Understanding African American Male Perceptions of Suspension: A Narrative Study

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Abstract

The purpose of this narrative study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the perceptions of African American males and suspension in grades 9-12. The participants in this study were able to reach deeply and share their real life experiences about their troubles from elementary to high school; their personal home lives; the challenges and struggles that they faced; their attributions of suspensions; and their overall perceptions of suspension. Participants were asked to share their most memorable childhood experiences and their three most memorable suspensions. The findings revealed that attributes cannot always be seen or perceived by the students themselves, nor the educators that students interact with, yet they have deep impact on students’ experiences. An in-depth understanding of the perceptions and attributions is needed in order to help minimize suspensions. Also, this study reveals the importance of training needed to help both staff and administration understand attributions that result in unfavorable behavior that often lead to suspension.
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Chapter One: Introduction

The U.S. Department of Education (2004) posits that throughout the United States in 2000, there were over three million school suspensions and over 97,000 expulsions. In some states, the number of suspensions exceeded 10% of the number of students enrolled in school. Discipline practices across different ethnic groups have been questioned, but the disproportionality among African American males causes more concerns (Harry & Anderson, 1995). The Office for Civil Rights (1993) reported the findings of a national survey showing that whereas African American males composed 8.23% of the total student population, they received corporal punishment and were suspended at rates over three times their percentage in comparison with their white peers (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003, p.20).

Morgan (1991) notes that the population of a school outside of Atlanta has an 8% population of African-American males; however, 18% of them have been suspended. Additionally, a study by L. W. Rodney, Crafter, H. E. Rodney and Mupier (1999) of 243 African-American male students in a mid-western city revealed that 69% had been suspended at least once while 51% had been suspended twice or more. Schott Foundation (2004) found that although Black males make up only 8.6% of public school enrollment, they represent 22% of expulsions and 23% of suspensions.

African American males are disciplined at higher rates than any other group (Monroe, 2005, p. 14). They experience corporal punishment at twice the rate of Caucasian males (Richardson & Evans, 1992; Townsend, 2000). “In another school district in Illinois, the African American male population of the school was only 11%, yet this subgroup made up 31% of students who had received one out-of-school suspension (OSS), a judgment, and 41% of those who had received multiple OSS judgments” (Karp, 2009, p. 19). Karp (2009) shared that in the
Chicago Public School System, African American males account for the highest rates of OSS and the highest rates of dropout among the various racial and ethnic groups. Their disproportionate rates of suspensions and expulsions contribute to their low levels of academic achievement (Townsend, 2000, p. 100).

In contrast, Finn (2012) found that 8.5% of white males/4.4%, of white females 13.3% of Hispanic/Latino males/8.4%, of Hispanic/Latino females, and 17.5% of African American males/14.6% African American females are suspended, Based on the data, suspension affects African American males disproportionately. There are considerable data documenting the suspension of African American males, but there is a paucity of information that describes the problem from the perspective of African American males.

**Justification of Research**

Having knowledge about the perceptions of African American males can be important. Their perceptions will allow an in-depth look at their view and opinions and will help stakeholders devise a plan that could possibly help reduce the suspension rate of African American males. In reducing this rate, it will help reduce another issue that African American males face: high school drop-out.

Although frequently used in schools in an attempt to punish or to promote appropriate behavior, exclusionary discipline can result in a number of unfavorable outcomes. For example, high exclusionary discipline rates are positively associated with academic failure (Gersch & Nolan, 1994; Rausch & Skiba, 2004; Safer, Heaton & Parker, 1981; The Civil Rights Project/Advancement Project, 2000).

Canter & Hale (1999) conclude:
Students who drop out are more likely to have a history of serious behavior problems than those who complete high school, and this history may date back to the primary grades. Prevention efforts may be enhanced by viewing behavior problems as symptoms of disengagement from school that can be addressed if identified early (p.2).

In other words, there are changes and interventions that can be made to school policies to help students stay in school and have fewer disciplinary issues. It is my hope that understanding the perceptions of African-American males will allow my school as well as others to re-evaluate some of our own discipline policies. In hearing the participants, it is my hope that their voices will help to join the conversation by being the change agent for discipline.

**Deficiencies in the Evidence**

The disproportionality rate among African American males is at an all-time high. There are several factors that contribute to suspension rates; there are many effects caused by the suspensions, and there are many interventions. Yet, one thing of importance that most studies lack is the perceptions of African American males as they relate to suspension. Two studies in particular that lack the voices of black males are *Why Are “Bad Boys” Always Black? Causes of Disproportionality in School Discipline and Recommendations for Change and African American Male Discipline Patterns and School District Responses Resulting Impact on Academic Achievement: Implications for Urban Educators and Policy Makers*. Both of the studies research African American males and suspension but lack the input of African male perspectives.

**Audience**

The data from this study will benefit administrators, teachers, and any type of support staff that are in contact with students who have been suspended. The narratives are unique and
specific to students at the school of study. This study is in no way intended to generalize the experiences of African American males. Instead, the intent is to share unique, individual perspectives in order to determine patterns that can inform the work of educational practitioners.

**Significance of Research Problem**

This research study is important because school suspension is connected to dropping out from high school (DeRidder, 1999; Eckstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock, 1996; Wehlage & Rutter, 1996). When students are not in school, they lose instructional time and the chances of dropping out increases (Achilles, Krezmien, & Leone, 2006, p 16).

It is noted throughout the literature that black males have higher rates of suspension which increases the likelihood of negative outcomes. For example, “When students are suspended from school they have the opportunity to get into trouble which continues to hinder their social success” (Townsend, 2000, p. 119).

Among other negative outcomes, students risk getting into trouble with the legal system when they are not in school (Chobort & Garibaldi, 1982, p. 65). Hodgson & Webb (2005) posit that teenagers and suspension are often associated with crime and there is no doubt that some excluded school children are involved in delinquency; there appears to have been a concerted effort by the media and politicians to establish a link between school exclusion and crime. Therefore, this study is needed to recognize that there is an issue and to explore the perspectives of African-American males.

It is my hope that through this study, the information learned may help to reduce the suspension rate among African American males and to offer suggestions and alternatives to principals and teachers, as well as strategies and interventions for the students. I also want to explore the purpose of suspension and the attributions that place students at risk for suspension.
Currently, the literature suggests that at-risk students are suspended because of various reasons. Skiba et al. (2002) found that disciplinary consequences for African-American students tended to be imposed for more “subjective” behaviors (e.g., being disrespectful or threatening), but white students tended to be suspended for more “objective” behaviors (e.g., smoking or leaving the classroom). It is my belief that a better understanding of African American male perspectives and attributions can help inform teachers and administrators of internal attributions, challenges, and strengths of these students. This will in turn help administrators change disciplinary policies and improve student/teacher and student/administrator relationships. For example, Townsend (2000) emphasized that teachers must take deliberate steps to better engage African American students, especially males, in instruction that goes beyond discipline and management. Davis & Jordan (1994) found that high suspension rates occurred in schools where extensive amounts of time were spent on discipline-related matters. Townsend (2000) suggests that to ensure that differential treatment of African American learners does not occur, teachers observe the rates at which they make positive statements to students, call on students, and academically engage students.

**Positionality Statement**

As an African American female teacher who has taught in high school over a nine-year span, I have not only read about the disproportionality rate among African American males and suspension but I have witnessed it first-hand. As a colleague, I perceived that the teachers as well as some of the administrators were not receptive to the African American male culture. According to Monroe (2006), the primary reason for the large number of African-American discipline issues is culture. "Many classroom and institutional disciplinary approaches suffer from a basic inattention to cultural context. Common techniques and expectations are moored in
middle class, white norms; numerous approaches fail to prove useful with students of color” (Monroe, 2006, p. 48). As a teacher that students confide in, my assumption is that some teachers have not built positive relationships with the students and pre-judge, and therefore even with minor infractions resort to disciplinary measures that will expel students or give them in-school suspension (ISS). Over the years, I have read about the negative effects that suspensions have on African American male students. Costenbader & Markson (1998) found that students who are excluded from school have an increased likelihood of experiencing academic failure, and subsequently drop out. Leone, Cristle, Nelson, Skiba, Frey, & Jolivette (2003) posit that these failures place them at great risk for involvement in juvenile courts and corrections. My research is important for this study and my problem because it will enable me to investigate the lived experiences of African American male students and suspension more closely.

As a member of the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) at my school, my hope is that I can help decrease the rate of suspensions among African American males. My mission is to help create improved systems of discipline with positive reinforcements and to help promote positive teacher behaviors. As a part of the interventions for suspension, the goal is to make sure that the students are working to become successful in reaching those intended behavior goals. One way to ensure success is changing to a positive school climate that will benefit the students. “When establishing positive school environments, most researchers, policy makers, and service providers agree that a continuum of behavior supports provides an effective, efficient, and relevant structure for organizing resources, interventions, and systems within and across schools” (Sugai & Horner, 2006, p. 10). I wanted to become a part of the PBIS committee to help make a change as a teacher, colleague, and mother to an African American male, and as a cousin to many young African American males.
As an African American, it is important for me to understand the attributions for suspension, effects of suspensions, the student/teacher relationship, and the perceptions of African American males. I believe that if we have a clear understanding of the perceptions of African American males of suspensions, we can come up with better interventions and solutions to the problem. My positionality coupled with the literature on African American male suspensions leads me to the following research question: How do four African American males in grades 9-12 attribute their out-of-suspensions?

**Theoretical Framework**

African American students are suspended and affected by the suspension in different ways. For every suspension, there is an attribution for it. “An attribution is a casual explanation for an event or behavior and describes how individuals develop casual explanations for behaviors and outcomes, and how their casual explanations influence subsequent reactions” (Harvey & Martinko, 1995, p. 56). Attribution theory will be used to support the data from my research.

**Attribution theory.** Attribution has two meanings. Malle (2011) posits that one explains the behavior and wants to know why things happen and the other refers to inferences or ascriptions (e.g., inferring traits from behavior, ascribing blame to a person). The two meanings are relevant to one another because of the assigning process. “In attribution there is a reason for the behavior and in attribution reference, a quality or attribute is assigned to the agent on the basis of observed behavior” (Weiner, 1974, p. 12). The researcher’s data explain why the participants were suspended and what was attributed to the behavior.

Weiner (1985) explains that substantial research on the nature of attributions in an academic setting is evident within the attribution literature. “Theorists and researchers contend that attributions influence individual reactions to success and failure” (Abramson, Garber, &
Seligman, 1980; Weiner, 1985; Cortes-Suarez, 2004, p. 64). The researcher’s data is supported by Weiner, Abramson, Garber, Seligman, and Cortes-Suarez.

Malle (2011) explains that attribution can be classified along the dimension of locus of causality, which describes the internality or externality of an attribution (theory is also concerned with the relationships that exist between attributions). “The locus of the causality dimension is particularly relevant to emotional reactions, internal attributions for undesirable events or behaviors are frequently associated with self-focused negative emotions, such as guilt or shame, and external attribution for the same behaviors and outcomes are associated with externally focuses negative emotions, such as anger and resentment” (Gundlach, Douglas, & Martinko, 2002; Weiner, 1985, p. 16). The data from the research is supported by the author’s literature. The participant’s locus of causality was described internally and externally by attributions such as peers, teachers, desire, medication, disability, and determination. The participant’s reacted in ways that resulted in unfavorable outcomes.

Casual attributions can also be categorized along the stability dimension. “Stable causes are those that tend to influence outcomes and behaviors consistently over time and across situations; causes such as intelligence and physical or government laws are considered relatively stable in nature and hard to change” (Kovenkliogl & Greenhaus, 1978, p. 17). “Unstable causal factors, such as the amount of efforts exerted toward a task, are comparatively easy to change and unlike the locus of causality dimension, which primarily influences emotional reactions to events and behaviors, the stability dimension affects individuals’ future expectations” (Kovenkliogl & Greenhaus, 1978, p. 17). In order to get a clearly comprehend how attribution works, it is important to understand its different components.
**Seminal authors.** According to Jones et al., 1972 (as cited in Jones, 1976) the attribution approach is essentially a perspective or a framework, rather than a theory. The perspective owes much of its current prominence to the seminal writings of Fritz Heider. Heider, 1958 (as cited in Learning, 1994) posits that Heider was the first to propose a psychological theory of attribution, but Weiner and colleagues (e.g., Jones et al., 1972; Weiner, 1974, 1986) developed a theoretical framework that has become a major research paradigm of social psychology. According to Learning (1994) Heider discussed what he called “naïve” or “commonsense” psychology; in his view, people were like amateur scientists, trying to understand other people’s behavior by piecing together information until they arrived at a reasonable explanation or cause. There are other seminal authors to give contribution to the theory.

Martinko, Douglas, and Harvey (2006) state:

After Heider, the two most influential contributors were Weiner and Kelley. Kelly (1973) focused on the front end of the attribution process, describing how people use information to make causal inferences. On the other hand, Weiner et al (1971) focused on the consequences of attributional explanations and their dimensions for expectancies, emotions, and behavior. In addition, Jones (1976) and his colleagues (Jones and Davis; Jones and Nisbitt, 1971, p. 68) as well as many others (e.g. Abramsom, Seligman, and Teasdale, 1978; Deiner and Dweck, 1978, p. 99) have made significant contributions to the development of the attribution theory (p.128).

**Rationale.** My rationale behind choosing the attribution theory over other theories is due to the type of study that I am conducting and what it is about the study that I want to learn. This study is giving me a deeper understanding about suspensions, perceptions, and attributions as they relate to African American males in high school. Why are they being suspended and how
can we help to reduce the rate of suspension? In order to accomplish this reduction, I need to know why. The major components of the theory are why; what are the explanations for behaviors? There are reasons for every behavior and attribution theory will assist in determining the causality, stability, and controllability. This theory aligns with my research question because it assists with an in-depth investigation into the lives of the participants. This will enable the question to be answered as well as provide other information that can assist in helping to reduce the suspension rate among African-American males.

I applied the attribution theory to the problem of practice, methodology, and questions because it will give insight and understanding about behaviors, the reasons behind them, and the stable causes.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

The purpose of this qualitative, narrative study was to explore how African American males in grades 9-12 attribute their reasons for suspensions. To what do they attribute their suspensions? Why the disparities and what are they? This study was needed because there are underlying reasons that are attributing to high suspension rates among African American males such as discipline practices, student/teacher relationships, poverty, stereotyping, internal behaviors, lack of knowledge, and the absence of mental support for students. With thorough knowledge of the literature and research data, the findings assisted in gaining a deeper understanding about the intended purpose of the study.

Attribution theory along with the experiences of the participants enhanced the understanding of African American male perceptions about suspensions and how this knowledge can help bring change to schools and reduce the suspensions.

Exclusionary Discipline Practices

The U.S. Department of Education (2004) reports that throughout the United States in 2000, there were over three million school suspensions and over 97,000 expulsions and in some states, the number of suspensions exceeded 10% of the number of students enrolled in school. Discipline practices across different ethnic groups have been questioned, but the disproportionality among African American males causes more concern (Harry & Anderson, 1995). The Office for Civil Rights (1993) reported the findings of a national survey showing that while African American males composed 8.23% of the total student population, they received corporal punishment and were suspended at rates over three times their percentage in the population. Data proved that African American students are at a greater risk of suspension than their white peers (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003, p. 80).
According to Fenning & Rose (2007) over the 2008 academic year, African American males accounted for more than 60% of students who received OSS. This number marked an increase of 7%, from 53% five years prior. In the Illinois school district, the African American male population of the school was only 11%, yet this subgroup made up 31% of students who had received one OSS judgment, and 41% of those who had received multiple OSS judgments (Karp, 2009). The Children’s Defense Fund Cradle to Prison Pipeline Campaign identifies suspension and expulsion as major risk factors for students to drop out of school. Students who are suspended or expelled are more likely than their peers to drop out of school altogether (Wright Edelman, 2009, p. 34).

**Understanding School Discipline Practices**

Because of the increase in the practice of sanctions that exclude students from the learning environment, it is important to have support in place to help combat this issue. Butler, Lewis, Moore III, & Scott (2012) suggest that while it is important to highlight the increased frequency of exclusionary sanctions resulting from a student's misbehavior, it is vital that such efforts continue to receive adequate support (e.g., access to data, adequate funding resources, training and development support for personnel, etc.). Understanding the sanctions and how to close the exclusionary gap is the start of a solution. Butler et al. (2012) suggest by making a firm commitment to continue efforts to both better understand and close the exclusionary sanction gap that currently exists, teachers, administrators, school social workers, and school counselors convey a level of sustained institutional commitment toward solutions rather than problem identification. There are other alternatives in place that can help close the gap to suspension.
Strategies and Alternatives to Out-of-School Suspension

Research reports that (OSS) is not beneficial as a way to discipline students whereas alternative programs such as In-School Suspension (ISS) and Cool-off Rooms are. Out of school suspensions are not working, particularly for minor infractions. Morris & Howard (2003) posit that out of school suspension is seen as an illogical solution, especially for students suspended for skipping class or school altogether; many in-school suspension programs are being developed as a result in order that the programs can be beneficial. Dickinson & Miller (2006) posit the goal of these alternatives is to provide a meaningful learning experience for students, which results in the modification of their conduct to prevent further suspension.

Peterson (n.d.) concludes:

In-School suspension should be provided and include academic tutoring, instruction on skill-building related to the student behavior problem (e.g., social skills), and a clearly defined procedure for returning to class contingent on student progress or behavior. The environment should be carefully managed to guard against using in-school suspension as a way to avoid attending classes. Students are usually given a referral because of misbehavior. Because the student academics are first priority, the teacher should be careful not to disrupt the educational process if at all possible. Teachers as well as the students try to use ISS or suspension as a way to avoid dealing with the students (p.2).

Nielson (1979) offers other successful alternatives such as the cooling-off room where angry or disruptive students leave class and seek counseling. The result was 27% reduction in suspensions (National School Public Relations, 1976, p. 19). “Another alternative is a behavior clinic that incorporates three hours of weekly group counseling for students that are misbehaving and guided group interaction where the teachers identify school leaders and assign them
randomly to heterogeneous groups for 12 weeks” (Nielson, 1979, p. 3). When incorporating the latter two, it is important to remember that one of the main things should be on teaching how to act appropriately and showing responsibility for your actions (Nielson, 1979). BC Ministry of Education (1999) offers effective discipline practices that focus on teaching social responsibility and appropriate behavior, not on demanding obedience.

Morris & Howard (2003) posit that out of school suspension is seen as an illogical solution, especially for students suspended for skipping class or school altogether and as a result, many in-school suspension programs are being developed and have proven to be beneficial. The goal of these alternatives is to provide a meaningful learning experience for students, which results in the modification of their conduct to prevent further suspension (Dickinson & Miller, 2006). There should be a system set in place at schools that consists of a knowledgeable staff that share in expertise about discipline.

Protocol. Butler et al. (2012) suggest that internal protocols should be established to evaluate student disciplinary cases, and identify and remove unintentional biases that sabotage objectivity and reduce policy standardization. A team of different individuals with knowledge about interventions, behavior, and discipline within the school should be established, to serve as advisors, and monitor disciplinary cases (Butler et. Al, 2012). For example, in the researcher’s school, there are four administrators that handle discipline and each administrator is assigned a grade level (9-12). Using a system called Infinite Campus; teachers input the discipline referral report and submit it to the proper administrator. The administrator reviews the infraction and the code of conduct book to determine the discipline. If a student is in the special needs program, the special education chair might be contacted to assist in determining punishment. Also, it will help to eliminate biases as they relate to students with behavior issues. Butler et al.(2012)
suggest that administrators should construct a team of school professionals with diverse expertise, who can serve as advisors; it is also recommended that a school database be developed that has the ability to track and report trends along a number of select variables (e.g., race, gender, offense, disciplinary action recommended and taken, etc.).

**Evaluations.** Regular evaluations should take place to ensure that sanctions and offenses are in accordance with one another. Butler et al. (2012) posit that it is, therefore, important to frequently review student conduct policies and school sanctions for misconduct to ensure that penalties for minor infractions do not result in major exclusionary sanctions. Without this kind of on-going review process, the cycle of suspension and expulsion is likely to continue (Osher, Sandier, & Nelson, 2002, p33).

**Training.** Getting stakeholders involved will offer solutions for all. Butler et al. (2012) engage administrators and teachers in the development of special trainings that help them and students develop positive conflict resolution and de-escalation skills and improved coping strategies. According to Butler et al. (2012) if students are provided with alternatives, knowledge, and strategies to deal with situations, they are less likely to resort to measures that will lead to unfavorable consequences. Butler et al. (2012) state that with proper skill development, properly placed interventions, and counseling, many students are better able to positively address inevitable situations of conflict and stress. School social workers and counselors are an asset for staff and can provide proper training to them. Butler et al. (2012) posit that given the counseling training of school social workers and school counselors, they are strong candidates for offering special professional development to administrators and teachers; they are highly trained in developing rapport with individuals and large groups and facilitating counseling dyads and groups.
Possible Mechanisms of Suspensions

Skiba et al. (2002) offer a number of possible hypotheses that have been proposed as mechanisms to account for rates of disciplinary practices and included among them are different disparities.

Race. Disparities for disciplinary action among African American males exist for a number of reasons and are increasingly high. “Nationally, African American students are targeted for disciplinary action in the greatest numbers” (Johnston, 2000). Some disparities such as minor infractions can be handled on a different level that would eliminate referrals or suspension.

Skiba et al.’s (2000) study reveals that African American males receive harsher punishment than their peers, often for subjectively defined offenses. Among other disparities is criminalization of black males; most students are grouped together and never given a fair chance because of media and stereotypical views of others. According to Monroe (2005) both media and scholarly portrayals of contemporary black life often highlight cultures of violence, drugs, antiauthoritarianism, and other social deficiencies. Monroe (2005) states that when disciplining African American students, teachers are likely to demonstrate reactions that appears to be more severe than required.

Disabilities. Krezmien, Leone, & Achilles (2006) indicated that youth identified as having disabilities experienced higher rates of suspension than youth not identified as having disabilities. If students are diagnosed with an emotional Disability (ED), they are at risk for higher suspensions. Krezimen, Leone, & Achilles (2006) posit the risk of being suspended among students with ED was high across all racial groups, even among the Asian population that typically had lower odds ratios than all other groups, including White students without
disabilities. Due to the student’s disability, the behavior can be expected and it is imperative that schools appropriately handle discipline issues and that behaviors are managed well by teachers and principals (Krezmien, Leone, & Achilles, 2006, p. 12). “The high suspension rates of students with ED are problematic because these students require intensive behavioral interventions implemented consistently over time” (Krezmien, Leone, & Achilles, 2006, p. 12). The researcher’s data show that three of four participants were diagnosed with some type of disability. Due to their disability and its characteristics, they require teachers and administrators to be knowledgeable about their disability. The participants were suspended throughout their school years and participated in situations that led to their suspensions.

Monroe (2005) provides some recommendations to closing the discipline gap. They are as follow:

1. Provide opportunities for teachers to interrogate their beliefs about African American students.
2. Incorporate and value culturally responsive disciplinary strategies.
3. Broaden the discourse around school disciplinary decisions.
4. Maintain learners’ interest through engaging instruction.

Closing the discipline gap is not an easy task, but there is effort being put forth to help reduce the problem. Ending racial disparities in school discipline is a formidable responsibility. Yet, encouragingly, some school systems are taking strides to eliminate the discipline gap (Denn, 2002, p. 10).

**Stereotyping.** The relationship of the disproportionality of office referrals among African American males and stereotyping cannot be overlooked. Zumwalt & Craig (2005) believe that with a predominantly White teaching force in most school districts in this nation, the
possibility of cultural mismatch or racial stereotyping as a contributing factor in disproportionate office referral cannot be discounted. “Teachers may be unaware of how to culturally handle or accept African American males and the way that issues are handled, can bring about negative outcomes” (Zumwalt & Craig, 2005, p. 5).

Anderson (1999) states that there are a number of parents of African-American males who tell their sons that they are the “man of the house” or that they need to “be a man.” Some are also told to hit anyone who hits them first. Thus, “teaching modeling aggression at home and teaching positive discipline, self-control, and anger management in school, must surely be confusing to the children” (p. 16).

The findings of this study as it relates to the father’s absence, supports Dunn & Tucker. “Another relevant cultural concept is that of adaptive functioning in which this concept refers to the way children function in a particular environment; students must function in their home environments as well as their academic environments” (Dunn & Tucker, 1993). Ogbu (1982) explained this situation by stating that African-American students must learn to function in two cultures, their culture and the dominant culture. Sometimes African-American students exhibit behaviors that is adaptive or appropriate in their home environments but maladaptive or inappropriate in their school environments (Dunn & Tucker, 1993, p. 9). This phenomenon represents a conflict between the student's home culture and the student’s school culture (Day-Vines & Day-Hairston 2005; Irvine, 1990). This conflict results in discipline issues (Ogbu, 1982).

Another cultural aspect is communication. African-Americans are verbally oriented people while European Americans are more visual and documentation oriented (Akbar, 1978, p. 3). According to Akbar (1978) African-American students can effectively identify feelings and
animosities toward them from words addressed to them; they thus tend to react to prejudices and resentments that those speaking to them may think they are hiding.

Another communication feature is related to the way some African-American students speak. Some use nonstandard English and certain tones that are not familiar to the dominant culture (Townsend, 2000, p. 9). At times this feature can be misinterpreted and identified as a discipline issue that needs to be addressed. “In class, many African-Americans speak loudly and interrupt as a way of showing their interest or even argue as they press their point; their intention is to participate, not misbehave, although some teachers consider them disrespectful” (Schwartz, 2001, p. 4).

Townsend (2000) suggests that the unfamiliarity of white teachers with the interactional patterns that characterize many African American males may cause these teachers to interpret impassioned or emotive interactions as combative or argumentative. While conducting a study at an elementary school, Ferguson (2001) concluded the possibility that racial stereotyping influenced an increased rate of punishment for young African American males. African American males are stereotyped by their way of walk and style. Neal, McCray, Webb-Johnson, & Bridgest (2003) found that students who engaged in a “stroll” style of walking more often associated with African American movement style were more likely to be judged by teachers as being more aggressive or lower achieving academically. Vavrus and Cole (2002) analyzed videotaped interactions among students and teachers, and found that many office referrals were less the result of serious disruption than what the authors described as “violations of…unspoken and unwritten rules of linguistic conduct” (p. 91), and that students singled out in this way were disproportionately students of color. In a study of office referral practices conducted by Gregory
and Weinstein (2008) it was found that disciplinary outcomes were dependent upon the way students responded to classroom management.

**Behavior.** There seems to be a correlation between African American males with behavior issues and special education; the research shows a high percentage rate. Education can be quite differential, both in terms of quality and access to services. The degree to which all children receive an equitable education in this country is continually debated. Specifically, the overrepresentation of African American male students in special education continues to be one of the most persistent and unresolved issues in education. Specifically, African American children tend to be overrepresented in the disability categories of mild and moderate mental retardation and serious emotional disturbance, while also being underrepresented in programs for the gifted and talented (The Civil Rights Project, 2002, p 10; National Research Council, 2002, p. 6; U.S. Department of Education, p. 8).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1990 is a gateway for the introduction of behavioral stimulants used with Black males as a method for social control. Issues of social control by the White elite of Black males are linked with historical data of school use of control, punishment and the placement of Black males within the special education bracket (Fitzgerald, 2002, p88). Fitzgerald (2002) indicated black males were disproportionately placed within the category of special education and prescribed psychotropic medication; black males within special education are placed for different reasons such as academic and behavior concerns. In fact, this is also observed within the reasoning for being prescribed medication as well (Fitzgerald, 2002, p. 88).

Schools are sending a message to and about African American males; this message does not say that they are valuable and intellectually capable of academic success. Furthermore, the
African American male has a one in four chance of becoming a dropout statistic from high school and has an even worse one in 12 chance of graduating from college (Trescott, 1990, p. 34). In order to find a solution for the overrepresentation of African American male suspensions, we first need to understand the attributes associated with suspension and how they can be manipulated to help key stakeholders reduce the suspension rate.

**Effects**

Suspension does not serve as a benefit to the student; it has disadvantages, and great negative effects. Among the most obvious is the denial of access to learning opportunities that occurs when students are not in school. Students who receive OSS or expulsions typically are not provided opportunities to continue their school work. Finn (2012) posits that suspending a student from class or school serves two purposes: as punishment for misbehavior intended to deter further misconduct on his/her part or that of others, and to preserve orderliness and safety in the school setting. In the extreme, suspending or expelling a student from school is necessary for the welfare of others. But suspending a student from a school is a discretionary act that often fails to deter—or may even encourage—further misconduct. Suspension can lead to drop out and drop out can lead to a negative life trajectory. African American males disproportionally suspended are therefore at greater risk. Absence for any reason interferes with learning, an effect accentuated among students having academic or behavior difficulty (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Blum, Beuhring, & Rinehart, 2000; Fabelo et al., 2011; Finn & Rock, 1997, p77). A suspended student is disengaged from the flow of instruction, and more likely to experience alienation from school altogether (Jessor, Turbin, & Kosta, 1998; Resnick et al., 1997; Stewart, 2003). The support that students need to become re-engaged after returning to school after being suspended is often not given. Issues such as this cause students to be at risk for a dangerous trajectory. It is
little wonder that suspensions, together with academic achievement and grade retentions, are the strongest student-level predictors of dropping out (Finn & Zimmer, 2011; Rumberger, 2011, p.54). Garibaldi (1998) gave histories of underachievement and school failure; lost opportunities for schooling are of even greater importance. According to Wu, Ert, et al. (1982), suspended or expelled students typically do not receive instruction. This, coupled with frequent opportunities to affiliate with individuals who have antisocial behavior, gives rise to dismal outcomes. Families as well as communities are affected by suspensions.

**High school drop-out.** According to Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morrison (2006); Greene (2002); Khatiwada, McLaughlin, & Sum (2007); and Tyler & Loftstrom (2009); there are clear economic impacts on the local, state, and national economies for the collective decisions of students that drop out of high school. Students who drop out of high school diminish their chances of success. According to Greene (2002) students who fail to graduate from high school face a very bleak future. Greene (2002) posits that because of the needed basic skills that are essential for success in today’s economy which are conveyed in high school and higher education, students who do not receive these skills are likely to suffer with significantly reduced earnings and employment prospects.

**Academics.** Exclusionary discipline describes suspension, expulsion, and other disciplinary actions leading to a student’s removal from the typical educational setting. Although frequently used in school in an attempt to punish or to promote appropriate behavior, exclusionary discipline can result in a number of unfavorable outcomes. For example, high exclusionary discipline rates are positively associated with academic failure (Gersch & Nolan, 1994; Rausch & Skiba, 2004; Safer, Heaton & Parker, 1981; The Civil Rights Project/Advancement Project, 2000, p. 6), dropping out of high school (Costenbader & Markson,
involvement with the juvenile justice system (Chobot & Garibaldi, 1982; Florida State Department of Education, 1995; The Civil Rights Project/Advancement Project, 2000, p. 8), grade retention (Safer, 1986, p. 5), and illegal substance use (Swartz & Wirtz, 1990, p. 10).

**Social.** School suspensions have an effect on social skills for students and research supports the negative consequences associated with the legal system. “Higher rates of suspension are related to higher rates of future antisocial behaviors and involvement in the juvenile justice system” (Iselin, 2010, p. 15). Costenbader & Markson (1998) posits that exclusionary discipline practices, such as suspension, interfere with the educational progress and perpetuate a failure cycle, decreasing the opportunities to gain academic skills and appropriate social behaviors.

**School Relationships**

Relationships are one of the building blocks of success for students as it relates to being successful in school. Forming bonds between student and teacher give students the opportunity to academically share their goals. The National Association of Secondary School Principals (2004) believes that every high school student should have at least one faculty member who is knowledgeable of the student’s aspirations, strengths and weaknesses. When African American male students feel accepted, the setting can be positive for both student and teacher. Noguera (2003b) found that African-American male students respond cooperatively in school environments when they believe educators care about them and expectations for high academic performance are communicated. When relationships aren’t established or students feel discriminated against, a situation can become problematic. According to Thomas, Coard,
Stevenson, Bentley & Zamel (2009) elevated levels of conflict between African-American male students and their teachers occurred when the student perceived rejection based upon their race.

**Teacher.** When teaching African American males, it is imperative that students have teachers who care and want to make a difference in the education of the students. According to Gay (2000) it is clear in the literature that having caring teachers is essential for all students, and especially students in urban classrooms. African American males feel that a good student–teacher relationship is important for academic growth. According to Hughes & Kwok (2007) participants stressed the need for strong teacher–student relationships in order for students to achieve academic success. Caton (2012) believes these men suggested that students need teachers’ support and encouragement to be successful in school. Teachers might not realize the impact they make on a student’s life, but it can be harmful. Caton (2012) witnessed the crucial role teacher’s play in assisting students to achieve their highest potential; this was confirmed by one participant’s comment that “a teacher can make or break you.” Another student elaborated on an experience that he had.

Caton (2012) reported:

The first day I attended the school I was transferred to, a few teachers told me that they had heard about me. The teachers’ comments affected our relationship. I spend most of day in a large open area with no structured activities. It is difficult to develop a relationship with your teacher in this type of environment. (p. 1067)

The Advocates for Children and Youth concludes:

Teacher attitudes, centralization of discipline, and school governance climate are among the increasing factors that contribute to school discipline problems. Accordingly, schools with high suspension rates typically have high student-teacher ratios, low academic
quality ratings, administrative indifference to school climate, a disproportionate amount of time spent on reactive discipline, and ineffective school governance. Most disciplinary actions are initiated in the classroom. Different teachers give various levels of disciplinary referrals. In most cases, a small proportion of teachers give out a substantial percentage of suspensions (Advocates for Children & Youth, 2006, p.9).

Interventions

Mentoring. “Mentoring programs have proven to provide benefits to youth and are expanding rapidly in schools” (Dappen & Iserhagen, 2006, p. 151). Dappen and Iserhagen suggested that school mentoring programs are assisting in the reduction of alcohol and drug use, teen parentage, gang membership, and peer violence. They also reported that interpersonal skills and relationships have improved along with self-confidence, attitudes toward school, and academic achievement. The key to the effectiveness of the mentoring program is following best practices based upon monitored program implementation.

School counseling. Wyatt (2009) posits that individual counseling and small-group counseling represent effective media for promoting healthy pro-social behaviors among urban African American male adolescents. Such counseling approach facilitate social/emotional well-being and reduces maladaptive behaviors. School counselors will have to establish relationships that exude warmth, nurturing, trust, and personal respect (Day-Vines & Day-Hairston, p. 239).

Mental health counseling. In the United States, one in 10 children and adolescents suffer from mental illness severe enough to cause some level of impairment (Costello, Mustillo, Erkanli, Keeler, & Angold, 2003; Roberts et al., 2007, p 56). Recent data that illustrate the alarming prevalence of mental disorders in youth support the need for increased attention to children’s mental health. Evidence supports the efficacy of providing mental health services to
children with mental health problems. Support for the use of child psychotherapy has been
evidenced through countless studies and four major meta-analyses that examined the effects of
child therapy (Ollendick et al., 2005, p. 16). A thorough review of the literature consistently
shows that therapy for children results in beneficial impacts on the lives of children and their
families and in recent years a shift has occurred towards identifying efficacious treatments for
children who present with specific behavioral, emotional, and social problems (Miller, n.d.).

Conclusion

The suspension rate of African American males is at an increasing high. Suspension is
not only affecting our students but it is affecting our nation and communities. Findings from
Hemphill & Schneider (2013) demonstrate that the negative impacts of school suspension on
behavioral outcomes for young people transcend the school environment and have the potential
to increase the probability of young people in engaging in serious offenses that impact the whole
community. When children are not educated they suffer because they miss out on the
opportunity of being educated. Arcia (2006) believes that the increasing use of school
suspension is concerning because of the negative consequences experienced by suspended
students including a higher risk of academic failure and school dropout, disengagement from
school (Butler et al. 2005), and failure to graduate on time (Rafaelle, 2003, p. 3). These students
ultimately end up in prison or committing a life of crime because they have no means to support
themselves. An examination of the impact of secondary school experiences on the likelihood of
future incarceration showed that individuals who had been suspended from school were 2.2 times
more likely to be incarcerated in the future in comparison to non-suspended students (Arum &
Beattie, 1999, p. 11).
As a nation, we have to determine what we can do to reduce the suspension rate and decrease the chances of students potentially dropping out and ending up in prison. However, in order to make this a reality, we have to find the underlying reasons and alternatives to suspending our students. It would be unrealistic if there were not consequences for misbehavior and even more unrealistic if there were not alternatives set in place that would minimize the suspensions.
Chapter Three: Methodology

This is a qualitative study in which I gained a better understanding about the process and practices that influence the suspension rate of African American males. In this chapter I provide descriptions of the research design & tradition, participants, recruitment, data (collection, storage, analysis) and trustworthiness. The research methodology provided the tools needed to answer the following question: How do four African American males in grades 9-12 attribute their out-of-suspensions?

Paradigm and the Role of the Researcher

As a constructivist-interpretivist, I was able to gain a deeper understanding of the participant views and truth. Researchers approaching their study from the constructivist-interpretivist perspective would attempt to interpret the individual truth of the participant by carefully documenting the viewpoint being considered (Butin, 2010, p16). When using this paradigm, my goal was to get the participants to share and be as open about their experiences as it related to the problem. Schwandt (2000) states that the constructivist position espouses a hermeneutical approach, which maintains that meaning is hidden and must be brought to the surface through deep reflection. Also, a constructivist-interpretivist believes that people have different viewpoints and experiences about situations. Ponterotto (2005) posits that those subscribing to the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm believe that there is not just one reality but that each person has his or her own individual reality that is influenced by the context in which the person functions.

Use of the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm was particularly appropriate for a narrative study of black male high school students’ experiences with disciplinary action and suspension. As the researcher, my goal was to gain an intimate knowledge of students’
experiences with suspension, teachers, disparities, stereotyping, and prejudices. Schwandt (2000) states proponents of constructivism-interpretivism emphasize the goal of understanding the “lived experiences” from the point of view of those who live it day to day. In this study I wanted to understand the daily experiences of adolescent black males who have been in disciplinary trouble. In this study, I was able to determine the participant’s individual perspectives, recognizing that I was not looking for one generalizable truth, but was seeking to know the complexity of how each student interprets his personal experiences (Ponterotto, 2005, p3).

Research Design

“In qualitative studies, the researcher is the instrument of data collection through questions asked in personal interviews or focus groups and through observations and notes” (Magilvy, 2003, p. 7). Qualitative researchers perceive and explain issues by making sense of what they believe to be real in the participants’ experiences (Creswell, 2003). Qualitative research is a type of educational research that relies on the views of participants, in which data consist largely of words from the participants, and that involves describing and analyzing statements subjectively (Creswell, 2003). Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klinger, Pugach, and Richardson (2005) defined qualitative research as a structured process to understand components of a problem in a particular setting. McDuffie and Scruggs (2008) suggested qualitative research is exploratory and offers contributions to social validity by controlling the perceptions of participants in a natural setting and everyday life in the world.

Qualitative research is the best methodology for this study of black male experiences with discipline because of the need to understand student experiences and voices. The use of qualitative research enabled the researcher to gain a better understanding of the real lived
experiences of the participants. Krueger (1998, 2000) states that qualitative research concentrates on how individuals make sense of their world while interacting with others. Merriam (1998) states that qualitative research allows the researcher to analyze the embedded meaning of lived experiences of the participants in which the meaning is mediated by the perspectives of the researcher.

**Research Tradition**

In order to understand the human lives and their experiences about a particular situation, a narrative enabled the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and look through the lens of their personal experiences. Polkinghorne (1998) posit that a narrative is the major way human experience is made meaningful, and “the individual stories and histories that emerge in the creation of human narratives are available for direct observation.” Of the many forms of narrative, I looked through the lens using personal experiences of the student. Creswell (2012) states that “narrative research assumes multiple forms” and among them are biographies, autobiographies, life histories, and personal experience stories. For this study I used stories of personal experience.

This approach gave me an understanding of the students’ overall perception of the attributes that lead to suspension and students’ personal experiences about suspension. Students were prompted to share their experiences and give their perceptions about suspensions. The experience among the students was analyzed to get a sense of the above examination and provide feedback for stakeholders that might lead to different processes and procedures for suspension and offer alternative solutions.
Participants and Sampling Strategy

To gain an understanding of African American males and suspensions, purposeful sampling was used to choose the participants. According to Gall, Gall, & Borg (2007) purposeful sampling is the process of selecting participants that are likely to be information-rich in terms of the purpose of the study and is used with the intent of achieving a thorough and in-depth understanding of selected individuals. Also, Patton (2002) states that purposeful sampling is a qualitative strategy aimed at systematic representation of a variety of relevant perspectives on a topic of inquiry.

Homogenous purposeful sampling was appropriate for this study. According to Patton (1990) homogenous purposeful sampling entails intentionally selecting participants that are the same or similar in nature and uniform throughout and is used when conducting a study on a specific phenomenon to gain an understanding of the collective. For this study, black male students at Glenn Hills High School who have experienced suspension were recruited for participation. Doyle (2006) notes that when conducting a qualitative study, the goal is to search for participants that will be most beneficial and offer the information needed for the study. The participants of this study were a small and purposive group utilized to acquire an in-depth understanding (Sorensen, 2007, p18).

My participants consisted of black males at Glenn Hills High School, which is in Richmond County, Georgia. The student ages range from approximately 14 to 19 years old. I recruited four black male students, one from each grade level, who accumulated more than one suspension within the past year or current year. I determined the number of suspensions from each student by using suspension data from Infinite Campus. Infinite Campus is a database used by the school and accessed by administration and the data clerk to track discipline, attendance,
referrals, and suspension. Only African American males were recruited because I want to learn how African American males perceive suspensions. Disciplinary data from Infinite Campus were requested (Appendix C) from the data clerk. Once disciplinary data were received, I removed any students that I have personally recommended for suspension. This would be few, if any, students. Then, from the remaining students, I identified three students from each grade level, for a total of 12 potential students, with the most suspensions. Three potential students were identified from each grade level, 9th-12th grades as possible participants in case one chose not to participate. These 12 students formed the population that I intend to recruit.

**Recruitment and access.** Of the 12 students identified, I contacted each one individually, starting with the student who had the most suspensions in each grade level after I received the suspension data from the clerk. This occurred during homeroom by calling the students down to the media center. I met with the students for about five minutes each and explained the study without pressure or obligation and to see if this would be a study of interest (Appendix D) and if they were interested, I gave them consent forms (Appendix E) if they were 18 or older. If they were younger than 18, a letter of explanation for their parents was given, explaining the study (Appendix F). Also, they were given a parental consent-child assent form (Appendix G) to take home and return no later than two days out. The next day, I followed up with their parent/guardians via phone to answer any questions.

Since this study involved children, I met face-to-face with the participants and went over the study in detail (Appendix D). I explained the study in high school student-friendly language and answered any questions that they had. To make myself available for any questions or concerns that the parent had, I contacted the parent on the following day after meeting with the participants. If the parent chose, they were able to contact me by phone or e-mail.
Data Collection

Data collection consisted of in-depth, semi-structured interviews (Appendix H). Interviews were conducted after school in the media center or in a designated classroom with the school counselor present. If students chose a location outside of school for anonymity, arrangements were made for a private location with a parent or guardian. An adult witness, the school counselor, was present at all interviews. There were three audio-taped interviews total per students that lasted between 45-60 minutes. Participation in the study did not require more than three hours.

The interviews gave me an understanding of the student overall perception of the attributes that lead to suspension. Interview one allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of student’s home life, background, and prior school experience. For example, I asked about their background, important figures in their lives, childhood memories, suspensions, etc. I used the attribution theory as a guide to form these questions in hope that their background, role-models, or childhood memories could give a deeper insight about possible attributes of their current behaviors, which ultimately leads to suspension. I want to know the true causes for the outcome. Interview two allowed students to share their perceptions of school environment including information about peer pressure, student/teacher relationships, and experiences with school administration, and interview three allowed students to share their three most memorable times being suspended. This allowed the participants to really open up and share what they felt.

Data Storage

To help protect personal information, the confidentiality of transcripts, hard copies, audio files, and other records were maintained by storing the items on a designated disk, drives, and maintained in a locked file cabinet for safe keeping. All digital files were stored on a password
protected computer. All forms and paper files were stored in a locked file cabinet in the student investigator’s home. Transcriptions were backed up with additional copies as recommended in Creswell (2013). The principal investigator and the student investigator were the only ones that have access to the data. The data was used then and may be used in the future to add to the research by understanding the overall perception of the attributes that leads to suspension. After the three-year waiting period, data will be destroyed; digital data will be erased and hard copies will be shredded.

Data Analysis

In vivo coding and axial coding were used to analyze the data. In in vivo coding, Schartzman and Straus (1973) state that qualitative data analysis primarily entails classifying things, persons, and events and the properties which categorize them. “The data analysis process starts with identifying and describing patterns and themes from the perspective of the participants (s), then attempt to understand and explain these patterns and themes” (Agar, 1980).

For the first rounds of data analysis, in vivo coding was used. King (2008) describes the practice of assigning a label to a section of data, such as an interview transcript, using a word or short phrase taken from that section of the data. “The aim of creating an in vivo code is to ensure that concepts stay as close as possible to research participants’ own words or use their own terms because they capture a key element of what is being described” (Saldaña, 2013, p9).

Also, Saldaña (2013) states that in vivo coding is also appropriate to use when the researcher’s intent is to honor the voice of the participants and to focus the analysis on the perspectives of the participants. The different codes were kept on a spreadsheet to make it easier to do cross-case similarities and differences. I used in vivo coding to analyze all of the participant interviews.
The second cycle of analysis used was axial coding. “Axial coding is using concepts and categories while re-reading the text and it is important to confirm that your concepts and categories accurately represent interview responses and explore how your concepts and categories are related” (Aulls, 2004, p. 4). In vivo and axial coding was used for each set of interviews before beginning the next set of interviews. Completing two rounds of coding for each interview allowed me to gain an understanding of gaps or important themes from the data that was needed to follow up on before proceeding to the next interview. After analyzing each participant’s interview individually, I collapsed the themes from each interview across participants to gain a more holistic understanding of the participant views altogether. This allowed me to see similarities and differences across participants.

I conducted provisional coding using key concepts from the literature review and the theoretical framework once I completed in vivo and axial coding for all interviews. Provisional Coding establishes a predetermined “‘start list set of codes prior to fieldwork’” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 58). These codes can be developed from anticipated categories or types of responses/actions that may arise in the data yet to be collected (Saldaña, 2009, p. 120).

**Trustworthiness**

Creswell (1998) recommends the use of multiple strategies that should enhance the researcher’s ability to assess the accuracy of findings, as well as convince readers of the accuracy. Three of the eight validation strategies that Creswell discussed will be used. To ensure validity, member checking, external auditing, and clarifying researcher bias were used.

The purpose of member checking was to ensure information has been correctly interpreted from the interview (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p.6). In this study, member checking was conducted with all participants after the final interview was conducted and analyzed. All
interviews were analyzed and findings were summarized in order to present to students during the member checking interview.

Another method used for validity is external auditing (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 6). External auditing was used to evaluate the accuracy and evaluate whether or not the findings, interpretations and conclusions are supported by the data. In this study, I had teachers from the research site conduct an external audit by helping to establish face validity of the data by analyzing interview questions to see if they measure its purpose (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 6). Finally, trustworthiness from the study was established by clarifying researcher bias (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). I clarified research bias by gaining a better understanding about the topic as well as through stating my positionality.

**Protection of Human Subjects**

Throughout the research project the researcher worked to ensure that the participants in this study were protected from any harm as a result of participating in the research process. Creswell (2009) states that ethical issues can arise during any part of the research process including the design of the research problem, development of the purpose and questions, during data analysis and interpretation, and throughout the writing and dissemination process (pp. 87-92).

The researcher ensured that the participants clearly understood the purpose of the research and an informed consent was signed. During the data analysis and interpretation phase of the project, key ethical considerations were made. According to Creswell (2009) these considerations include maintaining the anonymity of participants through the use of aliases, development of a plan to keep and dispose of records, developing a plan to define ownership of the study, and a process to ensure the validity and accuracy of the research (pp. 91-92).
This study involved suspension, attributions, and the chance for participants to share in-depth feelings and experiences. When answering certain questions about their suspension or home life, background, and prior school experience participants can display characteristics of nervousness such as sweating, stuttering, or fidgeting with their hands or clothes. The participants had the opportunity to stop the study if they became frustrated, irritated, or if too many questions were being asked. To minimize students becoming irritated due to the number of questions, we took a five-minute break after question 7 if needed. If the participant felt the need to take a break sooner, the researcher allowed that time. If the student felt that the interview location was uncomfortable or inconvenient, the opportunity to meet in a different location was given. The researcher gave the opportunity to reword any question that the participant might have found uncomfortable. During interviews and the nature of the questions, the participants could have become emotional, shameful, brought about feelings of guilt, or displayed characteristics of being uncomfortable due to certain questions being asked. There was a counselor present at all meetings to assist the participant with any emotional issues that could have occurred.
Chapter Four: Narratives

The participants whose stories are featured in this study have much in common as well as differences. All four are African American males, ages 14-19, grades 9-12, and have accumulated one or more suspensions in the past or present year. One intriguing commonality among three-fourths of the participants is the fact that they have some type of diagnosed disability. It is possible that this factored into the disconnect between attributions of the student vs. the school. The participants were eager to share their lived experiences from elementary to high school and tell their stories about the most memorable suspensions and the attribution of their suspensions. Although they attend the same urban high school, their experiences are a little different. Here are the stories Allen Adams, Kevin Kitchens, Mark McGuire, and Eddie Ealy. While the names are pseudonyms, the stories reflect experiences lived by four real individuals.

Allen

Allen is a 9th grade student who was diagnosed in elementary school with bi-polar and schizophrenia, and was classified as having an emotional and behavioral disorder (EBD). Before starting school, Allen had behavior issues at home that his mother considered to be the norm for a typical child. For example, according to Allen his mother said, “There is nothing wrong with Allen; he’s just like every other little boy his age.” After starting school, his behavior escalated and his academics begin to reflect his behavior. There was an instance in elementary school where he put his middle finger up at the teacher and called her a bad word that he heard on television. In elementary school, Allen would be evaluated and placed in the special education program in which he qualified for. He was prescribed Ritalin to help manage his behaviors.

Allen’s family. Allen described his parents and siblings as well as his relations with them.
**Mother and Ms. Georgia.** When asked about the important adults in his life, Allen talked about his mother. She is considered to be the caregiver as described by Allen. “My mom bought me clothes and shoes. My mom did whatever she could for us and made sure that we had food because we got a lot of food stamps.” His mother is not only a caregiver but she tried to give moral support the best way that she knew. Although Allen felt “great” about his mom, he wished that she was like Ms. Jones (friend’s mom). He wanted his mom to be more like Mrs. Jones because she went to the school to follow up with teachers. If having a bad day at school, Allen stated “Mom told me not to worry about it, but I wanted her to be like my friend’s mom and go to the school the next day to see what happened; that would have made me feel better.” Allen would have appreciated it if his mom would have come to the school to inquire about the situation that occurred.

In the beginning Allen’s mom was the caregiver because she bought material things but that changed because of his behavior and when Ms. Georgia came to live with them. Allen stated, “I got into trouble and my mom stopped buying me clothes, but Ms. Georgia bought them for me.” When asked who Ms. Georgia was, Allen stated, “I don’t know, but she has been living with us for about five months and people say that it’s my mom’s girlfriend and when I asked her about it she said ‘no’.” The rumor about the relationship between his mom and Ms. Georgia does not affect him at all because “Ms. Georgia buys me clothes and shoes.”

**Father.** Allen’s father is not a big part of his life. According to Allen, “He left my mom a long time ago. I would see him sometimes but not all the time. When I went to his house, he fuzzed at me when I asked for food. He told me that I begged too much.” Allen puts his dad in the “middle” when he described his feelings for him and does not see him as a caregiver. Allen expressed his feelings about his treatment by stating, “It made me sad and not like him and
wished he wasn’t my dad because he fusses for no reason.” However, if his dad was different, he would feel different. For example, Allen stated, “I wished he wasn’t mean and then I would want to be with him more.” Allen has never expressed his feeling with his father because of fear. When talking to his mom about how he felt, he recalled that his mom said, “Don’t worry about it and I’m not letting you go back.” Not going to visit dad does not matter to Allen. He states, “I don’t care because he treats me bad.” However, he states, “Dad didn’t call and I got mad. I acted out because dad didn’t come around; all I have is females in my life and I wanted to have a relationship with my dad.”

**Siblings.** Allen has one sister and two little brothers. His sister’s name is Dominique, his five-year-old brother’s name is Darius, and his other brother is David. They have a good relationship. They play fight with each other sometimes. They don’t watch movies because they don’t have a DVD player. His two little brothers play together. His sister likes to take a lot of pictures of the both of them together. They don’t go anywhere together because of transportation and his mom has to work.

**Elementary school.** Adderall typically calm children down and helps to improve their behavior. Faraone and Biederman (2015) found that Adderall helps ADHD symptoms in about 70% to 80% of children and has been shown to be efficacious for measures of inattention, hyperactivity-impulsivity, aggression, disruptive behavior, and academic productivity. However, in Allen’s case it made his behavior worse. As he said, “I use to be laughing and bothering people. The nurse and teacher would call my mom and would say that I get worse after taking the medicine. I had to go home because they couldn’t handle me.” The doctor had to put me on another medicine because it did not work. According to Allen, the second medication prescribed was Concerta. According to Janssen Pharmaceuticals (n.d.) Concerta is a prescription product
approved for the treatment of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) as part of a total treatment program that may include counseling or other therapies. This medication helped him to be calm and concentrate so that he would be able to function in school.

**Catholic school.** Allen only attended Catholic school for a short time. In the beginning it seemed to be working out well for Allen until he would take his medicine. Allen states, “I was doing good until I started taking my medicine then I started getting into trouble.” The researcher is relying on the participant response when including this particular piece of the evidence. Allen perceived that the medicine made him act in the opposite way in which it was prescribed. When asked about the consequence of his behavior, Allen states, “They call mama, and then I’d go home and get into trouble.” When asked to share what his consequences at home were, Allen shared, “I got a spanking and punishment and couldn’t go outside.” Unclear of the reasoning for leaving Catholic school, Allen would spend the rest of his years in public school.

**Behavior problems.** Allen had a lot of behavior issues and he shared some of these behaviors during the interviews. “I fought a lot in elementary school, and I disrespected the teacher.” Allen believes that he is a good person but it’s others that get him into trouble. “Hanging around with a whole bunch of friends but I’m good with people. It’s like thugs and stuff like that and they bad.” When asked what a thug was, this is what Allen describes. “A thug is a bad kid, in a gang, and people respect a thug. I’m a thug because I’m in a gang.”

**Public school.** When asked to describe his elementary experience, Allen states “Bad. Sometimes I was kept back because I am too bad.” Allen believes that the type of neighborhood he lived in is a bad influence. “In elementary school I stayed in a bad neighborhood and went to school with the same kids that lived in the neighborhood. People curse, shoot, steal, fight, drink, and do all kinds of stuff and they did this same stuff in school.”
Getting into trouble. Getting into trouble was a regular occurrence for Allen. According to Allen, “Sometimes I got suspended, I couldn’t go outside for recess, picked on kids, and I got sent to the office a lot.” Although Allen would get punished when he got home, it didn’t change him long because he would return to his old ways. “I would be good a few days and be bad again. We took our friends’ candy and we bullied other kids.” He was afraid of the consequence if he did not participate in this behavior. “Because if I didn’t, I was afraid that they might not like me or beat me up.”

Middle school. Allen’s middle school experience was better than his high school experience. “My middle school experience was good. I was in a band and we went to the games.” Allen and his family started middle school out in a different surrounding. Allen started his middle school out with his grandparents who lived in a different type environment than what he was used to. They lived in middle to upper class neighborhood and he felt because of this and the school environment, he was able to be more successful academically and socially.

Neighborhood and school. Allen attended two different middle schools in which one of those years involved living with his grandparents. Living with them provided a better living and education. “We moved to a better neighborhood with my grandparents and my teachers helped me more and I didn’t have friends to fight me.” Allen grandparents lived in a middle class neighborhood where the school was located two blocks away. His grandfather is retired military and his grandmother is a retired Registered Nurse. Allen believed that the teachers at this school provided him with the support and education that was needed since he was able to learn more. For example: they always offered to help him in class and after school if needed, they expressed care through their words, the school had working computers, and books were up to date. The family lived with their grandparents until his mother no longer wanted to abide by the
grandparents’ house rules. More specifically, Allen’s mother did not want to come in the house at a respectful hour, did not pay any bills, and would not clean up behind herself. Allen and his family had to move back an hour away to the districts where they came from.

**Getting into trouble.** As long as Allen was on the new medicine, there was never an issue with his behavior. “If I didn’t stay on my medicine I would get into trouble. I wouldn’t do my work and teachers could tell when I didn’t take it. They would call my house and one of my grandparents would come and get me because they didn’t want my mom to pick me up.” Allen’s grandparents did not want their daughter to visit the school because she had a history of talking loudly and being disrespectful to staff at the schools that her children attended. Her disturbance was the reason for being handcuffed and taken to jail once.

Allen would soon transfer schools and no longer believed that anyone cared. Allen recalled, “We only stayed for a year and I was sad.” He felt that living with his grandparents was better for him and even better for his mother. As Allen described, “When we were living with my grandparents my mom was even different; she was happy and never fussed.” When they moved out, his mother would go back to her old ways of cursing and fussing about any little thing that him or his siblings did.

The middle school with his grandparents was different as compared with his old school. The new school was higher-performing and had more of the luxuries than his old school. He even recalls that on Fridays during lunch, they were given free ice cream such as Cremesicles and Drumstick Ice Cream. Also, he recalled that parents were a big part of their children’s education. Every time an event was held at the school the parents would always attend. At his old school many things were the opposite. For example, the old school was a low-performing school where some students would attend for a little time and then stop coming, the police would
come and arrest students and take them to jail, and students fought frequently. Parents at the old school never attended any functions that were given and this included Allen’s mom. They were never given free ice cream and the food tasted so bad at times until Allen would actually feel sick. His old middle school would transform him back into his old ways. When his siblings and mother moved out of his grandparents’ house he moved to another school where he would begin to hang with a bad crowd that would always get into trouble in school, cut school/class, and never do any school work.

**Respect as the leader of a gang.** Allen would become the leader of the Tree Gang. As the leader of a gang, Allen felt that is was his responsibility to protect his members. This gang consisted of eight members that all lived in the same neighborhood. The other neighborhoods had their own gang in which they started. In order to be a part of the Tree Gang you would have to beat somebody up yourself or you would have to join the gang in beating someone up. All of the members consisted of high school students who attended the same school. He felt that his role gave him respect. For example, he said “My gang members looked at me like I had all the control and I protected my crew and I don’t let anybody disrespect it.” Allen feels that loyalty is also a very important part of being in a gang. Allen said, “Because you're part of a crew and when they fight, I gotta fight with them.” Allen would rather risk getting into trouble than to give up his loyalty to his gang. Overall, being in a gang gave Allen the acceptance he was looking for but it also caused him trouble in and outside of school.

**Leader of a gang (protect members).** The Street Thugs have about 15-20 members in their gang and they are supposed to be one of the most popular gangs that no other gang wants to fight. There are other rival gangs at the school such as Cherry Hill Gang and Barton Chapel Gang. Allen said, “The Street Thugs put up their gang sign one day in school and then we
started putting up ours and they said, ‘Meet us outside,’ and then went out there. People looked at me like I had all the control and I protect my crew and don’t let anybody disrespect it.” If the gang was being disrespected or somebody did something to harm any of the gang members, it was Allen’s responsibility to protect the gang. Otherwise, the members of his gang and other gangs will look at him as if he’s afraid and doesn’t care what happen to his members.

The gang affiliation is a big distraction for Allen and because of it his high school experience is impacted. For example, Allen admits that in the gang, they smoke marijuana every chance they can—normally walking to the bus stop, sometimes in school, and always after school. According to Allen, smoking marijuana calms him down when he doesn’t take his medication. However, it does not help him focus so that he can do his work. Allen feels that eventually he won’t be able to do the minimum to get by.

**High school.** Despite the fact that Allen is motivated by his extra-curricular activities to do better academically, he feels that his experience so far has been negative instead of being positive and exciting like other student experiences because he is always get into trouble. Also, he states “I don’t like it because you have to take too many tests.” Allen performs just enough for him to pass and make at least a 70% on his class work although he fails all of the tests. The teachers give Allen extra credit work to help him pass the class. However, he does enjoy extracurricular activities. For instance, he said, “I like school because we can go to the gym and play basketball and then we go to band class and I play the drums.”

**Beat up.** Even though Allen is the leader of a gang, he does not go outside of his house much because he feels threatened. Allen shared his experience. “I don't really go outside, that much. I stayed in the house because my friends in the neighborhood punched and hit on me all of the time.”. According to Allen’s mother, boys/young men from the neighborhood came by the
house and fought with Allen. During the interview, Allen explained why a leader of a gang would be beaten. Allen stated, “My friends in the neighborhood fought me but they apologize later and I forgive them. You can’t hold grudges and I know that they are only playing.” In this instance, Allen again demonstrates his need for acceptance.

**Need for respect.** Allen chooses to hang with who he calls gang bangers and thugs. He feels that respect comes along with these types of associations. “Probably because I feel like people respect thugs and bad folks because they be scared of them.” Allen describes himself as a small guy and this type of guy is labeled as scary, a pushover, and someone that people takes advantage of. His physical characteristics are that of a 5’4-5’5 tall, slender, and nerdy-type student. To him, respect is important because he will always be looked at in a negative way.

**Extracurricular activities and belonging.** In spite of his troubles, extracurricular activities keep Allen motivated to pass. He states, “Yes, it goes back to me playing drums and going to the games. You have to have good grades to perform in high school band.” Playing in the band is what motivates him to pass his classes. When asked how he passes his classes, he states, “I have to do a lot of extra credit work in most of my classes but I can’t pass with higher than a 70. I’m in special education and I get modifications for my work.” In other words, Allen is doing just enough academic work to pass his courses so that he can graduate and seems to know about his individualized educational plan.

Allen likes to perform with a group at his school named the Dancing Dolls. The Dancing Dolls are a mixture of freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors. This group was originally formed for and started by females and eventually they opened it up to all groups. This is how the name came about and they will be changing the name because it is no longer just for girls. The Dancing Dolls perform in community parades, and parades in other cities; they are invited to
perform in concerts, Christmas functions, etc. Performing makes Allen happy. “I like performing because it calms me down and I feel like a star because people are looking at me.”

Kevin

Kevin is a 10th grade student who was never diagnosed with any type of disability but his school years are filled with trouble with the law, suspensions, detention, and other issues. He has a passion for playing basketball and being with his friends whom he grew up with. Kevin’s defiance against his mother and school became a serious battle when he had trouble with the law, and worst of all, when he witnessed the suicidal shooting of his best friend.

Kevin's family. Kevin described his relatives and his relationships with them.

Mother and grandmother. The two real people in Kevin’s life are his mother and grandmother. When asked why he see them as real, he states, “Because they are the ones that raised me, disciplined me, and take care of me in every way.” Kevin’s mom is a single parent and she seems to be his pride and joy. According to Kevin, “I love my mom to the moon and back. There is nothing that she won’t do for me. Even when I’m wrong, she takes up for me.” Kevin feels that condoning his wrong is okay because he is her son. He’s not sure whether or not this has an effect of his decisions and his life.

Father. Kevin’s father is still alive but has never been a part of his life. Kevin is not fond of his father. According to Kevin, “I don’t like my dad because he has never been there for us. It hurts me because if you have children, you are supposed to take care of them and be a part of their lives.” Kevin expressed his feelings about his life being different if his father was involved. “I know that my life would be better; especially school and my grades. I wouldn’t get put out of school as much and I would probably be the senior that I should be instead of a sophomore.”
**Siblings.** Kevin is the oldest of his siblings. He has a younger brother and two younger sisters. When asked about his relationship with his peers, Kevin expressed a little distance and maybe jealousy with one of his younger siblings. “My family always compared me with my younger brother. He is the one that never got into trouble, always got straight A’s, played sports, and everybody liked him.” When asked about his feelings, Kevin stated, “It made me mad because they always said that he was going to pass me and make something out of his life.”

**Elementary school.** Kevin does not remember his elementary years as being too bad. “I didn’t really start getting into big trouble until my middle school. I did little things like be silly, talk too much, take people candy or pencils, and maybe not do my class work. I think this was my best time.”

**Public school.** Kevin attended public school and considered this to be the best of all his school years. “If I could go back to elementary school, I would. I don’t know what all happened but something changed after these years.” When asked to think a moment about things that might have affected him, he states, “I don’t know but it might be my dad. I think I saw some of my friends with their dad and other people and I always wished that my dad was like that. I asked my mom and she told me not to worry because she was both my mom and dad.” Kevin’s mom did not think that not having his father was an issue, but even his friends as little children knew that something was wrong. “When my neighbor got mad at me, he would always say, “That’s why you don’t have a daddy.”

**Behavior problems.** Kevin stated that he had what was considered to be normal behavior in elementary school. Although Kevin has never been on medication, his teachers thought that he needed to be. This researcher’s data do not support that there are any biological causes for the behavior. Kevin recalls the words of several of his teachers. “My teachers told me that my
mother needed to put me on medicine or keep me home.” When asked what his mother said, he replies with laughter. “My mother told me to tell them that maybe they need to take medicine in order to deal with me and I told them just what she said.”

**Middle school.** Middle school was when Kevin’s troubles began. He began to rebel, smoke in school, and would not go to school if he did not want to. In middle school he made new friends with students that had gotten retained and should have been in 8th or 9th grade but were in the 6th grade with him.

**Friends.** When asked to elaborate about his new friends, he was willing to share with excitement. “I met Robert and Keith during my 7th grade year. Both of them had already been kept back for at least two years. Everybody was scared of them and no one would bother them. Robert already had a mustache like a man do. I started hanging with them in my neighborhood and would go outside with them.” When asked why his mother allowed him to hang with them and especially someone with a mustache, he replied. “My mom always let me do what I wanted to do.”

**Neighborhood.** Kevin lived in a crime infested neighborhood that included Robert and Keith. I asked Kevin about his neighborhood. “My neighborhood is no different than anybody else hood. People break in houses, steal cars, and rob the corner store all the time. Last year someone was waiting at the corner store and killed the Chinese owner because he was trying to rob him.” Kevin was asked if he really considered this type of neighborhood to be the same neighborhood that everybody lives in and he said “yes.”

**Getting into trouble.** “When I got to 6th grade, I was still an okay kid but it wasn’t until 7th grade that I started getting into trouble because I met Robert and Keith.” Kevin shared his troubles with me. “I stole my mom’s car. It was fun and exciting; I knew I wasn’t supposed to
do it and I had my friends with me.” Kevin shared earlier that his mom condones his behavior so I asked how his mother responded and he said, “I knew my mom would be fine with it and all she was going to do was fuss.” Kevin never thought about the consequences of the law. “If the police had stopped me, I guess I would have had to deal with it.”

**High school.** High school has been trying for Kevin. School is not an everyday part of his life and he goes depending on his mood. He has not had much success and continues to struggle to get out of high school. Despite various options given by the school for Kevin to graduate and be successful, he still struggles with school and doing what’s right. “It’s always like something is holding me down no matter how hard I try.”

**Getting into trouble.** Kevin described one troubling event that would haunt anybody with a child. When asked about his run-in with the law, Kevin described the event like it was yesterday and continues to struggle with the internal hurt:

While walking in the neighborhood with three of my friends one day, the police pulled up and told us to stop. Instead, we took off running through the woods. One police caught me, beat me in my face and head with the flashlight, and threw me in back of the police car. I have asthma and could not breathe. I suffered many bruises from the beating of the police. When my mom made it to the scene, the police would not let my mother seek medical attention for me. She was trying to get to me in the car because she saw that I could not breathe. I was eventually rushed to the emergency room, pictures and reports were taken, and the news station was called. There was an investigation and the police officer was fired. After this incident, it’s like I became the center of attention for everybody. Teachers especially made it hard for me and believed that I was guilty and that I
made the police do it. Earlier that day before the incident, homes had been
broken into and because my hair looks like the guys that broke into the house, he
thought that it was me. We were awarded our lawsuit.

When asked why he ran and the type of treatment given by the teachers, Kevin states, “I
don’t know why I ran. I just knew that I didn’t do anything. Teachers talk to me any kind of
way, lie on me, and disrespect me. The principal even calls my name for no reason when they
see me in the hall. They tell my mom that I be cutting class. One teacher even accused me of
stealing her flash drive and I wasn’t even by her desk.” After this incident and winning the
lawsuit, he would be caught smoking marijuana, being robbed, and sent to a rehab program for a
few weeks.

Friend’s suicide. Things for Kevin were already difficult but they would get worse. “I
acted out because my friend killed himself in my yard.” When asked Kevin if he mind talking
about the suicide he did and shared the heart drenching reality.

It was five months ago and the day before birthday and I won’t ever forget it.
Every time my birthday comes, I will think about it and be sad. It will never be
happy for me again. My friend lived with his grandmother and her husband but
she out him out because the husband said to. You know he was working at
McDonald’s trying to make honest money and all he needed was help and no one
would even give him a ride to or from work. No one would give him a place to
stay. One day it was real HOT and he had to walk from the McDonald’s on
Deans Bridge all the way to Meadowbrook. Do you know how long it takes to
walk that far???? It took him over two hours because nobody would give him a
ride. He was mad because no one cared about him and showed him love. The
next day we and my friends were setting up tents and getting the yard ready for my birthday cook-out. Before he came to my house, he kept calling but he couldn’t get me. My mom said that after he couldn’t get me, he came by my house several times but I wasn’t home. My brother and friends was outside and my mom was inside the house. After a few minutes of being there, he pulled a gun out, put it to his head, and said that nobody gives a **** about him. They told them not to come near him and as he was saying that he blew his brains out. My brother ran to get my mother and she started CPR on him until the ambulance came but it was no use because he was already dead. I have not been good after that and if I was there, I could have stopped him. Why did he do that? Why did he do that?

Kevin was asked how he deals with this issue and he responds, “I did whatever I wanted to and don’t think about it. It I want to smoke, drink, not go to school, that’s what I do. I just can’t take it and it does not help if someone talks to me. I did get put in the hospital for three weeks because I tried to kill myself.” When asked if he felt comfortable sharing, he did.

I was home one day and my mom kept asking me if I was okay but I didn’t say anything. I had been thinking about it for a while but I didn’t know when it would be. I went outside in the back where my friend killed himself and that’s where I fell out. They had to pump my stomach because I had taken all kinds of medicine. I remember waking up strapped to the bed and people standing around me. They had to always have somewhere to watch me. So many doctors and crazy people talked to me. I had to go to therapy for three weeks and they put me
on some medicine that I will not take. I’M NOT CRAZY!!! I don’t do to the
shrinxs anymore. I don’t think that I will do it again but I’m still not straight.

When asked if he thinks that taking his medicine and going to therapy was
beneficial, he said, “no.” When asked why, he said, “Because I still feel the same way”.

What do you think would help you? “I don’t know; I guess for T to come back.” What
do you think that T would tell you? “T would say like he always does, ‘Man, your mom
loves you and your family does too. They do whatever they can for you and give you
everything. Your family is close and I don’t have that but I wish I did. If I had a mom
like yours, I would never give her a hard time. You need to go to school and make your
mom proud.” If you really thought about the words that he would say to you and his
advice, do you think that it could help you feel better? “It might but I don’t know.”

Career. When Kevin was questioned about his career, he seemed to be a little distracted
but was still willing to share. When I asked him about his career goals once he graduated, he
was unsure of what he wanted to do. According to Kevin, “I want to drive trucks or go to
college, but I don’t know; my mom says that college is not for me.” When asked if he believes
that, he responds by saying, “I don’t know what I believe or if I even care.” At this present
moment, he seems to be unclear about life.

Mark

Mark is a student 11th grade student who was diagnosed as having a mild intellectual
disability (MID) in kindergarten at the age of seven. Due to having academic and behavioral
problems (acting out, misbehaving, and breaking rules) within the classroom, the Student
Support Team (SST) referred him for a psycho-educational evaluation. Mark’s evaluation
results displayed general learning difficulties, slow learning rate, difficulties in most academic
subjects, high activity level, and distractibility. Several modifications such as one-on-one tutoring, preferential seating, modified assignments, and individualized instruction were given to Mark with little to no success. As he progressed through school, he would continue to display academic and behavior issues.

**Mark’s family.** Mark talked about his parents, grandmother, and siblings.

**Mother.** When asked about the important adults in his life, Mark talked about his mother. Mark’s mother is the main caregiver for him and his siblings. Mark stated, “She made sure that we ate and we had to keep the house clean. My mom was nice to us; she never fussed at us as long as the house was clean. When we were sick, she made sure that we got better by taking us to the doctor and feeding us soup and Ginger Ale soda. My mother raised me.”

**Father.** When asked about his father, Mark shares his feelings. “My dad would come and go. Even though he was not a part of my life like he should, I loved him though. He did things for me and my siblings.” When sharing his feelings about his father not being a major part of his life, Mark stated “I guess it didn’t bother me too bad; I was happy when he did come.” Regardless, he loves his father. “I feel good about my parents because they give me clothes, shoes, and whatever I need.”

**Grandmother.** Mark’s grandmother was an important part of his life until her death. Mark stated, “My grandmother passed away about seven or eight years ago. Before then, it was her and my mom. My grandmother helped us out a lot when my mom worked. She kept us and helped my mom in every way she had to.”

**Siblings.** Although Mark love his siblings, they are not always easy to be around. According to Mark, “I have a twin sister and brother that get on my freaking nerves.” Because of the major age difference between them, they don’t do as many things together. When asked
why they get on his nerves and his relationship with them, Mark stated, “They are just like all little sisters and brothers that like to mess with the bigger sister or brother and get them into trouble. We have an okay relationship but not much in common because of our age.”

**Elementary school.** Mark attended public school for all of his elementary years and transferring to another school within the same school term. When asked to describe his elementary years, Mark shared “I wouldn’t say I was bad and I ain’t going to say I was good. It was half and half, because I went to all types of elementary schools.” When asked to elaborate on what half and half meant, he stated, “It was good sometimes and bad sometimes. When I didn’t get into trouble it was good and when I did it was bad.”

**Behavior problems.** Mark began to have behavior issues at the age of seven before being diagnosed with his disability. Mark experienced behavior issues that another teacher might consider to be minor compared to other behaviors. When asked about some of the things that he would get in trouble about, he states, “I had to write sentences at school for talking.” He also stated, “I would misbehave by laughing and acting up with my friends. I never got suspended for it though. I only had to set in the corner or my teacher would call my mama.”

**Medicine.** Although Mark had academic and behavior issues, he only took medication for a short period of time. When asked about medication, Mark stated, “My mom let me take it while I went to elementary school but after that she said that I didn’t need it. I never took it in middle school and I don’t make meds now.” During the interview, Mark was asked why his mother took him off of medication and he stated, “I don’t know, I guess, I don’t know why.” Mark has always seen himself as being a child that didn’t need medication because he was never bad. “I wasn’t like most kids that fought the teacher, curse them out, or stole. That’s why I never needed it because I’m not bad.”
Getting into trouble. Mark might have never fought the teachers, curse them out, or stolen, but he did have his share of trouble in elementary school, including getting into trouble twice that led to suspensions. Mark recalls, “One time when I went to Brookshire school, I got suspended for kicking a student on his leg because he took my pencil. Another time I got in trouble was when a student took my book off of my desk and I went and got it and hit him in the head with it.”. When asked about the consequence and the student’s condition, he stated, “I can’t remember how long I got suspended but it didn’t hurt them.”

Middle school. Mark attended the same middle school for all three years. This was the year that he was easily persuaded. “Middle school was okay but I was a follower in middle school. I started to get into trouble because I was hanging with bad boys.”

Behavior problems. Mark would do whatever his friends did in middle school. “We played around a lot and I would follow behind them. Anything that we shouldn’t do, we did. We would get suspended and have detention all the time.” When asked to share some his experiences, Mark stated, “We would cut class all the time and sometimes we would walk to Rally’s hamburger and we would get caught.” Despite the many times being caught, they continued to cut. “We got caught most of the time but not all the time.”

Neighborhood. Mark stated, “I lived in a good neighborhood called Barton Village. I have been living in this neighborhood since I was in elementary school and I have the same friends.” When asked to describe his “Good” neighborhood, Mark shared his thoughts. “It’s good but I lost a lot of friends, neighbors, and enemies because of killings in the neighborhood and other neighborhoods.” Curious about his feelings, future plans, and whether or not this violence has affected him, he was asked to share his feelings. “It’s sad but I might be used to it
since I have been living in this neighborhood for a long time. I still want to do better and go into the army when I graduate. I don’t ever want to forget where I come from though.”

**High school.** Mark’s junior year in high school seems to be more of a challenge. He became a father, had to get a job, and still struggled with behavior issues. The same student’s that he attended elementary and middle school with are the same students that he attends high school with.

**Getting into trouble.** According to Mark, “This year I had to serve a lot of detention, get suspended, and do work detail around the school. Oh, I get in-school suspension a lot. I get into fights this year and cut class a lot.” When asked about the reasons, he states, “Sometimes I don’t feel like going to class.” He fights for numerous reasons. “People approached me, talked about me, or lied on me.”

**Acceptance.** Mark is on the football team; football is something that makes him feel special and away for him to unleash what he feels. According to Mark, “We won a big football game and I scored the point to make our football team win. I was the talk of school for a long time. I like football because I look up to my coaches and they like me.”

**Responsibility.** Mark had an unexpected surprise that he would have to deal with for a long time. “I have a six-month old baby that I can’t take care of right now. I had to get a job to help take care of him and on top of it, my baby mama took me to court for child support and I have to pay $231.00 per month.” Mark was sad and asked if he thought that the baby would interfere with graduation and his future plans, he stated, “I hope not since my mom will help; I want to go into the Army.”

**Career.** Mark seems to have a clear goal in mind that he wants to accomplish. “I do want to go to the Army and make something out of my life. I want to be able to take care of my
baby so her mom won’t need the system. I want to be able to give my child insurance and not have to be on Peachcare Insurance.” After graduation, Mark would like to go directly into the military so that he can start making money to help support his mom as well. According to Mark, “My mom struggles so much and I want to move her with me. I can take care of her and she doesn’t have to work so hard. Watch, one day I will look back at these bad days and say I made (with a smile).”

**Eddie**

Eddie is a high school senior who has endured many issues that some students are fortunate enough not to go through; for example, from being born a drug baby, living with family member to family member, and from foster home to foster home. According to Eddie, “I use to cry a lot as a baby and my aunt said that it was because my mom was on drugs while she was pregnant.” Eddie’s young life would be filled with troubled years to come. According to a psychological test given in 3rd grade, he was diagnosed with an emotional and behavior disorder (EBD) and in the 7th grade he would later be re-tested and diagnosed with schizophrenia after stabbing a student in the shoulder with a pencil.

**Eddie’s family.** Eddie described his family as well as foster families.

**Mother.** Eddie can only wish that he had the love and support of his mother. According to Eddie, “I wanted for my mom to come and see or call me. I know she is living but they took me from her because she was on drugs.” When asked about the last time that he saw his mother, his response was “I saw her one time at Easter because she came over to eat but I guess that was about three or four years ago.” Eddie had a non-existent relationship with his mother.

**Father.** Eddie’s relationship with his father was worse than it was with his mother. “I don’t talk to my daddy or see him. I only saw one picture of him but I have never seen him for
real.” When asked how this makes him feel, he responds by saying, “I felt really bad because I wanted to see him for real since people say that I look like him.” Eddie had a non-existent relationship with his father as well.

**Siblings.** When asked to share about his siblings, Eddie stated, “I have a lot of sisters and brothers that are everywhere in foster homes but some of them are with other family members.” None of his sibling fathers could have taken care of them or prevented foster care because they don’t know who the fathers are.

**Foster care.** Eddie lived with family and in several foster homes where he currently resides with his foster mother and two other foster children. Eddie felt unloved throughout his life because he constantly moved from place to place. According to Eddie, “No one wanted to keep me and I always moved to another home. Since I will be 18 soon, my aunt and uncle said they might let me stay with them in South Carolina”. He felt that he has constantly been moved around because he has schizophrenia and is “crazy” when he doesn’t take his medicine.

**Elementary school.** Eddie described his behavior problems and medical issues in elementary school.

**Behavior problems.** When sharing his experiences about his behavior in elementary school, he described them as being good. “When I was in elementary school, I didn’t think that I was bad but people always called me bad. I just did what everybody else did but I always got into trouble.” He described some of the things that got him into trouble. “I would bother other students, talk without raising my hands, played unfair with the other kids (like cheat in games). One time I did not do my homework and I took this boy paper and erased his name and put my name on it. I got into trouble for that.”
**Medicine.** Although Eddie was diagnosed with EBD in the 3rd grade, he would not be given medicine until the 5th grade, he thinks. “I was living with my family during 3rd grade but the doctor said that she did not want to give me medicine because I was too young. She told my family that children sometimes grow out of the behavior and if things weren’t better by 5th grade, she would give me some then.” *Did the behavior get better or worse?* “It got worse because my family was saying that my grandmother’s was sickly and that she couldn’t handle me.” *How did it make you feel?* “It made me feel real sad because everybody else was saying that they couldn’t take care of me.” *After the behavior got worse by 5th grade, did you finally start taking medicine?* “I was taking medicine but it made me feel crazy like real funny sometime.” When asked if he could remember the feeling from back then and how it affected him, these are the words that he said. “I was on a medicine called Ritalin and one day they were looking for me at school and I was hiding beneath one of the buses. They asked me why I did that and I said I don’t know.”

**Middle school.** Middle school is where Eddie would begin to experience different transitions and more serious trouble in school. “I think it was the end of 5th grade when I was put into foster care. The first family that I went to did not care about me either. I only stayed for half of my 6th grade year. They use to let my foster brother beat me up and I had to wear all the old and ugly clothes and he wore the nice and new clothes.” Eddie described his feelings. “I use to cry on my way to school because kids would pick at me and say that I was a foster kid. It made me want to do bad things to them.”

**Getting into trouble.** According to Eddie, by the time he made it to 7th grade, he had already been in several foster homes. The build up from being bullied by foster siblings and class mates and physically abused by foster siblings had taken its toll and this is the year that a
life altering event happened. “One day while I was in class, I was not bothering anybody and this boy just kept messing with me. I told him to leave me alone but he wouldn’t and the teachers would not make him stop. I had just sharpened a pencil and something said just stab him with it and I did. I stabbed him I think in the top of his shoulder somewhere.” He described what happened next: “The teacher went running to get help and the principal, school officer, and everybody came running. They called the ambulance for the student and they took me from the class. I got expelled and I had to take a lot of different kinds of test and they said that I had schizophrenia. I had to go to a crazy house for six weeks and get treatment and then go to the alternative school.”

Eddie spent his 7th grade year at the alternative school and his 8th grade year back in public school and back into foster care. According to Eddie, “I was at another foster home when I got out. It was a little better but I only stayed there for about a month.” When asked why he left, Eddie responded by saying, “I don’t know but I never stay long. After that, I was with another family for almost my whole 8th grade. After that family, I was with this old couple for half my 9th grade but they were mean and I was happy when I left there.”

Acceptance. Eddie longed for acceptance and the need to feel a part of something.

“When I was in the 9th and 10th grade, I would steal out of the store and from people. I stole with my friends because we were alike. They would be hungry and didn’t have money to buy food so we would steal together and they treated me like their brother.”

Medicine. When asked about the kinds and number of medicines that he had to take, he was unsure because he can’t remember sometimes. According to Eddie, “I just know that I had to take a lot of medicine but I don’t know how many. When I took the medicine I just know that
it was like I was inside of myself and couldn’t get out, I don’t know how to explain it. If I don’t take my medicine though, something is talking in my mind.”

**High school.** Eddie feel like things started to turn around for him in the 11th grade and now he is a senior. He started to participate in activities at school, make friends, take a new medicine that made him feel better, and would move with his aunt and uncle in South Carolina once he graduates.

**Turn-around.** Things for Eddie started to look brighter because he made some new friends in his 11th grade year. When asked to describe his high school experience, Eddie responded, “I was sent with a nice foster family and I have a foster sister and brother who treated me real nice. I still go to a bad school but I say it’s better than my old school because I stay in a gooder neighborhood and I made two good friends.” When asked how this makes him feel, Eddie expressed this change as making him feel good because his friends helped him be good and I take my medicine like I should.”

**Extra-Curricular.** Being in the band helped Eddie to become a better student and enjoy his junior and senior years. “I liked school because I played the bass drums in the band and we got to march in parades and go on trips.” When asked how being in the band made him feel, he responded by saying, “I practiced real hard in band practice but I couldn’t get the beat right sometime and it made me feel bad. I practiced a real long time until I got the beat right so I could march in the parades and stuff and it made me feel good.”

**Medicine.** Eddie has been taking his medicine like he should since he has been with his new family and friends. “The doctor said that I would have to take medicine for the rest of my life so that I would be able to get a job and go to school.”
Family and career. Eddie shared some good news: “When I graduate, my aunt and uncle said that I can come live with them in South Carolina and that made me really happy (smiling).” When asked about his career plans, Eddie was unsure of his plans but would like to attend a trade school one day.

Eddie has experienced a lot of troubles from childhood until now. Although he struggled throughout life and faced internal attributions that he had no control over, his present and future seems to be a little more promising. As long as Eddie takes his medicine as prescribed, he can be a productive citizen and his internal attributions that reflect his external attributions can be minimized.

Theoretical Framework Findings

The three continuums of attribution are locus of causality, stability, and controllability (Harvey & Martinko, 1995, p. 9). Harvey & Martinko (1995) explain: Causality can be internal in which one believes the outcome is a response of one’s own ability or effort (ex: ability, effort, preparation, interest, self-confidence, mood, and attention/concentration) or external which means that the outcome is a response of the task difficulty or luck (e.g., task, luck, other people, and attention/concentration) (Harvey & Martinko, 1995, p10). Stability can be stable which means that the outcome will be the same every time or unstable which means that the outcome will vary each time, and controllability which determines if the outcome is controlled by you (e.g., task difficulty, preparation, effort, and attention/concentration) or external which is controlled by an outside factor (e.g., ability, interest, self-confidence, mood, other people, and attention/concentration) (Harvey & Martinko, 1995, p.10).

This section represents the analysis of the student suspensions in the context of attribution theory. I wanted to find out about the true attributions of the behavior. It is easy to
look at the behaviors and assume external attributions, but I wanted to know about the internal attributions that are difficult to detect without talking to participants. After researching several theories, the attribution theory was the one that fit my study because it “Explains the behavior and wants to know why things happen and the other refer to inferences or ascriptions (e.g., inferring traits from behavior, ascribing blame to a person)” (Malle, 2011, p19). Attribution theory allows you to find the reason for the behavior. Conducting a narrative study allowed me to get a full perspective and get a deeper sense of other attributions that students cannot express. Attribution Theory played a significant role in making this correlation.

Suspensions

**Allen’s suspensions.** During interview two, Allen described three of his most memorable suspensions and discussed what contributed to his suspensions, consequences, and attributions. His most memorable suspensions were punishments for smoking, fighting, and being disrespectful.

**Suspension One.** Allen’s first memorable suspension was getting caught smoking while on school campus; he was influenced by peers and money. For Allen, the memory of this suspension is fresh in his mind because he is reminded every time he sees students smoking. As Allen put it, “I saw people smoking around the school and it made me think back.” Allen was told that he would be given $10.00 if he smoked some marijuana at school. Allen described, “It's because I was with a group of boys and they had influenced me to do it and said they would give me some money. I wasn’t going to take no chances because it was money. They showed me the money and everything.” After his friends talked him into smoking, they left him to take the blame. Allen discussed getting caught by a teacher. He said, “She asked me what I was doing, and I said, ‘Nothing, just sitting here waiting for the bell to ring.’” Then she said, ‘No, cause I
smell smoke.’ Then I said that ‘I don't smoke.’ Then that's when the teacher said, ‘Yes, you do,’ and then she saw my homeboys run up and down the stairs. That’s when she took me to the office.”

Once they reached the office, this is what took place: “She took me to the office, and then they asked me what I was doing and I was like, ‘Nothing.’ Then they caught the group of boys on camera and they called them to the office and they told her who was smoking. The officer asked us what we were smoking and one of the boys had said, ‘Some weed,’ and then he wrote us up.” After being written up, Allen’s mother was called to pick him up and return to school after his five-day suspension. Allen realized the mistake that he made and does not blame the school for his actions but does blame his “homeboys.”

Allen blamed his friends for his smoking which led to his suspension and stated that he was encouraged by his friends to smoke because he would be given monetary gain. Allen also felt the need to belong and feel respected. According to Allen, “I just wanted to do what my friends did.” Above all, Allen battles with voices in his head that tell him to do bad things when he does not take his medication but when he does, he can function normal. Allen admitted that on the day of this incident, he did not take his medicine. Allen’s locus of causality is external. According to the school policy, these types of situations impose stricter punishment with each occurrence. Due to this fact, the incident is considered to be unstable. The controllability of the situation is external. There are outside factors such as other people and interest that attribute to the outcome.

**Suspension Two.** Allen’s second most memorable suspension was when he was fighting. He was involved in many fights but what makes this one most memorable is because he was fighting for initiation into the Tree Gang. Allen was asked if this was a real gang or something
that was made up. His response, “Yeah, I don’t play round.” Allen described the incident, “We were in the classroom and there was this gang and I was in middle school and we got a gang called ‘Tree Gang’ and there’s another group called ‘Ks.’ They put up their gang sign and then we start throwing up ours and they said, ‘Meet us outside,’ and then we went outside and started fighting.”

According to Allen, this is what follows: “After we fought we got caught by Officer Eubanks. He took us to the office and we had to explain that we were fighting because they disrespected our gang. We told Officer Eubanks that we were the Tree Gang which means smoking weed.” Allen was given ten-day suspension pending a tribunal hearing. According to Allen, the tribunal panel found him guilty of gang affiliation and he was sent to the alternative school for the remainder of the school term.

Allen was asked if the incident was a reflection of something that he did wrong and he feels that it’s not his fault. Allen’s reaction to the situation appears to be the result of peer pressure and feeling obligated. “They came in disrespecting our crew, and everybody wanted to know if I was going to fight. I said, ‘Naw,’ and they start boosting me up. I said, ‘Yeah, come on let’s go on outside,’ and then we just started fighting.” When asked to elaborate a little more on the term “crew,” he responded. “They disrespected my crew (gang members). I was the leader.” What do you mean by leader and what are your duties? “People looked at me like I had all the control and I protect my crew and don’t let anybody disrespect it in any kind of way.”.

When Allen was asked if he was hearing voices on the day of the fight, he states, “Yes, that’s what give me power.” Is it safe to say that you did not take medication that day? “I know that I didn’t take medicine that day because I remember after going home, my mom asked me” Although you were the leader of the gang and you feel the need to protect your crew, if you had
taken your medicine, do you think the fight would have still happened? “Naw…I don’t think so but I don’t know because I would still have to protect the Tree Gang.” Allen’s locus of causality was external and the result of peer pressure and obligation to his gang members. He felt that he was not to blame and does not take ownership of the outcome of the situation. According to the school policy, these types of situations impose stricter punishment with each occurrence. Due to this fact, the incident is considered to be unstable and might lead to exposure if the incident occurred again. The controllability of the situation was external. There are outside factors such as other people and interest that attributed to the outcome. More specifically, peer pressure which was his reason for smoking, obligation to his gang which was his reason for fighting, and his teacher which was his reason for being disrespectful.

**Suspension Three.** Allen’s third suspension was because he disrespected the teacher. He remembered this suspension the most because it felt good to him when he did it. Allen shared his experience about the incident. “I had to use the restroom and the teacher would not let me. We started arguing back and forth and I walked out of class. She said that she would write me up.” After walking out of class, the teacher reported Allen to the office and they did an all call for him. Allen explained his reason to the principal by saying, “I was mad because she wouldn't let me use the restroom and I started cursing the teacher.” He admitted that he sometimes disrupted the class but believed that the teacher did not like him and showed favoritism to others. For example: “When I walked in class she always said things like dang and I thought you were out today she never told the other students that.”

Allen felt that this incident was a reflection of something that he did wrong. “I should have never cursed at a teacher; if they tell you do to something you should always follow their rules.” Allen received three days of out-of-school suspension and one day of in-school
suspension. Allen believes that if this occurred again, he would get the same punishment the
next time because this is the second time that he has been disrespectful to a teacher in this
manner. During the first incident he received the same punishment. According to Allen this
type of incident is not as serious as others. According to Allen, “It’s not that bad like drugs or
something.” Allen believed that he could have controlled the incident and if it occurred again he
would do things different. For example: “Instead of cursing her out, I would just ask her nicely
to be excused and if she says no, I will wait until after class.” However, he does feel that the
school could have removed him from that teacher’s class to prevent this from happening again.

Although Allen states that this was an issue that he could have controlled, he blames the
teacher for not letting him use the restroom. This was another incident when Allen was not
properly taking his medication. Also, Allen believed that the teacher treated him unfairly and
showed favoritism between him and the other students. Allen’s locus of causality is external and
is the result of peer pressure and obligation to his gang members. He feels that he is not to blame
and does not take ownership of the outcome of the situation. This incident is considered stable
due to the fact that it has occurred more than once and Allen received the same punishment both
times. The controllability of the situation is both internal and external. There are outside factors
such as other people that attributed to the outcome as well Allen having admitted to taking
responsibility for his actions and the fact that he acknowledged that he could have responded in a
different way.

Conclusion. Allen attributed suspension to obligation to his peers, teacher relationships,
unfair treatment by teachers, and peer pressure. In other words, all of Allen’s attributions are
external. He sees outside influences causing his suspensions. However, as part of our
conversation and my personal knowledge of his circumstances, he also discussed the role of
voices in influencing his behavior, which would be internal. Further, underlying all of Allen’s suspensions is a desire for respect. He is part of a gang because of the need for respect and he felt like his teacher disrespected him so he cursed her out and got suspended. Therefore, Allen’s internal needs interact with external factors in the environment which cause him to receive disciplinary action in the form of suspension. Allen seems to be unaware of these internal factors.

**Kevin’s suspensions.** During interview two, Kevin described three of his most memorable suspensions and discussed what contributed to his suspensions, consequences, and attributions. His most memorable suspensions were punishments for smoking, fighting with a student, and physical assault on a teacher.

**Suspension One.** One of Kevin’s most memorable suspensions were getting suspended for smoking in the boy’s bathroom with the two boys that he met during his middle school years. He remembered this suspension well because it was his very first one. “I got suspended for the first time when I got to middle school. I really didn’t want to smoke but I did it because the boys that I was with did it and they kept telling me to smoke. I didn’t want them to think that I was scared.” He described the incident as follows, “I was cutting class with my friends Robert and Keith. We were in the bathroom smoking and then the janitor smelled some smoke coming from the bathroom. The janitor went and told the principal and the school officer and they came and got us.”

Kevin was lucky this time and did not get into the trouble that he could have but instead was suspended and his mother was called. “I was supposed to go to the alternative school but since this was my first time getting into trouble, the principal only suspended me for five days.”
If this same incident happens again, he feels that the punishment will be worse like the alternative school.

Kevin does not feel that he is the blame for smoking but blame his friends. Kevin feels that this incident happened because his friends kept telling him to do it. He feels that he would probably do the same thing if it happened again. When asked why, he responds, “I still wouldn’t want them to think that I’m scared.” He attributes this smoking to peer pressure. Kevin’s locus of causality is external and the result of peer pressure and the need to belong. He feels that he is not to blame and does not take ownership for the outcome of the situation. This incident is considered unstable due to the fact that he should have been assigned to the alternative school but instead was given out-of-school suspension since this was his first incident. Kevin believed that another occurrence would send him to the alternative school. The controllability of the situation is external due to the fact that this was a situation controlled by outside factors such as other people.

**Suspension Two.** The second most memorable suspension was fighting another student. This is memorable for Kevin because the boy kept bothering him and when they fought, he made his nose bleed. Kevin shared his experience, “This boy always said stuff to me in the cafeteria during the morning time and he had his boys with him. I told my mom and she would come to the school and report it.” Although Allen’s mom reported the incidents, the boys continued to bother Kevin and he could no longer take it. “I got fed up with the bull and I just got up one day while he wasn’t looking and I started beating him in the face.”

Kevin received a punishment that he considered unfair since his mother reported the taunting every time it happened. However, since he passed the first hit, he was suspended for ten days. Although Kevin passed the first hit, he attributes the fight to being provoked. “I never
bothered this boy but he kept on messing with me and I snapped (fought) on him.” He blamed the school for not listening to him and his mother. If the incident was to happen again, he would not do anything different. “Man…they didn’t listen to my mom and she tried to talk to them. If he didn’t bother me, I wouldn’t have fought him.” Kevin’s locus of causality is external. The outcome is the result of being provoked and the school not taking his complaints seriously. He believed that he is not to blame but instead the administration team is. This incident is considered unstable. Every situation is different and the punishment could vary. According to Kevin, his mother questioned the principal about the punishment and any future incidents and the principal explained that each situation is handled on an individual basis. The controllability of the situation is external and there are outside factors such as other people that attributed to the outcome.

**Suspension Three.** Kevin’s third memorable suspension took place not long after the second suspension and not long after his incident with the law. He would get suspended for trying to fight the teacher. “After the police beat me up, it’s like certain teachers had it in for me at school. Not one teacher but a lot of teachers. I would miss a lot of days from school because of comments that teachers would say to me.” For example: “You know you robbed that house, you made that police do that, I be wanting to hit you myself so I know you provoked that officer.” He described in detail (looking sad). “So much was on me that day. I didn’t want to be there because of what happened and because teachers were bothering me. This one teacher never did like me because he believed that I was spoiled and a momma’s boy. Every day he made comments until I just got tired and couldn’t take it anymore. He made fun and told the students not to talk to me because my mom would sue them too. One day he was saying things and I jumped up and pushed him. The students started acting silly and someone called the office.”
According to Kevin, “I was taken to the office by the officer and they called the teacher in a different office to see what happened. Because I pushed a teacher, I was suspended for ten days pending tribunal. Before tribunal, they investigated and talked to other students about what they witnessed that day and every day.” Kevin was sent back to his home school but was suspended for ten days. The teacher had to go work at another school after investigations were completed. Although Kevin attributed his actions to the teacher bothering him and the incident with the law, he felt bad about what happened. “I never want to fight a teacher but I feel like he made me do it.” He did not feel that his behavior was a reflection on his suspension. He believed that the school could do better by protecting the students more. If this incident happened again, he hoped that he could react different but is not sure. Kevin’s locus of causality is external. The outcome is the result of being treated unfairly by the teacher and the fact that outside issues played a part of his treatment in school by the teachers. This incident is considered unstable. According to the school policies, physical assault on a teacher or staff can lead to more serious consequences such as expulsion and/or arrest. The controllability of the situation is external and there are outside factors such as other people that attributed to the outcome.

**Conclusion.** Kevin attributed suspension to peer pressure, teacher bullying, other students, and being provoked. In other words, all of Kevin’s attributions are external. He sees outside influences causing his suspensions. However, as part of our conversation and my personal knowledge of his circumstances, he also discussed the role of suicide that resulted in depression and police violence which resulted in him acting out. Further, underlying all of Allen’s suspensions is a desire for respect and the need for therapy. Kevin acts out because he feels the need of respect from his teacher and the police. The suicide of his friend and his
attempt brought about the need for therapy. Therefore, Kevin’s internal needs interact with external factors in the environment which cause him to receive disciplinary action in the form of suspension. Kevin seems to be unaware of these internal factors.

**Mark’s Suspensions.** During interview two, Mark described three of his most memorable suspensions and discussed what contributed to his suspensions, consequences, and attributions. His most memorable suspensions were cutting, fighting, and leaving school campus.

**Suspension One.** Mark’s first memorable suspension was being in the hall and getting caught. This suspension is memorable because Mark met a young lady that he was interested in and decided to cut class to talk to her. “One day I started talking to this girl and was so happy that I didn’t want to go to class. The principal told me to go to the office.” Mark refused to tell the principal why he was in the hallway but was willing to take a suspension or in school to talk with the young lady.

Mark was given a referral that resulted in a one-day suspension. He feels that what he did is something that he could have controlled by just going to class. He does not blame the principal but feels that he/she could have done something different. “They could have given me another chance.” Mark attributed getting suspended to wanting to talk with a girl. “If I had not saw that girl I wouldn’t have been in the hall and then I wouldn’t have gotten suspended.” Mark’s locus of causality is internal. The outcome is the result of effort and interest in talking to the female student. This incident is considered stable. According to the school policies, cutting is considered a more minor infraction and normally is given in-school-suspension or a day of out-of-school suspension. The controllability of the situation is internal and there are factors such as effort and attention that attributed to the outcome.
Suspension Two. Mark’s second suspension was fighting. He described this incident anger and being provoked. “It’s like I saw red I get so mad quick. I don't like anybody to talk to me any kind of way.” He remembered this well because it made him feel hot on the inside. Mark reflected on the moment, “This boy is my age and he tried me. He thought that he was going to talk to me any kind of way like I was an animal. He kept talking thrash and I just fought him; we were at a football game.” After the fight, the Richmond County Police Department put them in handcuffs because they were at an after school activity. They then turned them over to the school principal to handle the situation.

After the incident, Mark was banned from playing ball for the next two games and was suspended for five days. He believed that the school could have done differently and let him play in the games and maybe gave him community service instead of suspending him. Mark was provoked and his temper got the best of him. He feels that it’s not something that he could have controlled and that his temper was the blame for him acting the way that he did. “Sometimes I get real angry when people do certain things to me and I snap (fight).” Mark’s locus of causality is internal and external. His temper was a part of the internal attribution and other people were a part of his external attribution. This incident is considered is unstable and the outcome can vary with each incident. The controllability of the situation is external and there are factors such as mood and other people that attributed to the outcome.

Suspension Three. Mark’s third most memorable suspension was walking off of campus. According to Mark, “I walked off school campus and I went to McDonald's. I was REAL hungry, so I went to McDonald's and got something to eat. I walked back to school with the people; I told them we shouldn't have left. We went up there and then the principal caught us in the bathroom with the food.”
Mark was suspended for three days and feel that if it happened again, the consequence will be worse. “Some students got suspended for leaving campus walking to McDonald’s one day and they were suspended for ten days.” He blamed himself for the incident that he was in control of it. “My head was hurting so bad and I was so hungry because I had not eaten breakfast or dinner the night before.” He admitted that his actions were a reflection of his suspension. “You know, nobody supposed to be walking off school campus. It was my choice and I choose to walk off school campus to get something to eat.” Mark’s locus of causality is internal. The outcome is the result of preparation and interest. This incident is considered stable. According to the school policies, leaving school campus will result in school suspension. The controllability of the situation is internal and there are factors such as effort and preparation that attributed to the outcome.

**Conclusion.** Mark attributed his suspensions to wanting to talk to a female student, his own interest, and his desire to not attend class. Mark had factors such as his temper and mood that was provoked by other students. The students were also another attribute to his behavior and outcome. In other words, Mark attributions were internal or external. However, he only sees the outside influences causing his suspensions. As part of our conversation and my personal knowledge of his circumstances, he also discussed his internal factors and blamed himself for the suspensions. He blamed others for his temper and mood which provoked him to fight. Further, underlying all of Mark suspensions is a desire for respect, attention, and his own desires. Therefore, Mark’s internal needs interact with external factors in the environment which cause him to receive disciplinary action in the form of suspension. Mark is unaware that his temper and mood are internal and result in fights, which are external.
**Eddie’s suspensions.** During interview two, Eddie described three of his most memorable suspensions and discussed what contributed to his suspensions, consequences, and attributions. His most memorable suspensions were stabbing, stealing, and fighting.

**Suspension One.** One of Eddie’s most memorable suspensions was when he got suspended for stabbing another student in the shoulder with a pencil. According to Eddie, he does not know what made the event most memorable. Eddie described the incident. “It’s the same one that I already told you. I was in class one day and I was not bothering this boy. I told him to leave me alone but he wouldn’t and the teachers would not make him stop. One of the voices told me to just stab him and I did. The teacher ran to get help and everybody came running and called the ambulance.”

Eddie was suspended for ten days pending tribunal and had to attend the alternative school for the whole school term. “Before I went to the alternative, I had to stay at the children’s psychological ward for six weeks.” Eddie felt that he was not in control of the incident and don’t know what he would do if it happened again. “I already know that I’m crazy if I don’t take my medicine like I’m supposed to and can’t help what I do.” Eddie is not sure if the school could have helped out. “The principal or nobody can help me when I don’t take my medicine.”

Eddie’s locus of causality is external. The outcome is the result of voices and other people such as the teacher and students. This incident is considered unstable. If an incident such as this happened again, the consequence would be worse and he could serve time in jail and could get expelled from school. The controllability of the situation is external is controlled by factors such his disability, medicine, voices, and people.

**Suspension Two.** Eddie described his second memorable suspension and he remembered it because he wanted a phone just like it. “I was in class one day and the teacher always left her
cell phone on the desk. Every day I wanted to take it but she always walked back in when. She left it one day and a fight broke out and I took it off her desk while nobody was looking and walked out the class. They called the phone the next period and that’s how I got caught.” You actually answered the phone? If you had stolen the phone, what would make you answer it? “I don’t know.” Were you on medication that day? “No.” Can you tell me more? “They came to my class and got the phone from me.”

Eddie’s locus of causality is internal. The outcome is the result of his desires and interest of the teacher’s phone. This incident is considered unstable. If an incident such as this happened again, Eddie consequences would be worse since it would be his second offense. The controllability of the situation is internal controlled by factors such preparation and his determination and effort to get the phone. However, Eddie blamed the teacher for leaving the phone on the desk which is considered an external attribute.

Suspension Three. Eddie remembered his third suspension because he beat up two big boys at the same time. “My friends and I were walking in the hood and we started arguing with some boys that went to our school. The next day they tried to jump me when I was by myself.” Eddie admitted to winning the fight because he always has people with him that nobody else can see.

Eddie was suspended for three days from school and shared that the same incident would not happen again if he is medicated on that day. According to Eddie, he is not the blame for the fight and could not control the situation because they were bothering him. “I was minding my own business until they tried to jump me and I fought them.”

Conclusion. Eddie attributed his suspensions to external factors such as medicine, voices, students, his disability, teacher, and being provoked. He had internal factors such as his
own desire, effort, and determination that attributed to his suspensions. In other words, Eddie’s attributions were internal and external. However, he only sees the outside influences causing his suspensions. As part of our conversation and my personal knowledge of his circumstances, he saw all of these factors as external and was not able to differentiate between the two. He blames others for his behaviors and suspensions. Further, underlying all of Eddie’s suspensions is a desire for love, care, and the need to belong. Therefore, Eddie’s internal needs interact with external factors in the environment which cause him to receive disciplinary action in the form of suspension. Eddie is unaware that his internal factors are a reflection of his behavior.

**Conclusion**

The suspension incidents that these four African American males experienced in this study have been presented through re-telling from actual interviews. This allowed me to see similarities and differences across participants.

The findings in this study show that each participant had a different relationship with the medication. Their behavior outcomes were dependent upon the way that the medication was taken. Most of the participants attributed the outcome to external factors although and some could not identify with the internal attributions that were displayed. The significance of the data is that the participants are not aware of the internal attributions that can attribute to their behavior; they can only identify with the external factors. There are internal factors such as emotional or mental issues that students are not aware of as well as internal factors such as interest that they are aware of. Students need the expert support of a therapist or behavior counselor to help them understand the internal struggles that are taking place in their lives.

External factors such as teachers, administrators, and peers are sometimes looked at as the attributions for African American male suspensions. However, there are serious internal
attributions for African American males misbehaving that lead to suspensions and there are the external attributes that administrators choose to ignore.
Chapter Five: Discussion of Findings—Research Question and Review

The purpose of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the perceptions of African American males and suspension in grades 9-12. The stories shared about their real lived experiences assisted the researcher in accumulating data to answer the following question:

1. How do four African American males in grades 9-12 attribute their suspensions?

This chapter provides themes which allowed me to not only explore the commonalities but to investigate what the external and internal attributions were. My theoretical framework supported the common themes among the participant and will be discussed in this chapter. These themes will assist the researcher in understanding the overall perception of suspensions and attributions from all the participants and help determine if the commonalities play a significant role in their suspension. Each theme is described in this chapter. The different themes are a sense of belonging, medication, and extracurricular activities and academics. This chapter will connect the following findings with the literature: teachers, needs not met, absent father, difficult family circumstances, personal desires, and difficulties/challenges. Also, this chapter will provide and explain the implications for research and practice as well as my action plan for the use of my research findings.

A Desire to Belong

This study results shows that the majority of the participants wanted to be a part or belong to something. The data from the narratives prove that participants engaged in certain behaviors because they felt a certain way in doing so. Being a part of a gang for Allen made him feel important and respected. Although he was aware of consequences when participating in certain activities, it was more important to him to represent his gang and keep the respect that comes along with that title. Being a part of the football team and winning made Mark feel
special. He enjoyed the attention that he received after the win of a game and especially when he was the reason for the win. He enjoyed being congratulated and being the talk of the school.

Eddie’s narrative data shows that his living situation was not stable for the majority of his young life. He lacked the love, care, and attention that most students have. His desire for love resulted in hanging with people that he felt was more like him. He felt bonded because they were hungry or did not have money just like him. Despite the consequences of his negative activities, he would rather feel love and belong. When Eddie participated in unlawful activities, he attributed it to the lack of medication since that is when he gets into trouble. In contrast to the other participants’ desire to belong, Kevin had the love and support of his family. However, the lack of rules and being stern at home resulted in unfavorable consequences. Regardless of the true attribute, his perceptions of his behaviors were outside factors.

**Medication**

All of the participants with the exception of Kevin were prescribed medication during some time in their school years. Allen, Mark, and Eddie were prescribed medicine during an early age to aid in their diagnosed disability. However, Allen and Eddie were not persistent with taking the medicine and Mark took it for a short period because his mother felt that he did not need it. For half of the participants, they perceived that the lack of medication was one of the factors that contributed to their behavior.

Some participants of this study were prescribed medication at an early age to assist with controlling mental issues, lack of concentration, or behavior. Eddie’s medication was beneficial in controlling the issues in which it was prescribed and as long as it was taken as prescribed. The perception of the participant of his negative behaviors was when he was not properly medicated; when he was medicated, he perceived himself to be tolerable. For Eddie, he did not take the
medicine most of the times because he had used all of it and switching from foster home to foster home, it would sometimes get lost. However, there were times when he was in control and chose not to take it. Mark was prescribed medication due to his MID, which had an effect on his academics and behavior. Although the medication did not produce any negative results for him such as side effects or academic failure, his mother chose to stop the medication early in his school years since she perceived that he did not need it. Despite the temper that he has when provoked or challenged. In contrast to the usual benefit of medications, Allen was prescribed the medication Ritalin which resulted in him doing abnormal things. He and his mother perceived that the medication intensified his behavior and was not beneficial. At this time, the medication was changed and the new one aided with his behavior as long as it was taken as prescribed. However, there were times that Allen chose not to take the medicine because he did not like the way it made him feel.

“African-American children tend to be overrepresented in the disability categories of mild and moderate mental retardation and severe emotional disturbance while also being underrepresented in programs for the gifted and talented” (The Civil Rights Project, 2002; National Research Council, 2002; U.S. Department of Education). Based on the literature and data on this study, there is a pattern related to African American males and diagnosis of special needs and the reliance on medication to treat it. Medication for boys is sometimes helpful but not always.

The participants with the exception of Mark attributed their behaviors to external factors. The school’s administrator perceived the actions of the participants to be internal factors and therefore discipline according to that. Administrators rarely investigate further what the
participants perceive as external factors that cause the behavior; this can result in a lesser punishment.

**Extracurricular Activities and Academics**

Extracurricular activities were essential for three of four of the participants. The data show that being a part of extra-curricular activities allowed students to feel like they can be successful at something. Although it was at the bare minimum, being in extra-curricular activities motivated students to achieve academically. For Allen, it calmed him down and made him feel special. The data support the fact that extra-curricular activities were a way to help release negative feelings. For example, Mark has a temper and playing football helps to release his anger. For Eddie, being in extra-curricular activities allowed him to achieve academically and become a better student. Being able to participate in band and play the drums encouraged him to work hard academically and in the band.

The researcher’s data were consistent with the findings of Metsäpelto & Pulkkinen and Senn. Metsäpelto & Pulkkinen (2012) posit that when students are involved in extracurricular activities, there can be positive outcomes in school such as performing well academically. It is imperative to find ways to interest African American males while in school because it helps them to stay involved and feel like they belong (Senn, 2012, p99).

**Student Leadership**

This study’s data support the need for student leadership. All four of the participants either lacked love, attention, respect, care, or the need to belong, which resulted in taking part in unlawful or behavior that led to negative outcomes. School professionals must support and encourage ethnic minority students to become widely involved in school leadership roles and
activities. This involvement will help to foster an environment that promotes human growth and development and also aid the institution in retaining these students (Lavant & Terrell, 1994).

**Theoretical Framework and Discussion of Findings**

Attribution theory describes how individuals develop causal explanations for behaviors and outcomes, and how their causal explanations influence subsequent reactions (Harvey & Martinko, 1995, p71). It asserts that individuals attempt to seek out meaning when trying to determine causes of events, outcomes, and behavior (Weiner, 1974). This section will correlate findings from the study and will be supported by the attribution theory. Weiner (2014) posits that the process of attribution must be: observed/perceived, determined to be intentional, and be attributed to an internal or external cause. Three continuums of attribution are the locus of causality, stability, and controllability (Harvey & Martinko, 1995, p. 71).

**Causality** can be internal in which one believes the outcome is a response to one's own ability or effort or external which means that the outcome is a response to the task difficulty or luck (Harvey & Martinko, 1995, p. 71). The researcher’s data show that some attributes were internal because the result of the behavior was something of their own choosing and they had control over the situation. **Stability** can be stable or unstable which means that the outcome will be the same every time, or the outcome will vary each time (Harvey & Martinko, 1995). The data show that if participants engaged in the same type situation in the future, the outcome would be the same or harsher. As long as the participants were with that group that motivated them to achieve, they never got into trouble and received the accolades desired. **Controllability** determines if the outcome is controlled by you or the external factor (Harvey & Martinko, 1995, p. 71). Although some things were perceived by participants as external, the participants knowingly or unknowingly exerted internal factors as a result of the behavior.
Teachers. The participants in this study perceived their teachers to be an attributing factor in some type of way. Allen was denied going to the restroom and walked out of class because of the teacher’s refusal. Kevin attributed his behavior to being taunted by a teacher because of an unfortunate incident that had taken place outside of school. Regardless of their perceptions, they were suspended due to the result of the behavior. The researcher’s data support that of Noguera. When African-American male students feel that the teacher cares about them and their needs, they will be receptive and cooperate in the school environment (Noguera, 2003, p. 6).

Needs not met. Some of the participant’s participated in activities that resulted in their suspensions because of their needs not being fulfilled. Allen needed to use the restroom and asked for permission but the teacher refused. The teacher’s refusal resulted in Allen walking out of class and disrespecting the teacher. In another incident, Allen was suspended for smoking due to the fact that he wanted ten dollars that was promised to him if he smoked. Mark’s need was food and the fact that he was hungry resulted in him leaving campus to get food from a local fast-food restaurant. Kevin stole his mother’s brand new car during the night and wrecked it. His desire to steal the car and joy-ride was more exciting for him than the outcome of the behavior. Even though they were aware of the possible consequences, their need at that time was more important than the consequence.

Absent father. When the participants were asked about the important role models in their lives, they all discussed important female role models in their lives such as mother, grandmother, or a family friend. Although mention was made of their fathers, they didn’t depict them as an important figure. However, at some point in the narrative they made mention of the desire for their fathers to be in their lives. Allen loved his mother but he expressed the
disappointment in being raised with and by many females in his family. Mark’s father was unstable in his life and enjoyed the time that he did get to spend with him. Eddie never had a relationship with his father because both his parents were on drugs. He desperately longed for the relationship and love from a father. The data show that the behavior of some of the incidents appears to be external but is indeed internal factors that resulted in the behavior. Literature supports the data in showing that students need psychological services and counseling when dealing with mental or emotional issues. Schools have trained professionals or access to professionals who can provide mental health services and psychological support for students. Mental health services for struggling students are pertinent. Miller (n.d) shares that a thorough review of the literature consistently shows that therapy for children results in beneficial impact on the lives of children and their families; in recent years, a shift has occurred towards identifying efficacious treatments for children who have certain behavioral, emotional, and social problems. The researcher’s data agree with Miller; the participants display psychological, mental, or emotional issues and can benefit from services.

**Difficult family circumstances.** Family circumstances had an effect on all of the participants in one way or another. Kevin was in a situation that allowed him to be spoiled and his family condoned all of his negative behavior. Although his father was not in the picture, he never mentioned the desire or the longing for his love. Instead, his mother and family gave him what he thought was needed. Allen had a desire to be loved by his father and wanted for him to be a part of his life but instead was treated unfairly when he visited him. He admitted that he liked the females in his family but would rather have that fatherly love and support. Mark was raised by both his mother and grandmother and his father did not play a major role in his life. His grandmother was the backbone of the family and did whatever she could to assist their
mother in raising them. However, his grandmother died leaving his mother to take care of him and his siblings. Eddie was in a situation that brought about bullying and abuse from his foster siblings. He was transferred from foster home to foster home in hopes of finding a family that would love and care for him. Both his parents were on drugs, and when he was born, he suffered and continued to suffer from the effect of being born a drug baby.

All of the boys came from difficult family circumstances such as absent fathers, being born to parents on drugs, foster homes, bullying, and abuse from family members. According to Price, Chiapa, & Walsh (2013), family and society play a significant role in children’s lives beginning at the early stages. Farmer (2006) informs us that African American males are faced with the difficult challenges that come society and politics. These challenges matter because they affect boys’ academics and their behavior in school, contributing to their suspensions, albeit in an indirect way.

**Personal desires.** Allen felt important and needed because he is the head of a gang. This title makes him feel respected by others. The fact that Kevin won a lawsuit and was awarded money adds to the problem of being spoiled and his family condoning his wrong. After the success of the lawsuit, his desire to be in charged has only magnified. Although Mark passes his classes and is good at sports, he has a bad temper, is angry a lot, and does not like to be treated like a child. Mark has an eight-month-old that needs his support. All of Eddie's life, he has wanted to be loved and feel cared about. His desire finally came true, and he is with a loving family. After graduation, there is a chance that his aunt and uncle will let him live with them.

All of the participants have personal desires of their own that are important as a part of their school lives. The participants’ own desires varied but included feeling needed, feeling respect, feeling empowered, feeling loved, and feeling like an adult. It is interesting to note that
their personal desires are all related to internal attributes, not external attributes. This is important because the participants all felt like they were missing something. The voids that they described in their lives are being filled in various ways. For all of the participants, the gaps are being filled in ways that can be described as negative. More specifically, the boys act out in a manner that causes disciplinary actions to be taken against them. Gregory & Thompson (as cited in Skiba and colleagues, 2002) found that African American middle school students, as compared with European American middle school students, were more likely to be issued referrals for subjective reasons, such as defiance and disrespect. Gregory & Thompson (as cited in Wentzel, 2002) found that teachers perceived African American students as more defiant, disrespectful, and rule-breaking than other groups.

Gregory & Thompson (as cited in Gregory and Weinstein, 2008) state:

When considering both African American and European American high school students with discipline referrals, African American students were more likely than European American students to be referred for reasons related to defiance. Together, these studies suggest that African American youth is at-risk of being perceived as defiant by their teachers and, consequently, issued discipline referrals and sent out of class, thereby missing important instructional time (p. 387).

**Difficulty/Challenges.** Kevin has been in many challenging situations in his young adult life. He was beaten up by the police with the police stick and flashlight. This left him with many bruises that left his face a little disfigured. Kevin witnessed the suicide of his friend that he can never get out of his mind. He smoked weed and has tried to commit suicide himself because he feels that he is to blame. One of Mark’s challenge is his friends and peer pressure.
The fact that he had a baby and was ordered to pay child support, he is given the challenge of working, attending school, and taking care of a baby.

All of the participants experienced stressful situations that influenced their behavior. Stressors include suicide, law enforcement, friends, family responsibility, and marijuana use. In this study, stressors caused students to feel depressed, anxious and worried. “Depression, anxiety, and worry can cause students to be distracted, unfocused, and can lead to anger or frustration” (Paxton, Robinson, Shah, & Schoeny, 2004, p. 7).

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the perceptions of African American males and suspension in grades 9-12. Literature about the suspension rate among African-American males has proven to be disproportionate over the past decades. Due to this fact, this study was conducted to gain a deeper insight about suspensions and African-American male perceptions about it. The interview narratives of the four students allowed them to feel free and share some of the most intimate details of their lives and school experiences. This study displays the perceptions of their suspension and describing in detail every aspect of the consequence. The participants discussed challenges as well as positive supports such as medicine and extra-curricular activities to help with their behaviors.

The findings of the researcher agree with the conclusion of authors Pelman & Gnagy. Overall, participants in the study described two solutions that help support positive behavior: medication and extracurricular activities. Medication can be helpful. According to Pelham & Gnagy (1999) stimulant medications have been shown to improve the behavior of children. “As a sole form of treatment, stimulant medication yielded many superior outcomes than did psychosocial treatment alone” (Safer, 2000, p. 4).
Sommers-Tackett (as cited in Pelham & Gnagy, 1999) explains:

This type of medication has the benefits to calm the students and eliminate the negative characteristics that come with ADD or ADHD. Although there are benefits of taking medication, they are not beneficial for all. Only 70-80% of children with ADHD respond positively to a stimulant regimen.

Waschbusch, Kipp & Pelham (1998) posit that children respond differently to different medications, as well as different doses of the same medication, stimulants can have unpredictable effects between and within children.

This study has informed the researcher in many ways and the data show how schools can better support the students in helping to reduce the behavior issues. The data shows that extracurricular activities had a positive effect on students with behavior issues. It would be beneficial if schools encouraged activities at school as a way to assist with behavior. Most of the participants enjoyed extra-curricular activities. “Extracurricular activities serve the same goals and functions as the required and elective courses in the curriculum. However, they provide experiences that are not included in formal courses of study, and they allow students to apply the knowledge that they have learned in other classes and acquire concepts of democratic life” (Lunnenburg, 2010, p. 4). This is also consistent with the findings of the researcher.

Extracurricular activities have many positive effects on education. The positive effects that extracurricular activities have on students are behavior, better grades, school completion, positive aspects to becoming successful adults, and a social aspect.

This participant’s narrative has raised an awareness to investigate the external factors that students perceive to be a part of their behavior as well as providing the opportunity for teachers and administrators to be trained in ways that can assist them in dealing with behavior issues of
students and becoming knowledgeable about attributions. It is just as important to evaluate the internal causes just as well as the external. Sometimes those internal causes can be mental or psychological and should be taken into account when assigning discipline. However, if administrators took the time to evaluate the external causes instead of the wrong internal causes such as their own desire or determination, the consequence can be less threatening.

This study of African American male perceptions of suspension adds to the literature by informing about attributions that cannot be seen unless you have an in-depth conversation with the student, challenges in the home and school that African American males might face on a daily basis, medication that might be beneficial or detrimental that the student might be taking, training for teachers and administrators, and positive supports that can assist in the behavior of African American males. This study is beneficial because it displays the need for a better awareness about African American males and the attribution of the behavior. This awareness is beneficial because it can assist the both the student and teacher with better coping skills, interventions, and training.

**Implications for Practice**

**Find other interventions beyond medication.** There are other interventions besides medication that can be effective. Dappen & Iserhagen (2006) state that mentoring has been proven to provide benefits to youth. Day-Vines & Day-Hairston (2005) posit that counseling promotes healthy pro-social behaviors among urban African American male adolescents. Miller (n.d) posits that mental health counselors are beneficial because it impacts the lives of children and their families.

**Encourage students to participate in extracurricular activities.** Herbert Marsh did a comparison of students who did not participate in extracurricular activities. Marsh (1992) found
that students who did not participate in extracurricular activities had a major difference in social and self-concept, the effects of participation on social and academic self-concepts are significant, and participation in extracurricular activities leads to increased commitment to school and school values, which leads indirectly to increased academic success.

Data from the researcher's study support the finding of Marsh. Although still low, three-fourths of the participants showed an increase in academics because of the band or sports. The extra-curricular activities motivated the students to achieve to stay eligible to participate in sports.

**Increase teachers’ understanding about medication and student support.** Pfiffner, George, DuPaul, & Barkley (n.d) states that the educational success of children with ADHD involves the presence of teachers actively and willingly engaged in the process of working with students with ADHD, and an administration that supports identification and intervention for ADHD.

**Offer to train staff, administrators, and students.** Proper training on conflict resolution, de-escalation skills, and improved coping strategies are beneficial for both student and staff. Research posits that with these mechanisms, students will have positive alternatives that can be used to help deal with situations and will not resort to measures that will have unfavorable outcomes. In a narrative study conducted by Gibson & Haight (2013) parents explained that when their children were suspended, teachers were negligent in addressing the problems underlying their children’s misbehavior.

**Offer counseling and have school social workers accessible.** If counselors and social workers are readily available, students can address inevitable issues that arise. Research shows
that school social workers and counselors are a valuable asset to schools and have expertise when establishing rapports with individuals and groups.

**Provide culturally responsive discipline practices.** Schools should provide culturally responsive discipline practices. Monroe (2005) posits that many classroom and institutional disciplinary approaches suffer from a basic inattention to cultural context. Because common techniques and expectations are moored in middle class, white norms, numerous approaches fail to prove useful with students of color.

The data supports that teachers might not be familiar or receptive of the African-American male cultures way of expressing themselves. Due to this issue, students are written up for minor infractions that often result in the disciplinary measures which is normally out-of-school suspension. If teachers and administrators are knowledgeable about the African-American male way of expression, the number of suspensions might be reduced. Talking with students before giving a referral is important. Their intent may be different than what was perceived. The behavior could be their cultures way of saying of saying, “Good Morning” or “Thank you.”

**Implications for Research**

**Examine students’ medication taking behaviors.** It is important to know why a student might or might not be taking medication. This can be valuable information. The medication might make them feel a certain way that can have the opposite effect of its intentions.

**Examine literature on medications that students are taking.** Being knowledgeable about the medication that a student is taking can provide the teacher with information about side effects that can affect the student academically and mentally. Some medication has psychotic effects, and the teacher/nurse should be aware of it.
Conduct a broader study. There is a great deal of literature that supports the behavioral and academic effects of suspensions, but there is a lack of literature that supports social and emotional effects. Broader study to see how suspension affects the social and emotional lives of African American males and suspension is recommended.

Improve teachers’ relationships with African-American male students. African American males feel that a good student–teacher relationship is important for academic growth. According to Hughes & Kwok (2007), participants stressed the need for strong teacher–student relationships for students to achieve academic success.

Additional and in-depth research is needed on attributions as it relates to behaviors and high school suspensions that negatively affect academics and the ability for students to become productive citizens due to being suspended which can lead to outcomes such as dropping out of high school. Also, based on this research, more is needed to evaluate serious internal attribution factors such as mental issues, physical/mental abuse, and economic factors that contribute to the outcome that resulted from the behavior.

Research on Outlets for Students with Behavior Issues

This research shows that there are alternatives such as extra-curricular set in place that can assist with students and behavior issues. The data show that school activities assist in coping with the behavior. However, there are other alternatives and research on other outlets needs to be investigated further in order to better serve the student behavior issues.

Action Plan

This study will be beneficial for administrators and teachers. At the completion of this study, I will share this information with my principal in hopes that training can be provided for teachers. This training will allow the teacher and administrator to become knowledgeable about
how to support African American male students with behavior and mental issues. This will allow them the opportunity to learn about interventions and alternatives. The training will also inform the teacher that the attribution of the behavior is not always external but can be internal as well.Knowing whether or not the action is external or internal will allow for different intervention strategies and consequences. My desire for my research is to obtain approval to visit different schools to share with teachers and administrators about in-depthness of a student’s behavior as well as the seriousness of internal and external attributions.

Once the need and benefit for a social worker is proven, it is my hope that a social worker is provided for the school. A social worker can provide services that the teacher sometimes can't provide. He/she can make visits to the home if a critical situation such as abuse or neglect is brought to attention. The social worker can locate resources for students that don't have food, clothing, or a place to stay. When academics are being affected, the social worker can help identify the root of the attribution. It is my desire that this research will help bring about a change for the African American males at the school as well as the teachers and administrators.

Through this research, it is my hope to bring about consideration for a Certified Mental Health Counselor to be provided at the schools. Often, the school counselor is not certified or experienced in dealing with mental and emotional issues but only academics. I hope that this research will bring about a positive change and can help reduce the suspension rate if these actions are followed.
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Appendices

Appendix A—Letter of Support from Administrator

Glenn Hills High School

Charles L. Givens, Sr. Ed. S., Principal

2840 Glenn Hills Drive Augusta, GA 30906 (706) 796-4924 / (706) 796-4932 Fax

Assistant Principals

Valerie Squire-Kelly, Ed. D., and Jené Kinnitt, Ed.D

March 19, 2015

TO: North Eastern University

Re: Understanding African American Male Perceptions of Suspension: A Narrative Study

Dear Bridgette Jackson,

I’m aware of your proposed research project. I understand the involvement of potential participants and staff in obtaining data as it relates to the study. Also, I understand that in order to accomplish this project, you will need to send out consent forms, approach potential participants, and interview participants after school at designated times and location.

As the principal, I grant you permission to seek out these potential participants and give my permission to contact parents for this study. I understand your research and support the involvement in this project and look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Mr. Charles Givens, Ed.S.
May 13, 2015

Dear Ms. Jackson:

I am pleased to inform you that your request for research titled

“Understanding African American Male Perceptions of Suspension: A Narrative Study”

and Instruction has been approved with certain stipulations outlined below. This authorization simply means that you are able to conduct your research as described in your application.

Stipulations of this approval include:

• It is acceptable for you to send your parental survey home as long as: o It is sealed for the parent/guardian to receive; and
  o You provide a return envelope so that the survey can be sealed as the student returns it.

• For purposes of this specific research, please make certain that you clearly identify yourself in your capacity as a researcher rather than as an agent of the RCSS.

• Further, you will need to work closely with the building-level supervisors to ensure that: o Instructional time is not being negatively impacted; and,
School personnel are not being subjected to undue burdens as a result of this research being conducted.

Please note that the RCSS follows these general procedural guidelines:

1. Research that is approved by the Department of Student Services does not guarantee that schools, departments, school personnel, parents, students, community leaders, others, etc. will participate. Participation is strictly voluntary and should be neither expected nor anticipated. Each entity will need to agree to participate, and they have every right to decline to do so without consequence;

2. No research involving RCSS students will be approved without the express written consent of Parent/Guardian. In other words, Parent/Guardian must “opt-in” in writing prior to being included in any outside research;

3. No research will be approved that interferes with instructional time;

4. The district will assume no responsibility for accepting, disseminating, collecting, warehousing, and/or forwarding of any materials for researcher;

   5. All costs associated with approved research are the sole responsibility of the researcher;

6. No RCSS equipment or resources are to be used to facilitate your research. These include (but are not limited to): a. Email;

   b. Fax Machines;

   c. Copiers;

   d. Phones/Long Distance;

   e. General Office Supplies;

   f. Postage;
g. Stationary/Letterhead.

7. A copy of the approved research proposal and completed research is kept on file at the Department of Student Services for review;

8. Once research proposals are approved, any modifications to the approved methods, research instruments, populations, score, etc. are to be immediately brought to the attention of the Department of Student Services prior to continuing with said research;

9. Parents and staff members shall have the right to inspect such studies, and materials used in connection with such studies, on request;

10. Any data collection, reporting, and/or related research activity undertaken within, or by the Richmond County School System shall protect the privacy of students, parents, and employees;

11. Researchers are required to submit electronic copies of their competed research to the Department of Student Services upon successful completion of their defenses;

12. The RCSS reserves the right to revoke Research Approval at any time. For your information, the Student Services Office is maintaining a copy of your approved research application which is available for review by RCSS personnel.

I wish you much success with your research!

Yours most truly,

Maria M. Brown, Ed.D. Director of Student Services

Richmond County School System
Appendix C—Letter to Data Gatekeeper

Dear Mrs. Mullins,

I will be conducting a study on Understanding African American Male Perceptions of Suspension: A Narrative Study as a part of my requirements of my doctoral degree in Curriculum, Teaching, and Leadership. As a part of my recruitment and data, I will need your assistance in collecting disciplinary data from Infinite Campus. In order to assist me, I will need your help in the following: disaggregating data by grade level and the students that have been suspended more than one time in the past or present year. I have received permission from the superintendent and the principal for this study. If you have any questions about this process, please contact me at 706-840-3524 or e-mail me at Jackson.brid@husky.neu.edu

Thank you

Bridgette Jackson
Hello. My name is Ms. Jackson. You know me as a teacher this school, but I’m also a student at Northeastern University in Boston, Massachusetts. I’m attending school to obtain my Doctor of Education degree. How are you today?

I’m doing a study that I would like to invite you to participate in. During this study, you and I will talk about why you have been suspended, how you felt about it, and if you feel that being able to talk to your teachers and having an academic relationship could stop you from getting suspended. Mrs. Sheppard will be in the room with us at from the start of our interviews to the end. I want to get the views of young, black students who have been suspended more than once within the past or present year.

These are the things that I will ask you to do:

- Stay after school on three different days. We will talk no more than 60 minutes each interview.
- We can meet at a different place with your parent/guardian if you feel more comfortable.

Some things that might happen if you participate:

- You can become emotional, ashamed, guilty or uncomfortable when you are asked to talk about your mother or father, things at home, or things about your past school life. Mrs. Sheppard will always be present if you need her.
- You could get tired.

In order to participate:
• You agree and understand that no special arrangement will be made for compensation or payment in any way for treatment solely because of your participation.

• If you are under 18, I have to receive permission for your parent/guardian, even if you agree to participate in this study.

• Sign student consent/assent form

• African American male

• You have to be between the ages of 14-19

• Having accumulated one or more suspensions in the past or present year.

I will do a follow up phone call tomorrow to answer any questions. If both you and your parent/guardian agree, the consent/assent form should be returned the following day. You can contact me yourself by calling 706-840-3524 or by e-mail at Jackson.brid@husky.neu.edu. Thank you for your time and consideration in helping make improvement for our students. Do you understand or have any questions? If yes, I will answer any clarifying questions. If no, this will conclude our meeting.

Thank you for your time and have a nice day.
Appendix E—Signed Informed Consent Document for Student

Northeastern University, Department of Education

Name of Investigators: Dr. Corliss Brown Thompson, PhD, Principal Investigator, Bridgette Jackson, Student Investigator

Title of Project: Understanding African American Male Perceptions of Suspension: A Narrative Study

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

We are inviting you if you are 18 or older to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask this person any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

You are an African American male and have been suspended more than once within the past year.

Why is this research study being done?
The purpose of this study is to better understand why African American males are being suspended, how it has affected them, their perceptions, and the effect of suspension on their lives.

### What will I be asked to do?

If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you to:

1. Participate in three in-depth semi-structured interviews. Interview one will allow me to gain a deeper understanding of student’s home life, background, and prior school experience. Information about the student’s history can help to determine if there are internal attributing factors in their history that can have an effect on the student actions that can lead to the consequence of suspension.

2. Interview two will allow students to describe three suspensions and how they attribute the event of being suspended. For example: Are you suspended because of an error on your part, could this suspension have been prevented, who’s in control of the outcome, etc.

3. Interview three will allow students to member-check the information shared in the previous interviews. I will share the findings with the students and ask them follow up questions based on the findings and questions that emerge from the analysis.

### Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?

As a part of the study, you will participate in three in-depth, semi-structured interviews that will last 45-60 minutes. The total time for all interviews is estimated to be no longer than three hours. Each interview will take place in the school’s media center, designated classroom, or an outside location if the participant wishes. There will be a counselor present at all meetings.
Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?

This study involves suspension, attributions, and the chance for participants to share in-depth feelings and experiences. When answering certain questions about their suspension or home life, background, and prior school experience the participant can display characteristics of nervousness such as sweating, stuttering, or fidgeting with their hands or clothes. If the participant feels that they are being asked too many questions, they may become frustrated or irritated. To minimize students becoming irritated due to the number of questions, we will take a five-minute break after question 7. If the participant feels the need to take a break sooner, the researcher will allow this time. The student might feel that the interview location is uncomfortable or inconvenient. If this happens, alternate arrangements will be made for the interview. If the participant decides that the questions are uncomfortable, the researcher will attempt to reword the question. After rephrasing the question and the participant is still uncomfortable, the participant will have the choice of quitting the study if they choose. During interviews the participant can become emotional, shameful, bring about feelings of guilt, or display characteristics of being uncomfortable due to certain questions being asked.

Will I benefit by being in this research?

There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in the study. However, the information learned from this study may help to reduce the suspension rate among African American males and to offer suggestions and alternatives to principals, teachers, and other stakeholders.

Who will see the information about me?


The only two people that will be aware of your participation in this study will be the participant and the researcher. These are the only two people that will have knowledge of your answer to the interview questions. Your part in this study will be confidential. Only the researchers on this study will see the information about you. No reports or publications will use information that can identify you in any way or any individual as being of this project.

To help protect personal information, the confidentiality of transcripts, hard copies, audio files, and other records will be maintained by storing the items on a designated disk, drives, and maintained in a locked file cabinet for safe keeping. This data will be stored digitally on a password-protected computer. Throughout the research, the computer and file cabinet will be kept in a locked room in which only the researcher has access to and can’t be read or seen by anyone else other than the researcher. Upon completion of the study, all digital recordings and hard copies of the data will remain securely stored for three years. After the three-year waiting period, data will be destroyed; digital data will be erased and hard copies will be shredded. To ensure confidentiality, aliases will be used. The only limits to confidentiality would be anything that is required by the law to report; such as physical abuse, sexual abuse, etc. This abuse would have to be reported to the proper authorities such as the police or Department of Family and Children Services child. In rare instances, authorized people may request to see research information about you and other people in this study. This is done only to be sure that the research is done properly. We would only permit people who are authorized by organizations such as the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board to see this information.

If I do not want to take part in the study, what choices do I have?
This study is voluntarily and you are not obligated to take part in this study. If you do not wish to participate, please inform the investigator, who respects you and your decision and your participation will end immediately.

**What will happen if I suffer any harm from this research?**

Precaution will be taken to minimize risks or harm for the participants. During interviews and if the participant becomes emotional, shameful, guilty, or display any characteristics of being uncomfortable dues to questions about his home life, background, and prior school experience, a school counselor will be in place to counsel the student during and after if needed.

**Can I stop my participation in this study?**

You can always stop participation at any time.

**Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?**

If you have questions about this study, please feel free to contact Bridgette Jackson. Her e-mail is Jackson.brid@husky.neu.edu. Her phone number is 706-840-3524. She is the primary contact person for the research. You can also contact Dr. Corliss Brown Thompson, the Principal Investigator. Her e-mail is co.brown@neu.edu. Her telephone number is 617-637-6702.

**Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?**

If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, and Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

**Will I be paid for my participation?**
No compensation of any kind will be offered for participation in this study.

**Will it cost me anything to participate?**

There will not be any cost for participating in this study.

**Is there anything else I need to know?**

You are at least 18 years old and if not, you must have parental consent to participate. You acknowledge that your identity will be hidden, you will be given a pseudonym, and identifying information will be changed to protect your privacy and the integrity of this study.

**I agree to [have my child] take part in this research.**

____________________________________________  __________________________

Signature of person [parent] agreeing to take part    Date

____________________________________________

Printed name of person above

____________________________________________  __________________________

Signature of person who explained the study to the participant above and obtained consent    Date

____________________________________________

Printed name of person above
Appendix F – Explanation of Study for Parent

Dear Parent/Guardian of Potential Participant:

Hello. My name is Ms. Bridgette Jackson. I’m the department chair and teacher at Glenn Hills High School, but I’m also a student at Northeastern University in Boston, Massachusetts. I’m attending school to obtain my Doctor of Education degree.

I’m doing a study that I would like to invite your son to participate in. During this study, your son and I will talk about why he has been suspended, how he felt about it, and what strategies he believes will help keep him engaged and in school. Mrs. Sheppard will be in the room with us at from the start of our interviews to the end.

These are the things that I will ask your son to do:

- Stay after school on three different days. We will talk no more than 60 minutes each interview.
- We can meet at a different place with a parent/guardian if he feels more comfortable.

Some things that might happen if he participates:

- He can become emotional, ashamed, guilty or uncomfortable when he is asked to talk about his mother or father, things at home, or things about his past school life. Mrs. Sheppard will always be present if he needs her and he can always refuse to answer any question.
- He could get tired.
In order to participate:

- You and your son agree and understand that no special arrangement will be made for compensation or payment in any way for treatment solely because of your participation.
- If your son is under 18, I have to receive permission from his parent/guardian, even if he agrees to participate in this study.
- I will need a signed copy of the student consent/assent form
- A student has to be an African American male
- He has to be between the ages of 14-19
- He should have an accumulation of one or more suspensions in the past or present year.

I will do a follow up phone call on tomorrow to answer any questions. If both you and your son agree, the consent/assent form should be returned the following day. You can contact me yourself by calling 706-840-3524 or by e-mail at Jackson.brid@husky.neu.edu. Thank you for your time and consideration in helping make improvement for our students.

Thank you for your time and have a nice day.
Appendix G—Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Parental Consent/Child Assent

Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115, USA

Department of College of Professional Studies

Principal Investigator Name: Bridgette Jackson

Title of Project: Understanding African American Male Perceptions of Suspension: A Narrative Study

My name is Bridgette Jackson, and I am a doctoral student at Northeastern University in Boston, Massachusetts. We want to invite your child to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study. If you would like your child to participate, please sign one of the copies of this form and have your child return it to Ms. Bridgette Jackson. The other copy is yours to keep. Your child does not have to participate if you do not want him to.

**Why are you doing in this research study?**

The purpose of this study is to better understand why African American males are being suspended, how it has affected them, their perceptions, and the effect of suspension on their lives.

**Why is your child asked to take part in this research study?**

Your son is an African American male and has been suspended more than once within the past year.

**What will your child be asked to do?**

If you decide to let your son take part in this study, we will ask him to:
1. Participate in three in-depth semi-structured interviews. Interview one will allow me to gain a deeper understanding of student’s home life, background, and prior school experience. Information about the student’s history can help to determine if there are internal attributing factors in their history that can have an effect on the student actions that can lead to the consequence of suspension.

2. Interview two will allow students to describe three suspensions and how they attribute the event of being suspended. For example: Are you suspended because of an error on your part, could this suspension have been prevented, who’s in control of the outcome, etc.

3. Interview three will allow students to member-check the information shared in the previous interviews. I will share the findings with the students and ask them follow up questions based on the findings and questions that emerge from the analysis.

Where will this take place and how much of my child’s time will it take?

As a part of the study, your son will participate in three in-depth, semi-structured interviews that will last 45-60 minutes each after school. The total time for all interviews is estimated to be no longer than three hours. Each study will take place in the school’s media center, designated classroom, or an outside location if the participant wishes. There will be a counselor present at all meetings.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to my child?

This study involves suspension, attributions, and the chance for participants to share in-depth feelings and experiences. When answering certain questions about their suspension or home life, background, and prior school experience the participant can display characteristics of nervousness such as sweating, stuttering, or fidgeting with their hands or clothes. If the participant feels that they are being asked too many questions, they may become frustrated or
irritated. To minimize students becoming irritated due to the number of questions, we will take a five-minute break after question 7. If the participant feels the need to take a break sooner, the researcher will allow this time. The student might feel that the interview location is uncomfortable or inconvenient. If this happens, alternate arrangements will be made for the interview. If the participant decides that the questions are uncomfortable, the researcher will attempt to reword the question. After rephrasing the question and the participant is still uncomfortable, the participant will have the choice of quitting the study if they choose. During interviews the participant can become emotional, shameful, bring about feelings of guilt, or display characteristics of being uncomfortable due to certain questions being asked.

**Will my child benefit from being in this research?**

There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in the study. However, the information learned from this study may help to reduce the suspension rate among African American males and to offer suggestions and alternatives to principals, teachers, and other stakeholders.

**Who will see the information about my child?**

The only two people that will be aware of your participation in this study will be the participant and the researcher. These are the only two people that will have knowledge of your answer to the interview questions. Your part in this study will be confidential. Only the researchers on this study will see the information about you. No reports or publications will use information that can identify you in any way or any individual as being of this project.

To help protect personal information, the confidentiality of transcripts, hard copies, audio files, and other records will be maintained by storing the items on a designated disk, drives, and maintained in a locked file cabinet for safe keeping. This data will be stored digitally on a password-protected computer. Throughout the research, the computer and file cabinet will be
kept in a locked room in which only the researcher has access to and can’t be read or seen by anyone else other than the researcher. Upon completion of the study, all digital recordings and hard copies of the data will remain securely stored for three years. After the three-year waiting period, data will be destroyed; digital data will be erased and hard copies will be shredded. To ensure confidentiality, aliases will be used. The only limits to confidentiality would be anything that is required by the law to report; such as physical abuse, sexual abuse, etc. This abuse would have to be reported to the proper authorities such as the police or Department of Family and Children Services child. In rare instances, authorized people may request to see research information about you and other people in this study. This is done only to be sure that the research is done properly. We would only permit people who are authorized by organizations such as the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board to see this information.

**What will happen if my child suffers any harm from this research?**

Precaution will be taken to minimize risks or harm for the participants. During interviews and if the participant becomes emotional, shameful, guilty, or display any characteristics of being uncomfortable due to questions about his home life, background, and prior school experience, a school counselor will be in place to counsel the student during and after if needed.

**Can my child stop participation in this study?**

Your son can always stop participation at any time. Your child’s participation in this research is completely voluntary. Even if you give permission for your child to be in this study they can still choose not to participate if he/she does not want to. Even if your child begins the study, he may quit at any time. If your child does not participate or decides to quit, it will have no effect on their standing at the school and your child will not lose any rights, benefits, or services that he would otherwise have.
Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?

If you have questions about this study, please feel free to contact Bridgette Jackson. Her e-mail is Jackson.brid@husky.neu.edu. Her phone number is 706-840-3524. She is the primary contact person for the research. You can also contact Dr. Corliss Brown Thompson, the Principal Investigator. Her e-mail is co.brown@neu.edu. Her telephone number is 617-637-6702.

Who can I contact about my rights as a parent of a participant?

If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, and Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

Will my child be paid for participation?

No compensation of any kind will be offered for participation in this study.

Does my child need to pay to participate in this study?

There will not be any cost for participating in this study.

Please check your decision below, sign and return the form to Ms. Bridgette Jackson.

I have read this the consent form and the investigator has explained the details of the study.

I understand that I am free to ask additional questions.

_______ I agree to have my child take part in this research.
I do NOT agree for my child to participate in this study.

_______________________________________           ________________
Signature of Parent/Legal Guardian     Date

_______________________________________
Printed Name of Parent/Legal Guardian

_______________________________________           ________________
Signature of Child     Date

_______________________________________
Printed Name of Child
Appendix H—Interview Protocol

Interview One

Hello, my name is Bridgette Jackson. How are you today? As you know, I am conducting a research project that will enable me to get a closer look at the lived experiences of African American male students and suspension. Other goals are to understand the attributions of suspension, the academic and social effects, and the perceptions of African American males as it relates to suspensions.

This information will be gathered via tape recorded semi-structured interviews. These questions are simply a guide and the interview will follow the participant’s flow. The goal is to obtain all of this information throughout the course of the discussion. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. You have already signed the informed consent form. Do you have any questions? Do I have your permission to record this interview?

The recording has begun: I will be conducting three interviews that will last between 45-60 minutes each. Interview one will allow me to gain a deeper understanding of your home life, background, and prior school experience. Information about your history can help to determine if there are internal attributing factors in your history that can have an effect on your actions which lead to suspension. Understanding your background will give you and me a context to work from when thinking about attributions. Do you have any questions before we begin?

If yes, the student will ask the question and the researcher will answer.

If no, great, we will begin with the interview.
1. Tell me about yourself (background, siblings, and neighborhood).
2. Who lives with you?
3. Who raised you?
4. Tell me about the important adults in your life now and when you were younger.
5. Was your mother/father an active part of your life? How do you feel about your parents and why do you feel that way?
6. Describe one of your favorite childhood memories.
7. Describe one of your favorite or memorable recent experiences.
8. What do you like to do outside of school?
9. What do you want to do when you finish high school?
10. Describe your elementary school experience.
11. Describe your middle school experience.
12. Describe your current high school experience.
13. How does your experience influence your school suspensions?
14. What other questions should I have asked?
15. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Thank you for your participation.

**Interview Two**

This information will be gathered via tape recorded semi-structured interviews. These questions are simply a guide and the interview will follow the participant’s flow. The goal is to obtain all of this information throughout the course of the discussion. Thank you for agreeing to participate.
in this study. You have already signed the informed consent form. Do you have any questions?

Do I have your permission to record this interview?

The recording has begun: This is the second interview and will last between 45-60 minutes. This interview will allow you as a student to describe three suspensions and share the reasons for being suspended and why the suspensions took place. I would like for you to think of three different times that you got suspended. I will be asking you to recount what happened and what you believe to be the cause of the suspension. Do you have any questions before we begin?

If yes, the student will ask the question and the researcher will answer.

If no, great, we will begin with the interview.

**Suspension One**

1. Can you take moment and think about the three most memorable suspensions that you've had? Can you start with the first suspension and give the details about its occurrence?

   Describe the suspension. Tell me everything you remember.

2. What makes this suspension memorable?

3. Do you feel that getting suspended was a reflection of something that you did wrong or something that someone else did? Explain your reasoning (External/Internal, Locus of Causality).

4. What if an incident like this happens again, would the consequence be the same or would a stricter punishment be imposed (Stable/Unstable, Stability)?

5. If an incident like this happens again, would you do anything different? Do you feel that changing anything would change the outcome (Internal/External Factor, Controllability)?
6. Was this incident controlled by you (Internal/External Factor, Controllability)?

7. Do you think there was anything you could have done to prevent being suspended in this instance (Internal/External Factor, Controllability)?

8. Do you think that the school could have done anything different to prevent this suspension (External, Controllability)?

**Suspension Two**

1. Can you tell me about the second suspension and give the details about its occurrence?

2. What makes this suspension memorable?

3. Do you feel that getting suspended was a reflection of something that you did wrong or something that someone else did? Can you explain your reasoning (External/Internal, Locus of Causality)?

4. What if an incident like this happens again, would the consequence be the same or would a stricter punishment be imposed (Stable/Unstable, Stability)?

5. If an incident like this happens again, would you do anything different? Do you feel that changing anything would change the outcome (Internal/External Factor, Controllability)?

6. Was this incident controlled by you (Internal/External Factor, Controllability)?

7. Do you think there was anything you could have done to prevent being suspended in this instance (Internal/External Factor, Controllability)?

8. Do you think that the school could have done anything different to prevent this suspension (External, Controllability)?

**Suspension Three**

1. Can you tell me about the third suspension and give the details about its occurrence?

2. What makes this suspension memorable?
3. Do you feel that getting suspended was a reflection of something that you did wrong or something that someone else did? Explain your reasoning (External/Internal, Locus of Causality).

4. What if an incident like this happens again, would the consequence be the same or would a stricter punishment be imposed (Stable/Unstable, Stability)?

5. If an incident like this happens again, would you do anything different? Do you feel that changing anything would change the outcome (Internal/External Factor, Controllability)?

6. Was this incident controlled by you (Internal/External Factor, Controllability)?

7. Do you think there was anything you could have done to prevent being suspended in this instance (Internal/External Factor, Controllability)?

8. Do you think that the school could have done anything different to prevent this suspension (External, Controllability)?

9. What other questions should I have asked about your suspensions?

10. Is there anything else that you would like to share?

11. Thank you for your participation.

**Interview Three**

Interview three will allow students to member-check the information shared in the previous interviews. After analyzing the data; I will share the common themes of that and the framework. I will share the findings with the students and ask them follow up questions based on the findings and questions that emerge from the analysis.
Appendix I–Letter of Participation to Counselor

Dear Mrs. Sheppard,

I will be conducting a study on Understanding African American Male Perceptions of Suspension: A Narrative Study as a part of my requirements of my doctoral degree in Curriculum, Teaching, and Leadership. As a part of my study and to minimize harm during or after interviews, I will need your assistance in counseling participants if needed. Participants might become emotional, shameful, or have feelings of guilt when being asked certain questions. We will be meeting with the students individually after school to conduct interviews. I have received permission from the superintendent and the principal for this study. Your participation is appreciated and if you agree, I can be contacted by phone or e-mail. If you have any questions about this process, please contact me at 706-840-3524 or e-mail me at Jackson.brid@husky.neu.edu

Thank you

Bridgette Jackson
Appendix J—Permission from Administrator for Meeting During Homeroom

Dear Mr. Givens:

As a part of my study that we have discussed and that I will be conducting, the selection process involves meeting with the potential participants and the school counselor. During this meeting, we will discuss the selection process as well as provide a description of the study’s research questions, purpose, projected time frame, why they were selected and potential anticipated risks and benefits of participation.

With approval, I will contact each one individually, starting with the student who has the most suspensions in each grade level after I have received the suspension data from the clerk. This will occur during homeroom by calling the students down to the media center. I will meet with each student for about five minutes to explain the study.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to conduct my study and add to the body of knowledge to help improve the success of student’s.

Sincerely,

Bridgette Jackson
Appendix K—Attribution Theory Chart

Weiner’s Attribution Theory

Suspension attributed to

External Factors

People
Interest
Disability
Medicine
Voices
mood
Stereotyping
Student/Teacher Relationships
Discipline Practices

Internal Factors

Effort
Attention
Preparation
determination
determination