A BLACKCRIT CASE STUDY ANALYSIS THAT EXPLORES THE INFLUENCE OF
SOCIETAL PERCEPTIONS OF BLACK MEN ON BLACK MALE K-12 LEADERS

A Dissertation
by
DRAMAINE FREEMAN

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APPROVED BY:

_____

Dr. Ashley Carpenter
Chairperson, Dissertation Committee

_____

Dr. Chris Osmond
Member, Dissertation Committee

_____

Dr. William Sheppard
Member, Dissertation Committee

_____

Dr. Vachel Miller
Director, Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

_____

Marie Hoepfl, Ed.D.
Interim Dean, Cratis D. Williams School of Graduate Studies

Abstract

A BLACKCRIT CASE STUDY ANALYSIS THAT EXPLORES THE INFLUENCE OF
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Dramaine Freeman
B.S., North Carolina Agriculture and Technical State University
MA. ED University of Phoenix
M.A., Appalachian State University
Ed.D., Appalachian State University

Dissertation Committee Chairperson: Dr. Ashley Carpenter

Black male leaders shape, constrain, or determine leadership style in education as they

interact with anti-Black structures such as social perceptions. This qualitative case study

investigates the relationship between the social perception of Black men in society and the

professional experiences of 15 Black male leaders in K-12 spaces. This study applied BlackCrit

to analyze how anti-Blackness impacts the experiences and decision-making processes that

coincide with Black leaders' performance and negative experiences. Secondly, the study

continues the research of connecting society's attitudes and beliefs of Black males and expands

the BlackCrit framework by analyzing how Black suffering increases the pressure to perform,

shapes identity, and makes it necessary to create spaces for Black male K-12 leaders to be their

most authentic selves and live out their liberatory fantasy in academia.

Acknowledgments

The freedman has not yet found in freedom his promised land.

~ W. E. B. Du Bois

First, to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, I thank you! I thank you because you carried me when I wanted to give up. You pushed me when I was tired. You covered me when I failed. Father God, I love you, and thank you so much for loving me. To my lovely wife, Faith Ann-Brown Freeman, it gives me immense pleasure and honor to be your husband. The love you have shown me has extended beyond my imagination. Thank you for the many times you told me you would be beside me. I am forever in debt to you. To my parents, William and Rosa Freeman, thank you for raising me to believe I can do anything through Christ who strengthens me. You taught me not to be afraid and never to give up regardless of what comes my way. I have used your words and actions to help overcome every challenge I have ever faced. I thank you, and I love you.

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you for constantly pushing me to do more and be more. To my brother Monte your last words to me, "I am so proud of you" and "You are an overcomer," has pushed me through some of the darkest moments of my life. Brother, I miss you more than words can describe. Rest in Power, my brother, rest in power.

To my mother- and father-in-law, Eric and Betty Brown, thank you for being there for Faith and me when we needed the boys picked up or food cooked. Thank you for your continued thoughts and prayers while on this journey. Thank you for my wife.

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Dedication

"And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love."

I Corinthians 13:13 NKJV

I dedicate this dissertation to the one who has kept the faith, hope, and love for me throughout

this journey, my wife. Your support is boundless.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter 1: Introduction

I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel To Be Free Lyrics
I wish I knew how
It would feel to be free
I wish I could break
All the chains holding me
I wish I could say
All the things that I should say
Say 'em loud say 'em clear
For the whole round world to hear
~ Nina Simone (1967)

The intersection of Blackness and maleness bounds the hopes and dreams of Black

men both in society and in the workplace. Simone (1967) describes two main concepts in the

stanza above: the desire to be free from the chains and that her voice would be valued. The

chains that have shackled Black men diminish their identities, keeping them from being their

most authentic selves in their professional and personal spaces. Therefore, the intersection of

racial identities and gender is why the primary objective of this case study is to explore Black

Critical (BlackCrit) theory by analyzing the experiences of Black male K-12 leaders.

Secondly, this case study explores the connection between societal perceptions of Black

males and Black male K-12 leaders in an anti-Black society. Thirdly, the study describes the

historical and social context of what has caused the anxiety of being a Black male, which

leads to increased pressures to perform, contend with navigating their identity, and the social

perceptions that choke Black male leaders' dreams.

In this study, I define educational leadership roles as understood and experienced by

Black males in leadership roles such as teacher leaders with management responsibilities,

school principals, heads of schools, and central office personnel. More specifically, I define a

leader as someone supervising five or more subordinates. I specifically considered the role of

historical, ideological, and psychological contexts, social structures, and experiences through

which race and racism exist, specifically through the lens of Black male experiences that shape, constrain, or determine leadership style in education. Therefore, this BlackCrit case study focuses on the social perceptions of Black males who are leaders in K-12 spaces and the experiences they encounter in their personal and professional space.

Throughout the study, I outline how the experiences of Black men in society are similar and directly affect how Black male leaders navigate through both spaces. The study additionally summarizes the literature, methodology, findings, and recommendations that could set the stage for Black males to feel they can be their most authentic selves in their personal and professional lives. Also, as the researcher, I am establishing that Black in this text refers to a person who has been identified as being of African descent. Therefore, to honor the pride and culture of being Black, Black is capitalized to represent the empowering movement of uplifting Black people from feeling undervalued. Moreover, white is not capitalized to reduce the anti-Black and white supremacy structures that produce silence in the voice of Black people.

As described by Black male leaders in this study, their interaction with social perceptions limits their ability to be their most authentic selves. Unfortunately, social interaction creates experiences we naturally place in our boxes of social identity. These social interactions throughout life are the foundation for forming ideologies for or against gender, race, economic status, sexual orientation, and other identities. Understanding the relationship between social experiences and oppressive structures helps dismantle the reproduction of oppression and suffering in Black people's lives. Moreover, the intersection of race and gender has shaped Black men's experiences in ways that have caused Black men to feel isolated, under-valued, and overworked.

Specifically, race's significant role in our social lives, particularly in America, has expanded from a geographical tagging system to intersectionalities that categorize and interlock race, gender, and social status, in addition to creating complex anti-Black systems (e.g., education, policing, employment) that haunt the lives of Black people, especially Black men. Additionally, race has become a social construct and "is not a biological category but rather the meaning people attach to physical appearances: the understanding of ourselves and our identities" (Bennett & Walker, 2018, p. 692). The response and treatment of racial identities begin the entanglement of social experiences. Moreover, the narratives of race guide the body and mind experiences to solidify our beliefs or uproot what we thought we knew about racial identities.

Although there are notable reasons why we should not characterize all Black people as the same, it is vital to this research study to highlight the everyday occurrence of negative stereotypes towards Black men. Black men, unfortunately, have been pigeon-holed and chained to negative stereotypes. As stated by Cohen and Garcia (2005), "when one belongs to a negatively stereotyped group, the awareness that how one is personally defined will be determined, in part, by how one's group is defined may give rise to an 'I am us' mindset" (p. 579). In summary, the "I am us" mindset means that I may be seen as a part of the negative stereotype even if I never do anything related to the negative stereotype. Therefore, the response to such fear leads to the anxiety to consistently perform at a high level because there is no room for mistakes or anxiety that one will be replaced by someone who does not have negative stereotypes. For example, Drayton (2021) describes his experiences of being the only Black male in Special Operations of the military and feeling the pressure of having "very little room for error" because he would "be judged differently" (p. 65) than his non-

Black companions. Hence, seeing life through the lens of stereotypes is similar to the thoughts of Du Bois's double consciousness. As Du Bois (1903) states,

 The Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil and gifted with second sight in this American world—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (p. 2)

The second sight creates tension and fears that must be examined, specifically through the lens of the perceptions of Black males in society as it correlates to the attitudes and beliefs of Black male leaders in an academic setting. It is important to note that for this study, gender is defined using social and physical attributes of being identified as male from birth. Black is defined as those identifying themselves as Black or African American.

The intersectionality of being Black and male has caused an excess of negative Black lived experiences. According to the Commission on the Social Status of Black Men and Boys Act of 2019, "Black men and boys face disproportionate hardships that result in disparities in areas including education, criminal justice, health, employment, fatherhood, mentorship, and violence" (H.R.1636 - 116th Congress, 2019, Sec. 2). For example, in police brutality cases, such as George Floyd, a Black man, and Jaylin Stiger, a sixteen-year-old Black boy, were both subject to police brutality, leading to disrespect, being unnecessarily targeted, and,

unfortunately, death. As noted in this research, disproportionate hardships have negatively affected productivity and can also impact Black male leaders' performances in K-12 spaces.

Leadership performance is essential because it is at the core of the success or failure of any sector of society. Unfortunately, not all voices are heard or presented with the opportunity to be in leadership roles, limiting the impact of dismantling structures that have plagued humanity. Young (1979) stated that "if those of us who suffer most from the problems at hand do not give the insight and the leadership in solving those problems, they won't get solved" (p. 2). The lack of equal representation in leadership roles for people of color, especially Black males, has led to the constant fight for equality, the battle for changes in the justice system, the continuous struggle to dismantle racist structures, and the never-ending focus to improve the quality of schools for students of color.

The lack of Black male representation in leadership is why there are still "first Black person" statements made in 2022. For example, Stephan L. Ball was the first Black man named Dean of Students at Harvard Law School in its 205-year history (Harvard Law School News Staff, 2022). Even in non-educational settings such as sports, only 20 Black men have been head coaches of the National Football League (NFL) over its 102-year history (Harriot, 2022). Of the 535 Members of Congress in 2021, only 59 were Black, including the first Georgia Black male senator, Dr. Raphael Warnock (Darnell, 2021). Lastly, Wes Moore was elected the first Black governor of Maryland, and in the nation's history, only the third Black elected governor (Booker, 2022).

Across multiple sectors, there is evidence that Black men are still not valued, seen, or provided the opportunity to lead in spaces. Even at the school level, Bass and Alston (2018) noted that 7% of the nation's principals were non-Hispanic Black or African American. In

addition to having a low percentage of Black principals, "Black principals are disproportionately hired to lead schools with higher percentages of minority students and students receiving free/reduced-price lunch" (Bass & Alston, 2018, p. 779). The conditions and position of Black male leaders continue to drive the conversations of visible and invisible barriers that minimize the positive impact of Black males in society or exacerbate the problem of having low levels of representation.

Black people have had to encounter the negative impact of the intersecting of racial ideologies created through historical and social experiences learned through racial stories, personal experiences, or intergenerational contexts. For example, the white woman clutching the purse as a Black man approaches or a Black person being constantly described as lazy continues the storylines that strengthen the dominant race ideology on the "collective understanding about how and why the world is the way it is" (Bonilla-Silva, 2018, p. 97). Racial ideology is the racially based framework dominant groups use to explain or justify the dominant race's racial status quo (Bonilla-Silva, 2018).

Each race and gender have a story to share, and each person brings their social experiences to be shared and their gender placement within society. As stated by Delgado et al. (2017), each person has their own identity, and "each race has its origins and ever-evolving history—is the notion of intersectionality and anti-essentialism" (p. 10). Black males are no different. As themed throughout the interviews, Black men do not wish to lose themselves in an anti-Black education structure because Black men know they have so much to offer in educational spaces. As told by Du Bois (1903), "he simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face" (pp. 2–3).

Like all other identity markers, Black masculine identities are formed by those who personify the identity and individuals outside the group (Johnson-Bailey et al., 2014). Therefore, all ethnicities are compared to white males to define true manhood. Slatton and Spates (2014) state that "because dominant definitions of 'manhood' are in opposition to socially constructed definitions of Black manhood, Black men find themselves seeking to reach an unattainable goal" (p. 2).

Seeking an unattainable goal is what is leading to the need to address the following research questions:

1. How does the anti-Blackness framing of Black men in society impact the perception of Black men in K-12 leadership roles?

2. How have social justice calamities and political rhetoric shaped, constrained, or determined leadership styles?

3. How does framing Black males in society impact the liberatory imagination of Black male leaders?

These questions aim to name the anti-Black framing of society that continuously threatens Black males in leadership positions through historical perceptions and current treatment of Black males. Therefore, through a BlackCrit lens, the study further analyzes how Blackness continues to matter and "explains precisely how Black bodies become marginalized, disregarded, and disdained, even in their highly visible place within celebratory discourses on race and diversity" (Dumas & ross, 2016, p. 417).

The internal conflicts caused by meeting societal expectations create countless experiences when the dominant institutions make Black experiences in society more horrific than those of any other race, deny Black people the right to be seen as human, and reduce

African culture to non-existence (Fairfax, 2020). Heinous and embedded everyday practices produce an unfree symbolic map that recycles never-ending experiences of being in mechanisms of oppression created by those in power.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of the case study is to examine the perceptions of Black males in society as they correlate to the attitudes and beliefs of Black male leaders in an academic setting. Research acknowledges that Black males continue not to be recognized as knowledgeable, intelligent, noble, and good-natured but continue to be defined as uneducable, dangerous, criminal, inherently bad, lazy, and threatening toward whites (Howard et al., 2012).

The alarming impact of a dominant white male society on all aspects of life appears in the everyday living of Black males, notably through social factors intertwined with historical context. As Gause (2008) describes, "to be a Black male or an African American male in America is inextricably tied to the history of servitude, slavery, and sex within and between the races in our society" (p. 47). Therefore, Black men are still captive to the historical perception of being an unevolved form of masculinity and an inferior race. Because of these false perceptions, Black men are overlooked or placed in roles that do not position them to lead.

Problem Statement

The disregard of Black men as leaders is a continuation of the socially constructed identities of race and gender that are publicized by and through relationships of power in a dominant white society and continues to produce anti-Black perceptions that drive prejudice against Black males. Therefore, Black men and boys continue to suffer and display "different forms of outward behaviors" because of "intergenerationally denigration, centuries of

mistreatment and being characterized as subhuman, sexually aggressive, threatening, and lazy," as noted by Winters (2020, p. 156). The constant reproduction of Black suffering, suggested by Dumas (2014), "is a kind of constant traveling between historical memory and current predicament, that there is a psychic link between the tragedy of antebellum African bondage and post-civil rights" (p. 3). Additionally, racially driven experiences shaped by historical and social factors, such as being labeled incapable, have caused an endless burden of defeatism and otherness. As articulated by Jenkins (2006),

> This strained development has often resulted in low self-esteem, a negative self-concept, and the internalization of the role of villain. The social stereotype of villain and outcast seems inescapable for Black men at all levels, with the most disenfranchised embracing the role and the most affluent fighting against it, but all living in relation to it. (p. 138)

Moreover, the uphill battle created by negative mental images of Black males in leadership roles leads to Black males having more negative interactions and experiences with leadership than their white male counterparts. Therefore, due to the interconnecting of racially driven social experiences, unfair characterization, and historical factors, Black male leaders face additional barriers in leadership that could lead to them not maximizing their leadership abilities.

Significance of Study

This case study is significant because anti-Blackness ideology in education provokes Black male leaders to uphold the white supremacist view of other Black people as violent, loud, and unknowledgeable, and needs to be maintained by limiting leadership opportunities to roles where the majority is the minority. As Saad (2020) described, anti-Blackness against

Black men upholds the colonialist white supremacist view of Black men as violent, almost animal-like savages less intelligent than their white counterparts.

Therefore, this study analyzed how social factors and decision-making processes coincide with Black leaders' performance and negative experiences as they encounter anti-Black structures, racist ideas, and more complex challenges than their white counterparts. Secondly, the study continues the research of connecting society's attitudes and beliefs of Black males and expands the BlackCrit framework by analyzing how the cycle of Black suffering shows up in Black male leaders in academic spaces. Thirdly, this research adds to the scholarship of creating spaces for Black male K-12 leaders to be their most authentic selves in academia.

For example, using the data from National Center for Education Statistics (2019), Black people make up 11.9 % of K-12 principals; specifically, Black males make up 8.8% of all K-12 principals compared to 91.2% of white males and 85.3% of white female principals. Unfortunately, the number of Black males has declined in the 2021 National Education Statistics report. The report describes that of 9,900 traditional and charter public schools and their principals, only 10% of K-12 public school leaders were Black, and among private K–12 school principals, 6% were Black. More specifically, Black males make up only 7.8% of the male principalship population compared to white males, who make up 81.5%.

The National Center for Education Statistics data indicates that the limitations that produce the small percentage of Black male K-12 leaders in central offices are because of the career track in education from the classroom to the central office. If there are fewer Black male principals, there will be fewer Black male leaders in the central office; therefore, they

will not have a seat at the table that can impact the school experiences of students, specifically Black students.

Like any other race group, social imagery becomes more concrete "through tools, language, forms of media, constructed knowledge, and the purported experiences displayed and widely distributed about a particular group" (Howard et al., 2012, p. 86). These social factors often produce obstacles simply from being Black and male because the perception of Black men as being disciplinarians or not knowledgeable chokes out their ability to lead authentically and creates missed opportunities to recognize the uniqueness of Black male leaders in K-12 spaces.

Definition of Terms

It is vital to note keywords and definitions according to this study to understand further the depth of Black males' experiences in K-12 spaces.

Anti-Black—a community of people and structures established solely for degrading, minimizing, and marginalizing Black people.

Black—a community of people identified visually (or perceived as) of African descent.

Blackness—the pride of empowering Black culture to persevere through negative experiences and celebrate loudly in positive experiences.

District Leaders—the persons who support the schools and school leaders.

School Leaders—the person who oversees the faculty, staff, families, and students in a public, charter, or private K-12 school setting.

Social Justice Calamity—an event that causes unjust and extreme harm to be placed on a human being that represents the continuous reproduction of devaluing the human life of those that are marginalized.

white—a community of people identified visually (or perceived as) of European descent.

Chapter Summary

This chapter began with the lyrics from Nina Simone that describes the wish to know what it felt like to be free. Black men have historically suffered from the negative perceptions that have produced and reproduced the feeling of not knowing what it feels like to be free in their personal or professional space. This chapter concludes with the second verse of Simone's song (1967):

> I wish I could share
> All the love that's in my heart
> Remove all the bars
> That keep us apart
> I wish you could know
> What it means to be me
> Then you'd see and agree
> That every man should be free

The intersectionalities of race and gender have proven to create diverse experiences, starting with race. The intersectionality of being Black and male produces a variety of experiences that can lead to hardships and negative consequences. Some hardships, involve a lack of representation in leadership roles, longevity in leadership roles, and constant scrutinization of leadership performance. As stated by Pitcan et al. (2018), "Black men's experiences are racialized and gendered, and therefore analysis must account for the ways in which masculinity and race intersect and relate to systems of power and privilege in the workplace" (p. 301). The hardships and the continuous Black suffering of Black men through

negative historical perceptions portrayed in media and history books produce the need to

describe how social factors impact the performance and experiences of Black male K-12

leaders in an anti-Black society and school systems throughout the nation.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The primary focus of this qualitative semi-structured case study was to investigate the relationship between the social perception of Black men in society and the professional experiences of 15 Black male leaders in K-12 spaces. The research synthesized relevant literature to examine the perceptions of Black men in society by first discussing racial identity and Black masculinity, followed by Blackness and the impact of whiteness on Black experiences. The research describes how anti-Black structures impact the socialization and leadership experiences of Black males. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion of the BlackCrit theoretical framework that I will use to analyze the experiences and performance of the Black male leaders interviewed.

Because Black men are constantly being compared to the dominant white hegemonic masculinity rather than to attributes important to Black males, it is essential to outline how these factors impact the experiences and performance of Black males in K-12 leadership roles. The literature review provides a foundation for studying the attitudes and beliefs toward Black male leaders and identifies current research for improving the experiences or perceptions of Black male K-12 leaders.

Constructions of Racial Identity

A natural talent of humans is the ability to categorize and sort information that creates systems that produce logistical flow. The creation of the social construct of race has allowed an ethnocentric culture to form. Ethnocentricity, in summary, is comparing cultures and deciding which is superior (Goodman et al., 2012). Superiority has also determined those who are inferior by racial constructs. According to Bolaffi et al. (2003), "race has been one

of the labels given that signify and identify first the skin color differences and secondly cultural differences" (p. x).

Race shapes society and culture through acculturation, resulting from conflict as distinct cultures seek to control the same resources and access. Through time, what was once a separation of culture became a separation of skin color. As Hannah-Jones (2021) stated,

> Colonial legislatures enforced the distinction between Black and white people through a series of new laws passed in the mid-1600s that established a legal regime that differentiated the political status of Europeans and Africans. It was particularly concerned with sex because sex between Black and white people produced children who confounded the strict distinctions between those two categories. (p. 49)

Keeping races separated out of fear of not being able to distinguish the races is seen in everyday practices now. For example, a person has one of three options to select across every job application. A person could choose to select their race, choose "other" and type in their race, or decline to share. For the persons who decided to share their race, their race data can be found in the company's or organization's demographics. If data are supposed to track and describe the need for change, why do we have inequitable opportunities for those outside the white race?

Unfortunately, race-driven hiring practices are designed to have the majority of whites in positions. This is why, according to Gerdeman (2017), Black candidates who "whitened" (i.e., remove references to their race or ethnicity) their resumes received a callback twenty-five percent of the time from future employers. In contrast, Black candidates who left in racial attributes only received ten percent of callbacks, thus creating the opportunity for specific skin colors to determine a person's access to civil and human rights.

As stated by Mills (2015), "race has correlated strongly with civic standing, culture, citizenship, privilege or subordination, and even designations of personhood" (p. 45). Therefore, as Delgado et al. (2017) described, race can no longer be treated as a fixed mindset linked to genetic code; instead, race is an invention of society used only to strengthen the dominant culture while weakening and oppressing all other cultures.

Race became a categorical name to describe the distinct types of humans on earth. The race layering of historical and cultural fabrics helped create what is known today as minorities and majorities. It is not the separation of race that created tension between those of more versus less, but the psychological impact of knowing one's place in the majority versus the minority. As described by Winters (2020),

> "Black fatigue" is repeated variations of stress that result in extreme exhaustion and cause mental, physical, and spiritual maladies that are passed down from generation to generation. It is a deeply embedded fatigue that takes inordinate amounts of energy to overcome—herculean efforts to sustain an optimistic outlook and enormous amounts of faith to continue to believe "we shall overcome someday." (p. 33)

Having the extraordinary strength to fight for a seat at the table has often been misinterpreted as herculean; however, the fight is really for equal opportunities to which a comparison to the dominated culture is measured. For example, "Africanized slavery did not enslave people who happened to be Black; it instead enslaved people solely because they were Black; in so doing, it helped to establish an association between Blackness and Black people and slave status" (Grimes, 2020, p. 175). Understanding the relationship between Blackness and slave status is called Afropessimism, which is understanding that slave status meant that Black people as non-human subjects could be bought, sold, and used in any way

to execute the performance of white and non-Black imaginations, as clarified by Wilderson (2020). Thus, the white race became the standard by which everything was measured.

The white standard of measurement led Black male K-12 leaders not only to find themselves in the minority in K-12 spaces but also often compared to their white counterparts. Thus, the standard of whiteness increased the pressure on Black males to seek possibilities rather than be their true selves. This is the reason Pitcan et al. (2018) describe that Black male leaders are not able to "be their true selves at work because of pressure to manage their impressions, thus restricting their identity and self-expression" (p. 309). In addition, Black men's constant battle of making sense of everyday anti-Black practices could limit their ability to be innovative and stifle their imagination.

Anti-Black practices continue the social construct of race as a part of society and seamlessly produce direct and indirect negative lived experiences on non-white bodies, which lead to the creation and maintenance of racism (Delgado et al., 2017). Akintunde (1999) describes racism as "a systemic, societal, institutional, omnipresent, and epistemologically embedded phenomenon that pervades every vestige of our reality" (p. 2). The systemic insertion of race impacts every facet of society and causes mistreatment of people not by their deeds but by the color of their skin. Therefore, comparing cultures and determining who has access to different resources has been the foundation for creating a history of complex concepts about race and has impacted the social progress of majority and minority races. As Reid-Merritt (2017) summarized, the social progress of minority groups was limited by whites who pursued colonization, wealth, power, and authority by eradicating the Indigenous people, who initially nurtured white survival, and enslaving African nationalities whose free labor they could control or exploit.

Consequently, the dominant white culture became gatekeepers to establishing and sustaining chattel slavery and racial ideas, as presented today, by causing the enforcement of slavery on Black skin. This enforcement became the cornerstone of racism and of the ideology of Black people as inferior to whites. Furthermore, the dominant culture has used the race-based system to establish the power to specify distinctions and enforce privilege. The determination of who has rights and who does not is why Spickard et al. (2016) stated that "race, this socially constructed identity, can be a powerful tool, either for oppression or for group self-actualization" (p. 25).

The divide created by race's ideology has forced society to define what it means to be Black or white. As Goodman et al. (2012) summarized, our lives impact our racial thinking as we make decisions to maneuver through our daily lives. The layering of racial thinking created the perception of honoring those who wore white skin, oppressing all others, and causing adverse treatment towards those not part of the majority, especially those who wore Black skin.

Black male leaders' experiences are not just about skin color. Race provides access to education and careers and impacts the social factors that often lead to negative or positive perceptions of each other. The social construct of race has created today's language to describe distinct groups of people as inferior or superior. As stated by Reid-Merritt (2017), "race has created a system of social injustice, unfairly distributing the nation's valuable social resources to the white majority and interfering with the ability of others to develop their fullest human potential" (p. 18).

Blackness

Blackness is like a secret society that one becomes a part of simply through birth. Blackness cannot be entirely defined because it is a forever-changing movement. Blackness movements sustain the past while constantly mixing in the present; therefore, ever involved in the Black culture. It is a complicated culture to understand unless you have a birthright. Unfortunately, when the majority does not understand facets of Blackness, it is hated, banded against, and labeled a threat. For example, the creation of the "dap," a handshake in Black communities that means dignity and pride for Black people, was considered a threat to the U.S. Military.

The paramount symbol of the "dap" symbolizes the importance of Black identity, Black consciousness, and cultural unity in the Black community in the late 1960s. During the Vietnam War, Black G.I.s based in the Pacific created the dap to say I am with you, or I have your back. However, as Hamilton (2014) described, "white soldiers and commanding officers deemed the handshake a threat under the misconception that the dap was a coded language of potential Black insurrection" (p. 2). Additionally, the military outlawed dapping at all levels and court-martialed, imprisoned, and even dishonorably discharged Black soldiers.

The concept of Blackness is to employ the conscience of freedom yet maneuver unconsciously as a slave who can not fully embrace the idea of freedom. "Framing slavery as an analog to the present or as the singular method of defining Blackness creates limits to what, who, and when Blackness is in the world" (Hunt, 2020, p. 508). Blackness is disruptive and lacks privileges to live free but resists the idea of not being free, which can hinder Black male leaders in K-12 spaces.

Blackness is a pressure to perform or a place to be silent. Blackness as a place produces the space of contrast and battles between the light and the dark. The light comes from a deep-rooted past, while the dark comes from the historical perspective of the shipment of Black bodies as they travel toward chattel slavery. Blackness is a source of pride that reproduces the seeds of joy and hope to combat such a robust structure as anti-Blackness.

Therefore, Blackness sits between living through the horrifying past while continuing to pursue liberation. Sharpe (2016) describes after-slavery's denial of Black humanity as a constant disaster. Sharpe states, "these disasters arrive by way of the rapid, deliberate, repetitive, and wide circulation on television and social media of Black social, material, and psychic death" (p. 21). The unrelenting negative images can "trigger a series of social-psychological reactions similar to a self-fulfilling prophecy" that tarnish the public perception and incites criminality (Williams & Kniffley, 2019, p. 36).

As stated by Carter (2013), "Blackness is a movement of the between" (p. 589); it is the ongoing exercise that battles pride and un-free. Blackness is a complicated space that Sharpe (2016) encourages us to think through the lens of "containment, regulation, punishment, capture, and captivity and the ways the manifold representations of Blackness become the symbol, par excellence, for the less-than-human being condemned to death" (p. 21). Wilderson (2020) states that Blackness at one moment "is a disfigured and disfiguring phobic phenomenon; at another moment, Blackness is a sentient implement to be joyously deployed for reasons and agendas that have little to do with Black liberation" (p. 12). Blackness is the state of constantly deciphering how to encourage each other in an anti-Black society while displaying a sense of power. Therefore, it is vital to note that the historical

moments we live in impact how we construct Blackness within and outside Black American culture, as Johnson (2003) describes.

The social construct has positioned Black bodies as oppressive yet comfortable with being disruptive. Put another way, "Blackness is consequential, complex, contested, and yet affirming" (Sefa Dei, 2017, p. 3). Blackness, as described by Harney and Moten (2013), means "to render the unanswerable question of how to govern the thing that loses and finds itself to be what it is not" (p. 49). Therefore, creating uncertainty, Blackness is feared and reduced to nothing but a myth—a myth used as a tool to develop and justify all reasons for its mistreatment. Sharpe (2016) describes the word "wake" as the space between mourning one's death and celebrating one's life. It is in this space that is reproduced daily in Black lives. She continues to say that to be in the wake of a Black person is to live in a constant no-space where one is not recognized as a citizen; therefore, the law is not sworn to respect (Sharpe, 2016).

Black and Blackness have a rich history that will take a lifetime for researchers to explore. Throughout history, Black people have been negatively treated and constantly reminded of their status as unhuman, only to be used as an economic power tool for the dominant group. In Hrabovský's (2013) research on the labeling of Blackness, he states that "Black skin was an external sign which referred to the internal inferior characteristics" (p. 67). He concludes his research with the idea that Blackness is misunderstood, which has caused continual embarrassment to Black skin and created an artificial social and cultural construction. The misunderstanding of Black/ness is often misrepresented in social circles and broadcast into the psyche for everyone to ponder. The constant broadcasting is why Wilderson (2020) stated, "Blackness and Slaveness are inextricably bound in such a way that

21

whereas Slaveness can be separated from Blackness, Blackness cannot exist as other than Slaveness" (p. 42).

The word Blackness has many definitions and a deep history that researchers have explored. Nevertheless, as stated earlier, for this exploration, I focus on Black as a race and how anti-Blackness structures inform and treat Black as a non-human and Blackness as a condition or experience. Hunt (2020) states that "Blackness as a collective can only be determined by our relationship to and the reproduction of stories that affirm our collective loss and mourning while remaining insistent that Blackness is a site for possibility and life" (p. 508). Through this definition, Blackness is the stories shared throughout the generation, not just a Black body used as an economic mechanism. Hunt (2020) encourages us to look beyond the limits of slavery dialogue to describe Blackness; instead, he urges us to protect the mysteriousness of "Black life and culture while still allowing for Blackness to serve as a critical site of possibility, expression, creativity" (Hunt, 2020, p. 508). Therefore, exploring how Black males express their Blackness while dismantling anti-racist practices that reproduce Black suffering becomes a necessary part of this study.

The Guise of whiteness

One of the social injustices created by race labeling is the concept of racial privilege. Privilege is a special right, advantage, or immunity created by using power to advance one culture while oppressing another. As described by Jordan et al. (1968), "embedded in the concept of Blackness was its direct opposite—whiteness" (p. 7) which was explored in this study. Whiteness, a social construct, turned into power and became the dominant position reproducing privilege by infiltrating and becoming the structures and standards to measure the progression of all non-whites. Therefore, whiteness became an institution's unearned

power, authority, and influence, creating a sense of entitlement. Sefa Dei (2017) describes the advantages of creating society's structures as being a part of the structure that allows the white body to move in and out of spaces of acceptance by commanding and demanding entry because of their white body. Sefa Dei (2017) describes the white bodies with the need to:

> Hang on to their identification with power and privilege, making them complicit even as they critique the 'inferiority complex' demonstrated by some within the colonized population who would accord privilege and respect to whites and allege the superior position of whiteness. (p. 6)

Therefore, the need to remain pure produced two frames that became the glue to whiteness as the entryway to the status of superiority and separate white from non-white. Those two frames are whiteness as property and the enforcement of white supremacy.

whiteness as Property

White identity shifted during slavery and subjugation to create a racialized privilege entrenched into law and provide the language needed for property status. The language of property status promoted the progress of whites while stopping the progress of Black people. As Harris (1993) describes, the hyper-exploitation of Black labor was accomplished by treating Black people as objects of property. Race and property combined established a form of property contingent on race—only Black people were subjugated as enslaved people and treated as property. As forwarded by Williams and Kniffley (2019), Black bodies were marketed for profit and stripped of all humanity by white people who sought to control them for personal profit gain.

Nevertheless, adopting race constructs solidified and positioned those in power to remain in power. Moreover, for those in power to stay in power, the power must be entangled

23

in multiple aspects of life. For example, one way to increase the value of whiteness is to gain property as land and ownership of those treated as property. As stated by Harris (1993), "through this entangled relationship between race and property, historical forms of domination have evolved to reproduce subordination in the present" (p. 1714), thus causing whiteness to become the key to property or rights. Zamudio et al. (2010) also agree that "whiteness was constructed as a precondition to claiming the rights of a liberal society" (p. 33); however, without the classification of whites versus non-whites, the rights of whites would not exist. Thus, through time what was only a classification of skin color to produce a social status became the standard for other non-whites to live.

Additionally, it became a physical characteristic that provided almost unquestionable access to all things, making whites feel human and all others not human. Dumas and ross (2016) stated that "whiteness makes necessary the dispossession and extermination of Indigenous peoples" (p. 421) because even the land they were on before whites arrived was taken, reclaimed, and renamed as white property. Whiteness as property reproduces the entitlement power because of the birthright of being white. Being white meant being able to obtain whatever you wanted by any means necessary. "As a result of the benefits of whiteness, all whites, from the wealthy to the poor, guarded this right at all costs, and often with the use of deadly violence" (Zamudio et al., 2010, p. 33). The use of deadly force and the manipulation of laws to enact force upon non-whites became what is known as white supremacy.

white Supremacy

White supremacy's primary objective is to exploit people of color by overwhelmingly upholding white dominance in daily practices across cultural, institutional, and social

systems to benefit those identified as white (Ansley, 1989; Williams & Kniffley, 2019; Saad, 2020). For example, whites were legally sanctioned before the Thirteenth Amendment to construct and mobilize punishment on non-whites and restrict freedom from non-white bodies (Jung et al., 2011). Similarly, the school system's protection by law enforcement agencies is an interconnecting network that can operate under the same laws and policies that mimic the structures of society in schools. For example, the school's ability to summon law enforcement is like slave plantation owners' ability to call "law enforcement" when a slave threatens the peace or structure of the plantation.

Another example of white supremacy is how whiteness shows up in education by ideologically lynching all non-white bodies by using and defining "tools that measure adherence to whiteness and presumed white standards" (Rogers-Ard & Knaus, 2021, loc. 487). The white standards became the norms by which non-white bodies that do not align with the white standard are labeled abnormal, which could lead to Black male leaders conforming for the sake of not being labeled abnormal or deviant.

Color-Blindness

White supremacy has impacted our schools directly and indirectly by changing the lens of direct racist actions to racial color-blind actions. Racial color blindness is whites' ability to claim that discrimination because of color is non-existent because they do not recognize color. Protected by color blindness, white people can express hostility toward minorities, scrutinize their righteousness, values, and work ethic, and even declare themselves as sufferers of "reverse racism" (Bonilla-Silva, 2018, p. 4). Bonilla-Silva (2018) defines colorblindness as an ideology that defends racial order by blaming the lack of progress of non-white bodies in an indirect manner versus a direct manner. He argues that

some researchers believe racial attitudes have changed to optimism and racial pessimism by using symbolic racism and group positions. As described by Bonilla-Silva (2018), racial optimists believe there is a "profound transition" (p. 4) in racial attitudes. Racial pessimists strive to discover a "balanced" (p. 5) view and propose that whites' racial attitudes display improvement and resistance. Symbolic racism is an anti-Black view that "has replaced biological racism as the primary way whites express their racial resentment toward minorities" (p. 6).

The same sentiment is why Bonilla-Silva (2018) created four central frames of colorblindness that describe white people's ability to explain away the inequalities. The ideas of abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and minimization become the framing for the belief that Black people have equal opportunities, discrimination is no longer a factor, and it provides context on the status of minorities in society. Additionally, the frames describe whites' ability to control the narrative by suggesting that "discrimination is no longer a central factor affecting minorities' life chances" (Bonilla-Silva, 2018, p. 57). All four of these frames continue the narrative that strengthens the white supremacy platform while reproducing the suffering of non-white bodies.

Black Masculinity

Gender plays a role in the opportunities people pursue. For this study, gender is defined using social and physical attributes of being identified as male from birth. Each race and gender have a story to share, and each person brings their social experiences to be shared and their gender placement within society. For example, the anti-Black "system of oppression works to suppress the ideas of Black women intellectuals and to protect elite white male interests and worldviews" (Hill Collins, 2014, p. 5). As stated by Delgado et al.

(2017), each person has their own identity, and "each race has its origins and ever-evolving history—is the notion of intersectionality and anti-essentialism" (p. 10). Black males are no different.

Johnson-Bailey et al. (2014) state that "although race is a central location for the negotiation of power and privilege in education and society, anti-essentialism led with a discussion of maleness unless the problem of the educational environment being researched is the African American male" (p. 7). Like all other identity markers, Black masculine identities are formed by those who personify the identity and individuals outside the group (Johnson-Bailey et al., 2014). Because of the intersectionality of race and gender in an anti-Black society, Black men's masculine norms differ from white men. "Black men's adherence to Black masculine norms and the intersection of traditional/Black masculinity norms was associated with greater public stigma, whereas adherence to traditional masculine norms was associated with less public stigma when controlling for the other masculinity variables" (Coleman-Kirumba et al., 2022, p. 21). Therefore, all ethnicities are compared to white males to define true manhood. In contrast, everyone else is described as others; as summarized by Johnson-Bailey et al. (2014), conceptualizations of oppression and discrimination in society created "a system of oppression that reflects the 'intersection' of multiple forms of exclusion, prejudice, and discrimination" (p. 234).

In a gender-biased society like America, males are the dominant gender. However, Black males rarely reap the benefits of being male compared to their white male counterparts. The implicit bias can be seen in practices that white men against Black men disproportionately perpetrate, such as stop and frisk, mass incarceration, or police brutality. "Implicit bias may also be involved in teachers' discrimination against Black males, resulting

in school drop-out of Black boys that contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline" (Assari, 2018, p. 45).

All non-white males are compared to the white male as a definition of true manhood, leading non-white males to experience, in many cases, substantial barriers. Slatton and Spates (2014) state that "dominant definitions of 'manhood' are in opposition to socially constructed definitions of Black manhood" (p. 2). The moment Black is added in front of man, the complexities of being free in one's space become exceptionally complicated, consequently causing Black men to create, as Slatton and Spates (2014) describe, "counter societal expectations" (p. 2). Slatton and Spates argue that white males are considered protectors and financial providers. In contrast, Black males are often associated with a criminal, are unreliable, dangerous, and lack the ability to protect or support in many capacities. With such labels or perceptions, one wonders how these perceptions of Black males impact their ability to lead in education.

Socialization of Black Males

Each human has multiple identities that make them who they are. These identity points converge at a point of intersection, where the multiple identities cross. This intersectionality "enables us to explore how experiences are affected by different competing identities and how this impact to exclude individuals in society" (Bhopal & Alibhai-Brown, 2018, p. 47). Individuals are excluded for things beyond their control—identity markers such as Black and male place an individual at a significant disadvantage. Therefore, the intersectionality of "gender and race are broad social identity groups that are often psychologically salient because they are perceived to be permanent predictors of a person's innate characteristics and behaviors" (Buckley, 2018, p. 2).

Additionally, when reviewing the language described in research about Black men, the language from the 1930s to the present makes it almost impossible to discuss Black males through lenses other than gender and race. The misconceptions, historical language, and social stereotypes link Black males to being criminals, jobless, unmotivated, or ill-educated (Buckley, 2018; Rowan et al., 1996). Society has built, as stated by Rowan et al. (1996), "manifested perceptions that have raped our minds, directed our thinking, nurtured our suspicions, and fed into our fears about how the African American male should be socialized" (p. 5). The control of societies thinking about Black males has caused Black males to know and feel unwelcome or unwanted across multiple sectors of society. Black males are often seen as having one sole attribute: being athletic or performing rather than being leaders or intellectuals. This shortsighted stereotyping can be damaging to the Black male's psyche. The mental image of Black males is often presented in what we see, hear, or become aware of through the senses.

Often the gatekeepers of the perception of Black men are the media. Kumah-Abiwu (2019) states, "Black men have become one of the victims of the negative portrayal through media gatekeeping" (p. 72). Media gatekeeping is the process used in media to determine the targeted group and what messages need to be transmitted to the targeted group or about the targeted group, (Kumah-Abiwu, 2019). The narrative media portrays of Black men and boys are often negative stereotypes that focus on the knowledge and emotional reaction of Black men and boys. The social imagery and the white framing of Black males in books, television, and schools is that Black males are uneducable, perceived as dangerous, criminal, inherently bad, lazy, and threatening towards whites. As summarized by Allen (2017), even "schools and their institutional actors draw upon and contribute to dominant ideologies of Black male

identity by positioning Black boys as culturally deficient, anti-intellectual, deviant, and intimidating" (p. 269). At the same time, Black males are overall perceived by white hegemonic society as "hypermasculine, deviant, hypersexual, intellectually inferior, and uneducable" (p. 269).

As stated by Howard et al. (2012), "social imagery becomes an integral part of a population's thinking when institutionalized for a sustained period of time through different venues, shapes generations of people's thinking about a particular reality or perceived reality" (p. 85). Unfortunately, the negative social imagery of society systemically inserts race into every facet of society. It causes the mistreatment of people not by their deeds but by the color of their skin. Therefore, the categorization of Black males, when seen through an anti-Blackness lens, positions dark bodies as "bad and in urgent need of disciplining, punishing whiteness" (Dumas & Nelson, 2016, p. 37). Hence, "his masculinity may become more identified in terms of his physical prowess as opposed to his intellectual" (Rowan et al., 1996, p. 11), which could lead to an overcompensating behavior to prove their intellect, or they will buy into the stereotyping.

Social constructionism is a term built on the idea that knowledge is socially constructed, which means that our life experiences impact our knowledge. Socially constructed knowledge brings the battle between valid and invalid knowledge to the forefront. However, no one has the power to determine valid knowledge. As Weinberg (2014) stated, it is impossible to decipher what is valid knowledge and "avoid implicating culturally or historically specific epistemic standards" (p. 21).

Knowledge's cultural and historical aspects symbolize the social interactions that create shared narratives. Esterberg (2002) stated that one of the three premises of symbolic

30

interactionism "is that the meanings of things arise out of social interactions" (p. 15). Social

interactions through time will cause knowledge to either change or remain the same.

Translating to mean the experiences that occur in specific times or places are embedded into

each social culture, which will cause various meanings and understandings to each

experience (Lock & Strong, 2010). Therefore, social constructionism has multiple historical

connections to the present knowledge, which will require a balance between real and false.

As said by Weinberg (2014), "sources of information are capable of deceiving us, the

achievement of genuinely valid knowledge requires us to withdraw from them into a space of

pure critical reflection" (p. 28). Critical reflection of gained knowledge and understanding of

context is critical to knowledge sustainability in both environment and experiences.

An additional tenet of social constructionism, as stated by Lock and Strong (2010), is

"a concern with revealing the operation of the social world, and the political apportioning of

power" (p. 8) to explain the process of its impact on social interactions. Critical reflection on

what knowledge to ignore is often governed by what is essential to the individual and the

person in power. For example, whatever is embraced as authentic becomes valid to the

person gaining the knowledge as the interaction increases. As the interactions between

objects increase, we begin to "create (and change) through a process of interpretation"

(Esterberg, 2002, p. 15). How we use the knowledge gained through interpretation also

determines the lens of how we function and see the world.

People construct their social realities through their experiences, and "our culture

brings things into view for us and endows them with meaning and, by the same token, leads

us to ignore other things" (Crotty, 1998, p. 54). In "a society marked out by different forms

of oppression, marginalized peoples have different perspectives and accounts based on their

experiences and struggles and are therefore best placed to challenge dominant accounts"
(Lewin & Somekh, 2011, loc. 5016).

Culture is another variable of life complexities that has played a role in creating
differences amongst humans, and societal structures have formed from those differences.
Unfortunately, as social realities change, societal structures have created gaps in constructed
social identities such as race and gender, causing life to be even more complicated. To fully
understand the gap in interpreting and reinterpreting social realities, a critical inquiry
provides insight into society's structures and their effects on race, gender, or economic status.
A critical inquiry addresses the inequitable approaches to appreciating every culture, social
structure, political stance, and race. Social constructionism is concerned with understanding
the social world and providing equitable systems to accelerate social change.

Anti-Blackness

Resistance is a term used to describe an ongoing conflict between two parties. Other
terms for resistance are blocking, shielded, and protected. These three words are the words
that describe what Black people encounter in everyday daily living as they maneuver through
social experiences in their personal and professional lives. Black people are often blocked
from human rights, while whites are often shielded and protected from accountability models
that describe their role in the treatment of Black people. This constant friction is what has
been coined "anti-Blackness" because anti-Blackness is about more than skin color; "it is a
narrative that negates the very humanity of a people; therefore, it is inherently violent"
(Lloyd & Prevot, 2017, p. 22). The narrative surrounding Black people describes Black
people as non-human and provides the unwritten right to treat Black people as objects. In

addition to the multi-dimensional ways Black bodies are subjected to violence, the anti-Black

narrative "has insinuated itself into the collective American consciousness" (p. 25).

Moreover, creating an anti-Black narrative that "has successfully implanted deep

within the American psyche the image of the Black body as a dangerously criminal body and

an ever-present threat to whiteness" (Lloyd & Prevot, 2017, p. 25). The threat to whiteness

has led to the adverse treatment of Black bodies in anti-Black society and academia because

of the constant images of being dangerous criminals. This same labeling process displayed in

schools is also in society because, as Coles and Powell (2020) state, "Black people are seen

as inherently bad people" (p. 115). Symbolic violence provides the lens to analyze how anti-

Blackness gets folded into everyday schooling practices (Coles & Powell, 2020). An example

of the folding of anti-Blackness into everyday school practices is the student handbook of

consequences of misbehavior or the placement of Black male principals into majority Title I

schools.

The everyday school practices have created space for misbehavior incidents to be

treated as an opportunity to remove the threat to peace from the school. Anti-Blackness is a

structure that places Black people between the state and co-collaborators; therefore, as

Wilderson (2020) noted, there is a need to ignore the singularity associated with anti-Black

violence. He continues to summarize that anti-Black violence is a series or a constant

insertion of suffering on Black bodies that fatally narrow the horizon of Black liberation and

eradicates Black cognitive maps that explain the distinctiveness of Black suffering.

Coles and Powell (2020) state that "the roots of Black marginalization are to preserve

peace (whiteness) and to neutralize threats to peace (Blackness)" (p. 116). Because Black

people are seen as objects, everyday anti-Black practices do not give way to Black people

being treated with respect or seek to preserve the Black body, causing words such as preservation and neutralization to be used to seek power, justify inequitable treatment, and frame the need for law and order. As Dumas describes, "Black cannot be human, is not simply an Other but is other than human" (Dumas, 2016, p. 13). Treating Black bodies as "other" supports the theory of Afro-pessimism, which is one of the core beliefs of Black Crit, the theory that "Black people exist in a structurally antagonistic relationship with humanity" (Dumas, 2016, p. 13). Sefa Dei (2017) stated that "anti-Blackness ideology was built on a manufactured notion of white superiority to the Black subject" (p. 67). Saad (2020) described:

> Anti-Blackness against Black men upholding the colonialist white supremacist view of Black men as violent, almost animal-like savages and brutes who are less intelligent than their white counterparts who pose a threat to white womanhood and society at large. (p. 96)

Anti-Blackness is not just a set of institutional and social practices; it provides insight into the ingrained patterns that constantly reject Blackness and Black people (Jung & Vargas, 2021). Anti-Blackness "marks an irreconcilability between the Black and any sense of social or cultural regard" (Dumas, 2016, p. 13). The ingrained practice is the reproduction of Black suffering "because the plantation paradigm has become educational, workplace, welfare, policed paradigms where productivity, thought, decision, indecision, action, and even inaction is based in this trauma" (Fairfax, 2020, p. 62). Additionally, anti-Blackness extends beyond what we have come to learn about slavery historically. Anti-Blackness is in the fabric of the American psyche, "shaping the way we perceive, treat, and relate to Black people— although we no longer wish to enslave Black people (or, in some cases, simply no longer

possess the power to enslave them), we cannot quite stop thinking about them as such"
(Grimes, 2020, p. 176). Therefore, Black bodies continue to be consistently and continually
mortified; identity becomes political and is challenged equally about dignity, self-
determination, and self-preservation to reclaim Blackness and Black identity (Sefa Dei,
2017).

Anti-Black Impact on Black Males

The U.S. Census Bureau report of 2021 describes the population as white people
making up an estimated 76% of the U.S. population compared to Black people at 13.4% and
Hispanic people at 18.5%. White domination of the population potentially leads to the
barriers that often manifest in laws and policies impacting everyday living and retaining
Black people under the authority or control of those in power. For example, Florida's Stand
Your Ground Law allows those who feel a reasonable threat of death or bodily injury to
"meet force with force" rather than retreat, which became the law used to acquit a non-Black
male of killing a Black teen. These cases and others have been researched to explain the
impact of the horrific usage of white domination on Black skin.

According to 2019 population data described by Moslimani et al. (2019), an estimated
46 million Black people in the United States, 48% identified as Black males, yet have one of
the highest incarceration rates. In 2020, the incarceration rate of Black people in local jails in
the United States was the highest rate of any ethnicity, documenting numbers that are nearly
five times the incarceration rates of white Americans and prompting many states to
implement reform laws that are now considering the fiscal outcome of incarceration
disparities, according to the Sentencing Project (Nellis, 2021). This illustrates the reduction
of opportunities or access available to Black males and the depth to which anti-Blackness

causes harm to Black bodies without any liability for the damage caused. The harm caused to

Black bodies has been seen in the community and schools, especially Black and male bodies.

As stated by Fasching-Varner et al. (2018), "this justifying phenomenon is at the root of the

mistrust between Black communities and the U.S. criminal justice system" (p. 7).

According to Hirschfield (2008), there are "reflecting patterns in the criminal justice

system, the intensification of school punishment is borne disproportionately by the youth of

color" (p. 82), meaning there is a correlation between students of color and the intensity of

school punishment. The power of school punishment agrees with Na and Gottfredson's

(2013) research of a harsher response when there is at least one full-time School Resource

Officer (SRO) on campus. It also corresponds with Blad and Harwin (2017), who state that

"nationwide, Black boys are at the highest risk, three times as likely to be arrested at school

as their White male peers" (p. 1). Hirschfield (2008) links the intensity of punishment to the

narratives of criminalization. He states that "criminalization encompasses the manner in

which policymakers and school actors think and communicate about the problem of student

rule-violation as well as myriad dimensions of school praxis including architecture, penal

procedure, and security technologies and tactics" (p. 80). There is an increasing concern

about the good-faith contract of maintaining school safety within these conversations versus

introducing students to the criminal system. Theriot and Cuellar (2016) note that there are

"growing numbers of students who are arrested at school and subsequently introduced to the

juvenile justice system" (p. 369) which supports the literature on the school-to-prison

pipeline. The discrepancies in Black disciplinary consequences explain the 13.7% of Black

students with one or more out-of-school suspensions, higher than any other race group.

Again, easily connected to the same data that describes the 2020 incarceration rate of Black

people in local jails in the U.S. as the highest rate of any ethnicity, according to the Sentencing Project (Nellis, 2021, p. 17). It is not far-reaching to connect the disparities of punishment on Black bodies to the underperforming Black student in academic spaces to the incarceration rate of Black men, especially when 29% of Black men hold a bachelor's degree or higher compared to over 40% of white men (Reeves et al., 2020).

Because adding together the unfairness in practices and students losing valuable instruction time because of suspensions, there is a potential increase in gaps in learning and eventually make it difficult for Black students to keep up in school, therefore increasing the probability of dropping out of school, which could lead to incarceration increase. The impact of the negative experiences described above continues into manhood. Reeves et al. (2020) describe eight ways Black men are not faring well compared to white men. In education, upward mobility, earnings, labor force participation, the unemployment rate during Covid-19, life expectancy, Covid-19 deaths, and criminal justice, Black men's intersectionalities of gender and race have produced negative experiences. Hence, the urgency to further examine the intersection of gender and race will help break the negative recurring disadvantages for Black boys and men (Reeves et al., 2020).

In addition to the high incarceration rate, Black men often experience double the unemployment rate of white men, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2020 report. Linking the barriers such as education, mental health, and law enforcement that seem to come with being Black and male makes it necessary to research Black males honestly and meticulously; however, it is complex because of the entanglement of social factors that misrepresent Black males and continue to cause harm to Black males daily.

Anti-Black Impact on Academia

America's education system has a history of playing "keep away" games with the knowledge gained from an equitable and inclusive education. W. E. B. Dubois (1903) described the fears and thoughts of educating Black people by stating, "the opposition to Negro education in the South was at first bitter, and showed itself in ashes, insult, and blood; for the South believed an educated Negro to be a dangerous Negro" (p. 35). From the secret books provided to enslaved people to learn how to read to the impact of Brown versus the Board of education, knowledge in American society has not been easily accessible for Black students or people. The implications of such inequalities can be found in the core of educational content, such as reading and math achievements. For example, the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance report (2017), describes a Grade 4 reading achievement gap of 26 points in 2017 compared between white and Black students, which is a decrease of only six points from the 1992 achievement gap. Furthermore, the report notes that even in Grade 8, the scores did not differ regarding the achievement gap in 1992 compared to 2017. Sadly, the gap remained the same in 2019 in both reading and math achievement gap between white and Black students averaging in grade 4 (26 points difference), grade 8 (30 points difference), and grade 12 (31.5 points difference) according to the National Center for Education Statistics (2020b).

The achievement gap was not the only inequity that has been continuous in the lives of Black students and people; we must now even include the impact of COVID-19. For example, the digital gap between white and Black families produces an additional barrier that will show its total impact on Black students in the future. In a National Center for Education Statistics survey (2020a), 90% of white families had computer access. In comparison, only

80.2% of Black families had computer access between April and May 2020. Access to a computer is one step; nevertheless, access to the internet poses additional concerns. White families had access to the Internet at a rate of 92.6%. In comparison, Black families' access was limited to 85.6%, the lowest percentage amongst ethnic groups between April and May 2020. The multiple barriers and inequalities will continuously impact the racial climate and achievement gap between Black and white students.

Additionally, even when Black people excel in academic spaces, there are multiple incidents of Black students being denied the opportunity to be honored, for example, earning the honor of being a valedictorian as described in a dispute in Covington, Georgia. A federal judge in 1991 had to resolve a dispute between a Black high school senior and a white student over who gets to be valedictorian. The decision was to make them share the honor. In 2011, Kymberly Wimberly, a Black student in Little Rock, Arkansas, had her valedictorian honor stripped away by her principal and given to a white student with a lower GPA. Alternatively, in 2012 and 2021, another Black valedictorian was forced to either share the honor with a white student or completely strip it away and give it to a white student (Donnor, 2021b).

The achievement gap describes the continuous struggles of Black students in academic space in comparison to their white peers and can be easily dismissed as just students underperforming. However, the valedictorian dispute represents the determination to keep Black people in their place, which is inferior to whites. Therefore, the effect of anti-Blackness acts in academic spaces seems to be the need to create policies that place Black students in the pipeline to prison.

Anti-Black Impact on Leadership

Leadership influences and inspires an individual or group by affecting attitudes and behaviors to accomplish a common goal. Therefore, leaders must believe in their capacity to affect others' attitudes and behaviors to meet the desired result. Moreover, leaders must have "self-confidence in their ability to set a direction for their team and collaborate across the group in order to gain commitment" (Sims et al., 2021, p. 362).

A person's method of influencing another is described as a leadership style. Over the years, research has been done on different leadership styles, for example, transformative, situational, or Laissez-faire leadership, to name a few. The leadership style is a label provided by people's perception of how a leader handles situations as they arise.

For example, Smith's (1984) research describes two types of leaders: pre-civil and post-civil rights. He labeled the two periods of time as Negro leadership (pre-civil rights) and Black leadership (post-civil rights). His research was groundbreaking because he shifted the lens from Black leaders' styles to why the particular type was necessary for Black leaders according to the time frame. Smith's (1984) writings describe the inability to separate social factors from the leadership approach of Black communities. For example, during the Negro leadership phase, most Black leaders were leaders within their community, i.e., church, school, or other local establishments. The downside of the period was that most Black leaders were accommodationists, which means that Black leaders during this pre-civil rights period only knew the limitations of challenging a segregated caste system.

Another example of the impact of social factors is the need to describe Black men as caring. The laissez-faire or criminalist perception of Black men is just some of society's perceptions of them as non-caring; therefore, they need to be described as caring. Bass

(2020) describes a study where Black men "deemed that their status as a Black man was punitive based on societal perceptions of what it means to be Black and male in the United States" (p. 365). Society's intent to punish Black men extends through personal and professional experiences. Moreover, the ownness to overcome such intent often falls on the shoulders of Black men to advance educationally or professionally. As Bass (2020) states, "if Black men buy into the stereotypes presented to them in society as well as the media, they can become locked into the characters that society portrays them to be and possibly manifest a self-fulfilling prophecy as a result" (p. 365).

Black male leaders, throughout time, have had to adjust two parts of their leadership—the expansion of their leadership influence and their impact. The social factors impacting leadership extend beyond race but must also include masculinity which often determines the impact method. Bass (2020) states,

> Leaders who operate out of masculine-centered approaches are more likely to rely on logic, rules, and established policies and structures as the primary basis for decision-making, while those who exemplify feminist approaches to leadership, such as situational leadership, advocate for prioritizing and responding to students, teachers, and the community's needs. (p. 367)

Analyzing leadership styles through masculine and feminine perspectives could also lead to another misrepresentation of Black male leaders.

Leadership is the ability to impact and encourage an individual or group by influencing mindsets and behaviors to achieve a shared purpose. Black men's experiences are racialized and gendered; therefore, the analysis must account for how masculinity and race intersect and relate to systems of power and privilege in the workplace (Pitcan et al., 2018, p.

301). Because "Black men are more likely to experience microaggressions" (Sims et al., 2021, p. 356), it is essential to understand the barriers Black males in leadership roles intersect throughout their everyday lives. Black men are frequently misconstrued or misperceived because of their given stereotypes and the uniqueness of Black male leaders (Bass, 2020). Black male leaders' inability to work in a professional space and not meet forms of racial bias or microaggressions could stifle their performance and lead to more rapid fatigue in the leadership position.

Respectability Politics

The investigation of the perception of Black men in society and how those perceptions influence the experiences of Black men in K-12 spaces includes investigating Black men's perceptions towards other Black people. The success of being a Black male leader in a K-12 space is often determined by their ability to navigate empowering Blacks and correcting the anti-Black perceptions of the deficiencies of Black people (Harris, 2014). The balancing of these two perspectives is called respectability politics.

Respectability politics is a term used to expand the philosophy of neoliberalism, which means that if you work hard and prepare yourself for the workforce, you can control the condition of your being, even if you are Black. Although there is merit to the idea of working hard and being prepared to pursue all hopes and dreams, it is impossible to imagine life in America or across the world without the impact of race. Reid-Merritt (2017) describes the categorization of race that has created "racism is one of the most problematic, persistent, and destructive systems of oppression that plagues the world today" (p. 26) hence the reason to explore the many influences of race on Black male leaders.

Additionally, because such concepts as "hard work pays off" or "neoliberal multiculturalism, as stated by Dumas (2013), "is able to account for continued racial disparities by insisting that racialized subjects who still suffer are either unable to access race-transcending neoliberal opportunities or, more damning, are unwilling to surrender their racial allegiances in favor of neoliberal ones" (p. 531). Black male leaders are positioned in roles that force them to reinforce these judgments because of the personal benefits of respectability politics on their career and identity. According to Jefferson (2023), "those who embrace respectability are also more likely to say that it is important for those committing the offense to change their behavior as well as more likely to support someone saying something about their behavior" (p. 12).

Furthermore, respectability politics provides further insight into how the dismantling of anti-Black structures often releases whites from the pressure to liberate Blacks because, as clarified by (Dumas, 2013), "the primary—and ultimately destructively—limitation of racial liberalism is that it never required white citizens to take responsibility for their own complicity in, and benefit from, structural forms of racial inequality" (p. 533). In contrast, racial liberalism urges Black people to seek upward progress as individuals without conceding to the stubbornness of anti-Black racism in both careers and policies (Dumas, 2013). Navigating the space of inspiration and corrective behavior is a part of the social interactions that occur as Black male leaders interact with other Black people daily. The constant battle of resisting or surrendering to anti-Black structures increases the pressure of deciding how to represent Black culture.

Theoretical Frameworks

This study examines the perception of Black men in an anti-Black society and the impact of those perceptions on Black men leaders in K-12 spaces. The theoretical framework used for this study is BlackCrit.

The birth of Black Critical Theory (BlackCrit) comes from the previous Critical Race Theory (CRT) work. Therefore, the research seeks to provide a brief exploration of CRT to describe the reasoning for branching from CRT and use BlackCrit to explore the experiences of Black men in K-12 leadership roles.

Exploration of Critical Race Theory

The launchpad that brought theorists together to transition their work from critical legal theory (CLT) to critical race theory (CRT) with the knowledge that race is the divider that splits the marginalized from the dominant was the battle of Civil Rights. Many policies and laws fail to advance people of color across economic status and education. Policies such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 slackened the societal hold on Black people in a non-human state, prompting a change in the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and restructuring the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1963. The swift change in laws and policies caused a needed response to slow down the balancing power progress.

During President Nixon's presidential term, four justices were appointed who seemed less concerned with the concerns and interests of minority groups (Brown & Jackson, 2013). Brown and Jackson (2013) stated, "the Court began to halt, and then reverse, many of the hard-won legal victories obtained for underrepresented minorities" (p. 10). The constant back and forth of progress caused a set of lawyers to rise in the late 1970s. These predominantly white lawyers expanded their work in Critical Legal Studies, as stated by Brown and Jackson

(2013), "to expose and challenge the view that legal reasoning was neutral, value-free, and unaffected by social and economic relations, political forces, or cultural phenomena" (p. 12). However, the lawyers discovered that politics and personal bias influenced laws. They continued the oppression of the marginalized by enforcing and legitimizing "the dominant social and power relations through social actors" who commonly assumed that they were unbiased and arrived at their conclusions through an unbiased process of judicial rationalizing (Brown & Jackson, 2013, p. 12). Understanding that race is the divider, CRT was born in the 1970s when 23 lawyers met and started a movement known as CRT.

The foundational core of critical race theory (CRT) is to use an analytical framework that sifts out white supremacy actions and behaviors that create systematic barriers for people of color. Examining the barriers often manifests in laws and policies that impact everyday living and retain people of color under the domination or control of those in power. As stated by Parker and Roberts (2011), CRT "is grounded in a social reality defined by our experiences and the collective historical experiences of our communities' origins" (Kindle loc. 3017). To understand the collection of experiences and their impact, critical researchers explore the creation and transformation of white supremacy structures that oppressed races, increased racism, empowered white culture, and exhibited conflicting progress in empowering the oppressed (Delgado et al., 2017; Esterberg, 2002). Therefore, empowering non-whites became the primary focus for CRT theorists as they fought to create suitable conditions for all non-white humans with all the alienated rights of any human being regardless of race, gender, or economic status.

CRT challenges the experiences of whites as the normative standard and grounds its conceptual framework in the distinctive experiences of people of color, non-white. Although

CRT is the framework that explores the struggles of people of color, there is a particular focus on Black people because of the infrastructure of society that has a more significant impact on Black people than on other non-whites. Dissecting the normative standard helps explain why racial oppression and social experiences are crucial for understanding racial exclusion. CRT analyzes the realities of the lived racist experience of Black people and oppressed others by investigating historical events, such as the Supreme Court cases and the Jim Crow era. CRT provided the tool to decode civil rights disparities, racism, and separate but unequal policy framing.

For example, court cases such as *Brown v Board of Education* began to challenge and dismantle the "separate but equal" rulings from Plessy v. Ferguson. The 1886 *Plessy v Ferguson* case established that although the Fourteenth Amendment provided equal protection under the law for all citizens, it was separate but equal regarding Black bodies, which means that Black people had the right to be citizens. However, it was unequal in the protection of those rights. Freeman (1978) describes the three different meanings of equal protection as "means-oriented," defined as a judicial check box, "fundamental right," defined as the courts' ability to create its limits on enforcing equal protection, and "substantive equal protections" defined as discrimination against Black people as a class (pp. 1058–1062). The court's ability to define laws to benefit whites led to the continuance of the superior versus inferior.

Landmark cases continue to reproduce the need for CRT tenets to explore the impact of laws and policies on non-white bodies, for example, the Supreme Court Case of 1976, *Washington v Davis*. According to the judge, the equal protection law of the Fourteenth Amendment did apply during this case. Federal laws did not have to answer racial

discrimination claims because the laws did not have discriminatory intent. Discriminatory intent, as stated by Brown and Jackson (2013), "is based on whether the actions by the perpetrators are motivated by discriminatory intent, not whether such actions or decisions have a discriminatory effect upon underrepresented minority populations" (p. 15). Therefore, in most cases, particularly in education policy, intent can be justified in a way that is not discriminatory or has no identifiable racial undertone.

The genesis of CRT has helped create the notion of being a Black movement or theory. However, CRT focuses on the experiences of non-whites as they collide with white supremacy structures. White supremacy "is the racist belief that white people are superior to people of other races and that they should have power over them" (Allcorn, 2021, p. 280). White supremacy focuses on annihilating or counterpoising all resistance by relying on economic, social, political, and judicial power to preserve control. White supremacy combines that power received simply for being white and infiltrates every aspect of every non-white category, such as law, schools, and housing, to name a few. Dumas and ross (2016) summarize CRT as a theory that analyzes how racism is built into the fabric of laws and policies designed to suppress all non-white, specifically Black people in the United States. Therefore, to explore how being Black is disruptive and resistant to establishing anti-Black systems, Black critical theory (BlackCrit) was born.

BlackCrit

BlackCrit, an extension of CRT, is designed to spotlight the anti-Black structures in society rather than all people of color. To understand the experiences of being Black in a white-dominant society, one must understand that Black people's non-human experience is a condition separate from other races because the social constructs built with anti-Blackness

structures continue the reproduction of Black suffering. The constant suffering explains the

argument by Reed (2022) that "the experience of living in the aftermath of subverted,

annulled, or still unfulfilled freedom dreams across the diaspora has intensified the feeling of

disordered time" (p. 283). Through time, the unfulfilled freedoms have produced even more

desire to oppose anti-Black structures and to insert Black people's experiences into logical

conversations on the plight of Black lives or living. Everyday Black living displayed across

media spaces continues to publicize the commonality and often dismissal of negative

experiences, particularly the lived experiences of Black men.

BlackCrit addresses the anti-Blackness social construct by expanding the work of

theorizing Blackness not only in how Blackness has maintained its sense of no value but how

to produce a celebratory perspective of being Black—additionally, describing the lasting

impact of those anti-Black structures on Black bodies. BlackCrit focuses not on all people of

color but only on those identified as Black or of African descent to "address the significance

of racial attitudes towards Africans and peoples of African descent in the structure and

operation of the international human rights system" (Lewis, 2000, p. 1076). Hence, to be

Black is to find ways to address negative perceptions and dismantle the structures that place

obstacles for Black people. Therefore, "BlackCrit finds its meaning not in insisting on a

unitary racial location, asserting an essential Black counter-story or political project" (Dumas

& ross, 2016, p. 423). Instead, it commands a recognition of and grappling with friction and

connection beyond difference. In other words, BlackCrit provides the framework to analyze

how Black people resist society's anti-Black culture yet try to live liberated.

The framework is separated into three frames. The first frame analyzes how Blacks

and anti-Blackness are in constant resistance to determine who or what lives and dies by

trying to "make sense of the social, economic, historical, and cultural dimensions of human life" (Dumas & ross, 2013, p. 429). The power struggle between Blacks and anti-Blackness has helped continue the narrative of the second frame of BlackCrit. The frame describes the friction between Blackness and neoliberal-multicultural imagination, meaning that social and economic mobility is driven by work ethic and is not correlated to race barriers (Dumas & ross, 2013). Excluding racial barriers from the story of Black people leads to the third frame of creating a space that both uplifts Black liberatory fantasy while resisting "a revisionist history that supports dangerous majoritarian stories that disappear whites from a history of racial dominance" (Dumas & ross, 2013, p. 431). Black liberatory fantasy focus in this research is the mindset needed for Black people to imagine and strategize on the intentional systemic change that disrupts anti-Black structures (Dumas & ross, 2013).

Dumas and ross (2016) summarize that BlackCrit's primary focus is to address anti-Blackness rather than white supremacy structures addressed by CRT. BlackCrit details the "more detailed, nuanced, historicized, and embodied theorizations of their lived racial conditions under specific formations of racial oppression" (Dumas & ross, 2016, p. 417).

BlackCrit Theorists

As described earlier, the arrival of BlackCrit is just as important as BlackCrit itself. BlackCrit, labeled as a race crit, is in the early stages of being theorized. However, researchers have researched and theorized the individual frames of BlackCrit. For example, one of the main critiques of BlackCrit is, as described by Roberts (1999), the fear that BlackCrit will "reinforce the White-Black paradigm as the only lens through which to view racial oppression, imply that Black people share a common estimate identity, and attribute to all people of color have the same experiences of Black people" (p. 855). "The central

49

component of any dominant racial ideology is its frames or set paths for interpreting information" (Bonilla-Silva, 2018, p. 54). These frames function as filters that explain racial phenomena following a predictable route after people filter issues through them. The three frames of BlackCrit built are anti-Blackness, Blackness exists in tension with the neoliberal-multicultural imagination, and Black liberatory fantasy, Dumas and ross (2016). These three frames describe the complexity of being Black, as mentioned earlier. Frames represent the past, present, and future aspirations of Black people. However, through the framing components of BlackCrit, theorists such as Michael Dumas and kihana miraya ross, have centered their foci on separate components of BlackCrit.

Michael Dumas and kihana miraya ross became the forerunners for taking the different principles of anti-Blackness and Black suffering to help frame the experiences of Black people in schools. In the article "'Be Real Black for Me': Imagining BlackCrit in Education," Dumas and ross (2016) sought to pull Black people from CRT literature and place it in a separate race crit. They analyze how Black people have shown up in CRT through fate and that the Civil Rights Movement was tied to Black people rather than all non-White humans. Dumas and ross (2016) discuss the temptation of others to label CRT as BlackCrit; however, as they state, CRT is a "theory of race, or more precisely, racism, based on analysis of the curious administration of laws and policies intended to subjugate Black" (p. 416). They continue by describing how CRT analyzes white supremacy rather than anti-Blackness. White supremacy is the creation of laws and policies that maintain the oppressor's power. However, anti-Blackness is critiquing how a social construction produces and reproduces social suffering and resistance when a Black body enters a space.

Michael Dumas expanded BlackCrit by furthering the research on Black social suffering at school sites. Dumas (2014) states that "social suffering is a group's consciousness of its pain, which inspires a collective imagination of a 'we' who suffer, a 'we' whose identity is under attack" (p. 6). Pulling from social post-racial theories, Dumas (2014) describes Black suffering as "constant traveling between historical memory and current predicament, that there is a psychic link between the tragedy of antebellum African bondage and post-civil rights (indeed, 'post-racial') Black suffering in schools" (p. 3). The space that links historical memory to the current predicament is the ingredient that produces the freeze, flight, or fight responses (Hammond & Jackson, 2015). Dumas (2014) describes four themes from narratives around Black suffering. The narratives reveal the materiality and mundanity of everyday struggle, the mourning of permanence of structural racism as it links historical and present conditions, followed by the connection between the Black people who suffer and the whites who cause the suffering. Therefore, it is essential to question the impact of Black suffering in schools, indicating the removal or cultural devaluation of Black people and the constant decline of the "material resources that allow Black subjects to be regarded and educated as human beings" (Dumas, 2014, p. 21).

kihana ross takes a more direct look at anti-Blackness regarding how it shows up in multiple places, specifically schools. Anti-Blackness is the effect of the implementation of white supremacy racist ideology that has specifically focused on the death and destruction of the Black body. Dumas and ross (2016) describe the difference between CRT and BlackCrit explicitly by stating that although CRT focuses on the Black experience, it does not address the "critical theorization of Blackness confronts the specificity of anti-Blackness, as a social construction, as an embodied lived experience of social suffering and resistance" (p. 416).

She, across articles, describes anti-Blackness as a space that continues to dehumanize Black students, and she pushes toward educational reparations in her most recent article. ross (2021) defines "anti-Blackness as a theoretical tool and organizing frame" that magnifies and sharpens "the extraordinary efforts required to begin any process of meaningful redress" (p. 229). The redressing ross is pursuing is reparations of educational equities, which she describes as promised knowledge that Black people have yet to receive. ross (2021) states, "anti-Blackness provides an analysis of that suffering as connected to the idea of theft—the theft of Black bodies, the theft of anything Black folks dared to build and/or own as newly 'freed' people" (p. 230). She concludes the article with two notions. The first notion is that what can be done right now is to provide whatever it takes to improve the current reality. She encourages thought around "what it means to create spaces within schools that move beyond improving test scores or graduation rates and attend to Black students' overall well-being. Secondly, what does well-being look like in the context of anti-Black schooling" (ross, 2021, p. 232)?

Chapter Summary

Anti-Blackness is such a part of the American fabric that it creates a natural movement of singularity. Black people often battle between being a collective group or being not associated with Black people that seem to fit the description of being non-human or savages. Anti-Blackness produces a reoccurring loop of experiences that cycles and recycles the negative experiences of being Black in society. This recycling continually causes trauma and suffering that no other group has experienced. Therefore, for the future of BlackCrit, it will be essential to theorize the expansion of liberatory efforts.

Liberatory efforts will help us turn the corner from constant writing and researching the suffering of Black males to searching for ways to improve the experiences and imagery of Black males in school and society. Because BlackCrit develops a consciousness of a Black identity not rooted in biology or genetics, "we should be concerned about avoiding Blackness when so many people still feel uneasy about 'loving Blackness'" (Roberts, 1999, p. 862).

Black people have been oppressed for a long time and need to move from the "wake" position between death and the celebration of life to being entirely in the land of the living (Sharpe, 2016). Therefore, using BlackCrit to not only focus on simply racism against Black male K-12 leaders but to analyze the broader attitude towards opposing a "relationship between Blackness and (the possibility of) humanity" (Dumas & ross, 2016, p. 429) is vital to the progress of Black men and their success professionally.

Lastly, society's inability to separate the societal image of Black males from the school image or take responsibility for the disparities of Black males could explain school data such as the connection between unbalanced Black male enrollment in school and Black male suspension or arrest. For example, according to the U.S. Department of Education 2017-2018 National Data on School Discipline by Race and Gender report (2020), the gap in disciplinary occurrences between Black males and White males is that Black males are 2.65 times more likely to be suspended from school than their White males' counterparts and Black males are 2.44 times more likely to be arrested during the disciplinary occurrences than their White male counterparts.

Additionally, according to the Vera Institute of Justice (Hinton et al., 2018), Black men constitute about 13% of the male population. However, about 35% of those are

incarcerated, and one in three Black men born in 2021 can expect to be incarcerated in his lifetime, compared to one in six Latino men and one in 17 white men (p. 1).

Therefore, it solidifies that although Black males are the minority in school and society, Black male bodies continue to suffer more than their white counterparts. The continuous suffering reproduces the need for Black people to negotiate the lack of power and privilege in education and society as they discover their place in an anti-Black world.

BlackCrit provides the framework for understanding and analyzing the topic of the connection of anti-Blackness structures that impact intersectionalities, such as race, gender, and social identity, and causes the reproduction of Black suffering in Black males in K-12 leadership roles the same as it does in society. Because Blackness is non-gender, there are constant intersectionalities that occur when the Black body appears. BlackCrit creates the ability to link the suffrage of Black male experiences in society to the suffering that reoccurs in schools. Therefore, as society continues to look for ways to lump all people of color into the same experiences, there remains a large discrepancy in the daily experiences of being a Black male and the continuous reproduction of Black bodies harmed, mentally and physically.

Therefore, in this dissertation, I explore the framing of BlackCrit by connecting the experiences of Black men in K-12 leadership roles to their experiences in society. Additionally, expanding the connection of anti-Blackness structures that impact intersectionalities, such as race, gender, and social identity, and cause the reproduction of Black suffering on Black males in schools as it does in society.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter outlines the critical components of BlackCrit through a qualitative case study focusing on a three-prong approach of experience, position, and navigation of social perceptions. This qualitative case study investigates the relationship between the social perception of Black men in society and the professional experiences of 15 Black male leaders in K-12 spaces. The research used direct participant contact with a snowball sampling approach to conduct semi-structured and in-depth interviews to gain insight into the experiences relevant to the intersection of race, gender, position relevance, and the perception of Black men. Each interview began with a music elicitation "to draw out or trigger a memory, affective experience and descriptive in-depth discussion" (Allett, 2010, p. 3). Additionally, each interviewed participant responded to 11 open-ended questions focusing on the larger societal perception of Black men and the impact on K-12 leadership. The questions were categorized into five different sectors. The final phase of the interview included music and a photo-elicitation strategy, allowing participants to reflect and provide a deeper meaning to the impact of anti-Black structures (Harper, 2002).

Relying on multiple sources of evidence made clear the primary focus of assembling the experiences of Black male leaders in K-12 spaces and how they navigate the social perceptions of Black men in their personal and professional lives. The case study is designed to use structural coding to assemble participants' narratives that lead to common themes that are unpacked and discussed in Chapter 4 of the research through narrative inquiry. Collecting and analyzing the experiences of participants who are Black male K-12 leaders provides context for the following research questions:

1. How does the anti-Blackness framing of Black men in society impact the perception of Black men in K-12 leadership roles?

2. How have social justice calamities and political rhetoric shaped, constrained, or determined leadership styles?

3. How does framing Black men in society impact the liberatory imagination of Black male leaders?

These questions aim not to focus on overt discrimination but instead on the anti-Black framing of society that poses a continuous threat to Black men in a position of leadership and the impact of historical perceptions and the current treatment of Black men in society. Therefore, this study has accepted the challenge of Howard and Flennaugh (2011) "to probe into new territories about their experiences, to seek alternative ways of describing how race, gender, and school intersect for Black males" (p. 115).

Gathering Black male narratives created the space for those often forced to hold back or be silent to be the author of their own experiences. Howard and Flennaugh (2011) stated that "each life has its own unique trajectory, set of experiences, triumphs, tragedies, conflicts and contradictions that represent human beings fighting and striving for self-actualization, who better to report these accounts than the actors who have endured these realities" (p. 114). Moreover, this research study explores BlackCrit theory to help understand the experiences of Black male K-12 leaders. Secondly, to determine how and in what ways anti-Black structures and policies impact Black male leaders, I explored the connection between societal perception of Black males and Black male K-12 leaders in an anti-Black society. Lastly, to resist the recreation of Black male leaders assimilating to maintain or improve their position as a K-12 leader, two additional objectives of identifying themes that create support systems

that can improve the experiences of Black Male K-12 leaders professionally and promote future research that focuses explicitly on Black experiences across different education sectors.

Research Design

Qualitative Research

This qualitative case study investigates the relationship between the social perception of Black men in society and the professional experiences of 15 Black male leaders in K-12 spaces. Therefore, the qualitative approach research method allowed for "a deeper understanding of the issue being investigated, honoring the voices of its participants" (Dawadi et al., 2021, p. 27).

Qualitative research is an inductive approach to exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. Maxwell (2013) describes the five goals of qualitative studies as:

- Understanding the meaning of participants in the study, the events, situations, experiences, and actions they are involved with or engaged in.
- Understanding the particular context within which the participants act and the influence that the context has on their actions.
- Understanding the process by which events and actions take place.
- Identifying unanticipated phenomena and influencing and generating new grounded theories.
- Developing causal explanations (pp. 30–31)

These five goals help shape and understand the interpretation of social interactions with anti-Black structures. For example, this case study focuses on how Black male leaders use their

experiences as Black males in society to inform their leadership experiences in K-12 spaces.

Specifically, it seeks to understand the influences of passed-down stories within the Black

communities, the most recent social calamities, and the political rhetoric of Black males on

their actions and the personal emotional, and professional decision-making processes.

Counter-Narrative

Social interactions and environments often shape each person's lens on race

interactions and lived experiences. Narrative inquiry allows the audience to analyze how

social interactions, social positioning, and experiences intertwine in our lives. As described

by Lueg and Lundholt (2021), stories are produced through the negotiating of social

interactions. However, critical social researchers must know who is sharing the story. For

example, majoritarian stories "carry layers of assumptions that persons in positions of

racialized privilege bring with them to a discussion of racism, sexism, classism, and other

forms of subordination" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 28). Solórzano and Yosso (2002) go

further and state that it does not matter who is telling the majoritarian stories because the

"stories are not often questioned" (p. 28) because the stories seem like a natural part of life.

Moreover, as master narratives or majoritarian stories are a natural part of life, this research

creates the space to resist such stories and provide a voice for those that are not heard

because of the intersection of their race and gender.

Researchers used counter-narratives to gain a more in-depth understanding of the

research and resist the dominant group's narratives. Lueg and Lundholt (2021) explain the

resists as "two narratives in confrontation and apprehension" of each other (p. 4). The

counter-narratives of the participants, in this case study, "cannot be reduced to emancipatory,

liberating, or constructive stories. Instead, they can be hostile, and destabilizing: politics and

58

organized propaganda" (p. 4) that debunk the stories of Black men as uneducable or incapable of leading. Moreover, the ability to collect multiple narratives from Black male leaders across different leadership roles provided insight into the meanings of decisions and actions. Additionally, analyzing narratives helped "unfold the ways individuals make sense of their lived experience and how its telling enables them to interpret the social world and their agency within it" (Somekh & Lewin, 2011, loc. 5680).

The research process involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant's setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher's interpretations of the meaning of the data. For example, the approach used during this research included one-on-one interviews and photo elicitation (Appendix B). The interviewing allowed the opportunity to seek a depth of understanding of the meanings of experience from each participant. Borrowing Watkins and Gioia (2015) state, "by 'meanings,' we refer to experiences that are best captured with words and images rather than numbers and counting" (p. 6).

Every person has a story to tell about their life and experiences. Storytelling through a race lens provides a deeper context to the described experiences. Using a case study approach allowed participants to narrate their race experiences related to location, society perceptions, and their roles as Black males in a K-12 space. Finding themes across the sectors of location, perception, and roles strengthened the understanding of the impact of anti-Black structures on Black male leaders. Additionally, sharing the narratives can help strengthen the inequities in social justice and education (Mensah, 2019). Randolph (2019) documented various narratives of stories that can inform the researcher of events that happened "relationally across time, places, and relationships" (p. 637). For example, the interviews, which included

15 participants across different leadership roles, multiple states, and years of experience, provided the opportunity to strengthen the findings if a theme emerged. Interviewing participants from the same region or position would have provided a less diverse view of experiences, potentially weakening the theme.

Therefore, to demonstrate the impact of the intersectionality of race, class, and gender on daily social experiences, Randolph (2019) detangles the intersectionality of race, class, and gender by focusing on a collection of narratives. As stated by Randolph (2019), "detangling voices of participants on the landscape of institutional and cultural discourses among race, class, and gender is vital to epistemological and ontological approaches to narrative inquiry" (p. 639). Ontological realism is established to believe that the real world exists independently of our perceptions and theories (Maxwell, 2013). Parts of our society do not believe that racism impacts social perceptions; however, not believing that racism is still alive and well does not mean racism does not exist. Moreover, epistemological constructivism recognizes that what people perceive and believe is shaped by their assumptions, prior experiences, and the reality they interact with (Maxwell, 2013), thus, becoming a critique of case study research.

Case Study

The case study focuses on Black male leadership in K-12 spaces, and the navigation of the historical social perceptions of Black males helps to satisfy all three focuses of a case study inquiry. According to Yin (2014), the three focuses of a case study inquiry are managing variables of specific situations, leaning into numerous data sources, and being aware of developing theoretical recommendations. The three focuses of the case study inquiry in this research are deciphering Black male leaders' experiences, amassing multiple

data points, and leaving space for the constant evolution of the theoretical framework and methods.

Applying the definition of a case study, as provided by Yin (2014), "investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident" (p. 16). This allows the opportunity to investigate the impact of the intersectionality of being Black and male in a leadership role in K-12 spaces. For example, investigating Black male leaders must include historical context, lived experiences, and uncertainty of the impact on each Black male leader, essentially linking the real-world context of being Black and male to everyday leadership experiences. Therefore, the case study allows the gathering of voices to present common themes lived out in Black male leaders' everyday lives. Stake (1995) describes case studies as either intrinsic or instrumental. Intrinsic case studies are interested in learning about a problem (object). In contrast, an instrumental case study transitions from just an object to a study of how other factors impact that object and how that object responds to those factors. This is the crux of using a case study to determine how context that is not evident such as social perception, impacts Black male leaders.

The case study expands on the impact of historical context and media on Black males living experiences. Additionally, using a case study for this research as a methodology allows for a larger gathering of data through interviews and photo elicitation. Thus, data gathering allows for systemically comparative narratives to be heard and divided into units of analysis (themes). The themes are coded so that each voice's representation displays negative and positive critiques of the power relations between society and the intersection of being Black and male in an anti-Black society.

The complicated experiences of being Black and male are innately and continuously aligned with the struggles that intersect social location, class, gender, sexuality, and other differences. Lock and Strong (2010) stated "that meaning and understanding have their beginnings in social interactions" (p. 7), which seems to have an impact on respecting people's differences. Unitary racial location asserting an essential Black counter-story or political project is not where BlackCrit finds meaning; instead, it is comparable to Blackness being "ever beyond the reach of one's grasp. Once you think you have a hold on it, it transforms into something else and travels in another direction," as described by (Johnson, 2003, p. 2). BlackCrit seeks to gather multiple transforming experiences of Black people as they interact with the transforming matrix of anti-Black structures. Therefore, it is critically necessary to acknowledge and wrestle with the differences and interdependences of Black male leaders in K-12 spaces (Dumas & ross, 2016).

Acknowledging the voices of Black male leaders and asserting the authority to define what is true, valid, rational, and scientific become urgent. They strengthen the need to use social science research to untangle people's life contexts with rational inquiries relating to the character of knowledge and truth, being, and values that support the judgments of humans (Somekh & Lewin, 2011).

A case study supports creating space that, according to Mensah (2019), "allows the storytelling and sharing of narratives as uniquely positioned within time and context of the life experiences of those telling them and those learning from them" (p. 1413). Empowering participants creates the space for the researcher to gather more in-depth narratives.

However, the more in-depth narratives gathered from participants continue the critique of case studies that the knowledge of lived experiences shaped assumptions. This

explains why grouping Black male experiences to form new outcomes is not encouraged because generalized cases limit the contribution of new developments. Also, my former experiences of being a leader could have led to predictions of findings rather than allowing the findings to emerge, which is a critique of the researcher entering the research with preconceived notions about the findings. Nevertheless, collecting and analyzing participants' experiences as Black men and their leadership helped expand the understanding of the impact of assumptions, stereotyping, perceptions, and racism.

Research Sample

To qualify for the study, participants had to identify as Black, male, currently or formerly in a leadership position for six or more months, and supervised five or more subordinates. This process yielded 11 initial participants but ended with 15 through snowball sampling from the north, south, and mid-west of the United States and ages 35 to 55. The research sample criteria came about because, as a former Black male school leader and literature, it was evident that the more requirements, the less represented Black male voices would be in the study. It is important to reiterate that for this study, a leader is defined as someone managing five or more subordinates. Gender is defined using social and physical attributes of being identified as male from birth. Black is defined as those identifying themselves as Black or African American.

Sample Selection

As a former school leader, I targeted outreach by contacting participants within my networks directly by emailing or by phone to other fellow school leaders. I advertised through social media (Facebook, Instagram, and GroupMe) to seek out additional participants that needed to be connected through the snowball sampling. To begin the

snowball sampling process, the initial participants contacted others in their networks to be

interviewed. Snowball sampling is employed when the researcher seeks to use at least one

known participant to gain access to other participants. It is important to note that snowball

sampling does run the risk of "easily influencing the results by introducing unexpected or

uncontrolled factors" (Noy, 2008, p. 166) because participants could refer to participants who

are similar to their beliefs or experiences. Fortunately, participants came from numerous

places and provided diverse experiences in their K-12 leadership positions.

Participant Data

To adhere to the practice of protecting the identity of each participant, they were

asked to provide a pseudonym to represent their narrative. If a participant chose a code name

that was too closely related to their identity, I prompted them to choose another to ensure

their confidentiality.

JD, a Black male, has served as a school leader in the south. Throughout his

leadership, he has been a part of all Black staff and student settings. His primary focus has

been to support the Arts department. He has been in education for 10 years and entered

education through a non-traditional route, meaning he worked in the industry first before

joining the education field. He is a father to two sons and a daughter.

Otis, a Black male, has served as a school leader in public and private schools in the

south. He is a husband and father to three sons. He has over 20 years of experience in

education and began his leadership journey when he was younger than 30.

Earl, a Black male, has served as a school leader in the public school setting in the

south. He has over 20 years of experience in education. He has worked in multiple states as a

school leader with the mantra that once you were in his classroom or under his responsibility, he would take good care of you.

LionofJudah, a Black male, has served as a teacher, school leader, and district leader across multiple school systems in the south. He has a strong spiritual background that guides his leadership style and decisions. He has over 10 years of experience in education. He is a husband and father to a son and daughter.

Lefty, a Black male, has served as a teacher and school leader in the north. He is a husband and father of two daughters. Hawk uses his 20 years of educational experience to serve and support schools nationwide.

Lewis, a Black male, has served as a teacher, school leader, and district leader across multiple school systems in the south. He is a husband and father of a son and daughter. He has over 23 years of experience in education.

Chadwick, a Black male, has served as a teacher and school leader across multiple school systems in the south. He is a father to a daughter. He has over 10 years of experience in education.

Bobby, a Black male, has served as a teacher and school leader across multiple states and school systems in the south. He has over 20 years of experience in education. He is a father to two sons and one daughter.

Cordell, a Black male, has served as a teacher and school leader across multiple school systems in the north. He has over 25 years of experience in education. He is a father of four sons and four daughters. He currently serves and supports schools nationwide, particularly Black male leaders in a school setting.

Charlie, a Black male, has served as a teacher and school leader in the south. He is a husband and has over 25 years of experience in education.

Jamie, a Black male, has served as a teacher, school leader, and district leader in the south. He has over 10 years of experience in education.

Fred, a Black male, has served as a teacher, school leader, and district leader in multiple states and school systems across the north. He has over 15 years of experience in education. He is a husband and father to a son. He has supported schools and districts across the nation. He currently has transitioned out of education and into the business sector.

Tchoufen, a Black male, from an African country. He speaks multiple languages. He has served as a teacher and school leader in various school systems in the north. He has over 15 years of experience in education. He is a father to two sons and two daughters.

Marcus, a Black male, has served as a teacher and school leader in the south. He is a husband and has over 20 years of experience in education.

Johnny, a Black male, has served as a teacher and school leader across multiple schools in the south. He has over 15 years of experience in education. He is a husband and father of a daughter and son.

Data Collection

In-depth Interviews

Each participant was given a range of dates, times, and the option to choose a location. Participants also had the option to provide their preferred date, time, and location if the provided date did not meet their needs and to increase confidentiality. I hosted 13 of the 15 interviews virtually using the Zoom platform. Two of the participants' interviews were completed in a face-to-face setting. Furthermore, once the date, time, and location were

determined, I provided a written confirmation and a reminder leading up to the interview.

Each interview began with me reviewing the IRB consent form to ensure that each

participant was fully aware of the purpose of the interview, their option to stop the interview

at any time, and the incentive that would be provided for completing the interview. Once the

participants agreed to complete the interview, I provided each participant with the first open-

ended question. I made them aware of the organization of the interview. For example, all

questions are open-ended and grouped into five different sections. The sections were

demographic and leadership journey, race, gender, leadership experiences, and photo

elicitation with a closing song (Appendix C).

Additionally, I asked participants to provide a code name, "pseudonym," that would

be used to represent their identity moving forward. To ensure that the participant had time to

focus on the interview and to provide them time to think through the first question, which

was for them to tell me a little about themselves in terms of their academic journey, what

made them decide to work in K-12 spaces, and for them to describe their journey to

becoming the leader, I played the song *I wish I knew how it felt to be free* by Nina Simone,

(1967) (Appendix A). As mentioned in chapter 1, the lyrics to this song allowed them to

think about their understanding of their freedom and to ground the conversation.

Photo Elicitation

Participants were asked to observe the photo (Appendix B) to help provide another

layer of the impact of anti-Black structures. The picture allowed me to expand the research to

include any biases towards Black men that may come up through the observations of the

photo. The photo consists of two faces that merge as if they were split in half. The visual

focus is on the two sides of the same person, one with a tie and one with a hoodie. This

process of inserting photos into research is called photo elicitation (Harper, 2002). When

added to interviews, photo-elicitation creates an additional form of representation. Collecting

the additional representation allowed them to identify anything of their choice that resonated

with them through the observation. In addition to observing the photo (Appendix B),

participants were provided background music by Michael Kiwanuka (2010), titled Home

Again. The music provided a chance to ground the observing process of the photo and help

give language to their observation.

Data Analysis

The semi-structured interview was categorized into six different sectors. The first

sector focused on demographic information such as race, gender, years in leadership, and the

number of subordinates managed. For example, tell me a little about yourself in terms of

your academic journey and what made you decide to work in K-12 spaces, and describe your

journey to becoming the leader you are today. The second and third sectors focused primarily

on the larger societal perception, such as the killing of Black men and boys by police and the

treatment received when not in professional attire or settings. For example, when social

justice calamities such as Trayvon Martin or George Floyd occur, how do you process those

moments as a Black male and as a Black male leader? The fourth sector combined the larger

societal perceptions with professional experiences. For example, when you compare your

personal experiences to your professional experiences of being a Black man, what are some

things that are different or similar as you navigate both spaces? The fifth sector provided an

opportunity to gain insight into proposed solutions from participants. For example, if you

could operate your current leadership role any way you wish, what would be some things you

would do differently and the same and describe what a space would look like and feel like for

you to be your authentic self? The sixth sector focused on their reflection of the photo. For example, participants had to describe what resonated with them regarding the photo.

After completing the interviews, I used Nvivo to transcribe verbatim statements given during the interview. This was followed using structural coding to sort participants' responses according to the interview questions and pre-established codes. Nvivo is a qualitative analysis software that organizes and codes data such as interview notes. The pre-established codes were Blackness, anti-Blackness, gender, liberatory, race, photo response, and their journey of becoming a leader. This process of deductive coding (top-down coding) allowed for coding the data based on a previous coding structure (i.e., Blackcrit framework). In this case study, deductive coding helped to back up generalized statements with specific examples and find a common language shared regardless of role, location, and years of experience. The second level of coding allowed for identifying common phases and themes. For example, most of them shared their belief about working twice as hard, a common phrase shared during one-on-one interviews. After coding each interview to match each theme, such as participants feeling pressure to perform to prove their worth or stifling their voice to remain in their leadership role, the next step was to verify coding themes. These common threads led me to rewatch their recording and read transcripts to understand further the nuances not necessarily shown in the text but learned through their body language and voice tone. Lastly, if there was any uncertainty about what I concluded from analyzing the text and recording, I contacted the participants directly for clarity.

Data Quality

Researching a topic as complex as the intersection of race and gender can lead to opportunities or mistakes that must be explored. Research has often described the

69

intersection of Black and male in leadership roles as a style needed to conform to the already established anti-Black structure. However, to expand such research, a need for rich data that can be gained through in-depth and semi-structured interviews will reduce the validity threats. One such threat is that participants may not accurately reflect their opinions by downplaying their interactions with anti-Black structures. To help combat this, open-ended questions were created to help eliminate research bias and provide consistency in questions. Additionally, cross-referencing participants' responses to the open-ended questions to their photo responses allowed me to analyze the data using a triangulation approach. Triangulation provides more than one method to review the data, which lessens the chance of being vulnerable to errors because the multiple data points allowed me to test for consistency.

Trustworthiness and dependability of data interpretation were ensured through independent review, identifying themes in the transcripts, and developing themes as they emerged. To ensure the reliability of the research, the study was documented and triangulated through video interviews, photo elicitation, and transcripts.

Throughout the collection of interviews, I used specific strategies to increase the confidentiality of data as well as the accurate relaying of findings. For example, I made sure to unblur my virtual recording background screen for all virtual interviews to increase the certainty that I was in a private space and that they could be reassured they could speak freely. After each interview, their data was stored in a separate folder in the university-endorsed drive. Lastly, to ensure that data was interpreted accurately, I contacted any participant for additional questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2020).

Researcher Role and Reflexivity

Although there are pros to using a qualitative approach, it does have limitations. One of the most common listed limitations is that it is subjective, which means that the interpretation is left in the hands of the researcher. Creswell and Creswell (2020) describe that researchers are hopeful they can eliminate their bias. However, the researcher must recognize that they influence the study's findings. "Researchers recognize that their own backgrounds shape their interpretation, and they position themselves in the research to acknowledge how their interpretation flows from their personal, cultural, and historical experiences," as stated by Creswell and Creswell (2020, p. 27). As a former Black male leader and researcher, I practiced protecting each participant's privacy at a high level by coding their names and providing descriptors highlighting their qualifications for the study along with some general humanizing factors.

Moreover, my former role as a K-12 leader made me aware of my bias toward Black male leaders. However, it is my intersectionality of former role, race, and gender that created the setting needed for participants to talk freely during the interview. Furthermore, my previous role as a school administrator provided me access to the language and experiences of school leaders in K-12 spaces. To ensure my experiences did not overtake the Black male leaders' voices. To combat this limitation, I limited my opinions and used my awareness of K-12 language to prompt participants to explain educational language and provide additional context to the experience shared.

Chapter Summary

Critical social theories examine the human collections of experiences that inform the knowledge and understanding of the world. These everyday social experiences are solidified,

analyzed, and layered with cultural traditions and historical context, producing a "symbolic map of social relations that we use to negotiate our experiences" (Levinson, 2011, p. 4). Throughout the study, participants are encouraged to navigate through their social relational map in describing how they navigate the anti-Black structures they encounter.

Black men have developed a historical context in society that has impacted both the everyday living and work experiences of Black male leaders. Levinson (2011) stated that "through our primary enculturation, our primary socialization into a particular group, we inherit a symbolic map of social relations that we use to negotiate our experiences" (p. 4). Black men in K-12 leadership have to balance the act of cultural and social experiences with the goals and policies often present in the field of education. The complex circumstance of being a Black male educational leader is that the social identities shaped through social interactions can cloud reality and paints our perceptions of diverse cultures. As Esterberg (2002) stated, "there is no social reality apart from how individuals construct it" (p. 16), meaning that experiences are determined by how people act or respond to the experience.

Social interactions throughout life are the foundation for forming ideologies for or against gender, race, economic status, sexual orientation, and other identities. Hence the reasoning for the coding is to include the Black leaders' gender, race, and other identities that impact their decision-making. Therefore, it is essential for researchers to "encompass all the practices through which meanings are produced and circulated" (Somekh & Lewin, 2011, loc. 5016). These complex experiences Black male leaders in this study have gathered through life are the basis of the paradigm of social constructionism and directly connect to the theoretical framework of Black Critical Theory. Understanding the relationship of social experiences to oppressive structures will help dismantle the reproduction of oppression and

72

suffering. Levinson (2011) crafted the definition of structural domination as "patterned and enduring, not just momentary; it is built into the institutions of society and is deeply embedded in everyday practice" (p. 11). The social construction paradigm acknowledges that social experiences profoundly impact knowledge. Through those experiences, social identities' constructs affect the narratives we share and the lens we look through. Therefore, to explore and measure those experiences, a case study approach is necessary to analyze the narratives of the patterns of experiences.

Chapter 4: Results

I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel To Be Free Lyrics

I wish I could give
All I'm longin' to give
I wish I could live
Like I'm longin' to live
I wish I could do
All the things that I can do
Though I'm way overdue
I'd be starting anew.
~ Nina Simone (1967)

Introduction

This qualitative case study investigates the relationship between the social perception of Black men in society and the professional experiences of 15 Black male leaders in K-12 spaces. The interview results show three main themes: (a) anti-Blackness structures increase Black male leaders' pressures to perform, (b) Black male K-12 leaders had to contend with navigating their identity in the presence of anti-Black structures, and (c) social perceptions choke Black male leaders' dreams. The following research questions guided the investigation of the impact of the social perception of Black men:

1. How does the anti-Blackness framing of Black men in society impact the perception of Black men in K-12 leadership roles?

2. How have social justice calamities and political rhetoric shaped, constrained, or determined leadership styles?

3. How does framing Black males in society impact the liberatory imagination of Black male leaders?

In Chapter 4, I describe the impact of anti-Black structures on Black male leaders' experiences through the participants' narratives. This qualitative, semi-structured interview

discusses the experiences of 15 participants who identified as Black, male, current, or former K-12 leaders in a public or non-public educational setting. Additionally, the participants supervised at least five staff members with 10 or more years of educational experience. As shown in Table 1, the participants are 10 current or former school leaders (i.e., principals, assistant principals, etc.) and five current or former district leaders (superintendents, principal supervisors, etc.). The participants brought a wealth of personal and professional experiences as they reside in the northern, mid-west, and southern states of the United States.

Table 1

Participants' Identity Markers and Positions

Participant Name	Race	Gender	Positions
JD	Black	Male	Current Department Team Lead
Otis	Black	Male	Former School Leader
Earl	Black	Male	Former School Leader
LionofJudah	Black	Male	Current District Leader
Lefty	Black	Male	Current School Leader
Lewis	Black	Male	Current District Leader
Chadwick	Black	Male	Current School Leader
Bobby	Black	Male	Current School Leader
Cordell	Black	Male	Former School Leader
Charlie	Black	Male	Current School Leader
Jamie	Black	Male	Current District Leader
Fred	Black	Male	Former District Leader
Tchoufen	Black	Male	Current School Leader
Marcus	Black	Male	Current School Leader
Johnny	Black	Male	Current School Leader

Research Question #1

How does the anti-Blackness framing of Black men in society impact the perception

of Black men in K-12 leadership roles?

Finding #1: Anti-Blackness Structures Increase Black Male Leaders' Pressures to

Perform

The perceptions of Black men in K-12 leadership roles caused participants to feel that

every facet of their being was under a microscope, and they had to work harder to prove their

worth. This increased pressure to perform in the workplace led the overwhelming majority of

participants to feel that "every move had to be so well thought out because every decision

was being analyzed," Johnny, the school leader, stated. The anti-Black structures that Black

male leaders battle explains why Chadwick, who has received awards for his leadership,

realized that "sometimes you have to work twice as hard just to be equal." "Our parents told

us we had to be two times better than our competition," declared Lewis, who strives to

increase representation in education. However, Lewis also argued that "it's almost like we

gotta be perfect, we have to be perfect." Even though the "seat is full of pressure"

participants worked twice as hard to prove they "deserve to sit in [the] seat" as participant

Jamie, a novice district leader stated.

The emotional labor of continuously feeling pressured to perform and questioning

one's value and identity is fatiguing. Anti-Blackness framing has reaped havoc on the being

of Black males causing thoughts of inferiority and self-doubt. Black men find themselves

between having to prove themselves to others and feeling they do not belong. It is no secret

that anytime you feel like you have to prove you belong and go against resistance, the work

of being successful is more complex and more challenging. Nevertheless, these Black male

leaders fight against the grain every day, and as Taylor et al. (2020) summarize, Black resilience is the ability to bounce back when anti-Black structures strike. Hence why Lewis stated,

> we cannot subject ourselves to feeling down when we already know the puzzle pieces are going to be moved. We already know that going in. So yeah, it frustrates you at the moment because I was frustrated when it happened to me, but you always have to understand we are built for this.

Additionally, proving belonging comes with being stereotyped. For example, "stereotypes of being the Black leader come with the assumption that you can only serve or work with the Black community," as described by Chadwick. Black male leaders described throughout the interview the tightrope they walk as they navigate all aspects of anti-Black structures. Unfortunately, the anti-Blackness barriers towards Black males are delivered by non-Black people and Black people. Marcus (who served as a school leader) explains that he "also gets barriers with people that do look like [him] because they feel like [he] don't know what [he] is doing."

Moreover, as Bobby described, "I have to constantly remind people who look like me not to assume that just because I'm Black and you're Black. I'm gonna take your side." The assumptions made about Black male leaders continue to stereotype all Black men the same and provide another barrier for Black men to overcome.

In addition to being concerned about same-race bias, Black male leaders also have to navigate "the mask [they] wear to be able to function in [their] daily lives," as expressed by Otis, as well as apply the code-switching needed to stay in their leadership role. Black male leaders such as Johnny, have "seen times when [his] white counterpart, male or female,

would respond to a Black or white supervisor in a way so different from the way [he] would." Johnny explained, "it is fear that if I said the same thing that my white counterpart said, I would be judged or held accountable differently than they would." The conflict of trying to rewrite the narrative is recognizing that the rules for Black men in society or educational leadership differ. Therefore, Chadwick recommends keeping a tally of the challenges you caused because "you want to make sure that you are keeping yourself in a position to have an impact and to be careful because you can't impact anything if you're not in a position to do so."

The Mirroring of Black Male Experiences

Black male leaders are undervalued, and often society has not fully grasped "the things that I have to walk with and deal with and consider, that other people don't have to do just in their daily life," Chadwick expressed with such frustration. Constrained by the structures of anti-Blackness has caused Black men to feel misunderstood and fully exposed because they cannot hide or disguise their Blackness or maleness. For example, they can "disguise being a principal, father, and so many different things"; however, as Chadwick, a community school leader, continues, "when I go in the world, I am a Black man, and sometimes the stress of that is a lot." Marcus expressed, "as a Black man, sometimes I don't even like going out in public anymore, not even the grocery store. I have to look over my back. It feels like I'm paranoid. It shouldn't be that way." Grimes (2020) summarizes it as the impact of hypervisibility that has caused Black people to toil with proving their distinctness despite the oppressive structures in their everyday lives.

Unfortunately, it happens even when their Blackness and maleness intersect with their leadership roles at the workplace; they are still not in a place where they are respected,

valued, or not seen as a threat; they are exposed to stereotypical unfavorable treatment. Black male leader Bobby who served as a school leader in multiple states did not hesitate to share his belief of having to prove himself and show that he belongs. Bobby describes incidents of having to extend himself because other white male school leaders were not acknowledging him at sporting events as the school leader. In another example, participant Otis (who served as school leader) says, "at least once a week, twice a week, I scare somebody just by walking in the hallway and entering a classroom." The emotional toil of constantly having their sense of being on trial creates a tension between knowing one's worth and yet being fully aware that emotional exertion increases fatigue because "skin tone calls kind of a fear reaction in certain cases," as described by Otis.

Unfortunately, the lack of respect or value impacted the participants' professional appearance. Marcus, who represents his Blackness unashamed, believes that because he "doesn't look the part," he has a more challenging time proving himself and has not been afforded specific opportunities because he refused to "cut my hair or trim beard down." For example, people ask him where he "got his administrator license," or his "leadership gets questioned particularly by people that don't look like me." Jamie continued the theme by connecting the justification of working hard to feeling pressure to look the part. He shared that he had to "work extremely hard" because he was "young and Black." Additionally, his beliefs reign true to him because "the public eye was on the Black man" and "the rules are different for us," concluded Lewis.

To be Black and male means to be in a society built to destroy or control your livelihood yet rely on that same society to provide the basic survival needs. The daily dilemma that Black males face, keeps them from being their true selves, and increases the

pressure to perform because the participants are trying to rewrite the narrative of being lazy, uneducable, and everything that represents not being human.

Research Question #2

> *How have social justice calamities and political rhetoric shaped, constrained, or determined leadership styles?*

Finding #2: Black Male K-12 Leaders Had to Contend with Navigating Their Identity in the Presence of Anti-Black Structures

In correspondence to anti-Black framing creating social justice calamities and hostile political rhetoric, Black male leaders experience negative mental feelings yet feel obligated to use the calamities as teachable moments for their students or children. Social justice calamity is defined as an event that causes unjust and extreme harm to a human being that represents the continuous reproduction of devaluing the human life of marginalized people. The suffering brought upon Black male bodies has been so disastrous that some participants, for example, have been unable to watch the nightmare on George Floyd's body. "I couldn't do it, couldn't do it," voiced Otis, father of three sons. Watching such calamities is even more challenging because "I can automatically see myself in those gentlemen, looking like me, especially in situations where they are just trying to exist," as Fred, father of a son, noted. According to Otis, when these events happen, "it confirms my place in society, which is hard to accept, to know that you're expendable, to know that you are not valued enough, that your life is not valued enough."

Black male leaders described their need to code-switch throughout the interview when social calamities such as the death of Trayvon Martin, George Floyd, and even locally, Andrew Brown Jr. occur. Jamie, who participated in marches, stated that "even after

experiencing all of that, and showing up at school the next day, and having to be a leader in the building, was a lot for me to process." To provide additional context to the participants' responses, it is necessary to note that two participants had direct ties, via friend or family, to two of the most recent social calamities involving Black males being murdered at the hands of the police. In addition, one participant whose representation is directly connected to the recording of the documentary "When They See Us," which describes five boys of color who are now exonerated and accused of rape and murder.

In the day and age of social media, these calamities that were only known through history books or local communities can now be shown worldwide in seconds. Jamie exclaimed that the impact of such negative images has been "extremely difficult, extremely hard" to process. Cordell, a father to four boys, also said, "heartbroken and getting choked up" because, like participant Johnny, father of a son, "it's stressful. There's a lot of stress. There's a lot of anger. There is fear." Additionally, these tragedies have an impact on the everyday practices of Black men. For example, through the transferred trauma of Ahmaud Arbery, participant Lefty, father of two daughters, shares his story of reliving that tragedy through the lens of Ahmaud Arbery:

> I remember this summer, I was visiting my grandmother-in-law, and I went for a run. I was running through a neighborhood and got Ahmaud Arbery vibes. I was like, all right. It's a whole bunch of homes; they still need to be completed. I'm jogging through this neighborhood. I got on a workout shirt and some shorts, so it looks like I'm jogging. I got my headphones in, but I got them low to hear everything around me. I'm not stopping anywhere in this neighborhood. I immediately thought about

that [Ahmaud Arbery] situation. I saw some images that mirrored the type of situation

he was in that day.

Lefty's jog experience in a similar setting as Ahmaud caused him to re-evaluate his identity

and compare his identity to someone he does not personally know and who was murdered in

a similar environment. The leftover trauma caused by oppression and institutionalized racism

that Lefty experienced is post-traumatic slave syndrome (Leary, 2017). These emotions

shared by the participants are why this research has to consider how social calamities are

experienced through the lens of Black male leaders. Through the research on post-traumatic

slave syndrome (Leary, 2017), we learn that trauma passed down through the generations has

shown up in our actions and thoughts. For example, those trauma-caused lessons helped us in

the past to prevail; however, those same lessons transferred through the experiences of the

community cause fear and hinder the progress of success (Leary, 2017).

 As described by Fasching-Varner et al. (2018), the germ of trust seems to coexist

between Black communities and the U.S. criminal justice system because anti-Black

structures can cause harm to the Black body without any liability for the harm caused. The

hurt caused on Black bodies, especially Black males, has been seen in the community and

within K-12 settings. The fears and feelings that transpire during these tragedies must be

navigated in their personal and professional lives.

 As Johnny explained, "I try not to carry that with me to work, even though it was on

my mind." Because "my position or my leadership had to take precedence over my feelings,"

as described by Jamie. The ever-present anger and fears become concealed as Black male

leaders try to "hold back some of the ways I felt about what happened, with what the political

expectations and communication allows," Chadwick described. The suppression of feelings

makes it highly critical for leaders to find the personal time or take moments to breathe, think, or find ways to pour into themselves because [they] had "to continue to do the pouring in light of calamity when in the building," Jamie described. Black male leaders do not have the avenue to process such calamities because having to "continue to serve and give everybody what they need."

Black male leaders suppressing their feelings and continuing to serve as leaders became coined by the participants as teachable moments. A teachable moment in this study is described best by participant Fred, who stated,

> I quickly turn on my educator hat because that's the strength of my experience, and that's what I lean on. Using the moment as an opportunity to empower others, whether it's from the standpoint that we have to speak out against this or from the standpoint of some things that we need to do to make sure that we keep safe because you can't speak out if you're not here.

In summary, teachable moments are a natural response to educators; however, these teachable moments are laced with the intent to teach how to survive anti-Black structures while implying that the victim can navigate those structures. For example, as stated by Bobby,

> we went back to the hoodie situation of Trayvon Martin. A lot of kids didn't understand that situation. I said, let me explain something to you. You look a certain way if you put yourself in a situation where you can be threatened.

Anti-Black harm places Black male leaders in a position to try to explain the unexplainable hence, why Wilderson (2020) explains that anti-Black violence and the narrative will never be able to co-exist because "violence in a narrative must have an

83

explanation, a trigger, a contingent moment that makes it make sense" (p. 89). Bobby's

position is that he must find an explanation for such violence leading Bobby to follow up

with, "a lot of our kids don't know how to handle pressure." "This may sound strange,"

school leader Chadwick recognizes as he states,

> Professionally, man, I use it as an opportunity to learn, an opportunity to teach our
>
> students and community how do you protect yourself. How do you still keep your
>
> identity? How do you still be proud of who you are to be Black and realize that you
>
> still have to survive in a world that may not see things the way you do? I use it as a
>
> teachable moment and opportunity to grow our kids and our community.

Unwanted anxiety caused by the violent acts on Black bodies has also caused Black male

leaders to worry about their children, especially their sons. JD stated,

> As a Black male, it inflicts trauma whenever I hear one of those stories because, as a
>
> Black man, as a Black father, having two sons and a daughter. I immediately think,
>
> what if that was my child, or what if that was me?

The wondering of how family and friends would respond to such tragedy makes it important

for LionofJudah, father of a son, to "try to connect with them. Try to say things to them that

get them to understand" the historical conflict between Black males and anti-Black

structures. JD remarked,

> This is something that we shouldn't have to be nervous about, but it's something that
>
> we have to process and really think about every time we're near the police. Every
>
> time police are around us. We have to think about the situation carefully now and
>
> how we're going to conduct ourselves. Is it going to be my last moment? Will it be

my last interaction? And so, in that regard extremely unfair for us to have to walk

through life like that.

As Dumas (2014) described, social suffering has a historical memory collected through daily

interactions. The historical collection of memories intersecting with police reproduces Black

agony simply by showing up to a call or riding through a neighborhood, therefore, constantly

stripping true freedom as it maneuvers in and out of space and time. Johnny agrees that it is

imperative, as a Black Father to a Black son, "to teach the lessons of what happens if an

officer stops you or confronts you or a white person confronts you." "My boys wear hoodies.

So, they need to know that if you get pulled over. The first thing you have to do is pull that

hood off your head," declared Bobby, father of two sons.

The "system" continues to produce social justice calamities and political rhetoric that

caused Black male leaders to experience negative mental feelings yet they feel obligated to

use the calamities as teachable moments for their students or children, demonstrating the

complexities and intersectionalities of the life of Black male leaders. Chadwick sums it up by

stating, "so a lot of people complain that things didn't work, and I said, no, it did work.

You're confused about what the system was set up to do." Chadwick's expanded theory

defines the system as designed to keep Black males disciplined and the continuous actions

that fortify and imitate the anti-Black structures. This could be why Sharpe (2016)

encourages us to be undisciplined about such tactics.

Society continues through anti-Black structures to cause harm to the mental and

physical bodies of Black male leaders. Additionally, the damage caused has impacted the

hopes, dreams, and talent that Black male leaders possess. Hence why Marcus said, "it can be

frustrating. It can really be frustrating. Racism has so many tentacles that it still plays with

your psyche." The frustration leads Black male leaders to feel they must navigate the space of their professional and personal lives differently. Haga (2020) supplies some understanding to such frustration that is a constant reminder that the entire system must be dismantled to "have a worldwide revolution, but if we haven't healed our traumas and learned how to be in authentic relationship with each other, we will corrupt any new system we put in its place" (p. xxii). Therefore, it is frustrating because anti-Black structures and Black humanity will never co-exist.

Research Question #3

How does framing Black males in society impact the liberatory imagination of Black male leaders?

Finding #3 Social Perceptions Choke Black Male Leaders' Dreams

Anti-Black framing limits the ability of Black males to be liberated in their imagination because the need for external validation replaces self-actualization. The need for validation forces them to perform at high levels at all times, to be paranoid in society, and they often must ignore their feelings and emotions when tragedies strike men that look like them. Additionally, Black male K-12 leaders had to contend with navigating their identity in the presence of anti-Black structures. One such way the participants indicated how they navigate their everyday living was during the conclusion of the interviews, where they analyzed a photo of two Black men (see Appendix B).

The image displayed on one side of a Black male as a clean-shaven professional wearing a shirt and tie. In contrast, the other side of the picture showed a Black male with a shaggy beard wearing a hoodie, causing one participant to describe the different career options of both men. For example, Johnny, a Black father to a son, said, "I could see the

young man in the hoodie as someone who has obtained a job in his community such as a mechanic or someone who's doing work that does not require a suit and tie." As indicated through this quote, there is nothing wrong with being a mechanic; however, the assumptions made because of clothing describes how society labels people just from the clothes they wear.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, race, specifically through the lens of Black males, shapes and constrains the experiences so much so that Black men have an increased desire to be "bigger than our color," as remarked by Johnny. "[They] want society to feel and know that [they] have just as much potential," Johnny continued. Johnny concluded his thoughts by articulating,

> When I work with others, who are of different ethnicity from me, and who have different ethnic backgrounds, I still want to show them that I'm capable of the work. I want to make sure that people who don't look like me still view me as someone who's capable of being a leader.

The potential that Johnny describes motivated Fred (who served as a former district leader and consultant) to find it necessary for people to acknowledge "what he could do for their children from an educational standpoint, and not just a socially emotional standpoint." Therefore, he "worked diligently to broaden people's perspectives so that they do not lower the expectations of Black male leaders." Because Chadwick did not just want to do "well for a Black guy," he wanted people to respect his value and not treat him with low standards and expectations. Black males not being seen as intelligent is why Lefty states that "Black boys second guess their potential and intelligence." In contrast, "others who aren't Black are expected to be successful, expected to do well, expected to be intelligent," stated Chadwick.

Lefty states that "if Black boys saw more Black men in leadership as intellectuals, not like the coach or the Dean or like the muscle, then they could do more connecting to what possibilities and potential are available to them." Lefty's statement describes the connection between Black male leaders not seen as intelligent and the impact it has on Black boys, hence why Black male participants felt as though they "always have to defend" themselves as articulated by Bobby. He continued, "I always have to tell people who I am. I've always had to explain to them who I am."

It is human nature to want a space to be yourself and to know you are heard personally and professionally. Black male leaders' voices are often silent through the anti-Black structures of society that impact their experiences in their workplace and community life. Participants shared their desire just to be themselves.

Chadwick, who has worked in multiple school systems, commented on the photo expressing the desire to "be comfortable, being [his] authentic self, both personally and professionally." To be comfortable, it is important to be in an "environment that allows or is conducive for both being able to dress how you authentically want to dress," as described by Chadwick. Most importantly, to be able to "talk how you want to talk, think how you want to think, and still not have that reflect as inadequacy or unprofessionalism." Chadwick describes a space in which he, as a Black man, is valuable regardless of what he wears or how he talks.

Cordell was even clearer; he wants "people to love, care, and respect him" by "telling him things he did wrong, but they also can see [his] potential to take him to the next level." "A place where I can operate in my truth," exclaims Lewis. He continued, "to be able to work in a place where it was safe; also, that you had a team that could work with you." Additionally, Jamie wants the ability to "feel like [himself], and not a version of [himself]"

when he enters a room. To be able to be "transparent and vulnerable," commented Marcus.

Phrased differently, "a space that would allow me to be my most authentic self," as JD described.

The Fixer

Black male leader participants overwhelmingly presented the desire to fix something for someone else. Nevertheless, when asked to share their hopes and dreams, the participants displayed mere joy at the idea of being able to share such views. "I would just love it if this would just be asked of me," exclaimed Jamie when I inquired about him sharing his dreams. Chadwick asked, "It would be a dream, right?"

Jamie added, "more equity specialists because the equity specialist will have critical conversations" with other leaders. LionofJudah had the same sentiments when he shared that he "would like to increase focus on equity and seek to empower and cultivate the neighborhood in the communities." The conflicting thoughts of the pride to serve while feeling as though this is only a dream was evident through the participant's response of describing the impact they would have if they were heard. For example, whether it was Chadwick's desire to "make decisions based on what's good for kids" or Johnny's wishes "to give every student a mentor," they all dreamed of "more opportunities for students." Over and over again, each participant shared their wish for someone else to receive.

Even when Black male leaders shifted their focus from others to themselves or the culture, there was a direct tie to the idea that a problem solved for them is a problem solved for others. The most desired wish for the overwhelming majority when dreaming of themselves is a space where they are accepted.

The dreams expressed for others or themselves can be summarized in one participant's dream for Black males, "which is to be at all tables." Fred continues by conveying, "if we sit at all tables, the conversation changes, whether it's political tables, economic, social, or educational; when we are present and a part of those spaces, things will change." The ideal work environment amongst participants is a seat at the table to share hopes and dreams. In addition to the seat, participants describe the desire to know that they have been heard.

Moreover, Black men recognize that their dreams are often not heard and are sometimes not even asked to share them. However, the response of most of the participants was to first dream of the day when the question about their dreams was asked. Secondly, to share what they will do for others or their culture before they share what they will do for themselves. I note these two responses because it demonstrates the two sides that Black male leaders navigate. Thinking about others first is an excellent trait; however, it should not come at the expense of silencing one dream.

Chapter Summary

There are similarities between the Black male as a leader and the Black male in a store, walking down the street, or just going for a jog. Society takes chances with the Black male that wears the shirt and tie; however, they fear him when he wears a hoodie. The fear of the dominant society continues to reproduce negative experiences for Black males by forcing them to be meticulous about navigating their identity in an anti-Black society. The primary focus of this particular navigation is to resist the devaluation of Black life while trying to shine a light on the everyday approaches and practices used to justify the reproduction of Black suffering, as described by Dumas and ross (2016).

Black male participants use their platform to provide teachable moments to their families, students, and community. Although, Black male leaders walk the line of helping Black people navigate social calamities by presenting teachable moments from a place of love and concern. They also presented from a place of fear. The fear of life and social well-being taking away causes strain on the Black male leader's imagination because they feel unrecognized and not heard in their professional and personal space.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Home again
One day I know
I'll feel home again
Born again
One day I know
I'll feel strong again
I left my head
Many times I've been told
All this talk will make you old
So I close my eyes
Look behind
Moving on, moving on
~ Michael Kiwanuka (2010)

Introduction

This qualitative semi-structured case study investigates the relationship between the social perception of Black men in society and the professional experiences of 15 Black male leaders in K-12 spaces. This study illustrates 15 narratives of Black male K-12 leaders who have been educators for ten or more years and serve in a leadership role in which they supervised five or more staff members. This study is significant in three ways. First, it examined how Black men experience anti-Black framing daily in their personal and professional lives. Secondly, it investigates how anti-Black framing shows up in their workspace as K-12 leaders. Therefore, connecting society's attitudes and beliefs of Black males to the practices and behaviors that reproduce Black suffering on Black male leaders in academic spaces. Thirdly, it examines how anti-Black structure impacts decision-making in their personal and professional lives. The participants are fathers, husbands, and brothers constantly in protector mode, yet; they became vulnerable enough to share their experiences

through interviews and photo elicitation. Through the unpacking of the narratives, participants' stories answer the following research questions:

1. How does the anti-Blackness framing of Black men in society impact the perception of Black men in K-12 leadership roles?

2. How have social justice calamities and political rhetoric shaped, constrained, or determined leadership styles?

3. How does framing Black males in society impact the liberatory imagination of Black male leaders?

Previous research tries to explain why Black men belong in leadership roles by humanizing Black male leaders and encouraging Black males' acceptance into an anti-Black educational society. Like the song lyrics at the start of the chapter by Michael Kiwanuka (2010) as he describes the experiences of being *Home Again* and the tiredness of trying to conform. This research is not trying to explain why Black men belong in leadership. Instead, the case study is drawing attention to dismantling anti-Black structures so that schools and districts could finally see the Black male in those leadership roles as human rather than unhuman.

Furthermore, to be seen as human will also create the space for Black male leaders to be unashamed about their identity. Identity is a simple word that holds and creates many facets of a person. As stated by Chandler (2016), "identity is something that has the potential to be individual or collective" (p. 2). Throughout this study, the narratives collected represent each participant as an individual; however, through the findings section, a collective voice depicts the impact of anti-Black structures on the 15 Black male leaders described in this case study. The effects of those structures create a tricky walk of navigating not being

recognized as human by society, all while being hypervisible while leading students, staff, and families in the workspace.

Knowing that race and gender increase the visibility of Black men in leadership complicates the process of becoming comfortable in their skin and abilities to succeed in leadership roles and life. Additionally, the complexities of being Black and male in society pose many barriers. For example, Fanon (1968) notes two factors control the Black man's thoughts, "white men consider themselves superior to Black men and Black men want to prove to white men, at all costs, the richness of their thought, and the equal value of their intellect" (p. 12). With such a mentality, Black male leaders describe in chapter four findings the:

- Anti-Blackness structures increase Black male leaders' pressures to perform.
- Black male K-12 leaders had to contend with navigating their identity in the presence of anti-Black structures.
- Social perceptions choke Black male leaders' dreams.

In summary, this research has analyzed Black men's narratives as they overcome the challenges and encounter anti-Black society. Additionally, through their photo-elicitation, the participants describe how anti-Black structures influence their perception of other Black men. Therefore, the remaining parts of this chapter provide a concluding analysis of the findings, limitations of the research, and implications and recommendations for future studies.

Blackness and Neoliberal Multicultural Imagination

Performance Pressure

Black male leaders find themselves hypervisible due to a lack of representation in leadership roles and the perception of Black men as uneducable, dangerous, or intrinsically

bad (Howard et al., 2012). Hypervisibility provides positive and negative experiences at the intersection of Blackness and maleness. For example, participant Chadwick, a primary school leader, describes that being a Black male leader helps "especially in elementary education." As Jamie, still a novice in his leadership position, explains, "it is not a secret that the education field is predominantly women." Although being a Black male provides favorable opportunities for placement, it is quickly met with performance pressures to maintain the academic and social status of being a leader. Wingfield and Wingfield (2014) describe in their research that Black men "had little latitude when it came to making errors and that any mistakes, they did make would cost them much more severely than white counterparts who made comparable misjudgments" (p. 487). The fear of making a mistake or being stereotyped causes participants to feel like they have to work twice as hard. As Wingfield and Wingfield (2014) further highlights, "stereotype threat further illustrates the implications of tokenism on performance. Stereotype threat occurs when one is aware of a negative stereotype about their group and is concerned about doing something that might affirm that unfavorable belief" (p. 484).

Secondly, the pressure to perform due to hypervisibility can add stress and tension, especially if Black men are perceived as a token. "Tokens were expected to perform masterfully because they were considered representatives of their entire group" (Wingfield & Wingfield, 2014, p. 484). Winters (2020) describes that Black men are tokenized by wanting their presence to be a part of the various committees to be the representative of all Black men, but their "voices are not welcome" (p. 147). Being in the position to be a representative but also being fully aware that you are always thought to be lazy, criminal, or unintelligent is

"detrimental to their health, income, safety, and overall well-being," (Winter, 2020, pp. 146-147).

As mentioned in chapter four, participants described having to represent themselves and their race. The low representation of Black male leaders increases the pressure to perform, leading to fear of making mistakes that can be widely known and misjudgments made about them and their performance, increasing the chance of being overly self-conscious (Wingfield & Wingfield, 2014).

Making Sense of Anti-Blackness Everyday Practices and Policies

Self-Consciousness's Impact on Identity

Self-consciousness in this context goes beyond self-awareness. Self-consciousness here means comparing one's essence of being and leadership to an anti-Black society hoping to gain validation and a sense of belonging. In the Du Bois quote used in chapter one, Du Bois (1903) describes the Negro or Black person as a person born with a cover "veil" over their face and eyes. Nonetheless, Blacks are given the gift of seeing "second sight" beyond the veil. However, this second sight is a curse because it encourages Black people to see themselves through the lens of an anti-Black society. A society that thrives off the brutality of Black bodies and creates spaces of frustration, deterioration, and perplexity for Black male leaders. Participants like Johnny, a formerly rural area school leader, remarked he wants people to know his Blackness has "just as much potential and worthiness" as any other non-Black leader.

Proving worth provides the added pressure to be perfect. There are two reasons for the need to be perfect. First, to prove that the opportunity was not given but earned due to working twice as hard. Secondly, a sense of owing, meaning it is owed to the Black

96

community to serve in the Black community. However, as Hull (2017) describes the need to prove oneself and represent the community helps create the external power structures needed to satisfy the goals of those oppressed while forcing the "compliance" of those oppressed. The compliance happens because "at the individual level, the sense of self is replaced by the need for external validation and approval," as stated by McDougal (2020, p. 4).

The Navigation of Teachable Moments

A reasonable parent wants the best for their children. From birth, the parent begins to share wisdom and knowledge about the world they have lived in over the years. That knowledge presented comes from a space of love for the child. The parent's wish is for the child to avoid all of the parent's mistakes and forge a path as close to perfect as humanly possible. Although this is true for parents of all races and backgrounds, there is an added layer for sharing such wisdom and knowledge when shared by a Black male.

Black males share their wisdom and knowledge from a place of fear in addition to caring or loving because "the otherizing and dehumanizing experiences of Black men—both historically and contemporaneously—require heightened awareness, sensitivities, and socialization," as stated by Brooms and Perry (2016, p. 169). The heightened sensitivity for Black male K-12 leaders has continued the narrative of providing wisdom about anti-Black structures to their students and their children, especially their boys. The obligation to such conversation showed up during the research as fear rather than liberation.

For example, when talking about social calamities, Johnny, the father of a son, asks himself what he could tell his son to "do differently that can help him if he is ever in a position like that should come out with his life and health and strength." Johnny's fear for his son's life exemplifies the historical treatment of the hostile relationship between Blackness

and humanity. As mentioned in chapter three BlackCrit was manifested to investigate the

hostile relationship "between Blackness and (the possibility of) humanity" (Dumas & ross,

2016, p. 429). The relationship between the two has come together to produce a disease that

has impacted how Black people interpret the treatment of unhuman life regarding "social,

economic, historical, and cultural dimensions" (Dumas & ross, 2016, p. 429).

Black male participants describe their emotions, obligations to their families, and the

community they serve when aggressive treatment occurs against another Black male body.

Even with the knowledge that "anti-Blackness positions dark bodies as already bad; to be

Black is to be always bad, and to be in urgent need of disciplining, punishing whiteness"

(Tuck & Yang, 2018, p. 37).

Black suffering, according to Tuck and Yang (2018), is "the ontological position of

the Black as having no Human place in the world" (p. 33). These inhuman treatments have

been well documented in the courts and the memory of Black people, especially Black males.

Sobbo et al. (2020) describe that, unfortunately, history has arrived at a historical moment

where Blacks have surpassed teachable moments and must be careful not to normalize the

oppressive behaviors that impact Black people.

The Resist Hesitation

The obligation to provide wisdom to someone of the same race and gender that may

help them survive an anti-Black attack on their well-being is a teachable moment. The belief

that discourse must happen between Black male leaders and Black male youth about the

survival of everyday anti-Black practices displays the quality and quantity of such Black

suffering. The dialogue that came from the participant describes the need to teach others how

not to become another martyr rather than resisting the anti-Black structures that have

engulfed the minds and bodies of Black males. The need to teach how to live despite brutal treatment is driven by what is described as post-traumatic slave syndrome (PTSS). PTSS is passed down trauma from slavery that is used to create adaptive survival behaviors through generations (Leary, 2017). In this case, the passed-down survival tactic teaches children how to survive oppressors' attacks. This conversation is had outside of their workplace to present themselves as not emotional about such turmoil within the workplace. This behavior produced by Black male leaders defines respectability politics.

Respectability politics pave the way to downplay Black values and expressions to appease white fears and anxieties and gain social recognition. The school leader Chadwick explains that "professionally navigating, having to hold back some of the ways I feel about what happened, with what the political expectations and communication allows." According to Tuck and Yang (2018), respectability politics "is an important exchange on what counts as racial justice and its relationship to social mobility in the United States" (p. 38). The relationship between speaking authentically about racial justice and social mobility stifles his voice as a critically conscious Black leader. As Rogers-Ard and Knaus (2021) summarize, "Black critically conscious school leaders must be inclined to 'operate in-between the rules, regulations, and compliance of the state' as fugitive and abolitionists" (pp. 145–147). However, most participants operate within the rules by leaning more toward teachable moments.

Black Liberatory Fantasy

Dream Forfeiting

A dream is a series of images, experiences, and stories that often influence our imagination. Throughout all the ways that imagination is created, Black men have endured

negative images, experiences, and stories that have decayed their ability to dream of a place of true freedom. ross (2021) describes that "anti-Blackness provides an analysis of that suffering as connected to the idea of theft—the theft of Black bodies and the theft of anything Black folks dared to build or own as newly 'freed' people" (p. 230). During the interview, after being posed the question, "If you could do whatever you wanted to do in your current role what will it be?" Jamie, district leader, responded, "I would just love for this to just be asked of me,"—implying that it would be an unusual request. It is an unusual request since anti-Black structures are designed to silence the voices of Black men. This might explain why participant Chadwick asked, "It would be a dream, right?" implying that if given the freedom to dream, he would do things differently. Black male leaders' dream of doing things differently demonstrates resistance to the status quo of how Black male voices are captured and mattering.

BlackCrit analyzes the space of freedom while challenging the anti-Black system's attempt to modify racial hatred history forced upon the Black body. The conflict between liberation and anti-Black systems is like a tug and war battle. The struggle between anti-Black structures and Black male liberation is the battle to win control or possession of Black male bodies. Unfortunately, Black males are fighting two battles among themselves. Black male leaders are lured into renouncing their most authentic selves with hopes of remaining a representation of Black males in a white-dominated environment and continuing to do the work they love. The strange position of loving the work, and resisting the anti-Black structures that heist Black bodies, stifles the daring needed to dream.

Implications

One day I hope
To make you smile again
I won't hide
Many times I've been told
Speak your mind, just be bold
So I close my eyes
Look behind
Moving on, moving on
~ Michael Kiwanuka (2010)

As mentioned earlier, the case study of 15 Black male leaders in K-12 spaces provided 15 different experiences; however, once their voices became a collective and themes were formed, there then became an opportunity to provide recommendations to address the themes presented in the study. Therefore, the three recommendations are highlighted:

- Review policy limiting Black male leaders' voice, particularly during social calamities.

- Create and sustain affinity groups for Black male leaders.

- Create and sustain anti-Black mentorship for Black male educators.

Analyze Policy

To first be recognized as human, one must be recognized in the policies and laws that impact society's views on how to treat the non-human. "BlackCrit encourages policy analysis and advocacy that attend to the significance of Blackness in the social construction of white supremacy, and then in education specifically, how anti-Blackness serves to reinforce the ideological and material 'infrastructure' of educational inequity" as described by Dumas and ross (2016, p. 432). For example, the participants shared their pain and fears as they read or watched the recurring events of Black males, boys, and men murdered by those who have

sworn to protect or by neighborhood security guards. Using deadly force so freely to cause harm to a Black body with no penalty produces the opportunity to resist such actions in the workplace rather than remain in a "good ole boy" status so that their Black body does not become a martyr to the same inhuman acts. However, Florida Bill HB 7 will hinder such conversation. In summary, Florida Bill HB 7 denies educators the ability to share their viewpoints on racism and sexism.

To change public policy, school districts and the alike must stop operating under the illusion of integration, meaning that all students and staff have the same level of love and belonging; therefore, everything is perfect, and there is nothing to fix regarding the Black body. Instead, the school district needs to raise awareness and voices that can help change public opinion of Black males. What we see happening now is that school districts conform to the anti-Black structure through a cease-and-desist model that removes all discourse about Black people, especially Black men (Ray & Gibbons, 2021). A cease-and-desist model is a notice mandating that the recipient immediately stop an illegal or allegedly illegal activity. The cease and desist of CRT in schools, books, and curricula that describe all American history, particularly the positive impact of Black people. Participants shared that in a perfect world, their representation would matter enough to have a voice in all aspects of education, including but not limited to social calamities, school placement, or advancement opportunities.

Affinity Groups

The second recommendation is to create Black male leaders' affinity groups. Affinity groups allow Black males to unite around a common purpose, ideology, or interest to strengthen their collective voice (Great Schools Partnership, 2020). Maslow's hierarchy of

esteem will be strengthened because a familiar voice and purpose breed strength and a sense of belonging. However, it must have a multiple-facet approach; one person serving a group of Black male leaders will be a short-lived affinity group (McCray, 2022). However, to have an affinity group that focuses on liberation, the group must have a team to assist in liberating the voices of Black male leaders. Black male leaders' voices must be humanized, recognized, and strengthened to increase the resistance to anti-Black structures in education.

Anti-Black Mentorship

The final recommendation is to create mentorship for Black male leaders. The mentorship can be interwoven into the affinity groups but should also operate as a separate identity. The affinity groups are for mental health, and the mentorship is for self-actualization. As mentioned earlier, humans not only have normal life barriers but are also taught how to navigate around or through them and, in some cases, use barriers to create wealth. Creating wealth in this context is freedom and authenticity.

Mentorship typically comes from someone with experience or a compelling knowledge of a topic. However, a Black male who conformed to the anti-Black structures would only be able to create other Black males who would eventually conform. Therefore, mentorship in this context is like Jacob's Ladder. Jacob's ladder was a ladder in the Bible that appeared to Jacob in a dream (Maxwell, 2018). The ladder stretches from heaven to earth, with angels ascending and descending upon it. It is important to note that the angels were not falling but intentionally going up and down the ladder. Therefore, using this metaphor, mentorship provides not support through experiences to reach a destination of a position but support to reach experiences of being liberated. Moving from earth to heaven is

an experience, not a destination, that will change our mindset and create the space to discover their most authentic selves.

The mentorship will have to push Black male leaders toward resistance versus conformity. This is not resistance just for the sake of resistance but resistance that pulls the right lever at the right time, leading to the continuing building of a Jacob ladder towards heaven experiences. What was shared in the interviews was a fear of resistance on any level. Such fear limits the opportunity to increase representation, establish platforms that recognize Black students as human, and choke the environment for Black males to be their most authentic selves.

> So I close my eyes
> And the tears will clear
> Then I feel no fear
> Then I'd feel no way
> My paths will remain straight
> Home again
> Home again
> ~ Michael Kiwanuka (2010)

Final Thoughts

People who read self-help books are reading them with the idea of becoming better humans by finding techniques and strategies that can improve their lives and will help them become all they have been designed to become. This is a very noble thing to pursue, and it would be if you had the status of a human. Black people have been deemed non-human; therefore, the goal is not to become a better human but first to be recognized as human. The closing of the eyes in the lyric above symbolizes imagining what could happen if fear was gone, the way was made straight, and your personal and professional being was not threatened but celebrated. You are your most authentic self.

The anti-Black structure continues to strip and create barriers that have not only dehumanized Black people but have caused them not even to know what true Blackness is outside of the anti-Black structures. Viewing Blackness outside of anti-Black structures is the freedom that Black people seek. Therefore, it causes a wonder if the freedom Dr. Martin Luther King spoke of was not all about rights and equity but about creating an environment where you can be your most authentic self. What if the mountain experience is a space of authenticity rather than a place of arrival? If it is a place of arrival, it makes sense to get bumps, bruises, or, worse, lose their lives through social and physical death because climbing the mountain will be treacherous. However, what will you do once you have arrived at the mountaintop? Do you descend back down to the bottom because you cannot live at the top of a mountain?

Nevertheless, if authenticity is the goal, the mountaintop becomes a place of solidarity. A place where Black people are not only supported by each other towards a common goal, but society acknowledges that Black people are human beings. Throughout the interviews, this unspoken need to be seen as human and respected professionally and personally coincides with the basic needs of being human. Ryan et al. (2020) summarizes that Maslow's hierarchy of needs teaches that humans are most satisfied when their physical and safety needs are met. Human beings thrive on feeling loved, knowing, and believing they belong. When those three are met, then self-esteem is strengthened, which can cause one to embrace freedom because they know that they can become the most that they desire, which is Maslow top of the pyramid, self-actualization. Reviewing Black male experiences through Maslow's hierarchy of needs solidifies that

society, according to the literature in Chapter 2 and interviews in Chapter 4, that Black male leaders are not being treated as human in their workplace and personal lives.

Throughout the interviews, there was a desire to feel a sense of belonging through the participants' narratives that were less resistant to anti-Black structures and more of a sense of conformity to the anti-Black structures. Most participants describe how they navigated the anti-Black system rather than how they sought to dismantle the structures. It is not their fault that they must decide to keep their position to feed their family or risk losing their position. Only people thought to be less than human have to choose between the right thing to do versus the right thing to do. Humans know they have choices that will not penalize them if they speak up about inequalities or injustices. For example, as Johnny described earlier about his white counterparts' ability to speak freely. Therefore, to be treated less than human forces, Black males not to voice their thoughts and views but instead, become cautious as they activate their respectability politics in their everyday workspace.

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"I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel To Be Free"
~ Nina Simone

I wish I knew how
It would feel to be free
I wish I could break
All the chains holding me
I wish I could say
All the things that I should say
Say 'em loud say 'em clear
For the whole round world to hear

I wish I could share
All the love that's in my heart
Remove all the bars
That keep us apart
I wish you could know
What it means to be me
Then you'd see and agree
That every man should be free

I wish I could give
All I'm longin' to give
I wish I could live
Like I'm longin' to live
I wish I could do
All the things that I can do
Though I'm way overdue
I'd be starting anew.

Well I wish I could be like a bird in the sky
How sweet it would be
If I found I could fly
I'd soar to the sun
And look down at the sea
And I sing 'cause I know
How it feels to be free

Appendix B

THE SOCIAL PERCEPTION OF BLACK MALES IN SOCIETY AND THE EXPERIENCES OF BLACK MALE LEADERS IN K-12 SPACES

Appendix C

Home Again
~ Micheal Kiwanuka

Home again
Home again
One day I know
I'll feel home again
Born again
Born again
One day I know
I'll feel strong again

I left my head
Many times I've been told
All this talk will make you old
So I close my eyes
Look behind
Moving on, moving on
So I close my eyes
Look behind
Moving on

Lost again
Lost again
One day I know
Our paths will cross again
Smile again
Smile again
One day I hope
To make you smile again
I won't hide

Many times I've been told
Speak your mind, just be bold
So I close my eyes
Look behind
Moving on, moving on
So I close my eyes
And the tears will clear
Then I feel no fear
Then I'd feel no way
My paths will remain straight

Home again

Home again
One day I know
I'll feel home again
Home again
Home again
One day I know
I'll feel strong again

I left my head
Many times I've been told
All this talk will make you old
So I close my eyes
Look behind
Moving on, moving on
So I close my eyes
Look behind
Moving on

Vita

Dramaine Freeman was born to William and Rosa Freeman in Ahoskie, NC. He graduated from Bertie Senior High School in Windsor, North Carolina, in 1997. In August 1997, he entered North Carolina Agriculture and Technical State University to study Electronics and Computer Technology. In May 2001, he was awarded a Bachelor of Science in Electronics & Computer Technology from North Carolina A&T State University. After earning a Bachelor of Science Degree, he earned a Master of Arts in Education from the University of Phoenix in 2008 and an Educational Specialist degree in Educational Administration from Appalachian State University in 2015.

Mr. Freeman has an extensive background in education, having worked as a Doctoral Academic Student Advisor at Appalachian State University, where he mentored students and advised on academic programs. He has also worked as a school administrator for a public K-12 school district and as an adjunct instructor at a community college, teaching developmental math and educational technology.