parents with concerns might rally other concerned parents to discuss their issues and talk about the school culture and climate. Parents must understand they have an important seat at the table in the educational reform discussion but especially regarding potentially harmful disciplinary practices due to their rapid proliferation in urban communities. For some parents, there does not have to be evidence of their child being mistreated in schools; parents simply being active and present could potentially affect change in school environments.

However, the same cannot be said for some parents who do have evidence of their child or other children being mistreated in the 'No Excuses' environment. For example, after hearing about her child being isolated in an abandoned room at a 'No Excuses' school, one mother exclaimed, "You lock dogs up. You don't lock humans up!" (Williams, 2011, p. 3). There is reasonable caution to assume that some parents might not understand the inner workings of the schools their children attend. They might not be aware that students are sent to secluded rooms, demeaned, bullied and spoken to in "condescending tones." Some parents may not know that students endure multiple silent meals and silent days at school where they are forbidden from speaking. Therefore, I am lobbying that parents maintain active engagement with schools that use 'No Excuses' practices as well as those that do not use these types of practices. In some schools, children are socialized to follow directions without fault, shun freedom, not push back, not have critical thoughts and avoid meaningful conflict. These experiences have led to students developing anxiety issues and depression. These types of interactions with adults and understandings by students have been verified in numerous research studies. Additionally, the propensity by educators at 'No Excuses' schools and other schools to use strict methodologies with students to prepare them for college did not assist the participants in this study like the

school insisted they would. So, I implore parents to begin asking critical questions to themselves, educators at 'No Excuses' schools as well as educators in other spaces if they have not already begun to do so. A few suggestive inquiries might be:

- Why has 'No Excuses' been celebrated, packaged and sold to low-income people of color as the prescription for educational and career excellence?

- Why are 'No Excuses' policies used with some demographic groups and not others?

- How does your child feel when they come home from school?

- What is your child's emotional state and disposition on their way to school?

Understanding the answers to only a few of these questions can save parents much grief and could possibly save their children from experiencing anxieties or re-traumatization. It is a fallacy for parents to believe that since their child has not complained about being tormented, is not considered a behavior problem and has a good academic record, they are not being adversely affected by their environments. As this study showed, some children suffer silently and do not exhibit outward behaviors that draw attention to them. Thus, it is important for parents to talk to their children about their school experiences and to pay close attention to the ways they express themselves about school as well as their dispositions when detailing school experiences. Parent advocacy is one of the greatest assets our educational system has, and I sincerely hope that parents will heed my recommendations to extensively analyze the effects that 'No Excuses' policies might be having on their children in school and at home.

Directions for Future Research

One of the more insightful understandings that emerged from this work as well as other research that has examined 'No Excuses' environments is that there seem to be similar perceptions regarding the prescriptive and strict protocols for each stakeholder that navigates the

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space. These procedures are not just for students to abide by however; they are also required of teachers and other staff members as well. These identifications are largely undoubted in the literature. However, there does seem to be a major misunderstanding of the 'No Excuses' moniker itself amongst all stakeholders in CMOs that do not specifically publicize their affiliation with the methodology. In some cases, students, parents, and teachers have different understandings and conflicting narratives about the type of school they navigate. Put differently, there are schools that use 'No Excuses' practices but do not identify with the name because of what it exudes and how it is viewed by the masses. During this study, I provided various examples of what 'No Excuses' schools were for participants because their high school did not ascribe to the title. Thus, when I asked the participants if they attended a 'No Excuses' school, they responded with "what type of school is that?" In future research, it would behoove scholars to critically identify schools that utilize zero tolerance policies like 'No Excuses' by the fruit they bear along with the affiliations they claim. Understanding what school networks and districts are flying under the radar by strategically refusing to adopt the name of the practices they are actually using could potentially lead to more students being disproportionately disciplined, pushed out of school and retraumatized.

Future Research Questions

The revelations from this study produced the following research questions for future review:

Teachers
How do teachers who were exposed to trauma during childhood and adolescence perceive the 'No Excuses' school culture?
Did their exposure to trauma before the age of eighteen impact their teaching philosophies and methodologies at 'No Excuses' charter schools?
Did their exposure to trauma before the age of eighteen impact the way they view the students they teach and how they enforce the discipline code?

How do teachers who were exposed to trauma during childhood and adolescence perceive self-care and secondary traumatic stress?
What coping mechanisms assisted them during their childhood and adolescence, and which mechanisms do they still rely on as adults?
Deans of Discipline
How do deans who were exposed to trauma during childhood and adolescence perceive the 'No Excuses' school culture?
Did their exposure to trauma before the age of eighteen impact their disciplinary decision making at 'No Excuses' Charter Schools?
What coping mechanisms assisted them during their childhood and adolescence and which mechanisms do they still rely on as adults?
What coping strategies have they implemented with students of color in 'No Excuses' schools?
Parents
What are parents' perceptions of the 'No Excuses' school culture and discipline code?
In what ways is the 'No Excuses' school culture similar or dissimilar to the socialization practices and disciplinary strategies utilized by parents at home?
School Leaders
How do 'No Excuses' schools develop the mind, body and spirit of students?
How do 'No Excuses' schools foster student identity and preserve ethnic culture while simultaneously enforcing compliance-driven discipline methods that have oppressive histories?

Table 9: Future Research Questions.

Conclusion

This study provided more evidence of the potential effects of discipline policies, socialization practices and aligned behavioral norms at 'No Excuses' schools. When this study was constructed, there were legitimate concerns from various school stakeholders whether 'No Excuses' methodologies implemented with potentially traumatized low-income urban youth could possibly trigger previous traumas. This study has shown that not only were Black males triggered in the 'No Excuses' environment and reminded of previous traumas, their previous

medical conditions worsened and begot a more complex symptomatology. The study also showed that the treatment they received contributed to their silent rebellions and created a psychological identity crisis. Overall, conducting this research added a fresh perspective that is not highlighted in the literature about the reflections of former 'No Excuses' students and how they perceived their experiences academically, emotionally and psychologically. Juxtaposed to the graduation and college acceptance rates discourse that is heavily centered by 'No Excuses' proponents and educators during debates questioning the efficacy of the practices, this dissertation offers firsthand insight from former stakeholders about their own outcomes. The understandings gathered from this work hoist the reflections of four Black males that attended a 'No Excuses' school in an urban environment like New Orleans that boasts one of the highest charter school student attendance rates in the country.

Although a theme in the data emerged around the participants developing a spirit of posterity and advocacy, it was clear that these understandings emanated through frustration due to feeling controlled, psychologically incapable, inhibited from having critical and progressive thoughts and socialized to believe they needed to be taught how to appropriately walk, talk and act in order to be worthy of learning. The results of this study showed that there could be hundreds and even thousands of students in these spaces silently rebelling and going through the motions acquiescing because they fear further denigration and humiliation. It also demonstrated in the reflections of two cases how the pervasive monitoring and rigid structure for student comportment did not lead to them feeling empowered and prepared for college and life post 'No Excuses.' It actually showed the opposite, that in comparison to their college peers, participants felt more handicapped and shackled mentally from perpetually being conditioned to value conformity instead of actively engaging in productive conflict, trained to be dependent and

encouraged to follow other people's ideals and standards of success in place of their own. These psychological and academic struggles led all of the participants to leave college in under two years whether under their own volition or from being academically dismissed. Once more studies are conducted to investigate the psychological, emotional and racial opportunity costs of 'No Excuses' schools for students of color actively enrolled in those spaces, the conversation must move toward understanding the longitudinal effects of those costs on students of color after they graduate from these schools.

The implications of this work are great for a multitude of stakeholders that serve students of color, especially Black males. The findings presented here regarding the retrospective experiences of cumulative trauma for Black males in 'No Excuses' schools contribute to various bodies of literature. First, it contributes to literature that assesses the psychological well-being of educators grappling with their own life stressors while under tremendous stress to conform and enforce practices on overly exposed youth. Having a more robust understanding of teachers' emotional health and implementing modes of self-care could greatly impact the educational outcomes for children in those spaces. Second, knowing that there is a good chance that children who live in poverty are exposed to trauma, coupled with the fact that participants in this study were exposed as early as five years old, community psychologists and social workers who are employed by educational institutions might benefit from the findings. The comprehensions that emerged from this study could spark interdisciplinary conversations and collaborations and help schools to proactively create health and wellness plans for students enduring cumulative stress. Public health and epidemiology literature not only confirms the findings in this study based on the medical diagnoses and complex symptomatology exhibited by the participants, but this study can serve as a catalyst to bringing multiple voices, knowledges and health fields together to

create awareness and responsive trauma-informed approaches with vulnerable populations. Lastly, this research is highly connected to the work that criminal justice researchers do regarding the propensity for Black males who are disciplined harshly in schools to become juvenile and adult offenders. Positioning these topics as germane to the holistic education of Black males will not only help to serve these young men more effectively, but it has the potential to facilitate robust policy dialogue that can be transformative for healing in urban communities overwhelmed by chronic trauma.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A:

Student Commitment to Excellence Contract

I fully commit to upholding the mission and values of S.T.A.R. College Prep Charter School in the following ways:

Teamwork -- We bring our individual strengths to our team so that, together, we can accomplish anything.

- I will always make myself available to my parents, teachers, and KIPP S.T.A.R. teammates, and will discuss any concerns they may have. If I make a mistake, I will tell the truth to my teachers and accept responsibility for my actions.

Achievement -- We persevere to overcome challenges and achieve our goals.

- I will always work, think, and behave in the best way I know how and I will do whatever it takes for my fellow students and me to learn. This also means that I will complete all my homework every night, I will call my teachers if I have a problem with the homework or a problem with coming to school, and I will raise my hand and ask questions in class if I do not understand something.

Responsibility -- We take responsibility for our actions, for the success of our team, for the achievement of our school, and for the strength of our community.

- I will arrive at school by 7:25 A.M. and remain at school until 5:00 P.M. (Monday-Friday.)
- I will come to school at 9:00 A.M. on appropriate Saturdays and remain at school until 1:00 P.M.
- I will attend school in the summer.
- I will follow the KIPP S.T.A.R. dress code.
- I will strive to take care of my personal belongings, my classroom, my school building, and my community.

Respect -- We treat each other with kindness and understanding. We always tell the truth and keep our

word. We show empathy for others and attempt to understand each side to a story.

- I will always behave so as to protect the safety, interests, and rights of all individuals in the classroom. This means that I will always listen to my teammates and give everyone my respect.
- I am responsible for my own behavior, and I will follow the teachers' directions and school rules.

Enthusiasm -- We welcome each day and learning experience with a positive attitude. We seek new experiences and remain flexible and optimistic.

- I will come to school each day with a positive attitude, ready to learn. I welcome new learning experiences, and promise to remain flexible and optimistic.

I understand that failure to adhere to these commitments can cause me to lose various KIPP S.T.A.R. privileges and can ultimately lead to my returning to my home school.

Student's Signature: _____   Date: _____

APPENDIX B

Teacher Commitment to Excellence Contract

We fully commit to upholding the mission and values of S.T.A.R. College Prep Charter School in the following ways:

Teamwork -- We bring our individual strengths to our team so that, together, we can accomplish anything.

- We will always make ourselves available to students, parents/guardians, and fellow staff members, and attend to any concerns they have. This also means we will bring our own concerns to members of the KIPPSTAR community directly and immediately.

Achievement -- We persevere to overcome challenges and achieve our goals.

- We will always teach in the best way we know how. We are willing to do whatever it takes for our students to learn.

Responsibility -- We take responsibility for our actions, for the success of our team, for the achievement of our school, and for the strength of our community.

- We will arrive everyday by 7:15 A.M. and remain at school until 5:10 P.M. (Monday through Friday.)
- We will come to school on appropriate Saturdays by 8:50 A.M. and remain until 1:10 P.M.
- We will teach in the summer.

Respect -- We treat each other with kindness and understanding. We always tell the truth and keep our word. We show empathy for others and attempt to understand each side to a story.

- We commit to treating each other, our students, and their families with respect and understanding.
- We will always protect the safety, interests, and rights of all individuals in the classroom.

Enthusiasm -- We welcome each day and learning experience with a positive attitude. We seek new experiences and remain flexible and optimistic.

- We promise to bring a love of teaching and learning and a positive attitude to each lesson we teach.

We understand that a failure to meet these commitments can lead to our dismissal from KIPP School.

Teacher Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX C

Parent Commitment to Excellence Contract

Teamwork -- We bring our individual strengths to our team so that, together, we can accomplish anything.

- We will always make ourselves available to our children, the school, and any concerns they may have. This means that if our child is going to miss school, we will notify the school as soon as possible, and we will read carefully all the papers that the school sends home to us.

Achievement -- We persevere to overcome challenges and achieve our goals.

- We will always help our child in the best way we know how and we will do whatever it takes for him/her to learn. This means that we will check our child's homework every night, let him/her call the teacher if there is a problem with homework, and read with him/her every night.

Responsibility -- We take responsibility for our actions, for the success of our team, for the achievement of our school, and for the strength of our community.

- We will make sure our child arrives at school by 7:25 AM and make arrangements for our child to remain until 5:00 PM (Monday-Friday.)
- We will ensure our child arrives by 9:00 AM and remains at school until 1:00 PM on appropriate Saturdays.
- We will make arrangements for our child to attend school in the summer.
- We will ensure our child attends all field lessons.
- We will make sure our child follows the dress code.

Respect -- We treat each other with kindness and understanding. We always tell the truth and keep our word. We show empathy for others and attempt to understand each side to a story.

- We commit to communicating respectfully with all member of the KIPP S.T.A.R. community.
- We understand that our child must follow the school's rules so as to protect the safety, interests, and rights of all individuals in the classroom. We, not the school, are responsible for the behavior and actions of our child.

Enthusiasm -- We welcome each day and learning experience with a positive attitude. We seek new experiences and remain flexible and optimistic.

- We will ensure that our child comes to school each day with a positive attitude, ready to learn.

We understand that failure to adhere to these commitments can cause our child to lose KIPP S.T.A.R. privileges, and can ultimately lead to our child returning to his/her home school.

Parent's Signature: _____   Date: _____

APPENDIX D

Interview Protocols

School History & Personal Experiences

1. What school(s) did you attend for elementary school?
2. What grade were you in during that time?
3. What was the process of getting into schools after Hurricane Katrina?
4. Describe the school cultures and climates to the best of your ability.
5. How did they look and feel?
6. If you had disciplinary referrals, what behaviors were you punished for?
7. How often were you disciplined?
8. Describe how receiving consequences made you feel.
9. Were there teachers that disciplined you more than others?
10. Why do you feel that certain teachers disciplined you more than others did?
11. Do you believe that you were disciplined fairly?
12. Describe the reasons you felt comfortable following rules in that space or why you felt uncomfortable following rules in that space.
13. Did you have a suspension record? If so, describe the offenses that you were suspended for?
14. Were your experiences at home with adults and other children (i.e. siblings and friends) different from your experiences at school?
15. Describe how you have succeeded in both spaces (home and school).
16. Describe what you perceive(d) your role at school and at home to be?
17. Did you struggle academically in that space and when did you notice it?
18. What did it feel like to struggle? Was there a physical response? What were your immediate thoughts?
19. Were your academic struggles noticed by others as well (Parent, Sibling, Teacher, Someone Else)?

'No Excuses' Schools Questions (Socialization Practices, School Culture, Discipline Policies)

20. Do you believe that your experiences with trauma/cumulative trauma affected your ability to achieve at 'No Excuses' charter schools?
21. If so, describe the resilient responses that you have displayed in that environment.
22. Did experiencing trauma/cumulative trauma affect you in any other ways at 'No Excuses' Charters, both positive and negative?
23. Why do you believe the experiences with trauma affected you in the ways that they did and how were you able to tell (symptoms, outward behaviors, somatic behaviors)?
24. What support structures did your school use to comprehensively educate you?

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25. What did these structures look like in practice?
26. How did they make you feel?
27. Describe parts of the socialization processes and/or discipline policies at 'No Excuses' Charters that promote(d) resiliency and healthy attachments for students.
28. Can you describe any part(s) of the socialization process and/or discipline policies at 'No Excuses' Charters that triggered or could possibly trigger Black males to relive previous traumatic experiences?
29. How would you suggest making the 'No Excuses' environment more of a safe haven for children who have experienced trauma?
30. Do you believe that 'No Excuses' discipline has been celebrated, packaged and sold to people of color as the prescription for academic proficiency and career excellence?

Interpersonal Trauma Questions

31. How would you define trauma?
32. Can you describe a traumatic experience or two that you endured?
33. What made you define the experience as traumatic?
34. Identify how many/what types of traumas you have experienced throughout your lifespan.
35. Did you develop any symptoms from these traumatic experiences? If so, can you describe them?
36. In doing so, please describe if any symptoms have gotten better or worse as time persisted. Also, describe what makes the symptoms worse and what makes them better.
37. How do you typically respond to stressful situations?
38. Where do you experience the greatest amount of stress (Home, School, Community, Elsewhere?)
39. Describe your support systems/attachments (relationships) in all of the spaces mentioned above.
40. Describe how your support systems provided support to you.
41. How did support "feel" in those spaces?
42. Do you possess any coping mechanisms and did your school encourage any specific coping strategies? If so, what are they and what are the results of utilizing these coping mechanisms?

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

While you were growing up, during your first 18 years of life:
1. Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often… Swear at you, insult you, put you down, or humiliate you? or Act in a way that made you afraid that you might be physically hurt?
2. Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often… Push, grab, slap, or throw something at you? or Ever hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured?
3. Did an adult or person at least 5 years older than you ever… Touch or fondle you or have you touch their body in a sexual way? or Attempt or actually have oral, anal, or vaginal intercourse with you?
4. Did you often or very often feel that … No one in your family loved you or thought you were important or special? or Your family didn't look out for each other, feel close to each other, or support each other?
5. Did you often or very often feel that … You didn't have enough to eat, had to wear dirty clothes, and had no one to protect you? or Your parents were too drunk or high to take care of you or take you to the doctor if you needed it?
6. Were your parents ever separated or divorced?
7. Was your mother or stepmother: Often or very often pushed, grabbed, slapped, or had something thrown at her? or Sometimes, often, or very often kicked, bitten, hit with a fist, or hit with something hard? or Ever repeatedly hit at least a few minutes or threatened with a gun or knife?
8. Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic or who used street drugs?
9. Was a household member depressed or mentally ill, or did a household member attempt suicide?
10. Did a household member go to prison?

Table 10: Original Adverse Childhood Experiences Survey.

Ramon Griffin ACEs

While you were growing up, during your first 18 years of life:	
1. Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often… Swear at you, insult you, put you down, or humiliate you? or Act in a way that made you afraid that you might be physically hurt?	1
2. Did a parent or other adult in the household often or very often… Push, grab, slap, or throw something at you? or Ever hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured?	1
3. Did an adult or person at least 5 years older than you ever… Touch or fondle you or have you touch their body in a sexual way? or Attempt or actually have oral, anal, or vaginal intercourse with you?	0
4. Did you often or very often feel that … No one in your family loved you or thought you were important or special? or Your family didn't look out for each other, feel close to each other, or support each other?	1
5. Did you often or very often feel that … You didn't have enough to eat, had to wear dirty clothes, and had no one to protect you? or Your parents were too drunk or high to take care of you or take you to the doctor if you needed it?	1
6. Were your parents ever separated or divorced?	1
7. Was your mother or stepmother: Often or very often pushed, grabbed, slapped, or had something thrown at her? or Sometimes, often, or very often kicked, bitten, hit with a fist, or hit with something hard? or Ever repeatedly hit at least a few minutes or threatened with a gun or knife?	1
8. Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic or who used street drugs?	1
9. Was a household member depressed or mentally ill, or did a household member attempt suicide?	1
10. Did a household member go to prison?	1

Table 11: Ramon Griffin's Personal Adverse Childhood Experiences Survey.

APPENDIX G

Expanded List of Key Terms and Definitions

Trauma

The American Psychiatric Association (1994) describes "traumas as stressors involving threats to life or physical integrity, which subsequently causes terror, helplessness or disorganized behavior in children." Slightly nuanced, the Center for Nonviolence and Social Justice defines trauma as "experiences or situations that are emotionally painful and distressing, and that overwhelm people's ability to cope, leaving them powerless" (Center for Nonviolence & Social Justice, 2016).

Cumulative Trauma

"Cumulative Trauma exposure refers to the simultaneous or sequential occurrences of child maltreatment—including emotional abuse and neglect, sexual abuse, physical abuse, and witnessing domestic violence—that are chronic and begin in early childhood" (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2016).

Community Violence

"Community Violence can be defined as exposure to intentional acts of interpersonal violence committed in public areas by individuals who are not intimately related to the victim. Common types of community violence that affect youth include individual and group conflicts" (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2016).

Domestic Violence

"Domestic Violence is commonly defined as a behavior, or pattern of behaviors, that occurs between intimate partners with the aim of one partner exerting control over the other" (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2016).

Early Childhood Trauma

"Early childhood trauma generally refers to the traumatic experiences that occur to children aged 0-6. Because infants' and young children's reactions may be different from older children's, and because they may not be able to verbalize their reactions to threatening or dangerous events, many people assume that young age protects children from the impact of traumatic experiences" (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2016).

Medical Trauma

"Pediatric medical traumatic stress refers to a set of psychological and physiological responses of children and their families to pain, injury, serious illness, medical procedures, and invasive or frightening treatment experiences" (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2016).

Natural Disasters

"Natural Disasters are any natural catastrophe (for example, tornadoes, hurricanes, and earthquakes) or any fire, flood, or explosion that causes enough damage that local, state, or federal agencies and disaster relief organizations are called into action. Disasters can result from a man-made event (such as a nuclear reactor explosion), but if the damage is caused intentionally, it is classified as an act of terrorism" (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2016).

Neglect

"Child neglect occurs when a parent or caregiver does not give a child the care he or she needs according to its age, even though that adult can afford to give that care or is offered help to give that care. Neglect can mean not giving food, clothing, and shelter. It can mean that a parent or caregiver is not providing a child with medical or mental health treatment or not giving prescribed medicines the child needs. Neglect can also mean neglecting the child's education.

Keeping a child from school or from special education can be neglect. Neglect also includes exposing a child to dangerous environments. It can mean poor supervision for a child, including putting the child in the care of someone incapable of caring for children. It can also mean abandoning a child or expelling it from home. Neglect is the most common form of abuse reported to child welfare authorities" (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2016).

Physical Abuse

"Physical abuse means causing or attempting to cause physical pain or injury. It can result from punching, beating, kicking, burning, or harming a child in other ways" (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2016).

Refugee Trauma

"Refugee trauma include exposure to war, political violence, or torture. Refugee trauma can be the result of living in a region affected by bombing, shooting, or looting, as well as forced displacement to a new home due to political reasons" (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2016).

School Violence

"School violence includes fatal and nonfatal student or teacher victimization, threats to or injury of students, fights at school, and students carrying weapons to school. Formal definitions of school violence range from very narrow to very broad. The Center for the Prevention of School Violence, for example, defines it broadly as "any behavior that violates a school's educational mission or climate of respect or jeopardizes the intent of the school to be free of aggression against persons or property, drugs, weapons, disruptions, and disorder" (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2016).

Sexual Abuse

"Child sexual abuse includes a wide range of sexual behaviors that take place between a child and an older person or alternatively between a child and another child/adolescent. Behaviors that are sexually abusive often involve bodily contact, such as sexual kissing, touching, fondling of genitals, and intercourse. However, behaviors may be sexually abusive even if they do not involve contact, such as of genital exposure ("flashing"), verbal pressure for sex, and sexual exploitation for purposes of prostitution or pornography" (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2016).

Terrorism

"The US Department of Defense defines terrorism as "the calculated use of violence or the threat of violence to inculcate fear, intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological" (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2016).

Traumatic Grief

"Childhood traumatic grief may occur following a death of someone important to the child when the child perceives the experience as traumatic. The death may have been sudden and unexpected (e.g., through violence or an accident), or anticipated (e.g., illness or other natural causes)" (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2016).

Charter Schools

Given their autonomous state, charter schools are public schools that possess the freedom to "implement policies and create structures that [they believe] maximize academic achievement and student motivation" (Griffin et al., 2015, p. 332). They have greater flexibility and less oversight from local school boards of education.

'No Excuses' Charter Schools

The policies and structures that many charter schools implement are called 'No Excuses.'

Basically, "the idea is that strict guidelines for how students should behave in and out of class,

enforced consistently over time, provide the basis for academic progress and can help close the

achievement gap. Without them, [educators in these schools] believe that the school [will]

become chaotic" (Disare, 2016).

Zero Tolerance

Zero Tolerance policies are aimed at keeping schools safe and maintaining a disciplined learning

environment. Most zero tolerance policies "mandate predetermined consequences or

punishments for specific offenses" (Curtis, 2014, p. 1253).

Phenomenology

"Phenomenology is the study of human experience and of the ways things present themselves to

us in and through such experience" (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 2).

APPENDIX H

Key to Abbreviations

AYP: Adequate Yearly Progress	IGAP: Illinois Goal Assessment Program
ISBE: Illinois School Board of Education	NECS: 'No Excuses' Charter School
CMO: Charter Management Organization	KIPP: Knowledge is Power Program
CWIG: Child Welfare Information Gateway	TREP: Trauma Responsive Educational Practices
ACEs: Adverse Childhood Experiences	GAD: Generalized Anxiety Disorder
PTSD: Post Traumatic Stress Disorder	NAACP: National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
UDCR: United States Department of Civil Rights	ACLU: American Civil Liberties Union
CNSJ: Center for Nonviolence and Social Justice	NCTSN: National Child Traumatic Stress Network
APA: American Psychiatric Association	APA: American Psychological Association
CREDO: Center for Research on Education Outcomes	ITBS: Iowa Test of Basic Skills
TAAS: Texas Assessment of Academic Skills	USDEOCR: United States Department of Education Office of Civil Rights
BMS: Black Male Statistics	NAS: New American Schools
EPI: Education Policy Institute	DSM IV: Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 4th edition
NCCP: National Center for Children in Poverty	AAP: American Academy of Pediatrics
CDC: Center for Disease Control	NCCD: National Council on Crime and Delinquency
CSR: Combat Stress Reactions	ASD: Acute Stress Disorders
ROC: Racial Opportunity Costs	AERA: American Educational Research Association
FEGU: Fellowship to Enhance Global Understanding	NCES: National Center for Education Statistics
CAPTA: Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Reauthorization Act	PM: Psychological Maltreatment

Table 12: Key Abbreviations Table.

'No Excuses' Discipline: The Sobering Realities of Black Males Exposed to Cumulative Trauma in Urban Poverty

Ramon Griffin
Ph.D. Candidate & Researcher, Erickson Graduate School of Education
Michigan State University

INTRODUCTION|BLACK MALES AND TRAUMA

An estimated 70-100% of all African-American children living in poverty are exposed to at least one form of trauma, such as community violence, neglect, physical abuse, household dysfunction, verbal abuse or sexual abuse (Dempsey, Overstreet, & Moely, 2000; Reiss & Price, 1996). At the point of exposure, research suggests that between 23-29% of these children will exhibit symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Hughes & Shin, 2011). Further complicating this narrative, data also demonstrate that between 81-98% of all adults who had at least one adverse childhood experience (ACE) will likely report experiencing at least one other adverse experience that can be considered traumatic throughout their lifespan (Dong et al., 2004). The concept Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) is another way to help classify the many different types of trauma one might endure before age eighteen (Cronholm et al, 2015). The term was coined in the mid 1990's by medical researchers who engaged in an unprecedented and highly ambitious study that examined whether childhood traumatic experiences with different forms of abuse and neglect could potentially impact the long-term health of an individual (Cronholm et al, 2015).

Growing evidence of these realities spawned new insights regarding young Black males and their propensity to experience childhood traumas earlier and more frequently than their White counterparts because of the communities they reside in and the families they belong to (Kiser, 2007). Widespread exposure to traumas in early adolescence intensifies these problematic and unfortunate realities and can be life altering for these young men (Redwood et al., 2010; Evans & English, 2002). This is especially troubling in light of the perpetual targets that young Black males constantly have on their backs in this country (Devega, 2015). Justified or unjustified, a legitimate case can be made that young Black males are confronted with challenges that no other group of young people in the United States of America have to face.

Black males are repeatedly branded as problems to their nations, to their local environments, to their schools, to Black communities, and to Blacks themselves (Collins, 2004). Too often, the academic success of Black males is stymied by stereotypical notions of race that ultimately places them at a considerable disadvantage in school spaces (Howard, 2008). They are unfairly portrayed as inherently violent and delinquent in the media (Dorfman, 2001) and in society as a whole without reference to the many structural, institutional and societal barriers that prevent some of them from reaching their full potential (Devega, 2015; Millner, 2014; Kiser, 2007). They are under siege in most statistical categories that matter in America as well, from school drop-outs and special education to disproportionate sentencing and incarceration rates to being gunned down by police officers (NAACP, 2016; Millner, 2014; Black Male Statistics, 2016).

WHAT'S AT STAKE?

Plainly, this issue can be viewed as a matter of life and death for Black males. Urban schools utilizing 'No Excuses' disciplinary and socialization practices have the ideal opportunity to redeem themselves and fulfill their promises to serve Black males to the best of their abilities. Instead of battling controversy regarding harsh discipline and the school to prison pipeline data,

urban schools have the opportunity to forge a more refreshing and inclusive path towards educating Black males. This path might include requiring educators to be proficient in disciplines like ecology and sociology that explain how individuals interact with and respond to their respective environments (e.g. home, community, school). It may also include a more holistic approach to urban schooling as well, one where educators must develop fundamental understandings of the risk factors that continuously plague students academically, emotionally and psychologically in urban contexts.

Some Black males who are exposed to cumulative trauma happen to be extremely resilient and resourceful individuals, but they still need champions to view them as assets and not liabilities. The same goes for those Black males exposed to similar environmental and communal threats that do not possess intrinsic qualities like perseverance and fortitude, they too need champions and individuals who will recognize them for more than their circumstances. This is only one prism that urban educators who utilize 'No Excuses' methods could glance through to take steps towards transforming the academic and life success of Black males exposed to cumulative trauma. However, through this process, some urban educators may further their appreciation of Black males and not only initiate the repair of relationships broken by historical discrimination, mistrust and subjugation in this country, but also began the restoration process of healing their own past histories with trauma that might be impacting the trajectory of those relationships (Devega, 2015; Healey & O'Brien, 2015).

PURPOSE AND SIGNIFICANCE

This study is needed because there are legitimate concerns that discipline policies, socialization practices and aligned behavioral norms at schools that utilize zero tolerance policies like 'No Excuses' could potentially trigger traumas that were suffered by Black males previously. It is also significant because it purposely hoists the psychological and emotional health of urban families to the center of educational and community discourses. Historically, mental health and trauma within families of color were not discussed with outsiders and worse, deemed as taboo. Therefore, positioning these topics as pertinent to the holistic education of Black males in urban education could spark a national debate about how to serve these young men more effectively. Additionally, having a robust policy dialogue about these issues can be transformative for healing in urban communities overwhelmed by chronic trauma. It can also shed light on the cultural and ethnic values used to cultivate trust and belonging within these populations. Last, it may serve as the impetus for relationships between urban educators and families of color to flourish, yielding wide ranging achievement outcomes and critical knowledges for these groups.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

a) What were Black males' perceptions of trauma and where did they experience the greatest amount of stress during their childhood and adolescence?
b) How did Black males exposed to cumulative trauma perceive the 'No Excuses' school culture and disciplinary practices?
    a. What types of interactions at 'No Excuses' schools have the potential to trigger previous traumas in Black males?

c) Did Black males exposed to cumulative trauma believe that the 'No Excuses' school culture prepared them for college, careers and successful lives?

    a. What coping mechanisms have assisted Black males enduring chronic traumatic stress and how have they impacted their abilities to be resilient despite their circumstances?

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

The interviews will take place at a date, time and location that is convenient for you. There will be two interviews that will last approximately 1 hour each, although you will not be pressured to end the interview if you would like to still discuss the topic in detail. You will not have to worry about travel, as Ramon will travel to you or arrange to interview you in whichever way works best for you.

Contact Ramon Griffin for your interview today.

ABOUT RAMON GRIFFIN

Currently, Ramon Griffin is a Ph.D. Candidate in the K-12 Educational Administration Department at Michigan State University. Prior to MSU, Ramon worked in post-adjudicated facilities for juveniles and several charter school networks in Houston, New Orleans and Detroit. He held administrative roles at the schools in New Orleans and Detroit. Ramon's research interests include "No Excuses" Discipline, the Effects of Trauma Exposure on Educational Achievement, Urban Education Reform, Community Engagement, as well as the School to Prison Pipeline. He has presented his work at the Albert Shanker Institute in Washington, D.C., the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA), the Northeastern Educational Research Association (NERA) and many other research conferences across the country. He is an Education Pioneer and UCEA Barbara Jackson Scholar Alumni. His work has been featured in the Washington Post and on websites like Cloaking Inequity, Edushyter and Diane Ravitch's blog to name a few. Ramon is very active with the American Educational Research Association as well (AERA). He has held number positions from Newsletter Chair, to Division A Connect Series Co-Chair, and now recently appointed AERA Graduate Student Program Chair for the 2017 AERA National Convention in San Antonio.

His dissertation will explore the effects of cumulative trauma exposure on Black males who have attended or are currently attending 'No Excuses' charter schools. The other strand of his work will examine how exposure to trauma influences the disciplinary decision making of deans and school culture leaders at 'No Excuses' charter schools. At the culmination of his doctoral studies at Michigan State University, Ramon plans to become a professor with a large majority of his work being in urban school districts and with community stakeholders. Ramon is a fearless advocate for urban youth and families. He hopes to conduct transformative research and create equitable educational policies for students who are disadvantaged and disenfranchised.

APPENDIX J

IRB Approval Form

Figure 6: Official IRB Approval Letter.

MICHIGAN STATE
U N I V E R S I T Y

Initial IRB
Application
Approval

May 25, 2016

To: Kristy Cooper
       403 Erickson Hall
       Michigan State University
       East Lansing, MI 48824

Re: **IRB# 16-657 Category: EXPEDITED 7**
       Approval Date: May 25, 2016

Title: 'No Excuses' Discipline: The Sobering Realities of Black Males Exposed to Cumulative Trauma in Urban Poverty'

The Institutional Review Board has completed their review of your project. I am pleased to advise you that **your project has been approved.**

The committee has found that your research project is appropriate in design, protects the rights and welfare of human subjects, and meets the requirements of MSU's Federal Wide Assurance and the Federal Guidelines (45 CFR 46 and 21 CFR Part 50). The protection of human subjects in research is a partnership between the IRB and the investigators. We look forward to working with you as we both fulfill our responsibilities.
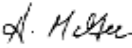
Renewals: IRB approval is valid until the expiration date listed above. If you are continuing your project, you must submit an *Application for Renewal* application at least one month before expiration. If the project is completed, please submit an *Application for Permanent Closure.*

Revisions: The IRB must review any changes in the project, prior to initiation of the change. Please submit an *Application for Revision* to have your changes reviewed. If changes are made at the time of renewal, please include an *Application for Revision* with the renewal application.

Problems: If issues should arise during the conduct of the research, such as unanticipated problems, adverse events, or any problem that may increase the risk to the human subjects, notify the IRB office promptly. Forms are available to report these issues.

Please use the IRB number listed above on any forms submitted which relate to this project, or on any correspondence with the IRB office.

Good luck in your research. If we can be of further assistance, please contact us at 517-355-2180 or via email at IRB@msu.edu. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

A. McGee

Harry McGee, MPH
SIRB Chair

c: Ramon Griffin

Office of Regulatory Affairs
Human Research
Protection Programs

Biomedical & Health
Institutional Review Board
(BIRB)

Community Research
Institutional Review Board
(CRIRB)

Social Science
Behavioral/Education
Institutional Review Board
(SIRB)

Olds Hall
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East Lansing, MI 48824
(517) 355-2180
Fax: (517) 432-4503
Email: irb@msu.edu
www.hrpp.msu.edu

MSU is an affirmative-action,
equal-opportunity employer.

Informed Consent Form for Research Participants

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Researchers are required to provide a consent form to inform you about the research study, to convey that participation is voluntary, to explain risks and benefits of participation, and to empower you to make an informed decision. You should feel free to ask the researchers any questions you may have.

Study Title:
'No Excuses' Discipline: The Sobering Realities of Black Males Exposed to Cumulative Trauma in Urban Poverty

Researcher and Title:
Kristy Cooper-Stein| Principal Investigator
Ramon Griffin| Researcher

Department and Institution:
K-12 Educational Administration| Michigan State University

Address and Contact Information:
Department of Educational Administration
Erickson Hall
620 Farm Lane Rm 413
East Lansing, MI 48824-1034
Tel.: (517) 355-4544
Kcooper@msu.edu
Griff519@msu.edu

PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

You are being asked to participate in a research study exploring the effects of cumulative trauma exposure on Black males who have attended or are currently attending 'No Excuses' Charter Schools. You have been selected as a possible participant in this study because you are 18 years or older, have navigated 'No Excuses' Charter Schools and may have experienced trauma throughout your lifespan.

From this study, the researchers hope to learn more about how exposure to trauma affects the educational experiences of Black males as well as how they perceive 'No Excuses' discipline and socialization within urban charters. Your participation in this study will take about 2 Hours. We hope to conduct as many as two one-hour interviews with each participant. However, please feel free to expand longer about the topic or talk about related ideas that you feel comfortable discussing. You will not be interrupted if the interviews go longer than an hour. In the entire study, 10 people are being asked to participate.

WHAT YOU WILL DO

During this study, you will be given a short questionnaire that asks about your experiences with trauma before the age of 18. The questionnaire will be used as a tool to help the researchers gauge what types of traumatic experiences you endured throughout adolescence. They may assist in helping determine if you are still experiencing those situations as adults too. We can discuss as much or as little of the questionnaire that you feel comfortable discussing. You will be asked if/how these experiences affect you holistically as well as if/how they have affected your ability to navigate strict environments like "No Excuses" schools. Lastly, you will be asked how your life experiences have helped you understand your roles within 'No Excuses' spaces.

Because trauma is such a sensitive topic, you will be allowed to recommend the place that you would like to be interviewed. A few of the questions that you will be asked are "where do you experience the greatest amount of stress (Home, School, Community, Elsewhere), describe your support systems/attachments (relationships) in all of the spaces mentioned above, what does a typical day look like at a 'No Excuses' charter school and what does your typical day look like when you are not in school?" Since trauma language is often misinterpreted, the researcher will explain the concepts in great detail and provide handouts that define what specific traumas are as defined by the American Psychiatric Association (APA) as well as the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN).

POTENTIAL BENEFITS

The potential benefits to you for taking part in this study are having your story contribute to the national conversation regarding the impact of trauma on Black males as a whole as well as those enrolled in schools that employ 'No Excuses' practices. Your stories can help transform discipline policies on the local, state and federal levels and they have the potential to provide a springboard in healing urban families plagued by trauma.

POTENTIAL RISKS

The potential risks of participating in this study are feeling uncomfortable, embarrassed, or possibly reliving past traumatic experiences. As mentioned above, trauma can be a very sensitive topic to discuss with anyone, irrespective of age, gender or race. Understanding these risks, you may choose to take a break or effectively end the interview at any time. We will not be disappointed. Your safety and well-being are of the utmost importance in this process. If certain questions asked are triggers for you, please alert us when this occurs so that we can pause to take a breather. If you feel like it is important to discuss the reminder of a previous trauma at length, please feel free to do so as well. We see these circumstances as minor risks, but we want to be sure that proper safeguards are in place for you to have a comfortable and productive interview with us about your experiences. If you would still like to participate in this study, after we just explained the minor foreseeable risks, we can proceed to the next part of the consent form that discusses the privacy and confidentiality of participating in this study.

PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

The audio recording(s) in this research study will be used for analysis by the research team. The recording(s) may include your name (unless confidentiality is requested). If you say anything that you believe at a later point may be hurtful and/or may damage your reputation, then you can ask the interviewer to rewind the recording and record over such information or you can ask that certain text be removed from the dataset/transcripts. If you request that your name be withheld for confidentiality purposes, the recording(s) will be stored in a locked file cabinet and/or on a password protected computer and will be labeled with a code linked to your identity known only by the researchers and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Michigan State University. Again, if you choose to withhold your name, the recordings will be kept for three years and then destroyed. Otherwise, they will be retained indefinitely at the Michigan State University Archives in East Lansing, MI and/or released at a date chosen by you. If a report of this study is published, or the results are presented at a professional conference, only group results will be stated and confidentiality will be upheld.

As a note, maintaining the privacy and confidentiality of your responses means that the research records including information about you will be stored in such a manner that linkage between your identity and your responses will not be discovered.

YOUR RIGHTS TO PARTICIPATE, SAY NO, OR WITHDRAW

You are aware that your participation in this interview is voluntary. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You have the right to say no. You may change your mind at any time and withdraw. You may choose not to answer specific questions or to stop participating at any time.

If anything is not clear, please do not hesitate to contact Kristy Cooper-Stein (Principal Investigator) or Ramon Griffin (Researcher) for any clarifying questions.

COSTS AND COMPENSATION FOR BEING IN THE STUDY

There is no financial benefit for taking part in this study.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have concerns or questions about this study, such as scientific issues, how to do any part of it, or to report an injury, please contact Dr. Kristy Cooper-Stein or Ramon M. Griffin at the addresses and phone numbers provided below:

Dr. Kristy Cooper-Stein (Principal Investigator)
Associate Professor
Department of Educational Administration
Erickson Hall
620 Farm Lane Rm 413
East Lansing, MI 48824-1034
Tel.: (517) 355-4544
kcooper@msu.edu

Ramon Griffin
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Educational Administration
Erickson Hall
620 Farm Lane Rm 413
East Lansing, MI 48824-1034
Tel.: (517) 944-0355
griff519@msu.edu

If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, Fax 517-432-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu or regular mail at 408 West Circle Drive, Olds Hall Room 207, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824.

DOCUMENTATION OF INFORMED CONSENT

Your signature below means that you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

_____

Signature   Date

You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

I agree to allow my identity to be disclosed in reports and presentations.

☐ Yes   ☐ No   Initials_____

I agree to allow audiotaping of the interview.

☐ Yes   ☐ No   Initials_____

If you agree to participate in this research study and would not mind using the data we collect from you as a public resource for educational purposes, then we will need separate permission to use your information for these purposes. During this separate consent, we will discuss your rights as a research participant and discuss how you desire your information to be used.

Note: You are not required to agree to this separate consent to participate in the above research study. If you agree and later decline, you can let us know us know at any time. Please indicate your preference below:

You agree to use the data we collect from you as a public resource for educational purposes.

Yes_____   No_____   Date: _____

You are also entitled to receive recordings and transcripts of your interviews for completing the entire study. Please check the boxes below to identify your choices.

You would like to receive recordings and transcripts of your interviews: _____

You would like to release recordings to you on a specified date: _____ Date: _____

You would like to withhold your name: _____

Other exceptions (i.e., I would like to review the transcript before donating it to the library or archives):

_____
_____

As mentioned above, at the end of the research project, the original recording and edited transcripts will be donated to the Michigan State University Archives in East Lansing, MI. These materials will be identified by name and made available to the public for scholarly and educational purposes, unless exceptions are listed above.

Letter to Ajohnte' Jamal "Tay" Griffin

What's good big bro? Over the past year, I have been thinking about the indirect impact

you had on my life. Even though, I don't remember spending a lot of time with you as a child, I

did remember your contagious passion for life, your fight and determination and your love for

family. One of the last times I saw you in person, you turned me on to Tupac Shakur's record

'Dear Mama' back in 1995. When I was too busy listening to the slow, melancholy beat of

Tupac's masterpiece, you implored that I try listening to the lyrics instead. I memorized the

lyrics and looked forward to spitting them to you when you visited again. I reminisced how we

would regularly banter back and forth about Biggie and Pac, and argue about who was the

greatest MC to ever live. We both shared a genuine love for hip hop and sports. You were always

the odd ball, in a good way. You had your own style and your own sense of individuality. You

were unique! I wanted to be like you.

I also remember your temper. You were so passionate about everything you did when we

were young and you were never afraid of confrontation. As my mom would put it, you didn't

believe that fat meat was greasy. You were always into something and super hard-headed too. I

am not sure how it started, but I remember when you got into that big fist fight with C'Andre

(my other brother) and my mother had to break it up. All I can remember from that day was

yelling and screaming and a great deal of profanity. I couldn't have been more than ten or eleven

years old at the time, but I remember that the fight was so bad that dad ended up taking you back

to Gary, Indiana earlier than expected. You never visited us again during my adolescence and we

rarely talked after that either. Unfortunately, between late adolescence and your untimely death

on February 10, 2017, we only talked a handful of times. One of those times was in December of

2016. You told me that you were dropping your sons off at school and that you had just moved back to East Chicago, Indiana from Louisville, Kentucky. You commented that you wanted a fresh start. You wanted me to come to visit you for the holidays to catch up and have a drink, but I failed to make time. I took the occasion for granted. I thought that since you were back in the area that I would be able to catch you another time, but you were taken away from us before I could see your face in person again.

When I got the news that you had been tragically gunned down, my heart sank with despair and regret. You fathered and supported eight children that I had never laid eyes on. It hurt me to the core to know that you would never be able to formally introduce me to your family. I questioned my loyalty as a brother. How could I have let that much time go by without speaking to you? How could I have never told you that I loved you? I struggled with these depressive thoughts for months after your death and they still emerge from time to time, but I am coping much better these days. Sometimes, I really wish that I could have those days back because I would do a lot of things differently. However, I understand that you cannot get time back. I understand that you always have to move forward despite the circumstances, never backwards.

Deep down in my heart, I know that you would want me to keep pushing forward as well. I just never thought that you would be the victim of domestic violence or any kind of heinous criminal act for that matter. For the rest of my life, I will never take relationships of any kind for granted. In memoriam of you, I vow to be a better brother, son, uncle and friend. I thank God for allowing me to be your brother and I will always cherish the limited time we shared together. I thought that I had a lifetime with you, but your passing has shown me that impact is not bounded by time. I will always keep our precious memories very close to my heart. I promise to be there

for your children as much as I possibly can brother. I know that you are smiling down on us

wherever you are. I just wanted to write you a few words to let you know that I love you and that

you will never be forgotten.

Rest up Bro,

Love Ramon

http://www.nwitimes.com/news/local/crime-and-courts/police-jilted-man-shoots-ex-lover-s-boyfriend-dead/article_d4769fa6-5e59-5698-b5d8-edbeb498dcf4.html

Former Students

Note of Importance:

All seven of the pictures below are personal to me. Ironically, in the 2010-2011 school year, one student was in the fifth grade, five students were in the sixth grade and one student was in the eighth grade. I served as their dean of students at a charter school for almost two years.

Figure 7: Sheldon Jefferson.

Sheldon is currently in a federal penitentiary serving thirty years for Aggravated Rape, Aggravated Kidnapping and Armed Robbery for crimes he committed in September of 2013.
http://www.nola.com/crime/index.ssf/2013/09/teeanger_accepts_30_years_in_p.html

Figure 8: Edward Barton.

Edward was shot dead on his front porch over a "frozen cup" dispute with a man twice his age on June 30, 2013.
http://www.nola.com/crime/index.ssf/2013/07/14-year-old_boy_murdered_over.html

Figure 9: Skye Johnson.

Skye was shot multiple times and killed while sitting in a car on October 11, 2014. As his lifeless body laid on the concrete, two assailants continue to riddle him with bullets.
http://www.nola.com/crime/index.ssf/2017/07/teen_survivor_of_desire-area_d.html

Figure 10: Shane Hughes.

Shane was indicted for the armed robbery and second-degree murder of a Domino's pizza delivery driver in 2014. If convicted, he faces a potential life sentence in a federal petitionary.
http://www.nola.com/crime/index.ssf/2014/09/dominos_deliveryman_murder_inv.html

Figure 11: George Carter.

George was shot multiple times and killed on October 21, 2014.
http://www.nola.com/crime/index.ssf/2014/11/george_carter_murder_robbery.html

Figure 12: Kentrell Jones.

Kentrell was killed in a quadruple shooting on August 25, 2015.
http://www.nola.com/crime/index.ssf/2015/08/man_killed_in_quadruple_shooti.html

Figure 13: Kayla LaGarde.

Kayla was killed when a drunk driver recklessly drove his car into the back of a car that she was a passenger in on June 9, 2016. The hit and run crash killed her on impact.
http://www.nola.com/crime/index.ssf/2016/10/driver_pleads_guilty_to_mansla.html

Life Stressor Checklist

Figure 14: Life Stressor Checklist.
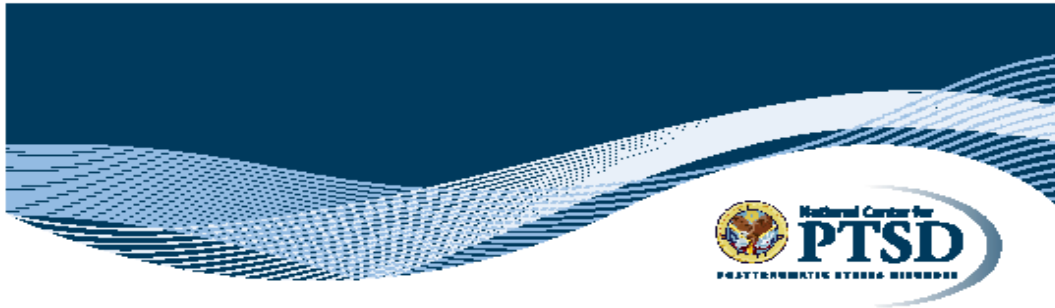
Life Stressor Checklist - Revised

Version date: 1997

Reference: Wolfe, J., Kimerling, R., Brown, P., Chrestman, K., & Levin, K. (1997). *The Life Stressor Checklist-Revised (LSC-R)* [Measurement instrument]. Available from http://www.ptsd.va.gov

URL: http://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/assessment/te-measures/lsc-r.asp

Figure 14 (cont'd).

Life Stressor Checklist - Revised

Please fill in today's date: _____

> **READ THIS FIRST:** Now we are going to ask you some questions about events in your life that are frightening, upsetting, or stressful to most people. Please think back over your **whole life** when you answer these questions. Some of these questions may be about upsetting events you don't usually talk about. Your answers are important, but **you do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to**. Thank you.

1. Have you ever been in a serious disaster (for example, an earthquake, hurricane, large fire, explosion)?   ☐ YES   ☐ NO

   a. How old were you when this happened? _____

   c. At the time of the event did you believe that *you or someone else* could be *killed* or seriously *harmed*?   ☐ YES   ☐ NO

   d. At the time of the event did you experience feelings of *intense* helplessness, fear, or horror?   ☐ YES   ☐ NO

   e. How much has this affected your life in the past year?   ☐ 1 not at all   ☐ 2   ☐ 3 some   ☐ 4   ☐ 5 extremely

2. Have you ever seen a serious accident (for example, a bad car wreck or an on-the-job accident)?   ☐ YES   ☐ NO

   a. How old were you when this happened? _____

   c. At the time of the event did you believe that *you or someone else* could be *killed* or seriously *harmed*?   ☐ YES   ☐ NO

   d. At the time of the event did you experience feelings of *intense* helplessness, fear, or horror?   ☐ YES   ☐ NO

   e. How much has this affected your life in the past year?   ☐ 1 not at all   ☐ 2   ☐ 3 some   ☐ 4   ☐ 5 extremely

3. Have you ever had a very serious accident or accident-related injury (for example, a bad car wreck or an on-the-job accident)?   ☐ YES   ☐ NO

   a. How old were you when this happened? _____

   c. At the time of the event did you believe that *you or someone else* could be *killed* or seriously *harmed*?   ☐ YES   ☐ NO

   d. At the time of the event did you experience feelings of *intense* helplessness, fear, or horror?   ☐ YES   ☐ NO

   e. How much has this affected your life in the past year?   ☐ 1 not at all   ☐ 2   ☐ 3 some   ☐ 4   ☐ 5 extremely

Figure 14 (cont'd).

4. Was a close family member ever sent to jail?	☐ YES	☐ NO

   a. How old were you when this happened? _____

   b. How old were you when this ended? _____

   c. At the time of the event did you believe that **you or someone else** could be **killed** or seriously **harmed**?   ☐ YES   ☐ NO

   d. At the time of the event did you experience feelings of **intense** helplessness, fear, or horror?   ☐ YES   ☐ NO

   e. How much has this affected your life in the past year?   ☐ 1 not at all   ☐ 2   ☐ 3 some   ☐ 4   ☐ 5 extremely

5. Have you ever been sent to jail?	☐ YES	☐ NO

   a. How old were you when this happened? _____

   b. How old were you when this ended? _____

   c. At the time of the event did you believe that **you or someone else** could be **killed** or seriously **harmed**?   ☐ YES   ☐ NO

   d. At the time of the event did you experience feelings of **intense** helplessness, fear, or horror?   ☐ YES   ☐ NO

   e. How much has this affected your life in the past year?   ☐ 1 not at all   ☐ 2   ☐ 3 some   ☐ 4   ☐ 5 extremely

6. Were you ever put in foster care or put up for adoption?	☐ YES	☐ NO

   a. How old were you when this happened? _____

   b. How old were you when this ended? _____

   c. At the time of the event did you believe that **you or someone else** could be **killed** or seriously **harmed**?   ☐ YES   ☐ NO

   d. At the time of the event did you experience feelings of **intense** helplessness, fear, or horror?   ☐ YES   ☐ NO

   e. How much has this affected your life in the past year?   ☐ 1 not at all   ☐ 2   ☐ 3 some   ☐ 4   ☐ 5 extremely

7. Did your parents ever separate or divorce while you were living with them?	☐ YES	☐ NO

   a. How old were you when this happened? _____

   b. How old were you when this ended? _____

   c. At the time of the event did you believe that **you or someone else** could be **killed** or seriously **harmed**?   ☐ YES   ☐ NO

   d. At the time of the event did you experience feelings of **intense** helplessness, fear, or horror?   ☐ YES   ☐ NO

   e. How much has this affected your life in the past year?   ☐ 1 not at all   ☐ 2   ☐ 3 some   ☐ 4   ☐ 5 extremely

Figure 14 (cont'd).

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8. Have you ever been separated or divorced? ☐ YES ☐ NO

    a. How old were you when this happened? _____

    b. How old were you when this ended? _____

    c. At the time of the event did you believe that *you or someone else* could be *killed* or seriously *harmed*? ☐ YES ☐ NO

    d. At the time of the event did you experience feelings of *intense* helplessness, fear, or horror? ☐ YES ☐ NO

    e. How much has this affected your life in the past year? ☐ 1 not at all ☐ 2 ☐ 3 some ☐ 4 ☐ 5 extremely

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9. Have you ever had serious money problems (for example, not enough money for food or place to live)? ☐ YES ☐ NO

    a. How old were you when this happened? _____

    b. How old were you when this ended? _____

    c. At the time of the event did you believe that *you or someone else* could be *killed* or seriously *harmed*? ☐ YES ☐ NO

    d. At the time of the event did you experience feelings of *intense* helplessness, fear, or horror? ☐ YES ☐ NO

    e. How much has this affected your life in the past year? ☐ 1 not at all ☐ 2 ☐ 3 some ☐ 4 ☐ 5 extremely

---

10. Have you ever had a very serious physical or mental illness (for example, cancer, heart attack, serious operation, felt like killing yourself, hospitalized because of nerve problems)? ☐ YES ☐ NO

    a. How old were you when this happened? _____

    b. How old were you when this ended? _____

    c. At the time of the event did you believe that *you or someone else* could be *killed* or seriously *harmed*? ☐ YES ☐ NO

    d. At the time of the event did you experience feelings of *intense* helplessness, fear, or horror? ☐ YES ☐ NO

    e. How much has this affected your life in the past year? ☐ 1 not at all ☐ 2 ☐ 3 some ☐ 4 ☐ 5 extremely

Figure 14 (cont'd).

11. Have you ever been emotionally abused or neglected (for example, being frequently shamed, embarrassed, ignored, or repeatedly told that you were "no good")? ☐ YES ☐ NO

   a. How old were you when this happened? _____

   b. How old were you when this ended? _____

   c. At the time of the event did you believe that **you or someone else** could be **killed** or seriously **harmed**? ☐ YES ☐ NO

   d. At the time of the event did you experience feelings of **intense** helplessness, fear, or horror? ☐ YES ☐ NO

   e. How much has this affected your life in the past year? ☐ 1 not at all ☐ 2 ☐ 3 some ☐ 4 ☐ 5 extremely

12. Have you ever been physically neglected (for example, not fed, not properly clothed, or left to take care of yourself when you were too young or ill)? ☐ YES ☐ NO

   a. How old were you when this happened? _____

   b. How old were you when this ended? _____

   c. At the time of the event did you believe that **you or someone else** could be **killed** or seriously **harmed**? ☐ YES ☐ NO

   d. At the time of the event did you experience feelings of **intense** helplessness, fear, or horror? ☐ YES ☐ NO

   e. How much has this affected your life in the past year? ☐ 1 not at all ☐ 2 ☐ 3 some ☐ 4 ☐ 5 extremely

13. WOMEN ONLY: Have you ever had an abortion or miscarriage (lost your baby)? ☐ YES ☐ NO

   a. How old were you when this happened? _____

   c. At the time of the event did you believe that **you or someone else** could be **killed** or seriously **harmed**? ☐ YES ☐ NO

   d. At the time of the event did you experience feelings of **intense** helplessness, fear, or horror? ☐ YES ☐ NO

   e. How much has this affected your life in the past year? ☐ 1 not at all ☐ 2 ☐ 3 some ☐ 4 ☐ 5 extremely

14. Have you ever been separated from your child against your will (for example, the loss of custody or visitation or kidnapping? ☐ YES ☐ NO

   a. How old were you when this happened? _____

   b. How old were you when this ended? _____

   c. At the time of the event did you believe that **you or someone else** could be **killed** or seriously **harmed**? ☐ YES ☐ NO

   d. At the time of the event did you experience feelings of **intense** helplessness, fear, or horror? ☐ YES ☐ NO

   e. How much has this affected your life in the past year? ☐ 1 not at all ☐ 2 ☐ 3 some ☐ 4 ☐ 5 extremely

Figure 14 (cont'd).

15. Has a baby or child of yours ever had a severe physical or mental handicap (for example, mentally retarded, birth defects, can't hear, see, walk)?	☐ YES	☐ NO

a. How old were you when this happened? _____

b. How old were you when this ended? _____

c. At the time of the event did you believe that **you or someone else** could be **killed** or seriously **harmed**? ☐ YES ☐ NO

d. At the time of the event did you experience feelings of **intense** helplessness, fear, or horror? ☐ YES ☐ NO

e. How much has this affected your life in the past year? ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
   not at all   some   extremely

16. Have you ever been responsible for taking care of someone close to you (not your child) who had a severe physical or mental handicap (for example, cancer, stroke, AIDS, nerve problems, can't hear, see, walk)	☐ YES	☐ NO

a. How old were you when this happened? _____

b. How old were you when this ended? _____

c. At the time of the event did you believe that **you or someone else** could be **killed** or seriously **harmed**? ☐ YES ☐ NO

d. At the time of the event did you experience feelings of **intense** helplessness, fear, or horror? ☐ YES ☐ NO

e. How much has this affected your life in the past year? ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
   not at all   some   extremely

17. Has someone close to you died suddenly or unexpectedly (for example, sudden heart attack, murder or suicide)?	☐ YES	☐ NO

a. How old were you when this happened? _____

b. How old were you when this ended? _____

c. At the time of the event did you believe that **you or someone else** could be **killed** or seriously **harmed**? ☐ YES ☐ NO

d. At the time of the event did you experience feelings of **intense** helplessness, fear, or horror? ☐ YES ☐ NO

e. How much has this affected your life in the past year? ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
   not at all   some   extremely

Figure 14 (cont'd).

18. Has someone close to you died (do NOT include those who died suddenly or unexpectedly)?	☐ YES	☐ NO

a. How old were you when this happened? _____

c. At the time of the event did you believe that ***you or someone else*** could be ***killed*** or seriously ***harmed***?	☐ YES	☐ NO
d. At the time of the event did you experience feelings of ***intense*** helplessness, fear, or horror?	☐ YES	☐ NO

e. How much has this affected your life in the past year?　☐ 1　☐ 2　☐ 3　☐ 4　☐ 5
　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　not at all　　　some　　　　extremely

19. When you were young (before age 16). did you ever see violence between family members (for example, hitting, kicking, slapping, punching)?	☐ YES	☐ NO

a. How old were you when this happened? _____

c. At the time of the event did you believe that ***you or someone else*** could be ***killed*** or seriously ***harmed***?	☐ YES	☐ NO
d. At the time of the event did you experience feelings of ***intense*** helplessness, fear, or horror?	☐ YES	☐ NO

e. How much has this affected your life in the past year?　☐ 1　☐ 2　☐ 3　☐ 4　☐ 5
　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　not at all　　　some　　　　extremely

20. Have you ever seen a robbery, mugging, or attack taking place?	☐ YES	☐ NO

a. How old were you when this happened? _____

c. At the time of the event did you believe that ***you or someone else*** could be ***killed*** or seriously ***harmed***?	☐ YES	☐ NO
d. At the time of the event did you experience feelings of ***intense*** helplessness, fear, or horror?	☐ YES	☐ NO

e. How much has this affected your life in the past year?　☐ 1　☐ 2　☐ 3　☐ 4　☐ 5
　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　not at all　　　some　　　　extremely

21. Have you ever been robbed, mugged, or physically attacked (not sexually) by someone you did not know?	☐ YES	☐ NO

a. How old were you when this happened? _____

c. At the time of the event did you believe that ***you or someone else*** could be ***killed*** or seriously ***harmed***?	☐ YES	☐ NO
d. At the time of the event did you experience feelings of ***intense*** helplessness, fear, or horror?	☐ YES	☐ NO

e. How much has this affected your life in the past year?　☐ 1　☐ 2　☐ 3　☐ 4　☐ 5
　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　not at all　　　some　　　　extremely

Figure 14 (cont'd).

22. *Before* age 16, were you ever abused or physically attacked (not sexually) by someone you knew (for example, a parent, boyfriend, or husband, hit, slapped, choked, burned, or beat you up?	☐ YES	☐ NO

a. How old were you when this happened? _____

b. How old were you when this ended? _____

c. At the time of the event did you believe that **you or someone else** could be **killed** or seriously **harmed**?   ☐ YES   ☐ NO

d. At the time of the event did you experience feelings of **intense** helplessness, fear, or horror?   ☐ YES   ☐ NO

e. How much has this affected your life in the past year?   ☐ 1 not at all   ☐ 2   ☐ 3 some   ☐ 4   ☐ 5 extremely

23. *After* age 16, were you ever abused or physically attacked (not sexually) by someone you knew (for example, a parent, boyfriend, or husband hit, slapped, choked, burned, or beat you up)?	☐ YES	☐ NO

a. How old were you when this happened? _____

b. How old were you when this ended? _____

c. At the time of the event did you believe that **you or someone else** could be **killed** or seriously **harmed**?   ☐ YES   ☐ NO

d. At the time of the event did you experience feelings of **intense** helplessness, fear, or horror?   ☐ YES   ☐ NO

e. How much has this affected your life in the past year?   ☐ 1 not at all   ☐ 2   ☐ 3 some   ☐ 4   ☐ 5 extremely

24. Have you ever been bothered or harassed by sexual remarks, jokes, or demands for sexual favors by someone at work or school (for example, a coworker, a boss, a customer, another student, a teacher)?	☐ YES	☐ NO

a. How old were you when this happened? _____

b. How old were you when this ended? _____

c. At the time of the event did you believe that **you or someone else** could be **killed** or seriously **harmed**?   ☐ YES   ☐ NO

d. At the time of the event did you experience feelings of **intense** helplessness, fear, or horror?   ☐ YES   ☐ NO

e. How much has this affected your life in the past year?   ☐ 1 not at all   ☐ 2   ☐ 3 some   ☐ 4   ☐ 5 extremely

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Figure 14 (cont'd).

25. ***Before*** **age 16, were you ever touched or made to touch someone else in a sexual way because he/she forced you in some way or threatened to harm you if you didn't?**   ☐ YES   ☐ NO

    a. How old were you when this happened? _____

    b. How old were you when this ended? _____

    c. At the time of the event did you believe that ***you or someone else*** could be ***killed*** or seriously ***harmed***?   ☐ YES   ☐ NO

    d. At the time of the event did you experience feelings of ***intense*** helplessness, fear, or horror?   ☐ YES   ☐ NO

    e. How much has this affected your life in the past year?   ☐ 1 not at all   ☐ 2   ☐ 3 some   ☐ 4   ☐ 5 extremely

26. ***After*** **age 16, were you ever touched or made to touch someone else in a sexual way because he/she forced you in some way or threatened to harm you if you didn't?**   ☐ YES   ☐ NO

    a. How old were you when this happened? _____

    b. How old were you when this ended? _____

    c. At the time of the event did you believe that ***you or someone else*** could be ***killed*** or seriously ***harmed***?   ☐ YES   ☐ NO

    d. At the time of the event did you experience feelings of ***intense*** helplessness, fear, or horror?   ☐ YES   ☐ NO

    e. How much has this affected your life in the past year?   ☐ 1 not at all   ☐ 2   ☐ 3 some   ☐ 4   ☐ 5 extremely

27. ***Before*** **age 16, did you ever have sex (oral, anal, genital) when you didn't want to because someone forced you in some way or threatened to hurt you if you didn't?**   ☐ YES   ☐ NO

    a. How old were you when this happened? _____

    b. How old were you when this ended? _____

    c. At the time of the event did you believe that ***you or someone else*** could be ***killed*** or seriously ***harmed***?   ☐ YES   ☐ NO

    d. At the time of the event did you experience feelings of ***intense*** helplessness, fear, or horror?   ☐ YES   ☐ NO

    e. How much has this affected your life in the past year?   ☐ 1 not at all   ☐ 2   ☐ 3 some   ☐ 4   ☐ 5 extremely

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Figure 14 (cont'd).

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28. ***After*** **age 16, did you ever have sex (oral, anal, genital) when you didn't want to because someone forced you in some way or threatened to harm you if you didn't?** □ YES □ NO

    a. How old were you when this happened? _____

    b. How old were you when this ended? _____

    c. At the time of the event did you believe that ***you or someone else*** could be ***killed*** or seriously ***harmed***? □ YES □ NO

    d. At the time of the event did you experience feelings of ***intense*** helplessness, fear, or horror? □ YES □ NO

    e. How much has this affected your life in the past year? □ 1 □ 2 □ 3 □ 4 □ 5
                                                       not at all   some   extremely

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29. Are there any events we did not include that you would like to mention? □ YES □ NO

What was the event? _____

    a. How old were you when this happened? _____

    b. How old were you when this ended? _____

    c. At the time of the event did you believe that ***you or someone else*** could be ***killed*** or seriously ***harmed***? □ YES □ NO

    d. At the time of the event did you experience feelings of ***intense*** helplessness, fear, or horror? □ YES □ NO

    e. How much has this affected your life in the past year? □ 1 □ 2 □ 3 □ 4 □ 5
                                                         not at all   some   extremely

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30. Have any of the events mentioned above ever happened to someone close to you so that even though you didn't see it yourself, you were seriously upset by it? □ YES □ NO

What was the event? _____

    a. How old were you when this happened? _____

    b. How old were you when this ended? _____

    c. At the time of the event did you believe that ***you or someone else*** could be ***killed*** or seriously ***harmed***? □ YES □ NO

    d. At the time of the event did you experience feelings of ***intense*** helplessness, fear, or horror? □ YES □ NO

    e. How much has this affected your life in the past year? □ 1 □ 2 □ 3 □ 4 □ 5
                                                        not at all   some   extremely

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Figure 14 (cont'd).

Life Stressor Checklist-Revised Scoring Options

This measure is valid using a number of different scoring methods. We have highlighted three scoring methods that we believe to be the most useful.

Option 1:
One method of scoring the LSC-R is to simply give one point to each positively endorsed stressor (the numbered questions), count up the total, and assign an *overall Life Stressor score* to each participant. The scores range from 0-30.

Option 2:
The second option is to score the LSC-R by assigning weights to the person's endorsed life stressors. This score, ranging from 0-150, reflects a person's subjective rating of how a life stressor affected the person's life in the past year. Each positively endorsed life stressor would be assigned points ranging from 1-5 according to the marked number in lettered question "e."

Option 3:
This method identifies the person's number of positively endorsed life stressors that reflect the *DSM-IV* Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Criteria A for having experienced a traumatic event. Points are assigned *only* when a life stressor is positively endorsed as well as questions "c" and "d," reflecting the *DSM-IV* criteria for experiencing a traumatic life event. You will notice that options c and d are only available for selected questions as appropriate for *DSM-IV* criteria. Some researchers have found it useful to use this scoring option in conjunction with Option 1, where there is a score for high magnitude stressors (criteria A stressors) and low magnitude stressors (other significant stressful events).

NOTES

It is important to note that certain parts of student handbooks and cultural blueprints were used to explain specific practices at CMOs like KIPP and Firstline Schools. Each section that was used was cited in the text. Below are noted citations:

Firstline Schools Cultural Blueprint (Grades 5-8): http://www.firstlineschools.org/uploads/Family%20News/family%20handbook/LHA%20Family%20Handbook%20for%202013-2014%20Final%20Draft%20copy.pdf

KIPP Philadelphia (Grades 5-8): http://www.kippphiladelphia.org/resources/parent-resources

KIPP STAR (Grades 5-8): http://www.kippnyc.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/KIPP-STAR-MS-handbook.pdf

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