INFLUENCE OF K-12 OSS EXPERIENCE ON BLACK STUDENTS WHO HAVE GRADUATED FROM POST-SECONDARY PROGRAMS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

by

Andria Michelle Watkins

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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APPROVED BY:

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Abstract

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of African Americans who had served at least two out-of-school suspensions (OSS) during their K-12 epoch but whose life outcomes did not reflect the deficit outcomes that researchers often use to describe that population. The central research question asked: What are the lived experiences of African Americans who had served at least two OSS and persisted to the completion of a post-secondary program? Guiding questions were implemented to understand further the phenomenon: How do African Americans believe their identity has been positively or negatively influenced by OSS? and How do African Americans bracket the experiences of the behavioral occurrence and the resulting OSS? Wenger's theory, Communities of Practice (CoP), served as the study's theoretical framework. Participants were selected through social media recruitment campaigns. The study included 10 African American participants who served at least two OSS. The data collection methods utilized were questionnaires, interviews, and journal prompts. Hermeneutical analysis was used to analyze the data. Research findings revealed that the suspension behavior and resulting OSS experience can be ascertained in a person's identity by examining their lived experience. Implications for policy and practice based on study outcomes include a common definition of significant disproportionality and a method for gleaning intent that can be used as data for OSS decision-making.

Keywords: CoP, critical theory, hermeneutical phenomenology, OSS, African American students, Black students, K-12, deficit terminology, typology.

Dedication

This doctoral journey is dedicated to Abba Father…My God from whom all blessings flow. It is He who told me to get off the couch when the pandemic first took the world off-guard in April 2020 and work to earn my doctorate. Amazing is His grace and mercy!

To my family who has always given me support. Specifically, my son, Ryan, my brother, Jim, my nephew, Aaron, my niece, Lauren, my uncle, Charles Harris, and my cousins Sharlene and Deidre – thank you for your love and patience. To my family in memoriam whose love transcends life and death: my mother, Katherine, my father, Gus, and my sister, Adrienne – though I miss each of you so much, you are forever with me. And finally, to my mother's friends, Delores and Yvonne, who shared my mother's insights and thoughts about me at opportune times – I love you more than I can express. I dedicate my research to all of you.

To the rest of my family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers, you were my cheerleaders. You checked on me, including texting me on Saturdays to make sure I was writing. You basically held me accountable for the goal of finishing. Thank you.

Finally, I dedicate this work to me. When God looked at His work, He said, *It was good*. As I look back over the doctoral journey, I say with all honesty, *It was good*. Not only do I value the research, but I also value the professional friendships that I made with the women of JASA along the way. Andria, I now enter the rest created by this body of work. This rest is called Today: the opportunity created by my PhinisheD work!

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Salud!

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List of Abbreviations

Communities of Practice (CoP)

Children's Defense Fund (CDF)

Corporate Social Irresponsibility (CSI)

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

Local Education Agency (LEA)

More Knowledgeable Other (MKO)

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

Office of Civil Rights (OCR)

Office Disciplinary Referral (ODR)

Out-of-School Suspensions and Expulsions (OSS)

US Department of Education (USDOE)

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative hermeneutical phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of African Americans who have served at least two out-of-school suspensions (OSS) during their K-12 epoch but whose post-secondary life outcomes did not reflect the deficit language (i.e., imprisonment) that researchers often use to describe that population. The proposed problem of this research was that academic performance amongst Black students is based upon static data (i.e., behavior and test scores) that were normed on the performance of White students. Thus, the disparity between Black academic performance and normed performance has resulted in deficit terminology that predicts adverse life outcomes for Black students. However, the problem is complex in that academic performance is also impacted by the social performance of school system behavior (a form of corporate behavior), as seen in exclusionary practices such as OSS.

As noted later in this chapter, research shows that exclusionary practices have a disproportionately significant adverse impact on academic performance. Chapter 1 opens with an in-depth examination of the background of the problem. Research questions regarding the impact of OSS on the post-secondary life outcomes of African Americans will be presented. The chapter will then continue with a presentation of the significance of the study in current practice. It will conclude with an explanation of common terminology and definitions and a summary synthesizing the presented concepts.

Background

The persistence of the disproportionality in data depicting the rate of OSS for Black students is a matter of discourse among researchers in education, sociology, psychology, and law

(Gregory et al., 2016, 2017). The overwhelming suggestions of staff equity intervention and social-emotional learning modules for students have done little to break the cycle (Federal Register, 2016; Gregory et al., 2016; Skiba & Losen, 2016). As a result, researchers have theorized that OSS adversely impacts the life experiences of Black students in K-12 programs (Federal Register; Gregory et al.; Skiba & Losen).

Historical Context

In 1975, the Children's Defense Fund reported data findings that depicted K-12 Black students receiving out-of-school suspensions at a rate three times greater than their White counterparts (Children's Defense Fund, 1975; Mills, 1975). The persistence of this rate as the likelihood of OSS being a part of the Black student experience caused the US Department of Education (USDOE) to develop a risk ratio that provides the states with a standard algorithm and unit of measure (Federal Register, 2016). Accordingly, there is a consensus amongst the literature that the rate at which Black students are suspended represents a risk to the experience of Black students in the K-12 environment (Federal Register; Gregory et al., 2016; Mills, 1975; Milner & Howard, 2004; Skiba & Losen, 2016; Skiba et al., 2014).

Researchers have juxtaposed suspension data with the outcome of the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling (Irvine & Irvine, 1983; Mills, 1975; Milner & Howard, 2004; Skiba et al., 2011). Ensuing discussions reflect the continued use of suspensions and expulsions as tools of segregation and other divisive devices within the context of the school community (Irvine & Irvine, 1983, 2007; Skiba et al.). OSS is deemed an aberration that multiply impacts Black students in such ways that seem more detrimental than the impactful issues addressed in the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling (Davis, 2018; Irvine & Irvine, 2007; Milner & Howard). According to a survey of literature and school data, the exclusion of Black students from the

school community is often based upon the subjective perspective of school staff – staff that does not reflect the community of the Black student (Gregory et al., 2017; Irvine & Irvine; Martin et al., 2019; Skiba et al.).

Social Context

Prior to the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling, Black students were educated in schools where the staff was comprised chiefly, if not totally, of Black principals and teachers (Skiba et al., 2009). The presence of a majority of Black staff served students in ways that went beyond teaching a subject (Evans, 1992). Black staff were viewed as servant-leaders within the community: leaders that influenced, protected, and promoted the values and ideals of those who resided within its boundary as a function of a shared identity (Evans; Irvine & Irvine, 1983; Martin et al., 2019; Northouse, 2019). Through mentor modeling, staff conveyed expectations and achievement to students and the community at large that went beyond the static litmus of grades and test scores (Davis, 2018; Evans; Irvine & Irvine).

After the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling, desegregating America's schools was important. As a result, many key Black staff were released from their positions and replaced by White staff (Evans, 1992). Specifically, the South reported that the number of Black principals decreased by 90% - from 2000 to less than 200 – between 1963 and 1974 (Irvine & Irvine, 1983). The lower staffing levels continue today, as noted by the fact that in 2017, Black teachers comprised 6.7% of the total number of teachers in America's public schools, while Whites comprised 79.3% (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). The number of Black public school teachers is significantly lower than the 12% represented in 1980 (Irvine, 1989). As a result, public school students matriculating through the K-12 epoch may likely encounter only two non-White teachers (Irvine). This has led to the perspective that the role of Black teachers

and principals as servant-leaders within the community that services Black students is diminished (Evans; Irvine).

In a sense, desegregation has created a condition of stasis: a disturbance in the various educational growth factors within the K-12 epoch of Black students (Irvine & Irvine, 2007; Newby & Tyack, 1971). This is not to say that desegregation was and is not necessary, but rather the language used for desegregating America's schools was partly ambiguous, as noted by the varying interpretations developed and implemented by states (Federal Register, 2016; Irvine & Irvine, 1983, 2007). Researchers have stated that the ambiguity in the implementation of desegregation has led to fewer numbers of Black principals and teachers, a weakened voice in the planning and implementation of student services, and fewer role models to perpetuate shared culture and communicate expectations (Irvine, 1989; Irvine & Irvine, 1983, 2007).

Theoretical Context

This research is situated in communities of practice theory (CoP) (Wenger, 1999). CoP posits that social context can be explained as a nested environment. The nesting represents levels of engagement and participation within local and global contexts. Wenger stated that individuals engage within a local environment while simultaneously participating within a global context. An example of this would be the behavior that led to the OSS: student behavior is an example of engagement within the local environment, and OSS represents the student's participation within the global environment (Irvine, 1989).

Problem Statement

The problem is that Black student success and high achievement are based upon static data (e.g., behavior, standardized test scores, grades) that are normed on the performance of White students (Davis, 2018). Researchers and educators have sought to address the

phenomenon of low academic performance among Black students (Dutil, 2020; Martin et al., 2019). The resulting epistemological theories tend to use deficit terminology when referring to the life experiences and life outcomes of Black students (Davis; Martin et al.). Deficit theories noted in much of the literature include but are not limited to academic deficits; trauma-informed data; lower socio-economic status; and predictive policing (Davis; Dutil, 2020; Heilbrun et al., 2018; Martin et al.; Pesta, 2018).

A related aspect to the phenomenon of low academic performance amongst Black students is the use of exclusionary practices in school discipline, specifically OSS (Barnes & Motz, 2018; Pesta, 2018; Welsh & Little, 2018). According to research, Black students receive OSS at a significantly higher rate than their White counterparts (Welsh & Little). The causes of such a significantly disproportionate disparity have been a topic in educational circles since 1975 (Welsh & Little). Additionally, exclusionary practices significantly correlate with low academic performance and high carceral engagement (Barnes & Motz; Pesta). Most research predicts that students who have served at least one OSS are at risk of incarceration (Barnes & Motz; Pesta). As stated earlier, many theories are deficit-based. This research explored lived experiences of African Americans who have served at least two OSS from a perspective of social learning and not that of deficit theories.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative hermeneutical phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of African Americans who have served at least two OSS during their K-12 epoch but whose post-secondary life outcomes did not reflect the deficit language (i.e., imprisonment) that researchers often use to describe that population. At this stage in the research, post-secondary is generally defined as a college, university, or vocational program, and OSS will

be defined as out-of-school suspensions and expulsions. Few research studies have shed a positive light on the impact of OSS on the life outcomes of African American students. This study's theory used Wenger's (1999) CoP as a theoretical lens. CoP hypothesizes that meaning is the characterization of how we negotiate the world and make sense of social engagement. Wenger's theory relates to the proposed study in helping to understand the accomplishments in post-secondary pursuits made by African American study participants with past educational experiences that include at least two OSS.

Significance of the Study

This study contributed to the body of literature related to OSS and Black students (Welsh & Little, 2018). Specifically, it fills the void as it aimed to provide a perspective of the student experience and an understanding of the African American experience within a school setting (Davis, 2018). At its core, this study sought to uncover the lived experiences of African Americans who have served at least two OSS during their K-12 epoch and persisted in completing a post-secondary academic/career program. By understanding the lived experiences of African Americans with such backgrounds, this study filled the academic gap for OSS (Davis). Academic theorists may begin to develop a different perspective of who the student is and how ethnicity influences school response to behavior, specifically concerning OSS (Barnes & Motz, 2018; Pesta, 2018).

Theoretical Perspective

Booker T. Washington (2015) wrote in his autobiography, *Up From Slavery*, that Black youth have various elements within their environment to overcome that are "little known to those not situated as he is" (p. 36). As a contributor to research on theories on Black student development after OSS, CoP will situate the Black student, retrospectively, within their

environment to glean the phenomenology of the lived experience of OSS (Van Manen, 2017a). This research sought to uncover the elements in the student environment about which Washington spoke, along with the effects on their identity, through the conceptual framework of learning, meaning, and identity (Van Manen, 2017a; Washington, 2015; Welsh & Little, 2018; Wenger, 1999).

Empirical Perspective

Washington (2015) wrote that people who direct attention to the Black student's weaknesses and compares the person to their White counterpart "do not consider the influence of memories which cling" (p. 36). Unfortunately, many outcome theories on the lived experiences of Black students who have encountered at least two OSS utilize deficit terminology (Davis, 2018; Martin et al., 2019). These theories require the student to be posited as a system victim or perpetrator of the problem (Davis; Martin et al.; Newby & Tyack, 1971). My research sought to honor Black students by identifying how their strengths were being used to progress them through their life continuum and goal attainment (Davis; Martin et al.).

Practical Perspective

Washington (2015) construed that people took it for granted that a White student could navigate any task successfully. Conversely, he wrote, people were generally surprised if the Black student did not fail (Washington). For almost 50 years, the disproportionate rate of OSS for Black students has been discussed (CDF, 1975; Mills, 1975). Deficit terminology possesses the parlance that dismisses surprise by explaining away poor academic performance and behavior (Martin et al., 2019; Milner & Howard, 2004; Newby & Tyack, 1971). It was hoped that the outcome of this research would stimulate the construct of the Black student as a person

unique within themselves and capable without validation to perform given tasks. The construct would be mediated by teachers who socially engage with students daily (Clarà, 2017).

Research Questions

This study interviewed African American post-secondary students who had served at least two OSS during their K-12 education and have persisted in completing post-secondary studies. Using hermeneutical phenomenology (Van Manen, 2017a), I intended to identify and understand how the participant negotiated their school experiences to get to their current level of education. This research is situated within the conceptual framework of Etienne Wenger's communities of practice (Wenger, 1999), a theory of social learning.

Central Research Question

What are the lived experiences of African Americans who have served at least two OSS during their K-12 epoch and persisted to the completion of a post-secondary academic/career program?

This study's participants were African American students completing a post-secondary degree or career certification program. This research, focusing on how the participants explained their experiences, used open-ended questions that hopefully provided insight into individual accounts of identity, meaning, and learning. It could lead to insights regarding the types of support networks engaged during their journey (Wenger, 1999). By presenting questions in an open-ended format, study participants provided personal accounts of their lived experiences (Van Manen, 2017a).

Sub-Question One

How do African Americans believe their identity has been influenced, either positively or negatively, by OSS?

This question was specific to the factors which impact a person's identity. The reflexive question allowed the participant to answer for different episodes in their school education (Van Manen, 2017a). According to Wenger (1999), identity is complex. First, it can be seen as lived – experienced by self and others through participation and reification. Secondly, identity is negotiated. In this sense, negotiation makes identity fluid, always becoming ubiquitous, shaped by a context but not limited by epoch (i.e., adolescence). Next, the attributes of participation, reification, and fluidity make identity social, as seen by its manifestation within experiences bounded by contexts familiar to the individual. Identity requires learning as a trajectory in time that defines its present manifestation through interpreting its past and desired (future) experiences. Identity is a nexus of concurrent memberships in multiple forms, negotiating boundaries through reconciliation. Furthermore, identity balances the effect of local-global interactions. It is an interplay between the immediacy of local activities and the expectancies found in global engagement (Wenger).

Sub-Question Two

How do African Americans believe their identity has been influenced, either positively or negatively, by OSS?

In this question, participants were asked to relay their personal experiences in terms of their life relating to being suspended. The meaning of an experience was garnered from how the participant told their story (Van Manen, 2017a). Wenger (1999) defined meaning as the characterization of the process by which we experience the world and that which makes our engagement in it meaningful. In this sense, meaning is deemed a method of negotiating within our eco-niche that demonstrates a continuous relationship between the participant and the objects (resources) within their environment. Because the act of negotiating is not restricted to social

interactions between people but also applies to interactions between people and environmental objects, a participant's negotiated meaning is not bound by language. For Wenger, negotiation is how a person navigates and interacts within their eco-niche to make their experiences meaningful.

Combining meaning with negotiation, Wenger (1999) formed the concept of negotiation of meaning. The concept is a single capture of the thought of sustained attention and readjustment – similar to that required when negotiating a sharp curve while driving. Wenger described the complexity of living meaningfully as an inherent duality – an active conveyance that purports and imports both dynamic and historical meaning. This duality gives meaning to a character that is both resistant and malleable. It lends itself to an ability to affect and be affected. Negotiation reflects the properties of a conduit by engaging a multiplicity of factors and perspectives. However, through all of its complexities, Wenger stated that a person's negotiated meaning can, at best, be partial, tentative, ephemeral, and context-specific: incomplete. Thus, meaning is a figment that finds utility in the context of its origins (Gibson, 1939; Piaget, 2013; Van Manen, 1997).

Definitions

1. *Affordances* – The implication that an individual's environment provides or furnishes objects (or points of interaction) that contain both values and meaning (Chong & Proctor, 2020).
2. *Communities of Practice (CoP)* – A social learning theory developed by Etienne Wenger and first introduced in 1993 (Wenger, 1999).
3. *Culture* – The assumptions that relate to the intents and purposes of the affordances within the environment (Schein, 1983).

4. *Mentor-modeling* – Staff conveyed expectations and achievement to students and the community beyond the static litmus of grades and test scores (Davis, 2018; Evans, 1992; Irvine & Irvine, 1983).
5. *OSS (Out-of-school suspension)* – Exclusionary discipline practice that results in school exclusion through out-of-school suspensions or expulsions (Welsh & Little, 2018).
6. *Servant-leaders* – Leaders within the community that influenced, protected, and promoted the values and ideals of those who resided within its boundary as a function of a shared identity (Evans; Irvine & Irvine; Martin et al., 2019; Northouse, 2019).

Summary

As presented in this chapter, researchers have stated that OSS adversely influences the life outcomes of Black students who had exclusionary experiences during their K-12 epoch (Federal Register, 2016; Gregory et al., 2017; Skiba & Losen, 2016). National data have shown a significant disproportionality, as much as three times greater, between the rate at which Black students are suspended compared to the suspension rates of White students in public schools (Federal Register). Chapter 1 discussed research that stated that the phenomenon is historically embedded across decades and social systems. From a theoretical standpoint, the chapter presented CoP and supporting theories to frame the phenomenon in terms of the systemic corporate behaviors of public schools. CoP and supporting theories were also presented as a way of understanding how African American students negotiate their K-12 experiences. Finally, the chapter concluded with presentations on the research problem, its significance, research questions, and defining key terms.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The purpose of this study is to understand the lived experiences of African Americans who had served at least two OSS during their K-12 epoch but whose post-secondary life outcomes do not reflect the deficit language (i.e., imprisonment) that researchers often use to describe that population. OSS is a social tool within the school environment that was developed as an administrative response to student behavior. The data on OSS is extensive within literature across the disciplines of government, law, education, business, sociology, and psychology. It is through the OSS data compiled by government agencies on schools that researchers have concluded that not only are Black students overrepresented in the data population, but the rate at which Black students receive OSS places them at risk for the probability of receiving a suspension within their K-12 epoch. For nearly 50 years, OSS data has consistently reflected the phenomenon of Black student suspension in America's public schools. The literature review opens with the theoretical framework used to analyze and support the theory implemented during this study: the social theory of learning, Communities of Practice (CoP). CoP frames and supports the narrative of the literature by identifying the social dynamics within the varying levels of the school environment. Related literature includes analytical discussions on historical climes, seminal documents, data limitation, culture, and bias. The literature review will conclude with a discussion of how this study fills a gap in the current literature.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used was Communities of Practice (CoP). CoP was chosen because it presents itself as a social theory of learning that focuses on practitioners within a given environment who accomplish a goal through mutual engagement in a shared enterprise (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1999). Practitioners are legitimate members of the environment

(Wenger). In a school setting, the practitioners include the instructional team, students, administration team, aides, custodial staff, and external stakeholders such as parents, superintendents, and bus drivers (Poon, 2020). Each grouping of members operates within its cluster and, at times, crosses practice boundaries to work cooperatively with other clusters (Venkatraman & Venkatraman, 2018). Practitioners participate in their local, immediate environment and engage in global environments through reporting channels, professional development, correspondence, and other means (Wenger).

Practice

According to the CoP theory, practice is not simply the act of participation, such as that of a student in a classroom (Wenger, 1999). Practice is the negotiated, always-changing person in an environment that simultaneously reifies historical and social contexts and explicit and tacit knowledge (Bernstein, 1964; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Practice includes language, artifacts, procedures, documents, and interaction with others (Bernstein; Lave & Wenger; Poon, 2020; Wenger). It understands the communication devices of what is said, unsaid, represented, and assumed (Bernstein). Practice includes implicit relations, codified procedures, and social contracts that make conventions (e.g., the discretionary decision-making that leads to OSS rulings) explicit (Bernstein; Lave & Wenger; Poon; Wenger). Through the definition's complexity, practice is the gestalt of all of these elements orchestrated into use (Wenger).

Negotiation of Meaning

Though practice is characterized by routine patterns of behavior, the purpose of practice is to make the phenomenon of experience anew by adding dimension to meaning through the transmission of knowledge and the provision of historical context (Aljuwaiber, 2021; Wenger, 1999). Thus, for a practitioner to engage in the phenomenon of experience, meanings must be

applied to negotiate from start to finish (Bernstein, 1964; Parker, 2019; Wenger; Yosso, 2005). Negotiation not only requires an agreement between persons, but in this sense, it also carries the meaning of sustaining attention to a task, such as that needed to drive to an unfamiliar place (Wenger). This makes the negotiation of meaning a matter of social enterprise and a dynamic engagement process to effect experiences anew (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger).

Environment

CoP is reminiscent of Gibson's ecological approach to perception (Chong & Proctor, 2020). Gibson felt a relationship exists between individuals and their environments (Young & Cleveland, 2022). For Gibson, the environment affords the individual beneficial or unfavorable points of interaction (Chong & Proctor). The points of interaction, termed affordances, imply that the environment furnishes objects directly perceived by the individual that contain values and meanings (Chong & Proctor).

Norman furthered the concept of affordances to include intermediaries such as cognition and signifiers (Masoudi et al., 2019). Cognition and signifiers emphasize the individual's discernment of an affordance's potential for use (Chong & Proctor, 2020). One perspective presented by Young and Cleveland (2022) was that some affordances are false: the perception of utility on an affordance that does not offer action possibilities. Finally, some theorists ascribed to hidden affordances, which simply means that the utility of an affordance may not be readily perceived by the individual in the environment (Young & Cleveland).

Affordances as an Element of CoP

Affordances exist within a specified eco-niche, and perception must be taught (Masoudi et al., 2019). Perceptual learning assists with identifying affordance as a utility within the environment (Heft, 2017). Teaching awareness of affordance is akin to the creation of

Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD): learning is structured through social interactions with more knowledgeable persons guided by explorative talk and instructional conversation (Clarà, 2017). It can also be likened to social constructivism in that school staff are both affordances and signifiers: points of engagement within the local community through school-level interactions; and signifiers within the global community by communicating expectations of norms (Cobb & Yackel, 2004).

Culture and the Environment

Culture represents the assumptions behind the objects in the environment: it is the intent of utility and not the affordance itself (Schein, 1983). Culture is communicated to individuals within the environment as methods for daily interactions; and perceptions of awareness, thoughts, and feelings (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Culture is abstract and never measured because it responds to the social need to cope with problems from outside the environment and coordinate the integration of internal systems that become shared learning within the environment (Schein, 1996).

Research Tie-In

Within the theoretical model of CoP, there exist multiple localities (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Each locality functions as a layer of participation for the mutual enterprises of practitioners (Lave & Wenger; Venkatraman & Venkatraman, 2018). Because the goal of an organization is to serve stakeholders outside of itself, the various layers of the environment function to divide or focus environments into specific units of organized work (Wenger, 1999).

Local environments are spaces where practice occurs (Lave & Wenger, 1991). It is within the ecology of the local environment that practitioners engage in their daily routines, access artifacts, and affordances, deal with the mundane, and hear conversations that may have nothing

to do with the task but everything to do with relationships as they connect in a mutual enterprise (Poon, 2020; Wenger, 1999). Through completing tasks, creating new artifacts, and communicating with practitioners and stakeholders operating peripherally in related environs, knowledge is community-sourced and shared to leverage practitioner skillsets toward a developing or specialized task (Poon). As forms are filled out and data is compiled and communicated, practitioners participate in a more global environment, one that is outside of their own agency but resides in the industry of their organization, such as that of a government agency (e.g., USDOE) or an industrial partner (Venkatraman & Venkatraman, 2018; Wenger). Whether local, peripheral, or global, CoP environments represent space to share knowledge and negotiate meanings (Poon; Wenger). The knowledge created by CoPs can help identify gaps between the actual practice and theoretical oversight (Poon).

OSS and CoP

Perceptions and behaviors are shaped through social interaction and mutual engagement due to shared language and goals (Aljuwaiber, 2021; Bernstein, 1964). By identifying its features, such as structure, culture, policies, and practices, the environment can activate phases to facilitate mutual engagement among stakeholders within the local environment (Aljuwaiber). Identification represents a method of negotiating meanings that are shared and reflective of the local environments but requires fluid and vague boundaries until new canons can be developed, along with developing a more inclusive culture (Poon, 2020). Because students are inextricably tied to their teachers, the identification can illuminate power differences within the hyper-disciplined environment and explain how practitioners (students) are impacted (Poon).

The related literature that follows, at times, will utilize the environment of the CoP framework for organizations. The Interpersonal Level is the local level and will be considered

the sphere of engagement. The School Level is peripheral, representing interactions with stakeholders in the greater school environment. Finally, the Global Level reflects entities like the federal government that collect data from schools and society.

Related Literature

Post-secondary life outcomes of Black students who have served two or more OSS during their K-12 epoch have been the topic of educational discussions for more than 50 years (Crain, 1976; Mills, 1975; Skiba & Losen, 2016; Welsh & Little, 2018). Black student success and achievement are often based on data that are normed on the performance of White students (Davis, 2018; Welsh & Little). Doing so creates an epistemology that characterizes Black student learners as inferior through the justification of theoretical interpretations of empirical data (Martin et al., 2019; Welsh & Little). Despite equally viable alternative explanations, the construct of problematic results tends to take the form of deficit terminology, such as poor academic performance and low achievement (Dutil, 2020; Martin et al., 2019). The deficit terminology frequently leads to deficit theories in perpetuity, as noted by predictions of future life outcomes and experiences of Black learners being negative, morally corrupt, and impoverished (Davis; Dutil; Heilbrun et al., 2018; Martin et al.; Pesta, 2018; Skiba & Losen, 2016).

According to many theorists, exclusionary practices in school discipline, specifically OSS, have been linked to the phenomena depicted by deficit theories (Barnes & Motz, 2018; Pesta, 2018; Skiba et al., 2014; Welsh & Little, 2018). Research has shown that Black students receive more OSS than their White counterparts (Federal Register, 2016; Welsh & Little). The discourse has delineated a trajectory that relates deficit life outcomes, such as low academic

performance and high carceral engagement, to exclusionary practices (Barnes & Motz; Heilbrun et al., 2018; Marcucci, 2020; Pesta).

Segregation: Pre-*Brown v. Board of Education* Black Schools

In the polemic surrounding segregation, much is written about integrating with White schools without identifying the value and contribution of Black schools and educators that flourished in the segregated environment. Conversations on segregation also tend not to focus on its harmful impact on the White community through perpetuating a mindset of superiority (Onwuachi-Willig, 2019; Parker, 2019). This research does not intend to take a stance against desegregation or integration. It strives, instead, to examine OSS from a different perspective.

Cultural Influence: Interpersonal Level

Predominately Black schools before *Brown v. Board of Education* were staffed with Black administration and teachers (Milner & Howard, 2004). The culture of Black staff is holistically noted as an ethical culture of care (Irvine & Irvine, 1983; Mawhinney, 2011). Prior to the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, the ethic of care noted in the teacher-student relationships in Black schools mimicked that of a surrogate parent, where the focus was directed toward the cognitive, physical, psychological, and disciplinary needs of the child (Irvine, 1989; Mawhinney). The teacher-student relationship formed a joint enterprise that developed marketable skills and strengthened life outcome possibilities. These skills were not simply focused on college but also on leadership, business, and contributing to society (Irvine).

Teacher-student relationships focused on positive life outcomes requires teachers to have high academic expectations for their students (Klopfenstein, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2017). Empirical studies have shown that when teacher race is in accordance with student race, the impact on academic achievement in reading and math reaches a level of significance that can

influence policy (Egalite et al., 2015; Klopfenstein). This effect may be due to Black teachers not making excuses for or minimalizing the abilities of Black students (Irvine & Irvine, 1983; Klopfenstein). In short Black teachers potentially offer a school experience consonant with home and community environments (Solomon, 1997).

The Eco-niche and Environment: School Level

An eco-niche, by definition, is the role a person has with their environment (Heft, 2017). This definition considers the social interaction of the person in their environment, the effects of the person on their environment, and the effects of the environment on the person (Heft, 2018). Within the eco-niche, elements called affordances exist (Heft, 2017). Affordances belong to a given environment where people can socially engage (Heft, 2018). For example, if a school can be considered an eco-niche for students, the physical environment is designed to have separated spaces (classroom affordances) where learning can occur. Classrooms contain affordances such as desks, chairs, laptops, electrical outlets, and instructors – all of which are in place for social engagement (Heft, 2020a, 2020b). The eco-niche of the classroom is designed so that everything necessary for learning is available to the student (Heft, 2017).

The school itself symbolizes a collective eco-niche for staff and students alike. The common areas of the building, as well as classrooms, are structured in such a way as to provide opportunities for socialization, cultural transmission, study, testing, and achievement (Siekiera & Białek, 2021). Students navigate their eco-niche by engaging in social behaviors (Heft, 2017).

In considering schools in Black communities pre-*Brown*, literature conveys that schools provided Black students with an eco-niche of affordances that were culturally familiar (Irvine & Irvine, 1983). The point of familiarity is that students were easily able to access and navigate their environment, socially engaging in pursuits that were motivating, academically stimulating,

cooperatively linked to a shared perspective and goal, and used a common language of expression (Heft, 2017; Irvine & Irvine; Kayama et al., 2015). Within the eco-niche familiar to all practitioners (staff and students alike), student behaviors were less likely to be viewed as deviant, resulting in fewer disciplinary actions based on subjective judgment (Irvine & Irvine; Losen & Skiba, 2010).

Schools during the pre-*Brown v. Board of Education* era were operated independently, autonomous of the bureaucracy put forth by White school officials, as long as nothing caught the attention of district personnel (Sowell, 1976). The autonomy allowed the school to reflect its community in culture, language, discipline, and expression (Irvine & Irvine, 1983; Sowell, 1974). Professional status and identity developed authentically through systemic links from the culture of the community (Sowell, 1974). Student expectations and achievement were communicated in stylized ways that did not require constant comparison to people outside their community (Sowell, 1974). Moreover, behavior was normatively diffused through discipline practices that were not only culturally familiar but also community-supported (Irvine & Irvine; Sowell, 1976).

Staff and students in an ethnically matched school environment were neither socially foreign nor hostile (Irvine & Irvine, 1983). Language, culture, expectations, and behaviors were consistent both in the building and outside of it (Irvine & Irvine, 2007; Sowell, 1976). Schools embraced a culturally rich insulated (versus the post-*Brown v. Board of Education* culturally deficit insular) environment (Newby & Tyack, 1971). Such consistency points to a trajectory from community to school, creating a cycle of positive influence: community-to-school – *teacher match, needs, culture*; school-to-community – *learning, performance/achievement,*

employment (Egalite et al., 2015; Evans, 1992; Irvine, 1989; Irvine & Irvine, 1983; Klopfenstein, 2005; Lunenberg et al., 2007; Solomon, 1997).

Community as Achievement Motivation: Global Level

Borrowing from Vygotsky's more knowledgeable others (MKO) and (ZPD) may be appropriate in framing the concept of community in the pre-*Brown v. Board of Education* era (Clarà, 2017; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Vygotsky regarded learning word meanings as the cultural process of concept development (Clarà). For him, meanings stressed the relationship between the word and the object, and the relationship is conveyed through cultural processes (Clarà). Pre-*Brown v. Board of Education* schools were staffed with people who lived in its community and whose cultural background was similar to the students with whom they interacted (Irvine & Irvine, 1983). The staff in this scenario represents the MKO (Clarà). The MKO implies that those responsible for teaching used meanings congruent with the community's culture, and students could be understood in their community using vocabulary learned in school (Milner & Howard, 2004). This cultural phenomenon is especially true since the Black community could be described as a collective: within the Black community, children interacted with elders such as family, teachers, ministers, leaders, neighbors, and business owners (Irvine & Irvine). The elders gave attention, motivation, inspiration, admonition, instruction, redirection, guidance, leadership, and more to the children in the community (Davis, 2018; Irvine & Irvine; Sowell, 1976). In this sense, ZPD was the community that included homes, schools, businesses, churches, and everyone providing social interactions (Clarà).

The Black community defined, developed, and nurtured success (Sowell, 1976). Achievement could be found in the artists, musicians, comedians, writers, doctors, scientists, entertainers, entrepreneurs, businesspeople, skilled laborers, mathematicians, teachers, cooks,

ministers, lawyers, and civil rights leaders that comprised the community (Sowell, 1974, 1976). Income and status levels intermingled, living together within the community as neighbors and making accessible continued, spontaneous, and purposeful interaction (Sowell, 1974).

Community and Society: Global Level

The Black community is unique because it reflects the resilience of displaced people groups. During the pre-*Brown v. Board of Education* era, a community hosted a generation of people born during slavery or knew someone who had been (Sowell, 1974; Washington, 2015). Public education was valued as a tool that led to higher learning or a tool that could address the needs of the community (Washington). Furthermore, though education carried internal and external values for the community, many who had a demonstrated ability to compete at a level outside the community were shunned because of ethnicity and forced to remain within the confines of the Black community (Sowell; Washington). For example, many Black people who graduated from universities such as Harvard, Princeton, and the University of Chicago with graduate degrees remained in the Black community (Irvine & Irvine, 1983; Sowell). Such scholars could not find employment in their field in greater society and took jobs as public school teachers (Irvine & Irvine; Sowell).

Iatrogenesis of *Brown v. Board of Education*: Mandate Without Strategic Plan

The Supreme Court's opinion on *Brown v. Board of Education* declared that the segregation of public schools was an unconstitutional practice, and it ordered states to desegregate their public school systems with *deliberate speed* (Read, 1975). The eleven-page ruling of what legalists consider *Brown v. Board of Education I* did not instruct states on how to go about the task of dismantling segregation, nor did it address the history of racism and its systemic benefits to Whites in America (Onwuachi-Willig, 2019). After passing *Brown v. Board*

of Education I, the Court heard testimony and, one year after the ruling, produced the opinion referred to as *Brown v. Board of Education II* (Read, 1975). The *Brown v. Board of Education II* opinion pushed school cases relating to desegregation back to the federal courts with the instruction that the responsibility for the creation and implementation of a desegregation plan fell upon local education agencies (LEAs); and that the responsibility of the courts was to make sure that the plans were not only remedies that demonstrated practical flexibility but were also consistent with the *Brown v. Board of Education I* ruling (Read). For twenty years after the *Brown v. Board of Education I* ruling, states grappled with compliance and collective feelings of opposition that in large part could be attributed to the zero-sum endgame of desegregation: material gains for Blacks that represented losses for Whites (Onwuachi-Willig; Read, 1975).

Integration of public schools did not simply mean that Black students had to leave their familiar environments to be placed in environments devoid of their cultural experiences (Sowell, 1974). Integration also meant a loss of jobs for many Black administrators and teachers (Milner & Howard, 2004). Data cites that 90% of Black principals lost their jobs or were reassigned to predominately White settings in lesser, limited decision-making positions (Irvine & Irvine, 1983). Many teachers were also displaced and had to contend with the expectations of the new environment and lack of support and respect from peers, students, and community while at the same time helping Black students with their transition (Irvine & Irvine; Martin & Brooks, 2020; Read, 1975).

Social Contract of Business and Society

According to the Federal Register, school districts are considered LEAs (Federal Register, 2016). This understanding means that school districts are in the business of providing

educational services to the students that live within their boundaries (Federal Register). Thinking about LEAs as corporate bodies can give insight into the behaviors of school districts.

Corporate Social Behavior in Social Climes

Driven by civil rights movements, the 1960s brought about many changes in America (Read, 1975). One change, in particular, was that of the relationship of businesses to society (Carroll, 2021). This relationship, a social contract between business and society, represented a compendium of shared understandings and expectations (Carroll). The social climate, frustrated by the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling and factors arising from it, resulted in societal perceptions of unfair practices by social institutions (Read; Carroll). These perceptions, categorized as *entitlement mentality*, *rights movement*, and *victimization philosophy*, were projected onto business practices (Adams, 2000; Carroll; Newby & Tyack, 1971).

The 1970s brought new organizational theories that analyzed social performance within corporations qualitatively and not just quantitatively (Carroll, 2021; Sethi, 1975). Performance was framed as specific action contextualized within its time, culture, and participant relationships (Sethi). Framing, as such, allowed for flexibility based on a stable classification and a stable meaning for the action (Sethi). Another widely accepted qualitative framing was through the use of the three dimensions of responsibility (economic, legal, ethical, discretionary), responsiveness (philosophy, mode, strategy), and discernment (selective response) as collective performance indicia (Carroll; Kiverstein et al., 2021). Finally, the 1980s and 1990s introduced and developed stakeholder theories (Carroll). These theories identify to whom the corporation is obligated and who is impacted by its existence (Sethi).

Corporate social behavior is a stakeholder perception (Xie & Bagozzi, 2019). In this sense, stakeholders assess whether a company demonstrates corporate social responsibility

(CSR; Xie & Bagozzi). Corporations are deemed socially responsible when they engage in activities beyond perceived implicit or explicit societal obligations (Clark et al., 2022; Xie & Bagozzi). On the other hand, corporate social behavior can be deemed irresponsible (corporate social irresponsibility, a concept that is not the opposite of responsibility (Clark et al., 2022; Xie & Bagozzi).

Currently, theorists have not agreed on one definition of corporate social irresponsibility (CSI) (Clark et al., 2022; Corciolani et al., 2020; Xie & Bagozzi, 2019). However, the focus of Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is the benefit to stakeholders; CSI has a focal point of harm characterized by features of duration and intent (Clark et al.). CSI measures actions by the degree of human harm and relates that to how impacted the act is by time (longer duration is indicative of irresponsibility) and how intent is affected in terms of *mens rea* doctrine (criminal intent) and culpability (Clark et al.). Thus, CSR and CSI are not opposites because to provide no benefit is not to cause harm; and to not cause harm is not the same as providing a benefit.

Corporate Social Behavior and Perceived Risk

Risk is a relational tool within the social contract between business and society (Hillson & Murray-Webster, 2004). It does not exist. Once reified, it is seen in terms of its impact (Hillson & Murray-Webster; Mairal, 2008). Thusly, risk represents a hypothetical relationship between two objects, functioning to predict a negative outcome if the two come together (Mairal, 2008). In this sense, risk is a tool that links an object of risk to an object at risk to create the likelihood of an adverse outcome if the linkage (condition) occurs (Mairal). Risk matters because it addresses uncertainty, the impact of negative or positive outcomes, at the nodal point of a relational link (Alawneh, 2017; Hillson & Murray-Webster). Risk lies in the uncertainty between nodes in considering the triadic performance relationship of a specific action contextualized

within time, culture, participant relationships, or the dimensions of responsibility, responsiveness, and discernment (Hillson & Murray-Webster).

OSS as a Corporate Social Response

States did not receive the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling well. This is evidenced by the fact that the Supreme Court and federal courts held hearings on cases regarding school desegregation for 20 years after *Brown v. Board of Education* was handed down (Read, 1975). Theorists have identified that the issue of desegregation is complex and cannot be rectified through a single act (Irvine & Irvine, 1983; Read; Skiba et al., 2009, 2011). In grappling with what compliance would look like and how to enforce it, justices realized that what was at hand was a social issue (Martin & Brooks, 2020; Read). As a result, the Supreme Court passed a mandate that LEAs would be responsible for creating a desegregation plan that was in accordance with the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling and charged federal courts with the task of discerning whether the implementation plan followed the constitutionality of *Brown v. Board of Education* (Read).

At the same time, many states, especially southern states, chose to interpret the language *deliberate speed* in a way that supported their segregationist practices (Read, 1975). Additionally, lower courts began ruling against the constitutionality of integration, citing that segregation may be an issue of constitutionality, but integration was not (Read). It was within the turmoil of desegregation that OSS was first implemented as a tool of control (Adams, 2000; Allman & Slate, 2011). The disciplinary removal of students by educators was considered justified by constitutional law if the policy could be rationally linked to a legitimate government interest, a practice that continues today (Skiba et al., 2009).

Social Climes

The cultural climate of the 1960s was one of turmoil (Martin & Brooks, 2020; Onwuachi-Willig, 2019). Blacks were finding their voice in the era of civil rights (Adams, 2000; Onwuachi-Willig). Some movements and demonstrations created change in the social fabric of the US (Newby & Tyack, 1971; Sowell, 1974). The thought that desegregation was a matter that would simply affect schools found no ground (Read, 1975). As noted by Jim Crow laws, segregation was part of the social contract between business and society (Newby & Tyack; Sowell). Black voices were buoyed by the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling in 1954, followed by the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955 (Adams, 2000; Martin & Brooks; Onwuachi-Willig). By the 1960s, Black youth had become engaged in the movement against public segregation, as evidenced by the lunch counter sit-ins (Adams; Martin & Brooks; Onwuachi-Willig). As school districts fought to no avail to maintain a segregated system, disciplinary removal (OSS in particular) was a tool developed to maintain stasis should integration fully take hold (Clark et al., 2022; Hillson & Murray-Webster, 2004; Mairal, 2008; Skiba et al., 2002, 2014).

CSI as a Risk Management Plan: The Nodes of Harm, Time, Intent

Since 1975, the disparity in the OSS data of Black student suspension rate has been three times greater than White students (CDF, 1975; Mills, 1975). This situation has existed for over 50 years (Federal Register, 2016). The use of suspensions as a disciplinary tool is not limited to severe behaviors (Skiba et al., 2014). Noted in early data, such as the 1970 census, the CDF research, and other sources, Black students received suspensions based upon behaviors categorized as *soft* offenses (CDF, 1975; Mills, 1975; Skiba et al.). Soft offenses are judgmental and subjective violations of daily disruptions (Owens & McLanahan, 2020; Skiba et al.). Soft

offenses most noted for Black students during the 1970s were dress code, pregnancy, defiance, attendance, and non-compliance (CDF).

Research has shown that OSS adversely impacts short-term and long-term student outcomes (Federal Register, 2016; Skiba et al., 2014). Examples of short-term outcomes associated with OSS include lower academic achievement, over-identification for special education services, failure to graduate on time, increased dropout rate, and repeated offenses (Adams, 2000; CDF, 1975; Federal Register; Ladson-Billings, 2017; Skiba et al.). Long-term impacts associated with OSS include decreased probability of college matriculation, decreased preparedness for higher-paying jobs in the marketplace, and increased risk for carceral involvement (Bonds, 2019; Federal Register; Ladson-Billings).

In reviewing the indicia of segregation in schools, researchers cite student assignment, faculty, staff, transportation, extracurricular activities, and facilities (Adams, 2000; Skiba et al., 2009). After almost 50 years of discussion, researchers and the federal government cite racial disparity as the major indicium of OSS (Federal Register, 2016; Skiba et al.). Race, especially for the Black student, is considered such a predictor of OSS that the federal government asserts that Black students are at risk of being suspended during their K-12 epoch (Federal Register; Skiba et al.). The Federal Register goes as far as to distinguish between being at risk of suspension and having the probability of suspension, concluding explicitly that Black students are at risk. Other theorists also describe Black students' suspension risk in public schools using terms such as disproportionality, significant disproportionality, likelihood, and substantial risk (Federal Register; Skiba et al.).

Performance of the Corporate Social Behavior Tool: OSS

It is important to remember that OSS is a specific action framed within its time, culture, and social relationships (Sethi, 1975). Framing OSS as such allows for its identification within the stability of classification and meaning (Sethi). The stable classification for OSS is disciplinary removal: the removal of a student from their educational setting due to a behavior infraction (Losen & Skiba, 2010; Skiba et al., 2014). The meanings and usage of OSS in this generational period (from 2000 onward) need not be the same as in the 1970s (Heft, 2017). The stability of OSS within a classification and meaning, and its fluid form within the perception of the user, gives relevance to its presence and speaks to its construct within the environment as a cultural artifact that affords usage on a need basis within the ecology of school (Heft, 2018; Kiverstein et al., 2021; Schein, 1983; Wenger, 1999). Within the eco-niche of a person and the environment of the group, artifacts exist with multiple functionalities and meanings (Heft, 2017; Kiverstein et al.; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Schein). As literature reveals, reasons for the use of OSS can be seen at the global level (cultural gaps between teacher and student ethnicities, stereotype thinking), at the environmental level (group pressure, lack of resources), and the interpersonal level (classroom behavior, safety) (Asch, 1951; Heft; Skiba et al., 2009).

Identification of the Experience Through Documents

There are three documents of seminal value to this research. These documents, spanning almost 50 years, punctuate the awareness of inequity within the social environment of schools and the need for equity in the education of America's youth. The central focus of all three is that inequity in the social environments of schools place America's future at risk.

Children's Defense Fund Research of 1975

Many researchers have alluded to the 1975 Children's Defense Fund (CDF) research entitled, *School suspensions: Are they helping children? A report.*, as the seminal document on the suspension and expulsion of Black students from public schools (Federal Register, 2016; Losen & Skiba, 2010). However, in that report, CDF stated that their original interest in student suspension was piqued by the 1970 US census data showing that two million students had missed one quarter or more of the school year primarily due to exclusionary school practices (CDF). The report written in 1974 garnered many conversations that led to the frequently cited 1975 report sponsored by the Washington research project (CDF).

A Nation at Risk…An Open Letter to the American People of 1983

Another document that punctuates the awareness of Black student experiences is *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform. An Open Letter to the American People. A Report to the Nation and the Secretary of Education.* (NAR; Gardner, 1983). Though the findings of the research do not specify Black students, it refers to the education of our nation's students as a whole and notes that not doing so puts our nation in further jeopardy. The document states that education should have dual goals: equity and high-quality schooling. It further states that a commitment to educational quality is not to be made at the expense of equity; doing so leads "to a generalized accommodation to mediocrity in our society on the one hand or the creation of an undemocratic elitism on the other" (Gardner, p. 13).

2016 Federal Register Part II: Department of Education

The 2016 Federal Register is a document that theorists often cite as a document of influence (Losen & Skiba, 2010; Skiba et al., 2014). This document is a meta-analysis of research compiled by the US Department of Education (USDOE) as evidence of continued

disproportionality in disciplinary exclusion practices against Black students (Federal Register). The document primarily focuses on the civil rights of special education students but details the suspension of all students. The Federal Register set the standard for the algorithm of determining suspension for LEA in each state (Losen & Skiba). The Federal Register refers to the high suspension rate against Black students as a significant disproportionality that categorizes OSS as a civil rights concern (Federal Register).

Social Awareness Through the Lenses of the Documents

Significant disproportionality is the nomenclature chosen to depict the suspension rate of Black students in public schools (Federal Register, 2016). The calculated suspension rate for Black students is reportedly the same in the CDF report and the Federal Register (CDF, 1975; Federal Register). For more than 40 years (from the time of both publications), Black students have been suspended at a rate three times greater than their White counterparts (CDF; Federal Register; Mills, 1975).

The rate of Black student suspension was first identified in the CDF report of 1975 (CDF, 1975; Mills, 1975). Although the Federal Register puts forth metrics the states must use in calculating and reporting suspension data, USDOE allows states to define and justify its metrics independently (Federal Register, 2016). The Federal Register, unlike the CDF report and the NAR open letter, allows for the use of special education services as a support for students (CDF; Federal Register; Gardner, 1983). However, USDOE cautions against the high rate of Black students being identified for special education as a possible indicator of exclusionary practices (Federal Register). And similar to the cautions found in the NAR open letter, the Federal Register takes particular note of the weakening of the nation in terms of graduates from racial, cultural, ethnic, or linguistic minority groups as not being qualified for competitive jobs in the

marketplace or having the pre-requisites for rigorous college programs (Federal Register; Gardner).

Post-*Brown v. Board of Education* Desegregation: 1960s and 1970s

Throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, the US Supreme Court heard testimony regarding desegregation in America's public schools (Read, 1975; Skiba et al., 2009). Stemming from *Brown v. Board of Education* in an era of civil rights, the courts (Supreme and federal) took a colorblind stance on the implementation of desegregation in schools without acknowledging the schism of racism that exists in the history of this country (Onwuachi-Willig, 2019; Skiba). Though the courts justified their actions as being per the Constitution, states misinterpreted the courts' non-engagement in the historic ills of racism that characterized the colorblind stance as *de jure* justification for maintaining a segregated system (Onwuachi-Willig; Read; Skiba). Some southern states took years before implementing plans on desegregation, with a few banning Black students from school attendance for four years or more (Read).

As desegregation was implemented, Black students attending previously all-White schools faced harm to a person in both physical and emotional ways (Newby & Tyack, 1971; Onwuachi-Willig, 2019; Skiba et al., 2009; Willie & Cunnigen, 1981). Military forces were deployed to protect students from Whites as they entered schools, but once inside, these Black students faced experiences of being pushed downstairs, kicked, shoved, and elbowed (Newby & Tyack; Onwuachi-Willig; Skiba et al.). Black students also had sharp objects, like scissors and broken glass, thrown at them (Newby & Tyack).

Formal education was a quest for power amongst Blacks during the civil rights era, but socialization in the desegregated environment countered that hope by limiting access to resources based upon the physiognomic identification of race (Kiverstein et al., 2021; Newby & Tyack,

1971; Read, 1975). Physiognomic traits such as skin color, hair texture, and facial features carry stereotypic meanings congruent with America's history of racist ideologies and practices (Gibson, 1939; Kiverstein et al., 2021; Newby & Tyack; Parker, 2019). So not only did Black students receive threats and harm to their bodies and emotions, but they also were subjected to educational harm (Newby & Tyack; Sowell, 1974). The power of education for Black students was also challenged by society regarding limited post-graduate opportunities in higher-paying careers in the job market outside of the Black community (Newby & Tyack; Sowell).

The environment of integrated White schools was replete with those who fought against desegregation (Onwuachi-Willig, 2019). Theorists opine that race is a worldview and White culture is the litmus of standardization (Davis, 2018; Newby & Tyack, 1971; Skiba et al., 2009). The environment of schools in terms of culture, norms, and academics is based upon White interests and ways of knowing, and Euro historical culture and the historical culture of White dominance (slavery and segregation) in America against Blacks, resulting in the creation of an environment based upon the false pretense of universal identity (Davis; Horkheimer & Adorno,

OSS: A Tool of Control

Out-of-school suspensions, including expulsions, are forms of punishment that disproportionately impact Black students (Owens & McLanahan, 2020; Skiba et al., 2002, 2009, 2011). OSS primarily concerns school discipline and safety (Milner & Howard, 2004; Skiba et al., 2009). Suspensions remove students from the learning environment precluding the opportunity of engaging with the curriculum (Skiba et al., 2014). The purpose of school discipline is to ensure safety within the school and to maintain an environment conducive to learning (Milner & Howard; Skiba et al., 2009). Administrators may also use suspensions for ad hoc reasons, such as reducing rates of future behavior and teaching social skills necessary for

school and society (Skiba). Most importantly, disciplinary removals represent a method for addressing serious disciplinary infractions – those that can cause harm or threat to the student or others within the school environment – so that safety can be maintained within the school itself (Milner & Howard; Owens & McLanahan; Skiba et al., 2002, 2009, 2011).

Data suggests that OSS is not being used as intended (e.g., severe or violent offenses) but rather as a response to a wide range of behaviors, with only a small percentage going to safety concerns (Owens & McLanahan, 2020; Skiba et al., 2009). In a special report of 35 school districts representing 1.3 million students with a student body of 46% White and 44% Black, 71.5% of the suspended students were Black, and 28.5% were White (Skiba et al.). Other studies that have controlled for indicators often associated with OSS (e.g., socioeconomics) have produced similar results (Adams, 2000; Skiba et al.).

Case Law

One of the most injurious ways that White power is maintained is through silence on issues of race (Parker, 2019). The *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling stated that separating Black students from White students of similar age and qualifications generate harm to Black students, which is made worse when sanctioned by law (Onwuachi-Willig, 2019; Read, 1975; Skiba et al., 2009). Critics of the ruling duly noted that the opinion handed down did not address the historical fabric of racism in America, nor did it guide what a desegregation plan should look like (Read; Skiba et al.). Constitutional law's most hallowed race relations decision is devoid of retribution toward racism (Onwuachi-Willig). President Eisenhower remained quiet on the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling causing speculation on whether the branches of government agreed (Read). It was not until 1965 that President Johnson spoke about the complexity of Blacks and Whites related to school desegregation (Skiba et al.).

Discrimination is difficult to prove in courts of law: discriminatory intent, which follows *mens rea*, must be evident (Onwuachi-Willig, 2019; Skiba et al., 2009). Since *Brown v. Board of Education*, students and families have brought cases of disparate disciplinary practices before the courts, citing the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment (Onwuachi-Willig; Read, 1975; Skiba et al.). Fourteenth Amendment case law requires the application of different tests depending on the school administrator's motivation for discipline (Skiba et al.). If the courts decide there is legitimate motivation, then the rational basis test will be applied, which asks whether the school administrator's actions were reasonably related to legitimate educational concerns. Deferential to school administrators, it reasons that administrators are experts and know how to conduct business best. If courts decide that motivation is based on racial animus, a compelling justification must be supplied. The disparity in OSS rates is not considered unconstitutional racial discrimination if made with racially neutral decision-making. Instead, such cases are considered the "unfortunate result of the application of legitimate decision-making by educational officials" (Skiba et al.).

Citizenry has also challenged disparate practices in schools through the Equal Protection Clause, Title VI, and Section 1981 (Read, 1975; Skiba et al., 2009). Title VI violations require students to prove discriminatory intent on the administrator's part (Skiba et al.). Title VI has been mostly ineffective due to the intent mandate. However, students have successfully shown disparate impacts of a specific action or program (Skiba et al.). There have also been court cases where the law may find the occurrence of White institutional racism within a district. However, the courts mandated remediation without administrative removal (Skiba et al.).

Understanding the Reported OSS Data: Limitations

For more than four decades, discussions on OSS data reporting regarding the rate of suspension for African American students as compared to the rate of suspensions for White students are always categorized as disproportionality or significant disproportionality (CDF, 1975; Federal Register, 2016; Losen & Skiba, 2010; Mills, 1975; Skiba et al., 2014). From 1975 until now, it has been reported that Black students are suspended at a rate three times greater than their White peers (CDF; Federal Register). Historically, the term significant disproportionality has been left to the states' discretion for defining (Federal Register). The stipulation has been that the states must define significant disproportionality in accordance with numerical data but may not include considerations of policies, practices, and procedures sanctioned by the state or its LEAs. As a result, various methodologies have been produced to calculate and explain the disparities between racial and ethnic groups; provide different considerations for the duration of disparities; and offer different reasons for excluding LEAs from discovery as to whether significant disproportionality exists (Federal Register). In a sense, the data reported in the Federal Register lacks trustworthiness: credibility cannot be established; there is no internal transferability amongst data sets – data parameters from one state are not necessarily compatible with data parameters from another state, and there is no confirmability due to the data's link to various funding requirements that the states vie to keep.

Another technical caution would be that the suspension data reported in the Federal Register is estimated (Federal Register, 2016; Losen & Skiba, 2010). This discrepancy is due to a misalignment between enrollment and discipline data years (Losen & Skiba). USDOE compiles enrollment meta-data biennially, which creates a lag in calculation reporting versus the annual compilation of discipline data. The misalignment between the enrollment year and discipline

data year is insignificant. In most cases, a researcher can manually match the aggregate reporting year of enrollment to the appropriate discipline year and re-calculate the data (Losen & Skiba).

The next technical advisory carries more weight. Whereas enrollment data is an aggregate of students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers, suspension data is only reported on students without disabilities (Federal Register, 2016; Losen & Skiba, 2010). Suspension data collected on students with disabilities is reported on students who have served a suspension of 10 days or more (Losen & Skiba). Suspension data collected on students without disabilities is reported on one occurrence per school year. Thus, the data is incompatible (Losen & Skiba). Neither has a clear picture of the average number of suspensions a student receives in a year nor the duration of the average suspension (Losen & Skiba).

Finally, USDOE changed its method for categorical reporting of race and ethnicity beginning in the 2010-2011 data reporting year (Losen & Skiba, 2010). The change marked the first time the government dictated procedures for collecting race and ethnicity categories in reporting data. Ethnicity is singly based upon whether a person considers themselves Hispanic/Latino. Race is proffered as a choice of one or more of the five groups: American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian, Black or African American, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and White. Hispanic/Latino ethnic designation is the primary precedence, regardless of the racial group chosen. A second precedence is afforded to multiracial persons identifying as Black or African American as one of their racial groups, such as Black/White or Black/Asian. According to the Census Bureau, Black multiracial students are reported as socially situated in higher socioeconomic conditions than single race Blacks. It is unclear how the ethnic/racial categories influence the interpretation of data sets (Skiba et al., 2009).

Please note that these technical advisories were identified by Losen and Skiba (2010) and included as a reference in the Federal Register (2016). Losen and Skiba are major authoritative contributors, and the US Census Bureau is a significant data contributor to the meta-analyses performed by USDOE in the civil rights data areas of special education and suspension (Federal Register).

Violence in the Data: A Matter of Interpretation

Research, textbooks, and schools are ways societies transmit idealized versions of the past (Parker, 2019). These are vehicles by which knowledge gets produced and transmitted intergenerationally to remain updated and current (Juárez & Hayes, 2015; Parker; Teo, 2010). This realm of knowledge is personal rather than structural because it influences individuation (Juárez & Hayes; Parker).

Knowledge gets produced from theoretical results that are based on empirical data (Bonilla-Silva, 2017; Teo, 2010). This method becomes problematic when interpretations are not based upon hermeneutics, a process that requires the researcher to acknowledge as essential to and embedded in the interpretive process their own past experiences and prior knowledge (Bonilla-Silva; Bynum & Varpio, 2018; Juárez & Hayes, 2015; Parker, 2019; Teo). When interpreting results on ethnic groupings that differ from the researcher's ethnic group, it is easy to mask the diversity inherent in the empirical data, relying instead on an arbitrary homogeneity assumption (Bandura, 2002; Parker). Empirical differences interpreted as inferiority or problems regarding the behaviors of others become a form of violence (Juárez & Hayes; Teo). The construct of negative images or profiles of a specific grouping of people based on theoretical interpretations of empirical data is a violation that negatively impacts that grouping (Teo). These constructs are often done under the authority of social systems, including education, and in the

guise of knowledge (Teo). Many theorists avow that such constructs should be reframed from knowledge to misleading generalizations (Bonilla-Silva; Bynum & Varpio; Juárez & Hayes; Parker; Teo).

Bias: Seeing Things from the Perspective of Group and Self

Racism has a rife and cumulative influence on American culture (Parker, 2019). For the African American with generational ties to the country, slavery has had a continual and profound negative impact on the person's institutional, social, economic, and psychological life, a condition that may continue through posttraumatic sequelae (Newby & Tyack, 1971; Parker). For the White American with generational ties to the country, slavery has had a profound negative and traumatic psychological impact by constructing an internal infrastructure that incorporates acts of domination and the continuation of privilege and power (Gibson, 1939; Parker). Race is not neutral. It influences logic and methods within social environments (Bonilla-Silva, 2017; Parker; Read, 1975; Skiba et al., 2011).

In transitioning from the pre-*Brown v. Board of Education* era of school segregation to the post-*Brown v. Board of Education* era of school desegregation, the Black student went from being a valued personality within the Black school environment to [the same student] being an outlaw – despised, rejected, unprotected, and targeted – within the predominately White school environment (Gibson, 1939). This occurrence is not because the student changed but rather because the new environment in which the student had to navigate operated under a prevailing attitude that had emotional roots strong enough to distort perception through transgenerational norms of privilege and frames of reference (Bandura, 2002; Gibson; Parker, 2019). Through cultural contrasts and explicit bias, misleading generalizations were projected onto the Black

student congruent with the distorted historical perception of Blacks in America (Bandura; Gibson).

The bias noted within the 1960s, and 1970s climate provides a societal example of explicit bias. In reflecting on an opinion handed down by the South Carolina federal court (*Briggs v. Elliott*), the three-judge ruling narrowly interpreted *Brown v. Board of Education* as noted by the last statements of the opinion, "The Constitution, in other words, does not require integration. It merely forbids discrimination" (Read, 1975, p. 13). This opinion is in addition to the atrocities faced by Black students during the early days of desegregation (Newby & Tyack, 1971; Skiba et al., 2009; Willie & Cunnigen, 1981). Though explicit bias still exists, research interventions have appeared to have reduced the presence of explicit bias, which has not been the case with implicit bias (Smolkowski et al., 2016).

Implicit bias continues in education's current era (1980s onward) (Smolkowski et al., 2016). It is defined as the impact and influence of stereotypic associations with groups other than self on perception, behavior, decision-making, and judgments (Parker, 2019; Smolkowski et al.). One form of implicit bias that has informed research in recent years is microaggression (Hotchkins, 2016; Schmidt, 2018). This form of implicit bias often reifies a physiognomic characteristic of the person (or collective) that is the object of the bias (Kiverstein et al., 2021). The physiognomic characteristic demands a response regarding the person because of the perceived meaning and value associated with the features (Gibson, 1939; Kiverstein et al.). The harm perpetrated by microaggressions is seen through their cumulative effects (Hotchkins; Schmidt).

Microaggressions are given in the form of seemingly innocuous comments that are not engaging due to their subtlety and sometimes non-verbal delivery (Hotchkins, 2016; Schmidt,

2018). *Micro* refers to under the surface and is not minimal and has the impact of drops of water continually hitting the same surface area (Schmidt). Research suggests that the cumulative impact of racial affronts and indignities toward Black teachers and students who navigate White space in schools includes negative self-image, lower academic performance, and poorer social navigation skills (Hotchkins; Schmidt). The cumulative effect of microaggressions can induce profound psychological and physical responses (e.g., disruptive behaviors, illness) as the object of the microaggression strives to maintain a sense of self (Hotchkins; Schmidt).

The School Environment: 1980s Onward

Desegregation brought about systemic changes for students and staff (Irvine & Irvine, 1983). Subsequent rulings stemming from *Brown v. Board of Education* on school desegregation required Black and White staff to be integrated into schools and students (Irvine & Irvine; Read, 1975). The integration of staff was characterized by the demotion of administrators, loss of jobs by close to a third of Black teachers, and the placement of teachers into environments which muted their voices and rendered their decision-making roles powerless (Adams, 2000; Irvine & Irvine; Milner & Howard, 2004; Newby & Tyack, 1971). Black students walked long distances to attend previously all-White schools, while White students rode school buses to attend previously all-Black schools (Newby & Tyack). Black children were forced to learn how to navigate White culture at risk of severe punishment; and how to navigate a school environment devoid of familiarity (Irvine & Irvine; Newby & Tyack; Sowell, 1974). The only curriculum available for Black teachers to teach and Black students to learn was a curriculum that modeled Eurocentric ideology (Irvine & Irvine; Martin et al., 2019; Milner & Howard; Newby & Tyack; Parker, 2019).

Behavior is purposive action that is taken within the ecology of a person's environment (Kiverstein et al., 2021; Teo, 2010). It is a social engagement regulated by the perception of meaning and needs within the eco-niche (Heft, 2018; Kiverstein et al.; Teo, 2010; Wenger, 1999). Objects within the environment, and affordances, provide immediacy regarding functionality and resources to the person within the niche (Heft; Kiverstein et al.). The immediacy of the objects within the eco-niche provides meaning through awareness and possibility (Heft). Not all objects in the environment are affordances: for an object to be an affordance, the person must be able to interact with it socially (Heft; Kiverstein et al.). Thus, not all things in the school environment are accessible to the Black student due to racialized barriers such as OSS (Dumas, 2016; Federal Register, 2016).

Bias: Interpersonal Level

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), for the 2011-2012 school year, 81.9% of public school teachers were White, 7.8% Hispanic, and 6.8% Black (NCES, n.d.). Conversely, student enrollment for the same year was reported as 52% White, 24% Hispanic, and 16% Black (NCES, n.d.). The average teacher in the US is White and female (Camacho & Parham, 2019). Thusly, the data shows that White teachers will more than likely encounter an ethnically diverse classroom during their teaching careers, and unlike in past eras, Black students will likely have more White teachers than Black teachers.

Teacher-student relationships are impacted by various factors, including perception (Nemer et al., 2019). For students, this relationship is predicated on whether they perceive their school environment as punitive: student-perceived punitive environments lead to strained student-teacher relationships overall (Bottiani et al., 2017; Heilbrun et al., 2018; Hotchkins, 2016). Teachers' perceptions of students are based on attributes the person holds prior to pre-

service training (Nemer et al.). These perceptions, which may be constituted by past experiences, emotions, beliefs, and histories, can impact engagement (Heilbrun et al.; Nemer et al.; Parker, 2019; Skiba et al., 2002). Negative perceptions can surface as forms of bias: explicit, implicit, aversive, or microaggressive (Dutil, 2020; Heilbrun et al.; Hotchkins; Owens & McLanahan, 2020; Parker; Skiba et al.; Smolkowski et al., 2016).

In reviewing office disciplinary referrals (ODRs), analysts have found that teachers refer Black students for disciplinary removals at a disproportionate rate for subjective behaviors such as perceived disruptions and oppositional defiance (Dutil, 2020; Marcucci, 2020; Skiba et al., 2009). The subjective use of teacher referrals has been attributed to cultural insensitivity based on bias (Dutil; Marcucci; Owens & McLanahan, 2020; Smolkowski et al., 2016). Microaggressions, continued verbal or non-verbal acts against Black students that are difficult to detect and have a cumulative effect over time, resulting in psychiatric or toxic stress, can reify behaviors in students that fulfill stereotypical constructs held by White teachers (Bandura, 2002; Dutil; Hotchkins; Nemer et al., 2019; Skiba et al., 2002, 2011).

Transmission of Culture and Its Capital: School Level

School culture is a feature of the school's environment (Heft, 2017; Schein, 1983). It has been defined by some as an accumulation of cultural knowledge, skills, and inheritable abilities (Yosso, 2005). Other theorists identify school culture through ways that help students whose ethnicity and socioeconomic status have left them disadvantaged (Losen & Skiba, 2010). Finally, some define culture as representing a collective in the environment based upon a pattern of assumptions that the group uses as a development of perspective and reasoning that gets shared and embraced amongst its members (Schein). Culture is not an artifact, nor is it an affordance. However, as a collective, it is defined by the artifacts and affordances associated with it (Heft;

Schein). Within a given environment, a person can access the culture but not its affordances, in total or part (Wenger, 1999). In other words, an artifact may be in a person's awareness, but without access and functionality, it is not considered an affordance to that individual (Heft; Wenger).

Affordances and artifacts of school culture are considered capital (Yosso, 2005). Capital speaks to the wealth inherent in the power and resources maintained within the environment's culture (Schein, 1983; Wenger, 1999; Yosso). Cultural denominations within a school include cultural capital, defined as education and language, social capital, which consists of networks and connections; and economic capital, which refers to money and material possessions (Yosso). Access to this capital is limited and is passed transgenerationally through lessons on navigating life using the capital for social mobility (Parker, 2019; Yosso). Cultural reproduction, the perpetuation of social class hierarchies, has been used by equity theorists to explain how the acts of institutions and individuals maintain a hierarchical status quo (Parker; Skiba et al., 2009; Yosso).

OSS functions to remove students from the classroom and the school (Skiba et al., 2014). Research shows that Black students are being hyper-disciplined: disciplined at a rate that represents a significant disproportionality compared to the rate of White student suspension (Federal Register, 2016; Marcucci, 2020). Additionally, researchers have also noted that the pathology for hyper-discipline behavior is based mainly on soft, subjective infractions such as classroom disruptions, student attitudes, and student opposition versus the severe infractions for which OSS was designed to manage (Drakeford, 2004; Dutil, 2020; Marcucci, 2020; Skiba et al.). Such constant and severe punishment has caused USDOE to identify Black students as being at risk for OSS, which results in time not engaged in studies (Drakeford, 2004; Federal Register).

Other researchers contend that the impact of OSS on Black students qualifies for a trauma perspective of discipline and serious concern regarding a Black student's ability to compete in college, secure higher-paying jobs in the workplace, and navigate through society successfully (Dutil; Federal Register; Owens, 2020; Marcucci; Skiba et al.). Concerning cultural wealth, the Black student being removed from school prevents access to denominations of cultural capital and signifies the value perspective of the school (Ortiz et al., 2019; Yosso, 2005).

OSS and Deficit Language: Global Level

OSS literature is replete with deficit language, focusing on the Black student's marginalization with exclusionary practices (Crenshaw, 2011; Yosso, 2005). Terms such as lower socioeconomic status or school-to-prison pipeline have been used so often in the connection of OSS and Black students that it tells their own story and creates their profile, one that has the power to generate a federal racial reporting category based on the perception of Black: “Black Multiracial students are more likely to live with both parents, live in families with higher incomes, live with families that own their own home, and have parents with more education than other [B]lacks” (Skiba et al., 2009, p. 1101). Through the reporting agency of schools, greater society has access to the individual (Losen & Skiba, 2010; Skiba et al.). In increasingly more sectors, the value of Blacks in society, including students in the school environment, is being reported negatively (Yosso). The primary factor behind the pervasive use of deficit language concerning Black students is the perspective of the person, and their culture, analyzing the deed (Crenshaw; Parker, 2019; Yosso).

Gap in Literature

Much of the literature available for review assessed Black students and OSS in terms of the established indices of carceral relationship, teacher stress and anxiety, bias, socioeconomic

status, and behavior (Ortiz et al., 2018; Skiba et al., 2009; Yosso, 2005). There are new changes in perspectives for a trauma-informed approach toward disciplining the Black student who is considered at risk in their school of attendance (Dutil, 2020; Marcucci, 2020). There is a focus on rehabilitating student behaviors with academic support, counseling, mentoring, and teacher support versus the harsh disciplinary practice of OSS (Valdebenito et al., 2019). However, the gap in the literature lies in the lack of voices who seek to analyze the phenomenon of the high rate of school suspensions levied on Black students without focusing on the indices that unduly burden the student in the guise of facts (Crenshaw, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2017; Yosso). This review attempted to view the phenomenon without the trappings of labels that violate the Black student's personage using multiple selected domains.

Summary

Chapter Two provided a historical overview of how OSS stemmed from the racial climate of the 1960s. A succinct discussion of the theoretical framework opened the chapter. The CoP theory will be utilized to analyze the phenomenological examples shared by study participants. The literature was reviewed using the environmental levels proffered by CoP: Interpersonal Level, School Level, and Global Level. Also discussed were three seminal documents of OSS and various intersections of case law. Finally, this chapter discussed how the study addressed the gap in the literature. Specifically, it used multiple selected domains to view the phenomenon with the labels that violate the personage of the Black student.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this study is to understand the lived experiences of African Americans who had served at least two OSS during their K-12 epoch but whose post-secondary life outcomes do not reflect the deficit language (i.e., imprisonment) that researchers often use to describe that population. This chapter will describe the analytical methods used to conduct the study. It provides information on the research design, chosen data collection approaches and analyses, and methods for establishing trustworthiness and ethical considerations.

Research Design

Qualitative phenomenology is a research approach that allows for an investigation of the singular through the exploration of a social experience (Van Manen, 2017b). The experiences of others will be explored using the analytical device of hermeneutics (Neubauer et al., 2019). Hermeneutical phenomenology will allow self-reflective themes to surface from the shared phenomenological example.

What Phenomenology Is

Phenomenology is based on the works of German mathematician Edmund Husserl (Prasad, 2017). It has its roots in psychology and philosophy but is also grounded in the social and health sciences, including education (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Van Manen, 1984). Other major contributors to the field are Moustakas, Stewart, Mickunas, and Van Manen (Crist & Tanner, 2003; Neubauer et al., 2019).

Phenomenology is a research approach that explores the experiences of a person's consciousness as it relates to a specific human social interaction (Prasad, 2017; Van Manen, 1997). Specific human interaction is considered a phenomenon (Van Manen, 1997, 2017b).

Phenomenological research seeks to focus on the experience that comprises an observable, singular social interaction (Van Manen, 1997).

The Phenomenon and the Phenomenological Inquiry

A phenomenon is a social occurrence whose experience is unfamiliar to the researcher (Van Manen, 2017b). It is a situation or event based on reality, making it both knowable and understandable (Van Manen, 1997, 2017b). Phenomena are explored through inquiry and lived experiences (Crist & Tanner, 2003; Prasad, 2017; Van Manen, 1997). Pragmatically, the phenomenon, inquiry, and lived experience must all be reduced to text and described eidetically for study (Van Manen, 2017b). Through reduction, the text becomes the tool necessary for hermeneutical analysis (Prasad, 2017; Van Manen, 1984).

Horizons within Phenomenology

Husserl appeared adamant about separating the social and natural sciences (Husserl, 1964). But the writings of physicists such as Einstein and Rindler, along with writings of social scientists such as Husserl, Kant, Piaget, Van Manen, Gadamer, and Wenger combined, have been instrumental in defining the phenomenological concept of horizons that is often spoken about in the social sciences regarding human experiences (Davey, 2006; Husserl; Natanson & Natanson, 1951; Piaget, 2013; Van Manen, 1997; Wenger, 1999). The phenomenological horizon in research is the distinction between a posteriori and a priori knowledge (Husserl). The phenomenological horizon is the boundary between the observable and unobservable aspects of an experience (Rindler, 1956; Wenger, 1999). The concept of the noumenon juxtaposes an awareness of the reality of an experience with the awareness of a reality outside of one's consciousness but not of one's senses (i.e., intuition) (Natanson & Natanson, 1951). Thus, one facility of a phenomenological horizon is that it provides a framework by which to juxtapose

conscious reality and non-physical, or sense, reality – pragmatically, it differentiates between the actor and the audience.

It is important to note that a horizon is not a cartesian point; a location that can be reached. A horizon is a point beyond which an event cannot affect an observer (Rindler, 1956). In physics, the horizon is called the event horizon when referring to the black hole. Social scientists, such as Gadamer, postured that the event horizon should be named (Davey, 2006). By naming the horizon, a sense of normalcy develops as a condition of acquaintanceship that facilitates familiarity (Davey). Ultimately, familiarity with the horizon leads to an intimacy that aids in the hermeneutical analysis of the phenomenon (Davey; Prasad, 2017).

The [physics] principle of the horizon is commonplace in human social interaction. For example, the act of driving does not impact the passenger. The passenger serves as an audience to the event but does not make the decisions inherent in the role of driver. The naming of the event, driving, brings about a familiar context by which others not connected to the event can be conversant (Davey, 2006; Rindler, 1956).

In physics, the horizon is always in relation to self (Rindler, 1956). The effect of the phenomenological event can be expressed in the three phases (time succession) of pre-outcome, engagement, and post-outcome (Husserl, 1964; Rindler). Transitioning through the phases of the event constitutes what physicists call a parallax. The parallax refers to the effect difference when the observer's position changes (Rindler). Lived experiences must reside in the consciousness of the self, and the experience must have a beginning, middle, and end. The phenomenological event in its totality must be internalized in the imagination through a process called retention, and it must progress from its beginning to its end, as termed by the concept of protention (Blaiklock, 2017; Husserl, 1964; Moustakas, 1994). The conscious awareness of the event’s

phases allows for the development of the figment into a lived experience of a phenomenon (Husserl; Van Manen, 1997). Furthermore, just as the parallax makes significant changes in the perception of the event via progression, the figment, through the process of horizontalization (internalization of the lived experience through repeated rehearsals of the experience in its serial form) creates changing perspectives that result from emerging angles of observation (Husserl; Moustakas, 1994; Rindler). The significance of parallax and horizontalization to phenomenology is that the changes in perspective are the result of changes in position in physical and non-physical realities and not the result of changes due to contemplation (Husserl; Moustakas; Rindler; Van Manen).

Horizons are an essential concept within this research study. At its essence, the research question identifies the event horizon as life outcomes that do not fit the type depicted by OSS deficit language. Gleaning an understanding of what that is like will require participants to identify, define, and share the meaning of *type* in terms of that which is known and that which is sensed (Davey, 2006; Moustakas, 1994; Rindler, 1956; Wenger, 1999).

The Role of the Imagination in Phenomenology

The imagination is the domain of non-physical reality (Subbotskiĭ & Chesnokova, 2010). Along the lines of Piaget, the distinguishing feature of the imagination is that it embraces object permanence and thereby separates perceived objects from imaginary ones (Piaget, 2013; Subbotskiĭ & Chesnokova). In other words, the imagination is a mental representation of an absent model that carries symbolic meanings and goes beyond the immediate present (Piaget).

Fantasy, the faculty to engage in the activity of imagination in one form, is characterized by presentification – the ability to realize or perceive that an event is no longer in the present but has concluded (Husserl, 1964). Understanding that the event has concluded is vital because the

concept of the present regarding phenomenology is an attribute of presentification (Husserl; Van Manen, 1997). Presentification allows for the preservation of the lived experience within the imagination to be in the present: the telling of its narrative a posteriori to be in the present tense and the phenomenological example to be an a priori experience (Husserl; Piaget, 2013; Van Manen). It is within the conscious imagination of the person that the lived experience finds residency (Husserl, 1964; Van Manen).

The Phenomenological Example

The underpinning of phenomenological research is hinged upon the examiner's desire to know what an experience is like (Van Manen, 2017a). To that end, the phenomenological question would best be framed in such a way as to connect a human experience to the experience that resides in the consciousness of the person (Van Manen, 1997, 2017a). Framing (but not necessarily wording) the phenomenological question should take the form, "What is this lived experience like?" (Van Manen, 2017a).

The experience shared by an individual is often considered a lived experience (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Crist & Tanner, 2003; Neubauer et al., 2019; Prasad, 2017; Van Manen, 1997). However, the lived experience has sometimes been referred to as a phenomenological example (Van Manen, 2017b). This term is seemingly more descriptive because it juxtaposes the phenomenological inquiry and the shared narrative. In this sense, the shared lived experience is contextualized within the example. The duality allows for the acknowledgment of the lived experience as the object belonging to the individual; and the phenomenological example – lived experience reduced to text for a specific audience (i.e., researcher) – as the object belonging to the phenomenological inquiry (Prasad; Van Manen, 2017b).

The phenomenological example resides in the consciousness of its author, the research participant (Van Manen, 1997). It is a critical figment with evidential significance: it is knowable and understandable, singular and unique (Van Manen, 2017b). Phenomenological examples contain concrete descriptions – descriptions that are rich in vividness and details (Van Manen, 2017b). A crucial aspect of the phenomenological example is that it is pre-reflective and eidetic (Crist & Tanner, 2003; Neubauer et al., 2019; Prasad, 2017). These are essential aspects because the example provides access to the singularity of the phenomenon (Van Manen, 2017b). Phenomenological examples are descriptive and not interpretive experiences (Neubauer et al.). As such, phenomenological examples are positioned to give testimony as a witness to the lived experience (Horkheimer, 2018).

The phenomenological example is a methodological device that mediates our grasp of the remarkable (Van Manen, 2017b). It uses language that contextualizes the phenomenon. If the phenomenon is expressed through the current language, its significance would become diminished, and its uniqueness would be made obsolete because the current language would generalize and universalize the experience (Van Manen).

In order to have clarity, the phenomenological example must relate to the phenomenon (Giorgi, 1997). Phenomenological examples reflect the impression of the event on the person. The phenomenological event provides the opportunity for an engagement that leads to an experience to colligate the event with the example (Giorgi, 1994).

In any case, the phenomenological example is a fictive experience, regardless of how factually personal the account is communicated (Prasad, 2017; Van Manen, 1984). The construct of the phenomenological example as a fictive element is critical because fictive constructs are those that are not in the immediate realm of reality. The fictive element allows the experience to

be in the moment, shared fresh without reflection and without the constraint of time (Van Manen). Because the experience is relayed, divorced from the actual moment, it resides in the conscious mind as a figment of memory, better known as the imagination (Piaget, 2013; Van Manen). Therefore, the lived experience is a phenomenological construct that may or may not have occurred and is devoid of the qualities of animation (e.g., time) and the interaction of engagement. It is a mental representation – fictive – that assimilates to the actual experience in symbolic form (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002; Piaget, 2013; Subbotskiĭ & Chesnokova, 2010; Van Manen, 1984). Therefore, phenomenology does not concern itself with the veracity of the lived experience (Van Manen, 2017b).

As previously stated, the imagination embraces object permanence, separates perceived objects from imaginary ones, and goes beyond the immediate present (Piaget, 2013; Subbotskiĭ & Chesnokova, 2010). The fictive construct of the phenomenological experience allows the narrative to develop through symbolic imagination (Piaget). The fictive nature of the phenomenological experience carries two critical elements. Firstly, as stated earlier, it is not essential for the phenomenon to be true (Gibson, 1939; Van Manen, 2017b). Not holding the phenomenological experience hostage to the truth is a critical understanding because the imaginary element of the fictive can carry attributes such as perspectives borne in stereotypes (Gibson). It is also crucial because meanings assigned to experiences, correct or incorrect, are created and generated in the imagination (Wenger, 1999). Secondly, through imagination, the fictive construct allows others to witness a phenomenological event without being physically present at the time of original engagement (Prasad, 2017).

Hermeneutics as an Analytical Device

The experiences that were shared are considered phenomenological data in the literature (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The data were interpreted using the method of hermeneutics. Hermeneutics seeks to glean inferential meaning from that which is shared through narratives (Prasad, 2017). It is an unintended interpretation because the researcher was not a primary source of engagement (Prasad). Therefore, caution abounds with the understanding that elucidations are contextual, valid, and meaningful in one context yet lacking meaning or possibly false in a different context or interpretation (Rindler, 1956). In order to aid in the process of hermeneutical analysis, researchers need to develop a relationship with the text to identify and give understanding to thematic meanings that emerge through the hermeneutic process (Van Manen, 1997).

Data as Meaning Units

Data, in its current usage, may not be the appropriate term (Van Manen, 2017b). However, the term data should not be avoided; instead, it should be understood that data is reflective of itself. In other words, data can only witness and give testimony of that which is in the imagination and not to the original event (Van Manen, 2017b). What is important to remember is that data comes in the form of phenomenological examples. These examples are components of analysis that are better described as meaning units (Van Manen, 2017b). Meaning units do not result in conclusions. Instead, they lead to the understanding of features and attributes that characterize the phenomenon (Castillo-Montoya, 2016).

Role of Text

Pragmatically speaking, the phenomenon, the phenomenological inquiry, and the lived experience must all be reduced to text. Text preserves the language of the particular event or

situation and concretizes the description with epoché–suspension of judgment–without reflection (Prasad, 2017). The central feature of the hermeneutic device is text (Prasad). Through the use of text, hermeneutics mediates our insight into the less obvious dimensions of the experience (Prasad; Van Manen, 2017b).

The use of text as a significant element of phenomenology comes from the understanding that text can stand alone: it does not require the presence of its author; it does not need social interaction, nor is it bound by time (Prasad, 2017). Text can be surveyed independent of the circumstances of its creation. The text that represents the content of a phenomenological study need not be reduced to simple words on a page. As an element of content, text can come in the form of many genres, such as film, electronic communication, advertisement, pictures, and organizational communication – the purpose of text is to transform the experience into something that can be witnessed and studied (Prasad; Van Manen, 1984).

When content is represented by words and expressions in the language of the author, hermeneutics can organize and construct verifiable models of meaning units (Prasad, 2017; Van Manen, 1984). These verifiable models dramatize the evolving themes as they become evident during the hermeneutic process (Van Manen). The resulting thematic model, separated from its various creators, contexts, languages, and time, allows the researcher and observer to witness the phenomenon's elements (Prasad) imaginatively.

Intimacy and Critical Hermeneutics

For a close relationship with the text, intimacy must develop between the researcher and the phenomenological examples (Prasad, 2017; Van Manen, 1997). Through textual intimacy, the meaning becomes more aligned with the spirit of the experience rather than a literal

understanding of the text (Prasad). Nevertheless, intimacy is not passive; it is critical (Van Manen).

Critical hermeneutics, as practiced by theorists, considers ethics, justice, and morality while interpreting texts (Prasad, 2017; Van Manen, 1997). Critical hermeneutics is an approach that primarily concerns itself with themes of power and domination within a corpus of text (Prasad). It acknowledges multiple influences on lived experiences and shared examples that shape the author's voice, possibly impacting its intention (Horkheimer, 2018; Prasad). In the presence of phenomenological examples, critical hermeneutics bridges distances that can be generational, linguistic, cultural, political, physical, and time-bound (Prasad).

Research Questions

Central Research Question

What are the lived experiences of African Americans who have served at least two OSS during their K-12 epoch and persisted to the completion of a post-secondary academic/career program?

Sub-Question One

How do African American post-secondary students believe OSS has positively or negatively influenced their identity?

Sub-Question Two

How do African American post-secondary students bracket the experiences of the behavioral occurrence and the resulting OSS?

Setting and Participants

This research study was virtually based. The virtual environment represents a societal change reflective of life post the initial COVID-19 pandemic response. At this time (2022-2023),

face-to-face interaction is still limited and social isolation is still commonplace (Yagi et al., 2020).

Setting

Online engagement has increased since the COVID-19 pandemic (Yagi et al., 2020). In today's marketplace, the online environment is being utilized as a local environment. People sign documents such as legal contracts and obtain degrees, diplomas, and certificates using online platforms. The online (virtual) experience is now just as valid as the face-to-face (local) environment (Yagi et al.). To that end, this research was conducted via convenience sampling using online social media platforms. The questionnaire took place through a social media platform. The interface was an online experience where participants could confidentially complete the demographics portion of the study. The questionnaire, interviews, and journal prompts were via the Microsoft Teams® video conferencing app. When utilizing the Microsoft Teams® video conferencing app, participants used their cameras for face-to-face interaction. As part of the IRB consent, participants were reminded that all Microsoft Teams® sessions were audio-visually recorded.

Participants

Participants were African Americans who had served at least two OSS during their K-12 epoch. The participants, furthermore, had completed a post-secondary degree (at any level), vocational/professional training, or military training. Such achievements represent an outcome different from that predicted by the deficit language utilized to depict students' life outcomes with OSS experiences (Federal Register, 2016). Participants varied in age, with all being older than 18. Moreover, participation in the study was not limited to a single locale or region of the country. This study met saturation at eight participants, but ten were selected. The first 10

candidates who met the study criteria and were willing to participate fully in the three engagement activities – online questionnaire, online semi-structured interviews, and online journal prompt – were chosen as study participants.

Researcher Positionality

Hermeneutical phenomenology seeks to communicate, as scientifically as possible, the flavor of the phenomenological inquiry taken from the examples derived from lived experiences; it seeks to inquire about the singular experience within a particular human engagement (Van Manen, 1997, 2017b). Phenomenological research carries the a priori rule, positioning the researcher outside the experience (Husserl, 1964; Van Manen, 1997). The researcher is an observer or audience of the event (Rindler, 1956). With epoche, I desired to glean from the phenomenological examples shared by participants the experience of being at a pre-commencement phase within a post-secondary program is like for an African American who had served at least two suspensions during their K-12 epoche.

Interpretive Framework

In considering various interpretive frameworks, critical theory was chosen. Borne from the Frankfurt School, critical theory is concerned with empowering people to go beyond the limitations and restrictions placed on them by race, class, politics, socioeconomics, and gender. (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Most importantly, from the perspective of research, critical theory acknowledges multiple influences on lived experiences and shared texts that shape the author's voice and impact intentions (*King James Bible,* 1917; Natanson & Natanson, 1951; Prasad, 2017). Critical theory seeks to interpret human fate as it relates to people in a social context (Horkheimer, 2018; *King James Bible*, 2017; Natanson & Natanson). This understanding is in

accordance with phenomenological theorists who contend that the phenomenon of life can only be examined in context (Prasad; Van Manen, 1997, 2017a).

Critical Theory

One concern of critical theory is ideology and compliance, including hegemony, making cultural processes a focus (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002; Prasad, 2017). The conjuring takes on the guise of being customary and routine with an intent toward standardization (Horkheimer & Adorno). Conjuring creates false identities based upon the construct of standardization as a universal outlook and difference as exclusive. Though opponents may argue that standardization allows for the needs of the many to be met, critical theorists would argue that standardization represents manipulation by those in power (Horkheimer & Adorno; Prasad). In this sense, the power serves an unjust system, as demonstrated by a leveling element (Horkheimer).

Cultural Processes

Cultural processes are so complex that they are formulated into the various industries that serve them (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002). The culture industry is an inherent element that guides social interactions and determines access to resources within entities. It has an economic base that assigns value and meaning to objects within the niche of a specific industry (Horkheimer & Adorno; Schein, 1983; Wenger, 1999). The value is perceived from the point of view of being subservient to something else, even if the correlation is not directly evident (Horkheimer & Adorno; Schein). Meaning is ascribed to that which is reproduced (Schein). Reproduction is an intrinsic characteristic of the industrial process that strengthens the immutability of the problem (Horkheimer & Adorno). The more strongly the cultural industry's position in society, the more stringent the manipulation – producing, controlling, and disciplining (Horkheimer; Horkheimer & Adorno).

Chance is a significant factor within critical theory. It imposes sameness, promotes risk, and dulls effort (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002). The Latin phrase *per aspera ad astra*, which means achievement comes through effort and hard work, cannot be realized by all societal participants (Horkheimer, 2018). By imposing chance, the justification of everyone not being able to win becomes the logic. Thus, chance is planned, and value judgments become chatter – hence the endurance of the cultural problem. Given that for more than 50 years, African American students have been three times more likely to receive a suspension than their White peers, along with the qualitative research choice of hermeneutic phenomenology, the critical theory would appear to be an appropriate interpretive lens.

Philosophical Assumptions

My philosophical assumptions are all based primarily on my Christian belief in God. I believe in the one, true God (*King James Bible,* 1917, John 17:1-3). I believe in the inspired Word of God recorded in the Holy Bible (Jer. 30:1-2). I refer to God in times of hope, belief, desire, and need (Is. 12:2). I trust Him with my life plan (Prov. 3:5-8). This is what is in me, and this is what I give in research. For example, I first understood the *critical* part of theory from Proverbs 1:3. In this passage of scripture, King Solomon delineates the steps of leadership (v 2-6) and in verse 3 writes that it is necessary to receive instruction in the elements of wisdom: justice, judgement, and equity (*King James Bible*). Within research, theorists continue along the same lines such as Prasad's (2017) definition of the critical elements of hermeneutics as ethics, justice, and morality, and Natanson and Natanson's (1951) record of Socrates' philosophy being that which examined human existence in terms of the good life and justice, specifically, among other things.

Ontological Assumption

I am a Christian who believes in multiple realities. I believe in one God, and He provides different experiences according to His will. In 1 Corinthians 12, it is written that one body has many parts and that the eye and ear have separate functions (*King James Bible,* 1917). The passage proceeds in a heuristic fashion so that the reader develops an understanding of the complexity of the message. Every part of the body has its function and purpose and engages with reality according to such: and the reality of every part is no greater than its member part's reality. This passage uses a non-threatening fictive to create imagery that adeptly takes us through a heuristic exercise that does not violate the multiple perspectives represented by the audience:

> For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body. …Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem more feeble are necessary…and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness. …Now ye are the body of Christ and members in particular. (*King James Bible*, 1 Cor. 12:14-20, 22-23, 27),

Just as reiteration is critical in research, the Bible is replete with other examples and types of multiple realities (see Ephesians 4:9-10 for an example; *King James Bible*).

Multiple realities play a crucial role in hermeneutics. The term hermeneutics is taken from the role Hermes played in Greek mythology. According to the text, Hermes was not only

known for delivering messages as given but also for deftly misrepresenting the original message (Prasad, 2017). The key point here is that analyzing phenomenological examples using hermeneutics is complex (Rindler, 1956; Van Manen, 1997). The phenomenological example is always shared from the worldview of its author, the composite of which is not available to the researcher (Rindler). Only the world map, the social persona, is available to the researcher (Horkheimer, 2018; Rindler). Thus, one of the significant complexities of hermeneutical analysis resides in working through a worldview unfamiliar to the researcher, making misunderstanding part of the hermeneutic process (Prasad; Rindler). Finally, if I did not embrace the understanding of multiple realities, I would oxymoronically juxtapose my epistemological assumption.

Epistemological Assumption

As a student, how can I not say that I rely on the experiences of others for knowledge? The Bible instructs me on the understanding that I am not to experience everything but that I am capable of gleaning the fulness from that which I personally experience (*King James Bible*, 1917, John 10:10 & Phil. 4:13). It also instructs me on the fact that sharing information with others that have experienced the same event helps me to develop a fuller understanding of that which I am a testament to (*King James Bible*, Luke 1:36-45). Finally, the Bible instructs me that a milieu is a phenomenon in and of itself that demonstrates the fact that phenomenological examples can be collective, as well as, categorical (*King James Bible*, 1 Cor. 12). As philosophical as the biblical references appear, the complexity of their content is pragmatic. Social interaction and engagement, and learning from others, comprise the basis of the chosen theoretical framework for this corpus of work – Communities of Practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1999).

Axiological Assumption

I value diversity over sameness. The choice of conducting a qualitative study versus a quantitative one speaks to the diversity found in the experiences of others. Hermeneutic phenomenology is an approach that commands acknowledgment of diversity (Van Manen, 1984). The interpretive framework of critical theory also speaks to my affinity toward diversity as it relates, in this context, to the voiced experiences of others (Gibson, 1939; Horkheimer, 2018; Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002). Most of all, the example that God has given in terms of uniqueness within categories – i.e., the fact that every person's fingerprints are different – signifies that every person's experience is uniquely customized for them (*King James Bible*, 1917, Eph. 4:15-16).

Researcher's Role

The researcher's role is multifaceted. At hand is the power to recruit people who are willing to share part of themselves for the sake of contributing to a body of knowledge; it is the power to transfer a lived experience into the meaning unit of a phenomenological example; it is the power to analyze the collected examples against the empirical phenomenon to identify the phenomenon's attributes and features. This power is not egotistical – there is no personal gain to be had. The power represents the burden of responsibility and trustworthiness inherent in the role.

Being able to recognize the significance of the singular within a phenomenological event is the hallmark of a researcher. As a teacher, I am surrounded by epithets that serve as signifiers of the experience of Black students within K-12 education. These epithets are value laden outcomes and include notions such as inordinately high suspension and dropout rates, overidentification for special education services, low matriculation and graduation rates, greater

likelihood to join gangs or become incarcerated, and low life expectancies. When looking to see whether the phenomena were being addressed within the field of education, it was found that the problem had been formally identified as early as 1975 (CDF, 1975). This 50-year problem has a lot of examples to support the empirical statements of deficits. But has the question been asked about outcomes that do not support the epithets? The question of interest is not empirical. Of interest is the exploration of life outcomes of African Americans that do not fit the prediction noted by the deficit language.

As a researcher, I must not only present myself as a trustworthy person, but I must also be trustworthy. The power invested is the power to burden trust. I will be trusted to transform lived experience into phenomenological text and, through the hermeneutical approach, develop an intuitiveness that will allow the meaning of the example to be revealed and communicated (Prasad, 2017; Van Manen, 1997). As a researcher, I sought to contribute to the knowledge surrounding the phenomenon.

Finally, as a researcher, I became a student to a griot. The griot, both participant in the phenomenological event and proprietor of the lived experience, possesses knowledge and authority (Husserl, 1964; Van Manen, 1997). Through communicative sharing, the griot becomes the author of a phenomenological example (Prasad, 2017). As a student of the narrative, my role was to listen to the story shared, gaining insight through structured and unstructured questioning to attain a vicarious experience within the phenomenon (Prasad, 2017; Van Manen). I was responsible for communicating my interests in the narrative, not simply through the spoken questions but also through my non-verbal communication of tone of voice and body language. My partnership as a student of the griot was formed to learn nuances in generational and cultural contexts, word choice, and vocabulary (Van Manen). The purpose of this level of engagement

was to assist in the analysis of text, whereas I developed a hermeneutic intimacy that helped bridge the gap between my perspective and the perspective presented by the example to the extent possible (Prasad).

Procedures

The researcher's role is multifaceted. At hand is the power to recruit people who are willing to share part of themselves for the sake of contributing to a body of knowledge; it is the power to transfer a lived experience into the meaning unit of a phenomenological example; it is the power to analyze the collected examples against the empirical phenomenon to identify the phenomenon's attributes and features. This power is not egotistical – there is no personal gain to be had. The power represents the burden of responsibility and trustworthiness inherent in the role.

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through my non-verbal communication of tone of voice and body language. My partnership as a student of the griot was formed to learn nuances in generational and cultural contexts, word choice, and vocabulary (Van Manen). The purpose of this level of engagement was to assist in the analysis of the text, where I could develop a hermeneutic intimacy that helped bridge the gap between my perspective and the perspective presented by the example to the extent possible (Prasad).

Permissions

This study was designed not to require site permissions. It was fully conducted online using platforms that did not require usage permissions. All documents, figures, tables, and/or text produced by this research are original material created by the author. No copyright permissions were required.

The LUO IRB social media, verbal script, and consent templates framed all recruitment activities and permissions. The IRB approval letter has been placed in Appendix A. The IRB gives university approval for research to be conducted. A copy of the IRB formatted participant consent was included as an embedded link on the data collection questionnaire. However, a copy of the consent form can be found in Appendix B. Electronic consent was accepted. The beginning and end of each activity were verbalized to the participant during the session.

Recruitment Plan

Recruitment for this study took place via social media platforms. The recruitment information was formatted according to the LUO IRB template for social media, and participants were chosen via purposeful sampling (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). According to Merriam and Tisdell (2015) and Creswell and Guetterman, sampling is intentional. It is termed purposeful because, unlike the probabilistic sampling method used in quantitative methodologies,

purposeful sampling is used to develop a detailed understanding that might provide useful information that would allow the researcher to learn about a phenomenon from those whose voices might otherwise be silenced (Creswell & Guetterman). It accomplishes this feat by selecting people who might be considered data founts (Creswell & Guetterman; Merriam & Tisdell).

Within purposeful sampling, there are many approaches (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Moser and Korstjens (2018) noted that phenomenological studies frequently utilize criterion sampling. In this case, participants met the criterion of being African American and had served at least two OSS in their K-12 epoch. Study candidates fit the study criteria, agreed to the activities outlined in the IRB e-letter, and submitted electronic consent. This study was based on the insight provided by 10 participants. Saturation was reached after the eighth participant. Saturation was noted after continuous data analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Moser & Korstjens). However, two additional participants were gleaned due to the novice stature of the researcher. Their data was incorporated fully into the research.

Data Collection Plan

Data collection is at the heart of all research. Analyses cannot go forth, and inquiries cannot be explored without data. To that end, data was collected comprehensively and reflects integrity, trust, and planning (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Because this research used human participants, care and respect were taken to maintain the trust that facilitates respect and openness of sharing. Phenomenological examples were collected in three formats: a qualitative questionnaire, a semi-structured interview, and a journal prompt (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Study candidates agreed to participate in each of the three formats.

The intent and focus of data collection was to address the phenomenological inquiry. The data collected needed to be able to bridge the theoretical framework of Communities of Practice (a theory of social learning that relies heavily on the development of a person's ability to survive, thrive, and become a member of a definitive social unit) with the interpretive framework of critical theory (a theory that in one regard seeks to explain how culture justifies hegemonic systems) in order to provide cohesion and support to this corpus of research (Horkheimer, 2018; Prasad, 2017; Wenger, 1999). Each of the three data collection approaches was chosen and designed to identify what Claude Levi-Strauss considered the bricoleur mindset (Johnson, 2012). The bricoleur mindset is one where people must creatively access elements within their eco-niche to survive. By identifying this mindset, an understanding of how the participant framed their narrative of the experience surfaced.

Questionnaire Data Collection Approach

Questionnaires are data collection devices that mold themselves easily to quantitative research (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). By focusing on data measurements, questionnaires can yield an aggregate from the various totals collected (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The collection of data through the device of a questionnaire for qualitative purposes can be more complicated. Efforts were taken to go beyond participant or context demographics (Merriam & Tisdell). In doing so, this questionnaire was designed as a descriptive device versus one that contributes to a result or response.

The questionnaire was qualitatively oriented (Braun et al., 2017). The activity took place in a social media forum and using Microsoft Teams®. Participants had access to the questionnaire during their initial intake process. Part I of the questionnaire collected participation consent (Levitt et al., 2018). Part II of the questionnaire asked demographic questions regarding

the selection criteria (Braun et al.; Levitt et al.). The demographic data was formatted quantitatively using closed and fixed-response questions. Demographic data collection was an expectation, as was consent, set forth by APA guidelines to be gleaned from participants (Levitt et al.). In accordance with Braun et al., consent and demographic data was collected prior to the qualitative portion of the questionnaire (Levitt et al.). Once the signed consent and demographic data were received, a Microsoft Teams® session was scheduled.

Part III of the questionnaire collected qualitative data surrounding the phenomenological inquiry. The questions in Part III were open-ended, allowing for authentic participant responses. The researcher read participants the questionnaire questions. Their answers were captured via recording and AI transcription. This activity was the opening activity to the data collection session.

Questionnaire Part I – Consent

Part I of the questionnaire included an embedded link to the IRB formatted consent document. The consent document was accessible and could be downloaded by study candidates through a link to a shared Google® Drive folder. The consent contained the verbiage for recording audio, video, and still photography and asked for an electronic signature for study participation. The consent also provided the researcher's contact information. Finally, Part I included an explanation of the questionnaire as an activity of knowledge sharing (Braun et al., 2017). Though confidentiality was maintained, the purpose of data collection was to share the output in a collective form to contribute to the body of knowledge on OSS and African American students.

Questionnaire Part II – Demographics

Part II of the questionnaire collected demographic information from study candidates. This information contained questions regarding the selection criteria for participation and background information, including age and gender at the time of suspension. Eight questions were in Part II, combining multiple-choice and fixed-response options. Demographic data provided a collective narrative of the study participants (Braun et al., 2017). This information was useful in understanding or identifying the influence of the phenomenon on the participant (Levitt et al., 2018).

Questionnaire Part III – Qualitative Questions

All questions in Part III were open-ended. The questions were designed to stimulate the memory of an OSS event shared during the Journal Prompt session. The questions were read to the participant. The questions on the questionnaire allowed for an assessment of the participant's engagement style. A copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix E.

Questionnaire Questions

Out-of-school suspensions are usually given when a student's behavior is regarded as socially unacceptable within the school community. OSS tells the story of how the school felt about the behavior. Think about one suspension that you felt was unfair. Please use that event to base the answers to the questionnaire questions.

1. Students oftentimes attend schools that are in their neighborhood or town. The student populations of these schools reflect the demographics of the surrounding community. Other than the student population, in what ways, or how, did your school reflect African American culture? BDQ
2. Public schools offer equal access to curriculum, services, and activities to all students.

Were there any times when you felt that certain classes were not for you, or certain services were not offered to you, or certain activities were closed to you? Choosing just one area (classes, services, activities), please explain your answer. BDQ

3. Behaviors can be misunderstood, especially in regard to motivations and intentions. In a few sentences, tell what behavior was the subject of your suspension. How was the behavior misunderstood by the administration? SQ1
4. Before a school administrator (principal, dean) gives a suspension, they usually ask, "Why?" Do you feel that you were in a mindset to explain rationally? If so, how did your explanation impact the outcome? If not, please explain your response when asked about the errant behavior. SQ2
5. In thinking about the incident, why do you think you made the behavior choice that you did? SQ2
6. Finally, attending programs after high school that focus on job certification or degree attainment requires the determination to begin and the stamina to finish. Please explain whether you feel high school prepared you academically for the challenge. CRQ, SQ1

The questions on the questionnaire protocol for Part III of the questionnaire data collection have been coded BDQ, CRQ, SQ1, and SQ2. BDQ questions are background/demographic questions that relate to the theoretical or interpretive frameworks of this study. CRQ questions relate to the central research question. Furthermore, the SQ1 and SQ2 questions relate to sub-questions one and two.

Background/Demographic – BDQ. BDQ questions glean background from study participants (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). Moreover, they give insight into how participants navigated their environment and what they perceived as available. To that end, BDQ questions

reflect theoretical and interpretive frameworks (Horkheimer, 2018; Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002; Wenger, 1999) and lay the groundwork for understanding how the respondent tells their story (Johnson, 2012). Questions that collect BDQ were 1 and 2.

Central Research Question – CRQ. The major focus of the central research question was: Do participants reflect their OSS experiences onto current life events? These questions helped identify the stable continuum of self and any transformations based upon the retelling of their narrative (Husserl, 1964; Weiner, 2010). The process of transformation along a continuum is considered horizontalization and represents change based upon repositioning and not judgment (Husserl; Rindler, 1956). The question relating to the CRQ is key to understanding the phenomenon. Meaning was derived from the respondent's shared story (Johnson, 2012; Van Manen, 1997). The question that reflects the CRQ is 6.

Sub-Question 1 – SQ1. The focus of sub-question one was: How has an identity (i.e., sense of self) been influenced, either positively or negatively, by out-of-school suspensions? SQ1 questions assisted in positioning the participant as a subject within the telling of the story. The process of horizontalization was facilitated by identifying the impact of changes within the subject of the narrative (Husserl, 1964; Van Manen, 1997). Questions that engaged SQ1 were: 3 and 6

Sub-Question 2 – SQ2. Sub-question two focuses on how the participant tells the story of the experiences of the behavioral occurrence and the resulting out-of-school suspension. These questions bridged the influence of the distant past and the recent past (Husserl, 1964). Questions that engaged SQ2 were 4 and 5.

Questionnaire Data Analysis Plan

The purpose of the questionnaire was to assist in mapping data around the collected phenomenological example through the participant's constructs of meaning construction or representations (Braun et al., 2017; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Individual responses are embedded in social meanings and thus are not reflective of the phenomenological example. Instead, they are descriptive and contribute to the collective reproduction of a social construct by which to interpret meaning (Braun et al.; Moustakas, 1994; Prasad, 2017; Van Manen, 1997).

Questionnaire protocols were transcribed verbatim using AI transcription. Transcripts were read reiteratively along with the recording to check for accuracy and become familiar with its contents (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Moser & Korstjens, 2018; Van Manen, 1997). As familiarity developed through reiterations, the researcher engaged further with the data by recording patterns that became identifiable, listing ideas regarding what was in the data, and exploring that which was found interesting about the ideas (Braun & Clarke; Husserl, 1964). Questionnaire responses were placed onto a data table, that included interview and journal responses. The table helped organize the data, facilitating the researcher's ability to notice how data groupings coalesced into cohesive meaning units.

Individual Interviews Data Collection Approach

The interview represented the second data collection piece. Participants were asked to share the experience of beginning the final chapter of their post-secondary academic or career program. The interview took place in the Microsoft Teams® environment with cameras on. The session began with IRB confidentiality statements.

In order to glean an after-the-fact engagement, research questions that reflect an inquiry-based conversation were designed (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Yeong et al., 2018). The semi-

structured format of the interview allowed for the interview to proceed in a language style, from formal to everyday casual, that more closely matched the participant's presentation style. Doing so afforded the participant a role in the conversation as the language developer of the context; it showed respect toward the participant's communication style, made interview questions accessible to the participant, and opened the flow for spontaneous conversation (Castillo-Montoya, 2016).

Individual Interview Questions

Upbringing

To begin this interview, I would like to ask questions about your upbringing.

1. Based on the information you provided in the questionnaire, the OSS that came to mind occurred during [elementary/ middle/high] school in ___ (city/state). Is that correct? BDQ

   Follow-up: What was that school like when you were going there?

2. Was the school located in the same neighborhood you lived in? How would you describe the neighborhood? In answering this question, you can focus on the people, the families, the organizations, or anything else that stands out to you the most when you think about your childhood neighborhood. BDQ, SQ2

   Follow-up: Do you still live in this neighborhood?

3. People have different ways of viewing the way their schools function. How would you compare the way you viewed your school to the way your parents (or guardians) viewed that school? BDQ, SQ2

   Follow up: Do you see your school in the same way or in a different way from your parents? How so?

Follow up: Can you tell me more about what makes you think that you have a different or similar view of your school than your parents (or guardians)?

Follow-up: What do you see as two differences and similarities between your school and the neighborhood?

4. Sometimes an experience, language, or way of being leads a person to identify with a community. For example, a requirement of this research was that the participant identify as African American. What makes you identify as an African American?

Follow-up: Is there some common experience, language, or way of being that defines your identity as an African American? What are they? CRQ, SQ1

Follow-up: When did you realize that you identified as an African American?

Follow-up: Do you think others in your family also identify as African American?

Prompt: Please tell me more about this. If no: Why do you think this is the case?

5. Sometimes there are differences in the way people are viewed or treated within a community. The differences could be based on lots of things. Do you think that being African American influenced the way staff within the school community viewed or interacted with you? If yes: How so? If not: How did you come to see that being African American did not matter in your school community? CRQ, SQ1, SQ2

Follow up: Were there other differences that mattered within your school community?

Prompt: Please tell me more about that.

6. When you were receiving your OSS, what did you see as being your future? Did you imagine finishing HS? Did you imagine going to college? SQ1

Decision to Pursue Post-Secondary Studies

Thank you for your responses. I'd like to now ask you questions regarding your decision to pursue studies after high school.

7. What did you do immediately after graduation? CRQ, SQ2

Follow-up: Did you go directly to college or a trades program? Did you have a job?

Follow-up: How long did it take you to decide to begin college (or career program)?

8. In your questionnaire, you said that your ___ (mother, father, or guardian) had a ___education. Is that correct? If yes: Does that mean you are the first in your family to enroll in college? If not: Who else in your family has gone to college? SQ1
9. Can you tell me a bit about how you went about making the decision to pursue a college (vocational) education? CRQ, SQ1

Follow up: You mentioned that _____ led you to decide to go to college. Was anyone involved in or influential in your decision to go to college? If says yes: Who else was involved or influential (i.e., parents, guidance counselor, coach, etc.)? How were they involved or influential in your decision-making process?

Follow up: Was there anything else that you think made you want to go to college? How did _____ influence you to want to go to college?

10. How did your K-12 school communities prepare you for life after high school graduation? Follow-up: How did your K-12 schools prepare you for the college experience (i.e., identifying majors, paying for college, academic support)? BDQ, CRQ

Follow-up: Do you view your experience as focused more on getting a job, becoming competitive for college, or playing a sport?

11. How did your family respond to your decision to go to college? SQ1

Follow-up: Did you receive any pushback from family or friends about your decision? Can you tell me about that?

Follow-up: Did you experience self-negativity, any doubts?

12. Once you decided to attend college, how did you go about selecting which college (program) to attend? BDQ, CRQ, SQ1

College Experience/Progression

Thank you for sharing information about your decision to attend college. I'd like to now ask you a few questions about your college/university.

13. What is your career or degree area? Can you tell me how you settled on that career? BDQ, CRQ
14. Think back to your first college class, tell me a bit about that experience. BDQ, CRQ
15. As you progressed through your program, what type of challenges did you face academically? SQ1, SQ2

Follow-up: What did you have to do to overcome them?

16. Working through your ___program, did you experience any personal conflicts? CRQ, SQ2

Follow-up: Can you tell me a bit about what happened?

Follow-up: How did you overcome the conflict?

Facing the Finish

My final set of questions is focused on getting to know more about your end-of-course experiences.

17. Thinking about the beginning of this last year of your program, what was different between it and the beginning of your first class? Can you tell me a bit more? BDQ, CRQ

18. Thinking about the person you were at the time of the suspension that you wrote about, was finishing a program such as this in your plans? CRQ, SQ1, SQ2

Follow-up: What did you plan to become at that point in your life? (If not already answered in #7.)

Follow-up: Is there one thing that you feel impacted you that caused a change in your life from the person who received school suspensions to the person who is accomplishing a high academic achievement?

Before we conclude this interview, is there something about your experiences in K-12 or college (vocational program) that we have not had a chance to discuss but that you feel is important to share?

The questions on the interview protocol were coded BDQ, CRQ, SQ1, and SQ2. BDQ questions were background/demographic questions related to this study's theoretical or interpretive frameworks. CRQ questions relate to the central research question. The SQ1 and SQ2 questions related to sub-questions one and two. A copy of the Interview Protocol is located in Appendix G.

Background/Demographic – BDQ. BDQ questions were designed to glean background or demographic information from study participants. These questions, which were interspersed throughout the interview, served multiple purposes. One purpose of BDQ questions was that they helped to develop and maintain an inquiry-based conversation throughout the interview (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). Another purpose was that these questions gave insight into how participants navigated their environment and what they perceived as available. As a result, BDQ questions reflected the theoretical and interpretive frameworks (Horkheimer, 2018; Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002; Wenger, 1999). Finally, BDQ questions laid the groundwork for understanding

how the participant told their story (Johnson, 2012). Questions that collected BDQ were 1, 2, 3, 9, 11, 12, 13, and 16.

Central Research Question – CRQ. The major focus of the central research question was: Do participants reflect their OSS experiences onto current life events? These questions were asked throughout the protocol. They helped identify the stable continuum of self and any transformations based on the retelling of their narrative (Husserl, 1964; Weiner, 2010). The transformation process along a continuum is considered horizontalization and represents change based upon repositioning and not judgment (Husserl; Rindler, 1956). These questions were also key to understanding the phenomenon. The meaning was derived from the story participants told about themselves (Johnson, 2012; Van Manen, 1997). The questions that reflected the CRQ were: 4, 5, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, and 17.

Sub-Question 1 – SQ1. The focus of sub-question one was: How has an identity (i.e., sense of self) been influenced, either positively or negatively, by out-of-school suspensions? SQ1 served as the primary focus of locating the participant as the subject within the telling of the story. Identifying the impact of the type of changes that the person went through assisted in understanding the process of horizontalization within the narrative (Husserl, 1964; Van Manen, 1997). Questions that engage SQ1 were 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 14, and 17.

Sub-Question 2 – SQ2. Sub-question two focused on how the participant told the story of the experiences of the behavioral occurrence and the resulting out-of-school suspension. Within the narrative of the current experience, these questions provided a link between the influence of the distant past and the recent past (Husserl, 1964). Questions that engaged SQ2 were 2, 3, 5, 7, 14, 15, and 17.

Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan

Interview protocols were transcribed verbatim using AI transcription. The transcript was read reiteratively along with the recording to check for accuracy and to become familiar with its contents (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Moser & Korstjens, 2018; Van Manen, 1997). The interview data was added to the table that contained the questionnaire data. The researcher read the collected data reiteratively and actively interacted with it by recording impressions and noting emerging patterns as familiarity with the text deepened (Braun & Clarke). Thus, the process of reiteration, the recording of data onto the table, and the journaling of impressions provided depth to the construct of data meaning units (Braun & Clarke).

Journal Prompt Data Collection Approach

A journal prompt in qualitative research is a participant's response to a given question (Braun et al., 2017; Creswell & Poth, 2016). It is a solicited request by the researcher to the participant with full transparency that the completed prompt is not for private use (Braun et al.). This transparency was significant because it established that knowledge was being produced purposefully, according to the researcher's agenda (Braun et al.; Creswell & Poth). For this research, the journal prompt was an oral submission gleaned in an audio-visual format. Participants were given 15 minutes to record their response to the following prompt using the Microsoft Teams® environment with cameras on. The researcher read the journal prompt and answered any questions the participant had. The researcher remained in the Microsoft Teams® environment, with the microphone muted throughout the recording. The researcher was positioned as an audience to the narrative.

Journal Prompt

At the time of the questionnaire, you were asked to think about one suspension you felt was unfair. You based your answers to the questionnaire on that event and were promised an opportunity to tell the story. Now is the time for you to share your story.

If you would, think about a time when you were given an out-of-school suspension that you felt was unfair. In 15 minutes, describe the suspension from the point-of-view of what you experienced. In your story, please include the details on what happened; as well as things like why you think the suspension was unfair; what was said by the administrator and your response; and whether the event impacted who you are as a person then and now.

Journal Prompt Data Analysis Plan

The journal prompt was transcribed verbatim using AI transcription. The transcript was read reiteratively along with the recording to check for accuracy and to become familiar with its contents (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Moser & Korstjens, 2018; Van Manen, 1997). Transcribed journal prompt responses were added to the data table, including the questionnaire and interview responses. The researcher read the data reiteratively and actively interacted with it by recording impressions and noting emerging patterns as familiarity with the text deepened (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The continued process of reiteration, recording of data onto the table, and journaling impressions provided greater depth to the construct of data meaning units (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Although the journal prompt signaled the close of data collection, the reiteration process continued to cycle multiple times to allow an opportunity for profound features within the data to become apparent to the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Just as importantly, the successive reiterations allowed the researcher to identify why the features in the data appear profound to the

researcher. These steps allowed the researcher to transition into Phase 2 of the thematic analysis cycle (Braun & Clarke; Davey, 2006; Prasad, 2017).

Data Synthesis

For the purpose of this research, data were collected from three sources: an online questionnaire, a semi-structured interview, and an online journal prompt. Each participant's data source was coded and analyzed as a dataset read and reread while listening to the correlating recordings for significant statements, a process known as hermeneutics (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Saldaña, 2011). The data set was shared with the participant contributor to verify sense-making (Saldaña; Saldaña & Mallette, 2017).

All data was combined to continue the coding and analysis of the phenomenon (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Moser & Korstjens, 2018; Saldaña, 2011; Saldaña & Mallette, 2017). Themes became apparent as the researcher identified patterns from the significant statements. These themes were used to develop textual and structural descriptions of the research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Saldaña, 2011). Structural and textual themes were merged into a composite to reveal the essence of the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Van Manen, 1997). Saturation was reached when the major themes were identified, and no new information contributed to the list of themes or their details (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Moser & Korstjens, 2018; Prasad, 2017).

Thematic Analysis

The thematic analysis used for this research followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step analysis. The steps in the analysis are referred to as phases, each with its own set of researcher tasks (Braun & Clarke). These phases are consistent with the qualitative methods mentioned in

the previous section; however, the steps provide structure and detailed guidance for novice researchers.

Phase 1: Familiarizing Yourself With Your Data. The researcher began the Phase 1 process during data collection. At that time, the researcher read data as it was received at each collection point. The reiterative reading was an active process during which the researcher took notes regarding impressions from the data and noted any questions that came to mind. During this phase, the researcher also identified patterns and interesting ideas that emerged from the data. Data collected from the questionnaire, the semi-structured interview, and the journal prompt were audio-visual. AI transcription was utilized to transcribe the data from all three collection approaches. Once the transcriptions were downloaded, they were checked against the recorded sessions for accuracy.

Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes. From the notetaking in Phase 1, initial codes were developed. This phase concentrated singly on coding, focusing on features within the data. The initial coding generated captured data features that appeared attractive to the researcher. One method of capturing these features was approaching the data with questions around which to code.

Codes generated as many potential themes as possible to keep data sets flexible in the early phases. The context of social engagement when coding was not ignored. The context assisted in the development of understanding. Inconsistencies, tensions, and contradictions were kept though some did not fit a code category. This was done because Braun and Clarke (2006) found that Phase 2 is too early in the overall analytical process to rule out the usefulness of any extracted data.

Phase 3: Searching for Themes. Phase 3 began when all data had been coded. At this point, analysis focused on codes, manipulating them through collation and visual media such as tables, charts, and sorting. Whereas coding focused on features, themes focus on patterns. Visual media allowed the researcher to step back to give objective space to the work at hand and identify patterns that presented themselves.

Phase 4: Reviewing Themes. This was the first review of draft themes. During Phase 4, the researcher thematically addressed coding at the micro and macro levels. At the micro level, themes were assessed independently, and the researcher looked at the extracted data for evidence of a cohesive pattern. Themes whose data showed cohesion were cataloged as candidate themes. The decision rule for themes without cohesive data included reworking the theme or reassigning the extracted data into themes with established cohesion, thus abandoning the problematic theme or abandoning the problematic theme and removing its extracted data from analysis.

At the macro level, the dataset, as a whole, was engaged. The researcher was tasked with assessing the cogency of the themes to the dataset and any additional data themes that may have been missed during earlier rounds of coding. Once the thematic map accurately represented meanings reflective of the study's theoretical and analytical approaches, then the analytical phase was complete.

Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes. Using recursion, the researcher identified a theme's essence through its data extracts' cohesion and internal consistency. A narrative was then written to define the theme based on the features of its data extracts. The narrative was framed to provide a detailed analysis that reflected the theme and the data set that addressed the research questions. Combined thematic narratives told a complete picture of the research story without

fragmentation. This phase was completed when each theme's scope and content could be described succinctly in a few sentences.

Phase 6: Producing the Report. At the point of Phase 6, the thematic map was clearly articulated, and an analysis of the identified themes, codes, and data could go forth. Each phase of the process allowed the researcher to become increasingly familiar with the dataset through engagement and manipulation. Through the multiple reiterations and collations, hermeneutic understandings grounded in the thematic underpinning of the process were positioned to unfold (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Moser & Korstjens, 2018; Van Manen, 1997). Phase 6 required the researcher to make sense of the data and communicate its complexity in a narrative that presents the merits of the research as a contribution to the body of knowledge. The resulting narrative has been illustrated using examples extracted from the collected data. The chosen examples are vivid, capturing the essence of the point in the narrative it illustrates, and easily identifiable as an example. For this study, the patterns of meaning were related to a final academic analysis of the influence of OSS on the participant.

Trustworthiness

Qualitative research is a non-numerical approach to analyzing data. (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Its focus is on making sense-knowledge out of the experiences of human actors. In order to do so, an interpretive lens was employed to develop an understanding of the experiences and meanings that individuals and groups assign a phenomenon so that it can be communicated to those outside of the phenomenon's experience (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Saldaña & Mallette, 2017). This study followed the practice set forth by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Erlandson (1993) to ensure trustworthiness. The practice of trustworthiness, according to

theorists, is established through credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and ethical considerations.

Credibility

In this study, a consistent review using multiple approaches to data analysis was used. Participants were given access to their questionnaire responses, interview responses, and journal entries for review and accuracy in recording. They reviewed the themes gleaned from their data to assess whether they reflected the essence of the lived experience. This procedure allowed for the triangulation of data, a technique that facilitates the identification of elements germane to the understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Martínez-Morato et al., 2021).

Transferability

I do not profess the transferability of the research outcomes presented in this dissertation. What I do hope is that, given the procedures, the study can be replicated. One characteristic of extreme value to this study was the flexibility that the interpretative framework of critical theory and the analytic framework of Communities of Practice provides to the body of knowledge regarding post-secondary life outcomes (Horkheimer, 2018; Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002; Saldaña & Mallette, 2017; Wenger, 1999). These frameworks give critical space through which the individual's behaviors within the context of corporate social performance (systems of meanings) could be examined and thus provide context by which the study's methods could be replicated (Denney & Powell, 2020; Eckert, 2017; Horkheimer; Horkheimer & Adorno; Washington, 2015; Wenger).

Dependability

A reiterative review, analysis, and interpretation of the data utilizing a procedure outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) were employed to ensure dependability. In addition, a journal was maintained to record my deepening engagement with the research (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Husserl, 1964). Additionally, since dependability refers to the consistency and replicability of procedures as a method of making meaning of the outcome, descriptions of my procedures and methods are detailed in this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The procedures and methods used in this research are supported by the literature and written in plain language. My committee has thoroughly reviewed these procedures and deemed them sufficient to demonstrate mastery of the method as I designed it.

Confirmability

Through a reiterative review, I journaled my relationship with the data and changes in my perspectives as themes emerged and meanings were revealed (Husserl, 1964; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Rindler, 1956). Through my conversations on paper, I sought to allow the data to reveal themes and trends without influence from my personal interpretations (Bolker, 1998; Husserl; Lincoln & Guba; Van Manen, 1997). Most importantly, interviewees were invited to read their responses to all data collected regarding their lived experiences. They were also privileged to respond to the themes I gleaned to confirm that they represented an interpretive essence of the shared experience (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations for this project were comprehensive. Pseudonyms were assigned for all data reported. The pseudonym allowed for the masking of participant information and participant privacy. Specific locations referred to in the data were changed for privacy. Broad or

general locations, such as parts of the country or school offices, were utilized in descriptive data reporting. All data is secured through an encrypted database and will be stored for three years upon completion of this study, after which time the documents will be deleted. I am the only person accessing the stored data to protect privacy. All IRB rules will be adhered to regarding data collection, masking, storage, and deletion.

Summary

This study explored post-secondary life outcomes of African Americans who served at least two OSS during their K-12 epoch. Using a hermeneutically centered, phenomenological approach, the data collection activities of a questionnaire, semi-structured interview, and journal prompt occurred. Data from all three data collection processes were transcribed verbatim. All data was subjected to a reiterative process as it was collected. An open coding approach was utilized to facilitate theme development through constant comparison.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this study is to understand the lived experiences of African Americans who had served at least two OSS during their K-12 epoch but whose post-secondary life outcomes do not reflect the deficit language (i.e., imprisonment) that researchers often use to describe that population. This study recruited ten African Americans who all happened to be from northern, southern, or midwestern states and who had served at least two out-of-school suspensions. This chapter opens with a description of each participant. Data were gathered through the collection approaches of questionnaires, interviews, and video journal entries. The data were analyzed and grouped into themes. Themes were based on commonalities of meanings that surfaced through the individual shared narratives. This chapter presents the resulting themes of the data analysis, including one outlier. Excerpts from the data are presented in narrative form. The chapter concludes by addressing the central and guiding questions of the study. Participant evidence is used to answer the questions the study posed. Finally, a summary of the chapter is presented.

Participants

The participants of this study were people who self-identified as African Americans and had not only served two OSS during their K-12 years but also had completed a post-secondary program such as that provided through college, vocational school, or military training. They were recruited through a social media platform to participate in the study. Eight participants consented to the study at the point of saturation; however, ten were chosen to participate. Participants varied in age, gender, geographic location, careers, suspension behaviors, and levels of education. The entire data collection for this study took place in an online environment.

Participants completed demographic information and gave consent before the first meeting. There was a concern prior to data collection in regard to whether participants would fully engage in the activities or if they would be reserved and slightly guarded with their responses—needless worry. The participants honored this body of work with total engagement, giving responses that were complete and rich in detail for each data collection activity.

Booker T. Washington (2015) is credited in Chapter 1 with saying that the elements in the environment of Black children are not the same as those who do not have the African American experience. The CoP framework provides a theoretical glimpse into a person's environment by looking at how learning, meaning, and identity is developed and used as a tool by which to navigate social situations (van Manen, 2017; Washington, 2015; Welsh & Little, 2018; Wenger, 2019). Participants are first presented in Table 1 (Appendix I). Following the table are vignettes to give readers a glimpse at how the participants made meaning of their unique situations. By sharing what made the participant identify as African American, readers get a glance at how the participant finds themselves situated within their environment, thusly framing Washington's sentiments within CoP through the participants' experiences. Confidentiality is maintained in this study through the use of pseudonyms.

Table 1

Study Participants

Name	Age	Gender	Post-Secondary Area	Career Field	Region/ Community	Suspension Behavior
Makayla	20-29	Female	College	Nursing	North/Urban	Fighting
DeShawn	40-49	Male	Military	Communications	South/Rural	Property Damage

Aidan	30-39	Male	College	Systems Administration	South/Rural	Uniform Compliance
Braylen	20-29	Female	College	Mental Health Therapy	South/Rural	Fighting
Izzy	40-49	Female	College	Marketing	North/Urban	Fighting
Ray	40-49	Male	Vocational	Welding	Midwest/Urban	Fighting
Nolan	30-39	Male	College	Mental Health Therapy	North/Urban	Property Damage
Danielle	30-39	Female	College	Educational Docent	North/Urban	Fighting
Michael	40-49	Male	College	Transportation	Midwest/Urban	Hurling Projectile
Jacinta	40-49	Female	College	Engineering	Midwest/Urban	Fighting

Makayla

Makayla recently completed her training program to become a medical assistant. She falls between the ages of 20-29 and currently resides in the state where she attended school. Makayla was suspended for fighting; she placed a peer in a headlock because the young lady had taken Makayla's pencil case and would not return it. Makayla referred to the peer's behavior as random and acted against such behavior because it was required of her according to her community's code of conduct.

> This public school was in an urban area, so we're very aggressive here…naturally aggressive. So, things really never come off as passive. And the type of environment like our school was in, and also like where we lived, it was just rough…our school was basically right outside of the projects…

When I asked Makayla what made her identify as African American, she alluded to how her identity reflected how she portrays herself to others and how she is treated.

> You know, so it's just based off like looks and whatnot and how I portray myself to other people is how I'm treated. I didn't have, how do I say like a hood accent or anything. I didn't speak like how the other students were speaking, like I didn't have any vernacular language. Like I said, I came from a pretty good, umm, home, good upbringing…just like how I'm speaking, so it will come off as, oh, she's a White girl. She's not from around here, but I am.
>
> I'm very light skinned, so I kind of, I'm not gonna lie, I kind of passed off as White. So, people originally thought that's what I was, but I'm not mixed with anything. Both my parents are Black, darker than me, so it was always hard to like, really claim my ancestry, my ethnic background. I have no proof on my face because I'm light skinned. But I just got tired of it, so I was just like, what you think is what you think. But I did also get treated differently with students and with the staff. I feel like they didn't know how to, umm, I wanna say they didn't know how to, like, handle me or approach me because they weren't sure what kind of background I came from. So, like the staff members at school just never really knew how to approach me.

During our sessions, Makayla presented as a woman with a story. She was forthcoming with her contribution to the research. The depth of answers gave the impression that she provided

without coaxing. Makayla gave a clear impression of the event as she remembered it and regularly checked in with me for understanding, as often as I checked in with her.

DeShawn

DeShawn, who falls in the age range of 40-49, has a military background and was trained in communications. His suspension incident occurred in the rural south, and involved event centered around the reputation he felt the property damage. For DeShawn, his suspension White principal held of him.

> And, you know, the assistant principal comes around. He asked me what happened. The assistant principal was a Black guy. The principal was a White guy. Really, the dynamics a lot of times of what happened to you depended upon who you saw.
>
> So, the assistant principal and me, we were on pretty good terms. You know, me and him had had a lot of encounters at that time. I was a very outspoken young man. He [AP] says, come with me, and he takes me into the principal's office. Well, me and the principal we had already had ours…I was definitely a mouthy Black kid to the principal. You know, even though I was fairly bright, you know, made good grades, that type of thing, I was still just a mouthy Black kid to this man.

Note that DeShawn described himself as an outspoken young man in regard to the assistant principal and a mouthy Black kid in regard to the principal. When asked why he identifies as African American, DeShawn's response was prefaced with laughter. He went on to base his reason as being a perception based upon societal interpretation of who he is.

> I would say almost the opposite. I don't have a choice. I would say society has determined more so who's African American. You know like, if your skin is dark enough, you're Black. You can be Hispanic, it wouldn't matter what your ethnicity is. If

> your skin is dark enough, you're Black, you know. I guess what makes me identify, I mean, I have a lot of pride in it. Me personally, there's a level of perseverance that I know was inherently within me because of what my people have overcome just to be here today…so.

In our sessions together, DeShawn was very generous with his narrative. He expounded on his stories by giving much background regarding society during the suspension. He was also excited about the research and ended our session by saying he hoped the study would impact the topic.

Aidan

Aidan is between the ages of 30-39 and is from a rural southern state. He holds an undergraduate degree and is a consumer electronics executive. Aidan's suspension incident centered around uniform compliance, but he used the word 'terrified' to describe his feelings. What stands out about the use of the word terrified is that Aidan described his dad as being a school administrator that was very involved with Aidan's education. In our sessions, Aidan talked about his father conferencing with a teacher who had given him a bad grade. So, being terrified over an untucked shirt did not make sense until he began to give context to his experiences within the school and community.

> I don't want to call it racism, but I'll call it just non-mixture of cultures, right? That air that, you know, the little few moments… a few teachers that make comments to students. And you know, you'd be like that's kind of…it's, it's telling. But that's that town, you know, that's that town. And I go back home and it's still somewhat that way you know… [There was] like a compromise that they [White people and Black people during the Reconstruction Era] made to try to make things work, and it wasn't perfect. It was a

> culture that kept the peace… I think that was the goal…so, you know you had to do what you had to do and so…

Being terrified about telling his dad about the suspension may have been Aidan's way of keeping peace within the community's unspoken rules. When asked why he identifies as African American, Aidan offered this reason which included the unspoken element within the town:

> You know, I think I identified just from my family. You know the culture that I was taught. I think also being in that town, you know, there's certain places you don't wanna be when the lights come on, you know, when the street lights coming on, you know. It was all those lessons… My grandmother making me watch *Roots* every year. You know cooking, food, how you do things.
>
> I think also just survival. You know when things are hard, I'm not saying other races don't go through hard times. I'm sure that being broke is not a racial thing, you know. But I think just all of that combined, that's what makes me identify as African American: the music that I listen to, the church that I went to, I mean the everyday activity. I think also just, you know, we lived alone. When we lived with my grandmother and my father and my sister, we, you know, we farmed, we had cows. You know, again, I don't think there is a racial line, but I attribute it to my culture because that's, that's what we did, you know.

Braylen

Braylen is a mental health therapist between the ages of 30-39. She was raised in a rural community in the south. Braylen's suspension event was fighting. She punched a student with whom she was horseplaying. However, Braylen's counterpart, a White boy, told the teacher (who was also White) on her. Braylen was suspended for horseplay, but the boy was not.

Braylen holds a graduate degree. When asked whether her K-12 education prepared her for post-secondary studies, Braylen gave an emphatic “No!”

> Not at all, definitely not! [K-12] didn't really prepare me. I don't believe my courses were completely different, but [college] dug a lot more deeper. And I just felt like it was just a little too simple with high school. I feel like. How can I say this? It was just literally like, not even a thin layer of what was expected.

When Braylen was asked what made her identify as African American, she cited culture, heritage, and physiognomic features.

> Why, I would definitely say my skin color. That's number 1! I would definitely say my culture, where I was raised up, and Gullah Geechee, that’s my heritage. And so, my culture itself stands for American and African American heritage. And not only that, I will definitely say, umm, I would definitely say a difference that stands out is my hair.

Izzy

Izzy is a college educated marketing administrator whose age is between 40-49 years. She was raised in an urban environment in a northern city. Izzy was forthcoming with her narratives and gave insight into her generational context.

Izzy moved a lot until she was school-age because of her father’s occupation. The community in which the family settled was predominately Orthodox Jewish which seemingly caused her to become aware of cultural differences. She said, “I didn't have the pleasure of going to school with any kids that looked like me until maybe like the 4th grade, and it was just one other family.” It was not until middle school that she found a cluster of Black students by which to identify. However, Izzy noted that most Black students were placed in remedial classes, and she did not see them much.

> They [school administrators] do try to box you and still segregate you, but my parents were educated enough to combat that and know that that's what was coming. So, they [parents] did a lot of fighting and they made sure that we [Izzy and siblings] got our rights and that we weren't placed in remedial classes and that we were able to take advantage of everything. My parents knew how to finagle it.

When the question was put forth in terms of why did Izzy identify as African American, she had this to say:

> OK, well, both of my parents are Black, but my mother's more of a mix of Black and Native [American]. I just always claim African American, because that's what the majority is that runs through my family. But as you can see, the Native is what shows through me. I just always say Black. I don't really ever break that down or explain anything, it just makes it a lot simpler. It doesn't come through my brothers at all, so that's always a whole ‘nother story. But I don't have parents who are necessarily mixed with anything else, it's just in my mother's bloodline. So, it shows up with every generation a couple of the kids look more American Indian than Black. It's [being Black] not a culture thing. If anything, I get called White Girl all the time because I'm not from the hood. So, I definitely hate that.

For Izzy, Black is not a cultural perspective but rather a collective perspective based upon other features.

Ray

Ray is in the 40-49 age group, works in customer service, and grew up in an urban midwestern town. He completed a post-secondary vocational program in the field of welding. Ray was forthcoming with his narrative and shared what it was like to struggle. His mother was a

single parent who worked double shifts at a factory. She moved the family (Ray and his brothers) into a predominately White, middle-class neighborhood because she thought it was safer.

> The school was in kind of a suburb area, suburban area, where it was predominantly White. It was tough living there. There were only a few Black people. It was like, let me see if I can do a percentage, maybe that might be easier. I would say maybe 70/30 White and Black, and maybe I'm just mixing Black and everyone, like Spanish or whatever, but 70/30. I got bussed but it was about a 10 or 15-minute bus ride. So, something like that. If I missed the bus or something like that, my mom was a single mom, so she couldn't take me to school.

When asked why he identified as African American, Ray responded:

> Just being the color I am in this society of oppression and hate and judgments and things like that. Me being a big Black man, I get it just daily, you know, I've always been like that. So, I have to carry myself as such, and sometimes not as aggressively as I want to. Just like with the school thing, tying into that, I really wasn't aggressive. I was bigger than a lot of people, but they thought I was gonna be a pushover all the time. So that type of thing.

For Ray, the African American experience was described as a societal perception of color, oppression, hate, judgment, and aggression through which he must navigate daily.

Nolan

Nolan is a licensed therapist in the age range of 30-39. He holds a graduate degree and grew up in an urban environment in a northern state. He enjoyed his high school experience. Nolan was required to wear a uniform that consisted of khakis, a button-down shirt, and a tie. He

took public transportation to and from school. This required him and many of the high schools in the area to take a bus to a transportation hub at the center of town. He remembers:

> Everybody has to get home and there's a shopping hub and plenty of shows down there. So, you're talking about maybe like 10 different high schools are congregating in a specific area. And again, like I took pride that like, you know, everybody's in a shirt and jeans and sneakers and we were dressed up. And you know, shirt and tie and it kind of separated us from everybody else.

Image is important to Nolan but not in a vain way. For Nolan, the image showed respect for himself, his family, and his culture. When asked why he identified as being African American, Nolan responded:

> It's always an interesting question for me. Umm, because I don't tell people I'm African American. I fill out African American or Black on, you know, documentation that I have to fill out. But if anyone asks me, I always say I'm Haitian American. My family is from Haiti. Anytime that I can highlight or emphasize my Caribbean culture and my Haitian experience, I definitely do so.
>
> Yeah, so I've had the African American or the Black experience in America. I've definitely gone through that. I've experienced anything that you can think about in terms of being a Black African American. I would never deny it and say I'm not. But you know, anytime I can, I specify and say that I'm Haitian.

For Nolan, being African American is a designation on forms and an experience by which to navigate society.

Danielle

Danielle is between 30-39 years of age, holds an associate's degree, and is an educational supervisor and docent at a museum in the northern city in which she was raised. Suspended for fighting, she remembers being told by the school administrator that the matter should have been handled in-house and not with parent involvement. Thus, although the suspension paperwork said fighting, Danielle was told that she was being suspended, and not the other girl, because she brought her mother to the school the next day. This event along with one other event caused Danielle to distrust and become angry with the educational system.

> After that incident, I had a major shift in my personality where I was kind of, there's a lot of ways to say, I just started to get angry. I guess because that distrust of authority figures really started to settle in and I started to kind of close myself off. This is when I started to do home instructions.

For Danielle, her experience in the school setting was within-group bias. Danielle's response to why she identified as African American also had elements of within-group bias. It included Danielle's confusion about having to defend being Black amongst people who considered themselves Black.

> Ummm? It's kind of weird because, I mean, aside from, well now, not so much now, but growing up in a neighborhood with, you know, predominantly Black or African American [people], that's all I knew. You know, I was raised to think [and] I consider myself Black. You know my mom and dad are Black. My dad is looking at him was a little confusing, you know. My brother thought for the longest time…he thought my dad was White. Ohh, my mom, you know, she looks Black.
>
> I never questioned whether I was Black. I started to have a lot of confusion when I actually started going to school because people would say, Oh well, what are you? And

> I would say, Ohh, I'm Black and they say, No you're not. And so, then I would feel like, like those bubbles that hold questions where you feel like, *Wait, I'm not? But I thought Mommy and Daddy told me I'm Black.* So, it was like, yeah, because I never really looked at it as a color difference. [If people say] they were Black, I took it at their word. So, it was just kind of odd to me.

Michael

Technical difficulties disrupted Michael's session. The conditions were so bad that we had to reschedule. And though there were still some technical difficulties when we met the following day, we proceeded. Michael is within the 40-49 age group and has earned an associate's degree. He is a customer representative in the transportation industry. Michael's suspension event occurred in an urban city in the Midwest and was based on his hurling a projectile at a White teacher. Michael's narrative considered how circumstances might impact the student's ability to communicate intent. Michael's circumstance mainly consisted of being able to associate the behaviors of the teacher with an experience that was unfamiliar to him at the time. Using his fifth-grade terms, he shared the description:

> This teacher was a very rude, nasty, mean-spirited person. I made the choice [to hurl the object] because she showed favoritism. So, we would be lined up in, you know lines, ready to move about the school. They would line us up in the hallway and even though she wasn't our direct teacher, she would come out and literally take Black male students and put them in the back of the line and that right away was just like, what are you doing? You know, why would you do this? Why would you only pick on the Black male students? So that just gave us a bad taste in our mouth. And then she would give us the

> dirtiest looks and it would only be the Black male students. She would mouth curse words to us. So, it was pretty blatant.

Michael later referred to the teacher's behavior as racist. When asked about his choosing to identify as African American, he gave me a response based on his heritage.

> My heritage, my root heritage. I mean, I always grew up knowing that my ancestors, my grandparents, from both sides of my family are from Mississippi, and my grandparents on my dad's side of the family were one step away from sharecroppers. So, they have their parents' stories of being the children of slaves. So, I mean, I always knew where my heritage was rooted. From a young age, I had that identity.

Jacinta

Jacinta is between 40-49 years of age and was raised in an urban midwestern city. She holds a graduate degree and is the CFO of an engineering company. Jacinta's suspension event was that of fighting. Throughout the shared lived experience, Jacinta stated that others seemed to misunderstand her by perceiving her as aggressive, but she maintains that she is not.

> I feel like they [school staff] try to, like in my case, they try to make an example of you. They tried to get you to back down. Uh, but I'm not that type of person, so I'm not going to back down, so I'm gonna keep going with you, right? Especially if I know that I'm right in this situation.

Jacinta, as she described herself, is very strong-willed, which can sometimes get her into trouble.

> As a person, I'm a very strong willed individual. Umm, so I'm not a yes person, so I'm not going to just go with what you say. So, I'm going to challenge you and I think sometimes my attitude or my delivery and the way that I speak to people sometimes can come across as rude or bossy.

This directness also came across when asked to explain why she identified as African American.

> Well, just look at me. I'm Black, right? And that's how I identify as African American. I don't identify as anything else. So, that right there. I'm Black. Nothing else.

According to Jacinta's statement, a sentiment found in many of the other narratives listed, being African American is a perception of others that is best described socially.

Results

The compilation of data from the phenomenological examples shared by participants resulted in a rich, detailed collection that can serve as meaning units of the phenomenological inquiry (van Manen, 2017b). Once shared, phenomenological examples are independent of the author and are under the stewardship of the researcher (Prasad, 2018). The participant-author crafted the phenomenological example uniquely to understand the audience represented by the researcher (Prasad, 2018). By being situated as an audience to retelling the event, I could probe the participant's memory with follow-up questions that clarified and understood the responses (van Manen, 2017b). Combined with reiterative readings of session transcriptions and the review of session videos, I developed an intimacy with the data. This intimacy led to features and attributes that characterize the phenomenon (Castillo-Montoya, 2016).

Unlike literal interpretation of text, textual intimacy is a critical practice that researchers use to align the data's meaning with the experience's spirit through the hermeneutic process (*King James Bible;* 1917, n.d.; Prasad, 2018). Critical hermeneutics considers ethics, justice, and morality during textual interpretation (Prasad; van Manen, 1997). It concerns itself with themes of power and domination while acknowledging multiple influences on the shared example (Horkheimer, 2018; Prasad).

Data collected from the three online activities of questionnaire, interview, and journal prompt were combined for analysis and thematic coding (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Moser & Korstjens, 2018; Saldaña, 2011; Saldaña & Mallete, 2017). Following Braun and Clarke's six-phase analysis, themes became apparent as meanings were identified from significant statements (Braun & Clarke). When no new themes became evident, saturation was reached (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Moser & Korstjens; Prasad). The phases of Braun and Clarke's thematic process are: become familiar with the data; generating initial code; searching for themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes; and producing the report. The resulting themes, in vivo names, and definitions are listed in Table 2 and Appendix J.

Table 2

Themes for all Triangulated Data Sources

Theme	In Vivo Name	Definition
Culpability	*Oh yeah…I did it.*	Responsibility for actions
Intent	*Mens rea…don't give it another thought*.	Willingness to take motivation into consideration
Deficit language	*Who are you saying I am?*	Interprets or operationalizes empirical differences as inferior or problematizes behaviors
Parental involvement	*Let me introduce you to my dad and mom.*	Parental involvement in school concerns
Preparation for future pursuits	*The rigor of academics.*	A belief that the system prepared participants for future endeavors
Navigating perceptions of self and others	*The spirit not to be stamped out.*	Participant view of themselves and their response to the behaviors of others
Perseverance and hope	*I always knew I would make it.*	Exhibition of self-motivation

Culpability

In sharing their stories, participants embraced the themed concept of culpability. They were clear about their behaviors and took responsibility for their actions. Such as this snippet from Michael:

> …it was not misunderstood at this particular suspension; it was definitely warranted. The behavior was the act of, of throwing an object at a teacher.

Ray's account was also clearly stated:

> …so the behavior part was actually one incident with me fighting. Actually, someone was picking on me all semester. I'd kind of notified [the administration] that [a student] was bothering me and it may be a problem at some point. They [administration] really didn't try to mediate the situation and kind of nip it there. It ended up being a problem. So….

The use of OSS for behaviors such as fighting was not surprising. Makayla's account was in this same vein:

> There was a time when a student in my class took my personal belongings and when I tried to get it back, it was more of like a hassle. And so you know, to get my things back, I ended up putting them in a headlock, but they weren't injured. It was just, you know, trying like to show that I'm being serious. Like you know, I want my things back. It was my pencil case, you know. And it was just random.

Some suspensions, however, were somewhat confusing, such as Aidan's. His vignette showed the importance of athletics to the school. The principal postponed the suspension until the week after the game:

> The one that comes to mind was, I believe, my junior year. Umm, the high school enacted a policy where you had to have your shirt tucked in. And I also played football. And so, during that Friday, right, when you're gonna play a game, you wore your jersey to school over your button down [shirt]. And that jersey was, say, supposed to be tucked in. However, my jersey only came down right above my waist, you know, which would constantly come untucked. I was walking down the hall, and the principal saw me and a few other guys and they had the same problem that I did. We all got suspended that following week. He allowed us to play in the game. He allowed us to play the game because if we got school suspension then we would not be able to play in the game, but they allowed us to play but enacted it [the suspension] the following week. And you know I, yeah, that was that. And that was pretty, pretty devastating, you know to have gotten a school suspension and knowing that it comes with a weekend where you had to actually come to school and then clean up around the school, too.

In Danielle's example, she shared that the behavior that led to an administrative meeting is not the behavior for which she was suspended:

> [I was] never a troublemaker. I got into a verbal altercation with another student over something very… I guess I slighted her by my very appearance in the classroom. Apparently, she was upset because I had gotten a lot of offers from other students to be paid to do their homework because I had came from private school. So, when we were, I will never forget, it was science, and we were doing something that a lot of students didn't understand, and they were asking me questions.

No participant denied their culpability. However, the suspension phenomena shared covered a variety of circumstances and multiply depicted uses of administrative power.

Intent

The thematic concept of intent refers to the system's willingness, through policy and its agents (i.e., school administrators), to take into consideration the motivation for the student's behavior when determining consequences. The policy put forth in the Federal Register (2016) cites an overrepresentation of African American students in the national suspension data. The document also states:

> The IDEA currently requires each State to collect and examine data to determine if significant disproportionality based on race and ethnicity is occurring in the State and LEAs in…incidence, duration, and type of disciplinary actions, including suspensions and expulsions (disciplinary removals: p. 10971).

The statement differs from 14th Amendment case law, which requires mens rea as proof of discriminatory intent against an administrator's motivation for discipline (Skiba et. al., 2009). The IDEA statement also differs from CSI performance indices that measure corporate acts regarding human harm and relates that to duration and mens rea (Clark et al., 2022). When determining disciplinary actions, it appears the student's behavior is to be considered but not their intent.

The consideration of mens rea was not seemingly factored into the suspension stories shared by the participants. Aidan's account of wearing a jersey given to him by the school, a jersey that inherently violated school policy, the same policy that required him to wear it on game days, caused his suspension. His story continues:

> I mean, we all kind of had the same problem. While you know, we were all bigger guys… we had a problem…our jersey wasn't tucked in. We had a button-down on [underneath the jersey]. You had to wear a button-down as well. So that was the thing:

> we weren't just walking around with our shirts out. And, [the principal's] response was, You need to pull your pants up a little more. You know that you're sagging. And I mean I've never been a sagger in my life, you know, but…

DeShawn's suspension account for property damage is another example of intent seemingly not being considered as part of the suspension decision:

> Inside the building, the bee lands on the window. OK, the window has the metal in it, like reinforcing the window. So, I'm under the impression that I could possibly, you know, kick this window with a little force, not too much. I just. I'm trying to kill the bee. You know, they're a couple of girls there, you know? So, it's like…I'm just trying to kill the bee. Umm, I kicked the window. The window just shatters. It's just, I don't know what that metal was in there for, but it wasn't reinforcing a damn thing. The window just shatters. So of course, you know, the kids running all over the place, you know, I'm like, man, OK, so I don't even, I don't even leave. I'm just waiting, hanging out for, you know, everybody to come because I know they'll be around the corner in a minute…

Deficit Language

The themed concept of deficit language refers to a condition that interprets or operationalizes empirical differences as inferior or it problematizes the behaviors of targeted individuals. Many participants were stunned by the harsh words used when disciplined. For Nolan, it was the fact that he was being disciplined with people with whom he hung out, a grouping that was not a good fit for him. Nolan was suspended because one person in the group used a fire extinguisher to settle an argument. However, Nolan was not even aware that an argument had ensued:

Me and a group of friends were in the hallway and they got into an argument and someone took the fire extinguisher off the wall and sprayed someone else. At that point, everyone ran.

I literally was off to the side trying to finish my homework before class started. So, like I heard the commotion nearby but I'm looking down in my notebook, writing. And then I see the smoke, you know? Now I look up and everyone's hightailing it down the hallway. So, I get up and I walk down the hall and then, you know, we all got called to the principal's office later on in that day. It was a whole big thing.

Like they called everyone after school, like the entire school had to show up, and they made a big thing about it. And they called the four of us. And put us like in separate rooms. And I was just saying, like, I don't know what happened like I was doing my homework. That was my story, which was the truth. And I remember the disciplinarian for the school, and he just kept saying, like, I know you saw who did it. You need to give me a name, or you're getting suspended. And I just kept saying, like, I, I really don't know who did it. Like, you guys have the three people that were there, like, why don't you ask the three of them? And I'm sure they'll tell on each other. But, like, I don't know who took the fire extinguisher off the wall and sprayed everyone. I got suspended just being there.

DeShawn's story about the bee continued with talks about the effect of harsh words on a person:

[The suspension] affected me a lot after that. You know in the short term it was negative in the long term it became a positive. In the short term you know you did it. You question yourself sometimes when people continue to tell you you're a bad person. I mean when people keep telling you that there's something wrong with you, at some point, sometimes

> you question [yourself]. I think, you know, I had a little period, not long, but I had a little period there as a youth where you know, I questioned me a little bit. But my parents did a good job giving me knowledge itself, so it didn't last long, you know.

For Makayla, she felt misunderstood by administration. Makayla did not feel that the administration understood why she felt the need to defend herself. From her perspective, the incident was about survival. From the school's perspective, the behavior was a threat to the student body:

> So, you really have to always like stay ready and you never know what can happen. So, what I learned at home was to always, like, defend myself, never to be a punk, you know, stand up for yourself, be verbal, be vocal to really show somebody that you're serious about what you're talking about. Because once you show that side, I promise they won't mess with you again. It's just unfortunate you have to show that side to people. But like I said, I'm a very calm and cool collective person. I never do too much. My parents have always taught me well, but on the school side I did get physical. I had to be removed from the premises because I'm considered a threat to the student body. So, I had to respect that, even though they didn't understand where I came from.

Along with processing the thought of being a threat to the student body, Makayla also had to process group bias, bias from other African Americans (staff and students) within the school community:

> I wanna say they didn't know how to, like, handle me or approach me because they weren't sure what kind of background I came from. Umm, I didn't speak like how the other students were speaking, like I didn't have any vernacular language, like I said, I came from a pretty good, umm, home, good upbringing.

> How do I say, like I didn’t have a hood accent or anything. Or I've just, just like how I'm speaking, so it will come off as, Oh, she's a White girl. She's not from around here, but I am. I just don't adapt to it. It's just not who I am. So, like the staff members at school, just never really knew how to approach me in this situation, even with the whole suspension thing, because they're shocked because they're like, I never would have guessed that you would have put her in a headlock.
>
> And it's just like, Well, why not? I mean, she took my belongings. I felt like I had to prove myself. When I did get suspended, in a way it proved to them that, Hey, just because I look like this doesn't mean I'm not capable of doing that. I just choose not to do it. I'm saying, but because I was put in a situation, I had to do it, unfortunately, and so they were just kinda like, Wow.

Parental Involvement

Parental involvement is also a concept theme. For many of the participants, parents were at meetings when trouble arose at school. Izzy gave an account of her dad scheduling school meetings before his work day began:

> So, I was never someone who instigated anything physically, but I was going to finish it. You don't put your hands on me, you know. So, my father gets the phone call. He'd be there at 6:00 o'clock in the morning because he had a two hour commute. You want to meet with me? I'll meet you early in my suit and tie. He was going there to do whatever he needed to do. Sometimes he got me out of the suspension, sometimes he didn't because I could fight.
>
> But my parents always understood that I was defending myself so that I, I always had their support when it came to that, they did not care. They said if anyone puts their

> hands on you or assaults you or does whatever you have the right to do what you need to defend yourself.

Michael recounted that his parents had to intervene on his behalf because of racial discrimination (which happened to have been the motivation behind his suspension):

> I've had several encounters with, with teachers that I felt racially discriminated against. I had a very, very specific encounter where my sister had to come to the classroom to talk to my teacher because I was being discriminated against like fiercely. And you know, we had a counseling session and my parents had to come in.

Aidan told how his father's connections kept his school's administration from taking things too far.

> So sometimes, with my dad being [a school] administrator and me seeing him interact with some teachers and with his expectation, I kind of understood like you could send me to the office but if it's just for talking, the principal's gonna be mad at you more than she's gonna be mad at me.
>
> I had a problem in high school with a teacher. She actually gave me an F in the class and we were just going back and forth. And it's so funny because she was like, she lived three houses down from me. And, and you know, my father had a conference with her. And I mean after that, you know, about six weeks later, my grade was a B. I did nothing different; you know, I did nothing different, but that was that one problem with that teacher. But most teachers I did not have a problem with. I had decent grades. When I say decent grades, I mean A's and B's. I was polite if you were polite to me.

Preparation for Future Pursuits

Preparation for future pursuits is the theme that refers to how well participants felt the system prepared them for future endeavors. As a requirement for participation, all participants had to have engaged in post-secondary training, whether at the college, vocational, or military level. The question posed to the participants was whether they believed their K-12 education prepared them for the rigors of post-secondary training. For some, the answer was a resounding, yes, 100%, and for others, it was a definite, exclamatory, No! Nolan let us know in no uncertain terms.

> I would say 100%, yeah. The curriculum that I learned in high school definitely prepared me for college. You know, I was definitely a good student throughout high school. Umm, I was always on honor roll. Always, you know 3.83, 3.9 and above.
>
> So, when I got to college, I didn't feel as though I was behind in anything and the teachers were definitely present for you if you needed assistance after school, if you needed any type of tutoring. My high school definitely did a solid job in preparing us for the next stage.

Braylen shared a school experience that definitely lacked academic rigor, one that she felt did not prepare her for college.

> No. Not at all, definitely not. How can I say this? It was just literally like, not even a thin layer of what was [expected in college]. I guess the major things that I learned in college compared to high school, was just a thin layer. It didn't really prepare me, I don't believe. [College] courses were completely different. It dug a lot more deeper. And I just felt like it was just a little too simple with high school or whatever the case is, it was simpler.

Jacinta brought forth a fuller experience, one that was both academically and socially stimulating.

> I feel like high school just prepared me for life, basically. Because when I look back, and even when I just look at, you know, others now, you know, as me being older, I'm just like, man, did I really act like that? You know? So yeah, I feel like high school has prepared me for life in the real world. I wasn't a troublemaker at all. I was a cheerleader. Uh, I was on the color guard. I was in the band. I was popular, you know, and I was in the in-crowd. And uh, I got along with everyone, you know, like, I'm just that type of person. I get along with everybody. My last two years in school, during my junior year, we had a program where we could go for 1/2 a day. So, I was a dental assistant half days. And then, my senior year, I ended up graduating early. I was a January grad, and then I just worked up until I walked with my class that June. So school was school was good, you know, and like I said [earlier], 20% of the makeup of the population was African American. The rest were White.

Navigating Perceptions of Self and Others

The theme, navigating perceptions of self and others, refers to how participants viewed themselves and how participants responded to the behaviors of others. To that end, participants found that reputations are sometimes difficult to shake once in place. For some, the reputation became the person; it was the persona with which others interacted. It was somewhat difficult for participants to navigate socially. DeShawn expressed the feeling that he carried the reputation of being a mouthy, bad little Black kid and equated that reputation to a spirit that adults targeted.

> I had a teacher or two that were they were extremely nurturing to me. Yeah, because they saw, you might say, my potential. Other teachers saw, you know, a bad ass little kid. I had a lot of teachers who, they only saw, the bad ass little kid and that's really for a lot of my schooling.

> A lot of my school experiences were based on that [reputation]. It was a reputation that followed in a small town. It was a *spirit* that a lot of people wanted to stamp out. I was young when I realized that I had a voice that I would not allow people to stamp out. I had a lot of encounters with people based on my race and on me being a mouthy, little Black kid, pretty much.

Braylen described the animus as a negative image:

> Sometimes they felt like you were just like a pity party or something like, you just, you know… Actually, I was well off. My parents, I mean. It wasn't like, you know, like we didn't have the finances or whatever the case was. That was never the case.
>
> But I just felt like they [White staff] seeing you as a troublemaker, you know what I'm saying? It was just, just a negative image and they treated you as such. So whenever anything pertains to you or your name, they just instantly had a negative, negative stigma. Or just a negative thought automatically.
>
> I had great grades. I was never, you know, was never a failing student. I've always had A's and B's, maybe a few C's. But for the most part A's and B's. And even academics wasn't enough for someone to still say, OK, well, you know her academics is completely opposite from, you know, her behavior or whatever the case is.

For Izzy, it was a matter of being targeted for clinical and remedial services:

> They [White school staff] do try to box you and still segregate you, but my parents were educated enough to combat that and know that that's what was coming.
>
> So, they did a lot of fighting and they made sure that we got our rights and that we weren't placed in remedial programs and that we were able to take advantage of everything. My parents knew how to finagle it.

> I remember when the school psychologist interviewed me without my parents' knowledge. They're trying to figure out about Black people. I was very tight lipped so then they sent a letter home to my parents saying they thought I was mentally retarded and that I needed to be checked out and put into remedial classes. My parents said, Ohh no, that's not the case. What are you doing talking to my child without my knowledge? Like that's how it was all the time.
>
> Me? I went back and it was fine, but it it's like every step of the way, my parents had to come back. Once a teacher was fired because they would hide our work and give us like failing grades. If I was put into a remedial class accidentally and the teacher knew I did not belong there, they [staff] wouldn't fight to have me [placed in the right] class. They wanted me to stay there because I inspired other students to do better and I was bored out of my mind. But then my parents would intervene once they found out.

Perseverance and Hope

The themed concept of perseverance and hope refer to the exhibition of self-motivation. For participants, the disbelief of having to serve a suspension for behaviors that followed family or neighborhood social norms did not dissuade the desires of participants. Jacinta possessed a belief in her future that was not defined by her suspension experience:

> I knew that, uh, suspension wasn't going to define my future endeavors. I knew I was gonna finish school. Mama made sure of that, and you know, I knew myself. I knew that I was gonna be somebody. You know, when I graduated high school, I knew I would, as well, graduate from college. And you know, so forth. So, suspension didn't define me as far, ummm, it didn't stop me from, you know, excelling in my adult life.

For Makayla, her future was tied into escaping not simply the neighborhood but also its lifestyle. The desire to attend college meant that she would have more choices and opportunities as an adult.

> I did imagine finishing. I almost did not finish. They tried to throw almost everything in my way to kind of stop me from graduating. Umm, it was so crazy. But it was my goal, and that I wanted to finish high school and I wanted to get out of that environment. I just, I just couldn't take it anymore. I thought, the situation that I was in, I didn't wanna be in this area anymore. I didn't. I wanna go to the suburbs. I wanna go travel and meet different people. A lot of people wanted to go to the same college as other people [students] and I'm like: No, I want to see new people, [live in a] new region. I don't care where I go, but I just have to get out of this environment. You know, I have to get out the hood, period. I don't wanna come back here.
>
> Umm. And it was just really like a goal for me to reach. I did everything I could. I joined the debate team to try to get some travel experience; we traveled to different schools, you know, competing against White kids. We didn't think that we were gonna win, but we did and we traveled to nationals. I also joined the track team, I did everything I could to, like, really, like, push myself to finish high school. Anything that could you know, really make me a scholar on my resume for colleges to see me because like I said, I had no help. They [high school] did nothing for us to really push us to, like, go to college. It was more so you can go to the military or you can do ROTC. And I didn't want to do that and I have no experience in that anyway. So, I'm just like, I can't. I don't wanna do that. I wanna do something else. I wanna go to college. We only visited one college and that was Howard for the whole four years I've been there.

> So there, it was just like, I had no clue. I had no idea and whatnot, I just wanted to get out of there. I just think I learned a lot of life lessons from there, but I just knew I had to leave. I could not stay.

Nolan kept his suspension experience within the perspective of a temporary situation:

> I had never gotten in trouble before. I was a straight A student. Like all of my teachers knew that, you know, he doesn't typically get in trouble, so I had no worry as to, you know, is this gonna lead to anything else? Is this gonna affect my, you know, me going to college? It was, again, me being caught up in the wrong place at the wrong time. I'll serve this time and you know, things will go back to normal once I'm finished. I think somebody with a more decorated history of behavioral issues or some other issues will probably have those concerns. For me, I was just like this is unfair, and I'll be fine once this is over.

Aidan was to the point:

> One hundred percent! I knew I was going to college. My dad was preparing me, and my dad played college football. He, you know, almost played for a pro team. So, he was he was preparing me for that process during that time. So, I had no doubt that I would graduate high school. I had A's and B's and you know, so I have no doubt that I was gonna go to college. It was just about, you know, it all depended on what I was willing to work through.

As for DeShawn's future had already been set. "Well, ironically, at that time my, my future was already determined. This [suspension] happened my senior year. I had already signed up for the military in my junior year."

Outlier Data and Findings

There was but one outlier in the data. The presence of the outlier is not unexpected, given the compilation of the population. Unfortunately, given the rarity of this type of research, I am not able to state whether the rate of this outlier is consistent when comparing the sample to the population.

Ray's phenomenological examples provided a different meaning than the examples gleaned from the other participants. These responses left a different impression on me in the areas of motivation and self-involvement. Two themes presented themselves in the outlier data. In Ray's narratives, limited access to resources, as noted through references regarding financing and housing, seemed to impact access to resources such as safety, independence, and perseverance. The resulting themes, in vivo names, and definitions are listed in Table 3 (Appendix K).

Table 3

Outlier Themes for all Triangulated Data Sources

Theme	In vivo Name	Definition
Socioeconomics	*The other side of the veil.*	The adverse impact of socioeconomics on the family's engagement with school
Motivation	*Life without a plan.*	Disengagement from future opportunities

Socioeconomics

One of the key impressions that surfaced as a theme in the outlier data was the barrier of socioeconomics. Only one participant mentioned that socioeconomics had an adverse impact on his mother's involvement with the school. She was a single mom who had to work double shifts to support her two sons. Ray shared:

So, I think most of the Black students were from households or homes where their parents just couldn't be there. I don't know everyone and everyone's situation, but some of the people that I did know and knew a little bit about them, they would either have a single-parent dynamic or both parents were working or something like that, so it would be kind of something similar for them.

So [mom] wasn't able to really get into the school activities and know exactly what was going on back there by her being a single parent who worked sometimes double shifts. So, she really didn't know. She just thinks because we moved from a bad neighborhood, that was all the way back, that it would be just totally better. And everything was great. It was better in some ways as far as safety in the community and the safety probably in the school and things like that.

Besides the typical things I've heard well, maybe there were still, even though that being in middle suburbs, there were still people who had more money, more affluent than others. And I think those things, you know, come into play with either the kids or the teachers or with some parents even being more able to, uh, to come and be a part of the school thing and do that.

I think it was, like, since my mom was a single parent, so they kind of would do us like any type of way because our parents really couldn't be involved like some parents who were hands-on, would know everything that is going on with their child or pretty much everything.

Motivation

A second key impression resulting as a theme from the outlier data was disengagement from future opportunities. Though life need not be mapped out, for many students, life after high

school comes with a plan to attend a post-secondary program such as college, military, or vocational. The other nine participants had a post-secondary plan guided by personal desire, parents, or school. When Ray's high school career ended:

> I didn't. I kind of didn't know what I was gonna do, to be honest. I kind of waffled all around the place.
>
> After a year, I kind of didn't do anything and kind of was just living the life. And my mom actually made me either pick between school or go somewhere and get a trade. And actually, I went to get a trade first. She was a single mom. She was like, you know, you live here, you gotta do something. Yeah, you gotta do something. You gonna be home with me, do something.

Mom's ultimatum caused Ray to pursue and earn a vocational certificate in welding. His training began a year after graduating from high school.

Research Question Responses

The purpose of the study was to understand the essence of the lived experiences of African Americans who had served at least two OSS during their K-12 epoch but whose post-secondary life outcomes do not reflect the deficit language, such as imprisonment, that many researchers used to describe the population. In Chapter 1, OSS is defined as exclusionary discipline practices that result in school exclusion through out-of-school suspensions or expulsions (Welsh & Little, 2018). In this chapter, participants were given a voice to collectively generate the definition of the African American experience for this work. A central research question with two sub-questions was created to encapsulate participant experiences. These research questions were designed to encapsulate participant experiences to understand the features of the stated problem. This section related the research questions to the collected data.

Central Research Question

What are the lived experiences of African Americans who had served at least two OSS during their K-12 epoch and persisted to the completion of a post-secondary academic, military, or career program? This question was first addressed by situating participants in their African American experiences. It then progressed through the sharing of the disciplinary event, followed by the sharing of post-secondary life. Finally, the central research question was answered when a typology surfaced along a trajectory that connected the person who performed the suspension behavior through the transformation of post-secondary studies to the person who participated in the study. The typology was an acknowledged remnant of the younger person within the current persona. In giving her statement, Jacinta admitted that there was still an element of who she was in high school in who she is today. However, that high school persona has been tempered, but not muted, by humility.

> I've had to humble myself a lot, right? I've had to really bite my tongue a lot. And, umm, I'm not so quick to, to jump off. But, umm, you're not gonna run over me, right? So, umm I am very confident, you know, and it reflects when I walk into a room and it reflects when I speak with people.

Aidan was suspended for not having his football jersey tucked into his pants. He partially attributed the event to covert policies of race within his community. In Aidan's phenomenological example, he shares an internal dialogue based upon conversations he remembers having with his grandmother. More importantly, his example possibly points to the cumulative effect of being restricted because ethnicity. Aidan's inner dialogue pushes him past the desire to *play it safe* instead of going for what you want.

> You know, a lot of people will fail and not necessarily give up, but give up on putting themselves in a better situation because of the fear of failure. Who are they? What are you? Do you say it or not? Do you think it or not? And whatever the case may be, you wanna go to something safe, right? You wanna go do something that you know will just get the results that you expect instead of going for something that you don't know what those results will be? And I think that, I think that's it maybe.

Nolan took an interesting route when linking his suspension behavior to his current persona. He provided a parallel narrative that included the same people. The repeated act made meaning to Nolan.

> And I just remember, and you're asking, does anything stick with me today? And yeah, so like that holds weight with me now, you know, you can try and help people as much as possible. But if their goals aren't aligned with yours or they don't care for things as much as you care for things like that's not gonna work. So, I just remember like maybe it wasn't specific to the suspension, but the people who were involved in the suspension were involved in at later scandal and that has stuck with me into adulthood. Just, you know, just being mindful of the people that you surround yourself with. In trying to assist people, you know, don't put yourself in a situation where you can potentially suffer consequences for the things as well.

The data that provides meaning to this question depicts participants as still having a response to the suspension behavior's antecedent but clearly making a conscious decision as an adult to respond differently.

Sub-Question One

How do African Americans believe their identity has been influenced, either positively or negatively, by OSS? The participants framed this question as a typology of the features of their suspension experience evidenced in their current persona. Participants answered the question by sharing their feelings about the suspension experience and contextualizing the learned lesson into a code by which to live. For example, in the central research question, Aidan shared an internal dialogue about playing it safe. For this sub-question we see that the behavior's antecedent may still be causing stress. In this snippet of data, Aidan used or alluded to words such as cheated, association, reputation, and life being unfair.

> Yeah, I think I learned life is not fair. I definitely feel cheated and, and, you know, that out-of-school suspension, I think, it told me to, you know, watch who you hang with. Because again, I think I was with some, I guess, known troublemakers, but they were my football teammates, and we're walking around and…and you know, I got caught up. You know, I got caught in the wrong spot at the wrong time, like so many people, kids, do you know? Somebody sees that bad kid, and you just so happened to be with that bad kid, and you get grouped into something that you had nothing to do with, you know? I think it taught me life is unfair. And watch who you hang around, you know, who you associate yourself with. Right. And I think that's it.

Makayla shared that she comes from a community where aggression is natural. When she put a peer in a headlock because they took her pencil case and would not return it when asked, her actions were consistent with her community's expectations. What influenced Makayla the most from the suspension event was being called a threat to the student body by administration.

> Umm, I'm going back to that moment. It's kind of a pretty ugly statement to say that someone is a threat to a whole student body when you only had a difficult encounter with

> one person. But because it was like a bad look for the school, I guess, and people talk or whatever, I had to be removed from the premises. I don't think I was really a threat to anyone. People do stuff to like, get reactions from people. And it's the reaction that the person does, that's what gets them in trouble. I had to figure out a way to get it back whether it was physically or verbally, but verbally didn't work. So, I had to get physical. I didn't have to go through this, but I think it just makes me realize what I could have done better in that situation, and it's just something that I can grow from. I see people a lot differently now because it's always way deeper than what it is.

Now Makayla shows compassion when faced with her triggers. And she stops to think about consequences that will impact her, as well.

Michael's stated typology was that of empathy. He is not certain how he found out, but he was told information about the teacher that was the object of his suspension. Michael ended up feeling empathetic for the teacher after learning all she was going through, even though he had to pay a consequence for reacting to the verbal and emotional abuse she put him through.

> Wow. Well, I definitely learned to have more empathy from that suspension. So, the actual detailed story of it is, this teacher was very mean spirited. She was, you know, very prejudice against Black male students such as myself. She would give us mean looks in the hallway. She cursed at us a few times, and so that's what led us to throw a book at her out of the window.
>
> But we, after the suspension, found out that she had been going through personal issues at home. She had been in an abusive relationship. She had a lot of negative things going on in her life that contributed to, you know, her personality and the way that she treated her students and other students that even weren't her students at school. And so, in

> learning all that was going on with her, I learned empathy and learned, to, you know, think about people and what they could be going through and maybe, you know, why they act the way that they do.

Sub-Question Two

How do African American post-secondary students bracket the experiences of the behavioral occurrence and the resulting OSS? This question required me to focus on how participants made sense of their behaviors at the time of the incident. All participants took responsibility for their behavior. DeShawn mentally sought to negotiate the situation through the development of a self-imposed consequence.

> At the time, I had a little job. Ohh. I was thinking: This is gonna cost my whole check. I wasn't really thinking that I'm gonna get expelled for this. I'm more so thinking that, you know, I'm gonna have to, you know, explain and keep my dad from killing me because he might have to pay for it now, and then I have to pay him back. I mean, like, I'm thinking, you know, I'm gonna have to figure out something with my parents. So, I have to pay for it myself.

Danielle's experience of receiving a suspension for having her mother join her in the disciplinary meeting is something she still grapples with because for her, family is important:

> I just remember she [the other student] just blew up at me. She's cursing at me. She's going to fight me and I was just not used to this. Now mind you, the teacher is right there. She doesn't say anything and I'm shocked. Thankfully the other students you know, actually scored. This is a case where the other students were actually helpful.
>
> So, I went home immediately and told my mom. Umm, we're up there the next day. I'll never forget it. And so we're sitting – my mom and I are sitting down on the left

> hand side, the student sitting down on the right hand side, and I get the blame. I get the blame. I, I'll never forget the phrase: I didn't follow the proper procedure. So, so I wasn't supposed to go to my mom. Everything's supposed to be settled in-house.

From there, an anger set in that impacted Danielle's ability to stay in school:

> Honestly, I don't, I don't want to say it was one thing, I think it was several things. Definitely after that incident, I had this kind of like major shift, uh, in my personality where I was kind of, there's a lot of ways to say…I was really timid before and I just started to get angry. I guess because a distrust of authority figures really started to settle in and I started to kind of close myself off. This is when I started to do home instructions, so I really wasn't around other peers my age until, you know, 2 1/2 years afterward. So, you know, kind of looking back on it is like, I was like, you know, angry. I mean, like, I mean, I was angry to the point where I just, I was almost kind of like looking for, you know, an argument… to argue with people. I, oh, I even kind of argued with one of my home instruction teachers where he just didn't come back. It was, it was that bad.

Danielle made sense of her intense anger by attributing it to distrust towards school and authority figures. Danielle was able to get to help with the anger she experienced. She is now able to talk about the emotion as a closed chapter, however, Danielle mentioned concern about how her young nephew will be able to manage the world because he shares a lot in common with her.

Summary

The chapter endeavored to present the generated themes based on the data collection of ten participants. It began by providing a table that presented the demographics of the participants. Then vignettes were used to situate the participant within their African American

experiences. The data was grouped into themes and presented in a second table. The generated themes were based on participant commonalities to arrive at the typology of the child that served two OSS within the persona of the participant. Seven themes were developed from the major corpus and two themes were generated from the outlier findings in the data. The themes included: culpability, intent, deficit language, (parental) school involvement, preparation for post-secondary training, navigating the stigmas of race and reputation, perseverance and hope, the barrier of socioeconomics, and disengaged from future opportunities. A rich description of each theme was developed and supported by participant quotes.

Further, this chapter answered the research questions that guided this study. As a result, the study queries the construct of the African American student who has served OSS as destined for prison and other deficit lifestyles that many theorists proclaim. It also found evidence that the essence of this time-progressed phenomenon may be captured in the typology of the participant's persona.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this study is to understand the lived experiences of African Americans who had served at least two OSS during their K-12 epoch but whose post-secondary life outcomes do not reflect the deficit language (i.e., imprisonment) that researchers often use to describe that population. Few research studies have shed a positive light on the life outcomes of African Americans who have been impacted by OSS. In this research, post-secondary has been generally defined as a college, military, or vocational program, and OSS has been defined as out-of-school suspensions and expulsions. African American is a self-defined term that is depicted through the unique experiences of the study's participants.

Discussion

I started this research with a question regarding the influence of OSS on African Americans who have served at least two during their K-12 epoch and have since completed a post-secondary program. Much of the data collected called forth the memory of the suspension behavior as a fictive construct: a compilation of elements over time and without reflective input (Husserl, van Manen, 1984). The result was a phenomenological example, a symbolic representation of the actual event mediated by the imagination (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002; Piaget, 1999; Subbotskiĭ, 2010; van Manen, 1984). The reduction of the phenomenological event into a figment of the imagination, and then further reduced into a language to communicate a shared example of the phenomenon, allowed both the experience to become divorced from the participant and me to become an eyewitness to the event (Prasad, 2018).

Interpretation of Findings

Data were triangulated through three methods of collection: questionnaire, semi-structured interview, and video journal. A selective analysis resulted in grouped themes based on commonalities in the data. Nine themes, in total, were generated to arrive at the typology of the essence of the suspension behavior within the persona of the participant.

Summary of Thematic Findings

The themes were correlated to the theoretical framework of CoP and the interpretive framework of critical theory. The CoP framework gave purpose to the environment through cultural contexts. Critical theory, on the other hand, was used to manage multiple perspectives and to identify features of the cultural assumptions as ideology and compliance, including hegemony. In this study, I was able to give focus to the participant within their stated suspension environment and identify the influences of others (i.e., OSS, parents, administrators, peers) within the typology of their identity. Thus, CoP and critical theory were used in concert.

Using typology as the interpretation of the suspension behavior that foreshadows the participant's current persona, I was able to cross the boundaries of time, geography, and language. The themes that emerged from the data reflected a stable trajectory of the person's identity from then to now given that identity is how a person makes meaning within their environment. And because interaction within the environment required social engagement between the participant and another person or object, meaning was facilitated through negotiation: the process by which the world is experienced the world, not being bound by language, geography, or time.

Data triangulation was instrumental in identifying patterns, codes, and themes. Bringing together the three data sources while focusing on participants singly and collectively resulted in

seven general themes and two outlier themes. These themes, nine in total, provided findings in two broad areas. The themes of culpability, intent, preparation for future pursuits, perseverance and hope, socioeconomics, and motivation gave understanding that partial interpretation to the research questions could be found in the environmental and cultural contexts of the suspension event. And, that the research questions also found partial interpretation through the concept of sense-making as noted by the themes of deficit language, parental involvement, and navigating perceptions of self and others.

Environmental and Cultural Contexts. The environmental culture of the school, and the community in which it resided, gave context to the assumptions around which participants had to negotiate. In sharing their experiences, participants not only gave detail about the setting in which their school was located but they situated themselves within their respective contexts. Nolan went to school in an urban area. When going home he talked about having to navigate an urban center at which ten schools converged and how he felt validated by having to wear a uniform of Dickies pants and a button down shirt instead of the t-shirt and jeans that students from other schools wore. He also viewed school as a place to learn about social differences. On the other hand, Aidan spoke of attending school in a rural town that was cloaked with the unspoken rules of race relations. And Jacinta referred to school as a place where she had to leave her own community in order to receive a better quality education.

The participants saw the cultural contexts of the community outside of their schools as being the culture through which they negotiated meanings within their schools. Each participant was keenly aware that administration and staff utilized a cultural perspective that differed from theirs. Participants attributed the cultural perspective of the staff to the hegemonic mindset of

how they were treated as students. For example, Makayla, who served a suspension for fighting shared that:

> [My] public school was in an urban area, so we're very aggressive here. Naturally aggressive. Our school was basically right outside of the projects. Our school was also brand new as well. Umm, the state gave the school two years to basically make sure all the students are passing. So, they gave us all this government funding. It was supposed to be an art school trying to be for the arts, but that didn't really work out because they tried to push us all in there from an urban community and we're not used to this kind of thing. And you know, having these teachers with so much intellect and it's like they're forcing it all down your throat, not trying to understand where our background comes from. So, it was just a lot of, like a lot of mix-ups and whatnot and the teachers weren't aware of like the situation they're not used to being in that type of environment.
>
> My school didn't really prepare us at all for college. It was more so, preparing us to leave, and they wanted us out of there. That's what I got from it. They prepared us to leave and not come back

Ray also mentioned that there was a difference between the way he was treated and the way students from more affluent families were treated:

> [We lived in the] suburbs. They were still people who had more money, more affluent than others. And I think those things you know, come into play with either the kids or the teachers or with some parents even being more able to, uh, to come and be a part of the school thing and do that. I think it was like my mom was a single parent, so they kind of would do us any type of way because our parents really couldn't be involved like some parents who were hands-on.

The issue of being able to negotiate school culture speaks to the participant's identity. Thus, the navigation of the cultural context of school reflected how the participant negotiated the suspension environment. In each of these cases, school represented a cultural environment that was not in situ to the participant.

Culpability and Intent. It was not surprising to see a dichotomy within themes come to fore with culpability and intent. As participants grappled with developing an understanding of expectation and meaning in an environment that was not, as Makayla termed, *natural* to them, none took issue with taking responsibility for their actions. Each participant readily stated that they committed the behavior (culpability). However, each participant also stated that though they felt understood, the disciplinarian did not take into consideration the intent behind the behavior when making the decision to suspend. As DeShawn shared:

> I just…I'm trying to kill the bee. You know, there are a couple of girls in there, you know? So, it's like, you know, a few people in there, you know, I'm just trying to kill the bee. I kicked the window. The window just shatters. It's just…I don't know what that metal was in there for, but it wasn't reinforcing a damn thing. The window just shatters.
>
> I was thinking, this is gonna cost my whole check. I wasn't really thinking that I'm gonna get expelled for this. I'm more so thinking that, you know, I'm gonna have to explain to keep my dad from killing me because he might have to pay for it now and then I have to pay him back.
>
> And the AP, he says. Come with me and he takes me into the principal's office. Well, me and the principal we had already had ours. Like I was definitely a mouthy Black kid to the principal. Even though, you know I was fairly bright, you know, make good grades, that type thing, I was still just a mouthy Black kid to this man. So immediately

> when I walk in this office, I know I'm getting expelled. I know he is going to drop the gavel for this. You know it's the most he can do and he did. He expelled me for like, a week. Made me pay for the window.

The participants' ability to identify and take responsibility for their behaviors provided a starting point for the identification of the typology. Being able to pinpoint a feature of the person's identity that could be directly traced from the suspension behavior to the current persona was key to this study. Just as important was the participant's ability to communicate the administrative response that led to the OSS. The pairing is key. The essence of the suspension behavior was recognizable in the successive epochs of post-secondary studies and current persona though it may have changed in intensity. However, in order for me to identify the feature in those epochs, I had to listen for a certain response. For example, DeShawn described his high school as very segregated, that as an athlete he could get away with dating a White girl, and that the White principal held a perception of him as a mouthy Black kid. Because of these elements within the school environment, DeShawn knew he would be suspended for the behavior. In the military, DeShawn spoke about how interesting his time was and that the only negative experience was that of racism. When asked as a follow-up whether there were other challenges, he answered:

> Ohh, I would say racism might have been the only real negative and I don't consider that a negative. I think at 18, I was forced to deal with a lot of grown men issues and an activity I was living the life of a man and it is a crash course in adulthood. You know, it really is. And I think it shaped me very much to be a much better person. As I got older, you know I made a lot of mistakes during that time period. But the cool thing about those

> mistakes were they were my mistakes like I had to suffer the consequences. I had to figure out a way to you know improve the situation that I had made bad.

When DeShawn shared his journal entry, he talked about how White teachers would send Black boys they found problematic to his room for the day. As with all of the participants, once the suspension behavior was identified within the context of the environment, the typology became traceable within the various epochs of the life experiences through a repetition of some sort.

Pursuit, Perseverance, and Motivation. The two general themes of preparation for future pursuits and perseverance and hope are coupled with the outlier theme of motivation. The basic premise of school is the attainment of knowledge through academics. This knowledge is bestowed for the purpose of preparing the workforce for the next generation. This is accomplished by providing students with academics at a level that is rigorous and challenging.

But when a student serves a suspension, they are removed from the classroom. A major impact of OSS is missed instruction. Because the participants of the study each served more than one suspension, looking at the impact of OSS on academics was important. With a resounding, *No*, many of the participants did not feel that school prepared them for life after high school (preparation for future pursuits). The exceptions were Izzy and Nolan, who both expressed that their high school's culture toward academics was embraced by most of the students with whom they chose to associate. As noted by Izzy:

> It was not only an expectation of my family, [it was an] expectation of the school, the district, and the community. Like, OK, I'll give you a really quick stat. My graduating class was like 535 students. All but three went to college out of the Black kids that were in the remedial classes. Maybe like 14 went to community colleges. And one student that didn't go decided to take, like, some trek around Europe. She was a rich White girl, so she

> doesn't count, but other than that, like it's expected. Like it wasn't cool to fail. It wasn't cool to get suspended. It wasn't cool to be an idiot. Like, that's not what that school system was about.

Given that academic rigor and preparation may or may not have been a feature within the school environments, what was of interest was the response to the lack of academic rigor and future preparation. Nine of the ten participants were steadfast regarding their next steps after high school. They communicated a sense awareness of something better than what they had been experiencing in life. Each talked about needing to be able to take care of themselves and to gain a bit more control over life experiences. Braylen shared:

> Well, I knew that I had a couple of options in mind for career choices, but I knew that I would have had to go to college…I knew that. Honestly, just to get far enough away from where I was at, you had to go to college because it's not much opportunity as far as like jobs options unless you move out of the city, which that's actually what I had to do, I don't even live in my state anymore. My home state so just knowing that you most times have to make sure, I guess, it's a lucrative field or a field that you know is gonna bring in money. Hear me. I just knew that I needed to have something to at least take care of myself.

But not everyone expressed perseverance and hope. Ray's journey was different from the others. His motivation for post-secondary studies came in the form of an ultimatum from his mother, a year after his high school graduation:

> I really didn't know what I was gonna do after high school, to be honest. I kind of waffled all around the place. After a year, I kind of didn't do anything and kind of was just living

> the life. And my mom actually made me go do either pick between school or go somewhere and get a trade. And actually, I went to get a trade first.

The themes preparation for future pursuits, perseverance and hope, and motivation that emerged from the data revealed that for the participants, the interruption of academic progress that was caused by OSS did not disrupt post-secondary goals.

Socioeconomics. Socioeconomics emerged as an outlier theme. It is included as part of the context because it presented itself as having a unique environmental impact on the participant. Ray impressed me as being less passionate about his environment than the other participants. Whereas Makayla stated that aggression was a norm in her community, she also stated a passionate desire to get out:

> I wanna go to college. So, it was just like I had no clue. I had no idea and whatnot, so I just wanted to get out of there. I just think I learned a lot of life lessons from there, but I just knew I have to leave. I cannot stay.

DeShawn shared negative experiences within his school community with the principal and academic preparation for post-secondary life, but he also made plans to join the military in his junior year of high school. Ray was different. He talked about the ills of one school community as compared to another. He never gave a sense of engagement in any of the schools and communities to which he referred, nor did he speak about engagement with his future. Ray talked most about moving from community to community and what that meant to his family:

> I really don't think school did much, to be honest. I think the only thing it really helped me do was be away from shootings. Or be in different communities because I went to like different areas of school, like three or four times. And that's really the only thing school

does is prepare me, maybe for the world and we're going around different people and different communities maybe…

So, my mom wasn't able to really get into the school activities and know exactly what was going on back there by her being in a single parent who worked, you know, sometimes double shifts worked in a factory. So, she really didn't know. She just thinks because we moved from one bad neighborhood, that was all the way back, that it would be just totally better. Everything was great and everything was. It was better in some ways far as safety and the safety probably in the school and things like that, that area.

The impact of socioeconomics seems to factor heavily on Ray's experiences. School represented the opportunity to live in a safer environment. His reasoning for not engaging in the environments of school and community, all center around the socioeconomics of safety, mom's availability, and family income. Thus, it was difficult to determine the influence of OSS on Ray's life experiences given the adverse impact of socioeconomics.

Sense-Making. The process by which we experience the world is considered sense-making and develop our identities. Sense-making grabs and sustains our attention, it is simultaneously resistant and malleable, and it can affect or be affected. It is context specific.

Sense-making is a stable feature of identity. It serves as a device through which a person negotiates their environment. It is not bound by language, time, or geography, neither is it limited to a social interaction with a person. Sense-making is dynamic – an active conveyance that combines both innovative and historical meaning in the moment – and allows for an understanding that is based out of familiarity. Within sense-making three themes emerged: deficit language, parental involvement, and navigating perceptions of self and others.

Deficit Language. Deficit language refers to a condition that interprets or operationalizes empirical differences as inferior or problematizes the behavior of a target individual. Many participants were stunned by the harsh words used when disciplined. DeShawn's story about the bee includes talks about the effect of harsh words on a person:

> [The suspension] affected me a lot after that. You know in the in the short term it was negative in the long term it became a positive. In the short term you know you did it. You question yourself sometimes when people continue to tell you, you're a bad person. I mean when people keep telling you that there's something wrong with you, at some point, sometimes you question [yourself]. I think, you know, I had a little period, not long, but I had a little period there as a youth where you know, I questioned me a little bit. But my parents did a good job giving me knowledge itself, so it didn't last long, you know.

For Makayla, she felt misunderstood by administration. Makayla did not feel that the administration understood why she felt the need to defend herself. In her perspective the incident was about survival, from the school's perspective the behavior was a threat to the student body:

> So, you really have to always like stay ready and you never know what can happen. So, what I learned at home was to always, like, defend myself, never to be a punk, you know, stand up for yourself, be verbal, be vocal to really show somebody that you're serious about what you're talking about. Because once you show that side, I promise they won't mess with you again. It's just unfortunate you have to show that side to people. But like I said, I'm a very calm and cool collective person. I never do too much. My parents have always taught me well, but on the school side I did get physical. I had to be removed from the premises because I'm considered a threat to the student body. So, I had to respect that, even though they didn't understand where I came from.

Along with processing the thought of being a threat to the student body, Makayla also had to process within group bias, bias from other African Americans (staff and students) within the school community:

> I wanna say they didn't know how to, like, handle me or approach me because they weren't sure what kind of background I came from. Umm, I didn't speak like how the other students were speaking, like I didn't have any vernacular language I, like I said, I came from a pretty good, umm, home good upbringing.
>
> How do I say, like I didn't have a hood accent or anything. Or I've just, just like how I'm speaking, so it will come off as, Oh, she's a White girl. She's not from around here, but I am. I just don't adapt to it. It's just not who I am. So, like the staff members at school, just never really knew how to approach me in this situation, even with the whole suspension thing, because they're shocked because they're like, I would have never would have guessed that you would have put her in a headlock.

The deficit language encountered by the study participants gave them pause. When recounting the event, they stopped speaking for a brief moment as if still in disbelief. And oftentimes they would come out of the reverie with a head shake. The impact of the deficit language used against the participant seemed to be intact and still defensible.

Parental Involvement. Participants noted that parental involvement was linked to the type of treatment they received within the school environment. All participants noted the impact of parental involvement. For many of the participants, parents were at meetings when trouble arose at school. Izzy gave an account of her dad scheduling school meetings before his work day began:

> So, I was never someone who instigated anything physically, but I was going to finish it. You don't put your hands on me, you know. So, my father gets the phone call. He'd be there at 6:00 o'clock in the morning because he had a two hour commute. You want to meet with me? I'll meet you early in my suit and tie. He was going there to do whatever he needed to do. Sometimes he got me out of the suspension, sometimes he didn't because I could fight.
>
> But my parents always understood that I was defending myself so that I, I always had their support when it came to that, they did not care. They said if anyone puts their hands on you or assaults you or does whatever you have the right to do what you need to defend yourself.

Michael recounts that his parents had to intervene on his behalf because of racial discrimination (which happened to have been the motivation behind his suspension):

> I've had several encounters with, with teachers that I felt racially discriminated against. I had a very, very specific encounter where my sister had to come to the classroom to talk to my teacher because I was being discriminated against like fiercely. And you know, we had a counseling session and my parents had to come in.

Ray noted his experience as:

> Well, my mom was away working single mom. And I have a brother. So, she wasn't able to really get into the school activities and know exactly what was going on back there by her being in a single parent who worked, you know, sometimes double shifts worked in a factory.

> I think it was like my mom was a single parent, so they kind of kind of would do us like that…any type of way because our parents really couldn't be involved like some parents who were hands on.

Overall, I did not view parental involvement as a stance of home against school. Instead, parental involvement was a tool by which participants could better assess their interpretive lenses within the school environment.

Navigating Perception of Self and Others. The theme, navigating perceptions of self and others refers to both: how participants viewed themselves and how participants responded to the behaviors of others. To that end, participants found that reputations are sometimes difficult to shake once in place. For some, the reputation became the person; it was the persona with which others interacted. DeShawn expressed the feeling that he carried the reputation of being a mouthy, bad, little Black kid, and equated that reputation as a *spirit* that adults targeted:

> I had a teacher or two that were they were extremely nurturing to me. Yeah, because they saw, you might say, my potential. Other teachers saw, you know, a bad ass little kid. I had a lot of teachers who, they only saw, the bad ass little kid and that's really for a lot a lot of my schooling.
>
> A lot of my school experiences were based on that [reputation]. It as a reputation that followed in a small town. It was a, it was a *spirit* that a lot of people wanted to stamp out. I was young when I realized that I had a voice that I would not allow people to, to stamp out. So, it was. I had a lot of encounters with people based on my race and on me being a mouthy, little Black kid, pretty much.

Braylen described the animus as a negative image:

> Sometimes it felt like you were just like a pity party or something… Actually, I was well off. My parents, I mean. It wasn't like, you know, like we didn't have the finances or whatever the case was. That was never the case. But I just felt like they [White staff] seeing you as a troublemaker, you know what I'm saying? It was just, just a *negative image* and they treated you as such. Whenever anything pertains to you or your name, they just instantly had a *negative stigma, o*r just a *negative thought automatically.*
>
> I had great grades. I was never, you know, was never a failing student. I've always had A's and B's, maybe a few C's. But for the most part A's and B's. And even academics wasn't enough for someone to still say, OK, well, you know her academics is completely opposite from, you know, her behavior or whatever the case is.

For Izzy, it was a matter of being targeted for clinical and remedial services:

> They [White school staff] do try to box you and still segregate you, but my parents were educated enough to combat that and know that that's what was coming.
>
> So, they did a lot of fighting and they made sure that we got our rights and that we weren't placed in remedial programs and that we were able to take advantage of everything. My parents knew how to finagle it.
>
> I remember when the school psychologist interviewed me without my parents' knowledge. They're trying to figure out about Black people. I was very tight lipped so then they sent a letter home to my parents saying they thought I was mentally retarded and that I needed to be checked out and put into remedial classes. My parents said, Ohh no, that's not the case. What are you doing talking to my child without my knowledge? Like that's how it was all the time.

With this theme, it appears that OSS was not the only element within the school environment that impacted the participant's identity. Participants navigated negative elements in their school environments that had the potential to critically impact identity. For some, participants had to find the internal strength to manage the negativity on their own. For others, parents stepped in to intervene on behalf of their child. Regardless of intervention, participants made sense of their environment in such a way that in their current phase of life they refer to as having more control. As Jacinta shared:

> With that being said again, I just I pick my battles. I don't run from conflict, but if conflict presents itself, I know how to handle it in a professional and tactful way. Where, you know, we are all able to talk on a professional level, talk through our issues and you know work towards a common goal.

And DeShawn as well:

> I think at 18, I was forced to deal with a lot of grown men issues and I was living the life of a man and it is a crash course in adulthood. You know, it really is. And I think it shaped me very much to be a much better person. As I got older, you know I made a lot of mistakes during that time period. But the cool thing about those mistakes were they were my mistakes like I had to suffer the consequences. I had to figure out a way to you know improve the situation that I had made bad.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings from the current research study revealed an implication for policy and one for practice. The policy implication is based on the projection of deficit life outcomes on the African American student. The implication for practice is based on the unresolved theme of racism found in every narrative.

Implication for Policy

The deficit experiences studied by theorists are often projected as features of the African American experience (Federal Register, 2016; Skiba et al., 2009). However, unlike national data that states otherwise, most of my participants disclosed that they came from two-parent households and that their parents were involved in their educational pursuits. Some participants did not find their secondary education academically rigorous, but others did. Overall, grades fell into the A, B, and C ranges, and none spoke of having to repeat a course or grade level. Most voluntarily talked about the socioeconomics of their families. Over half stated that there were no socioeconomic stressors. Two stated that there was neither lack nor need though they were poor, and one talked about socioeconomic insecurities. Finally, the features of theoretical outcomes and life experiences do not mirror the features noted in the experiences of most of this study's participants.

Implication for Practice

When talking about racism and discrimination, there is usually no discussion about whether it demands a response from the person targeted. The narratives of the participants depict behaviors as responses to ongoing microaggressions. The behavioral responses were not toward a single episode, nor were they responses to something seen in the environment. The behavioral responses reflected an emotional unease in the person. As Makayla stated, *I just couldn't take it anymore.* Izzy did not instigate fights but was willing to fight if necessary. As a fifth grader, Michael could not express why he threw the object at the teacher but understood that he threw the object because the teacher *displayed racism towards myself and others and was just a very nasty, mean-spirited person.* Ray gave an account of telling the administration that he was being bullied and if they did not intervene, he would defend himself.

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

This study of the influence of OSS on African Americans is added to the empirical and theoretical literature. Two implications emerged from the data that directly relate to the extant literature. These implications were gleaned through analysis using interpretive and theoretical frameworks.

Theoretically, the African American experience in America is defined by deficit language (Losen & Skiba, 2010; Skiba et al., 2009). Likewise, the school experiences of African American children are depicted using terms such as: at risk, likelihood, and probability (Federal Register, 2016). And, the projected life outcomes of those who have served at least one OSS includes low academic achievement and a high probability of carceral engagement.

However, the empirical data represented in this research was based on African Americans who had served at least two OSS. Except for the outlier data, the participants in this study did not define their lives using deficit language. Many expressed that they were from two-parent families, that there was no lack in the home, and that they had a desire to use education as the route by which to lead a better life. Finally, the life outcomes of the participants included careers that such as two mental health therapists, a communications specialist, a logistics manager, and an engineer. And, one participant held a vocational certificate, one completed military training, and the rest held degrees – three of which were at the master's level. Thus, the life outcomes of the participants in this study diverged from current theories.

The study's data contributes to the field of OSS by not categorically grouping African Americans into a single subset of life experiences (Sowell, 1976; Teo, 2010; Yosso, 2005). By extending an understanding that the African American experience is varied, theoretical

understandings of OSS can be developed to better inform the topic. Thus, the projection of deficit language outcomes globally onto African American students was not substantiated.

The second implication that emerged from the data was that of implicit bias, specifically microaggressions. Theoretically, microaggressions are often reified through the physiognomic characteristics of the person or group at risk, which for this study was the African American student as defined in the Federal Register (Hotchkins, 2016; Kiverstein et al., 2021; Schmidt, 2018). In hegemonic environments, such as that which schools represent, the physiognomic characteristics carry a perceived meaning and value associated with the features of the person or group (Gibson, 1939; Kiverstein et al., 2021). Microaggressions are given in the form of seemingly innocuous comments that are not engaging due to their subtlety and sometimes non-verbal delivery (Hotchkins, 2016; Schmidt, 2018). It is also important to understand that harm is perpetrated by microaggressions through cumulative effects (Hotchkins, 2016; Schmidt, 2018). Finally, the cumulative effect of microaggressions can induce profound psychological and physical responses (e.g., disruptive behaviors, illnesses) as the targeted person of the microaggression strives to maintain a sense of self (Hotchkins, 2016; Schmidt, 2018).

Empirically, the data from this study corroborates the literature. Many of the participants factored race, or other covert forms of bias, in their narratives. Participants also noted that the bias was not a single occurrence, instead, participants spoke of the reputation that the other person held of them. The reputation often included a racially constructed feature.

This research contributes to the topic of microaggression, especially as it relates to OSS. Understanding that the cumulative effect of microaggressions can produce profound psychological and physical responses may help to explain some of the behaviors that are

exhibited by African American students. It may also help in understanding why the rate of suspension for Black students has been constant for nearly 50 years.

Scope, Limitations, and Delimitations

In summation, this research, its scope, limitations, and delimitations are presented. Scope, limitations, and delimitations can be regarded as the decisions the researcher makes while developing a study or the issues with which the researcher must contend while performing research (Akanle et al., 2020). Pragmatically, the researcher is faced with what to study, the purpose of the study, and how to approach the study, all of which constitute the scope of the study (Akanle et al.; Coker, 2022). From the scope, limitations and delimitations arise in the study. Limitations are unplanned developments that the researcher must address, even if there is no impact (Coker). However, delimitations are the decisions that the researcher faces that are made in accordance with the scope of the study (Akanle et al., 2020).

Scope

This study researched the African American experience within the scope of OSS. This study gleaned the lived experiences of 10 participants who had experienced at least two OSS events during their K-12 epoch using a phenomenological approach. Using the data collection approaches of questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and journal prompts, lived experiences were shared, becoming phenomenological examples of the event. The researcher witnessed each collection activity forcing the data to be delivered in a way customized for the receiver (Bernstein, 1964). The data familiarity was begun upon receipt of the data and continued through the method of reiteration, meaning interpretation was developed from the impression of the data on the understanding of the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2016; Prasad, 2018; Rahman, 2017; Teo, 2010).

Research presents that African American students do not demonstrate academic achievement at the same rate as White students (Davis, 2018; Dutil, 2020; Martin et al., 2019). One reason provided for impacting Black students' achievement is the use of exclusionary discipline, especially OSS (Barnes & Motz, 2018; Pesta, 2018; Welsh & Little, 2018). Much of the research on the problem continues by using deficit language terminology to depict the life outcomes of African Americans who have experienced OSS (Barnes & Motz; Pesta). This research explored the experiences of African Americans who had served at least two OSS but did not live the lifestyle depicted by the deficit language.

Limitations

This research is a small study. None of the participants had the same or similar narratives. They did not live in the same geographic location. They were of different ages and went to school during different eras. This would be a limitation to understanding a specific group of people within a specific time period. However, at the same time, because ages ranged from 23 to 45 and participants were from different parts of the country, the sample population reflected the pervasive and enduring nature of the problem.

A limitation to overcome during data collection was receiving the consent and demographics information but not the written questionnaire responses. As a result, questionnaire questions were gleaned as part of the recorded session. Turning away a consenting participant or chiding someone for not completing a document section was inappropriate. The questionnaire questions' construct differed from the construct of the semi-structured interview and video journal entry. The questionnaire questions required simple responses that were engaging but not involved. The questionnaire was designed to introduce me to the suspension event and to make me aware of the initial impact, separate from the details. Asking the questionnaire questions in

the recorded session provided a warm-up activity, allowing me to get to know my participants' engagement styles while also allowing the participant to get to know mine.

There were technical difficulties with my tenth data collection participant. His session was scheduled to begin 30 minutes after the ninth participant, whose session went without a hitch. The difficulties were connectivity issues. There was a delay in both the audio and visual feeds. Our screens froze, and our speech was relayed in spaced bytes. He offered to try again the next day, which we did. The technical issues continued, but we got through the session. The tenth participant was as engaged as the other participants. He provided answers that were rich in detail. He communicated that he was invested in the topic and wanted to ensure the technical issues did not diminish the task.

Delimitations

A delimitation of this study was that the construct of the African American identity was collectively defined and is thus uniquely situated for this group only. Each participant proffered a unique understanding of their African American experience that cannot be transferred to another grouping. In this study, ethnicity was seen as an individual experience within a collective construct with multiple values, including the perceived values of others. This perspective was consistent with the theoretical framework of CoP that postures that identity is formed through social engagement with various levels of environments.

A second delimitation of the study was that participants were required to have served at least two OSS during their K-12 epoch. This delimitation was a researcher choice. The presence of two OSS in a person's experience allowed the participant choice over what to share, regardless of reasoning.

Finally, a major delimitation of this study was to not focus on racism as a point of social engagement. Participants alluded to issues of race in their shared examples, which left the impression that systemic issues of race were being navigated in their suspension experiences. However, a discourse on race as a systemic element of the suspension experience required detailed research using a different approach, placing it beyond the scope of this study. The introduction of race by participants as a point of social engagement gave insight into the need to develop an instrument that would be strong enough to measure the presence of racism in the system of OSS. Without an instrument strong enough to measure racism, I believe its inherent presence in the makeup of OSS could be denied and attributed to something else (Gibson, 1939; Horkheimer, 2018; Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002; Teo, 2010).

Recommendations for Future Research

Research on OSS and African American students is replete with deficit language. Theorists have opined for about 50 years that African American students are at risk for receiving OSS. For 50 years the rate of suspension for Black students has remained, without reported change, at three times greater than the rate of suspension for White students. As a result of such a high rate of exclusion from the learning environment, theorists further opine that Black students who have served OSS are more likely to experience adversities such as (but not limited to) low academic achievement, carceral involvement, and poor marketable skills that represent workplace readiness. Thus, the research presents the African American student using an impoverished profile that need not accurately represent the Black student in the classroom. So, to address the 50-year problem, the following recommendations are proposed.

Recommendation

I recommend that funding be allocated to study the post-secondary outcomes of African Americans who have served OSS but did not follow the deficit path on a larger scale for the purpose of designing procedural policies and academic intervention practices.

Recommendation

I recommend that administrators in LEA receive professional development on identifying non-physical forms of racism and discrimination, especially covert racism and microaggressions, and factor in the cumulative impact on the person, as noted by the resulting behavior when making disciplinary decisions.

Conclusion

Typology is the interpretation of the suspension behavior that foreshadows the participant's current persona across the boundaries of time, geography, and language. The typology of the suspension behavior was gleaned from the participant's persona through an exploration of identity (van Manen, 2017; Washington, 2013; Welsh & Little, 2018; Wenger, 2019). This research revealed the participant's typology within the context of their identity.

The literature review for this study, structured within the environmental framework of CoP, took time to define the Black community as it was before *Brown v. Board of Education*. The significance of understanding the community at that time was to present the positive mindset exemplified by African Americans and the role school played in the Black community. The chapter then looked at *Brown v. Board of Education* and the Civil Rights Movement, including the mindset of growth and justice that characterized Black people during that era. Corporations during that same period, including LEAs, were identified as entities with social responsibility. The significance of examining the time of the 1950s and 1960s social clime was to bring to the fore that OSS was developed in an era of civil unrest.

Vignettes of lived experiences were used to situate the participant. The data was grouped into themes. The generated themes, based on participant commonalities, arrived at the typology of the behavior within the persona of the participant. Seven themes were developed from the major corpus and two themes were generated from the outlier findings in the data. The themes included: culpability, intent, deficit language, parental involvement, preparation for future pursuits, navigating the perceptions of self and other, perseverance and hope, socioeconomics, and motivation. A rich description of each theme was developed and supported by participant quotes.

Finally, the outcome of my research differed from the stated outcome of the national research. Whereas national research projects a deficit life outcome on African American students who have served OSS, the outcome of this body of work was not in agreement. This study was able to identify the typology of the suspension behavior in the current persona of the participant using the theoretical framework of CoP and the interpretive framework of critical theory. And though the typologies of the suspension behavior were identified in the current personae of the participants, they were not found in conjunction with deficit life outcomes as predicted by the national research.

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Appendix A: IRB Document – IRB Approval Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

April 13, 2023

Andria Watkins
Jose Puga

Re: IRB Approval - IRB-FY22-23-1226 INFLUENCE OF K-12 OSS EXPERIENCE ON BLACK STUDENTS GRADUATING FROM POST-SECONDARY PROGRAMS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

Dear Andria Watkins, Jose Puga,

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: April 13, 2023. If you need to change 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 questionnaire, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

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, Ph.D., CIP
Administrative Chair
Research Ethics Office

Appendix B: IRB Document – Consent Form

Title of the Project: Influence of K-12 OSS experience on Black students graduating from post-secondary programs: A qualitative study.

Principal Investigator: Andria Watkins, Ph.D. candidate, Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be an African American who has served at least two out-of-school suspensions (OSS) during your kindergarten through 12th-grade years and who has completed a post-secondary program such as college (any level), trade or vocational school, professional training, or military preparation such as basic training or MOS. 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 understand the experiences of African Americans who have served at least two out-of-school suspensions (OSS) during their kindergarten through 12th-grade years but whose life outcomes after completing high school, do not reflect the negative language, such as going to jail for a long period of time, that researchers often use to describe that population.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to participate in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. Participate in three online data collection activities: an online questionnaire; a virtual, face-to-face interview; and a virtual, face-to-face journal prompt.
2. Part 1 of the online questionnaire includes electronic consent to participate in the study. Part 2 requires completing demographic data that will be utilized in the selection process. Part 3 of the questionnaire is the collection of study data by creating four lists. The questionnaire should take less than 20 minutes. And Part 4 of the questionnaire will provide information on the next steps.
3. The first 12 candidates to respond and complete the questionnaire will be chosen. All candidates will be emailed their status. The first 12 candidates who meet the study criterion will have 48 hours to respond to the email with their acceptance to participate. Study participants will be emailed the date of the interview session.
4. The second activity will be that of a face-to-face interview in a virtual environment. This interview will be scheduled via email after the completed questionnaire. There will be no writing involved, and the session will take approximately 1-hour.
5. The final activity will be that of the journal prompt. It will be a 20-minute session that immediately follows the interview. You will have 15 minutes to respond orally to a prompt regarding a suspension you felt was unfair. There is no writing. The response will be recorded as you speak.
6. Both the interview and journal prompt sessions require the camera for the video feed. Cameras must remain on during virtual interactions.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. Information from this study may provide indirect benefits in the form of reflective practices.

Benefits to society may include a contribution to the body of knowledge surrounding the disciplinary practice of student behavior; affect future disciplinary practices and policies within the school setting; and pre-service teacher training.

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. However, due to the reflective nature of this study, certain discomforts may arise. On interview days, participants are encouraged to share their discomfort to the extent they can. If overwhelmed, participants can leave the situation of discomfort at will. Neither the researcher nor Liberty University will provide medical, including emotional, treatment, or financial compensation if you are injured or become ill as a result of participating in this research project. This does not waive any of your legal rights nor release any claim you might have based on negligence.

How will personal information be protected?

Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

Participants' privacy and/or confidentiality will be protected in the following ways.

- De-identification of data by not using participant names or locations of incidents
- Pseudonyms will be used for introduction and all interactions with the researcher, including data collection, research, and transcriptions.
- Encrypted Cloud storage will be used for data and transcription storage
- Interview and journal prompt sessions will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored using encrypted cloud storage for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings
- Data will be stored for three years after the conclusion of the research or to the extent mandated by current law.

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

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

What are the costs to you to be part of the study?

No personal additional expenses are anticipated as a part of this 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 or phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

How to Withdraw from the Study

The researcher conducting this study is:

Andria Watkins

You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at the phone number or email listed. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Jose Puga.

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.

Your Consent

By signing this document electronically, you agree to participate in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. A copy of this document can be downloaded for your records. The researcher will keep a copy of 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 in the document.

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, video-record, and photograph me as part of my participation in this study.

_____

Printed Subject Name

_____

Signature & Date

Appendix C: IRB Document – Social Media Recruitment Flyer

Andria Watkins
IRB Social Media Post
IRB Application
March 13, 2023

ATTENTION FACEBOOK FRIENDS: I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Philosophy degree at Liberty University. The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of African Americans who have served out-of-school suspensions but whose life outcomes do not reflect the negative language that researchers often use in their descriptions. To participate, you must be an African American who has served at least two out-of-school suspensions during your kindergarten through 12th-grade years and have completed a post-secondary program such as college (any level), trade or vocational schools, professional training, or military preparation such as basic training or MOS. Participants will be asked to complete an online questionnaire (20 minutes or less), a virtual, audio-, and video-recorded interview (50-60 minutes), and a virtual, video-recorded journal prompt (20 minutes or less). Participants will be able to review their transcripts to ensure accuracy. If you meet the study criteria and want to participate, please click the link at the end of this post. Your consent will be asked as Part 1 of the questionnaire. Please review this information, and if you agree to participate, please sign the consent form digitally and click the "proceed to questionnaire" button when you have done so.

To take the questionnaire, click here.

Appendix D: Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness

Qualitative research is a non-numerical approach to analyzing data. (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Its focus is on making sense-knowledge out of the experiences of human actors. In order to do so, an interpretive lens was employed to develop an understanding of the experiences and meanings that individuals and groups assign a phenomenon so that it can be communicated to those outside of the phenomenon's experience (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Saldaña & Mallette, 2017). This study followed the practice set forth by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Erlandson (1993) to ensure trustworthiness. The practice of trustworthiness, according to theorists, is established through credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and ethical considerations.

Credibility

In this study, a consistent review using multiple approaches to data analysis was used. Participants were given access to their questionnaire responses, interview responses, and journal entries for review and accuracy in recording. They could review the themes gleaned from their data to assess whether they reflected the essence of the lived experience. This procedure allowed for the triangulation of data, a technique that facilitates the identification of elements germane to the understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Martínez-Morato et al., 2021).

Transferability

I do not profess the transferability of the research outcomes presented in this dissertation. What I do hope is that, given the procedures, the study can be replicated. One characteristic of extreme value to this study was the flexibility that the interpretative framework of critical theory

and the analytic framework of Communities of Practice provides to the body of knowledge regarding post-secondary life outcomes (Horkheimer, 2018; Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002; Saldaña & Mallette, 2017; Wenger, 1999). These frameworks give critical space through which the individual's behaviors within the context of corporate social performance (systems of meanings) could be examined and thus provided context by which the study's methods could be replicated (Denney & Powell, 2020; Eckert, 2017; Horkheimer; Horkheimer & Adorno; Washington, 2015; Wenger).

Dependability

A reiterative review, analysis, and interpretation of the data utilizing a procedure outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) were employed to ensure dependability. In addition, a journal was maintained to record my deepening engagement with the research (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Husserl, 1964). Additionally, since dependability refers to the consistency and replicability of procedures as a method of making meaning of the outcome, descriptions of my procedures and methods are detailed in this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The procedures and methods used in this research are supported by the literature and written in plain language. My committee has thoroughly reviewed these procedures and deemed them sufficient to demonstrate mastery of the method as I designed it.

Confirmability

Through a reiterative review, I journaled my relationship with the data and changes in my perspectives as themes emerged and meanings were revealed (Husserl, 1964; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Rindler, 1956). Through my conversations on paper, I sought to allow the data to reveal themes and trends without influence from my personal interpretations (Bolker, 1998; Husserl; Lincoln & Guba; Van Manen, 1997). Most importantly, interviewees were invited to read their

responses to all data collected regarding their lived experiences. They were also privileged to respond to the themes I gleaned to confirm that they represent an interpretive essence of the shared experience (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations for this project were comprehensive. Pseudonyms were assigned for all data reported. The pseudonym allowed for the masking of participant information and participant privacy. Specific locations referred to in gleaned data were changed for privacy. Broad or general locations, such as parts of the country or school offices, were utilized in descriptive data reporting. All data is secured through an encrypted database and will be stored for three years upon completion of this study, after which time the documents will be deleted. I am the only person accessing the stored data to protect privacy. All IRB rules will be adhered to regarding data collection, masking, storage, and deletion.

Appendix E: Questionnaire

Part I - Consent

[Embedded link will go here to take participant to full consent document.]

By signing this document electronically, you agree to participate in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. A copy of this document can be downloaded for your records. The researcher will keep a copy of 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 in the document.

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/video-record/photograph me as part of my participation in this study.

Type your Name as an Electronic Signature:
Today's Date:
Email address to be used during this study:
[Note: The entire, downloadable consent will be included on the Google Form.]

Part II – Demographic Questionnaire

1. Please indicate your gender at the time of suspension.
a. Male
b. Female
c. Other
2. Please indicate your ethnicity.
a. Black or African American
b. Asian
c. Caucasian
d. Hispanic
e. American Indian
f. Other (please specify)
3. Name(s) of K-12 school district.
City and state:
4. Have you ever served an out-of-school suspension during kindergarten through 12th grade?
a. No
b. Yes
If yes, how many?
a. 1
b. 2
c. 3 or more

5. Age and grade at the time of the suspension you would like to share for the purpose of this study.

Age:

Grade:

(Participants must select Black or African American for Question 2, and Yes with a sub-answer choice of b. or c. for Question 4 to become a candidate for selection.)

6. Please indicate your current age range.

a. 20-29
b. 30-39
c. 40-49
d. 50-59
e. 60-69
f. 70-79
g. 80 or older

7. Please list the type of post-secondary program in which you are participating:

a. College/University

Type of degree:

a. Associates
b. Bachelors
c. Masters
d. Doctorate
e. Other (please specify):
f. Not applicable

b. Professional Certification

Type of program

a. Plumbing
b. Electrical
c. Construction
d. Pharmacy Tech
e. Security Guard
f. Project Management
g. Other (please specify):
h. Not applicable

8. Name or pseudonym by which you would like to be referred to during the interview and journal prompt:

Preferred name:

Part III – Research Data Questionnaire

Out-of-school suspensions are usually given when a student's behavior is regarded as socially unacceptable within the school community. OSS tells the story of how the school felt about the behavior. Think about one suspension that you felt was unfair. Please use that event to

base the answers to the questionnaire questions. This is the only written activity. Responses to the questionnaire questions need not be longer than 5-7 sentences. During the last activity, you will have an opportunity to share your story regarding this suspension recorded in an oral format.

1. Students oftentimes attend schools that are in their neighborhood or town. The student populations of these schools reflect the demographics of the surrounding community. Other than the student population, in what ways, or how, did your school reflect African American culture? BDQ
2. Public schools offer equal access to curriculum, services, and activities to all students. Were there any times when you felt that certain classes were not for you, or certain services were not offered to you, or certain activities were closed to you? Choosing just one area (classes, services, activities), please explain your answer. BDQ
3. Behaviors can be misunderstood, especially in regard to motivations and intentions. In a few sentences, tell what behavior was the subject of your suspension. How was the behavior misunderstood by administration? SQ1
4. Before a school administrator (principal, dean) gives a suspension, they usually ask, "Why?" Do you feel that you were in a mindset to explain rationally? If so, how did your explanation impact the outcome? If not, please explain your response when asked about the errant behavior. SQ2
5. In thinking about the incident, why do you think you made the behavior choice that you did? SQ2
6. Finally, attending programs after high school that focus on job certification or degree attainment requires the determination to begin and the stamina to finish. Please explain whether you feel high school prepared you academically for the challenge. CRQ, SQ1

Appendix F: Research Questions

Central Research Question (CRQ)

The central research question asks: What are the lived experiences of African Americans who have served at least two OSS during their K-12 epoch and persisted to the completion of a post-secondary academic/career program? The participants in this study will be students who are African American and completing a post-secondary degree or career certification program. I am interested in hearing how the participants explain their experiences of being suspended during their K-12 education as a part of their life story. The use of open-ended questions will hopefully provide insight into individual accounts of identity, meaning, and learning, and possibly lead to insights regarding the types of support networks engaged during their journey (Wenger, 2019). By presenting questions in an open-ended format, study participants will be able to provide personal accounts of their lived experiences (Van Manen, 2017).

Sub-Question One (SQ1)

The first guiding question asks: How do African American post-secondary students believe OSS has positively or negatively influenced their identity? This question is specific to the factors which impact a person's identity. The question is reflexive and allows the participant to answer for different episodes in their school education (Van Manen, 2017). According to Wenger (2019), identity is complex. First, it can be seen as lived – experienced by self and others through participation and reification. Secondly, identity is negotiated. In this sense, negotiation makes identity fluid, always becoming and pervasive, shaped by a context but not limited by epoch (i.e., adolescence). Next, the attributes of participation, reification, and fluidity makes identity social as seen by its manifestation within experiences bounded by contexts familiar to the individual. Identity requires learning as it is a trajectory in time that defines its present

manifestation through the interpretation of its own past and desired (future) experiences. Identity is a nexus of concurrent memberships in multiple forms, negotiating the boundaries through reconciliation. And finally, identity balances the effect of local-global interactions. It is an interplay between the immediacy of local activities and the expectancies found in global engagement (Wenger, 1999).

Sub-Question Two (SQ2)

The second guiding question asks: How do African American post-secondary students bracket the experiences of the behavioral occurrence and the resulting OSS? In this question, I want the study participants to relay their personal experiences in terms of their life relating to being suspended. I am interested in garnering the meaning of the experience from how the participant tells their story (Van Manen, 2017). Wenger (1999) defines meaning as the characterization of the process by which we experience the world and that which makes our engagement meaningful. In this sense, meaning is deemed as a method of negotiating within our eco-niche that demonstrates a continuous relationship between the participant and the objects (resources) within their environment. Because the act of negotiating is not restricted to social interactions between people but also applies to interactions between participants and environmental objects, a participant's negotiation of meaning is not bound by language. For Wenger (2019), negotiation is how a person navigates and interacts within their eco-niche in order to make their experiences meaningful.

Combining meaning with negotiation, Wenger (1999) formed the concept of negotiation of meaning. The concept is a single capture of the thought of sustained attention and readjustment – similar to that required when negotiating a sharp curve while driving. Wenger described the complexity of living meaningfully as an inherent duality – an active conveyance

that purports and imports both dynamic and historical meaning. This duality gives meaning to a character that is both resistant and malleable. It lends itself to an ability to affect and be affected. Negotiation reflects the properties of a conduit by engaging a multiplicity of factors and perspectives. Yet through all of its complexities, Wenger stated that a person's negotiated meaning could, at best, be partial, tentative, ephemeral, and context-specific: incomplete. Thus, meaning is a figment that finds utility in the context of its origins (Gibson, 1939; Piaget, 2013, Van Manen, 1997).

Appendix G: Interview Protocol

Semi-Structured Individual Interview Questions

General Information Questions	
Date	Month: Day: Year:
Time	Start time: End time:
Recording Method	
Your Name	
Your Email	
Participant Demographics Taken from Part 2 of Questionnaire	
Gender at time of suspension	
Name(s) of K-12 school district	
Number of K-2 suspensions	
Age and grade at the time of the suspension	
Current age range	
Post-secondary program	
Name or pseudonym	
Interview Protocol Questions	

Upbringing

To begin this interview, I would like to ask questions about your upbringing.

1. Based on the information you provided in the questionnaire, the OSS that came to mind occurred during [elementary/ middle/high] school in ___ (city/state). Is that correct? BDQ

   Follow-up: What was that school like when you were going there?

2. Was the school located in the same neighborhood you lived in? How would you describe the neighborhood? In answering this question, you can focus on the people, the families,

the organizations, or anything else that stands out to you the most when you think about your childhood neighborhood. BDQ, SQ2

Follow-up: Do you still live in this neighborhood?

3. People have different ways of viewing the way their schools function. How would you compare the way you viewed your school to the way your parents (or guardians) viewed that school? BDQ, SQ2

Follow up: Do you see your school in the same way or in a different way from your parents? How so?

Follow up: Can you tell me more about what makes you think that you have a different or similar view of your school than your parents (or guardians)?

Follow-up: What do you see as two differences and similarities between your school and the neighborhood?

4. Sometimes an experience, language, or way of being leads a person to identify with a community. For example, a requirement of this research was that the participant identify as African American. What makes you identify as an African American? CRQ, SQ1

Follow-up: Is there some common experience, language, or way of being that defines your identity as an African American? What are they?

Follow-up: When did you realize that you identified as an African American?

Follow-up: Do you think others in your family also identify as African American?

Prompt: Please tell me more about this. If says no: Why do you think this is the case?

5. Sometimes there are differences in the way people are viewed or treated within a community. The differences could be based on lots of things. Do you think that being African American influenced the way staff within the school community viewed or

interacted with you? If says yes: How so? If it says no: How did you come to see that being African American did not matter in your school community? CRQ, SQ1, SQ2

Follow up: Were there other differences that mattered within your school community?

Prompt: Please tell me more about that.

6. When you were receiving your OSS, what did you see as being your future? Did you imagine finishing HS? Did you imagine going to college? SQ1

Decision to Pursue Post-Secondary Studies

Thank you for your responses. I'd like to now ask you questions regarding your decision to pursue studies after high school.

7. What did you do immediately after graduation? CRQ, SQ2

Follow-up: Did you go directly to college or a trades program? Did you have a job?

Follow-up: How long did it take you to decide to begin college (or career program)?

8. In your questionnaire, you said that your ___ (mother, father, or guardian) had a ___education. Is that correct? If yes: Does that mean you are the first in your family to enroll in college? If not: Who else in your family has gone to college? SQ1
9. Can you tell me a bit about how you went about making the decision to pursue a college (vocational) education? CRQ, SQ1

Follow up: You mentioned that _____ lead you to decide to go to college. Was anyone else involved in or influential to your decision to go to college? If says yes: Who else was involved or influential (i.e., parents, guidance counselor, coach, etc.)? How were they involved or influential in your decision-making process?

Follow up: Was there anything else that you think made you want to go to college? How did _____ influence you to want to go to college?

10. How did your K-12 school communities prepare you for life after high school graduation? Follow-up: How did your K-12 schools prepare you for the college experience (i.e., identifying majors, paying for college, academic support)? BDQ, CRQ

Follow-up: Do you view your experience as focused more on getting a job, becoming competitive for college, or playing a sport?

11. How did your family respond to your decision to go to college? SQ1

Follow-up: Did you receive any pushback from family or friends about your decision? Can you tell me about that?

Follow-up: Did you experience self-negativity, any doubts?

12. Once you decided to attend college, how did you go about selecting which college (program) to attend? BDQ, CRQ, SQ1

College Experience/Progression

Thank you for sharing information about your decision to attend college. I'd like to now ask you a few questions about your college/university.

13. What is your career or degree area? Can you tell me how you settled on that career? BDQ, CRQ
14. Think back to your first college class, tell me a bit about that experience. BDQ, CRQ
15. As you progressed through your program, what type of challenges did you face academically? SQ1, SQ2

Follow-up: What did you have to do to overcome them?

16. Working through your ___program, did you experience any personal conflicts? CRQ, SQ2

Follow-up: Can you tell me a bit about what happened?

Follow-up: How did you overcome the conflict?

Facing the Finish

My final set of questions are focused on getting to know more about your end-of-course experiences.

17. Thinking about the beginning of this last year of your program, what was different between it and the beginning of your first class? Can you tell me a bit more? BDQ, CRQ
18. Thinking about the person you were at the time of the suspension that you wrote about, was finishing a program such as this in your plans? CRQ, SQ1, SQ2

Follow-up: What did you plan to become at that point in your life? (If not already answered in #7.)

Follow-up: Is there one thing that you feel impacted you that caused a change in your life from the person who served school suspensions to the person who is accomplishing a high academic achievement?

Before we conclude this interview, is there something about your experiences in K-12 or college (vocational program) that we have not had a chance to discuss but you feel is important to share?

Appendix H: Journal Prompt

At the time of the questionnaire, you were asked to think about one suspension you felt was unfair. You based your answers to the questionnaire on that event and were promised an opportunity to tell the story. Now is the time for you to share your story.

If you would, think about a time when you were given an out-of-school suspension that you felt was unfair. In 15 minutes, describe the suspension from the point-of-view of what you experienced. In your story, please include the details on what happened; as well things like why you think the suspension was unfair; what was said by the administrator and your response; and whether the event impacted who you are as a person then and now.

Appendix I: Study Participants Table

Table 1

Study Participants

Name	Age	Gender	Post-Secondary Area	Career Field	Region/ Community	Suspension Behavior
Makayla	20-29	Female	College	Nursing	North/Urban	Fighting
DeShawn	40-49	Male	Military	Communications	South/Rural	Property Damage
Aidan	30-39	Male	College	Systems Administration	South/Rural	Uniform Compliance
Braylen	20-29	Female	College	Mental Health Therapy	South/Rural	Fighting
Izzy	40-49	Female	College	Marketing	North/Urban	Fighting
Ray	40-49	Male	Vocational	Welding	Midwest/Urban	Fighting
Nolan	30-39	Male	College	Mental Health Therapy	North/Urban	Property Damage
Danielle	30-39	Female	College	Educational Docent	North/Urban	Fighting
Michael	40-49	Male	College	Transportation	Midwest/Urban	Hurling Projectile

Jacinta	40-49	Female	College	Engineering	Midwest/Urban	Fighting

Appendix J: Themes for all Triangulated Data Sources Table

Table 2

Themes for all Triangulated Data Sources

Theme	In Vivo Name	Definition
Culpability	*Oh yeah…I did it.*	Responsibility for actions
Intent	*Mens rea…don't give it another thought.*	Willingness to take motivation into consideration
Deficit language	*Who are you saying I am?*	Interprets or operationalizes empirical differences as inferior or problematizes behaviors
Parental involvement	*Let me introduce you to my dad and mom.*	Parental involvement in school concerns
Preparation for future pursuits	*The rigor of academics.*	A belief that the system prepared participants for future endeavors
Navigating perceptions of self and others	*The spirit not to be stamped out.*	Participant view of themselves and their response to the behaviors of others
Perseverance and hope	*I always knew I would make it.*	Exhibition of self-motivation

Appendix K: Outlier Themes for all Triangulated Data Sources Table

Table 3

Outlier Themes for all Triangulated Data Sources

Theme	In vivo Name	Definition
Socioeconomics	*The other side of the veil.*	The adverse impact of socioeconomics on the family's engagement with school
Motivation	*Life without a plan.*	Disengagement from future opportunities