

Perceptions of the School-to-Prison Pipeline and the Educational Experiences of Formerly Incarcerated Black Males

Dr. Kristen L. Robinson
Northcentral University

Abstract

The school-to-prison pipeline detrimentally impacts the educational experiences of Black males through harsh disciplinary and exclusionary practices evident in the educational system. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the previous K–12 lived educational experiences of formerly incarcerated Black males who have been affected by the school-to-prison pipeline and harsh disciplinary and exclusionary processes. Through the lens of social learning theory and Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, two research questions guided this study: (1) What are the previous K–12 lived educational experiences of formerly incarcerated Black males affected by the school-to-prison pipeline and harsh disciplinary and exclusionary processes? (2) What are the perceptions of previously incarcerated Black males regarding how teachers have contributed to the school-to-prison pipeline? Ten formally incarcerated Black males were interviewed regarding their experience with disciplinary and exclusionary practices during K-12. Semi-structured interviews were conducted via Zoom and transcripts were analyzed via a thematic analysis. The findings included two themes and two subthemes related to the experiences of Black males in the educational system. Themes included the presence of exclusionary practices and lack of support to root causes of behavior problems, teachers not serving as positive role models, and the lack of academic and career guidance from teachers. The results highlight the importance of systemic and structural change in educational environments, including a cultural awareness training among teaching staff, and the need to eliminate harsh disciplinarian exclusionary practices. Future research is needed to evaluate the efficacy of cultural competency trainings for mitigating the school-to-prison pipeline.

Keywords: Black males, Exclusionary Punishment, Harsh Discipline, Incarceration, School-to-Prison Pipeline