

LET ME SPEAK: POETIC EXPRESSIONS OF JUVENILE
DELINQUENTS AS EXPERIENCED BY
AFRICAN AMERICAN ADOLESCENT MALES

by

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ABSTRACT

This is a narrative qualitative study that utilized critical pedagogy as praxis and poetry as method to investigate how three African American males between the ages of 18 and 22 experienced juvenile delinquency in the Deep South and how their narratives engaged with the broader educational narratives on the school-to-prison pipeline. Through a non-traditional method, this study created a less exploitive space where the participants were free to narrate and co-analyze their stories without the sole interpretation of the researcher. The liberatory praxis space fostered through a workshop format provided a space for the once labeled *juvenile delinquent* and legally silenced voices of these young men to be raised to critical and emancipatory voices. Voices that questioned whether or not the circumstances(s) that contributed to their involvement with the juvenile justice system was attributed to an environment impregnated with racism that funnels the school-to-prison pipeline, and not just poor personal choice(s) often attributed to natural adolescent mischief. Through the collaboration of alternative and conventional research methods this study provided a closer perspective of the experiences of African American males who were encapsulated by the juvenile court system, knowledge necessary to understanding how through racial disparities, zero tolerance policies, and formal labeling the juvenile justice system funnels the school-to-prison pipeline. Their autobiographical poems are condensed but rich narratives of how they experienced juvenile delinquency and even now, as adult Black men, still continue to experience the impact of juvenile delinquency.

DEDICATION

It brings me great joy and honor to dedicate this dissertation to the love of my life, my husband of over 40 years. Leslie, I could not have made my way here without your continuous love, encouragement, understanding, and patience. You are and have always been my greatest cheerleader. You always saw in me what I did not see in myself. You encouraged me to dream. Thank you is such an understatement, so I ask God, our Father, to recompense you for the many expressions of love you have rendered toward me. The best is yet to come.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

JCD Juvenile Detention Center

P.O. Probation Office

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“To teach from a place of love is to empower—to open your eyes and see the strengths and struggles” (Laura, 2014, p. 70).

Background

This is a study about the experiences of young African American males who had their voices taken away while being detained in a juvenile detention facility. It is about the stories of how they moved through the juvenile justice system in a Deep South state with a long history of racism and incarceration, and how they found ways to regain, even in small ways, a voice to express their thoughts, feelings, and stories. The focus of this study was several young African American males who used autobiographical expressions as a way to speak to what it is like to be labeled a *juvenile delinquent*. I cultivated a space for this to happen.

I am a secondary English Language Arts and Social Studies teacher in the state of Alabama, and my classroom is located in a county juvenile detention center (JDC). Being employed at a detention facility is not my first encounter with incarcerated individuals. For more than 20 years, I volunteered with inmates at a county jail. Prior to my teaching position at the juvenile detention center, I volunteered at the facility for 15 years and still do on weekends. I believe my many years of experience and compassion for incarcerated individuals have fueled my passion for this project. For me, students labeled *juvenile delinquents* are just students who have made choices noncompliant with the law, and just as with other kids, they need to know their voices are valued regardless of their deeds. At their places of identity is where I meet them

in my identity as a African American female teacher, mother, and pastor; all identities that are instrumental to providing an environment conducive to learning, a place where they feel loved, heard, accepted, and safe instead of feeling ostracized and alone. This study is not founded on the idea of me trying to be a savior for the students, but is based on a passion to provide an opportunity for their voices to be heard and honored.

The detention facility serves multiple counties. The building has the same architectural design as a jail or prison; a panopticon layout, surveillance from all sides, with steel automatic locking doors, security cameras, uniforms for students and corrections officers, and concrete blocks surrounded by razor-sharp barbed wire. Inside the building, my classroom has 32 feet high ceilings supported by concrete blocks. Two sides are painted a cream color, the front wall is teal green and a back wall of glass allows for ongoing surveillance by the correctional officers. My desk, located in the front of the classroom, gives me a full view of the classroom and allows for visual contact with the correctional officers, which is helpful in classroom management. These elements, combined with overhead fluorescent lights, create a stark and surreal atmosphere made even more uncomfortable by the camera in the corner, a constant reminder that I work in an institutionalized classroom constructed for adolescents detained by the juvenile justice system for criminal behavior. It is called a classroom, which it is, officially, but it is also something much more in the juvenile justice system. Ostensibly, it is jail for lawbreakers who by law are not old enough to be prosecuted as adults.

While students are detained at JDC, the state mandate is to follow a curriculum that complies with the state academic standards adopted by the Local Education Agency (LEA); in my case, the LEA is the county school board. The school day schedule and academic calendar for detained youth are supposed to be the same as all other schools within the county; however, it

is not. How can it be when my students, who range in age from 11 to 19, are required before, during, and after class to be present at court dates and keep appointments with attorneys, therapists, and/or probation officers? These appointments are a disruption to institutionalized schooling and are given more importance than the teaching in my classroom. While the class curriculum is officially concerned with English Language Arts and Social Studies, the hidden curriculum is a course in how to navigate the juvenile justice system. The longer these young men are detained, awaiting court action, academic concerns give way to the overwhelming demands of judicial concerns. My students become more concerned with the status of juvenile delinquency than their academic situations. This is where the identity as a teenage student begins to shift to that of a *juvenile delinquent*.

JDC operates under the guidance of the county juvenile court system for the purpose of providing temporary custody while legal action is pending for juveniles who are alleged and or adjudicated delinquent. The juvenile justice system defines a juvenile as an adolescent between the ages of 11 and 19 and a delinquent as an individual who has been adjudicated (judged by the court according to state and federal laws as guilty) for committing a criminal act(s) (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2001). The *Oxford English Dictionary* (1989) defined *juvenile* as young and childish, and *delinquent* as failing in one's duties. As an educator, my charge is to teach adolescent students who have been labeled *juvenile delinquent*, as "youthful failures," detained for truancy, running away, theft, domestic violence, sexual offenses, murder, terrorist threats, and drug and alcohol distribution and consumption. JDC functions as a short-term facility while legal action is pending (action by a probation officer, a hearing before the court, or a transfer to a state facility); however, in my experiences, many times, students remain beyond 30 days. Thus, I teach them during this transition from

mainstream society to jail society, a place with its own codes, culture, stories, and forms of masculine behavior.

Teaching at a Juvenile Detention Center

Teaching at the JDC is challenging, not because of where my classroom is located, but because my students, whom society has labeled *juvenile delinquents*, are consumed with disappointment, fear, and anxiety. They do not know whether or when they will see their family and friends again. They also do not know if they will ever return home or go back to their former school. To add to the emotional conundrum is the combination of pending criminal charges, the next court date, the probation officer, the judge, disgruntled parents, separation from family and friends, and, for some, failing grades, all of which have the potential to produce a toxic environment.

They are often angry and frustrated, not just because of the unknown, but because their voice has been taken away; they have no voice in decisions affecting their lives (Kim, Losen, & Hewitt, 2010; Langberg & Fedders, 2013). Society may claim these young people have forfeited their voice, the right to speak on their own behalf or express how they understand their experiences and loss of rights, not to mention the loss of privileges that mainstream society takes for granted; however, I take issue with this claim. As one who has taught in this system for 9 years, I believe something quite different happens to these young men, particularly African American males. My experience, supported by critical interrogations of the school-to-prison pipeline, indicated that the juvenile justice system transforms these young, mostly African American, males into future criminals (Kim et al., 2010; Langberg & Fedders, 2013). The official claim is that the system exists to rehabilitate them, but it actually does the opposite. Instead of helping them become productive citizens who can speak for themselves, the system

strips away not just physical freedom, but more importantly, their voices. The system has silenced them. The system has cultivated within these young detainees hopelessness and despair that diminishes emotional and psychological well-being (Kim et al., 2010). This socio-psychological effect on these mere “boys” is a silencing of emotions and mental states that lead to becoming a productive citizen and instead accentuates skills and dispositions that lead down one path—criminality (Kim et al., 2010).

Existing studies reflect the negative outcomes of youth incarceration (Alexander, 2012; Kim et al., 2010; Langberg & Fedders, 2013). As a researcher, I reflect on my 9 years teaching at JDC to explain why my attempts to deliver an institutional curriculum (to teach according to the curriculum script as though my classroom is a normal setting) is hopeless, ineffective, and futile. The longer the students remain in the facility, the worse their conditions become. While on one hand, my state-dictated professional responsibility is to deliver the prescribed curriculum, I believe I have a moral and existential duty to reach out to my students, especially those in a state of hopelessness and despair, and find a way to create a safe space for them to express themselves.

For the most part, as a result of their delinquency status, the voices of *juvenile delinquents* have been muted due to uninformed perspectives that they have nothing of value to contribute. To reinforce the purpose and passion that drives this dissertation, below is an autobiographical poem written by one of my students. This poem was found in a stack of poems I collected from the students at the end of a writing activity. I always ask the student to label their work properly with a name and date, but this poem was turned in without proper labeling and due to the sometimes high turnover rate with students going and coming, I was not able to identify its writer.

White Walls

*I lay and I see nothing but white walls.
My name is _____ and I am trapped.
I breathe softly trying to keep my calm.
It's hopeless.
I begin to panic.
I am tired of white.
I need color.
They say when you die you see a bright white light,
But I am in my youth and I've already seen too much white.
Am I dying?*

Anonymous

In response to the student's poem and a discussion during a Social and Cultural studies class about the racial injustices experienced by Black men in the United States, specifically Eric Garner, who died on the streets of New York in 2014, the following interpretive poem was composed. From my position as a teacher, this is what I hear a multitude of students saying:

I Can't Breathe

*If you just listen closely to what I have to say,
You will know I am not content with this stay.
Detention is no place for me.
There are other places I would rather be.
Please give me some air.
At least treat me as though you care.
Please,
Remove these shackles and don't let me fall.
A cry for help is my most urgent call.
Please don't ignore me!
I am struggling!
I can't breathe!
I can't breathe!
I can't breathe!*

I have witnessed for too long what “being silenced” has done to them. Ethically, I felt I had to find some small and modest ways to help them regain some form of voice, which I argue is crucial to have some sense of humanity. I wanted to give them a place where it was

permissible to appropriately express anger and their opinions about a system they felt constrained by. This does not mean I believe my pedagogy could or can save them. Nor am I trying to “radicalize” them. I am not even fighting the system to stop the incarceration of these young men. I am, however, arguing that as a teacher it is my moral and ethical duty to go beyond the systematic to a practical and transformative means of providing every child with an opportunity to analyze how the system has defined their identity and self-perceptions. My intention is to help them develop the dispositions and tools to make informed decisions about who they really want to become so they can navigate future adversities and cultivate a life where they can be self-sufficient and successful. Moving beyond the scripted method of teaching regular (non-incarcerated) secondary students to logical, realistic, and sensible methods that cater to teaching incarcerated students is my natural response to their existing human condition. Traditional teaching methods for regular secondary students will not work because my students are not regular students. This realization was crystalized with many of my students, but one particular case resonated with me and ignited this project. Mike¹ is no longer at the facility, but his experience is all too common in the juvenile justice system.

Mike’s Story

When Mike, a 16-year-old African American male, walked into the classroom for first-period class, I quickly sensed his anger, frustration, and hopelessness. He was not disruptive, but his short, snappy responses to questions, body language, hanging head, deeply entrenched frown, and rolling of the neck and eyes when speaking led me to believe that Mike had a chip on his shoulder. I knew I needed to have a talk with him about his demeanor. As an African American mother who has raised sons, and as a teacher with previously established a rapport with Mike

¹ Mike is a pseudonym used to protect the identity of the student. All names in this study have been changed to protect the young men with current and past involvement in the juvenile justice system.

during his past stints of detention, I felt comfortable addressing him privately about why he was so withdrawn and truculent. I believed I had a good chance of breaking through the walls he had constructed around himself without knocking off the chip. At least, that is what I was hoping. There were times I succeeded, and times I failed.

Regardless of the criminal offenses my students are charged with and adjudicated for, when they enter into my classroom, I see students. That means their criminal infractions do not predicate how I respond to them, or desire to facilitate their education. This particular day was Monday, and every Monday and Wednesday are letter-writing days. According to JDC guidelines, the facility provides each student with two stamps per week to correspond with family and friends or write to the judge, or their attorney. Letter writing is not mandated for students, but at least they have the opportunity. Several students needed to write letters, so before I sat down with Mike to work with him one-on-one, I made sure the other students had the appropriate supplies necessary such as paper, pencil, envelopes, and, for some, their home addresses. Leading up to my conversation with Mike, I was careful to find a place where I could hear him, provide some privacy, and still keep a watchful eye on the other students.

Mike was struggling with being in detention like most students do, but for him, it was especially difficult given the Juvenile Court's decision to place him in a drug rehabilitation program. During our conversation, Mike was adamant that he did not have a drug problem although he had been detained because of a positive result for marijuana urinalysis. Students who are placed on juvenile probation are randomly tested for drug use. In Mike's case, he had a confrontation with his school's principal, who called the probation officer. Once the probation officer is called to the school for what is considered a failure to comply with the court's supervision agreement, it is at the discretion of the probation officer whether to detain the

student. If the student is detained, a urinalysis upon arrival at JDC is standard operating procedures. Mike's urinalysis was positive for marijuana. According to the American Civil Liberties Union (n.d), more than half of the drug arrests in the United States are due to marijuana and the consistent trend within these arrests is racial bias. Despite equal usage among Whites, nationwide African Americans are 3.73, and in Alabama 4.4, times more likely to be prosecuted and incarcerated; consequently, this results in a mass incarceration of African American males and fuels the school-to-prison pipeline (Alexander, 2012).

Mike's rage and sense of hopelessness over his ability to convince the court he did not belong in detention was palpable. He kept saying, "They don't listen to me"—"They" meaning the court and his probation officer. As we talked about where he stood in his life and as I questioned him about his future goals, he said with despair and anger, "I have no future." From his matter-of-fact tone, I knew he believed what he said. "I have no future." Instead of sounding like a 16-year old at the peak of adolescence, Mike sounded like a hardened criminal who knew his fate was in the hands of a racist system and that he was destined for jail. This was the third time he had been detained by the juvenile court system in 2 years, not for new charges, but for probation violations that occurred at school. Mike's response to his dilemma of how to deal with what he considered to be racist harassment at school was to drop out, and not pursue a GED.

Mike's frustration with school was not because of an inability to effectively complete schoolwork. His frustration was with school administrators who, by his account, disciplined him for violating school policies, yet overlooked violations of the same policies by his White peers; however, for Mike the consequence for violating school policies was not just suspension, in school or after-school detention, but incarceration. Mike often commented about how the school administrators never gave him a chance to explain his actions and when he tried, he was always

perceived as being defiant and disrespectful. This is not uncommon. Whereas I heard a young man express his desire to find a way out of the system, according to Mike, the school administrators saw something different and according to Mike never took the time to hear his story.

Statement of the Problem

Mike's experiences with juvenile delinquency are consistent with Langberg and Fedders (2013) who posited that multiple incarcerations result in students feeling,

frustrated, unwanted and alienated, factors which contribute to further delinquency and criminal behavior, both in school and in the community. Once in the juvenile or criminal system and removed from home, a young person may feel stigmatized, become unmotivated, and fall further behind academically. (p. 661)

Although Mike is no longer in detention, his case is not unusual. I have been told countless stories from Black males who complained about differential treatment between them and their White counterparts for the same school violations. In fact, my experience with these young men aligns with the research that suggests young Black males know early on that the system that incarcerates them is rife with systemic racist policies and systems that define, label, and interpret Black male actions, words, and feelings in negative ways that White society believes must be constantly monitored and controlled (Gordon, Piana, & Keleher, 2001; Skiba, 2001). A statement common among my Black male students is that the system is racist. Research indicated that African American students are suspended or expelled from school at a higher rate than any other group, and for more subjective and less serious school infractions (e.g., Gordon et al., 2001; Skiba, 2001). According to the Children's Defense Fund (2007), African American juveniles are four times more likely to be incarcerated than their White peers. Students who are continuously arrested tend to struggle in school and fall victims to a vicious cycle that funnels the school-to-prison pipeline (Langberg & Fedders, 2013).

The American Civil Liberties Union (n.d.) defined the school-to-prison pipeline as the policies and practices that push our nation's schoolchildren out of classrooms and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems. The convergence of educational policies increases the likelihood that a child will receive a criminal record rather than a high school diploma (Kim et al., 2010). The pipeline reflects the prioritization of incarceration over education.

While the juvenile justice system is premised on the concept of rehabilitation, the school-to-prison pipeline flows in only one direction. Once a child becomes involved with the juvenile court system, for many it is difficult to transition back to the mainstream education system and the traditional classroom, increasing the possibility of not graduating from high school (Kim et al., 2010). How does this happen so easily? When students violate the law and are adjudicated and placed under court supervision, also known as juvenile probation, they are expected to abide by the rules of supervision. Failure to comply with the rules may result in further court involvement and/or placement in detention. The supervision agreement for the county in which I teach includes 35 rules and rule number 5 is directly related to school. Rule number 5 reads

I will attend school daily, apply best effort, and maintain passing grades, follow all school rules, adhere to dress code of conduct and address all school staff and personnel with respect at all times. (Rules of Supervision, 2014)

Upon release from detention for the initial charge, the student has to agree to the following statement:

I have read and understand that foregoing rules of supervision and will abide by them, realizing that if I violate the rules I may be subject to being picked up, detained in secure custody (if appropriate), having my supervision period extended and or require further Court appearances. (Rules of Supervision, n.d.)

After students are released, they are assigned a probation officer and are released to return to their home school; however, they are stigmatized. Students who are cited as violating the court supervision agreement may be arrested and returned to juvenile detention. Mike was trapped

within this cultural and racialized discourse that situated him as a criminal the moment he broke a rule. And he knew it. And he was angry. Any minor incident formerly viewed as typical teen behavior, moments that teachers would ordinarily use to instruct on character and moral values from which the student might grow without consequences, are considered recidivist behaviors that predestine a student for jail; consequently, they are for the school-to-prison pipeline where incarceration takes precedence over education. This is specifically true for Black males who are funneled into the pipeline at a higher rate.

The School-to-Prison Pipeline

Whereas the initial role of the Juvenile Justice System was to facilitate rehabilitation for youth offenders with the goal of preventing adult incarceration (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2001), data indicated that the system has now become a facilitator of the school-to-prison pipeline, specifically for youth of color. According to the Juvenile Justice Information Exchange, in 2011, the disproportionate representation of youth of color accounted for 71% of youth held in detention nationwide and 66% of youth committed to juvenile upon the determination of delinquency. Studies from the W. Haywood Burns Institute (Burns Institute, n.d.) indicated that close to 55,000 youth were incarcerated in 2013, and 66% were youth of color. Data specific to Alabama revealed the disproportionate rate for youth of color compared to Whites as 2.6:1, and African American youth compared to Whites as 3:1 in 2011.

Data from the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (2007) indicated that African American youth are detained in detention facilities at a higher rate (37%) than their referral rate (30%) to juvenile court services in comparison to White youth who are detained at lower rate (60%) although their referral rate is higher (67%). This differential in referral and detention rates represents an overrepresentation and was indicated in 45 states. The data are alarming

considering that youth of color under the age of 21 represent approximately only 45% of the youth in the United States. Disturbingly, African American youth make up 30% of arrests, while they only represent 17% of the overall youth population. According to Rovner (2016b), in a report published by The Sentencing Project, as of 2013 African American adolescents were more than four times as likely to be detained than Caucasian adolescents and between 2003 and 2013 their detention rate increased from 38% to 40% even as the national commitment rate declined. In addition, 62% of African American youth who are transferred to the adult system are “nine times more likely than white youth to receive an adult prison sentence” (The State of America’s Children, 2020).

Zero Tolerance Policies

I question the policies and procedures of the juvenile justice system in combination with public school board discipline policies and ask whether the zero tolerance environment for students facing criminal charges, and who are on probation, are being treated fairly. The school environment, through zero tolerance policies, is converted into a punitive space, especially for African American youth who are expelled and suspended at higher rates than their White peers, despite comparable rates of infraction (Kim et al., 2010; Witt 2007). Zero tolerance policies are mandatory and harsh punishments for school infractions with the intent of eliminating undesirable conduct regardless of the student’s history, culpability, or extenuating circumstances (Kim et al., 2010). Instead of zero tolerance policies solving a problem (Billings, 2001), they shift the problem, write off the individual student in an effort to eradicate deviant behavior, and result in case referrals to the juvenile justice court system that fuels the school-to- prison pipeline (Heitzeg, 2009).

With harsh zero tolerance policies in place, students in juvenile delinquency status are no longer allowed to make what would be considered youthful exuberance or indiscretions, and when attached to Black youth in a White society, such actions are perceived as nascent criminal tendencies and behaviors. When my students commit minor violations such as talking back to a teacher, school tardies, or low grades, and believe there is a strong probability of returning to detention, they often say, “if they are going to return to detention, it might as well be worth it,” so they turn to drugs and alcohol to escape the inevitability of returning to detention. According to Alexander (2010), these students were “embracing the stigma of criminality as an action of rebellion—an attempt to carve out a positive identity in a society that offers them little more than scorn, contempt, and constant surveillance” (p. 171).

Mike was a victim of a system with no regard for his voice. He complained that the school administrators and teachers treated him unfairly without due recourse and no one would listen to him. As with many students around him, both Black and White, in order to deal with such frustrations, he turned to drugs (in Mike’s case, his drug of choice was marijuana, unlike the recent epidemic of opioids and heroin, which is a hallmark of the White affluent society). Mike stated he had failed continuous drug urinalysis tests but would rather go to detention for breaking the law than for violating school rules. Students often expressed the embarrassment of being arrested at school and the disdain associated with returning to school. This was the case with Mike, who also expressed anger and frustration that school no longer mattered. All Mike wanted was to be left alone, and free from the constraints of the juvenile justice system. He wanted to hold some sense of control over his life.

Engagement With Critical Pedagogy

Whereas I was mandated to extend to Mike the school curriculum in compliance with the State of Alabama during his detention at JDC, I quickly realized that for him and many others a standardized curriculum was no more helpful or effective in detention than it was at their home schools. From my observations, for Mike and many other detained lack juveniles, knowledge received in school does not seem to apply to their lives. They saw no value or connection to a typical education and often expressed anger and hopelessness, choosing to lash out at the world. Their voices had been silenced, and so they spoke through actions. Witnessing this, I sought to find a way to not just reach Mike and the other students so they would talk about their experiences, but to also make school relevant so he might have some modicum of hope for a better life. For Mike and others like him, this meant not going to jail (not a life of crime) or ending up in a low-level minimum wage job. Whenever Mike was detained, I knew I had to find a way to break through the wall of hostility if I ever expected to have an opportunity to talk to him about schoolwork, or expect him to get along with the other students. I knew I had to provide a space for him to express his anger and frustration, a space to be heard, so he would not feel caged in.

I had to engage in what at that time seemed logical from my own observations, but that I now realize were actions following the principles of critical pedagogy armed with the critique of critical race theory (McKay, 2010; Reale, 2012) and the tools of autobiography (Furman, Coyne, & Negi, 2008; Griffiths, 1994; Grumet, 1990b). These theories, which served as the theoretical framework and methodology of this research, demanded that I no longer employ a lens of neutrality and view these adolescent males as failures who needed to be removed from schools, policed, remediated, and consequently imprisoned due to personal failures, but as young men

inscribed with socially constructed narratives that positioned them as “objects to be silenced and controlled,” to be feared and imprisoned (Asencio & Burke, 2011; Kroska, Lee & Carr, 2016; Langberg & Fedders, 2013). I realized that while I cannot change the narratives of those doing the imprisoning, I can carve out a space for African American adolescent males to regain something the system took away—a place to speak and think both silently and aloud about their circumstances in a way that gives them access to a different narrative. I wanted to give them an opportunity to be heard, to hear themselves, and retain a sense of dignity.

I realized I had to find a way to use my position to create a space for Mike to express his anger and frustration in nonviolent and productive ways. I wanted to give him insight to finding a better path, or at least give him the sense that he was not predestined to go to jail. What I have learned from my experiences with young, Black, incarcerated males is that they desire to express their sense of what is happening to them, and how the system is constructing them. They want an opportunity to speak a narrative different from predispositions of teachers and administrators who perceive young Black males as violent, hostile, and unintelligent.

According to Alexander (2012), “a major reason for these disparities is unconscious and conscious racial biases infecting decision making” which is akin to the oblivion of White privilege (p. 118). This is consistent with Townsend (2000) who proposed that many teachers may not be familiar and comfortable with the communication style of African American youth and may interpret “the impassioned and emotive manner popular among young African Americans as combative or argumentative” (p. 383). This is especially true for teachers with a European-American background who, without cultural and social understanding of African American culture, develop negative stereotypes that African American males are unruly and dangerous (Skiba, 2002). When fear is paired with a lack of understanding of cultural social

interactive norms teachers “overreact to relatively minor threats to authority” which results in biased decision-making concerning school disciplinary actions (p. 180). For Mike and many like him, the institution of schooling is blocking the path to an education, which is why it is important to provide a space and time for them to express themselves and foster skills for operating and coping in a world that tends to be already predisposed to think of African American males as bad boys (Laura, 2014).

Autobiographical Writing

I tried the privileged didactic teaching model, strictly sticking to the systematic methods that demanded directed instruction with no space for the students to voice how they were experiencing the curriculum, but I quickly realized the students seemed disconnected. They had no interest or understanding of its purpose, there was no connection to their lives, and they often commented that I was just giving them, “busy work.” Freire (1993) concluded that traditional methods of educating view the student as an empty vessel waiting for knowledge to be poured into them by the sage. So, instead of continuing the traditional didactic pedagogy in which I provided the students with assignments, worksheets, and assessments in alignment with curriculum standards, I decided to incorporate writing activities that allowed the students to connect their life stories and experiences with the curriculum. As adolescent males, I wanted them to realize what they had to say was important. I often referred to the *Diary of Anne Frank* and, how as a teenager, Anne had no clue that her journal would provide what is known as one of the most accurate accounts of the Holocaust, and one of the most influential and most read books in history. I also make reference to Tupac Shakur’s book, *The Rose that Grew from Concrete*, and how in his awareness of social and cultural history with the inclusion of Dr. King, Malcolm X, and Geronimo made him able to connect to his life experiences. By illuminating relevance

through the published works of Anne Frank and Tupac Shakur, I not only want my students to develop a personal connection with the literature, but I also hope for an opportunity to instruct them on spelling and grammar.

I wanted them to engage with the curriculum autobiographically. I did not realize at the time I was following the curriculum critique and theory of William F. Pinar, who has written for several decades about the necessity of creating curriculum spaces for the study of subjective experiences. Pinar believed that developing a narrative voice in education was a means to more fully realize a student's possible existence, not as a way of convincing the student to reproduce the world, but to perceive his or her self differently in that world. For Pinar, the teacher becomes a curriculum vessel that creates spaces and individual means to explore not just the facts of any discipline, but the interrelationships between the subject matter, the individual's experiences of the world, other students, teachers, parents, and so on. Pinar (2004) defined curriculum theory as the "interdisciplinary study of educational experience" (p. i). With student engagement in mind, I began to develop assignments that would help students like Mike internalize how assigned readings spoke to them and their own existence while investigating how the institution of school and the racialized expectations of society affected how they perceive themselves. My hope was that the implementation of such assignments would help my students find a means to better cope with life and not become prey to the prison system.

I am not trying to fight the juvenile justice system. I am acknowledging and addressing, on a small and intimate level, how young Black males incarcerated in a juvenile detention center have their voices taken away and how they engage in autobiographical expressions that convey what they are feeling and becoming as they move through that system. Although my classroom is located in a punitive facility, I had to reclaim it as a place for "learning and growth" where

“incidents of misbehavior, poor choices, wrongdoing, and even crimes” are not the primary focus, but where “principles of repairing the harm, recognizing the consequences, and developing talents and assets” are priorities that assist in diminishing the frustration and stigma associated with juvenile delinquency (Ayers, Ayers, & Dohrn, 2002, p. xiii; Kim et al., 2010). According to Langberg and Fedders (2013), this leads to lack of motivation, academic failure, and a vicious cycle of criminal behavior that fuels the school-to-prison pipeline.

Over the past 40 years, there has been an overwhelming influx in the prison population within the United States, “a tenfold increase, since 1970,” resulting in the highest incarceration rate in the world (Heitzeg, 2009, p. 5). This mass incarceration includes an over-representation of African Americans and is referred to by Michelle Alexander (2012) as *The New Jim Crow*, a recapitulation of the atrocities of the old Jim Crow laws. Unfortunately, this trend is also represented in the juvenile justice system, transforming a system with initial reformative goals into a punitive system that serves as a feeder, a source for the school-to-prison pipeline. In a report titled “Dismantling the School-To-Prison Pipeline,” the NAACP stated that

In the last decade, the punitive and overzealous tools and approaches of the modern criminal justice system have seeped into our schools, serving to remove children from mainstream educational environments and funnel them onto a one-way path toward prison. The School-to-Prison Pipeline is one of the most urgent challenges in education today. (2005)

As I watch the complex nuances of juvenile detention unfold, I grapple to make sense of juvenile delinquency and how to educate delinquents who are at risk for academic failure and further incarceration. I am challenged daily as how to meet required curriculum standards in a classroom room housed in a detention center with students ranging in age from 11-19, grades 6-12, who are either adjudicated or facing adjudication by the juvenile court and who, like Mike, often feel frustrated, angry, and ready to give up on an education.

As I struggle to find ways to reach my students, one of my greatest hopes is to convey that I want to hear what they have to say, that what they have to say matters, and it is okay to be frustrated and angry. Because I am employed as a teacher and not a counselor, I have to figure out how to provide an avenue for the students to express their frustrations within curriculum standards. As I grappled with how to connect their anger and frustration to the curriculum, I felt the process of self-reflective writing would provide a means for the students to discover themselves, make sense of, and develop understanding of their personal experiences and the world in which they live (Furman et al., 2008), especially their experiences with juvenile delinquency.

Laurel Richardson referred to writing as “a way of finding out about yourself” (2000, p. 923). With this in mind, I implemented journal writing. Every student is issued a journal for daily writing. I do not require a certain length, and I am not strict on grammar or spelling. I just encourage them to write and reflect on themselves. They can write about whatever they want and can even curse; some really like the cursing and take full advantage of what they consider a fringe benefit. The students always laugh when I tell them, “Write about what you want to, just don’t tell me where you hid the money or the body. I will have to report that and then you will have a new charge.”

As I read my student’s journals, I sometimes write comments on their entries and intentionally choose to focus less on the technical aspects of writing and more on their attempt to illustrate and articulate how they understand themselves, their sense of identity, their sense of how they perceive who they are, and how that corresponds or does not correspond with how society has defined them. My use of identity correlates to the way Pinar (2004) utilized it in his work on curriculum and autobiography, not as some unified, univocal self of an autonomous

agent, not the Cartesian philosophical self, “ I think, therefore, I am,” which situates the Anglo European educated, heterosexual male as the universal norm. Instead, the focus of identity in this study followed Pinar’s (2004) work in which the individual was comprised of subject positions as determined by society and the existential impulse to make meaning of, and go beyond the material constraints that cultivates a greater sense of individual awareness of voice and how voice affects the world around them.

Through autobiographical writing methods, students can begin to find, through interrogation of their own lives, how they have come to be defined as a *juvenile delinquent*, how to regain their humanity, and how to embrace their individuality by helping them begin to write about what they are reading in relation to who they are, where they are, and how they arrived at detention. This holistic perspective is supported by Pinar’s position on the complexity and “ever-evolving relations between individual and world” (2004, p. 83). Pinar’s (2004) position was that an autobiographical method (*currere*) can provide a framework for reflecting on educational experiences for both the teacher and student and such reflections become an impetus for identity formation through transformation. Additionally, it helps students gain access to the discourses and cultural narratives that construct them as criminals. In other words, society wants to limit them to one voice, one narrative way of interacting with the world, but autobiography helps them gain access to different voices that can identify different possible narratives and discourses from which to speak and act. The personal narrative also provides students with another means to resist the impoverished condition of delinquency and challenge the structural and systematic narratives that much of the dominant cultures in the United States accept as true and determined.

I encourage my students to take their journals when they are released so they can reflect on their experiences at detention and use what they learned about themselves during that time to

make better choices within a racialized landscape that inherently situates them as criminals. Furthermore, it is important for them to know what they have to say matters and is respected regardless of whether anyone else agrees with their points of view or not. I want them to know that their stories and their voices are just as important as the ones they are expected to learn about in History and English Language Arts.

At the time I made this decision, I did not realize I was engaging in a kind of critical pedagogy, I just thought the writing exercises would be the best way for me to develop a rapport with the students while also following my academic duties. The more they wrote without fear of judgment, the more comfortable they became with me; their responses to the journal writing activity varied from poems to lyrics and drawing pictorials. At this place of openness, they not only became more in tune with their voice(s), but more open to sound, like receiving instruction on mandated curriculum standards.

Autobiographical Poetry

In addition to journal writing, I include autobiographical poetry writing activities. The implementation of autobiographical poetry writing makes it possible for the students to engage in finding ways to access different narratives and discourses that allow them to articulate different subject positions and to be candid about their lived experiences, their struggles, their accomplishments, and, more specifically, an opportunity to reflect on how they have arrived at juvenile delinquency. Through autobiographical writing, students acknowledge their strengths, weaknesses, beliefs, ideas, and emotions. By avoiding one directional narrative that often takes place within a classroom, where the teacher does all of the communicating (Katz, 2014), these activities provide an opportunity for the students to communicate everyday living experiences while also providing me with an opportunity to become more acquainted with them. Critical

pedagogy provides a space for students to address issues that affect their daily lives, fosters student engagement, and allows teachers to learn about their students (Freire, 1993; hooks, 1994). In agreement with Freire's philosophy and the words of Michelle Reale (2012), I needed to see my students holistically by "recognizing that they come with thoughts, feelings, perceptions and many other human attributes that influence not only how they learn, but their capacity to learn" (p. 85).

The autobiographical poetry writing assignments are written either in free form or with a graphic organizer. I discovered the autobiographical graphic organizer as I was searching for assignments that would be engaging for the students, but also provide a way of learning more about my students. This type of assignment is usually done at the beginning of the school year, as a get-to-know-you activity. In detention, there is an ongoing rotation of students, and it is not uncommon for me to have a new student(s) every day. My use of poetry is not to follow the narrative of poetry as therapy, but for verbalizing the experiences of juvenile delinquency. I believe this is concrete evidence of juvenile delinquency.

The protocol for the autobiographical writing assignments is to hand-write the initial piece. Once the handwritten draft is done, I review them and then the piece is typed. Free verse is often used because it removes the pressure for perfect punctuation. Free verse poetry originated in the early part of the 20th century as a poetic movement to break free from the rules and constraints of formal verse (Furman & Shukraft, 2007). Utilizing free verse does not indicate that anything can be a poem. What it does is allow the writer the freedom to create poetry that suits their purpose of thoughts, and natural breath and speech patterns. Through the use of figurative language devices such as personification, similes, and metaphors, free verse captures images and conveys meaning. In general, free verse poetry has no certain length; is not required to include

rhyme, metric pattern, or stanzas; lines may be different in length; the first word of the line is most often not capitalized; nor does it require accurate punctuation or spelling. Influential poets Walt Whitman, T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Carl Sandburg, and Carlos Williams have utilized free verse. After proofreading, the piece is printed in a font of their choice on colored card stock paper of their choice and then mounted on craft paper (decorative with designs) of their choice. The premise behind choosing fonts, and colored and craft paper of individual choice is to further extend a reflection of self. The goal is for the finished piece to reflect the individual through words, shapes, and colors.

Through autobiographical writing, I want to provide a space for both academic and personal flourishing, a place where my students can thrive long enough to develop the means to cope with the racist system as well as find means to resist and disrupt assumptions within that system. I simply want my students to write, come to know and express themselves, and come to understand how their surroundings construct their identities and the narratives and choices they have available to live by (Leggo, 2008). With this understanding comes the opportunity to change their own story, to not allow their past or the juvenile justice system to dictate and destroy them, to see there are other choices. Although these practices are implemented within a juvenile justice facility, it is not to say that the system is fine and should be left as is, but is instead part of the problem. While acknowledging the impoverishment of a system that funnels America's youth, specifically young Black males into the prison pipeline, my focus was the individual, how he or she understands who they are, how they have become a part of the system, and how they can look inward to begin to make sense of their identities, narratives, and choices.

Autobiographical writing with youth of juvenile delinquency status is not a new occurrence. Existing programs like PONGO Publishing Teen Writing Project (Group, n.d.), a

volunteer, nonprofit organization that utilizes autobiographical poetry writing as a therapeutic activity to help adolescents express and deal with traumatic losses; the Alabama Writers' Forum (AWF) in collaboration with the Alabama Department of Youth Services sponsors the Writing Our Stories program, an anti-violence creative writing program; and the nationwide program, Words Unlocked, sponsored by the Center for Educational Excellence in Alternative Setting (CEEAS) believes it is critical to allow students in secure setting the opportunity to "explore literature and unlock their creative talents in writing." While these programs focus on autobiographical writing, they differ from critical autobiography that not only allowed my students to retell their stories, but most importantly, it provided a space for them to evaluate their experiences and analyze how such experiences have shaped their identity, schooling, and status with the juvenile court system.

Narrative alone has limited use for the purpose of gaining knowledge (Griffiths, 1994). The purpose of this study was to further empower the autobiographical writings of youth in juvenile delinquency status by increasing its epistemological value. Engagement with autobiography through poetry not only provided an opportunity for the participants' voices to be heard by others, but could also foster an awareness of how their voices are constructed and how they can use their voices and through the process of writing begin to take more control over their voices and choices. I am not trying to be a savior for these students; what I am simply and gently trying to do is open other doors for them in which they can have a choice to go through or not.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this dissertation was to study how autobiographical poetry provides a space for African American males to express their experiences with the juvenile justice system, and to evaluate how such experiences connect to broader educational narratives of the school-to-

prison pipeline. Autobiographical poetry provided an opportunity for African American males who, when telling their stories, exposed the limitations of statistics about juvenile delinquency through interpretive means with an “emphasis on the uniqueness of each life” (Denzin, 2010, p. 25).

Research Questions and Design

As I engaged in this research I explored the following research questions:

1. How do the autobiographical poems of African American males narrate the experiences of juvenile delinquency.
2. How do these experiences engage with the broader educational narratives of the school-to-prison pipeline?

This qualitative study utilized poetry as a method to analyze the autobiographical poems written by young Black men between the ages of 18 and 22 who have spent time in a juvenile detention facility. The premise for this age range is that I believe that post-juvenile delinquency status will make possible a longitudinal view of their experiences with the juvenile court system as the young men reflected on and expressed their feelings, thoughts, and even questioned their past, present, and expected future choices. The use of poetry acknowledges individuals as producers of knowledge and also contributes to new ways of knowing through a format that illuminates and honors the subjective experiences of individuals (Furman, 2007; Furman, Lietz, & Langer, 2006).

Utilizing autobiographical poetry instead of the traditional interview for inquiry, three workshops were conducted. During these workshops, questions about juvenile delinquency were used to prompt discussions. From the discussions and note taking, the participants constructed autobiographical poems about their experiences. Except for basic editing, the participant’s poems

were kept in their original form as data for this project. With the intent of investigating how the data from this study speak with prior research on the school-to-prison pipeline, this study merged theory-generated or provisional coding with in-vivo coding for the purpose of preserving the actual voices of the participants.

Significance of the Study

For my students, their poetic works are not just poems; they are the everyday realities of adolescents detained by the juvenile justice system. Prior research concerning juvenile delinquency clearly communicated the disparities experienced by African American adolescents within the juvenile justice system, but from an outside perspective. Autobiographical poetry tells the story from the perspective of those experiencing the system, those formally labeled *juvenile delinquent*. As I hear their voices and look into their faces, I struggle to make sense of why the juvenile justice system is not working, and question what could be done to reverse the damage communicated through the anguish and pain in their faces and voices that reek with despair, confusion, and hopelessness. At the genesis of the critical pedagogy practices, I was compelled to begin collecting the autobiographical pieces/poems written by my students with the hopes of one day allowing the world to hear their voices—their pain, their fears, their hopes, and dreams.

From a front row seat and through relational engagement with my students, I can attest that many of the programs currently in place within the juvenile justice system are not working; the very fact that I am employed at a juvenile detention facility, with a constant flow of students, is indicative of that. From my perspective, a significant key to beginning a serious conversation about how to facilitate change within the juvenile court system should begin with the voices of *juvenile delinquents* in combination with educators and other professional staff who work with them on a daily basis.

Conclusion

With all of this in mind, I am reminded of the words of Norman Denzin (2010) about the essentiality of qualitative research in understanding that, “the perspectives and experiences of those persons who are served by social justice programs must be grasped, interpreted, and understood, if solid, effective, applied programs are to be created” (p. 25). In other words, a relational engagement with the voices of detention is pertinent to making sense of why the juvenile justice system is contributing to the school-to-prison pipeline.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The focus of this review is on current research that defines and analyzes the school-to-prison pipeline, a pathway from school discipline to the juvenile justice system. This chapter includes a review of school discipline practices dictated by zero tolerance policies, the racial disparities of such school policies among African American males, and how such policies funnel the school-to-prison pipeline. There is a significant body of research that explores the connection between school discipline and the school-to-prison pipeline and the racial disparities that exist among African American males; however, there is a need for more research that examines how juvenile delinquency disenfranchises and silences the voices of Black adolescent males.

The purpose of this study was to provide a space for African American adolescent males to tell their stories about how they experienced juvenile delinquency. Their voice was essential to grasping, interpreting, and understanding the “perspectives and experiences of those persons who are served by social justice programs if solid, effective, applied programs are to be created” (Denzin, 2010, p. 25). Autobiographical poetry provides a space for African American adolescent males to express how their experiences have shaped their identity. An engagement with the “voices of detention” is pertinent to making sense of how the juvenile justice system is contributing to the school-to-prison pipeline. This chapter also defines *voicē* as used in this research and includes a review of the literature on the legal silencing of voice and formal labeling within the court system. Additionally, this chapter includes a discussion of critical pedagogy and autobiography.

The Juvenile Justice System

The initial conception of the Juvenile Justice System in the early 1900s was for the intent of intervening in the lives of troubled youth and recognizing that while youth may violate the law, they should be given the opportunity for rehabilitation. The system was designed to differ from the adult criminal system (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2001) in that the focus was not to be on the criminal infraction before the court, but on the personal need for rehabilitation; the proceedings were informal and closed to the public with most of the discretion left to the juvenile court judge who was supposed to act in the best interest of the child. The court records were to remain confidential for the purpose of not interfering with the adolescent's ability to transition back into society. The language used within the juvenile justice system emphasizes these differences. "Juveniles are not charged with crimes, but rather with delinquencies; they are not found guilty, but rather are adjudicated delinquent; they are not sent to prison but to training school or reformatory" (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2001, p. 154).

The School-to-Prison Pipeline and Zero Tolerance Policies

Since 1970, the United States has experienced an overwhelming influx in the prison population, "a tenfold increase," resulting in the highest incarceration rate in the world (Heitzeg 2009, p. 5). This mass incarceration includes a disproportionate representation of African Americans which Michelle Alexander (2012) referred to as The New Jim Crow, a recapitulation of the atrocities of the old Jim Crow Laws, laws in practice post-Civil War for the sole purpose of maintaining segregation and oppressing African Americans. The same trend is represented in the juvenile justice system, transforming a system with initial reformative goals into a punitive system that serves as a feeder, a source for the school-to-prison pipeline.

In the 1980s and 1990s, in every state except Nebraska, tougher juvenile policies were put in place, making it easier to prosecute youth as adults by decreasing the age at which a juvenile can be prosecuted as an adult. These new policies expanded the categories of crime, gave prosecutors more authority, and limited the discretion of the juvenile court judge (Arya & Augarten, 2008). This was especially true for youth of color, traditionally defined as African Americans, Native Americans, Latinos, Asians, and Pacific Islanders. According to research, African American youth are confined at a higher rates and treated more harshly by the justice system than White youth for the same crimes at all stages within the justice system (Arya & Augarten, 2008; Heitzeg, 2009; National Council on Crime and Delinquency, 2007; Rovner, 2016a). This pattern of students being “pushed out” of schools into the juvenile justice system and into the prison system has become so dominant that it is now referred to as the school-to-prison pipeline, a series of actions that begin in school and end in prison (Heitzeg, 2009) and is identified as a

Conceptual framework used to understand how policies and practices—primarily from, but not limited to, education and criminal justice systems—intersect in a manner which cumulatively results in students of color being disproportionately pushed out of school and into prison. (Smith, 2009, p. 1019)

Additionally, the school-to-prison pipeline is defined as “the collection of policies, practices, conditions and prevailing consciousness that facilitate both the criminalization within the educational environments and the processes by which this criminalization results in the incarceration of youth and young adults” (Morris, 2012, p. 2). The merging of such policies has created a panopticon (Foucault, 1995) system of surveillance, policies of power used to continuously and purposely monitor, specifically for youth of color (Laura, 2014). The American Civil Liberties Union (n.d.) defined the school-to-prison pipeline as the policies and practices

that push our nation's schoolchildren out of classrooms and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems. According to a report published by the NAACP,

The school to prison pipeline is one of the most urgent challenges in education today. The punitive and overzealous tools and approaches of the modern criminal justice system have seeped into our schools, serving to remove children from mainstream educational environments and funnel them onto a one-way path toward prison. (2005)

The school-to-prison pipeline analogy has become “the dominant frame by which to discuss the lived experiences of boys and girls, disproportionately Black, who are criminalized in their learning environments, ultimately leading to contacts with juvenile and criminal justice systems” (Morris, 2012, p. 2). The convergence of zero-tolerance policies which include school suspensions and expulsions (Kim et al., 2010) as well as referrals to the juvenile justice system increase the likelihood that a child will receive a criminal record rather than a high school diploma. According to the Advancement Project (2010), “arrests in school represent the most direct route into the school-to-prison pipeline, but out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, and referrals to alternative schools also push students out of school and closer to a future in the juvenile and criminal justice systems” (p. 4).

The pipeline reflects the prioritization of incarceration over education and is considered to be one of the “darkest sides of the educational system” (Collier & Bush, 2012, p.79). While the juvenile justice system is premised on the concept of rehabilitation, the school-to-prison pipeline flows in only one direction. Once a child becomes involved with the juvenile court system, for many it is difficult to transition back to the mainstream education system and the traditional classroom; many never graduate from high school.

Although zero tolerance policies were adopted with the hopes of preventing mass school shootings (Mitchell, 2014), such policies are now identified as a critical component of the school-to-prison pipeline (Berlowitz, Frye, & Jette, 2015; Kim et al., 2010; Mitchell, 2014);

schools originally designed to educate have now become facilitators to the school-to-prison pipeline through policies that interpret all conduct the same regardless of context and lead to juvenile court referrals, arrests, and incarceration for minor infractions. In addition to failing to distinguish the severity of offenses, zero tolerance policies also disproportionately impact African Americans who are targeted for a wide range of infractions (Laura, 2014; Mitchell, 2014). This is known as the discipline gap where, nationally, Black students are suspended at a higher rate than would be expected in relation to their proportion of the student population (Heitez, 2009).

Zero tolerance policies are not racialized in theory, but the implications of such policies are profoundly racial. The American Civil Liberties (n.d.) concluded that,

Zero-tolerance policies criminalize minor infractions of school rules, while cops in schools lead to students being criminalized for behavior that should be handled inside the school. Students of color are especially vulnerable to push-out trends and the discriminatory application of discipline. (para. 2)

The removal of students from the educational setting, especially for students of color, disrupts the educational process and becomes a pathway to “societal exclusion” and an increased risk of contact with the juvenile justice system (Kim et al., 2010; Mitchell, 2014, p. 276). To further emphasize the negative outcomes of zero tolerance policies, the Southern Poverty Law Center considers such policies a critical component to the school-to-prison pipeline and postulated that,

The school-to-prison pipeline starts (or is best avoided) in the classroom. When combined with zero-tolerance policies, a teacher’s decision to refer students for punishment can mean they are pushed out of the classroom— and much more likely to be introduced into the criminal justice system. (Elias, 2013, p. 39)

According to the Juvenile Justice Information Exchange, in 2011 the disproportionate representation of youth of color accounted for 71% of youth held in detention nationwide, and 66% of youth committed to juvenile detention upon the determination of delinquency. Studies

from the Burns Institute (n.d.) indicated that close to 55,000 youth were incarcerated in 2013 and 66% were youth of color. Data specific to Alabama further reveals that, in 2011, the disproportion rate for youth of color compared to Whites as 2.6:1 and African American youth compared to Whites as 3:1.

In 2007, The National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD) reported that while only 30% of African American youth were referred to detention, they made up 37% held in detention in comparison to 67% of White youth referred and 60% detained. This type of disparate representation of African American youth was indicated in 45 states in every offense category. The data are alarming considering that youth of color under the age of 21 represent approximately only 45% of the youth in the United States. African American youth make up 30% of arrests, while they only represent 17% of the overall youth population. In addition, African Americans are 62% of the youth transferred to the adult system, which makes them “nine times more likely than white youth to receive an adult prison sentence” (The State of America’s Children, 2020).

Over the past 10 years, research indicated that arrest and commitment rates for both White and youth of color declined, for Whites by 51% and for Blacks by 43%; however, statistical data continue to indicate that, nationwide, youth of color are more likely to be incarcerated than their White peers for similar crimes (Rovner, 2016a). In a report titled *Unbalanced Juvenile Justice* (n.d.) the Burns Institute reported that in 2013 the incarceration rate for youth of color was significantly higher than that of White youth:

- Blacks are 4.6 times higher
- Native Americans are 3.3 times higher
- Latinos are 1.7 times higher

Although justice should represent fairness, it is difficult to believe that the scales of justice are calibrated properly when one reviews the reported statistics concerning the racial disparities for African American youth incarceration within the United States. The NAACP (2005) referred to this as “the most urgent challenges in education today.” Rovner (2016b) reported in a paper published by The Sentencing Project that,

Between 2003 and 2013 (the most recent data available), the rate of youth committed to juvenile facilities after an adjudication of delinquency fell by 47 percent. Every state witnessed a drop in its commitment rate, including 19 states where the committee rates fell by more than half. Despite this remarkable achievement, the racial disparities endemic to the juvenile delinquency system did not improve over these same 10 years. (p. 1)

Cornel West, who wrote the foreword for Alexander’s book, *The New Jim Crow*, stated, “if young white people were incarcerated at the same rates as young black people, the issue would be a national emergency” (Alexander, 2012, p. x).

In light of prior research, it is clear that the racial disproportionality of African Americans is pervasive and persistent in pattern in both zero tolerance policies and the juvenile justice system. From a critical race theory perspective, such patterns are not accidental or coincidental and do not develop, but rather at least partially are the result of a biased process (Simson, 2014). Michele Alexander (2012) concluded that “a major reason for these disparities is unconscious and conscious racial biases infecting decision making” which is akin to the unconsciousness of White privilege supported by the racial hierarchy in the United States that identifies whiteness with superiority and dominance and blackness with inferiority (p. 118). This social framework is not absent from the educational setting, *the classroom*. Heitzeg (2009) postulated that this racial disparity cannot be explained by differences in behavior, thus leaning heavily toward differential enforcement of zero tolerance policies that begin in the classroom with teachers.

Wald and Losen (2003) identified teachers as “gatekeepers” who might be making subjective judgments that are “directly and indirectly” connected to race and class positions in society and inadvertently promote “ a journey through school that is increasingly punitive and isolating for its travelers,” specifically for Black males with White teachers (p. 3). Witt (2007) reported that “[s]ome of the highest rates of racially disproportionate discipline are found in states with the lowest minority populations, where the disconnect between white teachers and black students is potentially the greatest” (para, 23). Townsend (2000) argued that many teachers may not be familiar or comfortable with the communication style of African American youth and might interpret the more active style of communication, “the impassioned and emotive manner popular among young African Americans as combative or argumentative” (p. 383). This is especially true for teachers with a European-American background who, without a cultural and social understanding of African American culture, develop negative stereotypes that African American males are unruly and dangerous (Skiba, 2002). When fear is paired with a lack of understanding of cultural social interactive norms teachers “overreact to relatively minor threats to authority” which result in biased decision making concerning school disciplinary actions (p. 180).

Additionally, Collier and Bush (2012) posited that it is not the behavior of Black male students that creates the discipline gap, but rather “racism and teachers devaluing students’ cultural milieu, and its subsequent manifestations and the teacher’s negative perceptions and beliefs that are the root of the problem.” These beliefs have become so crystallized for African American males who are considered “agents in their own demise and destruction and therefore unworthy of sympathy, concern or love” (p.81). In other words, “beyond love” as suggested by Duncan (2002).

Another contributor to negative stereotyping of Black males is moral panic (Farmer, 2010; Morris, 2012), a negative media portrayal, that suggested that Black boys are immoral thus deserving of harsh punitive responses. “The media and political spheres are saturated with overblown, racially charged images of criminals and criminality, images which in turn stir up fear and are used to support harsher punitive measures” (Natapoff, 2005, p. 1501). Zero tolerance policies combined with a public fear of Black youth reinforces negative stereotypes about their moral character, resulting in the criminalization and marginalization of African American youth within an institution purposed for learning.

Critical interrogations of the school-to-prison pipeline (Kim et al., 2010; Langberg & Fedders, 2013) indicated that the juvenile justice system transforms these young, mostly African American, males into future criminals even as the official claim is that the system exists to rehabilitate them. In the words of Crystal Laura (2014), who writes from the account of her brother’s experiences from student to dropout to prison,

Black boys who have been sorted, contained, and then pushed out of schools become Black men—men whose patterns of hardship are pronounced and deeply entrenched: men who constitute nearly 50 percent of the adult males in prison; men who have been well primed for neither college or career, nor full participation in our democracy, but instead for punitive institutionalization. (p. 22)

The predicament of Black males within the educational system is a depiction of racism that is endemic to North America (Duncan, 2002). Instead of helping these young men become productive citizens who can speak for themselves, the system strips away not just educational and physical freedom, but, more importantly, their voice.

Formal Labeling, A Disruption of Voice

For the purpose of this research, *voice* is defined as an individual’s capability to articulate experiences in ways unique to them based on the understanding and meaning they give to issues

or circumstances (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Hadfield & Haw, 2001). In the words of Ashby (2011), “voice is the right and the ability to make oneself heard and to have one's experiences and perspectives available to others; to participate in the construction of the self and to decide how to represent that self to others” (para. 3). Bogdan and Biklen described voice as empowering, making it possible for “people to be heard who might otherwise remain silent” (1998, p. 204). Blocking the doorway to this voice is legal silencing.

The United States criminal justice system (Natapoff, 2005) is shaped by the premise that defendants within the court system have the right to remain silent; however, in such a system, their voices are absent from the criminal justice discourse. Thus, the justice system then proceeds without their voices, thus denying them personal dignity and imputing legal silencing that goes beyond the courtroom, and becomes “part of a larger phenomenon of expressive disempowerment” of disadvantaged groups to include, but not limit to minorities, the poor, the under-educated, and juveniles (Natapoff, 2005, p. 1452). What happens here is the identity and fates of defendants are shaped by the criminal justice discourse that formally labels adults as “criminals” and adolescents as “delinquents.”

Formal labels are those acquired through social control agencies and are believed to stigmatize juveniles to the degree that being labeled delinquent alters both social and academic opportunities and self-determinations. Labeling theory supports the idea that formal labeling can be a stepping-stone, a transitional event, in the “development of a criminal career” produced through societal reactions to crime that stigmatize juvenile delinquents (Bernburg, Krohn, & Rivera, 2006, p. 68). Labeling theory developed from the symbolic interactionist tradition of the “looking glass self” (Cooley, 1902), or the reflexive self (Mead, 1934), suggesting that an

individual will come to view her or himself in a way that reflects the views of others, and consequently come to act in the manner consistent with those views.

Numerous studies have postulated that being formally and publicly labeled delinquent increases the probability of subsequent deviance, and the likelihood of becoming involved in social networks with whom they identify, other deviant peers (Asencio & Burke, 2011; Bernburg & Krohn, 2003; Kroska et al. 2016) who provide “collective rationalizations, definitions, and opportunities that encourage and facilitate deviant behavior” (Bernburg et al., 2006, p. 68). These circumstances lead to further involvement with the juvenile court system or, as termed by Lemert, as secondary deviance (Sampson & Laub, 1997). Through defensive behavior and adaptation, secondary deviance can become a means to overt and covert problems created by the societal reaction to primary deviations. In the words of Asencio and Burke (2011), “once a deviant or criminal label is applied, it perpetuates itself by eliciting reactions from others, such as law enforcement, employers, family members, friends, and other acquaintances” (p. 164). Langberg and Fedders (2013) concluded that multiple incarcerations result in students feeling, “frustrated, unwanted and alienated, factors which contribute to further delinquency and criminal behavior, both in school and in the community” (p. 661).

Deviant labeling has a “profound, detrimental impact on the person’s social standing and may thus be a crucial step in building a stable pattern of deviant behavior” (Bernburg & Krohn, 2003, p. 1288). Due to factors that contribute to the continuance of deviant behavior such as the exclusion and stigmatizing effect of deviant labeling, youth are more likely to gravitate to other youth(s) labeled delinquent (Sampson & Laub, 1997). Rogers, Scott, and Way (2015) suggested that membership within a social group promotes a “sense of we-ness” and that “the social groups that youth belong to, and the socially constructed norms and expectations that accompany them,

provide critical information for how youth make sense of who they are and want to be.” This is important because “social identities can influence how we evaluate ourselves, judge our abilities” (p. 407), and are critical to shaping the manner in which adolescents view themselves (Howard, Flennaugh, & Terry, 2012).

Labeling theorists suggested that being labeled delinquent, a deviant label, “triggers the development of deviant self-meanings” and that “the official designation as a criminal empowers youth, perhaps because they begin to think of themselves in ways that more closely resemble delinquents and criminal identities, such as thug or gangster” (Kroska et al., 2016, p. 86), subsequently altering the life course of a juvenile through exclusion from “normal routines or conventional opportunities and increased contact with and support from deviant subgroups” (Sampson & Laub, 1997, p. 139). These are all factors that lead to “cumulative disadvantages in future life chances and, thereby, increases the probability of involvement in delinquency and deviance during adulthood” (Bernburg & Krohn, 2003, p. 1288). Sampson and Laub further (1997) asserted that

Cumulative disadvantage is generated most explicitly by the negative structural consequences of criminal offending and official sanctions for life chances. The theory specifically suggest a “snowball” effect—that adolescent delinquency and its negative consequences (e.g., arrest, official labeling, incarceration) increasingly “Mortgage” one’s future, especially later life chances molded by schooling and employment . . . The theoretical perspective in turn points to a possible indirect effect of delinquency and official sanctioning in generating future crime. (pp. 147-148)

A delinquency label not only alters self-concept, but also alters “a youth’s opportunity structures in ways that limit their ability to pursue conventional routes to socioeconomic success” (Kroska et al., 2016, p. 73).

Formal labeling and stigmatism, a system initially created to rehabilitate delinquent youth and prevent further violations, instead perpetuates higher criminal offenses among adolescents

(Adams, Robertson, Gray-Ray, & Ray, 2003; Kroska et al. 2016). In social science, stigma makes reference to a characteristic or attribute of a person “so thoroughly discredited” as to dispute the humanity of those bearing it (Simson, 2014, p. 535). With that being said, from a critical race theory perspective, in America, “the prototypical stigmatized trait is race; the prototypical stigmatized group, African Americans” (Simson, 2014, p. 535). From this definition, Simson (2014) postulated that racial stigma engages more perniciously than the mere dislike of a particular racial group, but goes further to dehumanization.

The involuntary status, collective identity, imputed through enslavement by White America has marked and continues to mark African Americans as a “distinct segment from the rest of the population” resulting in notions of conceptual whiteness and blackness that contribute to instrumental discrimination, social subordination, and expressive mistreatment (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ogbu, 2004, p. 4). Words and phrases of whiteness such as *school achievement*, *intelligence*, *science*, *middle classness*, *maleness*, and *beauty* become normative categories of whiteness and *gangs*, *inferiority*, *public assistance*, *the underclass*, and *basketball players*, become the “marginalized and legitimated” categories of blackness (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 9). Ogbu (2004) postulated that mechanisms such as these are utilized by the dominant group to shape and maintain a collective identity of minorities, to “carve them out and maintain them as separate segments of society with a distinct identity” (p. 5); for Blacks—inferiority and deficiency. And while we live in a postmodern and postcolonial world, such conceptions are embedded and fixed and continue to spawn a racialized society where whiteness is positioned as normative. This is particularly relevant in the educational setting where regardless of individual differences in physical appearance, education, ability, status, or place of residence, Black students are marked as deficient.

Ladson-Billings (1998) suggested that “current instructional strategies presume that African American students are deficient” (p. 22) In response, Black students quickly become cognizant of their minority status and know that in order to survive in the racially biased White dominated system of education, it becomes necessary to emulate whiteness (Ogbu, 1998). From a marginalized position, they realize they can never possess whiteness nor escape the separate existence and collective identity imputed on them by White America. In other words, they are who White America says they are, and in order to obtain academic success and acceptance by the dominant culture, they take on the burden of acting White—class and social positions override racial identification (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Black students transform themselves for the sake of survival. This taking on of whiteness is oppressive and a form of silencing and is no different from the aforementioned silencing that takes place in the legal system (Natapoff, 2005). The silencing, the loss of voice within the legal system and the educational system, is primarily responsible for the continued discrimination against Black males in school. Furthermore, the loss of voice spurns distrust, hopelessness, and despair and renders students invisible, thus further placing them at a disadvantage and at risk for academic failure and juvenile delinquency. Additionally, the loss of voice denies individuals the right to participate in the construction of the self as well as the right to have their experiences and perspectives heard (Britzman, 1989).

Cultivated by negative cultural stereotypes for Black youth of being bad, criminal, for being “unsalvageable,” “beyond love” (Everett, 2016, p. 318), or “cold and heartless” (Howard et al., 2012, p. 94), the formal label, *juvenile delinquent* imputes a negative identity and self-concept that may lead youth to view themselves in ways reflected upon them by others, resulting in behavior consistent with cultural negative stereotypes. Simply put, labeling theory suggested that, “an individual will behave in accordance with a label applied to him or her by others”

(Asencio & Burke, 2011, p. 164). It is important to note that Black males labeled delinquent, who hold membership in multiple social groups (Black, male, delinquent), and who are considered bad boys and beyond love (Duncan, 2002), not only internalize these depictions that foster “self-doubt, lack of motivation, low self-esteem, and lack of confidence,” but also “play out these roles much to their own demise” (Howard et al., 2012, pp. 93, 94). Simson (2014) argued that stigmatization creates a “virtual identity,” an accumulation of negative characteristics imputed upon individuals that take precedence over their actual identity (p. 535).

Hadfield and Haw’s (2001) position is that groups can be silenced in various ways, from being excluded to being stereotyped in such a way as to “invalidate what they say” (p. 488). Formal labeling fosters stereotypes and is a form of silencing, in that it not only denies (Britzman, 1989) an individual the opportunity in the construction of the self but further prevents them from deciding how they want to represent themselves to others. Silencing through formal labeling fosters disenfranchisement and disadvantages that exclude adolescents from traditional schooling and family, “the society in which they have membership” (Mitchell, 2014, p. 284). In addition, it produces dignitary harm, institutional ignorance, and social exclusion and promotes silencing practices (Fine, 1992) that camouflage, bury, and discredit ideologies, experiences, and contradictory evidence and makes it almost impossible for the viewpoints, experiences, and stories of those labeled *juvenile delinquent*, those at the center of the criminal justice system, to be heard.

Through silencing, the system has cultivated within these young detainees hopelessness and despair that diminishes emotional and psychological well-being. The sociopsychological effect on these mere “boys” is emotional withdrawals that accentuates skills and dispositions that lead down one path—criminality (Kim et al., 2010). Forced exclusion results in alienation,

marginalization, and stigmatization that disrupts the educational process and decreases the prospect of successfully re-entering society and increases the probability of future incarceration, especially among African American adolescent males. This is a major problem in the United States supported by empirical research and this statement by the Burns Institute:

The U.S. stands out in its use of youth incarceration. We incarcerate youth at higher rates than anywhere in the world: five times the rate of South Africa; 15 times the rate of Germany and 30 times the rate of Italy. With more than 75 percent of youth locked up for non-violent offenses, the U.S does not have an alarming crime problem; we have an alarming incarceration problem. And it's a problem primarily for youth of color. (n.d.)

Without the defendant's voices, judges, prosecutors, and the court system as a whole have no chance of learning about or coming to understand the social context that procreates crime and violence. "The institutional silencing of defendants ensures that courts, legislatures, and the public rarely hear the viewpoints, experiences, and stories of the people at the center of the criminal justice system" (Natapoff, 2005, p. 1501), thus, the courts never come to know their narratives—"their voices, identities, or motivations," thus leaving a narrative gap (Natapoff, 2005, p. 1499). Silencing not only renders defendants invisible, but it also shapes the law in ways that further places them at a disadvantage. Acknowledging this is a step toward breaking the silence and birthing a place for the voices of those encapsulated by the justice system to be heard.

Howard et al. (2012) suggested that one way to disrupt and dismantle the dominant discourses on Black males is to provide a space that contributes to the "recasting of the black male" (p. 94) and to "prioritize black male voices as central for engagement and analysis in research and practice" (p. 97). Scholarship that places the voice of the student at the center of analysis remains severely limited and significantly smaller than scholarship that focuses on accessing information from and about Black males.

Voice

What voice does is “privilege experience over theory or training, as the basis of an individual’s understanding of an issue or activity, and the meaning they give it” (Hadfield & Haw, 2001, p. 487). Voice provides an opportunity for African American adolescent males involved with the juvenile justice system to articulate experiences in ways unique to them based on the understanding and meaning they give to issues or circumstances (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Hadfield and Haw, 2001). In the words of Deborah Britzman:

Voice is the meaning that resides in the individual and enables that individual to participate in the community . . . The struggle for voice begins when a person attempts to communicate meaning to someone else. Finding the word, speaking for oneself and feeling heard by others is all a part of this process . . . Voice suggests relationships: the individual’s relationship to the meaning of her/his experience and hence, to language, and the individual’s relationship to the other, since understanding is a social process. (as cited in Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 4)

The voices of African American adolescent males involved with the criminal justice system are more than just individual meanings of experiences, but also include relational experiences, such as the relationships between the school-to-prison pipeline to race, school discipline, juvenile court, and academic achievement. Grumet (1990a) referred to this collaboration as choral and not just solo experiences. In saying that, Britzman’s (2003) position was “we do not have one voice but many,” and that voice is polyphonous and contingent upon shifting relationships, everyday practices, perspectives, and community interactions and that only through such relationships can one come to know the self (p. 34). She further argued that in order to “restore voice,” it is important to acknowledge the relationships: the relationships to the meaning of personal experience and the relationship to others, “since understanding is a social process” (Britzman, 1989, p, 146). McLaren’s (2015) perspective was that although voice refers to private discourse, the internalized, it is only understood by placing it in a universe of shared meanings with both

community and cultural social practices; he refers to voice as “cultural grammar” and “background knowledge” individuals use to understand and express experience (p. 180).

McLaren (2015) further referred to voice as a “constitutive force that mediates and shapes reality within historically constructed practices and relationships shaped by the rule of capital” (p. 180).

While prior experience and cultural history shape individual voice, the employment of such voice “within capitalist social relations” infuses voice with meanings outside of the student’s own making. This is consistent with Grumet (1990a), that voice is choral.

This concept of voice includes literal, metaphorical, and political territory: Literally, voice represents perspectives and speech; metaphorically, the quality and feelings conveyed by the words; and politically, the commitment to the voice of the speaker supports the right to speak and be heard (Britzman, 1989; 2003). Meanings constructed from collaborative experiences can provide an inside perspective and a gateway for developing effective programs to combat the school-to-prison pipeline. Furthermore, because meaning has psychological significance in that it matters to “how one’s life is lived and narrated” (Britzman, 2003, p. 7), these types of meaning provide the opportunity for the construction of the self and the opportunity to decide how to represent the self to others (Britzman, 1989), but to also “define themselves as active participants in the world” (McLaren, 2015, p. 180). Bell hooks (1989) referred to this as “self-recovery” as one becomes critically conscious of the self and the dependency on the collective realities of the past and present; the social construction of the self in relation to others and how together they construct a collective voice. In her words, “it is this collective voice we struggle to recover” (p. 31).

The purpose of this study is not to give voice, because it is not my voice to give, but to provide a space for adolescent Black males labeled *juvenile delinquent* to begin to make sense of

their experiences with delinquency, to speak for themselves, to express how they are experiencing the identity given to them and in doing so, to construct knowledge that moves beyond quantitative knowledge and theories about the school-to-prison pipeline to qualitative ways of understanding the lived experiences of those encapsulated by the school-to-prison pipeline with a commitment to honor their struggle and dignity. Critical pedagogy provided a platform for this to be accomplished.

Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy is a transformational educational response to institutional domination (Gruenewald, 2003), a philosophy of education that “empowers through connecting knowledge to power, allowing one to act constructively and to recognize relations between teaching and learning” (Reale, 2012, p. 85). Vandrick (1994) concluded that a major goal of critical pedagogy was to not only educate, but to emancipate all people regardless of their race, gender, class, etc. The genesis of critical pedagogy is rooted in critical theory, which is concerned with the concept of a just society in which individuals have political, economic, and cultural control of their lives and is foundational to critical pedagogy that focuses on transforming and saving the oppressed from being objects of education to becoming subjects with autonomy and emancipation (McLaren, 2015).

Whereas the roots of critical theory were cultivated in Europe pre-World War II in Germany and re-established after the war in Frankfurt, critical theory’s influence has been global, extending into social research, and influential in numerous disciplines to include anthropology, literary criticism, sociology, and educational theory (McLaren, 2015). Furthermore, McLaren (2015) noted that critical pedagogy was being practiced in Asia, Latin America, and Europe long before it was identified as a prominent domain of the progressive

education tradition. While its roots in the United States are connected to the work of educators John Dewey and Myles Horton, and the teachings of civil rights activists Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, Paulo Freire, a Brazilian activist and educator is credited as the founding father of critical theory. Freire's (1970) work with poverty stricken Brazilian peasants in the 1960s compelled him to develop educational practices that would improve the lives of this marginalized group of people. Through the employment of the principles of critical theory from the Frankfurt School in Germany, as its primary source merged with liberation theological ethics and the progressive passions in education (Kincheloe, 2007), Freire launched critical pedagogy in both theoretical and practical development. The "criticality" of both critical theory and critical pedagogy calls for action. Freire postulated that "criticality" demands praxis—both reflection and action (Burbules & Berk, 1999).

At the core of critical pedagogy is critical consciousness; Freire (1973) established three levels of consciousness, from lowest to highest: intransitive, semi-transitive, and critical consciousness. With intransitive, the lowest level, individuals accept life as is and credit any future life changes as a result of outside factors; they make no attempt to change their life conditions or any incurred injustices. At the middle level, semi-intransitive, individuals are aware of their problems, learn and take initiative to change one thing at a time, but are unable to connect their problem with the outside world and thus consider their problem as normal or accidental; thus, any changes they make are short-sighted. The third and highest level is critical consciousness or critical transitivity. At this level, individuals view their problems as structural and are able to make connections between them and the social context in which they are entrenched. At this point, individuals have the ability to not only interpret the problem, but to analyze reality.

Freire (1970) believed that raising critical consciousness of oppressed people was the purpose of an education. His goal for critical pedagogy was to engage learners in the act of what he called *conscientizacao*, the act of “learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” with the belief that through such consciousness of the inequitable historical, social, political, economic policies, norms, and values that have shaped and grounded their place in society, they can truly be in an empowered position to become agents of change (p. 35); consequently, improving their life conditions and becoming activists in building a more just and equitable society. In order to reach this level of consciousness, Heaney (1995) posited that students must practice dialogue and reject passivity because this level of consciousness is not based on individual or intellectual effort, but as a result of collective struggle and praxis. Dialogue encourages the learner’s voice (Shor, 1999) and “is the encounter between men, mediated by the world in order to name the world” (Freire, 1970, p. 69).

Critical pedagogy attempts to disrupt the transformation of “oppressive relations of power in a variety of domains that lead to human oppression” (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 45), such as what students experience in traditional education settings where the teachers deposit knowledge in the students and ask students to never question what is being poured in (Freire, 1970). With this model, students are not given the opportunity to relate this knowledge to current problems, social injustices, or their individual life situations. Freire referred to this model as a “banking model of education” that promotes an oppressive society. Critical pedagogy is an instructional approach to teaching that utilizes a problem-posing model by which systematic forms of oppression are critiqued (Freire, 1970; McKay, 2010). Critical pedagogy is a means to deconstruct the inferior position placed upon marginalized individuals by the dominant culture

and a way to debunk the power differential. It provides a space for students to address issues that affect their daily lives, fosters student engagement, allows teachers to learn about their students, and provides a space that honors their realities and life situations, while also allowing them the right to ask questions (Freire, 1993; hooks, 1994).

Freire's philosophy and the words of Reale (2012) support a holistic view of students by "recognizing that they come with thoughts, feelings, perceptions and many other human attributes that influence not only how they learn, but their capacity to learn" (p. 85). Freire's (1970) philosophy was that an education was not merely a "banking system" that viewed the student as an empty vessel waiting for knowledge to be poured into them by the sage, not a place of a one-dimensional narrative, but rather a liberating space where the teacher facilitates "students exploring their concrete reality, sharing those experiences and linking themselves to their socio-political context" and where they "find their voices" (Katz, 2014, p. 2).

Critical pedagogy fosters culturally responsive teaching, and according to Love (2012), academic instruction must engage in meaningful practices that connect the lives of students and communities to learning. Love also argued that creating a classroom where students have knowledge of self, their community, and love for each other should be the most important consideration in teaching. Culturally responsive teaching is defined as adjusting teaching methods to match the experiences and needs of students, "using student's cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles to make learning encounters more relevant and effective" (Collier & Bush, 2012, p. 82).

Unlike in the traditional classroom setting where sports, fashion, and pop culture might be the dominant themes that "form the axis of meanings," in the lives of students detained by juvenile court, the common axis of meanings are crime, drugs, and domestic violence (Mahiri,

1996, p. 178). Allowing students to be candid about their lived experiences and to reflect on how they arrived at juvenile delinquency avoids the one-directional narrative that often takes place within a classroom, where the teacher does all of the communication (Katz, 2014), but also links learning to cultural identity and background providing an opportunity for students to become active in the learning process (Mahiri, 1996). In the words of Reale (2012),

Critical pedagogy raises consciousness, is hopeful, is active, and allows for questioning and critiquing the subject at hand by extension the world at large, by developing a way of thinking and questioning that extends beyond the classroom and into other areas of their lives. (p. 85)

At this level of consciousness, humanity is restored. For those involved with the juvenile justice system, they transition from being objects of the system to human subjects (McLaren, 2014).

Freire (1970) theorized,

Apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and reinvention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other. (pp. 71-72)

Crystal Laura (2014) considered this to be a “practice of love,” not the romantic love or something we feel, but she borrows from bell hooks’ definition of “love” as

something we do, an exercise of will, a choice one takes to enhance, the action a person takes to enhance, protect, or alters another’s life on his or her terms. To teach from a place of love is to empower—to open your eyes and see the strengths and struggles of the three-dimensional beings in front of you, and to fearlessly put your ass on the line to help somebody meet a fuller measure of his or her own humanity. (p. 70)

Without such practices, students are silenced and, as stated earlier, silencing is a practice that camouflages, buries, and discredits ideologies, experiences, and contradictory evidence (Fine, 1992).

Critical pedagogy “encourages the learner to critique obstructions to the learner’s full participation in society and encourages critical collective actions, through the engagement of the

learner's experiential knowledge and social agency" (McKay, 2010, p. 26). For African American males labeled as juvenile delinquents, it provides a space to explore their realities and link themselves to their "socio-political context" (Katz, 2014, p. 2). It also helps examine how such a label might have created what Simson (2014) referred to as "a virtual identity, an accumulation of negative attributes imputed to that individual that takes precedence over the actual identity of the individual" (p. 535). Furthermore, critical pedagogy provides an opportunity for African American males detained by the juvenile court system to

Raise questions about inequalities of power, about the false myths of opportunity and merit for many students, and about the way belief systems become internalized to the point where individuals and groups abandon the very aspiration to question or change their lot in life. (Burbules & Berk, 1999, p. 50)

Through critical pedagogy, students are encouraged to exercise the freedom to explore who they are and to come to understand that the cultural, educational, and/or court institutions should not define them, but rather equip them with the skills and knowledge to comprehend that they can set the agenda for their lives (Lac, 2017). In the context of the classroom and based on the work of Habermas, this type of knowledge is considered emancipatory (McLaren, 2015). Emancipatory knowledge fosters the understanding of how social relationships are manipulated and distorted by power relations and privilege; creates conditions under which oppression can be overcome and be transformed through intentional collective action; and contributes to social justice, equality, and empowerment.

Freire (1970) concluded,

To exist, humanly, is to *name* the world, to change it. Once named, the world in its turn reappears to the namers as a problem and requires of them a new *naming*. Human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection. (p. 88)

A key component of critical pedagogy (Loc, 2017) is to engage students in dialogue; although this alone is not enough for societal transformation, it is the first step toward individual

transformation. Dialogue encourages (Shor, 1992) the learner's voice and "is the encounter between men, mediated by the world in order to name the world" (Freire, 1970, p. 69).

Voice is a key element in critical pedagogy because it restores (Freire, 1970) the lost voices and identities to marginalized groups and emphasizes that discourse is "situated historically and mediated culturally" (McLaren, 2015, p. 180). Whereas critical pedagogy gives stage to voice and constructs a platform for a liberatory praxis, a space where critical consciousness awakens, and the oppressed person moves from object to subject (Freire, 1970; hooks, 1989), what it fails to do is address the intersectionality of race and class. In response to this shortsightedness, Critical Race Theory (CRT) is adequate for addressing specific social, educational, political, and economic concerns of race also making it adequate for addressing the experiences of African American adolescent males involved with the juvenile justice system and how such experiences corroborate with the existing research on the school-to-prison pipeline a framework that represents practices and policies that cumulative result in students of color being disproportionately forced out of school into prison (Ladson-Billings, 1997; McKay, 2010).

CRT has emerged in education as a theoretical and methodological framework that seeks to disrupt race and racism in education (Decuir & Dixson, 2004; Howard, 2008) while also serving as a "framework to challenge and dismantle prevailing notions of fairness, meritocracy, color blindness, and neutrality in the education of minorities" (Howard, 2008, p. 963). Utilization of critical race theory and critical pedagogy as praxis will bring to focus to the voices of African American juvenile males deemed delinquent who have fallen victim to the institution of racism that operates with the Juvenile Justice System and provide an opportunity for them to name their realities and to speak for themselves. Tyrone Howard (2008) concluded that

One of the glaring absences of much of the research associated with African American males is that it has not included first-hand, detailed accounts from African American

males about the roles that they believe power, race, and racism play in their educational experiences. (p. 967)

CRT scholars argued that racial discrimination is not an occasional part of life for people of color, but rather an enduring part of everyday life made visible through story-telling, chronicles, testimonies, counter-story narratives, and, specific to this study, autobiographical poetry (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Soloranzo & Yosso, 2001). Restoration of lost voices and resistance to unjust reproduction fosters an opportunity for students to become active agents for social change (Freire, 1970). Such a platform affords an opportunity to question the master narrative, knowledge of the dominant culture, and “permission to revive silenced consciousness and embrace their own counter narrative” (p. 36). Hooks (1990) concluded that for those whose narratives have been silenced, a “yearning wells in their hearts and minds” as they long for a critical voice (para. 9).

Critical pedagogy provided an opportunity for African American adolescent males detained by the juvenile justice system to name their realities. Freire (1970) posited that marginalized students should be able to reflect on their life events and circumstances and ask why things are the way they are. This research utilized autobiography as a method for not only investigating how African American adolescent males are experiencing their involvement with the juvenile justice system, but also for assisting these young men, who have become aware of the oppression placed upon them through the dynamics and consequences of the school-to-prison pipeline, to participate in constructing a different identity asking how they might act and think differently.

Autobiography: A Form of Narrative

Autobiography is a form of narrative inquiry that focuses on making meaning of individual experiences. Narrative (Hendry, 2010) is derived from the term *gnō*, which means to

know. On a quest to address questions of meaning and knowing, the earliest oral storytelling traditions of man were narrative inquiries. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described narrative inquiry as not only a way of understanding experiences, but also, a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus” (p. 20). Although narrative inquiry is frequently used in education, it has a long history in other fields of study. Chase (2005) characterized narrative inquiry as “an amalgam of interdisciplinary analytic lenses, diverse disciplinary approaches, and both traditional and innovative methods—all revolving around an interest in biographical particulars as narrated by the one who lives them” (p. 651). Narrative is flexible and diverse and can be represented through both written and spoken discourse (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Narrative writing can be a means for African American adolescent males to connect with and discover themselves, make sense of, and develop an understanding of, their personal experiences and the world in which they live (Furman et al., 2008; Mahiri, 1996), especially their experiences with juvenile delinquency. Narratives serve as a lens for individuals to recognize the meaning of experiences and how they function as parts and in whole (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Experiences are the stories people live and narratives provide a way to include stories that have “traditionally been excluded from educational research” (Hendry, 2007, p. 490).

The origins of autobiography dates back prior to the 1800s, but in the past 30 years its value has been substantiated through bodies of work that connect lived experiences with learning. Autobiography allows people to deconstruct what they know and how their paradigms of knowledge have been developed and framed (Walker, 2017). Autobiographical writing has the capacity to embrace the “individuality of being,” as well as the “social construction of meaning” (Grumet, 1990b, p. 322). In combination with a critical lens, autobiography provides an

opportunity for the voice(s) of marginalized and silenced groups to be heard (Walker, 2017), and offers students a space to make themselves heard—and to embrace their individuality by writing about who they are, where they are, and how they arrived at detention. Richardson referred to writing as inquiry, “a way of finding out about yourself” (2000, p. 923). Taylor and Settelmaier (2003) likened the process of writing to

“peeling an onion” where we pull away layer after layer. There is a “top layer” of self knowledge, a layer we have constructed but might never have really questioned. And there are many more layers underneath that we may have completely forgotten about. (p. 240)

Autobiography is not just the re-telling of personal experiences. Through the use of individual experiences, theory, and a process of reflection and re-thinking with attention to politically situated perspectives, autobiography, as argued by Griffiths (1994), can be considered a valid, rigorous, and reliable form of knowledge for both the teller and listeners. This type of autobiography critiques and analyzes how experiences have shaped identity and according to McKnight (2017), autobiography “does not deny the wretched and powerful discourses” of the past, but instead challenges them in a way that “unveils and constitutes” identity (p. 334).

Autobiographical accounts not only make it possible for students to embrace their identity (the sense of who they are and their belonging), but it also provides a space for them to question, oppose, and write about the involuntary status, collective identity, and stigma imputed through enslavement. African Americans are marked as a “distinct segment from the rest of the population” resulting in discrimination, social subordination, and expressive mistreatment (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ogbu, 2004, p. 4). Self-reflective autobiographical writing includes three levels of writing: experience, telling, and interpreting (Polkinghorne, 1988). These levels provide an opportunity for students to illustrate and articulate how they understand themselves, their sense of identity, how they perceive who they are, and how that corresponds with how

society has defined them. By analyzing past events and actions, students can begin to examine prior outcomes as well as plan for future outcomes (Polkinghorne, 2010). In other words, autobiography helps African American adolescent males begin to participate in the construction of an identity that expresses how they are experiencing oppression and consider how they might think and act differently.

The use of identity in this study correlates to the way Pinar (2004) utilized it in his work on curriculum and autobiography. Identity is not some unified, univocal self of an autonomous agent. It is also not the Cartesian philosophical, “I think, therefore, I am,” self which situates the Anglo European educated, heterosexual male as the universal norm, the standard by which all others can be measured and judged. Pinar’s focus of identity suggested that the individual is comprised of subject positions, determined by society, and the existential impulse to make meaning of as well as to seek and go beyond the material constraints created by such positions in a way that opens up potential identity choices and cultivates a greater sense of individual awareness of voice and how voice affects the world.

Pinar’s (2004) position on the complexity and “ever-evolving relations between individual and world” supports a holistic perspective (p. 83). In addition, Pinar postulated that an autobiographical method (*currere*) can provide a framework for reflecting on educational experiences for both the teacher and student, and such reflections become an impetus for identity formation through transformation. The interrelation (Kehily, 1995) of the past and present, the act of re-creating the past makes it possible for discovery and invention of the self. Hooks (1989) defines self-reflective thinking and writing as an “act of reclamation, enabling me to recover myself, to be whole” (p. 30). Hooks referred to her book, *Aint I a Woman*, as a book of self-

recovery; “the expression of my awakening to critical consciousness” (p. 30). Walker also (2013) testified to the power of critical autobiography to transform:

My new, developing racial identity, similar to prior years, continued to be molded by the teachings and influences of the same racist ideologies and hegemonies of whiteness that had always been present throughout my life. However, the difference between then and now was that my new identity was aware of whiteness and the privileges that came with a status of a white racial status... I was breaking free from the chains of oppression and becoming able to converge the what of race with the processes of how and why with the conscious formation of my racial identity (as cited in Walker, 2017, p. 1900).

According to Polkinghorne (2010), autobiographical accounts are empowering in that they provide an opportunity for individuals to analyze past experiences as a means to examine prior outcomes as well as planning for the possible future outcomes.

Autobiographical Writing With Youth in Juvenile Delinquency Status

Autobiographical writing with youth in juvenile delinquency status is not a new idea, but the existing autobiographical writing programs are primarily therapeutic and cathartic in nature. Several programs dedicated to providing a writing space for troubled adolescents are the Pongo Publishing Teen Writing Project, The Words Unlocked program, The Writing and Reflecting on Identity To Empower Ourselves as Narrators program, The “Poetry Behind the Walls Series,” and The Writing Our Stories program.

The PONGO Publishing Teen Writing Project is a volunteer, non-profit organization that utilizes autobiographical poetry writing as a therapeutic activity to help adolescents who have suffered childhood traumas (Group, n.d.). The project facilitates trauma-informed writing programs in various types of facilities to include juvenile detention centers, homeless shelters, and psychiatric hospitals. The focus of this program is to provide youth the opportunity to write about their traumatic experiences in a way that feels safe, promotes openness, offers relief, brings joy, and facilitates healing. The Words Unlocked program sponsored by the Center for

Educational Excellence in Alternative Settings (CEEAS) is based on the belief that it is critical to allow students in secure settings the opportunity to “explore literature and unlock their creative talents in writing” (CEEAS, n.d.).

The Writing and Reflecting on Identity to Empower Ourselves as Narrators, WRITE ON, is a writing-based intervention program established in 2014 due to concerns for the mental health of incarcerated youth (Greenbaum, 2015). The goal of this program is to reduce negative mental health outcomes such as anxiety and depression and increase positive health outcomes such as self-efficacy, resilience, and coping skills. Another program, the “Poetry Behind Walls” Series (PBW), provides a publishing opportunity. PBW is a volunteer-led program with the mission of giving voice to incarcerated youth. Through a simple submission protocol, PBW publishes poetry written by incarcerated youth throughout the world and is “one of the only ongoing series in the world that is dedicated to writings by youth who are incarcerated” (2015).

The Writing Our Stories program is an anti-violence creative writing program sponsored in collaboration with the Alabama Writers’ Forum, a partnership program of the Alabama State Council on the Arts, and the Alabama Department of Youth Services (Smitherman & Thompson, 2002). The focus of this program is to provide youth detained in the juvenile justice system with a “positive non-violent means of expression,” and an opportunity to have their work published (p. 83). A search of the literature reveals that “Writing Our Stories” is the only manualized writing intervention program for incarcerated youth (Greenbaum & Javdani, 2017). Whereas this program provides a space for expression and publishing opportunities, this research differs in that the focus is not just the opportunity of expression through the written piece, but how the written expressions connect to and facilitate a broader understanding of juvenile delinquency.

These aforementioned programs focus on autobiographical writing but differ from the autobiography at the center of this research which will not only allow students to retell their stories, but will provide a space for them to evaluate their experiences. A unique component of my research project was the opportunity for former students to analyze how their experiences have shaped their identity, schooling, and status with the juvenile court system. The narratives they produced resulted in transferable knowledge of the self, which is essential for a productive life, and a source of reliable research knowledge. Sylvia Lazos Vargis (2000) noted that autobiographical narratives serve as a mode of communication and in her words,

Authentic narratives can help gain the necessary insights to better understand arguments that on first reaction seem extreme or beyond reason. When we come to understand another's experiences, we can sometimes catch a glimmer of why that person is so steadfast in a point of view that we initially find foreign and nonsensical. (p. 428)

Additionally, Lazos Vargis (2000) postulated that autobiographical narratives “provide a qualitative dimension to our knowledge of race” in that it makes possible for documentation on a “personal and anecdotal scale the various types of discrimination experienced by racial minorities” that “cannot be captured by scientific data alone” (pp.427-428).

Conclusion

There is a paucity of studies that examine reflective writing with at-risk adolescents, and to date there is only one study that examined reflective writing with students involved with the juvenile justice system (Greenbaum & Javdani, 2017), and that study is evaluated through a therapeutic lens. The purpose of this study was to contribute to existing research by showing that autobiographical narratives can be used to gain reliable knowledge when they make use of individual experiences through theory, reflection, and attention to political perspectives (Griffiths, 1994).

The intent of this study was to empower the autobiographical writings of youth in juvenile delinquency status by increasing epistemological value to individual experiences through the process of reflection (re-thinking) and theory for the purpose of gaining knowledge for both participants and audience. Engagement with autobiography through poetry provided an opportunity for the participants' voices to not only be heard by others, but also for them to become aware of how their voices are constructed. Through the process of writing they can begin to unpack their voice in terms of how and why they think of themselves as they do and how self knowing (gaining of knowledge) can help them take control over their voice and choices.

Poetry as method can speak to (represent) the multiple realities of the experiences of juvenile delinquency among African American adolescent males. Laurel Richardson (2017), in her poem "Deplorables," demonstrated how poetry can speak to multiple realities. "Deplorables" not only acknowledged the biases toward working class women during the 2016 presidential election but also the powerless positions, the realities, of all women who have been treated deplorably. Richardson asserted that her use of poetry made it possible for all women to be impacted and unified in a way that "writing in that hectoring genre, prose cannot" (p. 3). And in saying that, she posed a question: "So, isn't this why poetry" (p. 3). The use of poetry acknowledges individuals as producers of knowledge and also contributes to new ways of knowing through a format that illuminates and honors the subjective experiences of individuals (Furman, 2007; Furman et al., 2006). Poetry as method is well suited for allowing the participants to engage in the discourse about juvenile delinquency as subjects instead of being objects of the discourse about juvenile delinquency.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

With an “emphasis on the uniqueness of each life,” this dissertation was focused on providing an opportunity for African American adolescent males with past involvement in the juvenile justice system to give expression to how their experiences shaped their lives and self-identity, and how such experiences fit into the school-to-prison pipeline narrative (Denzin, 2010, p. 250). This is a narrative qualitative study that uses poetry as method through employing autobiographical poems written by young Black men to capture their experiences during their time spent in a juvenile detention facility. The research questions for this study ask: How do the autobiographical poems of African American males narrate the experiences of juvenile delinquency? And how do these experiences engage with the broader educational narratives of the school-to-prison pipeline?

A significant body of research has explored the connection between school discipline, the school-to-prison pipeline, and the racial disparities that exist among African American males (Alexander, 2012; Arya & Augarten, 2008; Heitzeg, 2009; National Council on Crime and Delinquency, 2007; Rovner, 2016a). In an effort to contribute to the literature, this project moved beyond examining how juvenile delinquency disenfranchises and silences the voices of Black adolescent males and instead allows Black adolescent males to speak for themselves.

Through critical pedagogy as praxis and autobiographical poetry, the purpose of this dissertation was to provide a space for adolescent African American males to speak about how they experienced juvenile delinquency, Their point of view was essential to grasping and

interpreting the “perspectives and experiences of those persons who are served by social justice programs if solid, effective, applied programs are to be created” and how such experiences corroborate with the school-to-prison discourse (Denzin, 2010, p. 25). Autobiographical poetry provided a space for them to express their experiences and how their experiences shaped their lives. An engagement with the voices of detention is pertinent to making sense of how the juvenile justice system is contributing to the school-to-prison pipeline. This chapter includes a discussion of the research design, including methodology, method, participant selection, research procedures, data collection, data review, and positionality statement.

Methodology

This study employed narrative inquiry, which focuses on the way individuals experience the world and make sense of their realities, as methodology (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Narratives date back as far as the earliest oral storytelling traditions of man as an instrument suitable for addressing questions of meaning and knowing (Hendry, 2010). Hendry (2007) postulated that “stories are what make us human” and are the “tales through which we constitute identities” (p. 495). Narratives create a space to include stories that have traditionally been excluded from educational research. This narrative space gives “voice to the voiceless” (Lewis, 2011, p. 506) and by doing so, provides a less exploitative research method for “giving voice” to those traditionally marginalized (Hendry, 2007, p. 489). This premise was at the heart of this study.

Although narrative inquiry is frequently used in education, it also has a long history in other fields. Chase (2005) characterized narrative inquiry as “an amalgam of interdisciplinary analytic lenses, diverse disciplinary approaches, and both traditional and innovative methods—all revolving around an interest in biographical particulars as narrated by the one who lives

them” (p. 651). Narrative is flexible and diverse and can be represented through both written and spoken discourse (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Specific to this study, autobiography, a form of narrative, was used. Taylor and Settlemaier (2003) postulated that autobiographical writing produces narratives about individual lives; they posed the question: “why is this worth the effort?” In response they borrowed from Barone and responded in this manner:

Narratives are designed to do what art does so well: to lay bare questions that have been hidden by the answers. Through autobiographical inquiry, we might start to question that which seems unquestionable to us, a given fact, something that has always been there. We might begin to confront what the phenomenologists call our “natural attitude,” that is, our everyday way of thinking and valuing whose naturalness makes this process invisible to us; in much the way that the fish is unaware of the water in which it exists. (p. 235)

Narrative inquiry provides a means for African American adolescent males to narrate their experiences with juvenile detention and question the circumstance(s) that contributed to their involvement with the juvenile court system. Through their stories, they can consider whether their imprisonment can be attributed to an environment impregnated with racism that funnels the school-to-prison pipeline, and not just poor personal choice(s) often attributed to natural adolescence mischief (Furman et al., 2008; Mahiri, 1996).

Poetic Justice: Research Design and Method

According to Lincoln (1993), in order to adequately investigate the lives of those who are silenced, alternative epistemologies and methods need to be developed. In her words, “traditional epistemologies and methods grounded in white and androcentric concerns, and rooted in values which are understood to be inimical to the interest of the silenced, will fail to capture the voices needed” (p. 32). One of the epistemic inadequacies of traditional research methods is the difficulty (Fielding, 2004) of speaking on behalf of others unlike ourselves; a position that not only lacks understanding, but also lacks the capacity to understand (the interest and struggle of

research participants). Alcoff (1991/92) cautioned about locations of power that often place researchers in discursively dangerous positions where “speaking for or on behalf of less privileged persons has actually resulted in increasing or reinforcing the oppression of the group spoken for” (p. 7). Alcoff’s position is in alignment with Hendry’s belief that less exploitative research methods are necessary. Hendry (2007) questioned the power given to narrative research to explain the lives of others and suggested that what is needed is trust in the stories as told by the storyteller. Supporting Hendry’s idea, Lewis (2011) suggested that narrative research needs to create a place “for the storyteller to share her story without the interpretation of the narrative researcher” (p. 506). This premise aligns with the focus of this study to allow the participants to speak for themselves.

While quantitative methods are sometimes necessary for understanding the scope of social problems, qualitative methods make it possible to understand the contextual realities of life experiences. Traditionally, methods such as interviews and ethnography are familiar methods in qualitative research; however, Furman et al. (2006) argued that what is most needed are methods that not only communicate contextual and affective thick description, but are also condensed enough to be easily consumed and understood by those familiar and unfamiliar with traditional prose research (Faulkner, 2016; Szto, Furman, & Langer, 2005). Poetry, a form of narrative, awakens and taps into our imagination and as a non-traditional method of research, helps to “disrupt the hegemony inherent in traditional texts and evoke emotional responses that bring the reader/viewer closer to the work, permitting otherwise silenced voices to be heard” (Butler-Kisber, 2002, p. 230).

Furman (2006) asserted that just as a qualitative interview is viewed as suitable for an exploration of a research subject’s lived experiences, so should a poem. Eisner (2008), one of the

first to embrace the importance of the arts in qualitative research with a central purpose of enhancing the understanding of human conditions, warned that it would be a major weakness to dismiss poetic “languages as meaningless utterances” (p. 9). To illuminate the significance of artistic approaches in research, Eisner (1981) utilized the analogy of a rose: to name a rose, yet miss its fragrance, is to forfeit the full meaning of a rose. Similarly, researchers miss the essence of a full experience when artistic approaches are overlooked.

Utilizing poetry to explore the experiences of juvenile delinquency opens up the experiences of African American adolescent males, allowing the realities to be named and the essence of their experiences to be diffused. Barone and Eisner (1997) believed that poetry is a way of expressing what words cannot say. While poems consist of words, poetry is more than words; it is the way the words of everyday life are put together utilizing literary devices to create a resonance greater than the totality of its parts (Janesick, 2016). Rhyme, rhythm, assonance, tone, and alliteration can “evoke embodied responses in listeners and readers by creating speech in ways that traditional research prose cannot” (Richardson, 1997, p. 143). The language used in poetry facilitates self-knowledge by demonstrating and disclosing human mysteries. For example, Janesick (2016) concluded that, “poetry is a way to find out what a person means to say as well as what a person means when he or she speaks the words” (p. 60). Poetry has the capability to directly connect the reader to the living experiences of African American male adolescents involved with the juvenile court system.

Poetry has become a valuable research tool (Butler-Kisber, 2002; Faulkner, 2009; Foster; 2012; Furman et al., 2006). In addition to being a method capable of illuminating human experiences and mediating understanding, it can also foster new ways of knowing necessary to providing suitable services and essential to understanding the lived experiences of the

participants. Poetry as inquiry (Prendergast, 2009) can be found in many areas of the social sciences: sociology, anthropology, psychology, nursing, social work, geography, women's/feminist studies, and education with research methods of autobiography, autoethnography and narrative inquiry. Prendergast's (2009) perspective was that, "the potential power of poetic inquiry is to do as poetry does, to synthesize experience in a direct and affective way" (2009, p. 545). This is consistent with Denzin (1997) who advocated for alternative research methods that have the capacity to connect the affective and cognitive worlds of research participants, investigators, and consumers.

Poetry, also known as expressive and creative art research has been viewed as a valuable method for communicating complex social phenomena limited by statistical representation (Szto et al., 2005). Oiler (1983) explained that

Poetry allows us to hold our typical interpretations of experiences temporarily in abeyance. By slowing down the interpretative process, the use of poetry gives the mind time to creatively reflect upon alternative meanings and interpretations, potentially liberating the mind from stereotypical ways of seeing the world. (p. 83)

Richardson referred to poetry as a form of "evocative presentation," a moral and emotional representation of lived experiences (2000, p. 931) that present a "candid photo or an episode or an epiphany" in addition to being a practical and powerful tool for analyzing social worlds (2000, p. 931).

Poetry as method is not new to qualitative research and transforming data into poetry has become most popular and an established tradition (Furman et al., 2006; Spiers & Smith, 2012). Social researchers Richardson (1994) and Poindexter (2002) utilized poetry as a form of re-presenting traditional qualitative data (interviews, ethnographic, field notes) using the words of their participants. Furman (2004, 2007) employed data from narrative reflections to craft autobiographical poetry as a documentation of his lived experiences. Langer and Furman (2004)

utilized interpretive poems to explore Native American women coming to terms with bi-racial identity and issues related to assimilation, while Bishop and Willis (2014) used poems to explore the meaning of hope for young people between the ages of 11 and 16. The utilization of poetry in qualitative research has referred to poetry as data representation, poetry as data, and the research poem; most popular is the research poem/research poetry (Faulkner, 2016; Furman et al., 2006; Spiers & Smith, 2012).

Research poetry (Faulkner, 2016) refers to poems crafted for research projects, either before a project analysis, as a project analysis, and/or poems that are part of, or incorporate an entire research project; it emphasizes the goals of poetic inquiry as both a method and research product. The term designates the use of poetry less for literary expressive means, and more for the purposes of presenting data (Furman et al., 2006). Though research poems borrow methods from literary poems, the primary focus is to present data faithful to the essence of the text or experience being studied. Unlike literary poems that incorporate fantasy, the research poem is based on reality.

Poetry as a document of social phenomena can be a vehicle by which to communicate multiple and compelling truths about the human experience that are valuable to understanding the experiences of adolescence because it has the “capacity to express both affect and context, or affect in context” (Furman, Langer, Davis, Gallardo, & Kulkani, 2007, p. 303). Prendergast (2009) concluded that poetic inquiry is distinguished by the voice it engages and belongs to one of three categories:

1. Researcher voiced poems: Written from field notes, journal entries, and reflective/autobiographical/autoethnographical writing as data source.
2. Participant voiced poems: Written by the participant or from interview transcripts.
3. Literature voiced poems: Written from or in response to literature.

Regardless of what it is called, it is important to note that poetry is a method that can be employed as a representation of data, a source of data, and as a source for data analysis.

This study utilized participants' voiced poems as the source of data. Whereas poetry as method has become an acceptable form of inquiry, some scholars question whether poetry and research belong in the same arena. In response, it is important to mention the following similarities of purpose between traditional qualitative inquiry and poetic inquiry (Shapiro, 2004):

- Pursuit of Meaning—Inquiry into meaning-making.
- Multiple Realities—Interested in the “relationships and circumstances in which the explanation of action is not straightforwardly causal, linear, or unidirectional but rather is due to multiple interacting factors, events, and processes.” In addition to making possible for a deep understanding of “subjective experience” that may be difficult to access in other ways and is “capable of presenting diverse, often contradictory, narratives and images simultaneously” (p. 173).
- Particularity—Preserving the details of human experiences.
- Point of View—The frame of reference and subjective view makes possible for a deep understanding of “subjective experience” that may be difficult to access in other ways and is “capable of presenting diverse, often contradictory, narratives and images simultaneously” (p. 173).

Drawing from this framework, the intent of this research was not only to provide a more intimate perspective of the experiences of African American adolescent males encapsulated by the juvenile court system but also to reach multiple audiences through the collaboration of alternative and conventional methods for the purpose of advancing knowledge. Shapiro (2004) argued that the relationship between traditional qualitative research and poetry not only encompasses different ways of knowing but when merged, this type of collaboration fosters wisdom. In his words, not only is “divergence and separation discovered, but also serendipitous convergences and felicitous affirmations that perhaps begin to approach wisdom” (p. 176).

Research on the school-to-prison pipeline is copious; however, most studies are primarily the voices of others from an outside perspective. In contrast, participant-voiced poetry (autobiographical poetry) can foster a human connection and “embrace the individuality of being” (Grumet, 1990b, p. 322). The essentiality of qualitative research is understanding that “the perspectives and experiences of those persons who are served by social justice programs must be grasped, interpreted, and understood, if solid, effective, applied programs are to be created” (Denzin, 2010, p. 25). In other words, a relational engagement with the voices of detention is pertinent to making sense of why the juvenile justice system is contributing to the school-to-prison pipeline.

Primarily data about juvenile delinquency and the school-to-prison pipeline has been derived from traditional forms of quantitative and qualitative studies; all of which have been valuable in identifying the connection between school discipline, the school-to-prison pipeline, and the overrepresentation of African American males. What is missing from the literature is research that gives a space for the voice(s) of African American adolescent males to expose the limitations of statistics about juvenile delinquency and provide a deeper revelation of the school-to-prison pipeline. In the words of Noguera (2008), “Students may very well have ideas and insights that adults are not privy to and could prove to be very helpful to improving schools if adults were willing to listen” (p. 69). This study will provide an opportunity for the perspectives and experiences of African American adolescent males involved with the juvenile justice system to have their voice(s) included in the school-to-prison pipeline discourse, and create a space where we see the world of juvenile delinquency as experienced by Black adolescent males the way it is rather than the way we want or think it should be (Duncan, 2002). The individual

experiences of juvenile delinquency can add reliable knowledge to the body of research on the school-to-prison pipeline.

For me, as a qualitative researcher, it was important not to speak for those who have experienced juvenile delinquency, but instead to provide a space for them to speak from their own location, which was epistemically significant to this project (Alcoff, 1991/92). This is a growing objective of social research and important for marginal groups who have been denied “the power and/or privilege to express their experiences” (Furman & Shukraft, 2007, p. 82). According to Denzin (1995), the quest to present the “authentic voice of the other” is a defining feature of qualitative research, a desirable goal (p. 313). Autobiographical poetry provides an opportunity for African American males to unmask the constraints of statistics about juvenile delinquency. Stzo et al.’s (2005) position was that poems “allow for holistic understanding that transcends a logic that numbers cannot understand” (p. 144) in addition to bringing their voices to the forefront, and pushing against positivist ways of knowing (Langer & Furman, 2004; Zamboo & Zamboo, 2013).

Poetry as method can speak to (represent) the multiple realities (Richardson, 2017) of the experiences of juvenile delinquency among African American adolescent males. The praxis of critical pedagogy was employed to articulate experiences in ways unique to the participants based on the understanding and meaning they express concerning the inequalities of the juvenile justice system, and how their involvement with the system and being labeled juvenile delinquent have fostered internalized belief systems (Burbules & Berk, 1999; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Hadfield & Haw, 2001).

Critical pedagogy encourages students to exercise the freedom to explore who they are and to come to understand that cultural, educational, and/or court institutions should not define

them (Lac, 2017). Voice, a key element in critical pedagogy, is encouraged through such questioning and is key to restoring the lost voices and identities of marginalized groups (Freire, 1970). Critical pedagogy provides an opportunity for African American adolescent males detained by the juvenile justice system to name their realities (Lac, 2017). Specific to this study, through the guidance of prompt questions detailed in the data collection section, critical pedagogy served as a platform for the construction of autobiographical poetry. Freire's (1970) belief was that marginalized students should be able to reflect on their life events and circumstances and ask why things are the way they are. As a researcher who is also a former teacher to my research participants, I understand my position of authority and am cautious about not re-telling their stories from my perspective, but allowing them to speak for themselves through utilizing their original autobiographical poetry as data. This decision aligns with Hendry (2007), who supported the need to trust in the stories as told by the storyteller. This will also allow the readers to have close access (Furman, 2007) to the experiences of the research participants, and in Denzin's words, "make the strange familiar and bring the reader directly into a field of experience that moves outward from the writer's feelings" (1997, p. 211).

Participants

After approval from the Institutional Review Board (see Appendix A), I contacted six African American males between the ages of 18 and 22 with past involvement in the juvenile justice system in central Alabama by phone. I selected this age range because post-juvenile delinquency status allowed for a longitudinal view of their experiences with the juvenile court system. Interviewing past students also supported the choice of narrative inquiry as method as it focuses on not only understanding experiences, but also understanding experiences "over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000,

p. 20). Participation in this study was voluntary. I recruited African American male students who kept in contact with me over the past 9 years. During the phone contact, I provided them with a brief overview of the study, and obtained a mailing address so I could mail them an informed consent form (see Appendix B). Participants were given an opportunity to ask questions prior to consent.

I had hoped to include at least five participants, but I was only able to recruit three due to lack of interest and work schedules. Once consent was given, I contacted each participant via text message for best available times to set up workshop dates. Due to the participants' work schedules, scheduling the workshops at a time when all three participants could attend was my greatest challenge throughout the data collecting and analysis process. The details of the workshops are below under the “Data Collection” and “Listening to the Data” sections.

Risks for the Participants

The participants were informed about the potential risk of experiencing some emotional distress due to a memory or storied experience. The shared experiences and workshop discussions were voluntary, and participants were only asked to share information according to their level of comfort. In an effort to minimize any risks, I provided referral information to a mental health service that was free and available 24 hours a day. Participants were encouraged throughout the study to take advantage of this service. An additional risk was the breach of confidentiality by other participants. Throughout the study, the participants were reminded of the importance of confidentiality; however, the confidentiality of the participants could not be guaranteed. Whereas these risks were present, the information learned from this study increased self-understanding for the participants.

Risks for the Study

The methodological framework utilized in this study was based upon the critical pedagogical platform found to be successful in a classroom located within a detention facility. There were no certainties the success would transfer to this study.

Procedures

Instead of utilizing the traditional interview for inquiry, the procedure of this study was unique in that five workshops were conducted. The workshop format was chosen because workshops provide a critical pedagogical platform because they are informative, participatory, and conducive to creating an intensive educational experience in a short time frame. Workshops strongly support the tenets of critical pedagogy by creating a space for the participants to explore who they are and to name their realities and their experiences with juvenile delinquency from their position of understanding (Lac, 2017). Finley (2008) argued that the direct involvement of research participants will “bring both arts and social inquiry out of the elitist institutions of academic and art museums, and relocate inquiry within the realm of local, personal, everyday places and events” (p. 72). Except for basic editing, the poetry of the participants has been preserved in its original form.

For this study, five workshops were conducted. Workshops 1-3 were designated for collecting data. During these workshops, the participants engaged in open discussion about their experiences, wrote autobiographical poetry, read, and discussed (re-thinking and analyzing) written pieces. Workshops 4-5 were designated for analyzing their data. These workshops were collaborative analysis workshops; both participants and researcher analyzed the data with a primary focus of employing thematic analysis coding, examining responses and text for similarities and differences, and generating themes (Bishop & Willis, 2014). A collaborative

analysis provided the participants with a sense of ownership and supported a less exploitative research method for those traditionally marginalized (Hendry, 2007; Saldaña, 2013).

The duration of the workshops ranged from 90 to 120 minutes. All workshops took place between June 22 and August 3, 2019. The location of the workshops was a conference room in a public library and a county building in central Alabama. The conference rooms were furnished with a large executive-style table with leather chairs. The setting format was ideal for discussion and writing. These sites were chosen due to availability, neutrality, room size, and privacy. During the workshops, participants were provided with all necessary materials (pencils, pens, highlighters, and paper) and copies of their work.

Data Collection (Workshops 1-3)

Workshop 1

The main focus of this workshop was for reflective purposes. This was an audio recorded question and discussion session about how the participants experienced the juvenile justice system. The following questions about juvenile delinquency were asked to prompt discussion.

- How old were you when you first became involved with juvenile court services?
- Was that involvement connected to an infraction at home, school, or in your community?
- What role do you believe gender played in your initial arrest and subsequent arrests?
- What role do you believe race played in your initial arrest and subsequent arrests?
- How has your involvement with juvenile court affected how you view yourself? If so how?
- How has your involvement with juvenile court affected how others view you?
- How has your involvement with juvenile court affected your schooling and overall success?

Each participant was provided with a copy of the discussion questions and were instructed to take notes, as needed. After the discussion, participants were asked to write a written reflection about their responses. After this workshop, I transcribed the discussion and made copies for each participant.

Workshop 2

Reflecting on the free writing (the reflections) and the discussion transcript from Workshop 1, the participants composed a free verse autobiographical poem. Participants were given the opportunity to read and discuss written pieces with the group. The focus of this step was for the participants to move beyond the obvious and familiar aspects of identity such as gender, ethnicity, and age. This step asked the participants to focus on factors they believed had shaped their identities, such as the inter-relational experiences with schooling, family, community, and the juvenile court system. Leggo (2008) believed that examining lived experiences by attending to issues of identity, relationships, and community is a way of knowing that seeks truth about human experience.

Workshop 3

Sitting around a table, each participant reviewed and edited their autobiographical poem. The final draft was read and discussed as a group. As a form of member checking, I met with each participant individually, read their poem to them and asked if there was anything they wanted to add or delete. The final draft has been included as data for this study.

Listening to the Data (Workshops 4 and 5)

With the intent of investigating how the data from this study corroborated with prior research on the school-to-prison pipeline and for preserving the actual voices of the participants, this study engaged in a collaborative analysis with the participants, utilizing thematic analysis. It

is important to note here that preserving the actual voices of the participants placed faith in the storyteller's voice which may not support traditional methods, but according to Hendry (2007), “to have faith in their stories might mean not analyzing, not verifying, not seeking trustworthiness, but plugging into the experience of listening” (p. 495).

The data in the analysis included the transcript from Workshop 1 and the autobiographical poems constructed in Workshop 2 and finalized in Workshop 3. The participants received a copy of the transcript and a copy of their autobiographical poem. To help the participants understand analysis, a handout (see Appendix C) which defined and discussed in detail the process (generating codes, categories, and themes) was provided.

Workshop 4

This workshop focused on analyzing the transcript. The following steps were utilized in the process (Green et al., 2007; Saldaña, 2013):

Step 1. Immersion: Read through the data for familiarization.

Step 2. Code: Re-read the data and identify descriptive labels using words or phrases.

Write down the codes in the right margin of the data. The transcript was coded in sections based on each question discussed in Workshop 1, not line by line. The discussion questions were highlighted to help the participants identify each section.

Step 3. Categorize: Link together any possible codes into categories.

Step 4. Identifying Themes: This step identified major elements of the data and moved beyond description to interpreting and asking why the categories are significant.

Workshop 5

This workshop focused on analyzing the autobiographical poetry. The steps applied in Workshop 4 were applied in this workshop with the exception of Step 2, the coding section. The autobiographical poems were coded line by line by the participants and me.

After the coding process, I juxtaposed the findings with prior research to identify common themes, differences, and how the experiences of African American males with past involvement with the juvenile court system engaged with the broader educational narratives of the school-to-prison pipeline.

Positionality Statement

Being employed at a detention facility is not my first encounter with incarcerated individuals. For more than 20 years, I have volunteered on almost a weekly basis with inmates at a county jail. Prior to my teaching position at the juvenile detention center, I volunteered at the facility for 15 years and still do on weekends.

I believe my many years of experience and compassion for detained youth served me well during the research process; however, I had to be mindful of how my position as a female, teacher, pastor, and non-detainee could become problematic if I did not establish rapport and explain the research properly prior to the workshops. To prevent my positions from hindering the researcher relationship, I communicated to the students that I wanted to hear their truth, and that, as a pastor and/or teacher, I would not stand in judgment of their responses. I did not want the participants, my former students, responding in a way they perceived I wanted to hear based on my Christian beliefs and values. Throughout the research process, I continually emphasized the importance of hearing their points of view about the experiences of juvenile delinquency.

My familiarity with the juvenile court system in general and my lack of fear and judgmental attitude toward the students helped during the process of this study. They seemed to be at ease and willing to be honest and candid about their experiences. During the workshops, they shared details about their lives that were contrary to legal constraints, but they trusted me with the information. They even enlightened me about some disciplinary incidents that took place within the classroom while they were detained. They would say, “Mrs. Whiting, remember when . . .? This is what really happened.” One area of concern for the study was my affection for my students. Whereas my affection fostered unity, I did not want it to cloud my vision. I want so much for my former students; I hope for a better future for them regardless of their past experiences with the juvenile court system. A continuous employment of subjectivity and reflexivity was necessary to prevent research sabotage.

Other areas of concern included how to go about selecting students for the project and participant access. As a researcher, I did not want to show bias due to past relationships. If teachers are honest, they will admit to the different degrees of bonding with students, so I was careful not to just select participants I felt a closer bond with, or who I thought would produce good poetry based on former classroom assignments. I had to be honest with myself in order not to jeopardize the integrity of the research.

Conclusion

This chapter included a discussion of the research design, including methodology, and method, participant selection, research procedures, data collection, data review, and positionality statement. The upcoming chapter will include the data produced from the workshops.

CHAPTER IV

THEIR VOICES

The Data

This is a narrative qualitative study that utilized poetry as both method and data to capture the experiences of young Black men who have spent time in a juvenile detention facility. Their voices were essential in order to grasp, interpret, and understand the “perspectives and experiences of those persons who are served by social justice programs if solid, effective, applied programs are to be created” (Denzin, 2010, p. 25). Poetic inquiry is distinguished by the voice it engages; specific to this research, participant voiced poems written by the participant or/and from the discussion workshop transcript. Employing poetry as method represents the multiple realities of juvenile delinquency through a format that illuminates and honors the experiences of African American adolescent males in addition to acknowledging them as producers of knowledge and contributors to new ways of knowing.

This chapter will include the participant’s narratives and autobiographical poetry captured through critical pedagogical workshops and the themes generated from a collaborative analysis between the researcher and the participants. The themes are supported with dialogue from the discussion workshop and poetry.

The Research Questions

1. How do the autobiographical poems of African American males narrate the experiences of juvenile delinquency

2. How do these experiences engage with the broader educational narratives of the school-to-prison pipeline?

This study utilized critical pedagogy as praxis to create a space for African American males to become critically conscious and communicate how they experienced juvenile delinquency. For the purpose of creating a critical pedagogical setting, a workshop format was used. Five workshops were conducted. Workshops 1-3 were designated for collecting data. During these workshops, the participants engaged in open discussion about their experiences, autobiographical poetry writing, reading, and discussion (re-thinking and analyzing) of their written pieces. Workshops 4-5 were designated for analyzing the data and collaborative analysis purposes.

The executive-style setting in the conference rooms was not only ideal for discussion and writing, but the atmosphere made the participants feel valued. They commented about how sitting at the huge tables with leather chairs made them feel important. This environment was conducive to creating a space for the participants to exercise the freedom to explore and question who they were outside of the criminal justice system and discuss their experiences with juvenile delinquency without fear of social or legal judgment. This study restored the voice previously silenced by the court system.

The Participants

Greg, John, and Tyler are charismatic, intelligent, and well-mannered young men. During their stints at the detention center, they were liked and respected by all of the staff. For this reason, I have chosen not to provide detailed information about their characteristics to minimize the risk of their identity being exposed. Below, I share some details.

Participant 1: Greg

Greg is 18 years old. He was raised by his mother. Between the ages of 11 and 16, he was detained by juvenile court services 11 times for probation violations related to drug use at home, at school, and within his community, all which led to detention and Department of Youth Services commitments. At age 16, he was detained 381 days for a new charge that resulted in him being transferred to the adult court system. He completed his high school coursework while in detention and was released prior to his high school graduation date. To his recollection, between the ages of 11 and 16, he was detained approximately 745 days.

Participant 2: John

John is 21 years old. He was raised by his mother after his father's death. His first involvement with the juvenile court system was at age 12 and was due to domestic violence. Between the ages of 12 and 18, he was detained by juvenile court services four additional times due to probation violations, all of which were categorized as domestic violence occurrences at home. He could not recall the number of days spent in detention, but he has spent time in various Department of Youth Services programs and vividly remembers spending approximately 1 year at one placement. He completed his high school coursework while in detention and was released prior to his high school graduation date.

Participant 3: Tyler

Tyler is 22 years old. He was raised by his mother and stepfather after his father's death. His first involvement with the juvenile court system was at age 13 and was due to domestic violence. Between the ages of 13 and 17, he was detained multiple times by juvenile court services for probation violations related to domestic violence and drug use that occurred at home and school and led to detention and Department of Youth Services commitments. Unable to meet

the academic requirements of the public school system during his 12th grade year, he elected to enter into a home schooling program where he was able to obtain a high school diploma. At age 17, he was transferred into the adult court system where he served 3 years in prison and 2 years on probation.

The Discussion Workshop

What I was hoping for by utilizing the workshop format for data collection and analysis purposes was to re-create an environment similar to what the participants experienced in the classroom as former students. I wanted to create an environment where their consciousness about their life as a whole was prodded and where they felt the freedom to be candid about their experiences. I was also hoping the previously established rapport from our time in the classroom would carry over into the research space regardless of the lapse in time since they were students. From speaking to them about the research and gaining their consent, they seemed to be looking forward to participating; however, what differed from the classroom setting was they were not legally obligated to be there. They were not detained and mandated to attend class. Knowing that, I was a bit nervous about them showing up and pondered these questions in my mind: Why would they care enough to show up? Now that they are free of detention, why would they care to share their experiences?

What I learned was, they not only cared, but used the opportunity to break free from the legal silencing placed upon them by the court system. Emancipation is a major goal of critical pedagogy and necessary for transforming the oppressed from being objects to becoming subjects with autonomy (McLaren, 2015; Vandrick, 1994). Their involvement in this study afforded them the opportunity to relocate social inquiry about juvenile delinquency from an outside perspective to an inside close and personal perspective, which is consistent with Finley (2008) who regarded

direct involvement of the participants in research as instrumental in bringing social inquiry out of the elitist academic institutions and relocating inquiry to local, everyday personal experiences.

To prompt the research discussion, the following questions were used:

- How old were you when you first became involved with juvenile court services?
- Was that involvement connected to an infraction at home, school, or in your community?
- What role do you believe gender played in your initial arrest and subsequent arrests?
- What role do you believe race played in your initial arrest and subsequent arrests?
- Has your involvement with juvenile court affected how you view yourself? If so how?
- How has your involvement with juvenile court affected how others view you?
- How has your involvement with juvenile court affected your schooling and overall success?

Prior to beginning of the discussion workshop, I emphasized to the participants that participation in this study was an opportunity for them to communicate how they experienced juvenile delinquency, not about what I wanted to hear or what I thought was important or even appropriate. I reminded them of a quote on my wall in the classroom that says, “you are the author of your own life story.” I wanted them to know that their story, from their perspective, was at the heart of this project. Freire’s (1970) belief was that marginalized students should be able to reflect on their life events and circumstances and ask why things are the way they are. From the conception of this project, I was conscious of my position of authority and was cautious about not re-telling their stories from my perspective, but allowing them to speak for themselves by way of their discussion responses, autobiographical poetry, and analysis. This decision aligned with Hendry (2007), who supported the need to trust in the stories as told by the storyteller. I am hopeful that this decision has made it possible for the readers to have close

access to the experiences of the research participants (Furman, 2007), and in Denzin's words, "make the strange familiar and bring the reader directly into a field of experience" (1997, p. 211).

Most importantly, this decision placed the voice(s) of the participants at the center of this research. Through the foundation of critical pedagogy as praxis, they voiced and analyzed their experiences thus becoming the researcher as well as the researched. For the purpose of this study, *voice* was defined as an individual's capability to articulate experiences in ways unique to them based on their understanding and meaning they gave to issues or circumstances (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Hadfield & Haw, 2001). Bogdan and Biklen (1998) described voice as empowering, making it possible for "people to be heard who might otherwise remain silent" (p. 204). As the prompt questions were asked, the participants were eager to express their experiences. The more they spoke, the more they wanted to speak, the more they wanted to tell their stories. This is consistent with research that supports the idea that dialogue encourages voice (Shor, 1992) and from Freire's (1970) perspective, encounters such as this foster the ability to name the world. They seemed empowered through the process. They were emancipated, set free from the restrictions placed upon them by the juvenile justice system. Polkinghorne (2010) would say that autobiographical accounts such as these are empowering in that they provided an opportunity for the participants to analyze past experiences as a means to examine prior outcomes and begin the process of planning for possible future outcomes.

As the questions were discussed, I was amazed at how much they remembered about when, what, and how their lives were interrupted through juvenile delinquency. As they spoke, so many of their responses concurred with research about the school-to-prison pipeline and though they all were individually unique, oftentimes their responses were the same; one would

start a sentence and the other would finish it. It was as though they had read the same story, but more powerfully, they all lived it.

The rapport initially established between a teacher and student continued as a researcher and participant. They could have walked out at any point or refused to speak, but instead they seized the opportunity to be heard—to speak freely. And in doing so, they were not only adding valuable knowledge to the school-to-prison pipeline narrative, but also gaining self-knowledge about how they arrived at juvenile delinquency and how such experiences have impacted their lives. As I listened, their visceral responses (body language, tone of voice and voice volume) indicated they, too, were surprised by what they were hearing and learning.

The workshop format was not only conducive to creating a space for the participants to explore the realities of their experiences with juvenile delinquency, but also a means for the participant to deconstruct the inferior position placed upon marginalized individuals by the juvenile court system, a way to debunk the power differential, an opportunity for them to articulate experiences in ways unique to them based on the understanding and meaning they gave to issues or circumstances.

At the initial workshop, the participants were happy to see me, but were not quite sure what they had agreed to. Although I had spent many hours with the participants as a teacher, I did not know what to expect either. I recall taking a few deep breaths before I pressed record to begin the discussion. This project was not just about juvenile delinquency, it was about the collision of juvenile delinquency with the lives of three young Black men and the consequential collateral damage.

The camaraderie between the participants seemed immediate; they trusted each other. A sense of brotherhood, a bond formed through the commonality of their experiences with juvenile

delinquency, seemed to fade any lines of discomfort and differences. During the workshop discussion there were breath-taking moments as I listened to three voices communicate almost the exact same narrative. There had been no collaboration of stories prior, no rehearsal. Critical race theory supported the idea that stories are not only a cure for silencing, but can reveal that others have similar experiences (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). They did not live in the same neighborhood or run in the same social circles. Their stories were individually unique, but similar. Out of the three participants, two were close to the same age and several years older than the other participant. Any knowledge of each other was due to spending time in detention together. Throughout the discussion, one participant would start a sentence and another would finish it which is why it is important to present the data from the discussion workshop in their own words, with the hopes of recreating the experience for the reader.

It was immediately obvious that the participants felt a sense of power in that they were not afraid to be honest about how juvenile delinquency and the issues associated with it negatively impacted and still continues to affect their daily lives. With the intent of honoring and preserving the voices of the participants, the data in this chapter represent their perspectives, in their own voice(s), of how they experienced juvenile delinquency.

The Themes

Unique to this research, the participants were involved in the analysis of the data. During this process, each former student was given a copy of the transcript and the poems. Before the analysis began, I provided them with a data analysis handout (Appendix C) which I discussed in detail. They were also given the opportunity to ask questions. Produced through coding the discussion transcript, the included excerpts (InVivo coding) are those the participants identified as important in communicating their stories. Why is this important? Because by presenting the

data this way, as a researcher I am not speaking for them, but honoring and trusting their stories in addition to allowing them to communicate meaning—restoring voice. As adolescents involved with the juvenile court system, their voices were absent from the criminal justice discourse. A form of legal silencing was placed upon them. Allowing the participants' voices to be at the center of this research provided an opportunity for them to be heard, to make their experiences available to others, to participate in the construction of the self, and to decide how to represent themselves to others.

Through a collaborative analysis of the discussion transcript and autobiographical poems, the following themes were co-constructed. This part of the process seemed to bore them. It was time consuming and tedious. We waded through all of the data more than once, coded, categorized it, and then co-constructed themes. Throughout this process, I heard a lot of heavy breathing, but they did not quit. This part of the process was difficult for me because I had to be careful not to lead them based on my knowledge of existing research on the school-to-prison pipeline. For this reason, I intentionally did not speak of the school-to-prison pipeline throughout the entire research project. As we co-constructed the themes, I found myself thinking, "They are speaking to existing research. That's it, keep talking." Below you will find excerpts from the discussion and the autobiographical poems as they correlated with the co-constructed themes. It is important to remember that the coding process for the discussion transcript was not done line by line, but in sections based on the prompt questions, so the excerpts may be chunks of data relating to the theme. The poetry communicated their experiences in a more concise format and was coded line by line.

Delinquency

For the participants, *delinquency* represented a state of being, a time period in their lives. Categories under this theme answered the what(s), when(s), how(s), and where(s) of their delinquency status. The following excerpts are from the discussion transcript.

Greg: *I was 11. Sixth grade possession of weed.*

John: *I was probably about 10 or 11*

Tyler: *I was 13, like 8th grade*

Greg: *I remember everything. I came out and they had both the police right there and they had both the dogs and the principal and was at my locker.*

John: *Most of mine was when I was at home. I would get to arguing with my mom and the next thing I know I was being locked up.*

Tyler: *Mine happened at home for real it was just mom and her boyfriend.*

From their poetry:

Greg: *First arrest for possession
I was only eleven
Being so young
But less than 6 weeks
I was back for a weapon
Went from smoking to taking
Learned how 2 do all the wrong things
The right way*

John: *That's when it all started
I was only 10 years old
When I first got put into the system
My life wasn't the same since*

Tyler: *I will never forget that day!
The day the world turned upside down
Most kids growing up try right from wrong
But mine was trying to learn why women's boyfriends like
hitting another man's kid!
Police looking for me
Fighting my mom's boyfriend!
I get in a fight at school*

*I am on probation
I get a probation violation
Sent to boot camp, 28 days*

For the participants, their delinquency status was the beginning of a downward spiral. Regardless of the nature of their stories, the lives of these young men were forever altered. Due to the requirements of juvenile court, also known as juvenile probation, they were expected to comply with the contractual agreement as dictated by the court which meant that home, community, and school quickly became punitive spaces. Normal teenage behaviors such as breaking curfew, tardies, or bad grades at school could lead to violations of probation for them, resulting in a pick-up order and subsequent arrests and detentions.

Additionally, when they were deemed delinquent by juvenile court services, they were also legally silenced. During their court hearings, their voices were absent from the criminal justice discourse. This denial of voice not only imputed legal silencing, but also formal labeling. The juvenile justice system, which was created to rehabilitate, had arrested and labeled these young men as delinquent, thus prioritizing incarceration over education.

Race

During the workshop discussion, there were times when the room did not seem big enough to contain the stories the participants began to tell. As they spoke, from their non-verbal gestures and the inflection in their voices, it was like for the first time they were hearing their own stories. Their words were many and they began to question what happened to them and why. Although the participants' juvenile records were different, they all began to question the role of race in their initial arrest and subsequent arrests. They all felt that to some degree race played a role in their involvement with juvenile court services and resulted in differential treatment between them and their White peers for the same, or from their perspectives more

serious, legal infractions. The excerpts below are from the discussion transcript and represent how they experienced race.

John: Like sometimes it does matter a little bit. When like Caucasian people argue with their family members and stuff you know or like you feel me the police get called. A lot of times when they pull up to the scene, they will talk it out and then you know they will just let everybody chill but with, but with you know, what I am saying with Black folks.

Greg: The first thing they say they want to detain

John: It wouldn't have made a difference for me because I still would have been in the situation but like it do play a role sometimes.

Greg: A lot of Caucasian people that came through and got out before I did for things that were more severe, so it played a role in the system.

John: During my arrest and all of that not really, cause the situation no matter was going to be the same thing, but inside of the juvenile court room and stuff, definitely.

Tyler: I agree, within the court system.

Greg: I feel like my P.O. felt like she had to put me under different standards just to keep his job². It's bigger than just dealing with us, our race, it depends on who's dealing with you too that forms your outcome. I wasn't given no leave way like everything, like dilution (referring to a diluted urinalysis which results in an automatic negative test), anything you are out of here.

John: I agree cause every time I got arrested it was just straight punishment, it wasn't no slap on the wrist. It was straight, you're going here, you're going there, you gone be here for this long, been there for that long. Like I was never, never just let off the hook.

The participants did not include indicators of race in their poetry.

Zero Tolerance Policies

For the participants, zero tolerance represented an unwillingness on behalf of the school and juvenile court systems to understand or even consider the contexts of their lives. Contexts that produced anger, frustration, and sometimes hopelessness and contributed to unacceptable behavior at school. There was no consideration that two of the participants' fathers were deceased and that one was experiencing domestic violence due to being raised by a stepfather or

² His probation officer was African American.

that one participant was being raised by a single mom. When the participants returned to school after being labeled delinquent, the panopticon eye, an eye of surveillance, was automatically turned on and through the lens of zero tolerance policies, a space designed for learning became punitive, and disciplinary moments where teachers would ordinarily use to instruct on character and moral values from which they might grow without consequences, were considered recidivist behavior and violations of probation.

Tyler: *I did a lot of bullying when I came back to school.*

John: *I used to just get on anybody's head that was doing a little too much looking, a little too much talking* (referencing juvenile delinquency status).

Tyler: *Well, they knew every time* (referencing time in detention) *because they kept coming and getting me from school.*

John: *They didn't show no mercy.*

Tyler: *I just knew that sooner or later these people ain't gonna want me at their school anymore. Police at y'all school every other day, someone going to jail every other day, so it really didn't look good.*

From their poetry:

Greg: *Others get grounded for mistakes,
But me
I go to the cage
Took me out of school*

John: *I didn't know how to control my anger
I didn't know how to control my temper*

Tyler: *P.O. comes to my school
I get in a fight at school
I am on probation
I get a probation violation*

Formal Labeling and Social Exclusion

Participants John and Greg expressed immense anger and pain about being labeled as a “juvenile delinquent or criminal” and how they believed such labeling led to social exclusion at

school. Both of these young men are outgoing and seem to thrive from social interactions with others. They were devastated and frustrated when they were rejected and labeled in what should have been an environment conducive to social growth. Below are excerpts from the discussion, presented in the actual flow of conversation, as prompted by the question, How has your involvement with the juvenile court affected how others view you? From the experiences of the participants, negative experiences with formal labeling and social exclusion generated from the school community. They did not express having problems with family, friends, or the communities in which they resided. As they spoke about this, I was thinking, “This should not be happening.” I even questioned whether their privacy as juveniles involved with the court system had been violated. How did everyone know they were involved with the juvenile court system if they were not telling them? And then Tyler spoke: *Well, they knew every time* (referencing time in detention) *because they* (probation officers) *kept coming and getting me from school.*

John: *People like to go back and talk about that.*

Greg: *They tell their mamas and everything, and you don't even know it, that's the bad thing. Little too much talking* (referencing juvenile delinquency status).

John: *And nobody knows what you are getting locked up for. You ain't been able to tell nobody what you really did, but by the time you come back . . .*

Greg: *You did everything.*

John: *Five different stories about how you in there for doing this and that.*

John: *Yeah, it's not even the case, so you feel me, it puts like a . . .*

Greg: *A pause on your life.*

John: *Yeah, puts like . . . and it gives you this certain image so then when new people meet you they already heard from Sally and John Doe that you were in juvenile last week. You know them other people not gonna want to fool with you. That creates a track record.*

Greg: *Like a warning sign that folks see.*

John: *When you walk into the room, they say that's the guy who went to juvenile. That's what they're gonna say, like automatically. You just automatically going to have that image on you for a while, until you are out of school or whatever. I don't know, it's just not a good look.*

Greg: *You did what you did, but folks ain't trying to see that.*

John: *You are not that person, you know just made a mistake, but they're gonna look at you like.* (sentence completed by Greg)

Greg: *You are that mistake.*

John: *Like you are out there robbing folks, like you really out here just constantly stealing from folks.*

Researcher: So do you think people were afraid of you?

John: *Yeah, I was thinking that too, but yeah like I don't want to mess with them. People ain't gonna talk to you, like we don't want to mess with him, he's been in juvenile like he might get mad and punch me.*

Greg: *Yeah, folks think like that, they literally think like that.*

John: *Especially me, cause like, especially me, I am big and I am Black and I go to a basically a White school. Them folks don't experience no like fights every day or people getting arrested for anything. Then when they see somebody Black getting arrested. That opens a whole new door to what you could have done cause it's like, these folks already are hearing about stuff on the news. They already see stuff on social media, so they just gone assume, like dang, Black people really be out here stealing from people or they really be out here killing folks or they really be out here being around. Hoodlums or something and that's what they're gonna think and once they get that in their mind, it's set in stone. And you done, you over with at that point. It was never gonna be positive.*

Greg: *Nah. it wasn't never gonna be positive.*

John: *Once they slap handcuffs on your wrist, positivity is out the window for you. Ain't nobody gonna think of you any type of good.*

Greg: *I think it was like that. You don't really care at all, but it's just the embarrassment part. When you come back to school and everybody is looking at you but then after a certain while then they looking at you like they feel sorry for you or something. I didn't like that right there because I got locked up a lot of times, you know what I mean so, I came back and I don't want it like they feel bad for me. I am good. I am still the same person that you knew before then, you know what I mean.*

John: *When I got arrested they was like looking at me like some type of animal or monster. I hate to say it but Caucasian people they overreact like so bad like it's to the point where it is just ridiculous like somebody could have easily took me being arrested and flip it like he said he was going to blow up the school and now they got like 15 other White people talking about, oh my God, I could have lost my life then boom they telling their parents and the parents telling the school.*

Greg: *Telling the other parents.*

John: *Yeah, they called the school asking what y'all got going on? Y'all not going to protect my child dah, dah, dah? And then it will fall back on you.*

From their poetry:

Greg: *Jail wasn't the worse thing,
But the looks of shame*

Tyler: *In high school now
Already got some stripes from middle school (Street credit from being locked up)
People already know what's up with me*

Academic Failure

Despite the fact that the juvenile justice system is premised on the concept of rehabilitation, once a child becomes involved with the system it is difficult to transition back to the traditional mainstream educational setting which increases the risk of academic failure and exclusion from extracurricular activities. Greg speaks specifically about gravitating to other students who were also involved in the system. At this point, schooling took a back seat to the excitement of investigating what type of criminal mischiefs were being committed by his peers. Although all of the participants graduated from high school, Tyler and Greg felt robbed of future opportunities that should have been crafted through high school experiences.

Greg: *It had a lot of effects on my schooling. Like bet, it's crazy though. Juvenile affected me cause of the people I was around because everybody I was around was getting locked up, so out of curiosity I wanted to know why they kept going back. I was like forget school. When I was 14, I was like, I ain't going to school.*

Tyler: *It really messed up my sports. My stats, my highlights. It messed up going to college and playing ball. They told me I was going to have to go to ahh, what's that?*

Alternative school and I was like man, I have been in shit so many times. I can't, I just knew me driving all the way to Riverdale (transportation was not provided by the school system for alternative school students) early in the morning getting a ride, it just wasn't going to work out. So it really didn't work out, so K just told him. I just homeschooled myself. Got my diploma but ended up going down the road after that (making reference to prison).

Greg: I feel like the juvenile robbed me of my school though cause like in 9th grade my transcript was messed up because I did a lot of changing schools and everything. I never went back to regular high school. I hadn't been in high school since my freshman year. Even though I deserved to go there because I was in the right grade, they kept saying, I would do better because it was a smaller environment.

From their poetry:

*Greg: Took me out of school
Still gave me education
Even, though I excelled barely participating*

Juvenile System Failure

Although all of the participants in this study received a high school diploma, from their perspectives the juvenile justice system failed in its rehabilitative purposes in addition to facilitating an environment that fostered additional involvement in criminal activities. I was not surprised by this because over the past 9 years I have heard them express how the programs wasted their time and did not work. Comments like these saddened my heart and made me feel helpless. My response to them as they departed the facility for the next program was, “come back with more than time served. Use the available resources to your advantage.” Nevertheless, the participants in this study believed the programs were as Greg stated, “failed attempts.” In reference to learning how to do the crime better, oftentimes I found myself cutting off conversations about criminal activities to try and prevent them from learning how to do the crime better. Below is the dialogue between them about the juvenile system in response to the question, How has your involvement with juvenile court affected your schooling and overall success?

John: Even when they were sending me to these programs, the programs wasn't necessarily cupcake, but they still wasn't enough to like to just stick with me. I am thinking these other two programs they sent me to was a 3 month minimum, maximum. You in there 90 days, 120 days whatever, so I am like, oh, I ain't really got to do much here. I can just chill, make sure I don't get into it with no body, boom, just thug it out 120 days. You ain't really got to do nothing, you ain't got to work on your anger, you ain't go to do nothing. I am not paying attention to how long, how much time going by. I didn't even know I was there for a year. It wasted a whole 365 days just to go to a group home for another four months. It was almost like I was serving a prison sentence.

Greg: Juvenile did its justice but it didn't do it, it took. Juvenile it helped me, but it also damaged me. Cause all the times getting locked up and not learning anything. I was only getting out and learning how to do the crime better, do the crime different, so that's how it damaged me, all the failed attempts.

Greg: I been to programs. I know how the programs work, you work the programs. You work the program and then you go home and then you do what you do and then you go back to another program. I knew what to say to just get out of there in the amount of time I wanted to get out and that's exactly literally what I did. It's a system.

Tyler: You work the system.

Greg: Exactly.

Tyler: Work the system since you already in a system.

Greg: Get out again until you get caught again.

John: Basically, just faking it until you make it.

Tyler: Yeah.

John: It's not like when you be in them programs you seriously like, O I fixin to get out and be clean, like you just doing it for the moment so you can get out. Just so you can go home and once you home you just fall back into that. It's just a recycling mode.

I witnessed this recycling mode during the participants' time in detention and even now with other students detained by juvenile court services.

Greg: It's like, it's just got a lot of stuff in the juvenile system that doesn't add up, you know what I mean. Like, I know specifically like I was locked up maybe 10 or 11 times, but I know somebody who was locked up at least 20 times and he was never DYS committed. I was DYS committed after my 3rd or 4th offense, you know what I mean. Like it's a lot, it's a lot, the problem is that it's systematically like created, but then it is individualized. That's the problem.

Greg is speaking of a flawed system that executed differential treatment between him and others who committed the same crime or lesser crimes. As he was speaking, I was thinking of the systematic racism that individualized him. As he spoke, I could hear the anger in his voice. The only consolation I was able to take hold of was that at least he is now aware.

From their poetry:

Greg: *It took 12 times out of 13 for me to learn my lesson
The other times Juvi only taught me how to get better at wrong
Ultimately it was fear that led me to change
Prison on my mind
You adapt or don't make it
Went from smoking to taking
Woke up the man in a baby
Now I'm on pills, I'm shaking
Need help with sleep
I can't take it
Learned how 2 do all the wrong things
The right way*

After Greg received an adult charge, reality set in. He realized that if he did not change, he was headed to prison. Tyler admitted to not learning from past mistakes.

Tyler: *I started getting in trouble again!
This time a big boy charge
You know its not juvie
They took me to the Big Dawg Jail
I spent 3 days there.
Age 18, adult charge
Didn't Learn from juvenile
3 years in prison*

Identity

For the participants, identity was a combination of both an inside and outside perspective. Throughout the discussion, the frustration over how the participants questioned their moral character and identity was apparent in their responses. Cultivated by formal labeling and negative cultural stereotypes, the participants began to view themselves as seen by others. This

frustration combined with the alienation fostered by multiple detentions created a negative self-identity. This was specifically true for Greg and John.

Greg: *I used to be like dang, am I a bad person?*

John: *Yea, I agree with that as well. It made me like, a lot of times, it made me second guess who I am.*

Tyler: *It bettered me. I showed my brothers and my friends that ain't the way y'all trying to go. Sometimes you gotta learn from your mistakes, sometimes you gotta go there.*

As I listened to Greg and Tyler, I hoped they could move beyond their past and begin to embrace their mistakes as a part of their identity formation. Tyler's words seemed to indicate an effort to go beyond the constraints of juvenile delinquency status (formal labeling) by making an attempt to learn from his mistakes and warn his family and friends.

From their poetry:

Greg: *Feel like I'm stuck in my ways
So much pressure on my mind
Feeling like I can't change*

The Losses

In addition to loss of identity, academic failure, and the failure of the court system to rehabilitate these young men, each expressed anger and discouragement due to the loss of time and experiences associated with a normal adolescent life. With tear-filled eyes, I listened to these young men grieve and grapple to make some sense of what happened to them. The following dialogue about losses was prompted in response to the discussion question, How has your involvement with juvenile court affected your schooling and overall success?

John: *Yea, even when they was sending me to these programs, the programs wasn't necessarily cupcake, but they still wasn't enough to be like to just stick with me. So Like I, you feel me. The juvenile, going through the juvenile growing up I have experienced a lot probably some things I probably wouldn't have learned If I never went. Ahh, you know I have met some great people, some great mentors, so like I have gained some things from coming in juvie, but . . .*

I was so moved by John's acknowledgement of meeting great people and mentors. I was thinking, "At least he has gained something positive out of all the time he spent locked up." But then

Greg: *The losses though.*

John: *Yeah, like I really wasted a lot of time.*

Greg: *Exactly.*

I could not move past this moment. I wanted to know more.

Researcher: *Talk about the losses.*

Greg: *It just, it sets, it pauses your life, if you know what I mean. It just pauses your life and it's a mental burden too though. When you get out, you got so many expectations and whatever and then you know what I mean, it just, it's not good for your body like all of the stress and everything as a kid.*

Tyler: *I was like people could be watching me on Saturdays or Sundays on TV cause I tore my ACL at the Fort playing a sport that I don't play.*

Researcher: *So you were detained in a program when you injured yourself?*

Tyler: *Yes, Ma'am. My knee ain't been right ever since. It's a rehab (a rehabilitation program for substance abuse) and you can't have surgery.*

Greg: *You can't have pain meds or nothing.*

Tyler: *I had to wait like, another 45 days. I had to wait like two more weeks to finish the program and two more weeks to have surgery.*

Greg: *Just so you wouldn't have a pain pill.*

As I listened to this, I was appalled by the lack of compassion and healthcare. I thought, "This is neglect. How did they get away with this? How could they treat a child like this? No wonder he is so angry."

Tyler: *It was crazy, it was just crazy. Like I said people probably would have been watching me on Saturday nights or Sunday.*

John: *I just felt like growing up a lot of times was just wasted. It's a lot of things I didn't get to experience that a lot of people get to experience.*

Greg: *That's how I feel now.*

John: *Yeah, You feel me. Like I missed basically, you feel me, all the fun years.*

Greg: *I missed all my high school years.*

John: *Yeah.*

Greg: *Teens.*

John: *I wasted basically the most important years of my life and then I don't have nothing to show for it. When I speak on my childhood, I really ain't got one if that makes sense, like after 10 years old, it was a wrap. I was locked up, so that just affects, that leaves an affect on you in the future, like you telling your kids about what you used to do back in the day or what you had to go through growing up. You don't want to tell them, you feel me, that you was in and out of juvenile, but you can't replace it with nothing else.*

Greg: *Yeah, it's discouraging cause you can't get the time back.*

John: *You can't replace it with nothing. You can't get the time back.*

Greg: *So you try to make up the time back, but can't never make it up.*

John: *I didn't get to experience just being a kid, being a teenager. I didn't get to go to dances, prom. None of that yeah. I missed both proms, you feel me. That's something I wanted to do in my senior year. It's almost like I was born, had a little fun . . .*

Greg: *Got locked up.*

John: *Had a lil fun, boom, got locked up and now I am an adult.*

Greg: *Just like that.*

John: *I promise you, cause I can't talk about nothing I was doing from the time I was 10 to 18 that was positive. Like I wasn't playing sports, I wasn't, you feel me, I wasn't in school like that. I was in juvie. Like everybody else, they have lived their life. I have lived like half of my life.*

As I watched John during this conversation, it was as though he too was hearing for the first time what happened to him. He seemed to be in disbelief about how much time he lost. Time he could not recover. As he spoke, he kept shaking his head.

Greg: *Yeah.*

John: *Like I have lived like half of it. I am 21 years old, but I feel like I have only lived 10 years of my life. It's like really I should be 13 years old.*

As I listened to this dialogue, it was all I could do to hold back the tears. These three young men deserved better than this. Listening to them reminded me of why I did this research, why I teach where I teach, and why it is important to continue creating a space for those with past and present involvement with the juvenile justice system to voice how they have and are experiencing juvenile delinquency with the hopes of fostering individual change and social justice.

From their poetry:

Greg: *Feel like I'm stuck in my ways
2 day, I won't go out and play
I'll just count the days
Never will it be the same
Trynna make up for lost time
4ever I'll be in pain
Sometime I wanna cry
Cuz so bad wanna rewind
I use 2 wanna die*

John: *You can't get the time back
Wasted so much time in my life
Growing up, I will never get back
My life wasn't the same since
I missed both proms
That's something I wanted to do
I missed all my teenage years
The fun years
I wasn't playing sports
I wasted a whole 365 days
It was almost like
I was serving a prison sentence*

Tyler: *3 years in prison*

The Poetry

Reflecting on the discussion questions transcript from Workshop 1, the participants composed the following autobiographical poems. As the participants reflected on their notes and the discussion transcripts, they individually combed through the data, a type of analyzing the data by choosing words, phrases, and sentences pertinent to re-telling their stories in a poetic conciseness. Unlike the courtroom where their narratives were not welcome and the juvenile justice system proceeded without their voices, thus imputing legal silencing, this pedagogical space welcomed their voices and created a space for them to holistically examine their involvement with juvenile court by questioning the multiple realities of the relationships, circumstances, processes, and the experiences that may have contributed to and perpetuated their delinquency in addition to how their past experiences impacted and still continue to impact their lives. They composed the following participant-voiced poetry not only as a re-representation of the data from the transcript, but as analysis, and a source of data that communicates a rich and deep understanding of how Black male teenagers experienced juvenile delinquency and even now, as adult Black men still continue to experience the impact juvenile delinquency.

12/13

*It took 12 times out of 13 for me to learn my lesson
The other times Juvi only taught me how to get better at wrong
Ultimately it was fear that led me to change
Prison on my mind
Seen my Momma in pain
First arrest for possession
I was only eleven
Being so young
You would have thought it was some they could tell me
But less than 6 weeks
I was back for a weapon
Sent counselors to help me
Meanwhile I'm rejecting
Surrounded by adolescents who wake up and take breakfast*

*You adapt or don't make it
Went from smoking to taking
Woke up the man in a baby
Now I'm on pills, I'm shaking
Need help with sleep
I can't take it*

*Learned how 2 do all the wrong things
The right way
Others get grounded for mistakes,
But me
I go to the cage
Feel like I'm stuck in my ways
2 day, I won't go out and play
I'll just count the days
Never will it be the same
Trynna make up for lost time
4ever I'll be in pain
Feeling like I'm not the same
2night Ma' won't see my face
That's only gonna build up anger
Cuz, I'm locked in this place*

*Took me out of school
Still gave me education
Even, though I excelled barely participating
But that's reality, gotta face
Can't go back to time and replace
It matured me
I'm no baby
But it wasn't time
Now it's all on the line
Sometime I wanna cry
Cuz so bad wanna rewind
I use 2 wanna die
Going back 2 school time after time*

*I remember everything
The scars from the pain
Jail wasn't the worse thing,
But the looks of shame
So much pressure on my mind
Feeling like I can't change
I was eleven, 6th grade
Locked up for possession
No more fear left in me,*

So I ain't learn my lesson

Cold and Lonely with nobody 2 hold me

Momma, I'm sorry,

Know this ain't what you showed me.

-Greg

I Was Gone That Long

You can't get the time back

Wasted so much time in my life

Growing up, I will never get back

I am currently 21 years old

But it seems to me

I've only lived 13 years of my life

My childhood????

Yea, I don't have one of those

I was born, had a lil fun growing up

Then, boom!!!

That's when it all started

I was only 10 years old

When I first got put into the system

My life wasn't the same since

I missed both proms

That's something I wanted to do

I missed all my teenage years

The fun years

I can't talk about nothing I was doing

From the time I was 10 to 18 that was positive

I wasn't playing sports

I wasn't, you feel me?

I wasn't in school

I was in JUVIE

I wish I would have been able to get right

When I was 14, 15, or 16

I didn't get right until I was 18

I hate it took me that long

I really wanted to get right

No later than my third time

But it just that

I didn't know how

I didn't know how to control my anger

I didn't know how to control my temper

I was gone for like a year at one place

Just to go to another for four months

I didn't even know I was there for a year

*I didn't start getting right until like my ninth month
I wasted a whole 365 days
It was almost like
I was serving a prison sentence
I was gone that long
-John*

Friday 13th

*I will never forget that day!
The day the world turned upside down
Most kids growing up try right from wrong
But mine was trying to learn why women's boyfriends like hitting another man's kid!
I understand punishing for doing wrong
But do the same to yours as well!*

Fast forward

*Police looking for me
Fighting my mom's boyfriend!
Yeah! I know looking for me!*

Juvenile detention

*I didn't think my day could get any worse
But it did
I had to wait in a holding cell or tank for my bed!
The next morning they say Grandma coming
And I am staying with her for Thanksgiving break!
I spend my break with them!
Break over school time
They say I can't stay around my mom's boyfriend
He got his own house*

School starts back

*P.O. comes to my school
She said, "how you doing?"
I am in the gym for 4th period P.E.
Shooting the ball
She wants a drug test
Her words, "pee in this cup"
"I don't do drugs; I play sports!"
For some reason she wasn't going for it!
I passed it with flying colors.*

Couple months later

*I get in a fight at school
I am on probation
I get a probation violation
Sent to boot camp, 28 days
Boot camp, just spring training for me
Getting in shape and staying that way*

Back at School
In high school now
Already got some stripes from middle school
People already know what's up with me
Need to make it a couple of months to get off probation
I got to make it
Thank the Lord
Made them couple of months
10th Grade
I started getting in trouble again!
This time a big boy charge
you know it's not juvie
They took me to the Big Dawg Jail
I spent 3 days there.
Fast forward again
Age 18, adult charge
Didn't learn from juvenile
3 years in prison
Life now
1 Corinthians 13:11
-Tyler

Conclusion

In an effort to investigate how the data from this study corroborate with prior research on the school-to-prison pipeline while also honoring the voices of the participants, this chapter included the emerging themes with excerpts from the discussion workshop transcript chosen by the participants in the analysis process as personally important to representing their experiences with juvenile delinquency and the autobiographical poems generated from the Workshop 1 discussion. In the next chapter, I discuss how the co-constructed themes and the autobiographical poems of African American males narrate the experiences of juvenile delinquency and such experiences engage with the broader educational narratives of the school-to-prison pipeline.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The genesis of this study was the product of my passion to create a space for students involved with the juvenile justice system to express how they were experiencing detention. As a 9-year veteran teacher witnessing firsthand how those detained by the juvenile justice system are forced to endure the legal silencing placed upon them and how such silencing produces anger, frustration, hopelessness, and negative self-worth, which consequently results in academic failure and recidivist behavior that leads to additional arrest, specifically among African American males, I was compelled to find some way to help them regain some form of voice through a space where it was permissible to appropriately express anger and their opinions about a system by which they felt constrained.

In response to what I considered a need, I began to integrate reflective autobiographical writings in the classroom as a means for them to release their anger and frustration in a positive manner. I felt that self-reflective writing was the best avenue because the process of self-reflecting provides a means for students to discover themselves, make sense of, and develop some type of understanding of their personal experiences and the world in which they live (Furman, Coyne, & Negi, 2008), especially their experiences with juvenile delinquency.

Laurel Richardson referred to writing as “a way of finding out about yourself” (2000, p. 923). Autobiographical writing provided a space for them to address issues that affected their daily lives, honor their realities, and address life situations; a place where they did not have to remain silent, but were given the opportunity to speak freely, to even ask questions. At the time I did not realize I was utilizing critical pedagogy. Through such writings I was creating a space for

the students to deconstruct the inferior position placed upon them by the juvenile justice system. I modeled this concept in this study through the employment of critical pedagogy as praxis and autobiographical poetry as method.

Restating the Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to provide an opportunity for African American adolescent males, with past involvement in the juvenile justice system, to give expression to how their experiences shaped their lives and self-identity and how such experiences fit into the school-to-prison pipeline narrative. Research on the school-to-prison pipeline is plentiful; however, most are primarily the voices of others from an outside perspective.

This is a narrative qualitative study that utilized poetry as method through employing autobiographical poetry writing. Through this non-traditional method, this study created a less exploitive space where the participants were not only free to speak but also co-analyze their stories without the sole interpretation of the researcher. Lincoln (1993) asserted that in order to adequately investigate the lives of those who are silenced, alternative epistemologies and methods not grounded in White and androcentric concerns are necessary. According to Denzin (1995), a desirable goal of qualitative research is to seek to present the “authentic voice of the other” (p. 313). Furman and Shukraft (2007) would add that “giving voice to those without the power and/or privilege to express their experiences” is a growing objective of social research (p. 82).

Summary of Findings

In this chapter, I discuss how the autobiographical poems of the African American males involved with this study narrate the experiences of juvenile delinquency and how such experiences engage with the broader educational narrative of the school-to-prison pipeline?

The foundation of this project was the critical pedagogical space created for the purposes of disrupting the nuances of juvenile delinquency as experienced by African American adolescents. Utilizing this praxis in collaboration with the employment of autobiographical poetry is how the African American adolescents involved in this study were able to narrate their experiences with juvenile delinquency.

The Poetry (Autobiography)

Research about juvenile delinquency and the school-to-prison pipeline has primarily been derived from traditional forms of quantitative and qualitative studies, all necessary for understanding the scope of the problem and the contextual realities of life experiences; however, what the poetry in this research did through a non-traditional method was communicate through rich description in a condensed and easily consumed format how the participants experienced juvenile delinquency and continued to deal with the far-reaching consequences of their involvement with the juvenile justice system. Furman et al. (2006) argued that this type of method is necessary because it makes research accessible to those who are familiar and unfamiliar with traditional prose research. Denzin (1997) postulated that alternate forms of research methods have the capacity to connect the affective and cognitive worlds of research, investigators, and consumers. Butler-Kisber (2002) conjectured that poetry awakens and taps into the imagination of the reader, but most importantly brings the reader closer to the work by disrupting the hegemony inherent to traditional texts. Poetry permitted the voices of those otherwise silenced to be heard.

Unlike the courtroom where their narratives were not welcome and the juvenile justice system proceeded without their voices, thus imputing legal silencing, this study welcomed their voices and created a space for them to holistically examine their involvement with juvenile court

by questioning the multiple realities of the relationships, circumstances, processes, and the experiences that may have contributed to and perpetuated their delinquency in addition to how their past experiences impacted and still continues to impact their lives. During the poetry writing workshop, the participants were asked to focus on factors they believed shaped their identities, such inter-relational experiences with schooling, family, community, and the juvenile court system. This holistic perspective was supported by Pinar's position on the complexity and "ever-evolving relations between individual and world" (1998, p. 83; Pinar, 2004) an essential impetus for identity formation through transformation by helping students to gain access to the discourses and cultural narratives that constructed them as criminals.

The participant-voiced poetry in this research represents their multiple realities of juvenile delinquency. Before we could gain access to the participant's voice through poetry, it was necessary to debunk what many students believe when they hear the word poetry—"I am not good at it." As within the classroom, when the word poetry comes up, students cringe because they initially think you want them to write like well-known poets such as William Shakespeare, Langston Hughes, or Maya Angelou. One of the participants felt as though he was not good at poetry. It was like *deja vu*; I recalled him saying that as a student, so I was not surprised. After I explained free-verse poetry and how to utilize the discussion transcript to transform the data into poetry, the participants understood they had the freedom to write poetry that suited their purpose of thoughts and speech patterns. This process is consistent with the power of voice which, according to Ashby (2011), "is the right and the ability to make oneself heard and to have one's experiences and perspectives available to others; to participate in the construction of the self and to decide how to represent that self to others" (para. 3). During this phase of the research, they

were given the autonomy to utilize the transcript and/or compose a poem about whatever they felt was connected to their experiences with juvenile delinquency.

The autobiographical poetry in the research was more than the participants re-telling their personal experiences, but through the processes of reflecting, inquiring, re-thinking with a holistic view, knowledge was gained for both the participants and the reader. In order to gain this valuable knowledge, it was necessary for the participants to both critique and analyze how experiences with juvenile delinquency have shaped their lives. They had to re-visit the painful and embarrassing emotions connected to incarceration. They had to face the truth about how they initially became involved with the juvenile justice system in combination with inquiring whether the dynamics of family, community, zero-tolerance policies, and/or race contributed to their arrests or subsequent arrest. According to McKnight (2017), autobiography “does not deny the wretched and powerful discourses” of the past, but instead challenges them in a way that “unveils and constitutes” identity (p. 334).

This use of identity, supported by Pinar’s 2004 work, suggested that an individual is comprised of subject positions as determined by society (such as delinquency) and the existential impulse to make meaning, as well as to seek and go beyond the constraints created by such positions in a way that opens up more choices in terms of potential identities (such as those contrary to being labeled delinquent). This process cultivates awareness of voice and how voice can affect the world in which we live. Through voice, the participants in this study began to recognize that it was not just their poor choices that led to their delinquency, but it was an inter-relational complicated entanglement between them and the world in which they resided, to include but not limited to the emerging themes in this study (race, zero-tolerance policies, formal

labeling, social exclusion, and inadequate academic and juvenile justice systems). At this point they were afforded an opportunity to consider how they might think and act differently.

One participant specifically made reference to how he turned to drug use to cope with the death of his father and how the absence of a father in his life led to discipline issues with his stepfather and male school administrators and teachers at school. He acknowledged his behavior as immature and on the last line of his poem under the “Life Now” heading he made reference to how he might act differently by referencing I Corinthians 13:11 which reads:

When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.
(I Corinthians 13:11, The King James Version)

According to Kehily (1995), the interrelation of the past and present, the act of re-creating the past, makes it possible for discovery and invention of the self. Through their poetry, the participants traveled from a painful past to what they hope for in the future.

The Themes

With the intent to honor and preserve the voices of the participants and to investigate how the data from this project engage with the broader educational narratives of the school to prison pipeline, this study employed collaborative analysis utilizing thematic analysis. This choice supported placing faith in the storyteller’s voice to the extent of “not analyzing, not verifying, not seeking trustworthiness, but plugging into the experience of listening” (Hendry, 2007, p. 495), which is at the heart of this study. During the analysis phase, the participants were given the liberty to decide what they identified as important in communicating their stories in addition to how they made sense of their stories, represented by thematic coding. For the participants, this was probably the most disliked phase of the project because it included combing through the data

multiple times. Through the collaborative analysis of the discussion transcript and autobiographical poetry the following themes were constructed.

- Delinquency
- Zero Tolerance Policies
- Race
- Formal Labeling
- Social Exclusion
- Identity
- Systems Failure (Educational and Judicial)
- The Losses

Delinquency

The initial intent of the Juvenile Justice System was to provide intervention in the lives of troubled youth with the premise that while youth may violate the law, they should be treated differently from adults and given the opportunity for rehabilitation. Different from the adult justice system and through a closed hearing and confidential records, the focus was not to be on the infraction before the court but on the personal need for rehabilitation with most of the discretion left to the juvenile court judge who advocates for the best interest of the child with the sole intent for the adolescent to not only transition back into society, but to flourish (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2001). From listening to the African American males in this study, the juvenile court system failed in its mission. From the perspective of the juvenile court system, delinquency is the status of being adjudicated. From the perspectives of the participants, delinquency was a life-changing occurrence and an ongoing nightmare with far reaching consequences. I was surprised that every participant was able to recall the exact age,

location, and circumstances that led to their initial interaction and subsequent contacts with juvenile court services.

For the participants, who were adjudicated delinquent between the ages of 11 and 13 and placed on juvenile probation, a system created to rehabilitate pushed them out of school and into a criminal system. How does this happen? Based on the experiences of the participants, this happened once the judge said, “detained” and they were legally labeled *delinquent*. At this point, they became disenfranchised through legal silencing and removed from traditional schooling, community, and family. This not only produced harm to these young men, but also resulted in institutional ignorance and social exclusion. Institutional ignorance is cultivated through the absence of the voices of those whom the institutions claim to serve. How is it possible to adequately serve those labeled delinquent when the voice of the one being served is absent from the discourse? As a teacher in the classroom and a researcher of those detained by juvenile court services, what I heard from many students was, “they won’t listen to me.” Research indicated that forced exclusion through the status of delinquency results in alienation, marginalization, and stigmatization resulting in the disruption of the educational process and decreasing the probability of successfully re-entering society and increasing the probability of future incarcerations, especially among African American male adolescents (Kim et al., 2010).

Research indicated that over the past 40 years there has been an overwhelming influx in prison population within the United States (Heitzeg, 2009) and within this mass incarceration is an over-representation of African Americans (Alexander, 2012). The same trend is represented in the juvenile justice system, transforming a system, with initial reformative goals, into a punitive system that serves as a feeder, a source for the school-to-prison pipeline. A pattern where students are being “pushed out” of schools into the juvenile justice system and into the prison.

The school-to-prison pipeline is defined as a “collection of policies, practices, conditions and prevailing consciousness that facilitate both the criminalization within the educational environments and the processes by which this criminalization results in the incarceration of youth” (Heitzeg, 2009; Morris, 2012, p. 2).

Zero Tolerance Policies

The school-to-prison pipeline has become “the dominant frame” by which to examine the lived experiences of students, disproportionately Black, who are criminalized in their learning environments (Morris, 2012, p. 2). Whereas zero-tolerance policies were implemented with the hopes of preventing mass school shootings, such policies are now identified as a critical component of the school-to-prison pipeline (Derlowitz et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2010; Mitchell, 2014). Schools originally designed to educate have now become facilitators to this pipeline through policies that interpret all conduct the same regardless of context. Context which may include a history of poverty, stressful life events, child abuse and neglect, physical and mental disabilities, and low academic achievement. All of these factors increase the likelihood of juvenile court referrals, arrests, and incarceration for minor infractions (Children Defense Fund, 2007). This is specifically true for African Americans who are targeted for a wide range of infractions that represent the disparity in discipline between them and their White counterparts (Laura, 2014; Mitchell, 2014). Specific to this study, all of the participants in this study, indicated how the absence of a father in the home negatively impacted their lives.

All of the participants concurred that involvement with juvenile court services changed the academic environment for them. This is consistent with research that indicated that zero tolerance policies facilitate criminalization within academic environments and the processes by which criminalization results in the incarceration of youth (Morris, 2012). The participants

attested to experiencing multiple arrests at school, in the hallways at their lockers with police and dogs as their peers watched. In their own words,

*They could have waited until school was over.
They didn't show no mercy.
Every time I got arrested.*

Instead of school being a place of learning, the participants felt as though they were continually being monitored and were expected to meet a different set of standards, which in essence was true. The merging of zero tolerance policies along with juvenile court policies created a panopticon system of surveillance whereby policies of power were used to continuously and purposely monitor (Foucault, 1995) the participants. When students violate the law and are adjudicated and placed under court supervision, also known as juvenile probation, they are expected to abide by the rules of supervision, specifically the rule that directly relates to school which reads

I will attend school daily, apply best effort, and maintain passing grades, follow all school rules, adhere to dress code of conduct and address all school staff and personnel with respect at all times. (Rules of Supervision, n.d.)

Failure to comply with these rules may result in further court involvement and/or placement in detention for infractions that, prior to juvenile delinquency status, would have been handled by school administrators. Minor violations at school formerly viewed as typical teen behavior, moments that administrators and teachers would ordinarily use to instruct on character and moral values from which the student might grow, for the participants became probation violations. Such violations prompted phone calls not just to the parents, but to probations officers and, consequently, resulted in subsequent arrests. Whether they were caught skipping school, bullying, or being disrespectful to administrators and teachers or with drugs or alcohol, it was not of concern because zero tolerance policies failed to distinguish the severity of offenses (Laura,

2014; Mitchell, 2014), but rather led to subsequent arrests and detention. Whereas keeping school policies is included in the signed release agreement upon release from the detention facility, as adolescents, it is questionable whether they understand that breaking a school rule could result in a probation violation, subsequent arrests, and detention. Zero tolerance policies are not racialized in theory, but the implications of such policies are profoundly racial.

Race

Zero tolerance policies disproportionately impact students of color, specifically African Americans, who are targeted for a wide range of infractions represent a disparity in discipline between African Americans and their White counterparts. This is known as the discipline gap where nationally, Black students are suspended at a higher rate than would be expected in relation to their proportion of the student population (Heitez, 2009). The convergence of zero-tolerance policies which include, but are not limited to school suspensions, expulsions, as well as referrals to juvenile court services made it difficult for the participants who were already involved with the juvenile justice system to transition back to the mainstream educational system and the traditional classroom in addition to increasing the likelihood of not receiving a high school diploma (Kim et al., 2010). Fortunately, all of the participants received a high school diploma, but not through traditional methods. Two out of the three received a diploma from the school system in which they were initially enrolled, but it was not by way of the traditional classroom due to multiple periods of incarceration and placements in multiple detention facilities and/or therapeutic programs as deemed necessary by the court. They were both placed in credit recovery internet-based programs and, ironically, were students in my classroom during the last semester of their senior year. They were released prior to their graduation with the opportunity to participate in the commencement exercises with their graduating class. The other participant

opted to complete his diploma in a private school setting due to multiple incarcerations and his frustration with a system he believed robbed him of the opportunity to advance his football career.

Whereas over the past 10 years research indicated that arrest and incarceration rates for Whites have declined by 51% and for Blacks by 43%, statistical data continue to indicate that nationwide, youth of color are more likely to be incarcerated than their White peers for similar offenses (Rovner, 2016b). The consensus of the participants was that race did play a role in their initial arrest and subsequent arrests and resulted in differential treatment between them and their White peers for the same or, from their perspectives, more serious legal infractions.

During my arrest and all of that, not really, but inside the juvenile court room, definitely. I agree, within the court system. I used to never do nothing that was like super deep where I should be sent off for a year or be held in the juvenile for months, but they did, I do agree, it was race.

Racial disproportionality of African American males is pervasive and persistent in pattern in both zero tolerance policies and the juvenile justice system. Through the lenses of critical race theory such patterns are not accidental or coincidental, do not develop, but are at least partially the result of a biased process supported by the racial hierarchy in the United States that identifies whiteness with dominance and superiority and blackness with inferiority (Alexander, 2012; Simpson, 2014). One participant believed his probation officer, who was also African American, was forced through institutional pressure to enforce tougher consequences. In his own words,

He had to put me under different standards just to keep the job. I see other folks. They dilute their drugs test, my first dilute, my first anything. My first drug test I failed. I got sent off for alcohol. I feel like it is bigger than just us two. The problem was bigger than just dealing with us, our race, it depends on who's dealing with you that forms your outcome.

Critical race theorists suggested that racial discrimination is not an occasional part of life for people of color, but rather an ongoing, everyday occurrence made visible through narratives

(Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Soloranzo & Yosso, 2001) and specific to this study, autobiographical poetry. This behavior is not absent from the educational setting and cannot be explained by differences in behavior but leans toward differential enforcement of zero tolerance policies (Heitzeg, 2009). Research indicated that it is not the behavior of Black male students that creates the discipline gap, but that the problem is rooted in negative perceptions rooted in racist beliefs, which is fueled by negative media portrayal (Collier & Bush, 2012). This premise is supported by the experiences of the participants.

Folks already hearing about stuff on the news. They already see stuff on social media, so they are just going to assume, Black people are really out there stealing from people or they are really out there killing folks.

Zero tolerance policies combined with a public fear of Black boys reinforces negative stereotypes about the moral character of Black youth and, consequently, results in the criminalization and marginalization of African American youth within an institution purposed for learning. This is especially true for those labeled *delinquent*.

Formal Labeling, Social Exclusion, and Identity

Formal labels are those acquired through social control agencies. Numerous studies indicated that being formally labeled delinquent, a form of public labeling, increases the probability of subsequent deviance, and the likelihood of becoming involved in social networks which encourage and facilitate deviant behavior (Asencio & Burke, 2011; Bernburg & Krohn, 2003; Kroska et al. 2016). One of the participants attested to how out of curiosity he wanted to hang around other students labeled delinquent.

Everybody I was around was getting locked up, so out of curiosity I wanted to know why they kept on going back. I was like forget school. I ain't going back to school.

Subsequent deviance is often produced through defensive behavior created by societal reactions to being labeled delinquent. This was specifically magnified for African American males in this

study who attested to being gawked at, feeling unwanted, and questioned as criminals when they returned to school after being detained by the juvenile court services. Their peers were afraid of them and viewed them as monsters, and administrators and teachers expected the worst from them. One participant even added parents to the negative stigmatism in which he believed was prompted by,

*What white people see on television.
Telling the other parents.
They calling the school asking what y'all got going on?
Y'all not going to protect my child.*

This is classified as moral panic, a contributor to negative stereotyping of Black males fostered through negative media portrayal (Farmer, 2010; Morris, 2012), which creates public fear of Black male students labeled delinquent and makes it difficult to successfully transition back to school and community. In the words of one participant,

*Hoodlums or something and that's what they're gonna think and once they get that in their minds, it's set in stone.
Once they slap handcuffs on your wrist, positivity is out of the window for you, ain't nobody gonna think you any type of good.
You just automatically going to have that image on you for a while, until you out of school.
I was at a football game or basketball game, but you just always had these people just looking at me crazy. I got use to it though, at first it was kind of rough.
It creates a track record.
Like a warning sign.
You did what you did, but that ain't who you are.*

The belief of being bad and criminal is supported by research that indicated that social identities influence how we judge and view ourselves (Rogers et al., 2015). One participant specifically spoke about how he began to question whether or not he was a good person. The formal label *juvenile delinquent* imputed a negative identity and self-concept that resulted in the participants viewing themselves in ways reflected upon them by others. Research suggested that

negative stigmatization creates a “virtual identity,” an accumulation of negative characteristics imputed upon individuals that take precedence over their actual identity (Simson, 2014, p. 535).

*You know he got the stripes you know (Street credibility, respect for going to jail)
I am a big dog to you.
When it gives you that image. It opens just more than one door.*

This is consistent with labeling theory that suggested that being labeled delinquent prompts the development of “self-deviant meanings” which perpetuates deviant behavior and subsequently alters the life course of juveniles through exclusion from conventional opportunities and increased involvement with others labeled delinquent (Kroska et al., 2016, p. 86; Sampson & Laub, 1997). Black males who are labeled *juvenile delinquent* hold membership in multiple social groups (Black, male, delinquent), and are considered a bad boy or criminal, not only internalize these depictions that provoke low self-esteem, self-doubt, and lack of motivation, but also tend to act out these roles to their own demise (Duncan, 2002). This assertion is supported by the participants’ narratives:

*It made me question myself.
Am I a bad person?
I agree with that, it made me second guess who I am.*

In response to the negative treatment and social exclusion, the participants felt as though they had to defend themselves and act out who or what others thought they were—criminals. They believed if they were labeled a *bad boy*, they might as well act like one. They admitted involvement in bullying and verbal confrontations with students, administrators, and teachers. Two of the participants engaged in substance abuse as a means of coping with the anxiety of such negative stigmatism. This type of behavior is consistent with Langberg and Fedders (2013) who believed that multiple incarcerations result in students feeling “frustrated, unwanted and

alienated, factors which contribute to further delinquency and criminal behavior, both in school and in the community” especially among African American boys (p. 661).

As a result of social exclusion, they opted to hang out with other students labeled *juvenile delinquent*, which only led to subsequent arrests. Research explained this as a “sense of we-ness” perpetuated by cultural exclusion and the need to belong (Rogers & Way, 2015, p. 407). This sense of “we-ness” is attributed to how the participants at the onset of the study were immediately comfortable with each other and seemed to bond during the workshops although two of them had not seen each other in at least 3 years and had never met the younger participant in the study. This sense of “we-ness” produced a sense of camaraderie and a mutual respect throughout the research. During the workshops, they respectfully waited their turn to speak. Additionally, they seemed to embrace their participation in the research as a group project, meaning “we are in this together.” I witnessed this in operation when at Workshop 3, one of the participants was more than 30 minutes late and the other two did not want to begin without him.

In addition to perpetuating negative stigmatism and social exclusion, formal labeling is a form of silencing that not only denies an individual the opportunity to construct the self, but further prevents them from deciding how they want to represent themselves to others as well as the having right to have their experiences and perspectives heard (Britzman, 1989). The legal silencing placed upon the participants not only denied them personal dignity that goes beyond the juvenile justice system, but became a “part of a larger phenomenon of expressive disempowerment” which research indicated includes, but is not limited to minorities, the poor, the undereducated, and juveniles (Natapoff, 2005, p. 1452). Whereas the participants in this study never used the word *silencing* or spoke of being silenced, they often expressed that no one would listen to them, meaning the school and juvenile court systems.

*It was always my word against my mom.
The adult is going to win every time.
They going to automatically go with what the adult says every time.*

This made them angry. As they shared their experiences about incidents at school, being arrested, or going to court, the anger and resentment toward school and court administrators was visceral (inflection and tone in voice and body language) toward those who never gave them an opportunity to share their narratives.

Systems Failure (Educational and Judicial)—The Losses

The praxis of critical pedagogy and autobiographical writing utilized in the study created a space for the participants to interrogate the academic and judicial system, to explore who they are and how they arrived at where they are, and to come to understand that the educational and/or judicial systems should not define them. During the discussion workshops, the participants openly discussed how being labeled a juvenile delinquent automatically placed an “X” on their back, meaning that students at school automatically thought they were criminals and wanted nothing to do with them or were told by their parents not to associate with them. To combat this, and to fulfill the need to belong, they turned to other students who were like them. Their behavior was supported by research that concluded that exclusion from normal routines and conventional opportunities increases contact with and the support of “deviant subgroups” (Sampson & Laub, 1997, p. 139). When this happens, students involved with the juvenile justice system experience cumulative disadvantages. Cumulative disadvantages are generated through negative consequences (arrests, labeling, incarceration, probation) and produce a snowball effect that alters opportunities in ways that limit their ability to pursue conventional routes to socioeconomic success. Due to the multiple detentions and placements in the Department of Youth facilities, the participants were robbed of the opportunity to obtain a driver’s license or a

part-time job. For two of the participants, these disadvantages, combined with the legal fees and court costs, led to further crime. They needed money, so they did whatever it took to get it.

From the perspectives of the participants, the employment of zero tolerance policies at school not only pushed them into the juvenile court system, but perpetuated additional criminal activity due to the criminal education they received during their stints of incarceration. This is consistent with research that indicated that the juvenile justice system transforms African American males into future criminals even as the official claim is that the system rehabilitates (Kim et al., 2010; Langberg & Fedders, 2013). This premise was documented by the experiences of the participants in this study who, between the ages of 11 and 18, were incarcerated more than 20 times combined and, between the three of them, two participants later received adult charges with both receiving adult probation and one serving 3 years in prison. Additionally, they held the educational and judicial systems responsible for robbing them of traditional school experiences that should have included academic learning, social development, and success through extracurricular activities. In the words of the participants,

*Juvenile did its justice but it didn't do it, it took. Juvenile, it helped me but it took so many ways to help me that also damaged me.
It pauses your life and it's a mental burden.
It's a lot of stuff in the juvenile system that doesn't add up.*

The participant was speaking of the differentials between his arrest for marijuana while others remained free on other major drug usage charges.

*I know somebody who was locked up at least 20 times and was never DYS committed. (Department of Youth Service programs are long term)
I was DYS committed after my 3rd or 4th offense.
The problem is that it is systematically created.*

All of the participants were honest in that they all admitted to their wrongdoings, but they expressed anger about how they believed the traditional school systems pushed them out and

would not allow them to rejoin their school communities. One participant specifically spoke of raising his grades to a passing standard during an alternative academic placement and asking to go back to his home school. However, he was told he could not. He felt he deserved to go back, but the court kept saying he would do better in a smaller environment. His comment on this was,

We will never know if that's true or not because I never went back to regular high school.

Whereas they all earned a high school diploma, they mourned over missed opportunities of traditional schooling and loss of normal adolescent activities, which included loss of socialization and development of relationship with peers, loss of involvement in high school athletics that prevented advancement to collegiate athletics, and loss of junior and senior proms and other social events. For these participants and many other African American adolescent males, they will never recoup these losses. What was heartbreaking during the discussion about losses was to hear them ask "What will we say to their children when asked about prom pictures, about high school, and about sports?"

New Voices—Critical and Emancipatory

This research did not limit the participants to one voice, one narrative way of interacting with the world, but autobiography poetry did help them to gain access to different voices. Through the liberatory praxis of critical pedagogy, a raising of critical consciousness, the participants moved from being objects of the juvenile justice system to human subjects who breathe, have feelings, and, most importantly, voices worth hearing. This movement would be considered by hooks (1989) as a wakening from oppression and by Britzman (2003) as a shifting relationship among perspectives, location, and the interactions, all conducive to producing not just one voice, but many voices (p. 34). Saying this, I believe it is impossible to know all of the

voices produced through this study, but from the storied experiences of the participants, the following voices emerged and resonated throughout the data.

Critical Voice

A voice of inquiry was critical for interrogating the participants' experiences with the juvenile justice system. According to Friere (1970), apart from this type of inquiry, “individuals cannot be truly human” (pp. 71-72). Through this voice, they began to raise questions about the inequalities of power within the juvenile justice system and how these inequalities have obstructed their participation in society, in addition to exploring their realities of juvenile delinquency and linking them to social contexts; specifically, the court system, school, and community. For example, one participant questioned why he was always returned to detention for every probation violation as he observed his White peers violate probation many times and not be detained. He linked this to the systemic power of racism he believed influenced his African American probation officer to render harsher consequences for fear of losing his job. All of the participants linked being labeled *juvenile delinquent* to not only being ostracized and misunderstood at school and within their community, but also to the racist beliefs White people hold about Black boys. The ability to make connections between them and the social context in which they were entrenched is considered by Friere (1973) as the highest level of critical consciousness.

Whether it was through the discussion workshop or the autobiographical poetry, this voice encouraged the participants to embrace their individuality, and name the whos, whats, wheres, and hows in relation to their experiences with the juvenile court system. It was likened to what Taylor and Settelmaier (2003) referred to as the process of “peeling an onion” where one layer after another is pulled away. Coming to knowledge of the inequalities of power within the

juvenile justice system and how these inequalities have obstructed their participation in society is emancipatory knowledge, which for the participants in this study fostered a freedom to voice their realities without fear of repercussions.

Emancipatory Voice

A voice of freedom, fostered through emancipatory knowledge, disrupts the legal silencing placed upon these participants through their involvement with the juvenile court system. Additionally, through the revival of the silenced consciousness, the participants questioned the master narrative and embraced their own narrative. One example of this is when one of the participants was not allowed to return to his regular high school after being enrolled in a credit recovery program even though his grades were sufficient. He was told by juvenile court, no, because they thought he would do better in a smaller environment. His counternarrative was, *we will never know if that's true or not*. He knew his grades were good enough to be in a traditional school setting whether the court agreed or not. Whereas the participants' voices were not honored in the juvenile court system, this voice contests such bondage and emancipates them to acknowledge and name what they considered unjust acts inflicted upon them by the system. Although it will never matter to the court what they said or how they felt, nor change the past, what matters is they were free to inquire and communicate their experiences. What this did for them was to provide an opportunity to understand how social relationships are manipulated and distorted by power relations and privilege (McLaren, 2015) in addition to moving them away from the negative identity placed upon them that led to an accumulation of internalized negative beliefs about themselves (being bad, a thug, a hoodlum, or a delinquent) to a point where they began to not only raise questions about how the school and the court systems handled their cases

and whether or not justice was served, but also began to think about themselves differently and considered how they could move forward in becoming successful citizens.

Through the critical and emancipatory voices, the participants began to become aware of the oppression placed upon them through the dynamics and consequences of a “collection of policies, practices, conditions and prevailing consciousness that facilitate both the criminalization with the educational environments and the processes by which this criminalization results in incarceration of youth and young adults”—the school-to-prison pipeline, a framework to which they had no clue they were involuntarily enrolled (Morris, 2012, p. 2). This is a framework the Children’s Defense Fund (2007) argued began in the cradle, before a single word was spoken or a single step taken, due to racial and economic injustices in America. The Children’s Defense Fund has termed this phenomenon as the Cradle to Prison Pipeline that encapsulates African American children from birth through childhood and adolescence and places them at a high risk for premature death, prison, and failed lives. Their response to these injustices was,

It’s time for America to become America. *The Cradle to Prison Pipeline* crisis can be reduced to one simple fact: The United States of America is not a level playing field for all children and our nation does not value and protect all children’s lives equally. (p. 3)

For the participants, this involuntary enrollment in the school-to-prison pipeline may have begun in the cradle, nevertheless, it was responsible for multiple detentions in the juvenile justice system, juvenile and adult probation, and prison time.

Whereas the critical and emancipatory knowledge gained through this research alone is not enough to derail the school-to-prison pipeline, and cannot bring back what was lost for the participants in this study, it is a step toward individual transformation and instrumental to understanding how social relationships are manipulated and distorted by power relations and

privilege; but most importantly, it contributes to social justice, equality, and empowerment (McLaren, 2015).

I am hopeful that as you listened to their voice(s) you embraced the literal, metaphorical, and political positions communicated through their autobiographical reflections (Britzman, 1989, 2003). Literally, voice represents perspective and speech; metaphorically, the conveyance of feelings through words; and politically, the commitment to the right to speak and be heard, all cultivated by critical and emancipatory voices.

Implications

Research indicated that youth in the United States are incarcerated at a higher rate than anywhere in the world (Burns Institute, n.d.). Although over the past 10 years research concluded that arrests and detention rates for both White and Black adolescents have declined, for Whites by 51% and for Blacks by 43%, statistical data continue to indicate that nationwide, Black adolescents are more likely to be incarcerated at a rate 4.6 times that of their White peers for similar crimes (Rovner, 2016a). At an alarming rate, African American adolescents are falling prey to the school-to-prison pipeline.

A significant key to turning this tide can be found within those who have experienced the system.

*I have been to programs. I know how the programs work. You work the program and then you go home and then you do what you do and then you go back to another program.
It's just a recycling mode.*

A tragic failure of the juvenile justice system is rooted in the legal silencing placed upon the adolescent Black males in this study and among all adolescents currently involved in the system. Instead of assisting these young men become productive citizens who can speak for themselves, the system stripped away not just educational and physical freedom, but more importantly their

voice. Loss of voice spurns distrust, hopelessness, and despair and renders students invisible. The silencing, the loss of voice, within the educational and judicial system, is a continuation of discrimination of Black males and a form of institutional silencing (Natapoff, 2005). And to the demise of those involved in the juvenile judicial system, it creates a narrative gap in the school-to-prison pipeline discourse, which ensures that school administrators, the court, and the public will probably never hear the experiences and stories of those at the center of the juvenile justice system. Without the voices of those encapsulated by the juvenile justice system, how can justice be served? How can the lives of African American adolescent males be rehabilitated when they are deemed invisible?

Whereas research on the school-to-prison pipeline is copious, most is based on the perspectives of researchers who have never experienced juvenile delinquency. Through prioritizing African American male voices as central for engagement and analysis in research, this study disrupted the one directional narratives about the school-to-prison pipeline by including the voices of those once encapsulated by the juvenile justice system in the discourse, thus minimizing the narrative gap fostered by institutional and legal silencing in addition to exposing the limitations of statistics about juvenile delinquency.

The autobiographical poetry in this study embraced the individuality of participants who have experienced juvenile delinquency by creating a space for them to speak from their own location, thus acknowledging them as producers of knowledge while also contributing to new ways of knowing through a format that illuminated and honored their subjective experiences (Furman, 2007; Furman et al., 2006). Their poetry not only reflected their relationship with schooling and the juvenile justice system and how they have come to understand and make sense of juvenile delinquency, but also reflected how they have embraced their individuality and

regained their humanity. The interrelation of the past and present, the act of recreating the past, made it possible for the discovery and invention of the self (Kehily, 1995). Their poems communicated a rich and deep understanding of how Black male teenagers experienced juvenile delinquency and even now, as adult Black men still continue to experience the impact of juvenile delinquency.

This study provided the participants with a means to challenge the structural and systematic narratives about juvenile delinquency among African American males that much of the dominant cultures in the United States accept as true and determined. In saying that, if the current level of incarceration in the United States persists among African Americans males, there is a 1 in 3 chance of them becoming prey to the school-to-prison pipeline. This is alarming and is supported by research that does not include solutions for change. How do we begin to turn this around? We begin including those served by the juvenile justice system in the conversation by creating a space to honor their voices, perspectives, and experiences. I believe this is our best chance for developing effective programs.

As far as implications for future studies, in order to increase the credibility of the non-traditional methods employed in this study, it is necessary to utilize such methods in research of other oppressive social issues and across curriculums. I further assert that the use of critical autobiographical poetry writing can be a valuable asset to individual transformation so should become a standard practice in programs that provide services to at-risk populations.

Limitations of the Study

The limitation of this study was the sample size. I had hoped for at least eight participants, but was only able to contact five and only three were able to participate due to work

schedules and transportation. Whereas this did not hinder the ability to answer the research questions or the quality of the findings, a larger sample size is needed in order to adequately voice the disparities experienced by African American adolescents with the juvenile justice system and how they communicate with the school-to-prison pipeline discourse.

One Final Word

The voice(s) of African American adolescent males involved with the criminal justice system is more than just individual meanings of experiences, but also includes relational experiences, such as the relationships between the school-to-prison pipeline and race, school discipline, juvenile court, and academic achievement. Grumet (1990a) referred to this collaboration as choral and not just solo experiences. Fueled by the passion to allow the participants' voice(s) to be the dominant voice in this study and because it is important for their voices to resonate with you, I wanted their voices to be the last you hear. Below is a poem crafted utilizing the participants' composed poetry written during the data collection phase. This poem is a re-representation of data and is not new to qualitative research and is considered an established and most popular method for representing the words of participants (Poindexter, 2002; Richardson, 1994). I believe this poem adequately represents the dynamics of the school-to-prison pipeline as experienced by the three young Black men represented in this study. Hopefully, their choral will begin to initiate the social process of understanding and prompt change.

Let Me Speak

*First arrest for possession
I was only eleven
But less than 6 weeks
I was back for a weapon
You adapt or don't make it
Went from smoking to taking*

*Learned how 2 do all the wrong things
The right way
Others get grounded for mistakes,
But me
I go to the cage
Woke up the man in a baby
Now I'm on pills, I'm shaking
Never will it be the same
Trynna make up for lost time
4ever I'll be in pain*

*Sometime I wanna cry
Cuz so bad wanna rewind
I use 2 wanna die
I remember everything
The scars from the pain
Jail wasn't the worse thing,
But the looks of shame*

*I Was Gone That Long
You can't get the time back
Wasted so much time in my life
I will never get back
I missed all my teenage years
I wasn't playing sports
I wasn't in school*

*I will never forget that day!
The day the world turned upside down
I understand punishing for doing wrong
But do the same to yours as well!
Police looking for me
P.O. comes to my school
She wants a drug test
I get in a fight at school
I get a probation violation
Boot camp, 28 days
Back at School
In high school now
People already know what's up with me
I started getting in trouble again!
This time a big boy charge
3 years in prison*

The Participants

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APPENDIX A
IRB APPROVAL

May 29, 2019

Teresa Whiting
ELPTS
College of Education
Box 870302

Re: IRB Application #: 19-009 "Let Me Speak: Poetic Expressions of Juvenile Delinquency as Experienced by African American Adolescent Males"

Dear Teresa Whiting:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your proposed research. Your application has been given approval according to 45 CFR part 46.

The approval for your application will lapse on May 15, 2020. If your research will continue beyond this date, please submit the Continuing Review to the IRB as required by University policy before the lapse. Please note, any modifications made in research design, methodology, or procedures must be submitted to and approved by the IRB before implementation. Please submit a final report form when the study is complete.

Please use reproductions of the IRB approved informed consent form to obtain consent from your participants.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,



APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Informed Consent for a Non-Medical Study

Title of Study: LET ME SPEAK: Poetic Expressions of Juvenile Delinquency as Experienced by African American Adolescent Males

Primary Investigator: Teresa Whiting, Doctoral Student, the University of Alabama

INFORMATION: You are being asked to take part in a research study titled **Let Me Speak: Poetic Expressions of Juvenile Delinquency as Experienced by African American Adolescent Males**. The study is being conducted by Teresa Whiting, a doctoral candidate in the Department of Educational Leadership, Policy and Technology Studies in the College of Education at the University of Alabama. This study will be supervised by Dr. Douglas McKnight who is a professor of Educational Leadership and Foundations of Education.

STUDY DETAILS:

What is the purpose of this study?

Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done, and what it will involve. This study will provide an opportunity for African American males with past involvement with the juvenile justice system, to give expression to how their experiences have shaped their life and self-identity. As a researcher, I seek to discover how such experiences fit the overall narrative about how African American adolescent males experience juvenile delinquency.

Although research on African American males involved with the juvenile justice system is plentiful; most is primarily the voices of others from an outside perspective. This study is unique in that it will provide an opportunity for African American males who were once labeled “juvenile delinquent” to speak for themselves through autobiographical poetry.

Why have I been asked to take part in this study?

You have been asked to participate in this study because you identify as an African American male between the ages of 18 - 22 with past involvement with the juvenile justice system and have been detained in a juvenile detention center in central Alabama.

How many people will be in this study?

Five

What will I be asked to do in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do these things:

- Participate in 5 workshops, for approximately 90-120
 - Workshop 1 - Discussion/written reflection of experiences with the juvenile justice system (audio recorded)
 - Workshop 2 - Compose an autobiographical poem
 - Workshop 3 - Edit, review, read and discuss autobiographical poem
 - Workshops 4 & 5 - Review poems and other data for themes

How much time will I spend being in this study?

The entire study will take between 7- 10 hours of your time over a period of approximately 8 weeks.

Why is this study important?

The heart of this research is to provide a space for the participants to be open and candid about how they make meaning of their experiences with the juvenile justice system. Your autobiographical poems and discussion of your experiences will be used as data for this project. By providing a space for you to discuss and compose reflections and poetry based on your experiences, my hope for this study is that the results will be helpful in developing effective programs to combat the increase of African American adolescent males involvement with the juvenile justice system, in addition to reaching multiple audiences.

COSTS TO SUBJECT: The only cost to you from this study is your time.

COMPENSATION: You will not be compensated for being in this study.

RISKS: Participants may experience some emotional distress due to a memory or storied experience—but the shared experiences and workshop discussions are voluntary, and participants will only be asked to share information according to their level of comfort. Every effort will be made to minimize any risks, including referral information to Chilton-Shelby Mental Health 24 hour free service at (205)663-1252. You are encouraged to take advantage of this service.

An additional risk is the breach of confidentiality by other participants. Throughout this study, I will remind all participants of the importance of confidentiality; however, the confidentiality of the participants cannot be guaranteed.

BENEFITS: Participants may develop an understanding of how their experiences with juvenile delinquency were connected to the broader narratives of the school to prison pipeline and not just isolated events based only their individual choices.

PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY: Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you (this included your name) will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission, or as required by law. Confidentiality is protected by removing your name and using pseudonyms (unless you request otherwise), keeping all hard copy data and materials in locked drawers and doors, restricting who can access data, and destroying raw data once the narratives have been de-identified. All audio recordings will be deleted after the data is transcribed.

During the workshop sessions, I will request that the other participants keep the discussions confidential; however, it is not possible to promise confidentiality.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION: Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is your free choice. Even if you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time and without giving a reason. You are free to not answer any question or questions you choose.

The alternative to being in this study is not to participate.

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD: The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board (“the IRB”) is the committee that protects the rights of people in research studies. The IRB may review study records from time to time to be sure that people in research studies are being treated fairly and that the study is being carried out as planned.

CONTACT INFORMATION: If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the study right now, please ask them. If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the study later on, please call Teresa Whiting, at 205-296-6552 or Dr. Douglas McKnight at 205-246-4884.

If you have questions about your rights as a person in a research study, call Ms. Tanta Myles, the Research Compliance Officer of the University, at 205-348-8461, or toll-free at 1-877-820-3066.

You may also ask questions, make suggestions, or file complaints and concerns through the IRB Outreach website at <http://ovpred.ua.edu/research-compliance/prco/> or email the Research Compliance office at rscompliance@research.ua.edu.

After you participate, you are encouraged to complete the survey for research participants that is online at the outreach website or you may ask the investigator for a copy of it and mail it to the University Office for Research Compliance, Box 870127, 358 Rose Administration Building, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0127.

CONSENT: I have read this consent form. I have had a chance to ask questions. I agree to take part in it. I will receive a copy of this consent form to keep.

Circle Yes or No.

I agree to have workshops audio recorded. Yes No
Recordings will not be used/shared outside
of this research project.

I agree to my writing(s), discussion input, and poetry to Yes No
be used in the publication of this research.

Signature of Research Participant

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

APPENDIX C

DATA ANALYSIS FORM

Workshop 4

Data Analysis

What is data analysis? A way of classifying the data and coming to a conclusion about this study. What is being said? What are we hearing?

As we read through the transcripts and poems we will analyze for the following:

Codes: Write down a word or phrase that represents how you interpret what is happening in the data.

Categories: A grouping of the codes that share similar characteristics. For example, a category of family members could include individual codes of mother, father, sister, or brother.

Themes: An outcome of coding, could include a major element. This step moves beyond description to interpreting and asking why the categories are significant.

(Saldana, 2013)