EXPLORING INTERSECTIONALITY IN SCHOOL DISCIPLINARY

DECISIONS: A PHENOMENOLOGY OF THE EXPERIENCES

OF AFRICAN AMERICAN FEMALE ADMINISTRATORS

by

Jennifer M. Anthony

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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Abstract

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore how African American female school administrators experience and understand intersectionality regarding discipline outcomes. The theories used to guide this study are critical race theory, first introduced by Bell in 1977, and intersectionality theory coined by Crenshaw in 1989 as they seek to analyze how racism and the intersection of marginalized identities impact school discipline outcomes. The central question that guided this research is how do African American female school administrators experience and understand intersectionality and discipline outcomes? This study used purposeful and criterion sampling to acquire 10 African American female school administrators who have direct responsibility issuing discipline consequences. Data was collected from interviews, a focus group, journal responses, and available documentation such as school demographics and longitudinal discipline data. Data analysis was conducted using a transcendental phenomenological approach as described by Moustakas (1994) including the *epoché*, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and meaning synthesizing. The analysis of data entailed a thorough review of information, which revealed four themes. These themes include a) equity, b) implicit bias, c) leadership style and identity, and d) positive relationships. Each theme answered the research questions of this transcendental phenomenology study and leads to a better understanding of the experiences of African American female administrators.

Keywords: critical race theory, discipline, intersectionality theory

Copyright Page

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation and the journey to my Heavenly Father, who knows the plans that He has for me. I dedicate this work to my mommy, who continues to be my biggest cheerleader. As well as my father, who made sure I got those six points. They have always encouraged and insisted that I pursue my wildest dreams. I dedicate this dissertation to my village. Your love, support, and reassurance pushed me to keep going even when I wanted to give up. Lastly, I dedicate this to the generations of powerful women of color that have paved the way for me to chase my passions and to all future generations of young women that will achieve more than I could ever imagine.

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List of Abbreviations

Critical Legal Theory (CLT)

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Office of Civil Rights (OCR)

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS)

Zero Tolerance Policies (ZTP)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

This transcendental phenomenological study explores how African American female school administrators experience and understand intersectionality regarding discipline outcomes. School disciplinary practices exclude thousands of students in the United States from receiving access to educational resources and instructional time (Jacobsen et al., 2018), while ongoing racial and gender disparities in discipline, such as suspensions and expulsions, continue to fuel the school-to-prison pipeline (Carter et al., 2017). Racial and gender disproportionality in school discipline is not a new phenomenon; however, one that continues to bloom because of history, the biases and archetypes birthed from history, and the continued experiences lived by the people that history has adversely affected. Although explicit bias is unlikely in schools (Nance, 2016), implicit bias functions without conscious thought that can directly impact students and their achievement (Chin et al., 2020). Implicit bias refers to the unconscious, unintentional attitudes and beliefs that one holds and can negatively evaluate a group of people based on characteristics such as race or gender (Fitzgerald & Hurst, 2017; Nance, 2016). Unlike explicit bias, where a person is aware of their prejudices and potential impacts, implicit bias encapsulates prejudices that are unknown to an individual. Research has linked implicit bias in schools to teacher perceptions and the harshness of disciplinary consequences (Gullo, 2017). There has been much research on the discipline rates of boys versus girls or the discipline of specific cultural groups; (Gullo, 2017; Hassan & Carter, 2020; White, 2018) however, there is little research on how leadership experiences impact student discipline outcomes.

Chapter One addresses the intersectionality of race and gender through historical, social, and theoretical information. This section shares information about the disproportionality of disciplinary outcomes, varied theories used to examine race and gender, and the impact of biases

and stereotypes on school discipline. The literature establishes an overview of the study and its key terms, and a summary concludes the chapter. The purpose statement and problem statement are also discussed. Insights on the significance of the study are shared by describing the potential benefits of the study. The final sections of Chapter One present the research questions which accompany the supporting literature.

Background

Race and gender are some of the few descriptors that are cognitively processed immediately and automatically without deliberate thought. The quick processing of this information leads to beliefs, narratives, and stereotypes being developed and becoming an implicit core of social interactions (Diamond & Lewis, 2019). Race and gender inevitably matter in school settings, and as such, school leaders both influence racism and stereotypes and are also influenced by them (Brooks & Watson, 2019). The terms Black and African American will be used interchangeably for this research.

Recent tragedies such as the deaths of Trayvon Martin, Philando Castile, Sandra Bland, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd keep issues of race in the immediate midst of our consciousness. As often as we try to deny or look away from the problems created by the socially constructed realities of race, events such as these are nagging reminders of the unyielding division that race has on American culture. These divisions go beyond the streets or what the media portrays but are omnipresent in our schools, where current disciplinary procedures can be a factor in widening racial and gender disparities.

White (2018) detailed a startling situation involving two middle school students. Two middle school girls, one African American and one White, got in trouble for writing "Hi" on a bathroom stall. While the White girl received a nominal punishment of a $100 fine, the African

American girl, described as "focused and a rule follower," was given the charge of criminal trespassing, had to spend the summer on probation, and complete community service. Stories such as this can tell narratives of potential discriminatory punishments at the expense of students of color. There are many instances where Black girls are subjected to zero-tolerance policies and portrayed as chronic and malicious perpetrators.

Historical Context

Racial and gender stereotypes have long been a thread throughout our American culture. Long after the Civil War, laws and policies enforced the inferiority of schools, housing opportunities, and jobs for people of color while propelling White people's economic and social advantage. The abolishment of slavery saw the continuance of harsh discipline practices, including Fugitive Slave Acts, Black Codes, Jim Crow, and now mass incarceration (Coles & Powell, 2019). Plessy v. Ferguson (1896), which spouted separate but equal, was the educational equivalent of the wider segregation laws. Just as racial segregation fueled a feeling of inferiority in Black people, it also aimed to generate a sense of superiority in White people.

Brown v. Board of Education (1954) was the crucial case that ruled that segregation of children in public schools was unconstitutional and overturned prior practices set forth through Plessy v. Ferguson. Yet, contrary to the Brown v. Board of Education ruling, schools are one of the first places students experience discrimination, implicit bias, micro-aggressions, and colorblindness (Carter et al., 2017; Watson, 2016). As a result of such incongruence, the passing of many reforms and acts has sought to equalize such disparities. During the term of President Johnson, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 passed as an attempt to tackle the war on poverty which provided federal dollars to poverty-stricken districts (Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 1965). In the decades that followed, the zero-tolerance approach to

school discipline became a popularized method of school discipline as a response to the federal Gun-Free School Act of 1994 and the government's war on drugs in the 1980s (Curran, 2016) which increased the use of punitive and exclusionary discipline practices.

More recently, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 under the George Bush Administration, primarily focused on closing the achievement gap (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2002). The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 is arguably the most aggressive education policy since Brown v. Board of Education (Nelson et al., 2018). Upon the conclusion of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, President Obama reauthorized the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Act through the lens of the Every Student Succeeds Act. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) served several purposes, including discipline reform options that schools can employ to mitigate explicit and implicit bias (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). Under ESSA, discipline data is collected and reviewed to address discipline disparities and develop action steps to intercede (White, 2018). In 2014, the U.S. Department of Education issued a set of guiding principles regarding school discipline consequences and reminded educators of the requirement to equitably administer discipline (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

Regardless of legal progress, gendered stereotypes occurred concurrently with the aforementioned racial stereotypes and the two have intersected; through the history of slavery and oppressive images, African American women have experienced many persecutions. These images include, but are not exclusive of the following: Mammy, nurturing yet obese, masculine and desexualized; Sapphire, an impudent, aggressive, and argumentative woman; Jezebel, a hypersexual and voracious woman originating from slavery as a means to normalize the constant sexual assault of enslaved Black women by White men; and the Welfare Queen, the woman who is loud, flippant, manipulative, and devours the resources of the system by having multiple

children and refusing to work (Annamma et al., 2019; Jerald et al., 2016). The authoritative

nature of the Sapphire and sexually aggressive exploits of the Jezebel are in direct contrast to the

submissive and sexually conservative norms of mainstream femininity. These stereotypes

contribute to the implicit bias that Black girls are shaped and can mold many educators' beliefs

about Black female students (Hassan & Carter, 2020; Jerald et al., 2016). The thoughts that

educators hold may inherently stunt future opportunities for Black females.

Despite decades of federal intervention, there are still glaring academic and social

disparities between children of color and White children (Howard & Navarro, 2016; Nelson et

al., 2018). Provided this history, it would be grossly negligent for educators to ignore the

longstanding plight of disciplinary actions for Black people while working to understand the

disproportionality in school discipline (Coles & Powell, 2019). However, documented measures

to ensure equity in disciplinary outcomes in research suggest that racial and gender disparities do

not solely represent differences in infractions but may reflect school administrators' differential

use and enforcement of policies.

Social Context

There have been significant concerns regarding discipline practices used with various

groups of students, with little research on the role of school administrators' perceptions of

implicit bias on school discipline outcomes (Shabazian, 2020). School discipline policies have

undergone increased scrutiny because of the well-documented racial, gender, and income

disparities in disciplinary consequences. According to Welsh and Little (2018), disparities in

disciplinary outcomes were uniform across all academic settings and grade levels. Discipline

disparities indicate a systemic problem that begins to bloom as early as preschool, with Black

preschool students three times as likely to receive one or more suspensions than White

preschoolers (Hassan & Carter, 2020). Kemp-Graham (2017) asserted that African American

girls have the highest suspension rates among all ethnic groups compared to similarly gendered

peers and are suspended out of school at nearly five times their White peers' rate (U.S.

Department of Education, OCR, 2016). Kemp-Graham (2017) also stated that African American

females were disciplined for more subjective reasons, such as defiance or excessive noise, while

their White female counterparts received discipline for objective reasons such as smoking or

obscene language. The Office of Civil Rights (OCR) detailed that during the 2015-2016 school

year, African American students made up 15% of the student population; however, they

accounted for 39% of students suspended from school. Subsequently, educational outcomes for

students of color still trail behind their White counterparts (Nelson et al., 2018). While these

statistics are alarming, numbers alone do not singularly account for the experiences of Black

female students nor the Black female administrators that enforce discipline policies (Coles &

Powell, 2019).

School administrators use zero-tolerance discipline approaches to reduce unacceptable

behaviors in the school setting. Since the 1970s, the rate of exclusionary discipline has been on

the rise for all racial groups. White students are 66% more likely to be suspended from school

than four decades ago, Hispanic students are 133% more likely to be suspended from school, and

African American students are 150% more likely to be suspended (McNeill et al., 2016). As a

result, school suspensions are linked to lower academic performance and increased dropout risk

(Morris & Perry, 2016). Morris and Perry (2016) documented a quasi-experimental study

conducted that observed two groups of similar students. One group of students had been

suspended at some point, and the other had not. After two years, the group that had experienced a

suspension was almost five grade levels behind the non-suspended group. The more students are

removed from school through suspension and expulsion, the more they disappear from graduation stages and appear in prison cells (Carter et al., 2017; Shabazian, 2020). Gripping research reminds us of the disproportional representation of African American female students assigned exclusionary disciplinary consequences as a national emergency (Morris & Perry, 2016; Shabazian, 2020). Administrators are charged with enforcing consequences; therefore, it is obligatory to use a critical race lens to better understand their experiences. This vantage point can help better inform researchers, policymakers, fellow educators, and school districts about the intersectionality of race and gender and school discipline outcomes.

Theoretical Context

The theoretical framework provided by the critical race theory (CRT) and intersectionality theory serves as a vehicle for this research. The core foundation of CRT is grounded in the fact that racism is institutional, systemic, and endemic (Sleeter, 2016). An analysis of CRT is significant because students of color experience schools in a markedly unique way than their White peers (Howard & Navarro, 2016). CRT will serve as a framework to examine the pervasiveness of racism and challenge the dominant ideologies of neutrality and fairness in school discipline outcomes. Intersectionality theory calls for an analysis of racism and its intersection with other marginalized identities. It enables us to recognize that perceived group memberships can make people vulnerable to bias (Gillborn, 2015) and provides a framework to examine the experiences of marginalized populations within the confines of school (Howard & Navarro, 2016).

It is imperative to note that these frameworks contend that students of color are not the only reason to explain discipline disparities. Still, institutional policies and practices work in tandem to create systems of oppression. This research will contend that critical race theory must

acknowledge race and racism in educational policy and continue to challenge the dominant narratives about a marginalized group in contrast to normed propositions. Intersectionality is essential to examine the whole continuum that equity and discrimination play in the experiences of African American females, and intersections of oppressed identities have manifested in a plethora of damaging ways and have a direct impact on females of color.

Both theories are best suited for framing the current study because the focus of the study is inquiry-based, with a constructivist lens detailing the experiences of the administrators themselves. The African American female administrators will draw on their own lived experiences and existing knowledge to discover facts, relationships, and new truths to be learned and applied in understanding how they reconcile their own intersecting identities in the disciplining of African American female students.

Problem Statement

The problem is female students of color experience disproportionate rates of discipline as compared to their similarly gendered peers (Hassan & Carter, 2020; Kemp-Graham, 2017), and there is a negligible amount of research on African American female administrators' experiences with intersectionality and the role that it plays in issuing discipline consequences. Male students of color have long been the focal point of school discipline and the school-to-prison pipeline. The crisis of the Black male is often set against the invisible dialogue of African American females in school discipline literature (Annamma et al., 2019; Patton et al., 2016). The Office of Civil Rights (OCR) chronicled discipline data for more than 96,000 public schools in the U.S. African American students made up only 15% of the student population; however, they accounted for 39% of students suspended from school and 31% of the arrests during the 2015-2016 school year. While boys receive more than two out of three suspensions, African American

girls are suspended at higher rates than girls of any other race or ethnicity and most boys. African American females make up 12% of suspensions, while their White female peers only make up 2% (Office of Civil Rights, 2016).

Discipline disproportionality poses a series of concerns for school communities and fuels the school-to-prison pipeline (Hassan & Carter, 2020). Morris and Perry (2016) asserted that receiving just one out-of-school consequence can drastically increase a student's risk of dropping out, contribute to increased student absenteeism, and negatively correlate to academic achievement. Although statistical disproportionality may not necessarily be a single indicator of bias, the documented severity of punishment potentially indicates discrimination in the dispensation of school discipline (Morris & Perry, 2016). According to Nance (2016), these disparities were problematic because most teachers and school officials act in good faith when dealing with students, which leads one to question why such differences exist. It is documented that the percentage of African American students in a school is the strongest predictor of receiving an exclusionary discipline consequence (Nance, 2016). However, the school administrators' perspective on discipline was also a strong predictor of receiving exclusionary discipline (Carter et al., 2017). Even with that study, little research exists on administrators' perspectives regarding school discipline and even less research on how the intersectionality of race and gender plays a role in the administration of school discipline.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore how African American female school administrators experience and understand intersectionality regarding discipline outcomes. African American female school administrators' experiences will be defined as understanding the role intersectionality has on school discipline outcomes. The theories that

guided this study are the critical race theory (CRT), first birthed by Bell in 1977, and intersectionality theory coined by Crenshaw in 1989. CRT examines the appearance of race and racism and its influence on behaviors, systems, and relationships within institutions (Butler et al., 2018). Intersectionality theory explains how various overlapping identities oppress a person or group of people (Coleman, 2019). Although there are several precepts of critical race theory, this research focused on the role of education policy and practices in advancing racial inequality and the perpetuation of Whiteness. This research also examined CRT through the perspective of intersectionality theory by exploring how race interacts with and influences other identity classifications (Dixson & Anderson, 2017).

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study was examined utilizing empirical, theoretical, and practical perspectives. The broad reach of this research seeks to spark dialogue regarding its relevance and context. This study is significant because it strives to fill a gap in giving African American female administrators a voice. It is hoped that understanding the experiences of African American female administrators sheds light on the implications of intersectionality regarding school discipline outcomes.

School discipline research has focused on the school-to-prison pipeline and its effects on boys of color. Although concentrating on the school-to-prison pipeline and its ramifications is vital, Wun (2016) held that this approach fails to consider how school discipline affects girls of color. In addition to little research documenting African American female students and discipline outcomes, even less research has been conducted on school administrators' experiences with the intersectionality of identities and school discipline outcomes (Goings et al., 2018). A study conducted by Moorosi et al. (2018) suggested that the missing voices and experiences of Black

female leaders limit the contributions to Black students. Emphasis on African American girls and discipline is critical because of the implications for improving the discipline outcomes for marginalized groups. The intersectionality of race and gender in school discipline outcomes is essential because discipline reform initiatives focus on racial disparities and fail to address gender inequities (Annamma et al., 2019). Shabazian (2020) specifically discussed the void in the literature addressing the viewpoints and practices of school leaders.

Bell's (1977) critical race theory and Crenshaw's (1989) intersectionality theory frame this study. Critical race theory uses race as the lens through which many elements of American life are analyzed, including the normalization of systemic racism. CRT is an intellectual movement that seeks to create relationships around race-neutral ideals and racism (Parker et al., 1999). Intersectionality theory is grounded in CRT as it aims to focus on multiple forms of social oppression rather than one singular source of identity and conceptualizes how oppressions are socially constructed. Adding to CRT and intersectionality theory research, this research will provide feedback informing how African American female administrators experience intersectionality relating to school discipline consequences. At this time, few studies have been conducted related to administrator experiences of intersectionality. Utilizing both theories to explore African American female administrator experiences is indispensable in understanding how race interacts with and influences other identity classifications (Dixson & Anderson, 2017), which will lead to new knowledge, insight, and practices.

The study investigated the perceptions of African American female administrators as they engage in the discipline process. The study is significant to education because it highlights how African American female administrators experience intersectionality of race and gender regarding school discipline outcomes. Although discipline policies are stated in race and gender-

neutral terms, the application of the guidelines has had a racializing effect by excluding students from receiving an adequate education (Slate et al., 2016). Race and gender are automatically cognitively managed categories without the need for deeper conscious contemplation (Diamond & Lewis, 2019). Therefore, this automatic processing creates a pathway toward implicit bias directed at a specific group of people. Diamond and Lewis (2019) also argue that race, gender, and class can influence students' differential selection and differential processing, meaning who gets singled out for misbehaviors and if those misbehaviors are assigned equitable consequences. This study will benefit the Mainstream School District by encouraging policymakers and other administrators to create fair discipline policies and practices.

Research Questions

There are limited amounts of literature that document the lived experiences of African American female administrators. This transcendental phenomenological study collected data from African American female school administrators to answer one central question and three research sub-questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The research questions are derived from the problem and purpose statement. This study was guided by both critical race theory and intersectionality theory. It examined the utility of intersectionality as an aspect of CRT by exploring the lived experiences of African American female administrators and the role that intersectionality has in discipline decisions.

Central Research Question

How do African American female school administrators experience and understand

intersectionality and discipline outcomes?

This research focused on the understanding that CRT investigates the role of education policy and practices in advancing racial inequities. This research examined CRT through the lens of

intersectionality theory by exploring how race interacts with and is influenced by other identity classifications (Dixson & Anderson, 2017).

Sub Question One

> *What are African American female school administrators' perceptions of how the intersectionality of race and gender impact the disproportionality represented in school discipline?*

Racial and gender inequities in disciplinary experiences can emerge from differential selection or through differential processing. As a result, gender, race, and class can shape choice by signifying guilt or innocence and how students are viewed and valued in the discipline process (Diamond & Lewis, 2016). CRT supports the idea that policies, procedures, and practices benefit one racial group over others. The U.S education system has been developed and maintained based on the values and beliefs of the White majority; therefore, schools are microcosms that reinforce ideologies that Whiteness is desirable and deserving (Anyon et al., 2017).

Sub Question Two

> *What are African American female administrators' perceptions of the ways their intersectionality impacts school discipline outcomes?*

Most educators are well-intentioned; however, the idea of antiblackness impacts educators' work in schools and can be a form of violence against Black children (Dumas, 2016). W.E.B. DuBois asserted that schools must be where Black students feel safe and have their racial identity protected (Du Bois, 1935 as cited in Yosso et al., 2021). African American school leaders recognize that their experiences with family, cultural, and spiritual backdrops influence their leadership identities (Newcomb & Niemeyer, 2015). It is imperative to realize that the intersecting identities of oppression make African American female leaders' experiences and

social hierarchy extraordinary. The representation of these identities can influence outcomes for Black female students.

Sub Question Three

What are African American female school administrators' perceptions and experiences on the intersectionality of race and gender and school discipline based on the level (elementary, middle, high) with which they work or their number of years of experience?

According to Warren and Coles (2020), educators who have spent any time working within the American education system are vulnerable to internalizing messages about blackness that lead to implicit biases that produce inequitable policies and consequences. One of the most daunting disparities in the current education system is school exclusionary practices (Shabazian, 2020). According to the Office of Civil Rights (2016), the disparity in school discipline was even more apparent in prekindergarten. Shabazian (2020) also asserted that the school level is a variable that can no longer be ignored when examining school discipline practices.

Definitions

1. *Critical Race Theory*- Examines the appearance of race and racism and its influence on behaviors, systems, and relationships within institutions (Butler et al., 2018).

2. *Discipline*- Organizational routine and process influenced by school policy and the people involved in carrying out discipline procedures (Diamond & Lewis, 2019).

3. *Discipline disproportionality*- The overuse of exclusionary discipline of Black students in American schools (Marcucci, 2020).

4. *Explicit Bias* – Awareness of bias and its potential impact; implicit or unconscious bias encapsulates bias, which is unknown to an individual (Gullo, 2017).

5. *Gender-* Socially constructed differences between females and males (Short et al., 2013).

6. *Implicit Bias* - An unobservable structure in an individual's mind that unconsciously drives behavior (Houwer, 2019).

7. *Intersectionality Theory-* Explains how various overlapping identities can oppress a person or group of people (Ferree, 2018).

8. *Race-* Social constructs and not solely based on biological or genetic differences (Carter et al., 2017).

Summary

Students of color face more severe disciplinary consequences than their peers (The Office of Civil Rights, 2016). Although the evident disproportionality is not enough to declare a bias, the harshness of punishment could be an indicator. This research seeks to fill a gap in the existing literature by examining the perspectives of how African American female school administrators experience and understand intersectionality and discipline outcomes. The significance of this study is outlined in this chapter, along with the research questions and relevant definitions. This chapter opened with an overview and background information related to the topic and research. The chapter provided both the problem and the purpose statement.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This literature review reviews and synthesizes existing literature around the intersectionality of race, gender, and school disciplinary outcomes. There is little research surrounding the experiences of African American female administrators and intersectionality in school disciplinary decisions. Therefore, as related to this study, a thorough review of the literature is conducted to identify studies and theories that provide insight into the role that intersectionality has in discipline decisions and the experiences of African American female administrators. The first section is comprised of a discussion of relevant theories. An analysis of related literature is explained in the second section, considering African American female administrators' lived experiences involving disciplinary consequences through the lens of intersectionality. This section includes a review of literature documenting the relationship between African American female administrators and school disciplinary outcomes, including intersectionality and disproportionate discipline of African American female students. An analysis of the central tenets of the relevant theories is presented after examining the role of school leadership. Upon reviewing the responsibilities of an administrator, barriers are discussed, including school discipline disparities, exclusionary discipline, and bias, followed by an analysis of supports and interventions. Upon reviewing the literature, a gap developed, creating a need for intensive study.

Theoretical Framework

Bell's (1977) critical race theory and Crenshaw's (1989) intersectionality theory serve as the theoretical framework for this study. Critical race theory is one of the most established theories used to explain the role of race related to social justice and oppression in the education

realm. The second theory is used to further understand the experiences of African American female administrators is intersectionality theory. The intersectionality theory builds upon the CRT movement of the 1980s by recognizing how multiple forms of identity are interwoven (Gillborn, 2015) and how identities are often social constructs that impact people differently across numerous groups (Howard & Navarro, 2016). This literature review examines the utility of intersectionality as an aspect of CRT by exploring the role that intersectionality has in discipline decisions and the experiences of African American female administrators making those disciplinary decisions.

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory, credited to Derrick Bell in the 1970s, blossomed from a movement known initially as critical legal theory (CLT), which "sprang up in the late 1960s when several legal scholars and activists around the nation realized that the heady gains of the Civil Rights era had stalled and indeed were being rolled back" (Delgado, 2003, p.125). The Civil Rights Movement saw many civil rights cases challenge unfair housing practices, school integration, job placement, and other forms of discrimination. However, the rulings of these cases that sought to eradicate such discrimination did not reflect any substantive change in our sociopolitical landscape. Instead of aiding in the deconstruction of discrimination, one could contend that the law served to maintain and uphold it. Therefore, critical legal theory scholars realized that "new approaches and theories were needed to deal with the color blind, subtle, or institutional forms of racism that were developing" (Delgado, 2003, p.125).

Critical legal theory was propagated in education by Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate in the 1980s, forming what is now known as critical race theory, which seeks to address accepted policies and the social construct of race. Scholars have a long tenure using critical race

theory to guide dialogue and evaluate research centered around race. History has established erroneous ideas that have molded our perceptions of who is valued and skilled and who is not (Carter et al., 2017; Diamond & Lewis, 2019). The components of critical race theory are organized into a framework that targets the systemic ways racism has infiltrated current systems. It is arguably the most prevalent theory used to explain race and its role in society through the vantage point of social justice and oppression (Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2018). CRT is a vehicle to examine how traditional laws and policies are drafted to benefit White people (Nelson et al., 2018), analyze racism and its intersection with other forms of oppression while examining race and educational inequities (Howard & Navarro, 2016), and seeks to challenge many fundamental beliefs about racial injustice. Critical race theory is grounded in the belief that racism is an everyday occurrence in society so that racism goes unquestioned (DeMatthews et al., 2017). Institutional policies and subsequent practices favor and benefit one racial group over others (Anyon et al., 2017).

CRT contends that racial inequity is the outcome of a system of achievement prompted by competition. According to the research conducted, there are several boundaries between CRT and education (Dixson & Anderson, 2017; Gillborn, 2015; Howard & Navarro, 2016). The second boundary assesses the role of education policy and practices in developing racial inequality. CRT rejects the narrative about the inferiority of people of color. CRT also examines the historical context between educational inequities and racial oppression. This theory functions as a vehicle to analyze how race interacts with other identities, such as gender, class, or language spoken. Lastly, this theory champions outcomes that will address and mitigate racial inequities.

CRT is not often utilized in the field of education; however, it is necessary for realizing the impact of discipline practices from the perspective of school leaders (DeMatthews et al.,

2017). Howard and Navarro (2016) asserted that scholars have struggled to understand how CRT can effectively translate to achieve equitable educational outcomes. Considering that race, gender, and education have always been essential elements in the way opportunities for learning have developed in schools (Howard & Navarro, 2016), CRT within the field of education seeks to dismantle race in theory and practice. CRT is vital when understanding the current education systems and dissecting the concerns and thoughts people of color have regarding their educational experience. Critical race theory continues to seek ways to deconstruct the norms of fairness, colorblindness, and meritocracy (Howard & Navarro, 2016).

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1997) proposed that inequality in education is based on multiple ideologies, including the thought that race is a significant factor in determining inequality (Gillborn, 2015) and gender bias must be accounted for in inequitable schooling. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1997) documented that girls receive less attention from teachers, are advised out of advanced science and math courses, and receive higher grades than their male counterparts, but that fails to equate to advantages with post-secondary options.

Although CRT has several hallmarks, the research was grounded in examining specific components, including the permanence and pervasiveness of racism, challenging the dominant ideologies that justify structural oppression and intersectionality. The permanence of racism contends that racism is a lever that controls the political, social, and economic landscapes of American society. In CRT, racism is an intrinsic part of American culture, which provides privilege to White individuals over people of color in almost every aspect of life, including education (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Delgado, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The dominant ideology that underscores Whiteness as privilege will be used to identify how racism is not just a system of prejudice but results in discipline disproportionality

between Black and White students (Decuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). While critical race theory in education is used to expose and analyze racism in education, the theory has infrequently been used as a lens applied to school leadership practice and intersectionality is a way to understand how identities can be oppressive social constructs that have varying effects on people across multiple group classifications (Howard & Navarro, 2016).

Intersectionality Theory

Intersectionality theory builds upon the CRT movement of the 1980s by recognizing that forms of oppression rarely act independently of one another; instead, these identities interconnect with one another to create a system that reflects the fusion of numerous forms of discrimination, prejudice, and exclusion (Howard & Navarro, 2016). According to Fay et al. (2020), "intersectionality discourse establishes that intersectional groups with multiple minority identities such as Black women face unique societal challenges based on the synergistic combination of racism and sexism that groups sharing only part of the identity avoid" (p. 337). Both political and educational scholars criticized the original feminism movement acknowledging that it did little to address the discriminatory practices of race and class that inundated non-white women. Therefore, intersectionality is an approach that focuses on multiple forms of social oppression rather than one singular source of identity and conceptualizes how oppressions are socially constructed (Crenshaw, 2018; Harrison, 2015; Mancini, 2016). Crenshaw (2018) concluded that the intersection between being both female and African American causes unique and multifaceted forms of discrimination different from the experiences of a White female or even that of a Black male. Intersectionality theory does not solely rest on multiple identities but entangles social context, social justice, and inequality (Hopkins, 2019) and is not a new theory of identity; instead, it is an analytical means to understand structural power

relationships (Agosto & Roland, 2018). The intersectionality theory holds that the hallmarks of discrimination and oppression in society, such as racism, sexism, and homophobia, connect to form a web of oppression. Although singular identities are subjected to discriminatory practices, intersectionality underscores the inter-connectedness of race, class, gender, and disability (Gillborn, 2015). The two critical beliefs of intersectionality hold that the intersectional approach is essential in fostering a clearer understanding of the systems that create social oppression. Developing partnerships with multiple groups is needed to challenge and change the status quo (Agosto & Roland, 2018; Gillborn, 2015).

Applying intersectionality theory to educational policy is vital for examining practices designed to help oppressed groups who should ideally benefit from racially directed or gender-directed policies. However, the reality is that oppressed groups do not receive any gain from either (Harris, 2015). This literature review allows CRT and intersectionality theory to serve as the context to evaluate the racialized experiences of African American females. This literature will specifically be guided by the underpinnings of CRT and intersectionality theory. The focus is on the permanence of race and racism, the dominance of ideologies, and the intersectionality of marginalized identities to assess the role of education policy and practices in the development of racial inequality to glean an understanding of the experiences of African American female administrators.

Related Literature

A constant spotlight has been on policymakers, advocates, and educators as there is growing racial, gender, and income disparity in school disciplinary outcomes (Welsh & Little, 2018). It is well documented that African American students are disproportionately affected by exclusionary discipline. However, few researchers have examined its impact on African

American girls (Slate et al., 2016), especially since they face a higher chance of suspension and expulsion than their peers (Office of Civil Rights, 2016). The numerous studies and reports documenting the discipline gap have led to an increased federal inquiry into school discipline practices. A joint letter from both the U.S Department of Justice and the U.S Department of Education (2014) states the following:

> Significant and unexplained racial disparities in student discipline give rise to concerns that schools may be engaging in racial discrimination that violates the Federal civil rights laws. For instance, statistical evidence may indicate that groups of students have been subjected to different treatment or that a school policy or practice may have an undesirable discriminatory impact. Indeed, the Department's investigations, which consider quantitative data as part of a wide array of evidence, have revealed racial discrimination in the administration of student discipline. For example, in our investigations we have found cases where African American students were disciplined more harshly and more frequently because of their race than similarly situated white students. In short, racial discrimination in school discipline is a real problem (p. 4).

There is preliminary evidence documenting a correlation between the discipline of minor infractions and future infractions that can be classified as disrespectful or defiant. According to a quantitative study conducted by Amemiya et al. (2020), African American students receive more minor infractions than their White peers. The noted research and racial and gender bias documentation support that student discipline is not an objective process rather is influenced by a student's racial and gender identities (DeMatthews, 2016; Paul & Araneo, 2018). Hassan and Carter (2020) stated that students who receive out-of-school consequences are more likely to engage in crimes such as burglaries, vandalism, and shoplifting. Fitzgerald et al. (2019) affirmed

that these discipline systems are designed for student failure and put them at higher risks for unemployment, gang activity, substance abuse, and poverty.

Despite many calls to action and reform, African American students are still disproportionately affected by school discipline outcomes (Annamma et al., 2019) and 50% of all African American students expelled from K-12 schools each year are from the southern states, which equates to 1.5 million students (Hines-Datiri & Andrews, 2017; Slate et al., 2016). However, more attention is turning towards a specific student group, the Black female. The experiences of Black women and girls are still disregarded despite the growing rates of police brutality, predatory enforcement of laws, and increased juvenile incarceration (Patton et al., 2016). In the last decade, African American girls have had the fastest growing suspension rates and experience discipline rates six times higher than their White counterparts and suspension rates higher than 67% of male students (Annamma et al., 2019).

There are dominant narratives about African American girls that place them at increased risk for exclusionary discipline practices (Jerald et al., 2016). The complexity of navigating a school system steeped in Westernized standards of femininity while being Black and female has resulted in Black girls being disciplined far harsher than their peers (Slate et al., 2016). Annamma et al. (2019) asserted, "the experiences of Black girls in schools and Black women in society more broadly suggest that social constructions of gender and femininity intersecting with race shape their educational outcomes" (p. 215). Therefore, African American female students' discipline risk can be ascribed to a contradiction of racialized gendered norms, which outline how decent and proper young ladies should act (Blake et al., 2017).

Examining School Leadership

Student safety and maintaining a positive learning environment are the primary

responsibilities of a school leader (DeMatthews, 2016). Navigating school discipline can be a

challenge due to the amount of subjectivity it may involve. Although local and state districts

have official policies that outline expected behaviors and consequences that can be administered

if expectations are not met, school discipline disproportionality can raise questions regarding

policy equity and fairness (Welsh & Little, 2018). It underscores the complex relationship

between student discipline and the transference of bias through disciplinary outcomes

(DeMatthews, 2016) and reflects systemic racial and gender disparities (DeMatthews et al.,

2017).

Identifiable experiences form a person's attitudes and beliefs related to racism and sexism

throughout their lifetime, often firsthand occurrences as an oppressor or the oppressed. Just as

teachers' learned beliefs and values shape their decisions regarding student discipline, so do

school administrators. Their biases can lead to the disparaging treatment of students of color

(Brooks & Watson, 2019; Kennedy et al., 2016). Many research studies have tackled the

relationship between school leadership beliefs and achievement, yet few have examined how

leadership viewpoints impact student discipline (Carpenter et al., 2017; Goings et al., 2018;

Shabazian, 2020). However, DeMatthews et al. (2017) suggested that the extensive discipline

gap underscores the influence of institutional racism and renders inquiries about whether school

leaders act consciously as intermediaries and disciplinarians. Williams et al. (2020) pointed out

that even as school leaders classify themselves as race-conscious, they often promote deficit

ideologies against Black students while maintaining the notion of being color-blind. A recent

study concluded that the policies and practices of schools and principals' perspectives play a

vital role in explaining discipline disparities (Welsh & Little, 2018), and the school discipline process can enter students into the school-to-prison pipeline (Goings et al., 2018). Second, only to teachers, building-level leadership has an overwhelming impact on student achievement, and their decisions influence students' long-term pathway and trajectory (Brooks & Watson, 2019).

Although there is mounting attention dedicated to preparing school leaders to address social justice issues and foster data-driven environments, the provided guidance is broad and general and does not stray from the traditional approaches (Carpenter et al., 2017; DeMatthews, 2016). Mundane administrative tasks have influenced the work of school leaders; however, research suggests that school leaders want to dedicate time to professional development opportunities centered around social justice and guidance while developing their own social justice leadership identity (Carpenter et al., 2017; Glanz, 1994). Social justice leadership holds a direct relationship with CRT because of its focus on addressing inequity in schools and communities, which is so deeply rooted in the American education system. Although the experiences of school leaders surrounding disciple, race, and gender are understudied, social justice leadership allows for insight into how to address race and gender inequities in school discipline. This type of leadership also enables school leaders to examine the myriad of variables that influence discipline, including prevailing ideologies that fuel injustices, the impact of a predominately middle-class White female teacher demographic, race and gender stereotypes, and the unspoken rules of normed behavior (DeMatthews, 2016).

In juxtaposition to student experiences, studies support the notion that building-level leadership plays a significant role in student success and achievement (Brooks & Watson, 2019; Marks & Printy, 2003; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012). Additionally, it is noted that the way principals address discipline concerns within their schools directly impacts the school culture and

climate (Griffith, 1999; Konishi et al., 2017). However, DeMatthews et al. (2017) commented that school leaders might fail to recognize and confront discrimination operating within schools due to the implicit bias of various stakeholders. The disparity between the school administrator's demographic and the public-school student's demographic is undeniable and challenges the correlation between diverse school leaders and student achievement (Brooks & Watson, 2019). Building leaders, such as the principal and assistant principals, can be held somewhat responsible for the growing discipline gap. In maintaining a positive and safe learning environment, leaders adhere to policies that place African American students at risk for failure and exclusion and can also be critical stakeholders in dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline (DeMatthews et al., 2017; Goings et al., 2018).

A school administrator's racial and gender identity, as well as the ability to be introspective on their implicit bias, is necessary to be "advocates for change, communicate truths about the lived experiences of children, or lead educators to adopt equity-oriented discipline practices" (DeMatthews, 2016, p. 8). However, even school leaders who consider themselves to have a keen sense of self-awareness and understand the importance of including social justice values can easily fall victim to upholding biases and exclusionary practices (Williams et al., 2020). The conclusions from research conducted by Walsh and Little (2018) supported the idea that discipline occurrences in schools can be attributed to policies and practices and the perspectives of school leaders play a crucial role in evaluating discipline disparities. Although school administrators have substantial influence and power to change the trajectory of students' lives, school administrators must be introspective and reflective regarding their own beliefs and behaviors. School administrators must critically consider their conventions related to effective school leadership practices, discipline policies, community relations, deficit thinking, and how

education characteristics might be experienced differently by students and families of color (Brooks & Watson, 2019; DeMatthews, 2016). CRT helps guide the discovery of how race operates within the school context and the importance of understanding students (DeMatthews et al., 2017). Leadership must be viewed as a tool to challenge the norms and reimagine future schools with race and gender-conscious policies and procedures.

Leadership and Intersectionality

Leadership is a socially constructed role (Weiner et al., 2019); however, school communities determine what normed leadership should look like through expansive conventions of how administrators should fashion their own identity. Such leaders may reject or accept these social norms; nevertheless, their actions and beliefs determine how their professional identity aligns with the status quo (Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017). White males are more frequently favored for leadership positions, as evidenced in data from 2013 (Weiner et al., 2019). In a 2015 national teacher and principal survey, 80% of school leaders identified as White, and 45% were male (U.S Department of Education, 2016). The remaining 20% of the school leadership pool were ethnic minorities, with African American women disproportionately represented in urban schools where there are insufficient resources and support (Newcomb & Niemeyer, 2015).

Despite this tenor, female leaders have garnered increased attention in recent decades. However, much of the discourse has focused on White middle-class women, with less consideration for women of color (Moorosi et al., 2018). According to Brooks & Watson (2019), "despite the fact that African American school leaders were found to challenge deficit ideologies that served to disenfranchise Black children, they are either overlooked within the context of traditional leadership theories" (p. 633). There is a substantial shortage of literature on Black women in educational leadership (Goings et al., 2018) which creates a void in documenting the

African American female school leaders' lived experiences. This lack of representation in literature is often reminiscent of the lack of inclusion in various other forms, such as the feminism movement, which Moorosi et al. (2018) described as blatant negligence of the experiences of Black women. Even though there is a struggle for visibility, Black women recognize that their experiences with family, cultural, and spiritual backdrops influence their leadership identities (Newcomb & Niemeyer, 2015). It is imperative to acknowledge that the intersecting identities of oppression make African American female leaders' experiences and social hierarchy extraordinary. Without these Black leadership narratives, it becomes ever more problematic to respond to the lives and address the needs of African American children, their families, and communities. Using intersectionality theory as a framework will allow more significant analysis and inform the research design. The context of the lived experiences of African American female administrators provides a richer understanding of how they experience intersectionality within the confines of their job duties and responsibilities.

A critical concern for African American female administrators is that the multilayers of their leadership role demand one to be a skilled negotiator, expert navigator, and flexible in their approach. These leaders must often choose between demonstrating behaviors aligned with typical leadership characteristics and breaking gender stereotypes or acting in ways that align with gendered norms and break leadership customs (Weiner et al., 2019). However, mainstream customs limit options that can be implemented, and gender and racial perceptions starve the options that must be imagined (Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017; Goings et al., 2018). African American female administrators must navigate and negotiate their own identities when engaged in the discipline process, and gender and racial discrimination remain a challenge in ways specific to African American female leaders. Research has started to evolve from thinking about

race and gender discrimination in isolation toward thinking with an intersectional lens where Black women's experiences are distinctive. Therefore, it requires significant reflection to challenge dominant ideologies and create new narratives (Weiner et al., 2019).

Agosto and Roland (2018) described how African American female leaders whose experiences with intersectionality influenced how they used their authority to bend the rules based on the insights into the system that makes the rules. However, during this process, the administrator must consider the dominant philosophies that birthed social inequities, such as the impact of a predominantly White middle-class teacher demographic, gender and race archetypes, variances in classroom management styles, and the impact of the unspoken rules of normed conduct (Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017; Moorosi, 2018). School leaders are in a challenging position, especially Black school leaders, that must work within an educational system that is fundamentally constructed against the advancement of Black students. Intersectionality is vital in understanding how a person can have multiple competing identities that make it impossible to have a cohesive and integrated identity. Therefore, these identities impact how Black female school administrators view themselves, engage in decision-making, and think about how others perceive them (Goings et al., 2018).

Traditionally, Black women's self-awareness has been interwoven with normed leadership and social justice (Agosto & Roland, 2018). Black female administrators must contend with the concurrence of being a medium for the system, a medium for marginalized students, and their multifaceted identities, making the decision-making process more complex. All too frequently, the behaviors of African American female leaders are influenced by negative stereotypes, perceptions from peers, and how actions can affect job security. As Black school leaders wrestle with this dichotomy, it is inescapable that Black children will become casualties

of a system designed for them to fail. Discipline disproportionality underscores the impact of institutional racism. Critical race theory provides context to understand the perspectives, values, and behaviors of school leaders in the context of race and how this impacts the disciplining of students (DeMatthews et al., 2017).

Permanence and Pervasiveness of Racism

There is a longstanding history in Westernized civilization that reflects a dualist relationship between White and Black people. Social constructs of the subjective identity of both groups, classified in terms of perceived ability, are often used to justify oppressive policies. Tate (1997) disclosed that nowhere is this a more apparent reality than in the United States Constitution. The Founding Fathers laid the groundwork for the White and Black dualist relationship by counting Black people as three-fifths of a person, deferring the prohibition of the slave trade, continuing fugitive slave laws, and allowing federal troops to smother Black insurrections. Therefore, by law, the African American inferiority narrative was not only birthed but immortalized. The inequitable treatment of African American students is entrenched in American educational and judicial systems. For most of the 1800s, many states disallowed the education of African Americans, and violation of these laws often resulted in fines or imprisonment (Tate, 1995). The period of desegregation saw Black students subjected to jeers and taunts by White parents who feared that their integration with Black children would forever soil the education of their White children. The current narrative consists of African American students being underrepresented in advanced courses (Davis et al., 2019; Grissom & Redding, 2016), disproportionately represented in special education classes and the discipline process (Voltz, 2019), and experiencing low graduation rights as well as low post-secondary enrollment (Wolf et al., 2019). According to Dumas (2016), this thought process was "the essence of

antiblackness in educational policy, the Black is constructed as always problem—as nonhuman; inherently uneducable, or at very least, unworthy of education; and, even in a multiracial society, always a threat" (p.16). As a result of this thought, anti-Blackness values and norms will always plague the work of educators. Even when school leaders believe that they act reasonably and equitably throughout the discipline process, Black culture will be viewed as a contradiction to normed education values.

Critical race theory begins with the assumption that racism is typical and ordinarily exists without being questioned (DeMatthews et al., 2017). The concept that racism is not only pervasive but also a permanent part of our society is also known as racial realism (Blaisdell, 2016; Fears, 2019). Racism is a central characteristic of our education system and is displayed in many educational policies. However, cryptic supremacist messaging is omnipresent because normed ignorance dominates schooling discourse. Educational policies maintain and continue the ideologies of the dominant culture, even if they are thought to be in the best interest of all. These ideologies are seen in discipline policies that adversely affect African American girls. Schools often disregard the historical context of race and gender and their implications on student discipline, which leads to negative perceptions of female students of color by both educators and the students themselves.

The United States has long created and fortified a system that divides along racial lines. It is essential to remember that schools operate within a context where inequality is the norm rather than the exception (Brooks & Watson, 2019). Blaisdell (2016) noted:

The racism phantasm makes it seem as if those practices are equitable, even when

evidence to the contrary arises. The result is that schools continue to maintain a structure

that secures increased access to educational resources for White students and denies

access to students of color. (p. 290)

Race scholars have long contended that our federal courts and policymakers set agendas in

motion to maintain White Supremacy, and "the school-to-prison pipeline is a new manifestation

of White American's efforts to subjugate Black people" (Nelson et al., 2018, p. 21). To see the

permanence and pervasiveness of racism is to recognize the privilege of having a White identity.

This privilege is so substantially valued that policies and laws are enacted to protect and defend

it (Fears, 2019).

Dominance of ideologies

Current teacher demographics and evolving student demographics set the stage for the

likelihood of a substantial racial and cultural knowledge gap between educators and students,

referred to as the demographic divide (Howard & Navarro, 2016). CRT is a valuable tool in

analyzing schooling experiences and helps teachers understand how the dominant ideology, also

referred to as "Whiteness," affects their practices and drastically impacts students of color.

Therefore, high incidences of disciplining students of color and low frequency of students of

color in advanced level courses are often explained as a lack of motivation or values and are

infrequently recognized as a product of racism (Cammarota, 2017).

Critical race theory undergirds the notion that policies, procedures, and practices serve to

benefit one racial group over others. The American education system was developed and

maintained based on the values and beliefs of the White majority. Schools are microcosms that

reinforce ideologies that Whiteness is desirable and deserving (Anyon et al., 2017). According to

Gillborn (2015), "Whiteness refers to a set of assumptions, beliefs, and practices that place the

interests and perspectives of White people at the center of what is considered normal and

everyday" (p.278). Considering discipline is indistinguishably linked to Westernized values, it serves to reason that school policies are created within a system encumbered with societal beliefs and ideals that serve political interests and produce conflicting values and beliefs (Shabazian, 2020; Slate et al., 2016).

Anyon et al. (2017) pointed to qualitative and quantitative research suggesting race-neutral school discipline practices such as zero-tolerance policies lead to inequalities because they are often based on White middle-class values. Annamma et al. (2019) indicated that there will always be a dominant perspective that allows the privileged group to tell the story about the marginalized group. For example, Blaisdell (2015) observed that students were subjected to disciplinary consequences if they did not abide by White norms. Wiley et al. (2018) documented the disproportionate assignment of school discipline to Black students, even for behavior like that of their White peers. Therefore, African American female students are disciplined for behaviors viewed as non-white without explicitly citing race. Similarly, the propagation of racial inequality in school discipline also manifests through dominant ideologies of racialized femininity and masculinity in school policies (Anyon et al., 2017). Racialized gender constructs support the idea that African American girls are evaluated according to white gender standards (Morris & Perry, 2017), leading to disproportionate discipline consequences.

School Discipline Disparities and Approaches

The disciplining of students is explicitly tied to the values, norms, and beliefs of a society and is a continuous process rather than finite moments (Diamond & Lewis, 2019; Shabazian, 2020). Williams et al. (2020) touted explicit evidence that middle school students are subjected to more discipline infractions than elementary or high school students. This uptick can be attributed to nationwide discipline policies that do not allow for normative pubescent behavior

(Amemiya et al., 2020). Schools must undoubtedly maintain order and safe environments; however, the reporting of minor infractions may have unintended consequences resulting in a higher likelihood that behavior will be interpreted as problematic. This action alone can lead to racial and gender disparities in school discipline between African American and White students (Amemiya et al., 2020).

Racial differences give way to students experiencing school very differently. African American youth in public schools are disproportionately disadvantaged in every indicator of academic success and experience school in contrasting ways to their White counterparts (Carter et al., 2017; Taylor et al., 2018). Black students are underrepresented in advanced courses (Davis et al., 2019; Grissom & Redding, 2016), disproportionately represented in special education classes (Voltz, 2019), and experience low graduation rights as well as low post-secondary enrollment (Wolf et al., 2019). These disparities are consistent across all settings, indicating that this disproportionality is a symptom of a more significant systemic problem (Welsh & Little, 2018).

Consistent with previous research, African American students are more likely to receive a disciplinary consequence. Further analysis reveals that African American girls are suspended five times the rate of their White counterparts (U.S. Department of Education, OCR, 2016) and are more likely to be punished for subjective and ambiguous policy violations (Kemp-Graham, 2017; Paul & Araneo, 2018)). These disparities in discipline cannot solely be explained through the lens of race or gender. They must be viewed simultaneously to uncover the unique challenges of the intersection of race and gender. The intersection of race and gender significantly affects how Black female students experience school, and they must traverse racism coupled with sexism. Many studies focus on the African American male student, as a result, exclude the

African American female student from the conversation regarding equitable outcomes, which perpetuates assumptions and creates a mirage that Black female students are not an at-risk population (Morris & Perry, 2017; Nelson et al., 2018).

Morris and Perry (2017) contended that African American girls are assessed against the dominant culture and punished for perceived misbehavior. However, race influences the perception of gender in the appraisal of behavior. Adult interpretations of African American girls' ways of expression, verbal or non-verbal, may be in direct conflict with the beliefs of the mainstream education field, which shares White middle-class values (Kemp-Graham, 2017; Nelson et al., 2018). CRT grounds that African American girls are part of a collective deemed inferior. The dominant culture will always tell the story of the marginalized (Annamma et al., 2016). They are at significant risk of being discounted, oppressed, discriminated against, and disregarded because of their intersectionality of race and gender, leading to an increased risk of falling into the school-to-prison pipeline (Slate et al., 2016).

The intersection of race and gender can impact how African American girls experience school (Carter et al., 2017). Black girls are often disenfranchised, marginalized, and oppressed. Although these girls are continually vilified, their experiences are overlooked and disregarded (Nelson et al., 2018). These girls must negotiate the dualistic oppressions of both race and gender. African American girls are more frequently subjected to subjective discipline referrals for dress code violations, defiance, and disrespect (Nelson et al., 2018; Paul & Araneo, 2018). According to a study conducted by Morris and Perry (2017), there was significant evidence documenting the harmful effects of the intersectionality of race and gender on African American girls. Per previous research and findings, Black girls are disciplined more often for less serious offenses, and the consequences are wholly based on the interpretations of the school official

(Annamma et al., 2016; DeMatthews et al., 2017; Nelson et al., 2018). Race appears to intensify the narrative of gender inappropriate behavior of African American girls in middle and high school (Morris & Perry, 2017). The deafening silence around the lives of Black females is both intricate and conflicting. Notwithstanding the inequities and prejudices experienced by Black women and girls, one study suggests that "there are no significant platforms that would influence educational practices and policies toward social justice on behalf of Black women and girls" (Patton et al., 2016, p.195). Therefore, it is necessary to illuminate the lives and experiences of Black females to expose how intersectionality influences outcomes and decisions.

Exclusionary Discipline Practices

For over a century, scholars and educators have questioned the fairness and effectiveness of exclusionary discipline policies (Wiley et al., 2018). Exclusionary policies, also known as Zero Tolerance Policies (ZTP), are defined as a form of "school discipline that imposes removal from school for a broad array of school code violations—from violent behavior to truancy and dress code violations" (Losen & Skiba, 2010, p. 2). These policies do not produce equitable outcomes for all students or reduce problem behaviors as perceived by school administrators (Curran, 2016). Regardless of the insurmountable research documenting the adverse effects of exclusionary discipline, the practice is pervasive (Losen & Skiba, 2010; Shabazian, 2020). Exclusionary discipline policies may not be racialized or gendered in theory. However, the application of the policies has a polarizing effect by removing female students of color from receiving an appropriate education (Slate et al., 2016). This type of discipline is a direct link to the school-to-prison pipeline. It is a strategic method for removing and criminalizing students of color that do not abide by the normative behaviors of the dominant culture (Hines-Datiri & Andrews, 2017) and is emphasized by Goings et al. (2018):

In other words, it is the process of tracking traditionally racialized and minoritized

student populations out of educational institutions, directly and/or indirectly, into the

juvenile justice system and subsequently into the adult criminal justice systems. It

adversely impacts Black students and has had a significant impact on their academic and

social trajectory in society, school, and classrooms throughout the United States. (p. 32)

A 1938 article in the *National Association of Secondary Principals Bulletin,* written by a

high school principal, stated that detention and suspension "fail to get the desired results" (Clark,

1938, p. 1). He instead advocated for an alternative approach that involved a continuum of care

from all school stakeholders, including tiered interventions and support. Although discipline

disparities are documented, sociologist Richard Cloward (1966) noted that in New York, most

students suspended from school were children of color. He also argued that the decisions of the

school administrators could have negative and long-lasting impacts on students. Nearly four

decades after the article denouncing exclusionary discipline appeared in the *National Association

of Secondary Principals Bulletin*, a 1975 report by the Children's Defense Fund, *School

Suspensions: Are They Helping Children?,* highlighted the disparities of discipline through the

differential selection and the differential processing (Children's Defense Fund, 1975)

underscoring the sentiments of prior research and observations that students of color are

negatively affected by these policies and practices and denouncing the position of exclusionary

policies being race-neutral (Diamond & Lewis, 2019; Goings et al., 2018).

The oppression and ill-treatment of African American female students are most

documented in urban settings where students of color are historically marginalized (Carter et al.,

2017; Nelson et al., 2018; Pavlakis & Roegman, 2018). These stereotypes about Black

femininity have severe and adverse effects on their educational experience and outcome. Albeit

research has focused on Black males and their discipline disparities, not addressing the predicament of Black girls serves to ignore the lived experiences of these girls and continued scholarly neglect of Black women and girls (Patton, 2016). Hines-Datiri & Andrews (2017) affirmed the following:

> Racialized-gendered approach of placing males of color at the forefront of discussion regarding discipline disproportionality conceals the negative outcomes that ZTPs have on Black girls in PreK-12 settings, and does not provide a complete portrait of the disproportionate effects of discipline sanctions against Black youth. (p. 3)

Endorsing the federal recommendations for school discipline reform, sixteen states and the District of Columbia have prohibited the use of exclusionary discipline in the early grades. Several states have limited the use of exclusionary discipline for certain violations, including attendance and truancy (Rafa, 2020). In September 2014, California became the first state to eliminate suspensions for younger students and place limits on expulsion for all students (Public Counsel, 2014). Miami-Dade School District also eliminated out-of-school suspensions, following Broward County School District's example years earlier (Anderson & Ritter, 2017). New discipline policies encourage districts to use alternative and holistic approaches to discipline, such as Response to Intervention (RTI), Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), and restorative justice. Wiley et al. (2018) revealed that suspended children of color are at an increased risk of lower academic achievement and the school-to-prison pipeline, impacting the pursuit of educational access and equity.

As research on the impact of school discipline on Black girls has grown and evolved, more focus has been placed on ZTP. African American girls' identities and behaviors are decoded and analyzed through both a gendered and racialized lens by teachers and school

leaders; therefore, the consequence that they receive for code violations is based on adult perception and place value on Black female students (Curran, 2016; Goings et al., 2018; Hines-Datiri & Andrews, 2017; Kemp-Graham, 2017). The U.S Department of Education detailed that more than 80% of the education workforce was White, middle class, and monolingual (U.S Department of Education, 2014). As a result, White teachers may be unaware of their students' racial and cultural experiences (Howard & Navarro, 2016). They may approach Black students from a deficit lens leading to conflicts and misunderstandings, resulting in a reputation for being disruptive and defiant (Going et al., 2018). Given how Black girls are subjected to school policies and the dynamics of zero tolerance environments, CRT and intersectionality theory prove vital tools for examining Black girls' experiences and identity development.

Bias

Morris and Perry (2017) explained implicit bias as "unacknowledged schemas that distort perceptions of outgroup members" (p. 129), and Houwer (2019) described implicit bias as an uncontrollable, intrinsic, clandestine box that makes people perform inappropriate actions. Therefore attention should be paid to understanding the role of implicit bias in mitigating any harm (Holroyd et al., 2017). Studies on implicit bias, subjective discipline, and school discipline center around race. However, it is evidenced that more intricate biases appear at the intersection of race and gender. Research has also shown that school staff potentially treat students differently based on race and gender, and these differences in behavior contribute to disparities in achievement and discipline outcomes (Hines-Datiri & Andrews, 2017). Several studies indicated that subjective offenses such as defiance and insubordination make up a large percentage of suspensions, suggesting some form of bias (Forsyth et al., 2014; Huang & Cornell, 2017). Morris & Perry (2017) documented, "African American girls were punished primarily for

perceptions of gendered transgressions, but race shaped the enactment and perception of gendered in the evaluation of those transgressions" (p. 129). A deeper examination of why these differences occur, especially in the school setting with students of color, is needed. Warikoo et al. (2016) and Nance (2016) made four distinct observations that outlined the effects of implicit bias in the classroom:

1. A deficit lens towards minority groups is a contributor to educational inequality.

2. Since there is little evidence of a correlation between implicit values and explicit behaviors, this can serve as a cornerstone in explaining why well-intended efforts can exist alongside disparities.

3. Implicit bias is likely to affect student outcomes because of problematic behaviors that may emerge during interracial interactions. Considering that as of 2017, White teachers make up 80% of the U.S. teaching staff, and Black students account for only 15% of the U.S student population (National Center for Education Statistics), it calls to question how teacher's implicit bias impacts interactions with students and long-term consequences.

4. Educators work in an environment that calls for quick and immediate decisions to be made. As a result, people may be unwilling to "devote cognitive resources" to their decisions and instead rely on reflexive reactions.

Based on these observations, school staff that engage with minority students may be more susceptible to implicit bias.

Many studies and research have been conducted using the Implicit Association Test, which measures implicit bias and associations. Researchers of this phenomenon conclude that there is a level of implicit bias towards all students (Harrison & Lakin, 2018; Yen et al., 2018).

White females are often categorized as feminine and submissive, while Black females evoke

stereotypes such as aggressive, loud, and indiscriminate (Jerald et al., 2016); like those of a

Sapphire, African American females are continually assessed against white gender standards. In

addition to the stereotypes, Black females are often seen as more masculine than any other ethnic

group. Because masculinity can be viewed as dangerous and threatening, the same ominous bias

associated with Black males may carry over to Black females (Morris & Perry, 2017; Thiem et

al., 2019), which can lead to negative consequences and outcomes for African American females

(Nelson et al., 2018; Warikoo et al., 2016).

Interventions

Research suggests that students who receive exclusionary discipline are more likely to

engage in crimes such as shoplifting, vandalism, and theft (Amemiya et al., 2020; Coles &

Powell, 2019). Hassan and Carter (2020) endorsed that removing students from the school

setting is unfair and costly to the American taxpayer, with an estimated $81 billion placed into

the correctional system. Research has provided clear documentation on the extent of

disproportionality in school discipline; however, there is limited pragmatic research on

interventions (Smolkowski et al., 2016). Nevertheless, leadership necessitates identifying

precursors to student behavior and understanding the ways interactions between students and

school leadership can further foster or reduce misconduct (DeMatthews et al., 2017). Therefore,

new frameworks and ideologies are beginning to emerge. A Gardening Metaphor (AGM) is a

new ideology that seeks to quickly close the apparent racial gap in U.S. public schools. This

framework isolates constructs essential to achieving equity and justice for African American

students (Taylor et al., 2018). This framework is rooted in a social justice approach that requires

school leaders to be a core component in ensuring that teachers are equipped with the knowledge

to be effective in the classrooms. With practices like those of a gardener, the uniqueness of African American students and their communities can be nurtured to achieve optimal success.

One of the most widely adopted evidence-based frameworks in schools is Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). PBIS is a three-tiered framework linked to improved student behavior, attendance, and student outcomes (Freeman et al., 2015; James et al., 2019). This approach is race-neutral which is a core tenet of CRT. It allows school personnel to reduce their implicit bias, in effect helping improve the outcomes of African American students. The research presented by James et al. (2019) supported previous findings that confirm that PBIS and race-conscious approaches are associated with improved student behavior (Anyon et al., 2017; Noltemeyer, 2017), improved school climate, increased positive relations among staff and students, and fewer disciplinary referrals (Bradshaw et al., 2008).

Another intervention that is garnering attention is restorative justice in schools. Restorative justice works in direct contradiction to the practice of exclusionary discipline by shifting from punitive consequences to resolution and reconciliation (Payne & Welch, 2013). Restorative justice methods closely mirror those used in the criminal justice system and seek to address student behavior by effectively focusing on relationship building through restorative conferences. Payne and Welch (2017) conducted a study to examine whether student racial composition impacted the likelihood for student schools to engage in restorative justice practices. Given the fact that students of color are more likely to be victims of ZTP (Curran, 2016; Hines-Datiri & Andrews, 2017), this study sought to uncover whether the racial composition of the student body contributed to the likeliness of a school using this method to address any unwanted behaviors. Indeed, their research confirmed that schools with high numbers of ethnic minorities

are least likely to implement restorative justice practices, which rely on punitive methods leading to increased discipline referrals.

Summary

Ladson-Billings and Tate's critical race theory and Crenshaw's intersectionality theory provide the framework for this study. Both theories provide the foundation for exploring how African American female school administrators experience and understand intersectionality regarding discipline outcomes. Researchers have documented that school leaders must create a safe learning environment that meets the needs of all students (DeMatthews et al., 2017; Griffith, 1999; Konishi et al., 2017; Welsh & Little, 2018). However, few studies have used critical race theory or intersectionality theory to explore how the experiences and disciplinary approaches of African American female school leaders can either dismantle or maintain discipline gaps among female students of color.

Leadership along with race are socially constructed roles. School communities dictate what normed leadership should look like, and race has been determined to be a social construct defined by history. Racial groups that are currently recognized are not based on genetic differences instead were created and have been fortified over several centuries (Carter et al., 2017). Both race and gender are identifiable characteristics that are processed without conscious thought; therefore, the use of critical race and intersectionality theories undergird examining the experiences of African American school administrators.

African American students represent approximately 15% of the student population. Nevertheless, school discipline measures disproportionately affect Black female students, leading to increased juvenile incarceration and increased engagement in crimes such as shoplifting, vandalism, and theft (Amemiya et al., 2020; Coles & Powell, 2019). Understanding

bias, exclusionary discipline practices, and discipline disparities are crucial in understanding the lived experiences of African American female administrators concerning student discipline outcomes. A school administrator's racial and gender identity and the ability to reflect on systemic racism and sexism are vital. However, school leaders who have a high self-awareness regarding social justice values and norms can fall prey to promoting inequitable and exclusionary discipline practices (Williams et al., 2020). The literature review highlights the experiences African American female administrators have when grappling with their intersectionality and navigating the strict discipline policies that are neither race nor gender-neutral.

This literature aims to understand the lived experiences of African American female school leaders as they interact with school discipline concerning race and gender. Examining the characteristics and role of school leadership is vital in understanding how administrators must interact with discipline. One of the main objectives of a school leader is to maintain a safe and positive learning environment. Although districts have developed codes of conduct and the accompanying acceptable consequences, perceived gender and race-neutral policies adversely affect female students of color. These policies lead to African American girls having the fastest growing suspension rates, experiencing discipline rates six times higher than their White counterparts and suspension rates higher than 67% of male students (Annamma et al., 2019). This discipline disproportionality can raise questions regarding policy equity and fairness (Welsh & Little, 2018) and underscores the complex relationship between student discipline and the transference of bias through disciplinary outcomes (DeMatthews, 2016). This disproportional relationship of African American female students in the discipline process is a national crisis.

A stark gap in the literature is present. Albeit there is an abundance of literature and research documenting the disproportionality of African American male students, a smaller,

growing body of literature is present about the Black female. However, even more, scant literature serves to help document the experiences of African American female administrators. The absent voices of African American female leader limit the ability to provide equitable educational outcomes that responds to the needs and lives of Black children and their families. The deafening silence around the lived experiences of Black women and girls is both multifaceted and incongruous. Despite the mounting inequities and disproportionality directed towards African American females, no significant agenda would influence educational practices and policies toward social justice on behalf of Black females (Patton et al., 2016). The urgency of this work is derived from how adverse school outcomes relate to negative social effects, including school discipline trends, zero-tolerance policies, and the school-to-prison pipeline for students of color.

This transcendental phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of African American female school administrators as they interact with school discipline concerning race and gender, and school context in Georgia. With little research focused on the intersectionality of race and gender and discipline outcomes, this study will add additional and pertinent information to the current research regarding African American female administrators and adequately framing problems and providing viable solutions.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore how African American female school administrators experience and understand intersectionality regarding discipline outcomes. The chapter provides an overview of the research methods for this study. Furthermore, a restatement of research questions, a description of the setting, and an introduction to the participants of this study are provided. Chapter Three also includes the procedures, data collection, and data analysis for the study. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the steps to achieve trustworthiness, discussions of relevant ethical considerations, and a concise summary of the chapter.

Research Design

The research was conducted using a qualitative study. According to Denny and Weckesser (2018), qualitative research considers why individuals think and behave the way they do and how these thoughts and actions play out in their daily lives. Qualitative research is an appropriate design as the phenomena from the perspectives of multiple stakeholders is observed in their natural settings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A qualitative study incorporates open-ended questions to acquire participants' knowledge, perceptions, and deeper meaning. This type of study is also fitting in obtaining the essence of the African American female school administrator experience.

A phenomenology design was utilized within the qualitative research study to describe "what" the participants experienced and "how" they experienced it (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) defined phenomenology as the science of describing what one perceives and experiences in consciousness. What appears in consciousness is categorized as

a phenomenon, and its essence is the foundation for gaining new knowledge. Husserl (1973) described essence as "that without which an object of a particular kind cannot be thought, i.e., without which the object cannot be intuitively imagined as such" (p.341). Therefore, the shared essence will give meaning to the experiences of African American female administrators regarding school discipline outcomes.

The transcendental phenomenology approach was chosen because it creates knowledge and understanding, furthers the development and implementation of policy change, and deepens experiences through the investigation process (Mills et al., 2010). A transcendental phenomenology underscores individual experiences and discovery (Moustakas, 1994). The transcendental phenomenological design focused on individual experiences that connect directly with the purpose of the study, which was to allow African American female administrators to describe their experiences with intersectionality and school discipline. This approach was also used to separate the participants' experiences from my own as the researcher. The goal of phenomenology is to view things with an open mind, free from bias and presumptions. Nevertheless, the challenge of transcendental phenomenological research is to describe things as they truly exist and understand meanings and essences in the light of self-awareness and self-reflection (Moustakas, 1994). Recognizing that I bring bias to this study, *epoche'* required me to avoid experiencing the phenomenon through a personal lens. In this transcendental phenomenological study, I analyzed all lived experiences that the participants have in common as they involved themselves with the phenomenon of the intersectionality of race and gender and school discipline outcomes. I collected data from African American female administrators who have experienced the phenomenon and explored the essence of the experience for all participants (Moustakas, 1994).

Research Questions

The following questions guided this transcendental phenomenological study:

Central Research Question

How do African American female school administrators experience and understand intersectionality and discipline outcomes?

Sub Question One

What are African American female school administrators' perceptions of how the intersectionality of race and gender impacts school discipline outcomes?

Sub Question Two

What are African American female administrators' perceptions of how their intersectionality impacts school discipline outcomes?

Sub Question Three

What are African American female school administrators' perceptions and experiences on the intersectionality of race and gender and school discipline based on school level (elementary, middle, high) or the number of years of experience?

Setting and Participants

This research was conducted in a natural setting which means things are studied and observed as they are. Participant selection was purposeful where those selected can best inform the research question and enhance the understanding of the phenomenon. Therefore, the participant must be an African American female administrator who directly influences disciplinary outcomes. For this study, the setting was a K-12 suburban school district, and 10 African American female administrators with direct involvement in school discipline were selected.

Site

  This research was conducted at Mainstream School District, a pseudonym for a large suburban public school in Georgia. Mainstream School District is considered one of the largest school districts in Georgia (GaDOE, 2019). The district is in a metropolis area and covers over 130 square miles. This setting was chosen as the backdrop for the research because of its size and diverse population. This diverse setting created an opportunity to gather vibrant data on the unique perspectives of African American female administrators.

  Mainstream School District is served by a Superintendent and a seven-member school board. There are 11 elementary schools, four middle schools, three high schools, and four specialty schools. Each school is served by a principal and at least one assistant principal, with many schools having multiple assistant principals (GaDOE, 2019). Purposeful selection of participants was used, including criterion sampling, to select African American female administrators who have worked in the Mainstream School District for more than one year.

Participants

  As a qualitative study, the sample needed to align with the research goals and provide enough data and information to thoroughly analyze the topic (Chinnery et al., 2016). This study used purposeful sampling and criterion sampling to select participants for the study. Participants were selected from several schools across Mainstream School District. Additionally, snowball sampling was used as needed to obtain additional participants for the study. Benoot et al. (2016) asserted that purposeful sampling in research selects information-rich cases where knowledge will develop from learning about the phenomena being studied. Purposeful sampling also involves identifying knowledgeable individuals who can describe the central phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Palinkas et al., 2013). It is also contended that purposeful sampling

aims not to come to one correct or right answer but instead investigate and understand different theories and schools of thought (Benoot et al., 2016).

The criteria for participants were current African American female school administrators within the Mainstream School District who have served in that role within this district for at least one year. This qualification is needed to ensure participant knowledge of current district discipline policies and practices. The sample size of this research included 10 participants, as recommended by Creswell and Poth (2018). All participants were directly involved with the school discipline process. After obtaining IRB approval (Appendix A), a recruitment letter was sent to Mainstream District school administrators through district email (see Appendix B). The study's participant selection screening was conducted using a researcher-created screening instrument (see Appendix C). The participants were selected based on the results of this survey to confirm that they met the outlined criteria, including being in an administrative role within Mainstream School District for at least a year and identifying as an African American female. The selection screening organized in such a way as to allow for confidentiality among the participants. Administrators who met the criteria were notified via email (see Appendix D). Maximum variation required the researcher to use a diverse set of participants, which was achieved by selecting participants representing all three levels of K-12 education (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Researcher Positionality

Evidence of the disproportionality of discipline towards specific racial or gender groups has been extensively chronicled (Annamma et al., 2019; Carter et al., 2017; Hassan & Carter, 2020; Hines-Datiri & Andrews, 2017), yet reasons for those disparities are less well understood. I have seen the disproportionality of school discipline firsthand and have been a part of various

conversations among school administrators regarding discipline practices. Schools partly function through the operation of procedures, policies, and routines. As an administrator, I am charged with daily tasks of maintaining order and structure within the school building. Part of my responsibilities is to issue consequences when a student violates school policy or code of conduct. As an African American female administrator, I often navigate various challenges due to the intersectionality of my race and gender. Based on my perspective, I want to continue to understand the experiences of other administrators regarding intersectionality and its role in school discipline. By focusing on experiences, I pursued holistic narratives from the research participants and how they perceived and described intersectionality and discipline in their lived experiences.

Crenshaw (1989) described intersectionality as a theoretical framework for understanding how social identities intersect to create forms of discrimination. Understanding my own multilayered identity and role as a school administrator is the first step in understanding my desire to explore this topic. I have been an educator for over 15 years and have worked as a school administrator for seven years. My first ten years of teaching were completed in Title I schools, where the population of both students and faculty was 99% African American. However, when I transitioned into school administration, the teaching staff was 95% White and the student population was 70% minority. I was the only African American female administrator that school had ever had in its 50-year history. Coming from a culturally homogenous environment to a highly diverse one was a significant transition and adjustment for me. I had little knowledge of where this journey would take me.

During my tenure as a school administrator, I have been responsible for launching the Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) program at my school. The catalyst for this

launch was the documented disparity in our school discipline data. Compared to schools similarly sized, there was triple the yearly discipline and no support or interventions to curb unwanted behaviors. A closer look at the discipline data continued to unravel the disproportionality that students of color were experiencing. Being one of few staff members of color, it was challenging for me to broach the discipline conversation without staff being defensive, ignoring the situation, or blaming students. Now that I have several years of school leadership experience, my focus has shifted from my own experience to understanding how others experience intersectionality related to school discipline.

Interpretive Framework

Although there are components from several worldviews that I can relate to, social constructivism, an approach that allows researchers to understand "the world in which they live and work" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), fits the best. Applying the social constructivism paradigm allowed me to build new understandings of the phenomena as I actively engaged in understanding the lived experiences. The constructivist researcher allows multiple perspectives to be considered and collects multiple levels of data, so the participants' voices are heard and understood. A transcendental phenomenological study with a constructivist lens allowed new perceptions and understandings to emerge.

Philosophical Assumptions

As the researcher, I bring certain beliefs and philosophical assumptions to the research. These beliefs are a culmination of prior experiences and ongoing scholarly research. The obstacle is being aware of the assumptions and how they will be incorporated into the research. The three philosophical assumptions addressed are ontological, epistemological, and axiological.

Ontological Assumption

Every individual perceives, interprets, and experiences phenomena from their perspective, which means every person has a different reality experience. My ontological philosophical assumption guided my decision to include multiple perspectives in this study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). As the researcher, I interacted with the participants to explore perceptions, feelings, thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors to obtain knowledge about the phenomena.

Epistemological Assumption

The epistemological assumption was also applied in this research as I gathered knowledge through the varied subjective experiences of the participants. Knowledge is gained through understanding the participants' lived realities and experiences. Therefore, evidence is gathered, and the truth is developed based on personal views. As the researcher, I must minimize the separateness between myself and those being researched (Guba & Lincoln, 1988).

Axiological Assumption

I also held the axiological assumption that values and beliefs are social constructs as I bring my values and biases into the research. This is apparent in the types of questions that were asked which are influenced by my worldviews. The analysis of the findings and identification of themes were shaped by my values, biases, and individual experiences. The worldviews, experiences, and values of the participants interact in tandem with mine to deepen the analysis.

Researcher's Role

As the researcher, I hold a critical and vital role in this project. It is necessary to disclose my background and provide the necessary framework for my understanding and passion surrounding the topic of interest. The background of this research is in direct relation to African American female administrators. As an American female administrator who has been an

educator for over 15 years, I served as the human instrument in this study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). As I collected and analyzed the data, I aimed to mitigate my influence or bias on the data and information as feasibly possible. I am aware that my personal and professional experiences and racial and gender identity will influence how data is analyzed and conclusions are drawn. My influence on the research can only be reduced once my own "assumptions, beliefs, and biases" are disclosed (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 127). To reduce bias, I utilized a researcher's journal to purify the experience to get to its essence (see Appendix I). This journal allowed me to record the process, decisions, and feelings throughout the research process. According to Husserl (1977), all prior positions are put aside through this process, and experiences can be viewed without prejudgment.

My interest in this topic is fueled and ignited by my observations, experiences, and conversations with stakeholders, including parents, students, and colleagues. In my current role as a school administrator, I am tasked with upholding the district code of conduct, which requires me to issue disciplinary consequences when violations of the code of conduct occur. I am also charged with analyzing disciplinary infractions and consequences for my school. This work has required me to reflect on my practices and experiences, including acknowledging and compartmentalizing my own biases and my multiple identity classifications. Being aware of the experiences of African American female administrators, I bracketed my experiences by responding to the same participant interview questions to eliminate any bias (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The school where I work was not a part of this study. I have no affiliation with any other school or administrative staff used in the research. This absence of affiliation is essential in helping control any bias present during this research.

Procedures

The procedures section provides clear direction and steps to be followed to conduct the study (Moustakas, 1994). This section includes attaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, eliciting participants for the study, gathering data, and recording procedures. Before data collection, IRB approval was secured to preserve the confidentiality of the school districts (see Appendix A). After IRB approval, a pilot study was conducted to help enhance the data collection, interview questions, and data analysis procedures (Moustakas, 1994). The pilot study consisted of three educators, one from each level of K-12 education, who tested the clarity of the interview and focus group questions. This process ensured that the questions provided the rich data needed and allowed me to practice the interview process. None of the data collected from the pilot study was included when analyzing data from the actual study.

After completion of the pilot study, I began recruiting participants for the study via the Mainstream School district email distribution list (see Appendix B). To ensure successful research, I selected administrators through purposeful sampling using a researcher-created screening instrument to determine the potential participants' involvement with the discipline process. The screening instrument contained six questions using Microsoft Forms, and the participants responded to the questions using a drop-down menu (see Appendix C). After administering the participant screening questionnaire, I selected participants based on several criteria, including race and gender, involvement with discipline, and the number of years as an administrator within the Mainstream School District. I contacted participants via email to inform them of their selection as participants in the study (see Appendix D). Those who agreed to participate completed a consent form that explained the details of the study, including risks and benefits (see Appendix E). This consent form is an agreement that ensures the participants'

identity will remain confidential and outlines the participants' rights to withdraw from the study at any given time. After participants were selected through the screening process and the signed consent forms were returned via email, I began to gather the data.

Permissions

Before the study was conducted, Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval at Liberty University was obtained (see Appendix A). The application for permission to conduct research for Mainstream School District was completed after IRB approval. Once the district Superintendent designee granted written approval, an email was sent using the district directory to solicit volunteers for the study (Appendix B).

Recruitment Plan

Qualitative research seeks out participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). After completing the pilot study, I began to recruit participants for the study using the Mainstream School district email distribution list (see Appendix B). To ensure successful research, l selected administrators through purposeful sampling using a researcher-created screening instrument to determine the potential participants' involvement with the discipline process. The screening instrument contained six questions using Microsoft Forms, and the participants responded to the questions using a drop-down menu (see Appendix C). After administering the participant screening questionnaire, I selected participants based on several criteria, including race and gender, involvement with discipline, and the number of years as an administrator within the Mainstream School District. I contacted administrators via email to inform them of their selection as participants in the study (see Appendix D). Those who agreed to participate completed a consent form that explained the details of the study, including risks and benefits (see Appendix E). This consent form is an agreement that ensures the participants' identity will

remain confidential and outlines the participants' rights to withdraw from the study at any given time.

Data Collection Plan

This transcendental phenomenology used specific and varied data collection techniques. According to Flick et al. (2018), triangulation of data aims to decode the mystery of the phenomena being studied by including multiple primary sources that allow for several types of data to be analyzed systematically for a greater understanding. For this study, four methods were used to allow participants to share their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). First, participants engaged in an in-depth individual interview. Second, participants responded to three journal prompts to reflect on their experiences with intersectionality and school discipline. The responses to the journal prompts helped find the essence of the experiences of African American female administrators. Third, the participants participated in a focus group to discuss how intersectionality influences disciplinary consequences. Lastly, I examined any available documentation, such as school demographics and longitudinal discipline data, to determine trends or patterns (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Moustakas, 1994).

Individual Interviews

The interviews that were conducted followed the construct of a semi-structured interview. Gill et al. (2008) defined this approach as an interview that asks several defined and definite questions and allows the responses to the questions to lead to other areas that can be explored. I conducted the individual interviews with each participant in their chosen location. The interview setting must be comfortable, allowing the participant to engage in rich discourse (Moustakas, 1994). If the interview was face to face, I recorded the interviews using a cell phone and an iPad as a backup. If a participant chose a virtual interview, Microsoft Teams, an online video and

audio messaging platform, was used to record the responses. Each interview was allotted one hour in length to include the use of open-ended interview questions and participant response time (see Appendix F). The following interview questions were developed and used.

Individual Interview Questions

1. Tell me about yourself, as if we just met one another. Why did you decide to pursue a career in education? CRQ

2. Tell me why you became an administrator. CRQ

3. Please describe your educational background and career through your current position, including demographic data of schools where you have worked. SQ3

4. Share with me your ethnic background and how that has influenced or shaped your worldview. SQ2

5. Detail an experience professionally or personally where your gender hindered or helped you achieve any goals? SQ2

6. Describe your specific involvement with school discipline decisions. SQ3

7. Describe the process of how you issue a disciplinary consequence. SQ3

8. Describe a time when gender stereotypes and racial bias played a role in your discipline decision. SQ2

9. Describe for me how your race and gender play a role in your leadership. SQ2

10. Intersectionality theory describes how various overlapping identities oppress a person or group of people. Describe your knowledge or understanding of intersectionality. SQ1

11. How does your school data confirm racial and gender discipline disparities? SQ1

12. Describe a time when you gave a different disciplinary consequence to students for the same infraction and why that decision was made? SQ2

13. Please share your thoughts on anything else related to this topic.

14. What is your preferred method of communication if I have any additional questions?

The qualitative research interview, as described by Brinkman and Kvale (2015), "attempts to understand the world from the subject's point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experiences, to uncover their lived word" (p. 3). Before the interviews were conducted, an expert review by my chair and committee member was conducted to assess the interview questions, garner feedback, and revise questions for clarity and conciseness. The questions were also piloted by three administrators representing all three levels of K-12 education to judge the flow of the questions. Questions one through five are knowledge questions (Patton, 2015) and designed to help establish a relationship with the school administrator and understand their background and journey (Moustakas, 1994). Questions six through eight were asked to understand each school administrator's varying techniques when approaching school discipline. Gillborn (2015) and Howard and Navarro (2016) mentioned that school administrators play a critical role in dispensing disciplinary outcomes, and current research supports the notion that bias influences educators' perceptions of student behaviors (Zimmermann, 2018).

DeMatthews et al. (2017) supported the notion that administrators must recognize and confront race and gender discrimination. Questions nine and 10 were asked to help determine if the administrator understood the term intersectionality and if they have ever been reflective of the obstacles or advantages their race and gender may have afforded them throughout their lives. Questions 11 and 12 are open-ended questions designed to elicit strong and thoughtful responses,

allowing the participant to reflect on their practices and add more information to support the emergence of themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Gall et al., 2006).

Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan

Individual interviews enabled me to identify and interpret the response to the interview questions (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). The interview protocol questions were developed to reduce bias and were read to the participants accordingly. The phenomenological "interview must begin with social conversation or short meditative activity that will lead to trusting atmosphere" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 114). Participants were asked to take a few moments to reflect or focus on the experience, which helped create a favorable environment for participants to express themselves without fear (Moustakas, 1994). The necessary tools used were a cell phone and Microsoft Teams. The interviews were conducted individually, and the interview protocol was used to explore responses within the allotted time. Upon completing the individual interviews, I used Express Scribe transcription software. Express Scribe is a professional audio player software that is downloaded on my PC to transcribe the audio recordings of the interview responses, which allowed for accurate and thorough transcription of each interaction (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The data gathered from the individual interviews was organized and analyzed using the NVivo software program. This program aided in finding common themes; however, it was used after I read the transcribed text and identified emerging themes. The coding process was used to facilitate the identification of recurring concepts. I used a coding list to minimize perception changes during the analysis process. After the codes were identified, I engaged in the process of *epoché* to ensure that I, as the researcher, continued to set aside prior experiences to allow the participants' experiences to be the focus (Moustakas, 1994). The coded material was divided into domains where emerging themes were identified. Lastly, I considered how the new

findings corresponded to the literature. To validate the outcome, I used member checking by sharing a transcription of their interview with each participant. Member checking is essential to check for accuracy and validate the meaning of the participant experience.

Journal Prompts

Journal prompts (Appendix G) allowed participants to reflect and consider how their intersectionality impacted African American female students (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants answered one question a week over a three-week time span. After the interview, participants used the journal prompts to describe how disciplinary decisions with students occur.

Journal Prompts

1. Thinking about your previous week, describe a time when you gave a consequence to an African American female student for a minor offense. Describe your process for issuing a consequence.

2. Thinking about your previous week, describe a time when you gave a consequence to a White female student for a minor offense. Describe your process for issuing a consequence.

3. Thinking about your previous week, describe a time when you engaged in a conversation regarding race, gender, and school discipline. Describe the outcomes of that conversation.

Journal Prompts Data Analysis Plan

Examining journal responses enabled the researcher to examine and interpret data to understand and develop empirical knowledge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The analysis in this research consisted of a personal artifact, which is the journal responses. Personal artifacts enabled participants to share information that may not have been included in the individual

interview and focus group discussions (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). The journal responses were used to provide relevant information to support the research questions. Document analysis was used as personal insight into the central research question and three guiding questions. Pertinent information was identified and separated from non-pertinent information. Journal responses were used if the described information fit the purpose of the research.

Focus Group

The third data collection method was the facilitation of a focus group conducted through Microsoft Teams. Microsoft Teams is an online video and audio messaging platform. A focus group in qualitative research allows a select group of individuals to discover perceptions of a defined phenomenon (Gall et al., 2016). Upon the conclusion of the individual interviews, participants were informed of the date and time of the focus group. The focus group enabled the researcher to generate participant perceptions, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes about their experience with intersectionality and disciplinary outcomes (see Appendix H). The participants were able to share their in-depth experiences and contributed further insights into the information shared during the individual interviews. The focus group outline consisted of an introduction, group questions, and a conclusion, allowing ten minutes for the introduction, 70 minutes for the questions and responses, and ten minutes for the conclusion (Moser & Korstjens, 2018).

As the focus group moderator, I sparked the discussion with various questions, scenarios, and comments relevant to the participants' lived experiences. The goal of the focus group was for participants to stimulate the other participant's thoughts, awareness, and understanding of intersectionality and school discipline that might not have been reflected upon. All participants were permitted to view transcripts and request changes as part of member checking (Moustakas, 1994).

Focus Group Questions

1. You were given access to CRT's definition and core tenets via a QR code. The foundation of the CRT is grounded in the fact that racism is institutional, systemic, and endemic. Based on that definition and core tenets, describe your thoughts about CRT. CRQ

2. Provide examples or share your experience that may support racism being institutional, systemic, and endemic. CRQ

3. Describe the relationship between CRT and racism as being institutional, systemic, and endemic to the challenges you have experienced? CRQ

4. You were given the definition and description of intersectionality via a QR code. Intersectionality theory describes how various overlapping identities oppress a person or group of people. Please describe your thoughts about intersectionality. CRQ

5. Describe the relationship between intersectionality and the oppression of overlapping groups to any challenges you have experienced? SQ1

6. What are factors that you believe have impacted your disciplinary decisions? SQ2

7. If you have been an administrator at various levels of school (elementary, middle, high), what are additional factors that would impact your disciplinary process and decisions? SQ3

8. Describe the strategies that you have used to engage in the conversation with others about potential discipline disparities within your school? SQ3

9. What specific types of supports do you receive from the district regarding discipline procedures? SQ3

Focus Group Data Analysis Plan

The data derived from the focus group was analyzed using a transcript-based approach. This method involved analyzing the recorded session's transcription and any additional field notes. Because the group is the unit of analysis, I was able to code the data and represent emergent themes using constant comparative analysis. There are three stages when using this type of analysis. During the first stage, the data was grouped into smaller elements, where a descriptor was attached to each element. Then, these elements were grouped into categories. I developed themes that expressed the group's consensus in the last stage. Whenever possible and appropriate, I provided the number of focus group members who agreed from which the category emerged and the number of participants who represented a dissenting view or those who did not express any view (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009).

Document Analysis

I also collected additional and relevant documents to substantiate and support the literature review, interviews, journal responses, and focus group. These documents included individual schools' longitudinal discipline data detailing various offenses and corresponding consequences. Discipline data is public information accessible through the Office of Civil Rights. I also used school demographic data, which is available on the Georgia Department of Education website, to better picture each school's cultural and gender makeup. Another helpful document is each school's strategic plan which is also a public document accessible from the website of individual schools within the Mainstream School District. District and school strategic plans often outline initiatives that support student behavior expectations.

Document Analysis Data Analysis Plan

The document analysis involved examining various pieces of information that provided

further insight into the culture of a school, including student and staff demographics and discipline data. The analysis of documents often uses a specialized approach called content analysis (Rossman & Rallis, 2017), which means that the researcher is thinking about relationships between ideas. Examining these connections can provide one of the richest sources of information to establish connections between intersectionality and discipline decisions. I explored the alignment of the available district and school programs that support student behavior and reported school discipline outcomes. Additionally, students' demographic and subgroup data were examined to identify and understand any disparities in the discipline process.

Data Synthesis

I analyzed the data for this transcendental phenomenological study using *epoché* and the modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method (Moustakas, 1994). I chose this analysis method because, as an African American female administrator, I am seeking participants who are African American female administrators, and the research questions are of personal interest and significance. The transcendental phenomenological analysis utilizes four main stages: the *epoché*, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and meaning synthesizing (Moustakas, 1994). Through this analysis, the phenomenon and the meanings of the research question were recorded and analyzed concurrently (Moustakas, 1994). The Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method emphasizes subjectivity and highlights that knowledge is constructed by systematically collecting and analyzing the participants' experiences and feelings, making meanings through discourse (Moustakas, 1994).

Epoché

To see things as they are, refraining from judgment and bias, is to observe without interpreting the meaning of the received information. According to Moustakas (1994), the

challenge of the *epoché* is to allow our predispositions to disclose themselves so we can see things with new eyes. This can be achieved through a pure lens of self, which is essential to avoid judgment and biases. *Epoché* allows the researcher to divulge her own experiences and thoughts (Merriam, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). The process of *epoché* continued from data collection into data analysis to ensure that I, as the researcher, continued to set aside prior experiences that allowed the participants' experiences to be the focus (Moustakas, 1994). This was a systematic approach to acknowledge biases the researcher may have and make every effort to set them aside before engaging in the data collected from the participants (Moustakas, 1994). To maintain the study's trustworthiness, I continued journaling to recognize my thoughts and feelings concerning the phenomenon (Appendix I). Additionally, I utilized myself as the human instrument, a professional transcription service, and the qualitative data analysis tool NVivo to support the data analysis process. Before concluding the study, I elicited member checks to ensure the entire essence of each experience had been gathered and described as true to the noema.

Phenomenological Reduction

During the transcendental phenomenological reduction, each experience must be considered singularly and "analyzed in the light of its own evidence" (Moustakas, 1994, p.44). Throughout phenomenological reduction, themes and meanings were detailed using horizontalization. Detailing themes and meanings allowed me to isolate each non-repetitive, nonoverlapping statement and bring new knowledge and understanding to "everyday situations, events and relationships" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 45). The horizons that developed are significant statements, sentences, or quotes that developed into themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018), and each has equal value (Moustakas,1994).   Following horizontalization, each statement was tapered

into unique and meaningful elements. This tapering allowed me to further reduce the data by eliminating statements that could not be categorized or did not contribute to understanding the lived experiences of African American female administrators.

Imaginative Variation

As the researcher, I understand that there is no singular road to truth; however, the myriad of themes that will emerge are connected to the essences and meanings of the phenomena. Determining a common theme requires creating and examining varying interpretations of the data using imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) defined a textural-structural description as a combined description of the textural elements and themes that develop. Textural and structural descriptions that emerged represented the meanings and essence of the experiences of African American female administrators. I used the qualitative data analysis program NVivo to organize and analyze the data. This data analysis program allowed for the further exploration of data and determining relationships.

Meaning Synthesizing

A textural and structural description was generated and incorporated into a description of the group experience (Moustakas, 1994). I identified noteworthy statements and assigned codes, which were used to draw a parallel with common statements and themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The data analysis program, NVivo, allowed data exploration and determining relationships. Textural descriptions were given based on repeated codes and themes, illustrating how African American female administrators experience intersectionality and school disciplinary outcomes. (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is a critical element of qualitative research and encompasses four criteria that determine the quality of qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Each of these criteria will be addressed in the study.

Credibility

Credibility establishes that the representation developed through research is valid and believable (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this study, I provided credibility through triangulation, member checking, and clarification of bias. For triangulation, the four data collection methods were to confirm the participants' lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The various interactions with the participants provided an in-depth description of the lived experiences of African American female administrators. I used member checking by sharing a transcription of their interview and their portion of the focus group with each participant. Member checking is essential to check for accuracy and validate the meaning of the participant experience. Member checking was accomplished through an emailed copy of the participant profile and transcriptions of interviews, focus groups, and subsequent documentation. Each participant was asked to review the documents for accuracy.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the generalizing through case-to-case transfer (Jenson, 2018), allows for the study to be replicated with comparable results, and shows that the findings may have applicability in other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, I addressed transferability by adhering to an order of procedures and ensuring detailed and literal descriptions for each participant. The information shared by one participant may be transferable to other participants in correlation to themes and ideas found throughout the study. District

leaders can take the information gathered from the interviews and use it as a resource when crafting discipline policy or implementing professional development centered around bias in their districts. I created an audit trail (Appendix J) to record tasks I completed.

Dependability

Dependability recognizes that the context of research is ever-changing. The results must always link to data, and the findings accurately express what the participants mean. Moustakas (1994) detailed bracketing out one's individual experiences should be as objective as possible, which is critical when establishing dependability. In addition to purposefully setting aside personal bias, the researcher must ensure that a documented and trackable process is in place (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2015). I accounted for this using a researcher reflexive journal (Appendix I). This journal allowed me to document the process, decisions, and feelings throughout the research process and is needed to purify the experience to get to its essence.

Confirmability

Confirmability is a means to verify the very essence of qualitative research, which is to understand the phenomenon from the vantage point of the participants and understand the meanings people give to their experiences (Jenson, 2018). A peer review was conducted to examine the findings and interpretations of the data (Patton, 2015). Before the interviews were conducted, an expert review by my chair and committee member was conducted to assess the interview questions, garner feedback, and revise questions for clarity and conciseness. While drafting conclusions, the researcher must be honest about biases, values, or experiences with the research problem. Through clarifying any biases, the study's confirmability was strengthened.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations of the research and the participants are of the utmost importance. Before the study began, I received IRB approval from Liberty University. Participants were presented with full disclosure of the study, including the purpose and expectations. Participants were informed of the voluntary nature of the study and their right to withdraw from the study at any time. Informed consent was gained by each participant, all information remained confidential, and pseudonyms were used to protect the identities of the participants in the study. Throughout the study, all participants were referred to by a pseudonym. In addition to the participants, individual schools and the school district were also given pseudonyms. The use of pseudonyms was used to ensure that the school district, schools, or participants are viewed in neither a negative nor positive light and that they will not influence the research. Another ethical consideration was ensuring the participants' privacy was not violated and the confidentiality of the research was maintained. All electronic data was stored via cloud storage and password-protected, accessible only by the researcher, and erased after three years (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Journals and other written materials were stored in a locked cabinet in my home office, with access restricted only to the researcher. After three years, documents will be shredded (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Summary

In summary, this chapter has provided an overview of the methods used in this transcendental phenomenology to explore how African American female school administrators experience and understand intersectionality regarding discipline outcomes. The chapter described the transcendental phenomenology design and procedures for identifying and selecting the setting and qualifying participants. Twelve participants selected were current school

administrators from Mainstream School District. The chapter then outlined procedures for the collection of data. Data was sorted to identify commonalities and identify trends and themes. Finally, the chapter summarized the researcher's role, methods for maximizing trustworthiness, and plans to address ethical considerations. The research and data were used to explore and understand the varied experiences of African American female school administrators in a large suburban Georgia school district.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

This transcendental phenomenological study explores how African American female school administrators experience and understand intersectionality in school discipline outcomes. Ten participants, who are African American female administrators, shared how they experience intersectionality regarding school discipline decisions. The findings based on the procedures and sequence of data collection are reported in this chapter.

Data analysis produced four themes: equity, implicit bias, leadership styles and identity, and positive relationships. Each theme answers the research questions of this transcendental phenomenology study and leads to a better understanding of the experiences of African American female administrators. This chapter provides a tabular description of each participant, who have been assigned pseudonyms, and presents the results of the data analysis gathered through the investigation. This chapter concludes with a summary of my findings.

Participants

The participants were 10 African American female administrators with at least one year of school administration experience with active roles in issuing school discipline consequences. The participants included three elementary school administrators, four middle school administrators, and three high school administrators. The years of school administration experience ranged from one year to 15 years. Seven of the participants, Rhonda, Sabrina, Andrea, Miranda, Tangela, Necole, and Bethany participated in the interview, journal prompt responses, and focus group. However, Jasmine, Denise, and Kimberly, only completed the interview and journal prompts because their schedules did not allow them to participate in the focus group. Regardless of any syntax errors, all quotes from the participants remain true to their

given responses. Pseudonyms were assigned in a realistic and culturally relevant manner,

utilizing randomly assigned names to protect the participants' confidentiality. Demographics of

each participant are found in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant	Gender	Ethnicity	Years of Administrative Experience	Level of School	Position
Rhonda	F	African American	5	Elementary (K-5)	Assistant Principal
Sabrina	F	African American	10	Elementary (K-5)	Principal
Tangela	F	African American	8	Elementary (K-5)	Assistant Principal
Necole	F	African American	11	Middle (6-8)	Assistant Principal
Jasmine	F	African American	7	Middle (6-8)	Principal
Bethany	F	African American	4	Middle (6-8)	Assistant Principal
Kimberly	F	African American	6	Middle (6-8)	Principal
Miranda	F	African American	4	High (9-12)	Principal
Andrea	F	African American	1	High (9-12)	Assistant Principal
Denise	F	African American	3	High (9-12)	Assistant Principal

There was little difficulty in getting administrators to be participants in the study. The challenge presented itself when coordinating time for both individual and focus group interviews. For many of the participants, it took at least two attempts to schedule a time that would be conducive to the participants' schedules.

Results

The results of the study were gathered by analyzing data from individual interviews, journal prompts, focus group, and supplemental school specific information. The study data saturation occurred when the participants expressed the same lived experience (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Moustakas, 1994). Participants' words from their responses were captured so that the researcher could establish a more detailed understanding of the participant's accounts and highlight their experiences of the phenomenon.

Analysis of the data revealed four major themes and several sub-themes. These themes supported the purpose of this study and its theoretical frameworks. These themes were identified through multiple readings of data, with significant statements coded using NVivo software. These themes and sub-themes are presented in Table 2. Table 2 is followed by discussion of each theme and sub-themes. Each theme answered the research questions of this transcendental phenomenology study and leads to a better understanding of the experiences of African American female administrators.

Table 2

Main Themes and Sub-Themes of Lived Experiences of African American female administrators

Theme	Sub-Theme
Equity	• Cultural Norms • Fairness

Implicit Bias	• Stereotypes
	• Marginalization
Leadership Styles and Identity	• Subjectivity
	• Experiences
Positive Relationships	• Trust
	• Value System

Equity

Ensuring equitable access and outcomes is a significant component of an administrator's duties and responsibilities. However, based on school-specific discipline data and administrator experiences, organizational capacity needs to be developed to identify racial and gender student disparities and develop equitable policies and practices. When asked about the discussion of discipline data, Tangela affirmed, "At my school we are always looking at discipline data, and it always shows that Black students are getting more discipline referrals. However, we never really try to address the "why" behind it." Bethany also declared during her interview, "I always follow the code of conduct when I get a referral, but sometimes, what the teachers refer sometimes seems pretty trivial, and I have to find a way to support both teacher and student." Through these shared experiences, two sub-themes emerged, cultural norms and marginalization.

Cultural Norms

"Why are they so loud?" quipped Jasmine. Necole recalled, "These groups of girls always seem to roll their eyes when I talk to them." Kimberly stated, "I don't even like calling on this child to answer a question, because she always has an attitude." Administrators recalled statements such as these during both individual interviews and the focus group. They reflected on examples and experiences that supported the role of racism in school, and any action outside those of the dominant culture is viewed with a negative and deficit lens. Bethany insisted that

African Americans, especially in leadership roles, are often forced to exhibit patience in interactions with people who may not understand cultural nuances. However, she also echoed that she is "… always wondering if there is an underlining message of racism, if it is cultural, or just who the person is."

Fairness

Bethany maintained in her interview, "I always defer to the code of conduct when faced with a discipline situation." Rhonda also stated during the focus group, "We have a discipline matrix that we use to determine the appropriate consequences." All participants agreed in the focus group that they stayed within the confines of the code of conduct when issuing a discipline consequence. When asked about the process of issuing a discipline consequence, Sabrina, an elementary principal with over 10 years of experience, described her approach with fairness,

> I will give an equitable consequence, but my approach with the Black girl will be very
> different. I will speak to that student as if she is a member of my family and really give
> advice on how to handle herself moving forward. I can't say that I do that with White
> students.

Other participants expressed similar sentiments to those of Sabrina. Participants conveyed that when giving a consequence they take the extra time to explain the implications of receiving a disciplinary consequence. The implications can include having a bad reputation or exclusion from advanced classes, as teachers may view them as hard to deal with.

Implicit Bias

The participants concurred that it is exceedingly rare to see explicit bias in schools, but implicit bias is omnipresent in the school setting. Rhonda stated, "You sometimes have to read between the lines and know what negative thing they were really trying to say." Sabrina also

recounted, "I remember when I worked with a White female administrator. She once told me that I should handle all the Black students, because I could identify with them more." Lastly, Denise stated, "I even think about the amount of dress code referrals I have received involving Black females versus White females, even though the White girl might have on the same thing." The administrators summed up their experiences of implicit bias in the school system as ubiquitous and often suffocating.

Stereotypes

The administrators agreed that stereotypes play a vital role in the education setting. Sabrina stated, "Working in a school that has a predominately Black student population, but majority White staff, has shown to be difficult. Often teachers say off-hand comments about the behavior of the Black students." While Miranda said, "I once heard two teachers talking in the hallway about some Black students and definitely characterized them as loud and aggressive." Denise also added, "I remember when I first started as an administrator, I had a White teacher tell me that she was so glad to have a 'sistah' girl on staff." Denise said, "I think we all have stereotypes about other groups of people, and it is important to recognize them, but they cannot impact how we treat students. The focus group participants had an "absolutely, of course" retort when describing if they have ever experienced any bias or were negatively impacted by their race, gender, or both. Bethany and Andrea both discussed how they as leaders as well as the Black female students were often accused of having "bad attitudes" and being "aggressive" when voicing an opinion or attempting to explain their point of view.

Marginalization

Administrators agreed that most of the focus on school discipline was the Black male student. The individual school discipline data reinforced other documented research that Black

male students receive more referrals than any other group. However, taking a closer look at this data also confirmed that Black female students are suspended at a higher rate than their similarly gendered peers. Additionally, Jasmine touted, "I really thought about the term intersectionality and how marginalized identities work together, and the evidence is there that Black girls are a marginalized group, because we never once had a conversation about them." The administrators reflected on their intersectionality and the impact on their leadership. Many chronicled experiences they had when working with colleagues of either a different racial or gender group. During the focus group, Necole expressed her thoughts on being marginalized,

> My principal is a White male, and the other Assistant Principal is a White male and I have been in so many meetings and my opinion is ignored or not even taken into consideration. But my colleague can say the exact same thing that I mentioned, and he is lauded for being such a great leader.

These sentiments were expressed by most of the participants and echoed prior research regarding the lack of voice given to the Black female.

Leadership Style and Identity

During the focus group, the participants agreed that representation matters, and students should know that there are teachers and staff who share similar cultural backgrounds. Kimberly declared, "You know it is crazy that in 2022, we still have students who have never had a Black administrator." Denise described her leadership style as being a "no nonsense nurturer." Sabrina chimed, "I think it can be challenging to bring all of your experiences as a Black female and as a leader and not run into criticism that possibly a White leader may not encounter."

Subjectivity

Both Kimberly and Andrea work in school schools with predominately African America student but have a majority of White faculty and staff. They reflected a great deal on the types of discipline referrals that they get for Black girls. Kimberly stated, "I get a lot of referrals for Black girls that relate to dress code and being disrespectful. I even had a White teacher tell a White parent that the reason for dress code policies was because of Black girls and their bodies." Andrea documented in her journal entry the following:

> I recently received a referral from a White teacher that stated that Kiera, who is a Black student, kept talking back and being disrespectful. I know I will have to get both sides of the story, from the teacher and the student. Kiera told me that her teacher kept accusing her of talking, when it wasn't her, and she was trying to defend herself and tell the teacher that it wasn't her. But she felt like the teacher never listens to the Black students or takes their feelings into consideration.

In both the individual interviews and focus group, the administrators shared similar sentiments regarding the challenge to remain objective when seeing bias and discrimination. It is even more difficult to have a dual role of supporting the teacher and the student.

Experiences

Crenshaw (1989) described intersectionality as the interconnected nature of social categorizations regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage. Race and gender intersect to produce personal and professional obstacles for Black women. This sub-theme produced comparable results for the participants; their understanding that their childhood, upbringing, and prior and present experiences play a role in how they interact with students. During the individual interviews, the participants provided brief examples

of various experiences that have shaped their leadership style, however, the focus group provided more robust and rich dialogue. As administrators shared experiences during the focus group, it was evident that each of them shared many similarities in their upbring and experiences.

The participants produced several responses regarding how their experiences impacted their leadership style and identity. In the individual interviews, Jasmine and Kimberly were able to share significant thoughts. Jasmine recalled, "Growing up, I was made to be aware of differences among people, not so much gender, but definitely race." Kimberly explained,

> I have two daughters and a son, and I am very serious when I talk to them about what it means to be African American and how other cultures can view them as a threat. This was a conversation, that my parents had with me, and I am sure that their parents had with them.

Miranda discussed her first school leadership position. She mentioned that she was the first African American leader that the school had ever had and how the community was extremely accepting. However, that same acceptance was also met with disapproval and condemnation. Miranda further detailed an experience that shaped her future interactions.

> Most of my staff were older, White females. Here I am a young, Black girl, getting ready to lead people who could be my mother. I remember when I made my first mistake, how much criticism I received from the teachers. It just reminded me of what I have always been told about having to be twice as good. I had never experienced anything like that professionally. I think that moment proved to be a defining moment of who I wanted to be as a leader.

Although the participants expressed similar views regarding the sub-theme, the grade level, and the number of years of experience were indicators of how these experiences impacted

leadership style and identity. The participants with more administrative experience expressed a deeper understanding of how their own identity impacts their leadership style. Furthermore, those who work at the elementary level acknowledge they do not deal with the same volume of disciplinary infractions but are mindful of their intersectionality and the interaction with younger students.

Positive Relationships

All participants concurred that building positive relationships is an essential attribute of good leadership. During her individual interview, Jasmine recalled various experiences she has had as an administrator.

> I have never worked with an administrative team that was diverse. Often, I was the only woman, or the only African American, now I serve on a team where I am the representation for both. When I named Principal at my new school, the community is very diverse, and I received so much love from my Black parents. Like, their whole-body language would change when they saw me. It was like they intuitively knew that I would share many of the same cultural values that they had.

When Necole reflected on how she handles discipline and works with students, she stated,

> Most of my administrative experience has been in middle school, however I did work in high school for one year. Now, I specifically work with eighth-grade students, and I really strive to build relationships with my students. But being totally honest, I gravitate to the Black students. We can talk about so much of the same things, so the Black students come to me about everything and often refer to me as their 'school mom.' So, building relationships matters, especially in our culture.

Trust

Necole detailed a memory of being an elementary school student, and her teacher put her in the back row behind all the White students, even though she was the shortest of all students.

> I never want any student to feel the way that I felt in that moment. My job as a leader is to make sure that I build trust with my students and the community. Yes, hold students accountable, but not at the expense of their dignity or self-respect.

Those sentiments were echoed by many of the administrators. Rhonda, Bethany, and Denise also believed African American children are generally taught to mistrust authority figures, so a positive relationship must be established between students and their families.

Value System

According to Merriam-Webster (n.d.), a value system is a system of established values, norms, or goals existing in a society. During the focus group and individual interviews, many of the administrators referred to a value system being a mechanism that grounds their leadership style. During the focus group, Tangela recalled, "Growing up, I was always told to not be associated with the wrong crowd, or to be in the wrong place at the wrong time." Andrea echoed Tangela's sentiments and added, "Because birds of a feather, flock together." Bethany stated, "You have to be twice as good to get half as much." These statements made by the participants document the created "rules" that shaped the many norms that were spoken of. Sabrina also inserted the following thought during the focus group discussion:

> There is an unwritten rule book that most Black people are aware. It tells you how to act when you are with your family and friends and how you should behave when you are out in public, especially around White people. This rule book, so to speak, helps me connect with my students of color and their families. So, I leverage that when I have to deal with

discipline issues. I speak to my Black students the way a momma speaks, and when I call

their parents, there seems to be an understanding and appreciation for those interactions.

All the participants agreed with Sabrina's statement, with Tangela adding,

I think it has everything to do with our culture and just all that we have had to endure."

When our Black families really believe that we want what is best for their children and

we carry many of the same values, it really does make a difference.

Research Question Responses

This investigation sought to examine the experiences of African American female

administrators with intersectionality with school discipline decisions. Participants' responses

from a semi-structured interview, journal prompts, focus group, and examining school-specific

discipline data answered the central research and sub-questions. The four themes of equity,

implicit bias, leadership styles and identity, and positive relationships supported all the research

questions.

Central Research Question

What are the experiences of African American female administrators who issue

disciplinary decisions? The participants' perspective was that issuing disciplinary consequences

should always be fair and consistent across all populations. However, the school administrators

in this study acknowledged that they build unique relationships with Black female students, and

they are often viewed as maternal figures. The participants each experienced issuing discipline

consequences using their unique leadership styles and identity to build positive relationships and

ensure equitable outcomes. Sabrina said, "I follow the code of conduct, however, my

conversation with the Black girl will be vastly different than my conversation with a White

student who committed the same discipline infraction."

All four themes that were established described the participants' experience of issuing disciplinary consequences. Understanding cultural norms and the consistent enforcement of policy aids in building equity in discipline decisions. Recognizing that the Black female is a marginalized group and is marred with negative stereotypes helps curb implicit bias that can occur when issuing discipline decisions. Leadership styles and identity help administrators navigate their dualistic role of supporting both students and teachers. Lastly, the establishment of positive relationships with Black female students provided opportunities to engage them and have authentic and meaningful interactions.

Sub Question One

What are the African American female school administrators' perceptions of how the intersectionality of race and gender impact the disproportionality represented in school discipline? The themes of equity and implicit bias describe the participants' experiences of how the intersectionality of race and gender impact discipline disproportionality. All 10 administrators acknowledged disproportionality in their school discipline data. Specifically, the sub-themes of marginalization and fairness address this question. Rhonda stated, "My administrative team always focuses on what we should do regarding discipline of our Black male students. However, when we really look at our data, our Black girls are also getting way more discipline referrals."

The middle school and high school administrators described how their school discipline data reflects a widening discipline disparity, with Black females receiving more referrals and often for subjective violations. Andrea questioned, "Why has the narrative always been on the black male student?" Kimberly expressed, "Even the conversation about discipline leaves out Black girls. Necole also suggested, "When I was at a predominately African American school, I

didn't have any other group to compare our discipline data to, but now that I am at a diverse school, I definitely see bias towards students of color." Similarly, several other participants described how implicit bias has an impact on discipline referrals and it is incumbent for administrators to be equitable when issuing consequences.

Sub Question Two

What are the African American female administrators' perceptions of the ways their intersectionality impacts school discipline outcomes? All participants agreed that the code of conduct is always followed when issuing consequences or making disciplinary decisions. The themes of equity, leadership style and identity, and positive relationships answered this question. Participants expressed those three themes were key in articulating the ways their intersectionality impacts discipline decisions. Bethany described discipline outcomes as having to be "fair and consistent." Kimberly shared that "past leadership experiences" helps her make decisions. While Andrea disclosed,

> When I issue a consequence to a White girl, it is often pretty cut and dry. I state the infraction, listen to their story and make a decision. But when a Black girl is in my office, I tend to make our time together more conversational and relationship-building. I try to explain the bigger implication when they get in trouble. I see myself in our Black female students, so they have a special place in my heart. I want them to understand that society will always judge them for everything, from how they wear their hair to how they talk.

In her journal, Miranda documented an experience giving a consequence to an African American female student who was given a discipline referral. Miranda wrote,

> A Black young lady was sent to my office today for a dress code violation. She had on leggings and a shirt that was not fingertip length. I think the policy is quite silly. The

student explains that she has worn this outfit several times, had nothing else to wear, and she sees other students wearing the same thing and they don't get in trouble. As I listen to her, she is absolutely correct. Some students are dress coded, and some are not. I really struggle with the picking and choosing. I have to support both her and the policy. Instead of giving her ISS, I decided to make it a conference. I used this opportunity to explain to her the 'why.' I explained to her what the rule is and that she indeed didn't follow the rule. But I also wanted her to know that she was right in her observations that the rule is not applied to all students.

Equity, leadership style and identity, and positive relationships are key components in the perception of the ways their intersectionality impacts school discipline outcomes.

Sub Question Three

What are African American female school administrators' perceptions and experiences on the intersectionality of race and gender and school discipline based on the level (elementary, middle, high) with which they work or their number of years of experience? This question was answered with the theme of equity as well as the stereotypes and experiences sub-themes.

Tangela asserted,

Being in elementary school, I really don't get the same type or amount of discipline that middle or high school administrators deal with. But I recognize that I am a Black woman, and I must be intentional when I deal with discipline in the elementary setting.

Nicole mentioned,

I'm a current middle school administrator but have worked at all three levels. The stereotypes of our Black students start at the elementary level and progressively get more severe the older the student. The difference is in the documentation of discipline. For

example, in-school and out-of-school suspensions are used in middle and high. Those

suspensions are documented and tracked. In elementary, the consequences are more like,

time-out or silent lunch. Those consequences aren't tracked anywhere. So to the outside

world, the disparities aren't there in elementary. The stereotypes are there, and they

follow students throughout their time in school.

Half of the participants have worked in at least two different levels of K-12 education throughout

their careers. These administrators all had similar opinions and experiences that support the

perception that the role of intersectionality has a larger impact the higher the level of school.

In addition to those sentiments, middle and high school administrators spoke about the

importance of building relationships with students and, more importantly, representation matters.

Jasmine, a middle school principal, stated,

I am the only Black administrator on staff, so when I see students of color getting

discipline referrals, my initial thought goes to what teacher is writing this referral. I have

a fairly diverse student body, but my teachers are predominately Caucasian. So there can

be a disconnect between teachers and students. I try to be that bridge.

Denise, and assistant principal with three years of experience explained,

I am going to be fair, when dealing with consequences, but this is my third year as an

administrator, and nothing is ever black and white. There is always a gray, and as a

person of color, I must be able to see and understand the gray.

All of the participants' statements aligned with Andrea when she said, "how you approach

discipline changes with the more experience that you have."

Summary

African American female administrators in a suburban school district described their lived experiences of intersectionality in school discipline decisions. This transcendental phenomenological study consisted of 10 participants: three elementary administrators, four middle school administrators, and three high school administrators. Four different forms of data collection—individual interviews, a focus group, journal responses, and school-specific discipline data—helped triangulate the data. The individual interviews and focus group were digitally recorded for transcription accuracy, while the personal journal responses were submitted electronically. All individual interviews and the focus group interview used Microsoft Teams, an online video and audio messaging platform, allowing the participants to be in a location to share their experiences. The data gathering process fully captured the participants' lived experiences by bracketing data into themes. Since I identify as an African American female administrator with direct involvement with issuing discipline consequences, I bracketed any experiences that I shared with the participants to eliminate any bias. This researcher's personal history and predetermined beliefs were removed by utilizing self-reflection and documenting my experiences in the reflexive journal.

The four themes from the data analysis are equity, implicit bias, leadership style and identity, and positive relationships. Each theme produced several sub-themes. Equity produced stereotypes, cultural norms, and marginalized populations, while implicit bias led to stereotypes and fairness. Leadership style and identity included the sub-themes of subjectivity and values and positive relationships produced experiences and cultural norms. After describing each theme and sub-theme, which the related participant responses supported, the responses to the research questions are presented from the individual interviews, focus group, personal journals, and

discipline documentation. The participant's ability to document their lived experiences through the individual interview, journal prompts, and focus group produced rich data. One of the most salient findings from this research is that the participants' acknowledged that much of the focus when dealing with discipline is on African American boys, which solidifies the underpinning of intersectionality that being an African American female is a marginalized subgroup and often excluded from many conversations.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

This investigation explores how African American female administrators experience intersectionality and school discipline decisions. This chapter begins with the interpretation of findings given the thematic results of the study from participants' accounts of their experiences related to intersectionality in school discipline decisions. Also, policy and practice implications are explained. The rationale for theoretical and empirical implications is described followed by the discussion of both limitations and delimitations. Furthermore, the recommendations for future research related to this study are presented, and a conclusion for this qualitative study is recounted.

Discussion

The discussion section of this study emphasizes the researcher's interpretation of the findings, which are supported by the empirical and theoretical sources of data. This discussion section begins with the interpretation of the findings, followed by the implications for policy and practice, and subsequently, the theoretical and empirical implications are outlined. Limitations and delimitations are explained followed by the recommendations for future research.

Interpretation of Findings

Four major themes emerged from the analysis of the study results that align with the central research question: how do African American female school administrators experience and understand intersectionality and discipline outcomes? The four major themes were equity, implicit bias, leadership styles and identity, and positive relationships. The following is the summary of thematic findings with interpretations.

Summary of Thematic Findings

The four major themes revealed during data analysis were equity, implicit bias, leadership style and identity, and positive relationships. The sub-themes that emerged were cultural norms, fairness, stereotypes, marginalization, subjectivity, experiences, trust, and value system. These themes combined to answer the study's central research question and sub questions. Interpretation of thematic findings is further explained below.

Support of Black female students being seen and heard. The U.S education system has been developed and maintained based on the values and beliefs of the White majority; therefore, schools are microcosms that reinforce ideologies that Whiteness is desirable and deserving (Anyon et al., 2017). When the participants were asked how their school data confirmed discipline disparities, they all echoed that it is evident there are disparities, and Black students are on the losing end. Implicit bias can lead to stereotypes and the further marginalization of subgroups. Although race and gender are automatically processed, differential selection and processing are critical in discipline disparities. As early as 1935, W.E.B. DuBois asserted that schools must be where Black students feel safe and have their racial identity protected (Du Bois, 1935 as cited in Yosso et al., 2021). CRT challenges claims of fairness, objectivity, and race neutrality, recognizing that such claims act as a mirage to disguise the interest and privilege of the dominant group (Howard & Navarro, 2016). Critical race theory also argues that racism is not simply comprised of overt acts of discrimination but through more elusive forms of normed racism. Marrun et al. (2019) explained that modernized racism focuses on cultural inadequacies so minorities can be fervently blamed for deficiencies and failure to adapt to the dominant culture's norms. In this study, the participants repeatedly reported that they often grapple with dually supporting teachers and students, especially when discipline referrals

seemingly challenge dominant cultural norms. They also documented that being an African American female administrator in schools is critical for all students, especially students of color. Being both African American and female can serve to confront biases and challenge the status quo. Murran et al., (2019) supports African American educators' aid in reducing the perception of the behavior of Black students as disorderly or unacceptable, in doing so reducing the number of disciple referrals and exclusionary discipline consequences. Many administrators in this study mentioned that race and gender are at the forefront of discipline conversations with their peers but have mostly centered around Black male students. These administrators further discussed that Black students are punished more often and severely than other subgroups when looking at specific discipline infractions. Black female students received discipline for subjective offenses, such as disrespect and dress code violations. These thoughts further advanced the premise of CRT, which supports the idea that policies, procedures, and practices serve to benefit one racial group over others.

Implicit bias and stereotypes affect both Black female administrators and Black female students. Implicit bias refers to the unconscious, unintentional attitudes, and beliefs that one holds and can negatively evaluate a group of people based on characteristics such as race or gender (Fitzgerald & Hurst, 2017; Nance, 2016). Implicit bias encapsulates prejudices that are unknown to an individual. Research has linked implicit bias in schools to teacher perceptions and the harshness of disciplinary consequences (Gullo, 2017). Stereotypes and marginalization were two subthemes that emerged through data analysis. The participants believed that we all hold some bias towards a group of people. However, the problem arises when bias affects the educational outcomes for students. Both elementary administrators revealed that biases appear to be more apparent the older the student gets. For example, they both discussed that when students

are in primary grades, the minor misbehaviors of Black students are viewed more negatively than White students. However, as students transition into upper elementary, those minor misbehaviors suddenly become classified as disruptive and disrespectful, which supported Welsh and Little's (2018) notion that disparities in disciplinary outcomes were uniform across all academic settings and grade levels, which is an indicator of a systemic problem.

The African American female administrators all reflected on their experiences with intersectionality personally and professionally. All participants agreed that their marginalized identities had been significant factors. They documented experiences of feeling ignored in the workplace, constantly being mindful of how they are perceived, and continuously battling microaggressions. The administrators also detailed that their Black female students speak of similar struggles. Black female students are often stereotyped as being loud and aggressive, especially when trying to advocate for themselves. Stereotypes that perpetuate the belief that Black girls are authoritative and aggressive are in direct contrast to mainstream femininity's submissive and conservative norms. Black girls are shaped by these stereotypes and may underline the implicit bias that can mold many educators' beliefs about Black female students (Hassan & Carter, 2020; Jerald et al., 2016). These thoughts are reinforced by the participants and support all sub-questions.

Leadership Styles and Identity Shape African American Female Administrators' Experiences. Prior research studies have detailed the relationship between school leadership beliefs and achievement, yet few have examined how leadership styles and identity impact student discipline (Carpenter et al., 2017; Goings et al., 2018; Shabazian, 2020). Williams et al. (2020) pointed out that even as school leaders classify themselves as race-conscious, they often promote deficit ideologies against Black students while maintaining the notion of being color-

blind. Black women's self-awareness has been interwoven with normed leadership and social

justice (Agosto & Roland, 2018). Black female administrators must contend with the

concurrence of being a medium for the system, a medium for marginalized students, and their

multifaceted identities, making the decision-making process more complex. All too frequently,

the behaviors of African American female leaders are influenced by negative stereotypes,

perceptions from peers, and how actions can affect job security. Through individual interviews, a

focus group, and journal prompt responses, each participant was able to detail the challenges of

their intersectionality and verified their neutrality when issuing consequences. All participants

declared that they follow the code of conduct to determine the offense and the appropriate

consequence. Several participants described how their leadership style has changed according to

their years of leadership experience. For example, Rhonda described that as she has gotten more

seasoned, she understands how to adjust based on the perceived situation. Also, many

participants agreed with how Denise described her leadership identity, which is a 'no-nonsense

nurturer.' When asked to elaborate on that phrase, she stated, "a no-nonsense nurturer is

someone who builds relationships, has the highest expectations of students, praises and corrects

with love and authenticity."

Agosto and Roland (2018) described how African American administrators used their

authority to influence and bend the rules based on the insights into the system that makes the

rules. In this study, little evidence that suggested that the administrators bent the rules, as they all

affirmed that they relied on the code of conduct when making disciplinary decisions. However,

the participants acknowledged that the interaction with the Black female student was vastly

different from that of a White female student. Sabrina confirmed that she gives equitable

consequences, but her approach with the Black female differed. Sabrina discussed how she often

talked to her Black female students about perceptions, stereotypes, and how to handle adversities. Conversations held between African American female administrators and African American female students are starkly different from conversations that the participants have with White female students. This research supported a relationship between leadership style and identity and discipline outcomes.

Positive Relationships Influence the Experience of African American Female Administrators. School administrators must be introspective and reflective regarding their own beliefs and behaviors. They must critically consider their conventions related to effective school leadership practices, discipline policies, community relations, deficit thinking, and how education characteristics might be experienced differently by students and families of color (Brooks & Watson, 2019; DeMatthews, 2016). All the participants confirmed that forming positive relationships with students and their families is of the utmost importance and a critical component when giving discipline consequences. Kimberly, an administrator and a parent of a Black daughter, asserted:

> Parents and students of color are usually on high alert for double standards and
> stereotypes. So when this parent knows me and knows that I have the best intentions,
> then any conversation about discipline outcomes normally ends pretty well. For example,
> I have a really close relationship with a student, in fact I consider her my mentee. She got
> in trouble with her teacher and when I called, the mom was extremely supported of any
> consequence. We were on the same page, because that mom knows that I will always
> have her daughter's back. That conversation could have gone differently if I hadn't
> established that relationship.

Most administrators believe that building a positive relationship with students can mitigate discipline referrals. Along with relinquishing bias, understanding students' culture and values, and building relationships, it is possible to see a decline in the disproportionality of disciple among students of color. The administrators also concurred that their identities helped them navigate various situations that perhaps their White counterparts would not navigate in the same way. Tangela described how the code of conduct provided a range of appropriate consequences for a discipline infraction. She stated,

> If a consequence can range from an administrative conference to an out-of-school suspension, many White administrators may give the Black student the max. I often give the minimum and use a restorative practice approach. Yes, the White administrator is technically following the rules but is it honestly what is best for that student. Probably not.

These attitudes were pervasive throughout the individual interview and focus group. Gaining and building trust is a significant component of developing a student relationship. Black students are already leery of authority figures, which makes establishing trust between administrators and students paramount in navigating intersectionality and discipline outcomes. These documented lived experiences and related literature supported sub-questions one and two.

Implications for Policy and Practice

This study presented a portrait of the lived experiences of African American female administrators in a large suburban school in Georgia. Their stories developed a foundation of knowledge surrounding how Black female administrators experienced and understood intersectionality in school discipline decisions. I based implications on the rich descriptions that evolved from the lived experiences. As I explored and defined the phenomenon, the

administrators' voices expressed through their lived experiences were always present. This essence served as the basis for my recommendations. This section details the implications for policy and practice to include recommendations for educational stakeholders and policymakers.

Implications for Policy

The main aim of this study was to address the almost total lack of research evidence on the experiences of African American female administrators as they explored intersectionality in school disciplinary decisions. This study's findings provided a voice to the vastly unique experiences of African American female administrators related to school discipline outcomes. The lived experiences of African American female administrators allow policymakers, school boards, school district leaders, and others to design policy, procedures, and actions that account for the missing narrative of African American female students and African American female administrators.

Accordingly, the first significant practical contribution of the present research is that it provided much needed empirical data on the lived experiences of African American female administrators in the K-12 setting. For example, authors of policy documents could note that most African American female administrators have documented that most Black female students are referred for disciplinary consequences for what is perceived as White feminine norms. This could enable policymakers to redesign district-level code of conduct documents and their corresponding discipline recommendations that are more race and gender inclusive.

A second important implication of this study was derived from the uniqueness of the knowledge and experiences of Black female administrators. The research findings pointed to a specific set of capabilities, leadership styles, decision strategies, and attitudes towards Black female students that may set apart the work of Black female administrators from their non-Black

counterparts. Therefore, hiring practices should consider and be reflective of the unique skill set of African American female administrators when placing administrators into schools.

Implications for Practice

The data from this study revealed several practical applications. It is necessary to examine the archaic and outdated images of femininity, racial stereotypes, and how society constructs images of Black females. Black females are subjected to varied oppressions and stereotypes, which can be a contributor to the implicit bias that can mold many educators' beliefs about Black female students and ultimately impact the lived experiences of African American female administrators. To change society's view of Black females is not a small undertaking. Pervasive messages supporting the stereotypical view of African American females undermine efforts to increase equity in school discipline decisions.

School administrators are responsible for leading learning organizations. Black female students are directly impacted by school leadership, and according to this study's findings, school administrators understand the importance of building positive relationships with Black female students and benefit from knowing their effort to build relationships with students is qualified by the discoveries in this research. Administrators must build time and strategy into their schedules to encourage informal interactions with Black female students. These interactions can easily occur through mentoring groups, weekly check-ins, implementation of the PBIS system, and continued outreach with families.

African American girls have the highest suspension rates among all ethnic groups compared to other females and are disciplined for more subjective reasons (U.S. Department of Education, OCR, 2016; Kemp-Graham, 2017). Routine administrative tasks have influenced the work of school leaders; however, current literature, along with the findings of this study,

supported school leaders desire to dedicate time to professional development opportunities centered around social justice. Administrators long for continued development of their own social justice leadership identity while engaged in professional development that centers around girls of color. Therefore, school districts must provide ongoing professional development, trainings, and seminars for administrators. These actions will aid in stakeholders being able to identify and minimize the impact that biases have when disciplining female students of color.

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

This research was informed by two theoretical frameworks, critical race theory (Bell, 1977) and Crenshaw's (1989) intersectionality theory. The core foundation of CRT is grounded in the idea that racism is institutional, systemic, and endemic (Sleeter, 2016). An analysis of CRT is significant because Black students experience schools in a starkly unusual way than their White peers (Howard & Navarro, 2016). CRT served as a framework to examine the pervasiveness of race and challenge the dominant ideologies of neutrality and fairness in school discipline outcomes. Intersectionality theory calls for an analysis of racism and its intersection with other marginalized identities. It enabled us to recognize that perceived group memberships can make people vulnerable to bias (Gillborn, 2015) and provided a framework to examine the experiences of marginalized populations within the confines of school (Howard & Navarro, 2016).

Evidence collected from this research study substantiated the parallels between the experiences of African American female administrators and the tenets of critical race theory, which include the permanence and pervasiveness of racism, challenging the dominant ideologies that justify structural oppression, and intersectionality. The implications of this study indicated in both Bell's critical race theory and Crenshaw's intersectionality theory provided an ideal lens to

view the data and results of this study. The main themes produced by the data in this study are equity, implicit bias, leadership style and identity, and positive relationships, all reinforcing critical race and intersectionality theories. The participants in this study described their lived experiences of exploring and understanding intersectionality in school discipline outcomes, they noted that racial and gender bias is pervasive in the policies and practices of schools. They oft-described how differential selection and processing are the vehicles for discipline inequities. However, participants noted that they could use their position as catalysts for fairness and neutrality.

This study focused on the lived experiences of African American female administrators and the role of intersectionality in school discipline decisions. Previous studies focused solely on the impact of intersectionality and disciplinary outcomes on Black female students, however, that research was scant. However, the available research documents African American students receive more minor infractions than their White peers (Amemiya et al., 2020). The noted research and racial and gender bias documentation support that student discipline is not an objective process rather is influenced by a student's racial and gender identities (DeMatthews, 2016; Paul & Araneo, 2018). In the last decade, African American girls have had the fastest growing suspension rates and experience discipline rates six times higher than their White counterparts and suspension rates higher than 67% of male students (Annamma et al., 2019). The data gathered from interviews and journals aligned with the existing literature and provided some additions. In exploring the lived experiences of African American female administrators, this study confirmed the impact of intersectionality on school discipline decisions. Participants affirmed that Black females are a subgroup often ignored and marginalized.

There is a need to be intentional in efforts to recruit African American females for leadership roles, as this can impact the disproportionality of discipline. Participants reflected being able to have a more considerable impact on a school and community as reasons they entered the field of education, specifically administration. This study's findings help advance the study of issues related to intersectionality in school discipline decisions and provide a voice for African American female administrators where it is currently lacking. Current policies and practices claiming to be color-blind ignore the unique experiences of Black females, which leads to discipline disproportionality.

Limitations and Delimitations

The first limitation of this study was collecting data from the participants through interviews and focus group sessions. Due to the COVID pandemic, the site only allowed virtual data collection. Additionally, scheduling the interviews and focus group sessions was a challenge because of the additional workload on school administrators to ensure that teaching and learning occurred even during this unprecedented situation. Multiple emails and phone calls were necessary to get participants' consent. The snowball sampling method was utilized where the initial participants invited other potential participants that meet the criteria to participate in the study.

Another limitation was obtaining permission from the school district to conduct interviews with the participants. Multiple attempts were made to get permission to conduct the study before permission was granted. The third limitation is the time required to secure permission from school principals to allow for their assistant principals to participate in the study. Although all participants committed to participating in all three sessions; individual

interview, focus group, and journal prompt responses, three participants did not participate in the focus group.

A final limitation is that few studies on African American female administrators and the role of intersectionality and school discipline decisions existed when this study was conducted. This research is an early study of this topic; therefore, the findings should be considered preliminary. Additional qualitative research is necessary to validate the results. Replication of this study is needed to fully understand the lived experiences of African American female administrators and the role of intersectionality in school discipline decisions.

There were several delimitations placed upon the study. First, participants must be school administrators in the K-12 school setting with at least one year of administrative experience within their current school district. Participants also had to identify as African American females. Finally, participants also had to have direct involvement in discipline decisions. These delimitations ensure that the African American female administrators could give a complete account of their personal experience and a robust understanding of the phenomena.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study is possibly the only exploration of lived experiences of African American female administrators and the role of intersectionality in school discipline decisions. This subject needs to be explored further. In light of this study's procedures, findings, and limitations, a key recommendation for future study is continued research on the lived experiences of African American female administrators and the role of intersectionality in school discipline decisions. Initially, this study should be replicated to compare the themes and experiences with those found in another study. A replicated research study needs further comparison of this initial study's sub-

themes of implicit bias, cultural norming, positive relationships, leadership styles, value systems, equity, and stereotypes.

A replicated study could use multiple school districts that vary in size and demographics. Using multiple school districts could increase the number of participants, which increases the depth of data collection and provides richer meaning to the lived experiences of African American female administrators. In addition, a further study could examine the experiences of African American female administrator in both suburban and urban school districts. The potential differences in urban and suburban school districts could produce different themes. It will also be noteworthy to examine if African American administrators in predominately White districts share similar experiences as those African American administrators who work in minority districts.

Conclusion

To address the void in scholarly literature, this study explores how African American female administrators experience and understand intersectionality in school discipline decisions. Previous studies had not investigated any connection between African American female administrators and the intersectionality in school discipline decisions. As a researcher and middle grades administrator engaged in the discipline process, this defined absence of analysis stimulated my interest. This study was guided by Bell's (1977) critical race theory and Crenshaw's (1989) intersectionality theory. Both theories are juxtaposed to examine the pervasiveness of racism, challenge the dominant ideologies of neutrality and fairness in school discipline outcomes, and recognize that perceived group memberships can make people vulnerable to bias (Gillborn, 2015). The findings in this study document the unique needs of

Black female students and the often-ignored voice of African American female administrators and are supported by critical race theory and intersectionality theory.

One of the most interesting insights that resulted from this study was that many of the participants never conceptualized the discipline rates of African American girls versus their peers. The narrative that has been constructed around discipline data in schools has overwhelmingly painted a picture of the delinquent Black male. That lack of recognition of how Black girls experience schools demonstrates how the Black female is often overlooked and disregarded. African American administrators often question the motivation of a discipline referral and if infractions are equally applied to all students. The findings in the study suggest that implicit bias, misunderstood cultural norms, and positive relationships are all essential components in African American female administrators' documented perceptions of intersectionality in school discipline outcomes.

It could be concluded that the disparity in discipline data is fueled by the bias in discipline policies or the bias held by teachers. Participants were adamant that their values and relationships were fundamental in helping Black female students in the school setting. Black female leaders have unique experiences, and it is imperative to recognize and respect those experiences. Policymakers, district leaders, and school leaders must take an intersectional approach when making decisions so Black female students will not continue to be adversely affected by discipline policies nor Black female administrators continue to be professionally disregarded.

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Appendices

Appendix A: IRB

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

January 10, 2022

Jennifer Anthony
Shante Austin

Re: IRB Approval - IRB-FY21-22-208 EXPLORING INTERSECTIONALITY IN SCHOOL DISCIPLINARY DECISIONS: A PHENOMENOLOGY OF THE EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN FEMALE ADMINISTRATORS

Dear Jennifer Anthony, Shante Austin:

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB). This approval is extended to you for one year from the following date: January 10, 2022. If you need to make changes to the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit a modification to the IRB. Modifications can be completed through your Cayuse IRB account.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

Appendix B: Recruitment Letter

Dear Administrator:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to understand the experiences of African American female administrators regarding discipline decisions, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be African American female administrators who have been employed with Mainstream School District for at least one year and who are directly involved in disciplinary decisions. Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in a recorded interview, complete three journal prompts, participate in a recorded focus group, review audio transcripts, and provide any additional discipline data as needed. I will use member checking by sharing with each participant a transcription of their interview as well as their portion of the focus group. Member checking is essential to check for accuracy and validate the meaning of the participant experience. This will be done through an emailed copy of the participant profile and transcriptions of interviews, focus groups, and subsequent documentation. Each participant will be asked to review the documents for accuracy. It should take approximately three hours to complete all procedures.

Your participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be collected.

To participate, please click here to access the participant screening survey.

If you meet the criteria to participate in the research study of African American female administrators' lived experiences with intersectionality and school discipline and are willing to participate, a consent document is attached to the post questionnaire email. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you chose to participate, you will need to sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the interview.

Participants will receive a $10.00 gift card.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Anthony
Doctoral Student

Appendix C: Participant Screening Questionnaire

 The purpose of this questionnaire is to identify educators that meet the selection criteria for the study.

1. How long have you been a school administrator?

2. How long have you been a school administrator within the Mainstream School

    District?

3. Do you currently make decisions with disciplinary outcomes within your school?

4. How often are you involved in disciplinary decisions?

5. What is your race?

6. What is your gender?

Appendix D: Post Questionnaire Email

Dear Administrator,

Thank you for completing the screening questionnaire to participate in the study. Based on your responses to the screening questionnaire, you meet the criteria to participate in the research study of African American female administrators' lived experiences with intersectionality and school discipline. If you are willing to participate, please review and sign the consent form that is included with this email. You will receive a $10.00 gift card as part of your participation. In addition to the consent form, please email me a specific time that you will be available for an interview. I will collect your signed consent form during our scheduled interview time.

Thank you.

Best,

Jennifer Anthony

Appendix E: Consent Form

Exploring Intersectionality in School Disciplinary Decisions: A Phenomenology of the
Experiences of African American Female Administrators

Jennifer Anthony
Liberty University
School of Education

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study about your experiences with school disciplinary decisions. To participate, you must be an African American female school administrator with at least one year in Cobb County School District. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of this study is to explore how African American female school administrators experience and understand intersectionality regarding discipline outcomes.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be a part of this study, I will ask you to complete the following:
1. Participate in a recorded interview discussing your experience as an African American female administrator and discipline decisions. The interview should last 45-60 minutes.
2. Complete three journal prompts over the course of three weeks that relate to your experiences as an African American female administrator and discipline decisions. The journals should take between 15-20 minutes each week to complete.
3. Participate in a recorded focus group to discuss the same experiences with other African American female administrators. The focus group discussion should last 90 minutes.
4. After the interview and focus group, all discussions will be transcribed. You will be given the opportunity to review the transcripts and make corrections before it is used in the study. The review of transcript may take 20 minutes.
5. Provide any additional discipline data as needed.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. However, you may benefit from taking part in a collaborative conversation with other African American female school administrators regarding their experience and understanding of how intersectionality might impact discipline outcomes.

Benefits to society include the advancement of knowledge on the impact of intersectionality on discipline outcomes.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. In any report or publication, I will not include any identifying information. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Participants will be assigned a pseudonym and interviews will be conducted at participant requested location. Focus groups will be held via Microsoft Teams. Both the interviews and focus groups will be held conducted behind closed doors where this conversation cannot be heard by others. Data will be stored on a password protected computer and/or a locked filing cabinet. After three years, all electronic data will be deleted, and written material will be shredded. Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in a focus group setting. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will be compensated for participating in this study. Participants will receive a $10.00 gift card upon completion of the study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Jennifer Anthony. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at ▇▇▇▇▇▇▇ and/or ▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇ You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Shante Moore-Austin at ▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇.

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record and vide record me as part of my participation in this study.

_____
Printed Subject Name

_____
Signature & Date

Appendix F: Individual Interview Questions

Standardized Interview Questions

1. Tell me about yourself, as if we just met one another. Why did you decide to pursue a career in education? CRQ

2. Tell me why you became an administrator. CRQ

3. Please describe your educational background and career through your current position, including demographic data of schools where you have worked. SQ3

4. Share with me your ethnic background and how that has influenced or shaped your worldview. SQ2

5. Detail an experience professionally or personally where your gender hindered or helped you achieve any goals? SQ2

6. Describe your specific involvement with school discipline decisions. SQ3

7. Describe the process of how you issue a disciplinary consequence. SQ3

8. Describe a time when gender stereotypes and racial bias played a role in your discipline decision. SQ2

9. Describe for me how your race and gender play a role in your leadership. SQ2

10. Intersectionality theory describes how various overlapping identities oppress a person or group of people. Describe your knowledge or understanding of intersectionality. SQ1

11. How does your school data confirm racial and gender discipline disparities? SQ1

Appendix G: Participant Journal Prompts

Instructions: For the next three weeks, you will receive a journal prompt each Sunday via email to reflect on your daily experience with school discipline. Please spend 10-15 minutes reflecting over the week prior before journaling. Write at least one paragraph detailing your experiences.

1. Thinking about your previous week, describe a time when you gave a consequence to an African American female student for a minor offense. Describe your process for issuing a consequence.

2. Thinking about your previous week, describe a time when you gave a consequence to a White female student for a minor offense. Describe your process for issuing a consequence.

3. Thinking about your previous week, describe a time when you engaged in a conversation regarding race, gender, and school discipline. Describe the outcomes of that conversation.

Appendix H: Focus Group Questions

1. You were given access to CRT's definition and core tenets via a QR code. The foundation of the CRT is grounded in the fact that racism is institutional, systemic, and endemic. Based on that definition and core tenets, describe your thoughts about CRT. CRQ

2. Provide examples or share your experience that may support racism being institutional, systemic, and endemic. CRQ

3. Describe the relationship between CRT and racism as being institutional, systemic, and endemic to the challenges you have experienced? CRQ

4. You were given the definition and description of intersectionality via a QR code. Intersectionality theory describes how various overlapping identities oppress a person or group of people. Please describe your thoughts about intersectionality. CRQ

5. Describe the relationship between intersectionality and the oppression of overlapping groups to any challenges you have experienced? SQ1

6. What are factors that you believe have impacted your disciplinary decisions? SQ2

7. If you have been an administrator at various levels of school (elementary, middle, high), what are additional factors that would impact your disciplinary process and decisions? SQ3

8. Describe the strategies that you have used to engage in the conversation with others about potential discipline disparities within your school? SQ3

9. What specific types of supports do you receive from the district regarding discipline procedures? SQ3

Appendix I: Researcher Reflexive Journal

2/6/2022	I conducted a pilot study with three administrators. One from elementary, one from middle, and one from high school. They gave feedback regarding wording of questions three and four of the individual interview questions. I reworded the questions so administrators could speak to all their experiences not just their current school.
2/7/2022	I answered the interview questions myself to assuage any bias.
2/8/2022	I conducted two interviews today. Both interviews were conducted virtually. One interview was with Denise and the other was Rhonda. Denise is a high school assistant principal, while Rhonda is an elementary assistant principal. Both interviews went well. I did notice that Rhonda wanted me to validate her responses, by continuously saying, "I hope I answered your question."
2/10/2022	Today I interviewed Necole and Kimberly. Necole is a middle school assistant principal while Kimberly is a middle school principal. They each lasted well over an hour. I am already starting to see the emergence of themes. Both participants have worked in at least three other schools throughout their career and offered invaluable insight on those experiences. At work this week, I dealt with a discipline situation, where the parents accused my colleague of not being fair in his discipline decisions. He is a White male and the student is a Black female. So during the interview that situation was on my mind. I have to continue to be mindful of these personal experiences.
2/13/2022	This is a busy day. Many of the participants mentioned that Sunday afternoons are a good time for them to participate in interviews. Today I conducted three interviews. These interviews were with Andrea, Miranda, and Sabrina. Andrea and Miranda are both high school administrators and Sabrina is an elementary Principal. To conduct high school interviews and an elementary interview in one day was interesting. Elementary administrators do not deal with the volume of discipline as high schools. Therefore there was a unique perspective on intersectionality and how it influences discipline decisions. I was impressed with Sabrina, because she often mentioned how "fair" can look different.
2/15/2022	I had one interview scheduled today. I interviewed Tangela, an elementary assistant principal. She has been in education for over 20 years with eight years of administrative experience. Tangela has worked at all three levels and had very distinct opinions on how discipline decisions are made, and the impact of her intersectionality may have when making decisions.
2/16/2022	One interview completed today. I interviewed Jasmine, who is a principal at a middle school. We had a lot of technical difficulties, even at one point having to disconnect the virtual meeting and reconnecting once we had a better internet connection. She has been a principal at two different schools. Jasmine was able to offer insight on the challenges of being a principal in a predominately White school and the challenges on serving in an extremely diverse school. This interview really resonated with me, because I could identify with many of the experiences that were being shared.

2/17/2022	Last individual interview today. This interview is with Bethany, a middle school assistant principal. This has been a long two weeks. But I have enjoyed learning about the experiences of these African American female administrators. Upon conclusion of the interviews, I sent an email letting the participants know that the focus group would be March 10th. I emailed the link along with the QR codes that participants will use to access any definitions or theories. My data collection process is ending which really brings me joy. I am looking forward to my focus group as it will provide a shift from the individual interviews.
2/24/2022	In coding these interviews, I'm seeing themes emerge, such as the importance of positive relationships and equity. The participants always deferred back to following the code of conduct, however, they all referenced the process of issuing a consequence can look different depending on the student. Their experiences affirm the available literature. However, it is difficult to really corroborate the lived experiences with research, because there is such a void in the lived experiences of African American females.
3/10/2022	Today was the focus group. I received notification that only seven of my participants will be able to join the focus group due to scheduling conflicts. Everyone submitted their journal prompts, prior to this date. The first few minutes of the focus group were used for people to make introductions. I already compiled school specific discipline data, district code of conduct, and journal prompts. This information was helpful when follow up or clarifying questions were asked. I was intentional to keep the focus group to 90 minutes. We went over by about 5 minutes, but the conversation was rich and full of experiences. Today was my focus group. The focus group setting felt more conversational with all participants offering input.
3/17/2022	In coding my focus group, the data is beginning to take form. I want to go and review the research questions to ensure that I am fully addressing them and capturing the essence of the participants.
3/24/2022	Today I spent some time trying to categorize and separate my data into the research questions that they answer. There is some overlap in answering those questions, or places where the same data applies. It was a good opportunity for me to take a wholistic look at my data and results.

Appendix J: Audit Trail

Identification of Research Problem	The role of intersectionality in school discipline decisions
Development of Research Problem	Research proposal to explore the experiences of African American administrators as they navigate discipline decisions.
Literature Review	Systematic literature review conducted to synthesize existing literature around the intersectionality of race, gender, and school disciplinary outcomes
Theoretical Framework(s)	Critical race theory and intersectionality theory are used to give voice to African American female leaders
Methodology	A qualitative transcendental phenomenological study to explore the experiences of African American female administrators as they explore intersectionality in school discipline decisions.
Interview protocol development	Individual interviews, journal prompts, and focus group. Questions are developed and examined by an expert researcher.
Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval	IRB approval was obtained and included in the appendices.
Participant Selection	Purposeful and criterion sampling. Participants were school leaders who (a) identify as African American, (b) identify as female, (c) responsible for discipline decisions, and (d) work in the school district for at least year.
Data collection and storage	10 participants participated in in depth semi structured interviews; three journal prompt responses; and a focus group. Recordings, transcribed data, and analyzed data are stored via cloud storage.
Data sources	Recorded interviews, journal prompt responses, focus group, and school based longitudinal discipline data.
Transcription	Recorded interviews and focus group responses were transcribed using ExpressScribe transcription software.
Coding	Coding list was derived. Coding was done using NVivo software. Codes were then clustered into themes using horizontalization
Trustworthiness procedures	Triangulation of data collection, member checking, expert review, reflexive journal, audit trail.
Summaries	Summaries of participants, answers to research questions, and rich descriptions of themes.
Research findings	Relevant literature, descriptions of context, methodology, research design, data collection, data analysis, answers to research questions, recommendations for future research, references, and appendices.