

## Participant Information Packet

### *'No Excuses' Discipline: The Sobering Realities of Black Males Exposed to Cumulative Trauma in Urban Poverty*



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**Note: This study is dedicated to the young men pictured above. May God bless them all.**

Michigan State University: Institutional Review Board: Human Subject Research

## INTRODUCTION|BLACK MALES AND TRAUMA

Nearly 70-100% of all African-American children living in poverty are exposed to [at least one form of] trauma (Dempsey, Overstreet, & Moely, 2000; Reiss & Price, 1996). Then, at the point of exposure, research suggests that between 23-29% will exhibit symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Hughes & Shin, 2011). Furthering complicating this narrative, data also claim that between 81-98% of all adults who had at least one adverse childhood experience (ACE) will report experiencing at least one other ACE throughout their lifespan (Dong et al., 2004). There is growing evidence that young Black males are more likely to experience these situations earlier and more frequently than their counterparts because of the communities they reside in and the families they belong to (Kiser, 2007).

Additionally, Black males are considered one of the most polarizing demographic groups in the entire United States of America (Bouie, 2014; Braithwaite & Taylor, 1992). There always seems to be a perpetual target on the backs of young Black males in this country, whether it is justified or unjustified (Devega, 2015). A case can be made that young Black males are confronted with challenges that no other group of young people in the United States of America have. They are unfairly portrayed as inherently violent and delinquent in the media (Dorfman, 2001) without reference to the etiologies and factual evidences that may produce profoundly divergent narratives from what is actually reported (Devega, 2015; Millner, 2014; Kiser, 2007). They are under siege in most statistical categories that matter in America as well, from school drop-outs and special education to disproportionate sentencing and incarceration rates to being the victims of gun violence by White police officers and other Black males (NAACP, 2016; Millner, 2014; Black Male Statistics, 2016).

Widespread exposure to trauma in early adolescence intensifies these problematic and unfortunate realities and can be life altering and even life threatening for these young men (Redwood et al., 2010; Evans & English, 2002). Their extreme, sometimes chaotic environmental conditions, make life ten times harder to navigate than it may for other demographic groups (Millner, 2014; Black Males Statistics, 2014). The troubling circumstances they endure are often compounded by more severe traumatic circumstances that make survival difficult and somewhat costly.

Still, there is an unadulterated disregard for Black males positionality as over-racialized, hyper-criminalized human beings in what is thought to be Post-Racial America. Historically, America's greatest institutions have failed Black males, and urban schools today have proven to be no different (Harper & Davis, 2012). Urban schools around the nation educate thousands of Black males each year with below average results (Harper & Davis, 2012; Reckdahl, 2015).

National statistics on discipline state that large numbers of Black males are unequally disciplined, suspended and expelled more often from schools every year compared to other demographic groups (Giroux, 2015; UDCR, 2014; Millner, 2014). Subsequent to their departure from urban schools, many Black males enter the department of corrections. School-to-prison pipeline literature suggests that these schools are complicit in their arrival at penal institutions (Raible & Irizarry, 2010; ACLU, 2015; Fowler, 2011; Boyd, 2009; Hirschfield, 2008). This troubling narrative has to change soon for Black males to thrive and have a chance at achieving the American Dream.

### **WHAT'S AT STAKE?**

Plainly, this issue can be viewed as a matter of life and death for Black males. Urban schools utilizing 'No Excuses' disciplinary and socialization practices have the ideal opportunity to redeem themselves and fulfill their promises to serve Black males to the best of their abilities. Instead of being lumped with controversial educational legislation like the school to prison pipeline, urban schools can forge a more refreshing and inclusive path towards educating Black males. The path may include requiring educators to be proficient in disciplines like ecology and sociology that explain how individuals interact with and respond to their respective environments (home, community, school). It may also include a more holistic approach to urban schooling as well, one where educators must develop fundamental understandings of the risk factors that continuously plague students academically, emotionally and psychologically. Some Black males affected by trauma are extremely resilient and resourceful individuals. However, many fall prey to their experiences. It is my hope that this study will provide urban educators with the necessary tools needed to take steps towards transforming the academic and life success of Black males exposed to cumulative trauma. Through this process, some urban educators may begin to appreciate the journeys of Black males and initiate the repair of relationships that were broken by historical discrimination, mistrust and subjugation (Devega, 2015).

### **PURPOSE AND SIGNIFICANCE**

This study is needed because there are legitimate concerns that discipline policies, socialization practices and aligned behavioral norms at 'No Excuses' charter schools could potentially trigger previous traumas that were suffered by Black males in urban environments. It is also significant because it purposely hoists the psychological and emotional health of urban families to the center of educational and community discourses. Historically, mental health and trauma within families of color were not discussed and worse, deemed as taboo. Therefore, positioning these topics as pertinent to the holistic education of Black males in urban education could spark a national debate about how to serve these young men more effectively. Additionally, having a robust policy dialogue about these issues can be transformative for

healing in urban communities overwhelmed by chronic trauma. It can also shed light on the cultural and ethnic values used to cultivate trust and belonging within these populations. Last, it may serve as the impetus for relationships between urban educators and families of color to develop.

## **DEANS OF STUDENTS**

While capturing the experiences of Black males holistically and within ‘No Excuses’ structures, it is also significant to investigate the life experiences of the individuals enforcing the disciplinary policies at these schools such as Deans, Disciplinarians, and School Culture Leaders. For Deans who have been exposed to trauma throughout their lifespan, I will examine how those experiences influence[d] their disciplinary decision-making at ‘No Excuses’ charter schools. For Deans who have not experienced widespread trauma, it will be revealing to understand the considerations and struggles that exists when enforcing discipline in these schools. Either way, this study aims to comprehend how much of their decision making derives from their own realities, hurt and past traumatic experiences. The data collected from this study can be groundbreaking and provide fodder for more comprehensive policies targeting Black males in urban poverty to emerge. Investigating these phenomena (Cumulative Trauma & No Excuses Discipline) on a deeper level has the potential to transform the educational sector for Black males in urban environments and may possibly have significant ramifications on national discipline statistics as well as the school to prison pipeline conundrum.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

### **Black Males**

- How do Black males exposed to cumulative trauma perceive “No Excuses” socialization and discipline?
- Does exposure to cumulative trauma affect the academic achievement of Black males who are/were enrolled at “No Excuses” charter schools?
- How do Black males exposed to cumulative trauma perceive healthy social and emotional development?

### **Dean of Students**

- How do Deans’ exposed to cumulative traumas perceive “No Excuses” discipline and socialization?
- Does exposure to cumulative trauma influence the way that Deans’ at “No Excuses” Charter Schools view their roles and responsibilities?

- How do Deans' exposed to cumulative traumas perceive healthy social and emotional development?

### **INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

The interviews will take place at a date, time and location that is convenient for you. There will be two interviews that will last approximately 1 hour each, although you will not be pressured to end the interview if you would like to still discuss the topic in detail. You will not have to worry about travel, as Ramon will travel to you or arrange to interview you in whichever way works best for you.

**Contact Ramon M. Griffin for your interview today.**



**Please locate your city below and do not miss the opportunity to have your voice heard!**

- New Orleans-May 30, 2016-June 24, 2016
- Detroit and Surrounding Areas-July 1, 2016-August 1, 2016
- Indiana-Flexible upon request
- Philadelphia-Flexible upon request
- New York-Flexible upon request

## **ABOUT RAMON M. GRIFFIN**

Ramon M. Griffin is a native of Ford Heights, IL. Ford Heights is a south suburb of Chicago that was once deemed the “poorest suburb” in the United States of America. He was raised and labeled at-risk during adolescence and faced insurmountable odds at every turn including widespread community violence, traumatic grief and low quality school systems. Due to his surroundings, Ramon struggled to gain access to the many pockets of knowledge and social networks that his counterparts possessed. However, the hidden curriculum in Ford Heights afforded him unmatched life experiences and critical indigenous knowledges that cannot be taught. To overcome the structural impediments he faced, Ramon exhibited perseverance, fortitude, will power and mental toughness; values that he still clings to today.

Currently, Ramon M. Griffin is a rising fourth year Ph.D. Candidate in the K-12 Educational Administration Department at Michigan State University. Prior to MSU, Ramon worked in post-adjudicated facilities for juveniles and several charter school networks in Houston, New Orleans and Detroit. He held administrative roles at the schools in New Orleans and Detroit. Ramon’s research interests include “No Excuses” Discipline, the Effects of Trauma Exposure on Educational Achievement, Urban Education Reform, Community Engagement, as well as the School to Prison Pipeline. He has presented his work at the Albert Shanker Institute in Washington, D.C., the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA), the Northeastern Educational Research Association (NERA) and many other research conferences across the country. He is an Education Pioneer and UCEA Barbara Jackson Scholar Alumni. His work has been featured in the Washington Post and on websites like Cloaking Inequity, Edushter and Diane Ravitch’s blog to name a few. Ramon is very active with the American Educational Research Association as well (AERA). He has held number positions from Newsletter Chair, to Division A Connect Series Co-Chair, and now recently appointed AERA Graduate Student Program Chair for the 2017 AERA National Convention in San Antonio.

His dissertation will explore the effects of cumulative trauma exposure on Black males who have attended or are currently attending “No Excuses” Charter Schools. The other strand of his work will examine how exposure to trauma/cumulative trauma influences the disciplinary decision making of Deans/Disciplinarians/School Culture Leaders at “No Excuses” Charter Schools. At the culmination of his doctoral studies at Michigan State University, Ramon plans to pursue career opportunities within the academy as well as the non-profit and philanthropic sectors. Ramon is a fearless advocate for marginalized youth and families. He hopes to impact urban communities, conduct transformative research and create equitable educational policies for students who are disadvantaged and disenfranchised.



## **ADDITIONAL MATERIAL FOR PARTICIPANTS**

### **List of Definitions and Key Terms**

#### **Note of Importance:**

To provide all research participants with accurate language that describes the many forms of trauma that exists, it was necessary to use the “exact” language from the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) and other academic sources.

#### **Trauma**

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

#### **Cumulative trauma**

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

#### **Community violence**

“Community Violence can be defined as exposure to intentional acts of interpersonal violence committed in public areas by individuals who are not intimately related to the victim. Common types of community violence that affect youth include individual and group conflicts” (NCTSN, 2016).

#### **Domestic Violence**

“Domestic Violence is commonly defined as a behavior, or pattern of behaviors, that occurs between intimate partners with the aim of one partner exerting control over the other” (NCTSN, 2016).

#### **Early childhood trauma**

“Early childhood trauma generally refers to the traumatic experiences that occur to children aged 0-6. Because infants' and young children's reactions may be different from older children's, and because they may not be able to verbalize their reactions to threatening or dangerous events, many people assume that young age protects children from the impact of traumatic experiences” (NCTSN, 2016).

#### **Medical Trauma**

“Pediatric medical traumatic stress refers to a set of psychological and physiological responses of children and their families to pain, injury, serious illness, medical procedures, and invasive or frightening treatment experiences” (NCTSN, 2016).

## **Natural Disasters**

“Natural Disasters are any natural catastrophe (for example, tornadoes, hurricanes, and earthquakes) or any fire, flood, or explosion that causes enough damage that local, state, or federal agencies and disaster relief organizations are called into action. Disasters can result from a man-made event (such as a nuclear reactor explosion), but if the damage is caused intentionally, it is classified as an act of terrorism” (NCTSN, 2016).

## **Neglect**

“Child neglect occurs when a parent or caregiver does not give a child the care he or she needs according to its age, even though that adult can afford to give that care or is offered help to give that care. Neglect can mean not giving food, clothing, and shelter. It can mean that a parent or caregiver is not providing a child with medical or mental health treatment or not giving prescribed medicines the child needs. Neglect can also mean neglecting the child's education. Keeping a child from school or from special education can be neglect. Neglect also includes exposing a child to dangerous environments. It can mean poor supervision for a child, including putting the child in the care of someone incapable of caring for children. It can also mean abandoning a child or expelling it from home. Neglect is the most common form of abuse reported to child welfare authorities” (NCTSN, 2016).

## **Physical Abuse**

“Physical abuse means causing or attempting to cause physical pain or injury. It can result from punching, beating, kicking, burning, or harming a child in other ways” (NCTSN, 2016).

## **Refugee Trauma**

“Refugee traumas include exposure to war, political violence, or torture. Refugee trauma can be the result of living in a region affected by bombing, shooting, or looting, as well as forced displacement to a new home due to political reasons” (NCTSN, 2016).

## **School Violence**

“School violence includes fatal and nonfatal student or teacher victimization, threats to or injury of students, fights at school, and students carrying weapons to school. Formal definitions of school violence range from very narrow to very broad. The Center for the Prevention of School Violence, for example, defines it broadly as "any behavior that violates a school's educational mission or climate of respect or jeopardizes the intent of the school to be free of aggression against persons or property, drugs, weapons, disruptions, and disorder” (NCTSN, 2016).

## **Sexual Abuse**

“Child sexual abuse includes a wide range of sexual behaviors that take place between a child and an older person or alternatively between a child and another child/adolescent. Behaviors that are sexually abusive often involve bodily contact, such as sexual kissing, touching, fondling of genitals, and intercourse. However, behaviors may be sexually abusive even if they do not involve contact, such as of genital exposure ("flashing"), verbal pressure for sex, and sexual exploitation for purposes of prostitution or pornography” (NCTSN, 2016).

## **Terrorism**

“The US Department of Defense defines terrorism as "the calculated use of violence or the threat of violence to inculcate fear, intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological” (NCTSN, 2016).



### **Traumatic Grief**

“Childhood traumatic grief may occur following a death of someone important to the child when the child perceives the experience as traumatic. The death may have been sudden and unexpected (e.g., through violence or an accident), or anticipated (e.g., illness or other natural causes)” (NCTSN, 2016).

### **Charter Schools**

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

### **‘No Excuses’ Charter Schools**

The policies and structures that many charter schools implement are called ‘No Excuses.’ Basically, “the idea is that strict guidelines for how students should behave in and out of class, enforced consistently over time, provide the basis for academic progress and can help close the achievement gap. Without them, [‘No Excuses’ educators] believe that the school [will] become chaotic” (Disare, 2016).

### **Zero Tolerance**

Zero Tolerance policies are aimed at keeping schools safe and maintaining a disciplined learning environment. Most zero tolerance policies “mandate predetermined consequences or punishments for specific offenses” (Curtis, 2014, p. 1253; American Psychological Association, 2008).