

A DREAM DEFERRED: BLACK GIRLS AND STUDENT DISCIPLINE:
ADMINISTRATORS' PERSPECTIVE: A CASE STUDY

by

Jacqueline Evette Holland

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Liberty University

2024

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Abstract

The purpose of this multiple-embedded case study was to explore school administrators' perspective on the school-to-prison pipeline and the repercussions on Black females at high schools in the Eastern region of the United States. The theory guiding this study was the social justice theory, as it explains the relationship between the social justice principles and exclusionary discipline norms and practices, racial injustice, and gender stereotypes that marginalize Black girls and increase their criminal justice involvement. The central research question of this study was: How do school administrators address the overrepresentation of Black girls that are suspended and expelled from school? The criterion sampling method was used to select participants for the study. After distributing the participant screening questionnaire, 11 participants met the eligibility criteria and were selected to participate in the research. Individual interviews, focus groups, and document analysis were used to obtain data from high school administrators. The case study framework, individual interviews, and focus groups yielded four themes: equity, professional judgment/discretion, alternatives to discipline, and building relationships. Eight sub-themes were developed from the main themes: fairness, positive intervention behavior support, restorative practice, Safe Center, code of conduct, overrepresentation, discipline outcomes, and culture. These themes and sub-themes were aligned with the central research question and sub-questions. The study findings indicated that administrators' leadership style and decision-making approaches impact discipline outcomes.

Keywords: disproportionality, exclusionary discipline, school-to-prison pipeline, Black, female, administrators

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my mother, Roberta Holland-Diuguid. You have always been my biggest cheerleader. Your unwavering sacrifices and support are why I am receiving this degree, and I am forever grateful. Thank you for being the best mentor and mother.

To my sister, Sonya Holland, thank you for your support since my undergraduate days. Thank you for answering the phone when I call you 20 times a day. You are truly the best sister I could have, and I am so thankful for you.

To my bonus father, the late Samuel Lee Diuguid, thank you for loving and supporting me from my undergraduate days at East Tennessee State University and beyond.

To my father, the late James Houston Holland, Daddy, I did it!! You can now call me Dr. Holland.

To my ancestors, thank you for paving the way for me, a little Black girl from Bedford, Virginia, to earn a Doctor of Philosophy, which is the highest level of academic degree one can earn. I am my ancestors' wildest dream.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to thank my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. For without Him, earning this degree would not have been possible. Dr. Breck Perry, thank you for your continued support during this long process. I appreciate your time, responsiveness, and commitment. Dr. Darren Howland, thank you for your insightful feedback and support. Lywannis Moon-Foster, my colleague and friend, thank you for always being my cheerleader, checking on my progress, and sharing your motivational words.

Table of Contents

Abstract	3
Copyright Page.....	4
Dedication	5
Acknowledgments.....	6
List of Tables	13
List of Figures	14
List of Abbreviations	15
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	16
Overview.....	16
Background.....	17
Historical Context	18
Social Context.....	18
Theoretical Context.....	19
Problem Statement	20
Purpose Statement.....	21
Significance of the Study	22
Theoretical Significance	22
Empirical Significance.....	22
Practical Significance.....	23
Research Questions	23
Central Research Question.....	23
Sub-Question One.....	23

Sub-Question Two	24
Sub-Question Three	24
Definitions.....	24
Summary.....	25
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	26
Overview.....	26
Theoretical Framework.....	26
Social Justice Theory	26
Related Literature.....	29
Educational System Racism.....	30
Social Racism.....	34
School-to-Prison Pipeline	37
Academic Achievement and Discipline.....	40
Criminalization of Student Misconduct	41
Zero-Tolerance Policies	43
Inside the School Walls	46
Black Girls Matter Movement	48
Contributing Factors of Disproportionality	51
School Leadership Perspectives.....	54
Summary.....	56
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS.....	58
Overview.....	58
Research Design.....	58

Research Questions.....	59
Central Research Question.....	59
Sub-Question One.....	59
Sub-Question Two	60
Sub-Question Three	60
Setting and Participants.....	60
Site	60
Participants.....	61
Recruitment Plan.....	62
Researcher Positionality.....	62
Interpretive Framework	64
Philosophical Assumptions.....	64
Researcher’s Role	66
Procedures.....	66
Data Collection Plan	67
Individual Interviews	68
Document Analysis.....	69
Focus Groups	70
Questionnaires.....	71
Data Synthesis.....	72
Trustworthiness.....	73
Credibility	74
Transferability.....	74

	10
Dependability	74
Confirmability	75
Ethical Considerations	75
Summary	77
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS	78
Overview	78
Participants	78
Andrew	79
Annette	79
Camille	80
Darren	81
Gavin	81
Ingrid	82
Kenneth	83
Kyle	83
Lawrence	83
Sonya	84
Tamara	84
Results	85
Equity	86
Professional Judgment/Discretion	88
Alternatives to Discipline	93
Building Relationships	97

	11
Outlier Data and Findings	98
Research Question Responses.....	99
Central Research Question.....	99
Sub-Question One.....	100
Sub-Question Two	101
Sub-Question Three	103
Summary	104
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION.....	106
Overview.....	106
Discussion.....	106
Interpretation of Findings	106
Implications for Policy or Practice	109
Theoretical and Empirical Implications	111
Limitations and Delimitations.....	113
Recommendations for Future Research	115
Conclusion	116
References.....	118
Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter	144
Appendix B: Site Approval Letter	145
Appendix C: Administrator Participant Recruitment Letter.....	146
Appendix D: Screening Questionnaire	147
Appendix E: Administrator Participant Consent Form.....	148
Appendix F: Individual Interview Questions.....	151

Appendix G: Focus Group Interview Questions..... 152

List of Tables

Table 1. Racial Composition by Site	61
Table 2. Administrator Participants	79
Table 3. Themes & Sub-Themes	85

List of Figures

Figure 1. Top 5 Discipline Incidents by Descriptions, 2022–2023	91
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List of Abbreviations

Critical Race Feminism (CRF)

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

School-to-Prison Pipeline (STPP)

Social Justice Theory (SJT)

Socioeconomic Status (SES)

Vulnerable Decision Points (VDPs)

Zero-Tolerance Policies (ZTPs)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

What happens to a dream deferred? In his poem "Harlem," Langston Hughes personified a dream that has been delayed or allowed to wither due to neglect. A phenomenon known as the school-to-prison pipeline (STPP) has emerged as a clear illustration of how Black and Brown students' dreams are being deferred. In the last three decades, exclusionary discipline policies, like suspension and expulsion, have had a high propensity to lead to students being "pushed out" into the criminal justice system, demonstrating patterns of institutional racism (Grace & Nelson, 2019). A systematic literature review was conducted to explore the problem of disparities in disciplinary infractions concerning African American children. Racism and low expectations for African Americans have been ingrained in society for a long time (Sue et al., 2008; Taylor et al., 2019). In turn, African American children have absorbed these negative perceptions about themselves, their appearance, and their skills (Bell, 2014).

This multiple-embedded case study investigated, through the analytical lens of the social justice theory (SJT), administrators' assessment of racial bias and gender stereotypes' contribution to disciplinary sanctions. This was accomplished by looking at the administrators' perceptions of how these factors contribute to disciplinary sanctions and the effects that lead to the STPP on Black female high school students in a school district in the Eastern region of the United States. This chapter provides background information and historical, social, and theoretical context on the issue. The case study was guided by the objective and significance of the research, as well as the researcher's questions. The chapter finishes with definitions of the terminology used throughout the research. This study helped bridge the research gap on how and why exclusionary disciplinary policies and practices, racial injustice, and gender stereotypes all

contribute to the marginalization of Black girls and their disproportionate exposure to the criminal justice system.

Background

The historical trajectory of low expectations and standards for African American students has continued to have a vice-like grasp on the academic success of today's youth. The antecedents of students involved in the criminal justice system included a lack of educational achievement and unequal disciplinary consequences (Hatt, 2011). In addition to the severe punishments handed out by schools that practice zero tolerance and law enforcement's growing participation in school discipline procedures, Black girls face additional obstacles. Building administrators and teachers tend to underestimate or undervalue the accomplishments of Black females because of the stereotypes that exist about them (White, 2018). Due to the criminalization of minor school offenses, an increasing number of Black girls have been funneled into the STPP. As a result, the American goals of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" have been deferred and denied.

DeMatthews et al. (2017) labeled several principals as overt racial justifiers because they had prejudiced ideas about how Black parents should raise their children. The administration utilized these ideas to justify the severe disciplinary methods used to teach Black youth rules that the students claimed they had not been taught at home. One of the most significant contributors was the pervasive and personal racism that affected not just the lives of students of color but also those of their families and the communities in which they lived. As a direct consequence, the schools that the students attend become another instance of institutionalized racism (DeMatthews et al., 2017).

Historical Context

Since schools and juvenile courts have not always had punishing rules, the STPP has been a relatively new phenomenon. Schools in the United States have prioritized academics and learning throughout most of the 19th and 20th centuries, preparing students for college and careers in various fields (McGrew, 2016). Academics have been using the phrase “educational pipeline” to characterize the smooth progression of students through educational institutions since at least 1960 (Berg, 1960).

Moreover, since at least 1986 (O'Connor & Treat, 1996), the phrase "leaky pipeline" has been used to indicate issues with associated completion rates or subject mastery for different demographic groups. O'Connor and Treat found the first usage of the word "pipeline" in reference to the imprisonment of young people; they were discussing the progression of young people who were about to become severe offenders in the criminal justice system (O'Connor & Treat, 1996). Noguera (2003) coined the term "educational pipeline" to describe the journey that young people take from school to prison and the role that administrators play in this process.

Social Context

Over recent years, there has been an increase in social concerns about the exclusionary school disciplinary procedures that have led to an alarming rise in the number of instances involving the STPP (Clark, 2020). In the same way, Black males are associated with later engagement in the criminal and juvenile justice systems. School-based disciplinary measures have been linked to future involvement in those same systems for Black females. Some school officials use suspension as a disproportionate punishment, raising the student's likelihood of being charged with a crime while still being a juvenile (Reimer, 2018). It also has been shown that Black females are more likely than their White counterparts to be disciplined, suspended, or

expelled from their respective schools (Annamma et al., 2019). When Black girls and White girls are found guilty of the same offenses, the harshness of the punishments might vary significantly from one another (Annamma et al., 2019). White (2018) described an incident between two students in middle school where the White student received a \$100 fine for scribbling "Hello" on a bathroom stall, while the Black girl was given a suspension from school. The discipline gap that exists between Black females and their White peers has been far higher than the discipline gap that exists between Black men, who are overrepresented in the population of people who are imprisoned or penalized. Researchers who take an intersectional perspective have argued that the differences in school-based punishment between Black and White girls have resulted from gendered traits and, more significantly, Black girls' rejection of conventional norms of femininity (Morris & Perry, 2017).

Theoretical Context

Using critical race theory (CRT) and critical race feminism (CRF), Annamma et al. (2019) examined Black girls' exclusionary discipline outcomes and whether disciplinary actions are for subjective or objective behaviors, as well as whether they align with dominant narratives about Black girls. Peguero et al. (2021) conducted a study in which they examined the relationship between strict and lenient school punishment practices, racial and ethnic inequality, educational success, and school context through the lens of CRT. Both earlier studies examined the disciplinary outcomes for African females. Neither, however, focused on the administrators responsible for the disciplinary issues and sanctions (Peguero et al., 2021). In addition, the studies did not address the necessity of achieving social justice, which requires recognizing the discriminatory treatment of disadvantaged groups and taking corrective action (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014). This practice of democracy has necessitated that educational leaders adhere

to social justice ideals in the daily operation of schools and attend to the educational needs of the marginalized, subordinated, and underrepresented (Wang, 2018).

Problem Statement

The problem was that exclusionary discipline policies lead students of color, particularly Black girls, down the STPP at a disproportionate rate. A historical tendency of low expectations and standards has stifled Black youth's academic growth. Furthermore, youth engagement in the criminal justice system has been exacerbated by a lack of academic achievement and disproportionate disciplinary sanctions (Tsai et al., 2021). According to Taylor et al. (2019), Black males outnumber all other categories of students when it comes to being the victims of inequitable school policies. The issue has been that when it comes to disciplinary punishment, Black boys often overshadow Black females. Disparate disciplinary measures have negatively influenced schools, causing a girl's most crucial life safeguard, her education, to be derailed. When teachers and school administrators make decisions based on judgment, which is vulnerable to prejudice, Black students are disproportionately targeted for exclusionary disciplinary measures (Morris & Perry, 2017). Thus, behaviors, such as disobedience, disruption, and aggressiveness, are more likely to result in a student being expelled from the classroom for Black females (Morris & Perry, 2017).

Disparities in exclusionary punishment, especially out-of-school suspension and expulsion, have been thought to be influenced by a wide range of factors. Teachers' unconscious prejudice and the attitudes and views of school administrators are only two examples of these characteristics (Mallett, 2017). For nonviolent, subjective conduct, Black girls are expelled from school and are the fastest-growing demographic of youths in the juvenile justice system. Black girls are not to blame for these trends in the discipline, however, since they are more likely to

commit minor violations than their White peers. As a result of the disruption that typically results in students' permanent expulsion from the educational system, most suspended students are at risk of committing further offenses (Yang et al., 2018). As a group, racial minorities are more likely to enter the prison system than their White counterparts. The Sentencing Project (2017) found that the likelihood of incarceration for Black youth was five times higher than for White youth. Moreover, there is much more to the criminalization of Black females than what takes place on the streets alone.

To address the gap in the existing body of literature, further research on disproportionate disciplinary sanctions and the effect on Black female students as seen through the eyes of school building administrators was necessary. When it comes to resolving equitable treatment of Black girls and the abuse of harsh disciplinary procedures, school administrators play an extremely integral role (Wang, 2018). The findings in this study contributed to the existing body of literature, which had practical significance. These findings informed policy and practices that address the specific needs of Black girls and the disparate disciplinary sanctions that are given to them.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this multiple-embedded case study was to explore school administrators' perspective on the STPP and the repercussions on Black females at high schools in the Eastern region of the United States. The STPP was defined as the mechanism through which inequitable treatment of youth has resulted in involvement with the criminal justice system (Puckett et al., 2019). This research has also assisted with a better understanding of how exclusionary disciplinary rules and practices, racial inequity, and gender stereotypes marginalize and increase Black girls' exposure to the criminal justice system.

Significance of the Study

The STPP affects Black boys similarly to Black girls. However, discussions on the STPP have often overlooked the consequences that Black girls face within the pipeline (White, 2018). Black female students are disproportionately disciplined with "pushout," an extreme form of exclusionary school discipline (Hines-Datiri & Carter-Andrews, 2020). The value of this study was found in the fact that it investigated the phenomenon of Black girls being pushed out of school using empirical, theoretical, and practical points of view. This research investigated and assessed the disproportionality among Black females from the perspective of high school administrators.

Theoretical Significance

The theoretical significance was predicated on the SJT. This qualitative case study was seen as applying the SJT since zero-tolerance rules result in disproportionate minority contact (DMC) within the juvenile justice system (McCarter & Durant, 2022). In line with the ideals of equity, social pedagogy considers promoting social justice in educational settings as one of its fundamental principles (Rawls, 1999). In the context of this research, the concept of social justice was used to ensure that fairness was maintained by doing away with power, oppression, and inequality in any form of society.

Empirical Significance

There has been a paucity of published research on the empirical relationship between Black girls and disciplinary practices within the framework of the STPP (Annamma et al., 2019; Crenshaw et al., 2016; Hines-Datiri & Carter-Andrews, 2020). Research on the STPP can be improved by going beyond the current paradigm of boys and men of color to investigate the discipline disproportionality leading to the STPP for students who identify as Black females

(Wun, 2018). Exploring Black girls and discipline contributed to the research that was already available on this topic.

Practical Significance

To address the gap in the existing body of literature, further research on disproportionate disciplinary sanctions and the effect on Black female students as seen through the eyes of school building administrators was necessary. To resolve the equitable treatment of Black girls and the abuse of harsh disciplinary procedures, school administrators play an extremely integral role (Wang, 2018). The findings of the study contributed to the existing body of literature, which had practical significance. These findings informed policies and practices that address the specific needs of Black girls and the disparate disciplinary sanctions that are given to them.

Research Questions

The purpose of this multiple-embedded case study was to explore the STPP and the repercussions on Black females at high schools in the Eastern region of the United States. The following questions were answered in this study.

Central Research Question

How do school administrators address the overrepresentation of Black girls suspended and expelled from school?

Sub-Question One

What are administrators' perspectives on the district policies addressing student discipline and the disproportionality of Black girls?

Sub-Question Two

How do exclusionary school disciplinary policies contribute to racial and gender disparities of African American girls?

Sub-Question Three

How can administrators and policymakers develop an equitable and fair learning environment within their respective institutions?

Definitions

1. *Black* - Often used to refer to persons of African descent but may also apply to any member of any non-White minority group. In scientific investigations, its usage may be deemed untrustworthy since it encompasses such a wide spectrum of ethnic and cultural origins (Agyemang et al., 2005).
2. *Discipline Disproportionality* - The disproportionate rate at which marginalized youth who identify as Black, Latinx, Native/American Indian, queer, low-income, and/or disabled are disproportionately represented at every level of the disciplinary process (Muñiz, 2021).
3. *Exclusionary Discipline* - Refers to a group of disciplinary practices that include removing students from the classroom, the school, or the curriculum because of their actions, such as those that lead to expulsions, in-school suspensions, and out-of-school suspensions. The use of exclusionary punishment, in which students are removed from the learning environment and there is little emphasis placed on finding solutions to the problems, has become the standard method for dealing with disruptive student conduct (McNeil et al., 2016).
4. *School-to-Prison Pipeline* - Pushes students out of school and into the juvenile court

system for violating school rules, damaging their futures (Puckett et al., 2019).

Summary

Research has indicated that Black females are disciplined at a disproportionately high rate (Gonzalez et al., 2017). This disparity accelerates the progression of Black females into the criminal justice system. Thus, this qualitative case study sought to gain a deeper understanding of how exclusionary disciplinary practices and norms, gender stereotypes, and racial injustice marginalize Black girls and increase their likelihood of incarceration. Chapter Two will provide a comprehensive review of the literature on school discipline and the theoretical framework that served as the basis for the study.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

A systematic review of the literature was conducted to explore the problem of disparities in disciplinary infractions pertaining to Black children, especially Black girls. This chapter reviews the current literature on Black girls entering the school-to-prison pipeline (STPP). This section discusses the theory relevant to the social justice theory (SJT), followed by a synthesis of recent literature regarding exclusionary discipline for students of color, zero-tolerance policies (ZTPs), the STPP, and the Black Girls Matter movement. A summary includes the research overview at the end of the literature review.

Theoretical Framework

This research aimed to explore and evaluate disproportionality among Black girls from the viewpoints of high school administrators. The theory guiding this study was the SJT. The connection between the SJT and discipline disproportionality is discussed in the following section.

Social Justice Theory

In previous research on the STPP, the racial threat and critical race theories (CRTs) served as the conceptual foundation. This research was supported by the SJT developed by John Rawls and the belief that every individual ought to have the same rights and the most-significant amount of fundamental freedom consistent with the same freedom for others. Rawls' (1971) theory, which followed in the footsteps of Rousseau and John Stuart Mill's social contract and utilitarian theories, posited that individuals enter a contract with the government to ensure that their rights are protected. In *A Theory of Justice*, published in 1971, Rawls discussed the concept of a well-ordered society and the belief that all persons are born equal and deserve the

opportunity to participate in a fair society. Rawls proposed that this may be accomplished by the implementation of a “Veil of Ignorance,” in which every single person is regarded as an equal member of society (Efreom-Lieber & Lieber, 2010). The Veil of Ignorance made it impossible for people to differentiate themselves from one another based on factors, such as social status, gender, skin color, ethnicity, or group interests (Efreom-Lieber & Lieber). Based on this assumption of equality, judgments should be taken to protect those who are the most vulnerable while at the same time limiting the dangers (Efreom-Lieber & Lieber, 2010; Rawls, 1971).

The SJT applied to this qualitative case study because exclusionary discipline and ZTPs produce disproportionate minority contact (DMC) inside the juvenile justice system (McCarter & Durant, 2022). Blader and Chen (2012) investigated the connection between authority and equitable treatment. Power creates distance and disassociation between the person with power and their lower-power counterparts (Blader & Chen). Racial disproportionality and exclusionary punishment may be the root cause of inequality (Blader & Chen, 2012).

The purposeful moral use of power based on democracy, equality, and opportunity has often been credited with significantly impacting SJT development. Social psychology, which tries to understand and create strategies to diagnose and eventually eliminate bias, intolerance, and other seeming impediments to social justice, incorporates the notion of social justice as an essential component of its research agenda (Jost & Kay, 2010). Rawls (1971) identified two fundamental principles of justice. The first and most-important principle was that every individual deserves the same fundamental liberties and rights. The second guiding principle was unfairness in the world if individuals are not provided with the same possibilities (Rawls, 1971). Buckingham (2013) argued that the disproportionate use of exclusionary punishment, adjudication, and detention conveys that education and courts mistrust children, and society

should strive to educate them about the importance of justice. In accordance with the social justice principle, persons in positions of authority are expected to advocate on behalf of those individuals who cannot do so on their own (Buckingham, 2013). Social justice leaders, for example, are school administrators who recognize the existence of racial inequities in the institutions and should take steps to remedy the situation (Koonce & Kreassig, 2020).

Administrators are accountable for ensuring that schools are secure and well-run. When it comes to discipline, administrators' prejudices and biases are factors in their decisions to suspend students (DeMatthews et al., 2017). The Office of Civil Rights led to a nationwide examination of disciplinary referrals being carried out (Muñiz, 2021; U.S. Department of Education, 2023). African American students had a four times greater likelihood of being reported to the office and receiving expulsion or out-of-school suspension (U.S. Department of Education, 2023). Statistics on racial prejudice offered proof that student punishment was subjective and impacted by the student's ethnic origin (Skiba et al., 2011). School administrators should educate themselves on the interaction of racism, sexism, and classism (Skiba et al., 2011). The conviction held by Rawls (1971) that justice and fairness should be interchangeable served as the impetus behind the quest for equitable treatment of youth to disciplinary consequences that are devoid of racial and gender prejudice.

It is imperative that leaders train staff in disciplinary awareness and how to handle conflicts appropriately. Disparities in exclusionary punishment procedures begin in the classroom when students are sent to the office (Skiba et al., 2011). Teachers' implicit prejudices influence disciplinary procedures, and data demonstrates that teachers' reactions to classroom misbehaviors depend on hidden biases (McIntosh et al., 2014). Raising teachers' understanding of how negative opinions are likely to appear when dealing with students' improper conduct is

one way to lessen the disparity in office disciplinary referrals between Black and White students (Gregory & Roberts, 2017). A teacher's decisions on punishment may affect the difference in disciplinary sanctions between oppressed groups. Thus, the SJT was pertinent to the present study being conducted. In schools, Black girls must contend with unconscious racism. Zero-tolerance rules lead to racial inequities in punishments (Wegmann & Smith, 2019). Moreover, the SJT has implications for how society marginalizes Black girls in America.

Social justice leadership is a valuable theory used when the goal is to eliminate the intended and unintended exclusion of marginalized student populations (DeMatthews, 2015). Rawls' (1971) SJT was relevant to the phenomenon of exclusionary discipline policies that disproportionately send students of color, particularly Black females, down the STPP. This theory illustrated how exclusionary discipline norms and practices, racial injustice, and gender stereotypes marginalize Black girls and increase criminal justice involvement. According to the research, administrators' attitudes and perspectives regarding exclusionary discipline are essential in disproportionality (Welsh & Little, 2018). The SJT helped to guide the literature review, research methodology, central research question, and sub-questions in the study.

Related Literature

In the context of the STPP, exclusionary punishment, which may take the form of suspensions or expulsions, has often been related to less-than-desirable academic outcomes. The academic achievement of children of color has been deteriorating. A deterioration in student-school relationships has indicated that students care less about school rules and are less motivated to achieve academically (Clark, 2020). The chance of students being entangled in the criminal justice system in the future has increased. Within the context of the STPP, this literature review examined Black girls' experiences. A contribution to existing research on the STPP has

been made by extending beyond the present boys and men of color paradigm to examine the lives and experiences of students who identify as Black females, including transgender and gender nonconforming youth who identify as Black.

Educational System Racism

White colonists, beginning with the earliest days of slavery, provided overwhelming support for the attitude taken by enslavers and government officials, which was to prevent Blacks from receiving any education (Kato, 2018; Love, 2004). Colonists made exceptional efforts to ensure that Africans had no access to literacy (Love). The colonists would have kept Africans in forced slavery if they could have kept them illiterate for as long as possible (Love). During the period known as the Progressive Era, White persons who gathered groups of Black people intending to teach them to read and write were imprisoned because educated Black people were seen as a threat (Bartz, 2019; Kato, 2018). There were very few, if any, exceptions to this rule. The dominant argument for such activities was simply based on an unproven idea that Africans lacked the culture and ability to learn how to read. This view was supported by most people in the world (Love, 2004). White colonists created myths about Africans to maintain power and control over Africans (Kato, 2018; Love, 2004).

Only 11 years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, pleas to allow Black children to attend public schools or to establish separate educational facilities were ignored by legislators in Massachusetts (Stanford Law Review, 1974). While African Americans were no longer considered property during the Civil War, nothing was done to grant African Americans equal property rights. This practice persisted into the 20th century (Daniel & Walker, 2014). The Civil Rights Act of 1886 gave citizenship to a freed man, but the South's Black Codes and Jim Crow laws were still in place, making it difficult for African American families to enjoy liberty

(Daniel & Walker, 2014). The Black Code laws enacted by former Confederate states prohibited freed African American children from learning fundamental skills, such as reading and writing (Bravin, 2019).

Mary Jane McLeod Bethune, Nannie Helen Burroughs, and other Black women who were pioneers during this period believed that education would improve their position in society by, among other things, strengthening their communities and diminishing the prevalence of racial discrimination (Hanson, 2003; McCluskey, 1989). Both women made significant contributions to the educational advancements of African American women (Michaels, 2015). Bethune and Burroughs were outspoken advocates for racial and gender equality who opposed prejudice (Bartz, 2019). They acknowledged that a formal education was essential for the advancement of liberated people and that women must take the initiative to become educated, despite the absence of most of the educational and historical literature (Warren, 2023). Both concluded that education would provide African Americans with the sophistication and culture required for entry into the highest strata of African American society (Perkins, 1997). Women of African American descent who had completed education focused most of their attention and energy on combating the Black community's illiteracy problem by founding community schools, libraries, hospitals, and social settlement houses (Warren, 2023). African American women will continue to make substantial contributions to the field of education, as well as the formulation of norms for social behavior (Hanson, 2003). The brutal realities of racial and sexual discrimination, as well as Bethune's conviction in the power of women to affect change in the world, served as the foundation for Bethune's leadership model (McCluskey, 1989).

The abolition of slavery was followed by the continuation of severe disciplinary procedures (Coles & Powell, 2020). These practices included the Fugitive Slave Acts, Black

Codes, Jim Crow laws, and now, mass imprisonment. The educational case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), in which the phrase "separate but equal" was espoused, was the legal counterpart of the broader segregation statutes. In the same way that racial segregation contributed to a sense of inferiority among African Americans, its primary objective was to foster a sense of superiority among White people.

The long and tumultuous history of racial discrimination in the United States has left an unpleasant and disturbing legacy permeating the country's educational system (Lewis Casserly et al., 2012). In the landmark case of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* (U.S. Supreme Court Center, 1954), the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the ruling of *Plessy v. Ferguson* of 1896 (Lewis Casserly et al., 2012; Heise, 2021). The decision of the Supreme Court to declare that racial segregation in public schools violated the Constitution shocked a significant number of White southerners (Heise). This decision, which was often referred to as *Brown v. Board of Education (Topeka)*, was the first of its kind to acknowledge that separate schools are innately unequal (Heise). However, the cogs of transformation turned very slowly despite the Supreme Court ruling. It was not until September 1957 that nine African American children became symbols, much like the historical judgment of *Brown v. The Board of Education* (Brown & Di Tillio, 2013; Devlin, 2018). The Little Rock Nine attempted to enter Central High, and a fierce public effort to retain segregation ensued (Bartz, 2019; Heise). Governor Orval Faubus forbade African American students from entering the institution and sent the Arkansas National Guard to obstruct the path (Heise). In reaction to Faubus's move, President Dwight D. Eisenhower dispatched federal soldiers to the area to ensure the African American students' admittance to Central High (Devlin; Heise). Later, the president federalized the Arkansas National Guard to safeguard "The Nine" from segregationists who harassed the African

American students outside the school and from the children of segregationists who tormented them inside the school (Darby & Rury, 2017; Devlin; Heise). Just a few weeks after attending Central High School, one of the students, Minnijean Brown-Trickey, was suspended for dropping her lunch plate when a group of White kids obstructed her path (Darby & Rury; Devlin, 2018; Heise, 2021). Brown-Trickey was then expelled for referring to tormentors as "White trash" when other students tossed a bag containing several combination locks toward her (Darby & Rury, 2017).

During that time, recalcitrant White schools would utilize unequally severe punishment to ensure that racial integration would not result in Black students receiving equal educational opportunities (Skiba & White, 2022). Minnijean could not have realized it at the time, but her story would come to represent the standard for how exclusionary punishment is implemented for Black students (Skiba & White, 2022). Unfortunately, the idea that people of different races have fundamentally different standards of behavior and morality had a deep-rooted history in the United States (Banaji et al., 2021).

Today's educational system treats young Black females as inferior and as unjustly as it did in the past (Lerner, 1992; Taylor et al., 2019). The crises at Spring Valley High School in South Carolina presented evidence that the criminalization of Black children and the plantation brutality against Black girls and women has not diminished (Warren & Coles, 2020). This ongoing tragedy exemplified the lack of sympathy shown toward persons of African descent and the callousness with which the educational system treated Black children (Hines & Wilmot, 2018). Shakara, a student at Spring Valley High School, was the victim of an assault, pummeling, and manhandling at the hands of a White sheriff's deputy in October 2015 (Hines & Wilmot; Warren & Coles; White, 2018). The incident occurred because Shakara did not comply

with orders to leave the classroom (Hines & Wilmot, 2018). The White male resource officer dragged Shakara away from the desk, put her in a chokehold, flipped her over in her chair, and then threw her to the ground as punishment (Warren & Coles). Even though the officer responsible for initiating the crime against the 16-year-old girl was removed from duty, the girl and classmate who recorded the assault on an iPhone faced misdemeanor charges (Warren & Coles, 2020). Since the beginning of the nation's history, the African American community's conversation has consistently returned to the idea of achieving educational parity for everyone (Perkins, 1997).

Social Racism

The current conceptual and practical framework of political and social systems that continue to promote injustice and discrimination towards people of color was built on the foundation of historical viewpoints, cultural attitudes, and policies enacted by the government (Griffith et al., 2007). The political and social framework allowed for the conceptual and operational foundations of contemporary political and social institutions to be constructed. As a result of the United States' long tradition of condoning racial disparity as the status quo (Bruch et al., 2019), the country now possesses cultural norms of implicit bias, social exclusion, and prejudice (Lucas & Washington, 2020). This was due to the country's acceptance of racial inequality as the status quo. Unconscious bias, marginalization, and prejudice are pervasive ways of life in American society and culture due to the normalization of racial inequality over time (Lucas & Washington, 2020). Social determinants change roles of structural pillars of racism, such as employment discrimination, mass incarceration, redlining substandard public education, exposure to environmental hazards, differential treatment, and poor access to quality resources and services, have been thoroughly documented (Ogedegbe, 2020).

Trayvon Martin, Oscar Grant, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Eric Garner, and George Floyd have been etched into the psyches of African Americans (Meikle & Morris, 2022). As activists and educators have witnessed, Black males are not the only victims of police brutality and violence; however, the public is less likely to hear the identities and experiences of the Black females affected. In 2019, six Black women died as a direct consequence of the hands of law enforcement personnel (Clark, 2020). The plight of Black females and how they are neglected compared to Black males must be brought to light, and it will take a voice that is not afraid to speak up (Crenshaw, 2014). The campaign known as #SayHerName brought attention to the fact that Breonna Taylor, Mya Hall, Rekia Boyd, Miriam Carey, Michelle Cusseaux, Shelly Frey, Kayla Moore, and Sandra Bland were all women who had been victims of death by law enforcement (Clark, 2020; Crenshaw, 2014). In reaction to the police killing of Bland in Waller County, Texas, the African American Policy Forum (AAPF) and the Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies (CISPS) published research in July 2015 titled, "Say Her Name: Resisting Police Brutality Against Black Women" (Bailey & Trudy, 2018). Bland became a symbol of the mistreatment and exploitation of other Black women by the criminal justice system as the case received widespread attention (Brown et al., 2017). In 2020, society experienced a series of shocks due to the collective and cultural trauma caused by the death of Floyd, an unarmed Black man, at the hands of police (Meikle & Morris). Police were captured participating in the unjust treatment by bystanders videoing the unlawful acts. These tragic events opened the human heart and honed the sense of justice (Meikle & Morris; Reny & Newman, 2021). Tears flowed freely as a worldwide alliance of human unpredictability, demonstrations, and social discordantly erupted onto the streets (Meikle & Morris). The demonstrations were held as a reaction to how Brown and Black minority groups are treated

(Meikle & Morris; Reny & Newman, 2021). The discriminatory practices that lead to the arrests and convictions of Black individuals in the United States are reflected in the disproportionately high rates at which Black people are incarcerated in this country (Morgan, 2021). The effects of structural racism on the health of people of color, including African Americans, Hispanics, indigenous people, and others, have received significant attention due to these tragedies. All 50 states saw increased civil rights action due to the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement (Meikle & Morris, 2022).

There have been several factors besides the discriminatory use of search, arrest, and conviction procedures against the Black community as the cause of disproportionately high incarceration rates (Morgan, 2021). Many Black students are confronted with severe forms of discipline at school, which has been criticized for fueling the STPP (Morgan). Using a harsh form of discipline leads to disproportionately high rates of expulsion for students from low-income backgrounds and schools with a high proportion of Black and Brown students. Urban schools have been more likely to embrace extreme punishment, resulting in higher suspension rates for these students outside the school setting (Morgan, 2021). Recent research has illustrated how destructive current practices of school punishment have been for Black youths (Camacho & Krezmien, 2020). However, there has not been a significant shift in the disproportionately high rates of suspension and expulsion.

Thinking about Floyd and the many other Black and Brown Americans whose lives were shortened similarly has reconnected present sadness with the oppressive history passed down from generation to generation. In contrast, the top social and educational authorities have argued that all individuals, regardless of color, gender, religion, philosophy, or sexual orientation, should be treated with justice and respect and that all components of humanity should be treated

equally (Meikle, 2020). W. E. B. Du Bois (1903) stated in his seminal work, *The Souls of Black Folk*, that the dilemma of the 20th century is the problem of the color line (Lindsey, 2018). Du Bois had the keen insight to see how profoundly White supremacist ideology was ingrained in the structure of race relations in the United States, from Jim Crow laws to the prevalence of anti-Black racial violence (Lindsey). More than a century after Du Bois' comments were published, the dilemma of the color line still persists from the disproportionate number of Black people being murdered by police to the disproportionate racial disparities in school discipline practices (Lindsey, 2018; Skiba et al., 2002).

School-to-Prison Pipeline

Over the past three decades, a punitive mindset has grown more robust in the relationship between school districts and the juvenile justice system. More students are being prosecuted and punished based on exclusionary disciplinary policies that disrupt their education and increase the likelihood that they will end up in the criminal justice system, which has often been referred to as the STPP (Aronowitz, 2021). The STPP has been a comparatively new phenomenon identified by researchers as a link between unfavorable educational outcomes, disciplinary action, and involvement in the criminal justice system (Rocque & Snellings, 2018). Juvenile courts have turned into school referral disciplinarians, not rehabilitative frameworks. This structure was not the intended purpose of juvenile courts (Mallett, 2016). Black and Latino students have been disproportionately targeted by administrators and teachers as disruptive students, subjected to enhanced monitoring and discipline because of long-standing institutionalized racism (Pena-Shaff et al., 2019). Furthermore, numerous studies have shown that most urban schools are the source of an increasing number of referrals to the juvenile justice system (Peguero et al., 2021). Race has been crucial in determining the harshness of students' consequences, even if

socioeconomic position has also had an influence on disproportionality in punishment (Anderson & Ritter, 2017).

Mass incarceration has been fueled when youth in the United States are targeted, criminalized, and pushed into jails and prisons due to the alarming trend of diverting them from public schools into the criminal justice system (Tyner, 2020). This trend has led to an increase in the number of young people who are currently incarcerated (Tyner, 2020). The disproportionate number of suspensions and expulsions of Black youth has exposed the unfairness of punishment for Black children (Office of Civil Rights, 2014; Van Dyke, 2016; Wallace et al., 2008). The implementation of zero-tolerance rules, which lead to students being criminalized for minor disciplinary crimes, has resulted in an increased police presence and stricter school surveillance (Stitt, 2021). The academic attainment of students of color has been significantly impacted by exclusionary policies (Ryan & Goodram, 2013). Suspensions from school raise the risk of committing more offenses since it causes disruption that often leads to a student being permanently expelled from the educational system (Yang et al., 2018). Students who are suspended for an extended period are more likely to drop out of school (Bottiani et al., 2016). Additionally, students who have previously been suspended from school run a higher risk of not only dropping out of school but also getting into trouble with the law (Bhopal & Chapman, 2019). Rocque and Snellings (2018) found that recent shifts in education and penal policy have increased the likelihood that students who have not been successful in school will become involved in the criminal justice system. The causal relationship between the two systems has not been evident, but there may be an increased danger in both areas. Thus, further research was necessary to understand the connections between school administrators, punitive policies, educational results, and engagement in the legal system (Rocque and Snellings). Existing racial

inequalities lead to an increase in both the number of students who are subjected to disciplinary practices and those who are not successful academically (Rocque & Snellings, 2018).

Mechanisms for perpetuating racial inequities in educational institutions have been highlighted in research on the STPP (Ghasletwala, 2018; Grace & Nelson, 2019). However, studies have failed to include all the Black population affected. Males have dominated the conversation on the STPP, while Black females' perspectives have been primarily absent (Annamma et al., 2019; Morris, 2016). The pipeline metaphor did not adequately describe the mechanisms that lead to the incarceration of Black girls because it adheres to an exclusive and profoundly patriarchal analysis model (Morris, 2012). The patriarchal analysis model placed a higher value on masculinity narratives and obscured how gender influences racial threat, stereotyping, and surveillance. As a direct result, the nature of the penalties that were inflicted against Black women continues to be misconstrued.

The new body of research, which is still in its infancy but has been proliferating, has illustrated how race, social class, and gender are intertwined to give a variety of routes leading to incarceration and other adverse outcomes associated with punitive schooling (Crenshaw, 2018; Smith & Hattery, 2008). The gendered construction of early criminality for women of color has, thus, been generally ignored (Crenshaw, 2018). The pipeline metaphor used a deeply patriarchal analysis model and exclusionary practices that prioritize masculinity narratives and obscure how gender informs stereotyping and racial threats (Morris, 2013). Haight et al. (2016) criticized the STPP study for not addressing the confluence of racism and gender faced by Black girls, including sexual harassment by male students and insufficient protection from educators. Likewise, African American females in the United States have been disproportionately impacted by racial discrimination, much like their male counterparts (Morris & Perry, 2017).

Academic Achievement and Discipline

In public schools throughout the United States, disparities in academic achievement and a culture of discriminatory disciplinary practices have persisted for many decades (Curran, 2016). In recent years, scholars concerned with issues of racial equity in education have come to see the two as interconnected, even as two sides of the same coin (Gregory et al., 2010). The disproportionate number of Black, Latino, American Indian, and Alaska Native students suspended or expelled has received significantly less attention (Gregory et al., 2010). Researchers have subsequently connected these disproportionate punishment rates to performance gaps by pointing to evidence of the harmful consequences of exclusionary discipline on achievement-related outcomes, including losing out on instructional time (Stake, 2006). Black students in the United States have struggled to reach their potential because of a wide range of factors, from poverty to racism to cultural norms that place low expectations on Black students. Because of this, Black youth have faced negative assumptions about their looks and talents (Bell, 2014). Black children have historically been subjected to low expectations and standards, negatively impacting students' academic success.

The engagement of juveniles in the criminal justice system has been caused by a combination of factors, including unequal disciplinary sanctions and a lack of educational performance (Hatt, 2011). Recent research on Black males and school systems has shown a significant disparity in the quality of instruction and disciplinary measures between White and Black children, which is inconsistent with equal justice (Kuhfeld et al., 2018). This was a problem because Black males make up a disproportionate number of incarcerated males in the United States (Heitzeg, 2016). The STPP may put young African American youth on a path that ultimately leads to unfavorable outcomes (Noguera, 2009). Repeated suspensions tend to

significantly enhance the likelihood of academic underachievement (Davis & Jordan, 1994). Suspension from school has been shown to be a moderate-to-strong long-term predictor of dropping out and failing to graduate on time (Raffaele Mendez et al., 2002).

Exclusion from school because of disciplinary actions may harm the learning process in several ways. Suspended students may become less attached to a school, less involved in school regulations and coursework, and, as a result, less driven to attain academic achievement (Gregory et al., 2010). Less-attached students may be more prone to engage in illegal behavior and have a diminished likelihood of academic achievement. Consistent data has demonstrated the value of school bonding in lowering the likelihood of delinquency (Chu & Ready, 2018).

Criminalization of Student Misconduct

People of color receive harsher punishments than their White classmates as a direct result of the racial disparities that have been firmly ingrained in the history of the United States (Horsford, 2017). Researchers in the field of racial prejudice and inequality have perpetuated many inaccurate misconceptions about Black male students in elementary school (Teasley et al., 2018). These stereotypes have focused on the students' behavior and academic performance. Teasley et al. (2018) posited that one of the misleading narratives has been that young Black men are inherently dangerous, aggressive, and uncommunicative. Reviewing the connection between race, socioeconomic status (SES), and school disciplinary practices, Carter et al. (2017) defined racism as a result of slavery and conquest. Racial inequalities began with the manipulation, violence, and slavery of indigenous people and displaced those people (Carter et al., 2017). The fact that institutional racism only protects and promotes the interests of White people makes it a continuous obstacle in the movement toward racial equality in the United States (Kohli et al., 2017).

The widespread practice of criminalizing student misbehavior via the use of curricula and disciplinary policies has been the basic tenet upon which the capacity of schools to expel children with poor academic performance has been founded. The term exclusionary discipline has referred to a broad category of disciplinary practices that include removing children from the classroom, the school, or instruction because of their engagement in activities that lead to in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, or expulsions (Peguero et al., 2021).

Unfortunately, the use of exclusionary punishment has become the standard method for dealing with disruptive student conduct, in which children are removed from the learning environment, and there has been little emphasis placed on finding solutions to problems (Peguero et al., 2021). These methods of discipline have contributed to the development of an unfavorable school environment, which in turn, has negative short-term and long-term repercussions for the students involved (McNeil et al., 2016).

Black males have been disproportionately criminalized due to the concealed curriculum's dual duties in school and society (Dohrmann et al., 2022). The educational environment for Black males has frequently been incongruent with their culture (Dohrmann et al., 2022). While much focus has been on Black boys, Black girls have often been consigned to the sidelines. Compared to Black boys, the shocking reality has been that Black girls have a higher rate of being disproportionately criminalized (Annamma et al., 2019). Black females have experienced the fastest-growing suspension rates over the last decade, with punishment rates six times greater than their White peers and suspension rates exceeding 67% of male students (Annamma et al., 2019). Most of their criminalization has been carried out using ZTPs. However, schools abuse ZTPs, which are supposed to monitor state rules that treat all children fairly (Bell, 2015). Instead,

ZTPs are conceptually incorrect and do not adhere to established standards for a punishment policy (Emmons and Belangee, 2018).

James Wilson and George Kelling, both of whom were criminologists, came up with the idea that criminal behavior is a disorder that, if not addressed or managed in adolescence, can lead to a greater propensity for the commission of more severe crimes in later life (Maxime, 2018). They called this idea the broken windows theory (Maxime, 2018). School administrations have implemented consequences for minor offenses as a deterrent for students to prevent them from committing more significant offenses (Golann, 2015). The broken windows theory and the Gun-Free Schools Act were enacted to discourage criminal behavior; nevertheless, they significantly impact school policies and sentencing practices throughout the nation (Weiss, 2007).

Zero-Tolerance Policies

The Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 required schools to expel any student detected in possession of a gun (later extended to include any weapon) for one calendar year and to send such students to criminal or juvenile court (Bell, 2015; Kafka, 2011). The term zero-tolerance rules, derived from the anti-drug legislation of the 1980s and referring to consistently harsh consequences for certain actions, was used to describe such strict, mandatory, universal disciplinary laws (Lustick, 2021). The legitimacy and efficacy of zero-tolerance rules have been called into doubt by educators and scholars for over a century (Wiley et al., 2018). When ZTPs were first implemented in schools, the primary goals were to reduce the incidence of violent acts committed on school grounds and to maintain peace and order at educational institutions in the United States that receive funding from the federal government (Grace & Nelson, 2019). However, it has been shown that implementing zero-tolerance rules results in inconsistent

disciplinary procedures in schools (Curtis, 2014). Students who are punished severely in school are more likely to end up in the criminal justice system (Hernandez, 2016). This contrasts with students who are reprimanded for infractions of ZTPs or for infractions that are considered less severe.

Multiple studies have concluded that ZTPs were the cause of unequal levels of discipline in schools, thus widening the racial discipline gap (Curtis, 2014; Kafka, 2011; Lustick, 2021). Racial inequities in exclusionary punishment methods have been known to begin in preschool but become more pronounced in later grades (Emma et al., 2014). Lustick (2021) and Curtis criticized the use of ZTPs, arguing that they are unsuccessful in decreasing school violence. For example, ZTPs have a disproportionately detrimental influence on the academic performance of students from underrepresented groups and contribute to high recidivism rates (Curtis, 2014). Furthermore, ZTPs have also drawn greater criticism from the federal government and media (U.S. Department of Justice & U.S. Department of Education, 2014). When used excessively, zero-tolerance rules are a doorway into the juvenile justice system since the lines frequently become blurry because of a typical disciplinary violation and the juvenile justice system (Spence, 2020).

There has been a clear manifestation of race and racism in the ZTPs, which contribute to the STPP. Policies of zero tolerance have a disproportionately harmful effect on the lives of young people of color and contribute to high rates of recidivism. For example, Harris and Linder (2018), following in the footsteps of Hernandez (2016), stated that ZTPs are ineffective since they negatively impact the lives of children, place a strain on the judicial system, and create more work since the policies promote disruptive behavior. An increasing school dropout rate and a cumulative victimization process have acted as a pushout mechanism (Harris & Linder, 2018).

There should be limitations placed on implementing rules that require extreme punishments, such as exclusionary punishment, by local school systems (LaForett & De Marco, 2020). When seen through the lens of school administrators, these rules have not ended in fair results for all students or a reduction in problem behaviors (Curran, 2016). Minority and low-income students have been disproportionately affected by ZTPs and the criminalization of education, which has had several causes. Inner-city and low-income school districts have been disproportionately affected by the negative results of these stringent regulations (Mallett, 2016). In research supporting the accomplishment of Black male students, Emmons and Belangee (2018) suggested that ZTPs have been inefficient at diverting Black children and that schools criminalize them before giving them a second opportunity. Teachers and administrators have seen no alternative to implementing ZTPs because they believe that the ferocious manners manifested by racial minority students are grounded in cultural norms beyond the control of educators (Berlowitz et al., 2017).

It is crucial to recognize how ZTPs and racial inequalities in school discipline affect students of color (Brown & Di Tillio, 2013). Despite the widespread evidence that these policies and procedures have negative outcomes for Black girls' educational and psychological development, they have often been ignored or dismissed as inconsequential. Suspension and expulsion from school have long-term repercussions for educational achievement and other indices of well-being (Morris & Perry, 2017; Owens & McLanahan, 2020). Dropping out of school has been associated with failing grades, more teenage pregnancies, and greater juvenile delinquency among Black females who have experienced exclusionary punishment (Noltemeyer et al., 2015). The repercussions of suspension and other types of exclusionary punishment last much longer than the duration of the punishment itself.

Even though it is school administrators' responsibility to ensure their students' safety, growing concern about using exclusionary discipline policies has been correlated with lower academic achievement (Anderson & Ritter, 2017). This lower academic achievement has disproportionately affected Black students compared to their White peers (Bottiani et al., 2016). Zero-tolerance policies have been damaging to Black children because they have led to their expulsion from the classroom, excessive recommendations for out-of-school suspension, and other ways that are unappealing to use in order to teach (Heilbrun et al., 2015).

Inside the School Walls

More than half of all schools have reported that Black girls are isolated from their educational environment, turned invisible, and slip through the gaps (Patton et al., 2016; Ricks, 2014). Because of rules and practices that legitimize racism, classism, and sexism, schools have historically been unfriendly environments for Black girls. For this reason, Black girls have taken on a super(in)visible status (Clark, 2020). They have often been overlooked in educational settings and research, owing to a propensity to disregard the interconnections of race and gender (LaForett & De Marco, 2020). Due to a solitary emphasis on gender or race (specifically White girls), the successes and hurdles faced by Black girls have sometimes been overlooked or overshadowed. As a result, even Black female characters have been systematically marginalized in literary works (Martin & Smith, 2017). In studies of the schooling experiences of Black girls, it has been found that these students are frequently cut off from their peers and their teachers because of the lack of support they receive, the difficulties they face in establishing a sense of justice and fairness, and the misunderstandings and unrealistic expectations they have of their teachers (Murphy et al., 2013).

The core nature of Black girls' education in the 21st century has been a sequence of mistakes—misunderstanding, misidentification, misinformation, and misdirection (Jones, 2015). Forming femininity has been challenging for Black females who do not conform to being meek and passive (Clark, 2020). Unfortunately, Black girls have been viewed negatively as loud, unsuitable, androgynous creatures, who represent a constant risk to authority, and who lack the femininity essential to behave appropriately in school (Jones). Therefore, these preconceptions and the dearth of positive portrayals of Black women have resulted in them being misidentified as something they are not (Patton et al., 2016). Black girls have been more likely to be misled than other girls because of inequitable access to the availability of educational resources. As a result of negative racial and gender stereotypes, many schools have seen Black females as the epitome of behavioral problems (Jones, 2015).

There has been a problem among Black girls that goes unrecognized because of the disproportionate suspension and expulsion rates. This disparity affects not just the lives of Black females but also the well-being of their families and society as a whole (Crenshaw et al., 2016). Black girls have had the most significant suspension rates across all ethnic groups (Smith & Harper, 2015), and Black girls have been more likely to be suspended or expelled from school than their Latina and White female peers (Annamma et al., 2019). The first research to highlight these differences was published by the Children's Defense Fund in 1975 (Morris & Perry, 2017). The study concluded that Black students were twice as likely as White students to be suspended (Morris & Perry, 2017). Regrettably, there has been little improvement in reducing racial inequities in school discipline since 1975. In reality, suspension rates have tripled since the 1970s, with African American children being targeted at a far higher rate than their White counterparts (Losen et al., 2015; White, 2018). Black females were more likely to be disciplined

for dress code violations, disobedience, and disruptive and aggressive behavior (Cooper et al., 2022). There has been a clear racial and gender trend in the data on exclusionary discipline (Annamma et al., 2019; Office for Civil Rights, 2021). Black students have been subjected to exclusionary punishment twice the rate of White students (Bottiani et al., 2017).

Moreover, among gender categories, 84% of Black females and 59% of White males had at least one discretionary violation, whereas 70% of Black females and 37% of White females had at least one discretionary violation (Clark, 2020). Discipline has also been more unequally distributed amongst Black and White females than Black and White males (Morris & Perry, 2017). While both Black boys and girls have been disproportionately affected by the STPP, many studies on exclusionary school punishment have not accounted for gender, focusing on exclusionary discipline's effect on Black males in their introduction, conclusion, and implications (Annamma et al., 2019). Educators who are led by unconscious prejudices might justify the criminalization of Black girls (Anyon et al., 2018; Hines-Datiri & Carter-Andrews, 2020). At the same time, educators disempower Black girls by legitimizing pushout strategies based on subjective actions (Hines-Datiri & Carter-Andrews, 2020). Furthermore, students of other racial groups and Black boys get more assistance from wraparound services than Black females (Crenshaw et al., 2016).

Black Girls Matter Movement

Criticizing oppression on several fronts, critical race feminism (CRF) was born from a long history of struggling against it (Evans-Winters et al., 2018). Based on critical race theory (CRT) and critical legal studies, CRF is distinctive in four ways: (1) its emphasis on the experiences of women and girls of color; (2) its incorporation of intersectionality; (3) its multidisciplinary nature; and (4) its emphasis on racism and sexism (Hines & Young, 2020).

There has been a glaring omission of the experiences of women of color in legal theories that have traditionally focused on criminal law, feminist theory, and CRT. The intersection of race, class, and gender in the legal arena and the vast experiences of women of color spurred CRF's expansion (Evans-Winters et al., 2018). The combination of race and gender has placed Black girls in a position where they are subjected to a wide variety of systemic and systematic kinds of discrimination (Hines & Young, 2020).

Critical race feminism conceptualizes Black girls' disciplinary experiences in educational settings throughout the United States (Hines & Young, 2020). Black girls' acts are viewed as less harmful and less recurrent; hence, intervention efforts and studies have primarily focused on Black boys (Annamma et al., 2019). Experiencing impostor behaviors could show commonalities with their sense of belonging to their programs (Whitehead & Wright, 2016). According to the research reviewed, Black girls' experiences have been neglected and criminalized in schools. The experiences of Black girls have often been seen as problematic or insufficiently significant because of their super(in)visibility (Annamma et al.; Evans, 2019). Because they are trapped between White women who are exemplars and Black men who are seen as underachievers, Black females cannot fulfill their full potential (Chavous & Cogburn, 2007). There has been much attention on Black boys since it has often been assumed that Black girls' offenses are less severe and occur less frequently than those perpetrated by Black boys (Annamma et al., 2019; Morris, 2012).

Black girls' feelings of rage and resistance have been documented using cell phones in the classroom. Various social media platforms have demonstrated how Black girls have been brutally removed from K–12 classes and attacked by instructors and police officers for disturbing

schools (Lindsey, 2018). This was exhibited and reinforced by the 2015 arrest of Shakara, a high school student, by a White male school resource officer (Esposito & Edwards, 2017). Salecia Johnson, a 6-year-old Black female student in Georgia, was detained at school in 2012 and then transported by a police vehicle, raising more concerns about how disciplinary measures are implemented on a micro-level in classrooms (Hines & Wilmot, 2018; Nyirenda et al., 2020). These are only two instances of how anti-Black racism has been used against Black females, how they have been punished with harsh and exclusionary methods, and how they have been portrayed as malicious offenders who intellectually and physically trespassed in the classroom (Henry, 1998; Hines & Wilmot, 2018).

Black girls face various interlocking kinds of violence outside school (Wun, 2018). The repeated cases of Black girls being raped and molested by police officers or individuals they should trust are being driven into the STPP (Hines-Datiri & Carter-Andrews, 2020). These repeated cases have heightened awareness of initiatives, such as #BlackGirlsMatter and #SayHerName (Hines-Datiri & Carter-Andrews, 2020). The fact that Black girls have been subjected to systemic violence both within and outside of schools impacts not just how they behave but also what they learn. Wun argued that the laws that govern school punishment have not considered the conduct and rage of female students in the context of structural violence. Girls become less ready to listen to their teachers and often engage in behaviors, such as fighting, bullying, or acting in a manner that demonstrates that they do not care (Wun). Black girls who have been victims of violence are being criminalized and punished in school. However, the violent conditions that push these girls to act out are not being addressed, which adds to their criminalization and incarceration (Wun, 2018).

Contributing Factors of Disproportionality

Researchers have found that there are several potential causes for racial differences in the use of exclusionary punishment (Wegmann & Smith, 2019). There is a complicated relationship between the student, the school, and the student's behavioral traits that leads to these differences. Disparities in racial discipline have been linked to issues, including financial position, cultural inequalities between students and instructors, unconscious prejudices, and the viewpoints and attitudes of school administrators (Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Suizzo et al., 2014).

Socioeconomic Bias

Unfortunately, race and socioeconomic status (SES) have been strongly intertwined in American culture, increasing the likelihood that any finding of racial disproportionality is a result of SES-related disparity (Skiba et al., 2002). Minority groups have made up a disproportionately large share of the prison population, as do low-income groups (Jeffers, 2019). There has been a substantial association between poverty and imprisonment rates in the United States (Jeffers, 2019). Based on the research, the STPP has often been highlighted; however, these children's destinies are frequently impacted by their family's financial condition and color.

Middle and high school students who received harsh disciplinary punishment from school are more likely to be Black students who are in the lower SES range and are disproportionately represented among those who face disciplinary sanctions (Welch & Payne, 2012). There has also been a correlation between low SES and higher percentages of students receiving free lunch, contributing to an increase in dropout rates among minority groups (Williams & Portman, 2014). Furthermore, students who attend schools in low-income and crime-ridden areas tend not to prioritize academic success and how to flourish academically and will eventually drop out of school (Futrell, 1996). Futrell (1996) attributed this to the fact that teachers and students in these

schools are required to focus more on preserving order than they do on education and all that it encompasses. The increased focus on discipline and not learning contributed to students' resentment and hostility toward education and other forms of authority (Lee et al., 2011).

Various viewpoints have been expressed on the connection between SES and the disproportionate occurrence of disciplinary actions in schools (Hemphill et al., 2014). Students' participation in programs offering free or reduced-cost lunches has been a proxy for their SES (Hemphill et al., 2014). In 2008, a study of a national sample of high school students that used parental education and family structure as indicators of SES concluded that SES has little-to-no effect on discipline disparities (McElderry & Cheng, 2014).

Suspension rates have been highly associated with racial and socioeconomic variables (Bryant & Wilson, 2020). Bryant and Wilson's model showed three significant outcomes. Initially, the suspension rate for Black students was 12 times that of White students, and Hispanic students were three times more likely to be suspended than White students. Those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds were three times more likely to be suspended than students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. The study also demonstrated that gender had no effect in deciding suspensions (Bryant & Wilson, 2020). It was deduced after critical analysis that SES is not a viable predictor for analyzing the differences in disciplinary outcomes between White students and students of color (Skiba et al., 2014).

Implicit Bias and Teachers

Racial bias in the educational setting has unearthed data that lends credence to the notion that biases held by educators play a part in the disciplinary decisions they make (Girvan, 2019). In contrast to an individual's professed opinions and values, implicit biases are deeply rooted attitudes that operate outside of conscious awareness and may even directly oppose them (Carter

et al., 2017). Although outwardly biased opinions are not usually the product of implicit biases, research by Carter et al. (2017) suggested that they may contribute to discriminatory actions if left unexplored or unstated; implicit biases may have a significant role in perpetuating behavior that is seen as disruptive. Due to the prevalence of implicit biases, many educators may be unaware that their behaviors are impacted by long-held, established assumptions (Payno-Simmons, 2021). Barnes and Motz (2018) noted that racial disparities in school discipline emerge when teachers' implicit biases cause them to propose discipline for a Black student more often than a White student for identical behavior. A simple policy that makes instructors aware of implicit biases might be beneficial in eliminating racial disparities in school disciplinary processes, if only partially (Barnes & Motz, 2018). If racial disparities in school punishment are eliminated, disparities may likewise be eliminated from the criminal justice system.

It has been suggested that skewed racial preconceptions are to blame for the systematic discrepancies in how teachers set expectations for diverse groups of students (Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015). This has been particularly evident when contrasting responses to undesirable behaviors shown by students of Black and White backgrounds (Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015). If a student's conduct is deemed disruptive by a teacher, that student may be sent to the office. Students' actions are considered disruptive when they do not correspond with instructors' beliefs of what constitutes good student conduct (Morris, 2012). Furthermore, it is possible that covert prejudices, as opposed to open manifestations of preference, might affect them. For example, members of various social groups may be vulnerable to either overt prejudice in the form of explicitly held values, also known as explicit biases or covert bias, in the form of implicit racial stereotypes (Fiske & Taylor, 2013; Girvan, 2015).

Educational institutions of all shapes and sizes are increasingly adopting restorative practices, which turn disciplinary actions into opportunities for students to forge stronger connections with one another. By setting an example of appropriate behavior and making effective use of class time, teachers can assist their charges in maturing into productive members of society (Cruz et al., 2021). However, as a result of a disproportionate number of disciplinary breaches, children from groups that have traditionally been underrepresented in society are at a higher risk of missing instructional time and withdrawing from school altogether (Gage et al., 2020). Researchers have focused on identifying and resolving vulnerable decision points (VDPs) to reduce racial imbalances in disciplinary actions. These VDPs are moments when educators' decision-making is most susceptible to being impacted by racial prejudices. To reduce racial imbalances in disciplinary actions, researchers have focused on identifying and resolving VDPs (Garro et al., 2019).

School Leadership Perspectives

Leaders in high schools have a wide range of expectations and responsibilities that impact student learning, school safety, and disciplinary practices. When it comes to enforcing discipline, school administrators are placed in a precarious situation since they must make judgments with which not everyone will agree (Goings et al., 2018). School leaders may feel wedged between the parents and the teachers, attempting to establish a balance between the two (Goings et al.). However, racial inequities in punishment practices are made visible by discipline practices that are enforced inequitably, leading to a hostile learning environment (DeMatthews et al., 2017). The increasing disciplinary disparity has been partially the responsibility of building leaders like principals, assistant principals, and those in administrative positions in schools. The persistence of leaders in adhering to policies that put African American children at risk for

failure and exclusion, while at the same time playing a critical role in breaking down the STPP, undermines attempts to build a positive and safe learning environment (DeMatthews et al., 2017; Goings et al., 2018). Policymakers and educational leaders need to have a better understanding of the factors that contribute to the pervasive inequitable practices in student punishment, which results in considerably higher rates of suspension for students of color compared to students of other races (Jean-Pierre & Parris-Drummond, 2018).

To ensure that all students' needs are met, Sebastian and Allensworth (2019) stated that it is the principal's job to cultivate a welcoming and supportive classroom setting. However, school administrators persist in using practices that put students of color, particularly Black and Latino students, at a higher risk of academic failure (DeMatthews et al., 2017). According to research by Skiba et al. (2014), the principal's view on discipline is a significant predictor of exclusionary discipline that exacerbates racial inequalities. Skiba et al. centered their research on school leadership to mitigate disciplinary disparities. According to the findings of their study, school administrators who were successful in keeping students enrolled had a lower expulsion rate. As a result, school leadership has been undervalued in efforts to minimize imbalances in school discipline (Skiba et al., 2014). Principals and assistant principals have discretion regarding the assignment of disciplinary sanctions beyond the scope of zero-tolerance rules (Bacher-Hicks et al., 2019). Due to extensive discretion, school administrators are not required to justify disciplinary measures (George, 2015). Nonetheless, the actions of school administrators may affect the course of youths' lives. Comparing the number of Black administrators to the number of Black students in schools has revealed a significant disparity that may lead to discriminatory treatment of Black children. For instance, when leaders lack awareness of students' cultures, disproportionate punishment methods might arise (Kemp-Graham, 2015). For example, school

administrators' discretion in addressing inappropriate conduct imbued with racial and gender prejudice may lead to disproportionate punishment practices affecting Black students, especially Black females (George, 2015).

School administrators who can see racial inequities and take corrective action have been frequently referred to as social justice leaders. Education policy experts have agreed that principals have a pivotal role in combating educational inequity and that antiracist, social-justice-focused leadership approaches are essential (Brown, 2006; DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Jean-Marie et al., 2009). Although principals' perspectives on race and discipline are undertheorized, social justice leadership definitions have provided light on how they handle the racial discipline gap. Leaders in social justice look for oppressive and unjust practices by analyzing institutional norms, student attitudes, and parental involvement (DeMatthews et al., 2017). Principals who employ social justice leadership could address issues of race and discipline by questioning the discipline policies of their schools, the classroom management practices of their teachers, and the institutional norms that emphasize neutral and colorblind ways of thinking (DeMatthews et al., 2017). Principals concerned with social justice also scrutinize ostensibly reasonable, scientifically based management systems that stress data-driven decision-making.

Summary

Exclusionary school disciplinary practices have recently garnered increased attention, which has resulted in an alarming increase in STPP cases. School-based disciplinary measures have been linked to subsequent involvement in the criminal justice and juvenile justice systems for Black females just as they are for their male counterparts. Furthermore, it has been shown that Black females are more likely to be punished, suspended, or expelled from school than their

White peers (Annamma et al., 2019). Additionally, there has been a disparity in the severity of punishment for Black and White girls when the same crimes are committed (Annamma et al., 2019). The discipline gap between Black females and their White classmates has been larger than between Black men, who are disproportionately represented among those imprisoned or punished. Intersectional academics believe that these disparities in school-based punishment between Black and White girls result from gendered characteristics, specifically the rejection of traditional ideals of femininity by Black girls (Morris & Perry, 2017).

It has been essential to understand the structural systems that have been historically implemented and, as a result, have led to a shift in the association between racial inequality and the justice system. Politics have been driving forces behind and enablers of the STPP, disproportionately affecting young Black females and males (Catrone, 2021). Unfortunately, young people of color are becoming the primary targets of the prison pipeline because of stereotyping in the media and unfair laws regarding schools and the criminal justice system (Heitzeg, 2009). Along with the compulsion of the criminalization of Black females, the STPP has become the steady systemic force pushing Black females away from a successful educational journey.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this multiple-embedded case study was to explore school administrators' perspectives on the school-to-prison pipeline (STPP) and the repercussions on Black females at high schools in the Eastern region of the United States. There has been a disproportionate number of Black female students who are pushed into the STPP, which is impacted by district discipline policies. Exploring how a person relates to a critical phenomenon has been at the heart of qualitative research. The primary focus of this research study was the STPP since it was the most-relevant phenomenon. The primary topics covered in this chapter are the research design, research questions, setting, participants, researcher possibility, procedures, data collection plan, and trustworthiness.

Research Design

Methods of qualitative research are adaptable designs that call for a human connection between the researcher and the participants, who are the focus of the study to get a deeper level of comprehension of the phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Case studies are an in-depth examination of social phenomena delimited by various viewpoints (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2018). Both single and multiple-cases are types of case studies. A single-case study examines a single event, while a multiple-case study examines several episodes (Stake, 2006). Research that focuses on one occurrence or event has inherent flaws (Yin, 2018). For example, single-case studies need more context, which can only be provided by other examples (Stake, 2006), and single-case studies may be subject to observer and information-processing bias (Meyer, 2001). For this reason, a multiple-case study was the most-appropriate research method for this study.

As a researcher, it was essential to understand the factors contributing to the disproportionately high number of Black girls receiving disciplinary sanctions; nevertheless, a single instance was insufficient. Yin (2018) stated that case studies are designed to answer the "how" and "what" questions when investigating phenomena within a real-world context. As such, the concept of this multiple-embedded case study was two-fold. First, this study was designed to describe how district discipline policies, exclusionary discipline, and ZTPs contribute to the disproportionate number of Black girls being suspended or expelled from school. Second, this study was designed to explore what factors contribute to the criminalization of Black girls in schools. For this study, two secondary schools were selected as the case, while embedded units of analysis included principals, assistant principals, and deans of students.

Research Questions

The purpose of the multiple-embedded case study was to explore school administrators' perspective on the STPP and the repercussions on Black females at high schools in the Eastern region of the United States. The following questions were answered in this study.

Central Research Question

How do school administrators address the overrepresentation of Black girls suspended and expelled from school?

Sub-Question One

What are administrators' perspectives on the district policies addressing student discipline and the disproportionality of Black girls?

Sub-Question Two

How do exclusionary school disciplinary policies contribute to racial and gender disparities of African American girls?

Sub-Question Three

How can administrators and policymakers develop an equitable and fair learning environment within their respective institutions?

Setting and Participants

This section includes a full explanation of the sites and settings where the case study took place. Moreover, this section discusses the characteristics of each site. In addition, a comprehensive justification for the site and setting of this specific location are provided. A narrative is supplied with specific demographic information on the settings and participants of the research after the institutional review board (IRB) approval (see Appendix A) and desired school district site approval (see Appendix B). This information includes information, such as age, ethnicity, gender, and experience, which was relevant to the site and study.

Site

This research was carried out at two secondary schools located in the school district comprised of 89,450 students located on the East Coast region of the United States (Georgia.gov, 2023). The student demographics consisted of 24% Black, 26% White, 16% Hispanic, 12% Asian, 4% multi-racial, 0.1% Pacific Islander, and 0.2% American Indian (Georgia.gov, 2023). The district had 108 schools, 18 of which were high schools. The researcher provided pseudonyms for the two schools and district once IRB and school district approval had been granted. Table 1 displays the demographics for both research sites. According to the findings of

previous research studies, there has been a distinct connection between involvement with the criminal justice system, failure to graduate from high school, student disengagement, and disparate racial punishment (Morris, 2015). This association existed even though there was no direct causal link between these factors. The researcher had the opportunity to get a wealth of knowledge regarding the many perspectives held by administrators due to the diverse nature of the district. Since the researcher worked for the selected school system, it was chosen as the site for the study.

Table 1

Racial Composition by Site

Ethnicity	Percentage	# of Students
Site 1		
Asian	TFS	TFS
Black or African American	91.9	1,596
Hispanic	5.0	87
Multi-Racial	1.6	27
Other	TFS	TFS
White	TFS	TFS
Site 2		
Asian	TFS	TFS
Black or African American	67.3	1,111
Hispanic	30.1	497
Multi-Racial	1.6	26
Other	TFS	TFS
White	TFS	TFS

Note. TFS = too few students

Participants

The participants in this study were female and male high school administrators of varying experience levels. The sample size had been estimated to be 10–15 participants. Participants did not receive any monetary compensation for their participation; nevertheless, each participant had

access to the final report. Participants were carefully chosen based on a set of criteria to make sure that they could inform the research questions specific to this study (Patton et al., 2016).

Recruitment Plan

Once permission was granted from the school district and university IRB, the researcher began communicating with potential participants. The researcher used criterion sampling to select participants for this study. This purposeful sampling, according to Patton et al. (2016), was the collection of cases that meet certain predetermined criteria of significance. The criterion sampling method was suitable for identifying and comprehending information-rich cases. This screening tool assisted in identifying participants' levels of engagement in the disciplinary process. The screening instrument consisted of five to seven questions created using Microsoft Forms. After distributing the participant screening questionnaire, 11 participants were selected according to various characteristics, including gender, race, engagement with discipline, and the number of years spent working as an administrator within the selected school district. Through criterion sampling, the criteria for participants were current school administrators within the Eastern School District who had served in that role within this district for at least 1 year. The participants also needed to ensure knowledge of current district discipline practices and policies. Individuals willing to participate in the research signed a permission form outlining the details of the study.

Researcher Positionality

The realities that I have faced as a minority, notably as a Black girl, concerning school punishment and academic standards have been formed by my experiences. As a Black student in a K–12 school system where minorities were underrepresented, I have seen the disproportionate use of biased disciplinary measures and low expectations for academic success against my

minority peers. I am grateful to have had a mom who did not waver regarding her standards for my sister and me. Unfortunately, I do not believe that the future of students from marginalized groups was a top priority for educators in the school district I attended. As a high school freshman, I was put on the standard curriculum track. My mother noticed that I was not completing my homework, nor was I concerned about any of my courses. My mother visited the school and rearranged my whole class schedule so that I could take advanced placement classes. I was not informed that my mother would be visiting my school until the guidance counselor summoned me to her office. At times, I find myself wondering what my life would be like if my mother had not gone to the school to voice her concerns and stood firm to her expectations.

In college, I found myself in the same type of demagogical environment as my high school experience. I attended a university in Tennessee with only around 3% minority students out of 13,000. Several scenarios I encountered in these learning environments prompted me to reflect again on how my Blackness is seen and how prejudices manifest themselves at school from teachers and administration. These events shaped my professional and personal values and how I understood my Blackness. I see myself as a supporter of efforts to ensure that all students have access to and are included in high-quality educational opportunities. My mission in life has been to fight for the rights of all underrepresented groups because of my own experience with racism and sexism in the classroom.

My career in education has spanned 24 years, during which time I have taught both elementary and middle-school students. Eight of these years have served as a high school assistant principal. The disproportionate number of Black male students subject to disciplinary action in schools prompted widespread attention to be focused on this demographic (regardless of predictor variables, race, gender, class, etc.). When conversations about academic and

disciplinary policies centered on Black males, Black girls' needs were once again pushed to the sidelines. Black girls, the largest and fastest-growing subgroup of students subject to extreme disciplinary measures, have been largely overlooked by district and school officials throughout my years as an educator. As a leader, I must dispel the myths about Black girls that harm their lives, such as keeping them from completing their education and increasing the likelihood that they will enter the criminal justice system.

Interpretive Framework

Critical race feminism (CRF), a subtype of critical race theory (CRT), emerged from a long history of fighting oppression based on race and gender from a variety of diverse points of view (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). Critical race feminism provides a conceptualization of the disciplinary experiences that Black girls face in a variety of school settings throughout the United States (Wing, 1997). The primary target group consisted of women of color who are subjected to a variety of forms of prejudice on account of their ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic position (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Meyer, 2001). This exemplified how all these components interact within a society that was based on the patriarchy of White males and the injustice of racial disparities.

Philosophical Assumptions

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), the development of research aims, the accumulation of research information, and the formulation of criteria for research-related choices all benefit from the incorporation of philosophical assumptions. Each research strategy has a distinct objective, which is determined by the ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions that support the research paradigms.

Ontological Assumption

Ontological assumptions are concerned with the nature of reality. Ontological is a set of laws that control how things operate and is defined by the fact that reality has several perspectives held by multiple people with different realities (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The utilization of several types of evidence in themes based on the actual words of different people and showing distinct viewpoints is an example of proof of many words (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The participants in the research needed to view reality as subjective and multilayered. As a qualitative researcher, I accepted the idea of many realities when doing research. I was also open to readers or other researchers interpreting my research in various ways.

Epistemological Assumption

Epistemology is also known as knowledge theory. Epistemology is the connection between a researcher and his or her study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher's goal is to lessen the distance between him or herself and the research they were undertaking or have already completed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher may need to spend additional time in the field. This implied that they will engage with the participants or audience more often to build a strong rapport with them. As a researcher, I needed to be comfortable being "in the field" to conduct my research in addition to scheduling as much time as needed to conduct the research to get all the information needed.

Axiological Assumption

Axiological research is driven and shaped by the values of the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The research can also be skewed in favor of the person doing the research. So, researchers might feel like they must tell the public about the ideas that have shaped their work and the factors that led them to the results that they uncovered. Important things to think about

include the researcher's personal views, instincts, and biases. It is called shared reality, and it gives our communication acts meaning and makes sense. Qualitative research tries to find out about this shared reality (Maarouf, 2019). As a researcher, it was important for me to stay focused on the study's goals and use beliefs and experiences that supported and added to the research findings.

Researcher's Role

I was conscious of the fact that I was functioning as a human instrument in this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I was not only the primary curator, designer, and driver of the study, but I was also accountable for ensuring that the research's objective was achieved while maintaining the research's reputation. My involvement in this study was that of a non-participant observer. I conducted interviews with high school administrators from two high schools within one school district located on the East Coast region of the United States. The goal of recording the interviews with school administrators was to address ethical problems associated with interviewing within my district. The presence of participants from various schools increased the staff's understanding of disciplinary procedures that are encountered daily.

I was aware that I could not skew interview questions to influence participants toward a certain result. In addition, I made it a priority to present myself in an impartial and neutral way. Participants were made aware that their involvement in this study was fully voluntary, and their participation could have been stopped at any time and for any reason, with no explanation or justification required.

Procedures

This was a multiple-embedded case study with nine steps. In the first step, the researcher formally requested conditional approval to conduct the research from Liberty University's IRB

(see Appendix A). In the second step, the researcher requested the proposed school district's approval to conduct research (see Appendix B). In the third step, the researcher communicated with the principals of the two schools where she wanted to conduct the research for approval (see Appendix C). The fourth step, participant recruitment, began with a five-to-seven-question screener created using Microsoft Forms (see Appendix D). The link was emailed to principals, assistant principals, and dean of students. In the fifth step, participants were selected based on screener responses. In the sixth step, the researcher kept a reflective journal to keep note of observations made during the interview and recurring themes and to draw connections from her notes. In the seventh step, individual assistant principals and dean of students' interviews were conducted virtually. The virtual interviews took place and were recorded and transcribed using Microsoft Teams. In the eighth step, the researcher led two focus groups via Microsoft Teams. Microsoft Teams was also used to transcribe both focus group sessions. In the ninth step, both responses from individual interviews and focus groups were categorized to identify recurring themes among the participants concerning the disciplinary procedure.

Data Collection Plan

A case study gathers information when a modern-day incident is studied in its real-world context. Yin (2014) recommended using various sources and ways to obtain data. Consequently, researchers may adequately support the validity of their findings and provide proof that their inquiries have been answered. Several methods were used for the duration of this research. Individual interviews, focus groups, surveys/questionnaires, and document analysis were used to obtain data from educational stakeholders. According to Gall et al. (2015), qualitative research aims to identify the meanings and interpretations of occurrences in a natural environment by extensively investigating them. There was more to the criminalization of Black females than just

what happens on the streets of the United States. Therefore, one of the essential safeguards for a girl's future, her education, has been thrown off course.

Individual Interviews

This case study focused on high school administrators' interactions and views on Black girls who are disproportionately disciplined. Administrators were given a consent form (see Appendix E) to read and were given a chance to ask questions of the researcher before the interview. The virtual interviews took place (see Appendix F for the questions) and were recorded and transcribed using Microsoft Teams. The researcher kept reflective journals and field notes; she referenced the journals often and kept track of interview observations, recognized recurring themes, and established connections more easily with the aid of the field notes. Following the interviews, the researcher provided participants with a copy of the transcript for review and approval.

Individual Interview Questions

1. What is your educational journey and what role do you serve? CRQ
2. Why did you want to become an administrator? CRQ
3. What is your perspective on zero-tolerance policies? SQ1
4. Have you analyzed demographic data at your school? If so, what did you see? SQ1, SQ2
5. Explain a situation when you sanctioned students with varied disciplinary consequences for the same offense and why you made that choice. SQ1, SQ2, & SQ3
6. Why do you believe students become disinterested in the learning process? SQ2
7. What impact does student discipline have on academic progress in reading and math? SQ2

8. What alternatives to zero tolerance as administrators in this district do you recommend to address student discipline and reduce suspension rates?
9. Based on your school discipline data, do you recognize a difference in students or groups? SQ1 & SQ2
10. What is your opinion on student discipline policies like suspension and expulsion?
SQ1
11. When students return from suspension, do you notice a change in behavior? SQ1
12. Do you follow up or have follow-up procedures for students who return from suspensions? CRQ
13. Do you have any other thoughts or suggestions you would like to make regarding the discipline process? SQ3

Document Analysis

The researcher looked at both the code of conduct for the school district and the disciplinary data records from the two school sites. The school district's code of conduct was a set of principles, rules, and guidelines that were presented to the district's residents to communicate the behavioral expectations that are expected of them. The student discipline referrals and the results of those referrals were the components of the school disciplinary data that were analyzed for the 2022–2023 school year. The discipline data contained information on the students' race and gender. Both the website of the school district as a whole and the websites of the individual schools made the code of conduct for the school district available to all stakeholders.

Focus Groups

A second method of information collection included the use of focus groups. Focus groups are researcher-led discussion forums where researchers ask predetermined questions and listen to participant responses to elicit information that may not have surfaced during the study's other data collection phases (Flynn & Korcuska, 2018; Schwandt, 2015). The focus groups were conducted online via Microsoft Teams (see Appendix G for focus group questions). The participants talked about their experiences and thoughts about disciplinary practice and the STPP in more depth and gave more information about the things that were talked about in the individual interviews. The focus groups consisted of an introduction, group questions, and a conclusion. The introduction took 10 minutes, the questions and answers varied between 45–60 minutes, and the conclusion lasted approximately 10 minutes (Moser & Korstjens, 2018).

Focus Group Questions

1. What barriers do you encounter with discipline data at your school? SQ1 & SQ2
2. What are your administrative perspectives on the current policy addressing student discipline and suspension rates in this district? SQ2 & SQ3
3. As administrators, what factors do/should you consider when addressing student discipline in schools to ensure each student receives their mandated due process as outlined by federal and state law? CRQ & SQ1
4. What strategies or advice do you have to offer other school administrators for reducing suspension rates? SQ3
5. A "chronic disciplinary problem student" is defined by law as a student who exhibits a pattern of behavioral characteristics that interfere with the learning process of students around him or her and which are likely to recur. What personal strategies do

- you utilize when implementing the district's discipline policies on a non-chronic and chronic discipline problem student?
6. Are there any additional factors that you consider that would impact your disciplinary process and decisions? CRQ & SQ1
 7. What resources are available in your school to promote fair discipline decisions for all students?
 8. In what ways does the district provide assistance with disciplinary measures? What additional assistance do you think is needed? SQ3
 9. Do you have additional comments about the research study?

Questionnaires

A screening questionnaire in the format of a Google Form was sent out through email to the administrators of the two selected schools. There were five questions that each participant needed to complete.

Screening Questionnaire

1. How many total years have you been a school administrator?
 - a. <1 year
 - b. 1–2 years
 - c. 3–5 years
 - d. 6–10 years
 - e. 11+ years
2. How many years have you been a school administrator in this district?
 - a. <1 year
 - b. 1–2 years

- c. 3–5 years
 - d. 6–10 years
 - e. 11+ years
3. What is your gender?
- a. Female
 - b. Male
4. What is your identified racial makeup?
- a. Black/African American
 - b. White/Caucasian
 - c. Hispanic/Latino
 - d. Native American/American Indian
 - e. Asian
 - f. Pacific Islander
 - g. Biracial
5. Do you make decisions on disciplinary sanctions for students in your school?
- a. Yes
 - b. No

Data Synthesis

Coding is the sorting and identification of pieces of data gathered that are relevant to research purposes (Saldaña, 2015). Coding is used as a way of indexing or mapping data to provide an overview of specific data that allows sense-making from the data as aligned with the research questions (Elliott, 2018). The researcher conducted two levels of coding. In the first cycle, she reviewed the transcribed data and applied a code using empirical examples of

perspectives of high school administrators on Black girls and the exclusionary discipline practices that were affecting them. From this, she was able to form generalized descriptive codes for similarities across participants' responses (Yin, 2014). In the second cycle, the researcher conducted pattern coding, clustering the data into overarching themes derived from individual interviews, focus groups, and documents to get a more accurate context (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin). Yin (2014) explained that open coding requires data cataloging generated from the transcribed interviews and then narrowing the categories to significant themes. Thus, sorting out codes (into themes), categorical aggregation, and naturalistic generalizations was the best approach for this study.

The responses from the administrators allowed the researcher to discover recurring ideas and concepts. It was important to analyze and synthesize interviews, focus groups, and documents individually. To make the most out of responses and get the richest data possible, it was best to connect or embed each of the three in order to determine the patterns and themes. As examined through the analytical lens of the social justice theory (SJT), these themes aligned with the administrators' perceptions of the role that racism and sexism play in sanctions.

Trustworthiness

The dependability of qualitative research may be broken down into four categories of characteristics. Other aspects contributed to the study's trustworthiness, including its credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Nyirenda et al., 2020). As a researcher, it was vital to provide data that was correct and fair throughout the process of data collection, and it was also essential to evaluate the process of developing dependability to ensure that this study was legitimate (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Thus, this study used various methods for data collection and analytical validation to strengthen its credibility.

Credibility

The research credibility adds to the study's informative and explanatory validity; participants assess the information provided by the researcher to determine the genuineness of the work (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The credibility of this research was established by using various sources of information, including interviews, questionnaires, and focus group discussions, to triangulate the data and cross-check the findings (Flynn & Korcuska, 2018). The researcher ensured that the provided content was accurate and legitimate (Shenton, 2004). Additionally, research must provide findings consistent with the world for its credibility to be considered credible (Nyirenda et al., 2020). Thus, for this study, the researcher devised an effective system for classifying the data obtained from interviews and focus group discussions to draw conclusions based on the raw data collected (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Transferability

The capability of an academic finding to be extended and used in other contexts is referred to as its transferability. Any trustworthy or genuine research needs to be relevant to various industries to highlight the study's context and the assumptions underpinning the research (Nyirenda et al., 2020). This study had the potential to provide the groundwork for more research on the STPP. The findings can be extrapolated to include other girls of color (i.e., Hispanic, American Indian, or Asian), demonstrating the pervasiveness of institutional racism in American society.

Dependability

Creswell and Poth (2018) stated that the dependability of the research is shown by the fact that it is consistent with the data outcomes and study replication. This research's dependability was ensured through various data sources, including but not limited to

questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups. When the data are dependable, both in terms of consistency and consistency across time, the research conditions are reliable (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The dependability of this study was measured by the amount to which the research team or observers could replicate and agree on what they saw and heard (Yin, 2014). The results of this scientific effort may be reproduced.

Confirmability

Confirmability is the impartiality with which a researcher evaluates the findings of a study, which is also often referred to as the study's objectivity (Nyirenda et al., 2020). Nyirenda et al. (2020) underscored that every study worthy of confirmability is free from any inherent or social-desirability bias, provided that the researcher maintains reflexivity while developing and executing the study instruments. The concept of reflexivity refers to recognizing and considering ideas or experiences that may influence the way that an experiment is conducted, the reactions of participants, the methods used to collect data, and the interpretation of that data (Creswell, 2018). This method aided in identifying study concerns and assessed the interviews of research participants to confirm the authenticity of the viewpoints held by the school administrators (Creswell). The participants were given the option to check the interview transcript for accuracy, which was an extra step to ensure that their perspectives were unbiased (Creswell, 2018). Additionally, this study used an audit trail to display the raw data, analytical tables, and a thorough record of research operations during the inquiry.

Ethical Considerations

The research was carried out in accordance with the guidelines laid forth by the Liberty University IRB to guarantee the participants' continued moral well-being. The researcher committed to taking all measures required to safeguard the rights of research participants. A

purposive sample of building-level administrators participated in this research. Following the receipt of IRB consent (see Appendix A), the gathering of data commenced. A school district in the Southeastern United States served as the location for the study. Questionnaires were sent to selected school administrators via email with a link to a Google Form. The Google Form replies were recorded, and the participants could not have been identified in any way. The researcher had access to a summary of the individual interview and focus group replies that restored on a secure USB drive and accessible on her Google Drive. Participants were always anonymously referred to by an alias throughout the study. Pseudonyms were also used for individual schools and the school district. The anonymity provided by using pseudonyms protected the research's integrity and the reputation of the participating administrators, district, and schools.

Permissions

The researcher formally requested permission to conduct the research from Liberty University's IRB. After gaining approval from Liberty's IRB, she requested approval from the proposed school district to conduct research. When the site was approved, the next step was to speak with the principals of the two schools where she wanted to conduct the research for approval. Once the researcher had the principal's approval, she started participant recruitment and the data collection process.

Other Participant Protections

The records of this study were kept private. Published reports did not include any information that would make it possible to identify a subject. Research records were stored securely, and only the researcher had access to the records. Participant responses were anonymous and kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms. The data was stored on a password-locked computer. After 3 years, all electronic records will be deleted, and all

hardcopy records will be shredded. Recordings were stored on a password-locked computer until the participants had reviewed and confirmed the accuracy of the transcripts, and then they were deleted/erased. The researcher and members of her doctoral committee had access to these recordings.

The expected risks from participating in this study were minimal, which meant that they were equal to the risks that people would encounter in everyday life. Participation in this study was voluntary. The decision of whether to participate did not affect current or future relations with Liberty University or the school district. If participants chose to withdraw from the study, they could have contacted the researcher at the provided email address/phone number, and all data collected, apart from focus group data, was destroyed immediately and was not included in the study. Focus group data was not destroyed, but contributions to the focus group were not included in the study for withdrawn participants.

Summary

This qualitative study aimed to investigate how racial prejudice, gender stereotypes, and the criminalization of conduct in schools contribute to the overrepresentation of Black girls in the STPP. The ramifications of the STPP for Black girls were the primary focus of this line of study. Interviews and focus groups were the primary means of data gathering used by the researcher. The key areas that were discussed in Chapter Three were the study design, research questions, setting, participants, researcher positionality, methods, data collecting plan, the role of the researcher, and trustworthiness.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this multiple-embedded case study was to explore the administrators' perspective on the school-to-prison pipeline (STPP) and the repercussions on Black females at high schools in the Eastern region of the United States. The problem was that exclusionary discipline policies lead students of color, particularly Black girls, down the STPP at a disproportionate rate. Chapter Four presents the results of the study, including participant descriptions, narrative themes and sub-themes as derived from the data, and responses to research questions, followed by a summary of this chapter.

Participants

Criterion sampling was used to select participants for this study. The criterion sampling method was suitable for identifying and comprehending information-rich cases. The participants were 11 administrators consisting of assistant principals and deans of students from two high schools within the same district. The principals from each school were excluded from the research study, with one principal not meeting participation criteria and the other lacking availability. Pseudonyms were employed to protect participants' confidentiality and location, ensuring that they were realistic and reflective of the participants' culture. Eleven administrators participated in the individual interviews. Demographics of the interview participants consisted of five Black females and six Black males. Nine of the 11 administrators who participated in the individual interviews participated in the focus groups. Demographics of the focus group participants consisted of four Black females and five Black males. A portrait of each participant is depicted (see Table 2), outlining data on administrator participants, including their years in education, years as an administrator, administrative role, and method of participation.

Table 2*Administrator Participants*

Participant	Years in Education	Years as an Administrator	Administrative Role	Method of Participation
Andrew	17	3	Dean of Students	Interview/Focus Group
Annette	24	11	Assistant Principal	Interview/Focus Group
Camille	28	3	Dean of Students	Interview/Focus Group
Darren	21	8	Assistant Principal	Interview/Focus Group
Gavin	9	2	Dean of Students	Interview/Focus Group
Ingrid	29	15	Dean of Students	Interview/Focus Group
Kenneth	11	4	Assistant Principal	Interview/Focus Group
Kyle	18	12	Assistant Principal	Interview
Lawrence	8	3	Dean of Students	Interview/Focus Group
Sonya	17	3	Dean of Students	Interview
Tamara	9	3	Assistant Principal	Interview/Focus Group

Andrew

Andrew self-identified as a Black male. His educational journey started with his mother, who dedicated 30 years to education. Andrew said he tried to avoid the education path, but it kept calling his name. He had been in education for 17 years, with the last 4 years as a dean of students. Andrew was the dean of students for ninth grade and served as the testing coordinator. Andrew believed that becoming an administrator puts people in the realm to make important decisions to guide their school building, the educational process of students, and the capacity of teachers within the building.

Annette

Annette self-identified as a Black female. She had been in the high school setting for 24 years. She started as a social studies teacher. Annette was honored by being the teacher of the

year two times during her career in the classroom. She was promoted to data support specialist (DSS) within the district before moving into her role as an assistant principal. Annette moved overseas to Dubai, was there for 2 years, helped to establish an Advanced Placement (AP) program in an American school there, and then moved back to the United States again for another assistant principal position. She had been an assistant principal for 5 years.

Annette had a leadership degree for years, and she loved being in the classroom. When she became a DSS, she saw that she could help teachers and students on a more global level. That was what inspired her to apply for the assistant principal pool. She enjoyed the work of an administrator because she could help teachers get better and help students, too. Annette said she was able to make a greater impact in the building.

Camille

Camille self-identified as a Black female. As a senior in high school, Camille's goal was to serve city children to ensure that they had the resources they needed in order to provide them with a better outcome. While in college, she started volunteering at an elementary school where her cousin worked, working with young girls. She also started as a substitute teacher while in college. After graduating from college, she began her teaching career as a special education teacher. She wanted to throw herself into the educational culture on every level. She taught at elementary, middle, and high school levels. She had worked in education for 28 years, with three of those years as the dean of students.

Camille wanted to become an administrator to learn all the aspects and facets of education. Her goal was to be a resource and be able to help as many youths as she could. She wanted to impact students, and sometimes she did not know if what she was doing was impactful. However, someone always comes back and lets her know that what she is doing is not

in vain. Annette loved being an administrator because of that one person, not for the masses. She wanted to reach the masses, but she said that one has to affect that one in order to get to the masses.

Darren

Darren self-identified as a Black male. He has served as an assistant principal for 8 years. Darren made a career change. He was in sales and marketing for several years prior to becoming an educator. He began substitute teaching just as a way to make money between jobs. He ended up getting a long-term substitute teaching position at the same school where he was now an assistant principal. Darren said he always loved kids, and his mom was a former educator. His dad was an educator early in his career, too. He decided to teach full-time, and he loved teaching interrelated special education students when he was in the classroom for 7 years before he became the department chair for the interrelated special education department.

Darren was torn on wanting to become an administrator. He had undergraduate and master's degrees in business. By being in the classroom, he realized that his path drifted to wanting to do more from a managerial than business standpoint. He saw a lot of that in the administrative roles. Darren recognized that he was organized and had a logistical mindset. He saw the opportunity as an administrator to do things that he felt he was trained for. He desired to extend his leadership capacity as a building principal and one day in a central office position.

Gavin

Gavin self-identified as a Black male. His educational journey started back in 2015 by way of his experience as a restaurant marketing director with Chick-fil-A. This position allowed him to work with area schools and participate in many family engagement events. It was by curiosity when delivering a catering order to his current school that he made the transition into

education. He started as a long-term substitute teacher, and then he became a full-time district employee, teaching as a sports and entertainment marketing teacher. Gavin had also taught entrepreneurship, hospitality, recreation, and tourism, which all aligned with his interests.

He was in his ninth year in education with the last 2 years in administration. He served as the dean of students for 12th grade, as well as being the positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS) coach. Gavin wanted to become an administrator because he believed that students need someone to advocate on their behalf. He felt that he needed to be there for the teachers who had not yet found their voice in their school building. He also wanted to be an advocate for students to help and assist with conveying the mission of the school district and the school community and by being a change catalyst for the community by way of being somebody who is a product of this community and still lives in this area while genuinely caring about this community.

Ingrid

Ingrid self-identified as a Black female. She served as the coordinator for the Safe Center at her school. She had served in many roles throughout her 29 years in education, including as an administrator for 15 years. Ingrid shared that her road to becoming an administrator was by chance. She felt as though she had mastered what she needed to do in the classroom, and she wanted to be a positive light. She wanted to help people achieve the same level of success in the classroom. Ingrid obtained her national board certification and had been teacher of the year, and she really wanted to expand on her ability to support other teachers and students. She thought that administration would help her to do that. Ingrid endeavored to remove any barrier that would prevent students from being successful.

Kenneth

Kenneth self-identified as a Black male. He had been in education for 11 years and had served as an assistant principal for 4 years. Before becoming an assistant principal, Kenneth worked in the Office of Student Discipline, Intervention and Prevention, as a student behavior program specialist within the district. Kenneth wanted to become an administrator because he had a great rapport with the administrators, especially secondary administrators growing up when he was in middle school and high school. He was from a family of educators, so he wanted to be able to impact the community more largely than just as a teacher in the classroom.

Kyle

Kyle self-identified as a Black male. He served as an 11th-grade assistant principal. Kyle's educational journey started when he was sitting in a personal finance and American government class. Kyle shared that being in these classes helped him realize that all students can learn, and they should have multiple opportunities to show mastery of their learning. The classes helped him see that teachers have a major influence on students and student learning. It was seeing one success story that sparked his interest in wanting to become an educator. Kyle's first administrative job was being appointed as the assistant administrator and athletic director in January 2010. Kyle shared that he had never wanted to aspire to be an administrator. It was an administrator who came into his classroom that apparently saw something in him that he did not know that others saw, which was his ability to be able to lead and cultivate others.

Lawrence

Lawrence self-identified as a Black male. He had been in education for 8 years. For the last 3 years, he had served as the 10th-grade dean of students. Lawrence believed that learning never stops. Learning is a continuous journey for students and adults. He wanted to become an

administrator because he believed that it is a rewarding role, and it gave him an opportunity to be able to support more people.

Sonya

Sonya self-identified as a Black female. She served in the role of dean of students. She was also part of partnerships, as well as the Safe Center, which was a wraparound school support center. Sonya's first career was not in education. She worked in corporate America but stayed close to coaching and mentoring young girls and boys. She developed a strong relationship with them and could influence them to do things differently. So, she decided to take an alternative path to education and went through the Georgia alternative teacher certification program. Sonya switched careers and had been in education for 17 years. She believed that she could make a difference with students and let them know that they had people in place who want them to be better, do better, and have better. When Sonya started working with teachers, she realized that she could have an effect on the change but with teachers as well. As an administrator, Sonya's goal was to assist teachers in growing their capacity and getting them into a position where they can cause positive change in the educational arena.

Tamara

Tamara self-identified as a Black female. She was serving her first year as an assistant principal over curriculum and instruction. Tamara taught science for 5 years before transferring to a local high school to teach science. She taught science for 1 year before gaining a promotion to the dean of students for 11th grade. She also assisted with building the school course schedules. Tamara served in the capacity of dean of students for 2 years before getting another promotion as an assistant principal at a neighboring high school.

Tamara felt that she was pushed or motivated into the administrator role. She always had a good rapport with her students and was good with discipline and instruction. Building relationships always was something that she really cherished with students, even though she was hard on them. In order to see behavioral changes, administrators need to be consistent but still show students that they care about their well-being. As an administrator, she was able to build relationships and help students on a broader scale.

Results

The themes and sub-themes of this study were derived from data analyzed from individual interviews, focus groups, and discipline data. Administrator participant responses from individual interview and focus group questions were captured for analysis. Response analysis highlighted the themes and sub-themes identified in Table 3 followed by a narrative of each theme and sub-theme.

Table 3

Themes & Sub-Themes

Themes	Sub-themes
Equity	Fairness
Professional Judgement/Discretion	Code of Conduct
	Overrepresentation
	Discipline Outcomes
Alternatives	Restorative Practice
	Safe Center
	PBIS
Building Relationships	Culture

Equity

It is imperative that administrators seek out effective practices that will improve disciplinary outcomes for each student group. Ensuring equitable outcomes is an important role for administrators. Elements of equity appeared across individual interviews and focus groups. There needs to be a shift in school culture and a shift in policy to safeguard equity in disciplinary consequences. When it comes to zero-tolerance policies (ZTPs), Kenneth and five other participants in the focus groups thought that they were inequitable. Kenneth stated, “It minimizes the non-academic barriers that go on around certain students, who are marginalized. This is one of the causes as to why they [students] react the way they do.” Equity consists of not only being aware of but also recognizing the differences in students and their experiences and consequently implementing the policy. Ingrid thought that ZTPs and exclusionary discipline practices were politically motivated. She shared, “Policymakers are not in support of students or their needs. The policymakers fail to view policies and the district code of conduct through gender and racial lens.” Camille was not in favor of the ZTP because “it does not lend to basing discipline decisions on a child's circumstances, they may have put them in a situation, so it doesn't necessarily mean that you eliminate a child from an educational situation because of one incident.” Discipline outcomes must be based on the individual student/individual person because everyone's story is different. Kenneth and Camille shared that this must be done for it to be equitable.

Fairness

Through the discussions in the individual interviews, focus groups, and analyzing discipline data, administrators questioned the fairness of exclusionary discipline policies. Elements of fairness appeared consistently across all participants in individual interviews and

focus groups in viewing exclusionary practices, discipline referrals, and discipline consequences. Andrew felt that ZTPs were not fair. He explained, “These policies place a 100% perfection stamp on everyone. No one should have to tolerate a mistake from growing up.” Andrew stressed that everyone makes mistakes on their journey in life, and we learn from those mistakes. Annette’s stance was that ZTPs criminalize students and are thus, unfair. She added, “The policies deny students educational attainment [which] does not foster the developmental needs students need.” Consequently, Gavin believed that the ZTPs were necessary, and the school district had implemented ZTPs that were fair for all students. Gavin shared, “I do believe things get cloudy when it comes to implementation on the school level, and so that is contributed to human error by neglect or insubordination, or just mere not caring.”

Black girls are being suspended and expelled for misbehavior at a disproportionate rate compared to their male counterparts. Kenneth said that when it came to dress code policy, “Black females are oversexualized and over-scrutinized for what they wear and how they wear their hair.” Students from different races are not held to the same expectations as other races (e.g., African American). At Kenneth’s previous school, which was predominantly White, ladies wore track shorts and a t-shirt to school, and the administrators did not say anything to them. However, in his current predominately Black school, the opposite happens. Female students are chastised and directed to the clothing closet to find another outfit to put on or to call home and have their parents bring another set of clothes. Kenneth exclaimed, “How dare our [Black] students wear the same thing as students in the predominately White school. So, I do take into account where I am in the community in which I serve when imposing discipline.”

Tamara shared that school-wide support programs, such as restorative practice and PBIS, are positive approaches to discipline. She explained that “these supports help to bring fairness

and consistency in the discipline process.” In addition to restorative practice and PBIS, Lawrence stressed the “importance of schools addressing social-emotional needs by incorporating a social-emotional program into the school-wide programs that are provided.”

Professional Judgment/Discretion

Administrators use professional judgment/discretion when determining disciplinary outcomes. When sharing sentiments about the discipline process, Ingrid stated, “It is not ok for me to shell out disciplinary consequences, it’s not the right thing to do.” Darren said that he looks “at the student as an individual” and does “not keep it black and white when determining the disciplinary consequence.” All 11 participants in the individual interviews and focus groups voiced that some level of judgment and evaluation are imposed when determining the appropriateness of disciplinary decisions. When imposing discipline, Kenneth stated, “I look at the child individually and holistically because children will be children.” Kenneth added that “children are human, and they will make mistakes.” Annette and Ingrid both explained that the district provided a discipline policy by way of the code of conduct, and for each infraction, there was a window or range of discipline options. Tamara shared, “I look at a situation case-by-case, even if it’s the same situation where multiple students are involved, I look at each student separately.” Andrew added, “If you use your professional judgment and discretion, you can see that in some of the cases, you need to have varied disciplinary consequences.” Lawrence affirmed that he reviewed the student’s attendance record and prior offenses as factors in determining consequences.

Code of Conduct

The code of conduct mirrored the state code of conduct that the district develops for each school to adhere to. All the participants shared the sentiment that the code of conduct was

necessary. The participants voiced different perspectives on how they use the code of conduct. These differences were based on the gender of the participants. The six male participants in interviews used the code of conduct violation scale as a guide but used professional judgment/discretion in determining discipline outcomes. During the interviews, five female participants all agreed that they did not deviate from the code of conduct nor use any outside factors when determining discipline outcomes. Kenneth shared, "I think that schools have to follow policies and procedures, but I think they should also be culturally relevant and creative in the discipline practices because suspension does not always fix the problem." Darren and Andrew's perspective on student discipline was that the district has done a decent job of aligning the discipline codes with the appropriate consequences. The code of conduct gives leeway to administrators at the school level when assigning consequences. The school district revised the code of conduct and discipline tiers in an attempt to reduce the number of possible turbinal hearings. Andrew believed that the district had properly aligned the infraction with the tiers; however, he believed that "the ball falls short on the school-based level because oftentimes the school does not follow the rubric or the hierarchy or the protocol of the district disciplinarian chart." The systems that are put in place at the building level were not aligned. Gavin shared that where his school fell short was understanding what logical consequences sanctions are in response to student discipline infractions. Gavin iterated, "Oftentimes I see students disciplined in a way or given consequences as a response to adult frustration or relationships with certain students." Participants from both research sites agreed with Gavin that policies were skewed in the implementation at the school level.

Kenneth noted, "When it comes to Tier 1 discipline infractions, the discipline range is too large." According to Kenneth, when it comes to supporting the overuse of out-of-school-

suspension and in-school-suspension days for Tier 1 infractions, “Administrators should not be able to suspend the student for three to five days or even give them ISS for three to five days.” Based on participant interviews and the archival data, females encounter more Tier 1 and Tier 2 infractions as hall walkers, had more verbal conflicts with peers and staff, and were involved in more one-on-one fights. Kyle noted:

Decreasing or shortening the range of suspension days for these infractions will be more equitable because if the student is known to just be annoying or to get on someone's nerve, then typically that student is going to get the higher end of whatever the range is, regardless of what the [infraction] is.

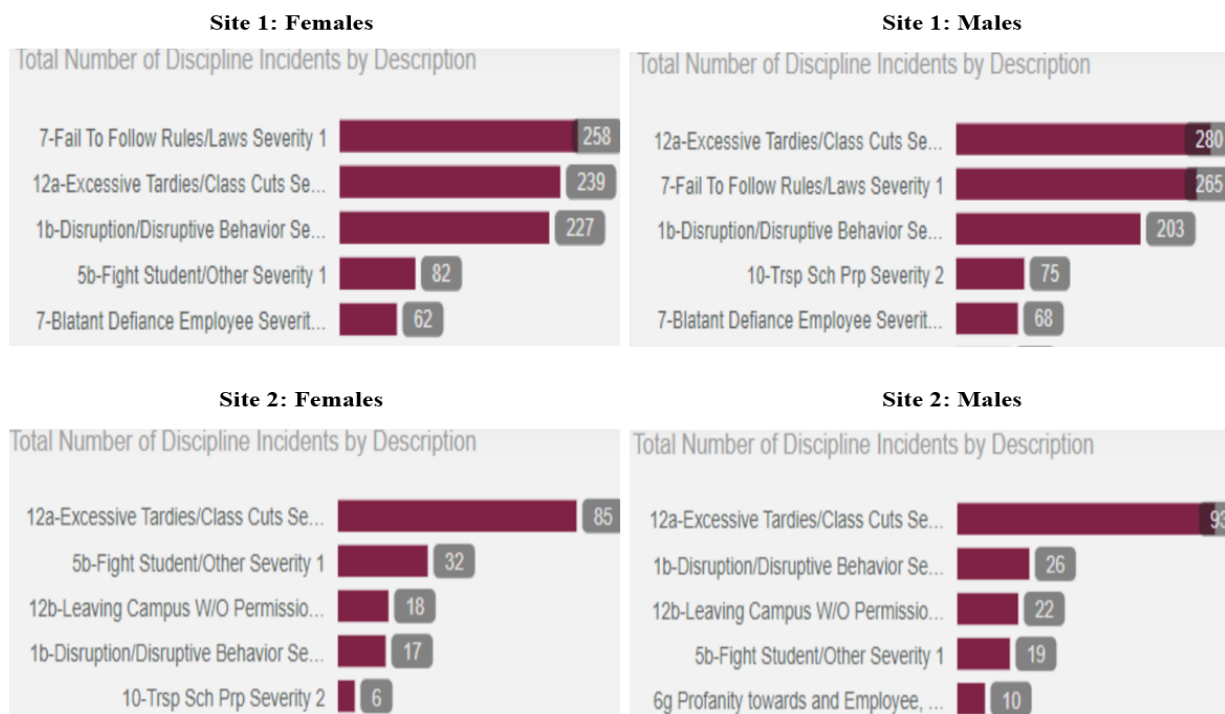
Overrepresentation

Analysis of the discipline data from both research sites revealed that Black girls receive higher rates of out-of-school suspension than their male counterparts. Elements of overrepresentation were discussed by all 11 participants during individual interviews and focus groups with questions centered around zero tolerance and school discipline data, as well as document analysis with the review and analysis of the discipline data. Camille was a veteran educator with 28 years of experience. Camille expressed that who she and her colleagues saw for discipline issues had changed over the years. Black boys were the leading demographic group for disciplinary infractions initially, then the shift turned to Hispanic boys receiving the most disciplinary infractions. According to Camille, “Now the demographic group that I see more for disciplinary infractions is from African American girls over African American or Hispanic boys or White girls.” There had also been an increase in girl group fights at her school. Additionally, Camille noted that girls are more aggressive and that is shown by the increase in girl-boy fights and girl-girl fights. Document analysis of discipline incidents for both research sites collaborated

with Camille’s statement (see Figure 1). She explained, “The girls are going to post up like she’s a man and fight the boy.” Andrew added that at his school, “9th-grade females were leading the way in disciplinary infractions.”

Figure 1

Top 5 Discipline Incidents by Descriptions, 2022–2023



Kyle shared another view of the overrepresentation of Black females receiving disciplinary consequences: “The disproportionality in the building may be due to the number of female students or female leaders, as male leaders often shy away from giving consequences to female students.” Similar to a household, Kyle further stated that adult male relatives are more stringent with the boys. Kyle said that as a male leader in the school, “I consider the male students to be members of my family or my sons, and as such, I tend to be very strict with them.” On the contrary, Kyle considers the “female students as my daughters; therefore, my approaches and repercussions towards them might differ from those towards the male students.” Kyle held

the belief that female leaders exhibit a more lenient stance toward male students while being more stringent with females: "Since there are more female leaders in my building, there is an increase in the number of girls who receive disciplinary action than the boys." Kenneth and Darren, administrators from the other research site, agreed with Kyle's notion that administrators treat students differently when it comes to issuing out consequences or having a conversation with students about their behavior based on gender. Kenneth said:

There is almost a level of empathy you employ because I look at them as if that's my family member, a little brother, little sister. Sometimes I may handle a situation like a father figure, or oftentimes, I discipline like the administrator.

Kenneth added that administrators can be removed from the generation of today. He continued to share the importance of letting the students know that he once had done things he should not have, but that all actions have consequences. Darren agreed with the stance of having children and approaching a situation through the lens of "What if this were my child?" Darren posed the question, "As a parent if this was your son or daughter, how would you want the school to handle the situation?" and answered, "As a father of a daughter and a son, I look at each case/infraction differently. It is on a case-by-case basis." The disproportionality of Black girls has been directly related to the number of female administrators in the building issuing disciplinary consequences.

Discipline Outcomes

Zero-tolerance policies (ZTPs) in schools are infractions that can result in the expulsion of a student for behaviors considered harmful to the safety of students and staff. Discipline outcomes include student withdrawals from the enrolled school with short- or long-term suspension, expulsion, or placement in alternative educational placement. Six out of 11 participants in the interviews agreed with having ZTPs in place but with provisions. Darren and

Tamara agreed that ZTPs need to be in place, particularly for school safety as it relates to weapons and drugs, as well as more aggressive behaviors like group fights. They both also felt that professional judgment needs to be employed to find alternatives to zero-tolerance outcomes in those situations where zero-tolerance might be too strong. Kyle felt that “the consequences should be aligned to the district policy; however, the consequences should be differentiated based on individual students.”

Alternatives to Discipline

According to the findings derived from the individual interviews and focus groups, it was critical that schools incorporate alternatives to discipline into the building operations. Alternative approaches include to rectify the racial disparities in discipline outcomes and decrease or eradicate the instructional time that students miss from the learning environment. Kenneth shared, “Administrators on my team started to monitor and have conversations around our tiered discipline system to make sure we are not over suspending or overusing ISS for minor infractions.” He added that at his school, they:

Urge students to speak out when they have issues, speak out when they have a problem, and we're also holding de-escalation trainings and meetings with teachers, so whenever they encounter a situation, they don't escalate the situation rather than deescalate the situation.

Camille’s perspective on alternatives to discipline placed the focus on classroom management:

“Overall, we have to change our mindset as to how we deal with children.” Gavin added:

In order to make a shift in the discipline rate and curtail the discipline issue, it’s imperative to support our parents, guardians, and families. Giving them this knowledge

can help address the issues around mental health or this is what you can do to support your scholar if they are grieving and lashing out.

Restorative Practice

Restorative practice is one of three alternatives to discipline that was revealed from individual interviews and focus group discussions. All of the participants stressed the need for schools to incorporate restorative practice and the need for all staff to be trained in the practice. According to Kyle, restorative circles help to a certain extent when the students are willing to participate and willing to hear each other's side communicate with whatever conflict they are having. Kyle pointed out that "even with teachers, I do feel like we should have more restorative circles when it comes to teachers and students." Kyle felt that there were a lot of miscommunications going on inside of the classroom. The classroom would benefit from the implementation of restorative circles. Sonya's sentiments aligned with Kyle's in wanting to see a more structured process for students returning from suspension, particularly if it involves more than one student coming back, so that they are involved in some type of restorative circle: "All leadership team members at my school have been trained in restorative practices; however, there is no process in place for the leadership team to conduct restorative practices."

Ingrid affirmed, "It is my best effort to mitigate kids being kids, and falling through the cracks with the aid of the Safe Center, which coordinates wraparound services, such as counseling, mediation, and restorative practices." She continued that "when an administrator is deciding what consequence the student will receive, they also need to determine what restorative practice he/she need to juxtapose with that discipline so they can make sure that behavior does not happen again." Consequently, Andrew shared that at his school, there was not a vast majority of restorative practices to use, even with a Tier 1 infraction. According to Andrew, "All the

district data can get skewed when we're looking at Tier 1 offenses for just, say, excessive tardies and class cuts where we don't have an intervention so unfortunately, it goes straight to suspension." Gavin considered the lack of interventions for certain Tier 1 infractions as a barrier to providing fairness in the discipline process. He posed the question of how effective the practices of in-school suspension and out-of-school suspension are, considering the demographics of students and the economic disadvantages that they are facing. The students are suspended, then they come back and possibly do something else. Andrew also questioned the effectiveness of in-school suspension and out-of-school suspension, if after serving the suspension days, students have repeated incidents, which lead to more suspension days. All the participants agreed that implementing restorative practice is key to preventing the recurrence of disciplinary offenses.

Safe Center

The second-most-discussed alternative to discipline by the participants was the Safe Center. The Safe Center was mentioned in both interviews and focus groups. Both research sites had created space within their building to house the center. The goal of the Safe Center was to remove any barriers that would circumvent students from being successful. Ingrid led the Safe Center at her school, which was developed in 2018 because the school was on the failing school list. Ingrid shared:

We endeavored to come up with pearl grams and strategies to assist students. Students were asked what their needs were, and what things hindered them. The students' feedback changed the way the team worked, and we realized we had to start thinking outside of the box.

Currently, the Safe Center at Ingrid's school had 14 mentor programs and one mental health program for students and offered everything from grief counseling to depression to anger management. Additional staff members consisted of one conflict resolution specialist, who handled student mediation sessions, and a social worker. Ingrid continued, "The Safe Center also has a food distribution program that distributes about 380,000 pounds of food per year, and is open to the students, community, and staff."

Lawrence shared an experience he had with a student he was going to suspend. After talking with the student to find out the reasons why he was skipping and his behavior concerns, Lawrence discovered that the student had personal things going on with his mother and with their living situation. Lawrence said, "The student could not stay still in the classroom for 90 minutes because he's focused on his parents, where they are going to live, and what they are going to eat because they don't have food." Based on this information, Lawrence decided to give the student in-school suspension in lieu of out-of-school suspension, so that he could get caught up on his schoolwork. Lawrence also met with the Safe Center staff to assist with finding resources to assist not only the student but also the whole family. Lawrence shared, "The Safe Center not only distributes food once a week, but there is also an in-house food pantry." The fact that the Safe Center was able to locate external resources and provide food from the food pantry for the family brought the student great solace knowing that the Safe Center could assist his family.

Positive Behavior Intervention System

Data from individual interviews and focus groups showed that eight out of 11 participants discussed implementing the PBIS, which was the most-effective intervention to create equity in school discipline. The PBIS promotes positive behavior and a positive school culture/climate,

which positively reinforces behaviors. According to Sonya, “A lot of times, earning PBIS points becomes a competition with the students. I have heard a student say, I need my points because there are things in the store that I want to purchase.” Camille added that for some students, it becomes a big deal to be able to go to the pop-up store or go and purchase things with the points that they have: “Students are reinforcing their behaviors by telling the teachers, ‘Hey, I did what I was supposed to do.’” The participants asserted that this multi-tiered method impacts students’ academic progress, reinforces behaviors, improves school culture and climate, and builds positive relationships between students and staff.

Building Relationships

All the participants in interviews and focus groups spoke about the importance of positive relationships among students and teachers and how a relationship, or lack thereof, can impact student behavior and school culture. Gavin supported this by saying, “The relationships that administrators and other staff have with students, the relationships they have with our staff members and colleagues in this building, means something.” Lawrence added that “proactively improving relationships among students and staff in the building aids in creating a sense of community within the school, classroom, schools in general. As a result of these relationships, disciplinary infractions will decrease.” According to Camille, “Students building relationships with their faculty and staff is also important because when you impact them [faculty and staff], they impact the students.”

Culture

If schools can change the culture successfully, they may be able to increase seat times and decrease the use of exclusionary discipline. The elements of culture were spread across all the themes derived in this study. Lawrence affirmed, “Exclusionary discipline practices like

zero-tolerance that result in suspension and expulsion do not reduce disruptions nor improve the school culture and climate.” The 11 participants in the interviews agreed that to shift the school culture from a punitive discipline environment, it was imperative to use more interventions, such as restorative practices, to assist with decreasing school discipline. According to Kenneth, “There is a level of empathy that you employ, though, as if it were your family member, a little brother, little sister, or a fatherly figure; otherwise, administrators discipline like an administrator.” Camille shared that she uses restorative circles to help improve the culture:

In one of the girl fights, the girls stated that they did not know why they were fighting. However, when conducting restorative circle, it was determined they were fighting because one girl does not want to be friends with the other anymore.

Camille and the girls involved had a rich discussion on friendship and assisted them with resolving their differences.

Outlier Data and Findings

Data analysis resulted in one outlier that was an unexpected finding that did not align with a theme nor the central research question and sub-questions. Though not directly related, this information was valuable for further study or similar research topics.

Students Receiving Services

Before issuing a disciplinary consequence, the administration should consider whether the student is receiving special education services or on a 504 plan. Several participants from both research sites shared that when viewing their school data, special education students receive the most discipline infractions and harsher discipline consequences than students who were not special education students. One question that came up when discussing students on an individualized education program (IEP) or 504 plan, was whether the IEP or behavior

intervention plan (BIP) were being followed by both the teacher making the referral and/or the administrator determining the discipline consequence. To ensure that school policies are unbiased and equitable, schools must strive to reduce disproportionality regarding special education determination eligibility and discipline referrals (Bradley-Williams et al., 2017).

Research Question Responses

There has been a disproportionate number of Black female students who are pushed into the STPP, which is impacted by district discipline policies. This study sought to gain the perspective of building-level administrators on discipline. The 11 participant responses from the individual interviews and focus groups provided a deeper understanding of discipline disproportionality that existed in two high school sites. Four themes were derived from the participants: equity, professional judgment/discretion, alternatives, and building relationships. The themes and sub-themes aided in answering the central research question and the three sub-questions.

Central Research Question

How do school administrators address the overrepresentation of Black girls suspended and expelled from school?

The participants identified the need to implement with fidelity and consistency wraparound support services, such as counseling, mentoring, and conflict resolution facilitated by a mediation specialist from the Safe Center. Ingrid stated, “Wraparound services are used to connect with Black girls so they can start to deal with some of the outside issues they are dealing with which may impact school behavioral issues.” Lawrence added, “Administrators must understand that suspension in and of itself is not going to change behaviors. Students cannot be suspended for 10 days and come back a different person.” According to Ingrid, “Wraparound

services, such as counseling, therapists, and social workers, must be made available to get to the root cause analysis of the existing behavior.”

The administrators addressed the overrepresentation of Black girls being suspended by looking at the student holistically before determining disciplinary outcomes. Sonya felt that ZTPs had their place in the school system; however, she thought that “students and the situation should be looked at look holistically before making a consequence decision.” Kenneth added that before he imposed discipline, “I’m looking at their attendance history and previous discipline history. I’m looking at the child individually and holistic by looking at external factors as well.” Likewise, Darren said that he views “disciplinary decisions holistically by looking at attendance history, previous disciplinary history, reflection on prior conversations, and extrinsic factors.”

Sub-Question One

What are administrators’ perspectives on the district policies addressing student discipline and the disproportionality of Black girls?

The participants agreed overall that the district had done a good job of aligning the codes and giving leeway to the administrators at the school level a range of options to use when assigning suspensions. According to Annette, “The school district revised the Code of Conduct and discipline tiers and ranges to reduce the number of possible turbinal hearings, which may result in alternative school placement or expulsion.” Andrew added that “although the district made revisions with the alignment, the range of suspension days is too large/long for Tier 1 infractions.” When it comes to supporting the overuse of out-of-school-suspension and in-school suspension-days for Tier 1 infractions, Kenneth stressed that “you shouldn’t be able to suspend the student for three to five days or even give them ISS for you three to five days.” Based on the participant interviews and the archival data, female students from both sites encountered more

Tier 1 and Tier 2 infractions as hall walkers, engaged in more verbal conflicts (peers and staff), and were involved in more one-on-one fights. Decreasing or shortening the range of suspension days for these infractions would be more equitable.

In addition to the range of suspension days contributing to the disproportionality, Andrew added:

There is a significant shortfall at the building level because oftentimes the schools do not follow the discipline code rubric, or the hierarchy of the tiered violations listed in the Code of Conduct to issue sanctions in response to the student discipline infractions. Oftentimes, Gavin “sees students disciplined in a way or given consequences as a response to adult frustration or relationships with certain students. This is where policies are skewed in the implementation at the school level.”

Sub-Question Two

How do exclusionary school disciplinary policies contribute to racial and gender disparities of African American girls?

Over recent years, there had been an increase in social concerns about the exclusionary school disciplinary procedures that have led to an alarming rise in the number of instances involving the STPP (Clark, 2020). Black students were being suspended and expelled for misbehavior at a disproportionate rate compared to their White counterparts and their male Black counterparts for the same infractions. Kenneth said, “When it comes to dress code policy, Black females are oversexualized and over-scrutinized for what they wear and how they wear their hair.” Students from different races have not been held to the same expectations as Black students. At Kenneth’s previous school, young ladies wore track shorts and a t-shirt to school, and the administrators did not say anything to them. However, in his current school, they over-

scrutinize the girls for wearing the same type of clothes as the girls did at his previous school. Essentially, at his current school, the staff who are predominately Black are scrutinizing the very children who look like them. Kenneth shared, “So, I do take into account where I am in the community in which I serve when imposing discipline.” Conversely, the discipline data showed that not all administrators from both sites shared their sentiments.

Exclusion from school because of disciplinary actions causes harm to the learning process in several ways. Suspended students will become less attached to a school, less involved in coursework, and, as a result, less driven or more disinterested in attaining academic achievement. The administrators agreed that discipline policies, such as suspensions, have a negative impact on academic achievement in all content areas. When students are not in class, they are typically not learning. Darren responded, “Students not being in class impacts their opportunity to engage in instruction with reading and math. Those two disciplines carry across so many different content areas that it can impact any type of class or content area.” He added:

If students' suspension rates are high, chances are they're not paying attention to either catching up on their work when they return, or it may even create a moment of disinterest where they are not interested anymore, and recidivism occurs.

As Ingrid shared, “When we send them away for 5 days or 10 days, we are helping to create that gap in their learning or to widen that gap in their learning. It's very hard for kids to recover from that.” She continued, “Our approach traditionally has been to get them out of the space, and so I think we're just doing a disservice to them when we start talking about reading and math scores and the kids having a solid foundation.” Annette shared that “students suspended from school fall behind, and then when they return to class, they are even further behind.” As a result,

Annette explained, “The students lose interest in school. When interest diminishes, the rate of dropping out increases significantly.”

Sub-Question Three

How can administrators and policymakers develop an equitable and fair discipline practices and learning environment within their respective institutions?

Policy and cultural relevance are imperative for achieving equity and fairness in discipline. To achieve equity and fairness in discipline, discipline cannot be viewed as a one-size-fits-all process. Tamara explained, “It is imperative when determining disciplinary outcomes, you must make your professional judgment. Every situation should be handled on a case-by-case basis.” Camille said that before discipline outcomes are determined, “administrators should also look at past discipline history and class attendance.” Darren added, “Past conversations with the student and grades also play a role in decision-making, in addition to taking a holistic account when administering discipline for that student.” Lawrence shared that he also considered the student's social-emotional needs.

Implementing PBIS, restorative practices, and the school-based Safe Center were all alternatives to discipline that created equity and fairness around school discipline. Ingrid stated, “Having these resources in schools and when they are used by all with fidelity will shift the school culture from a punitive discipline environment to a positive learning environment where students thrive both behaviorally and educationally.” Ingrid continued:

I have often seen kids do a complete turnaround due to implementing wraparound services, but [it] is also contingent upon our welcoming the kids back from suspension or expulsion in a restorative environment. It is also important to weave them back in the building with programming from the Safe Center.

The implementation of the alternatives to discipline helps to reduce suspension rates. These methods of addressing the overrepresentation of Black girls being suspended or expelled promote fairness and equity.

Policymakers and administrators need to include non-exclusionary alternatives to discipline to keep students in the classroom instead of removing them from the classroom due to suspension and exclusion. Kyle shared, “Student discipline resulting in out-of-school suspensions or expulsion has a negative impact on academic success in all academic areas.” In the end, equitable discipline aims to provide a welcoming and safe learning environment for every student.

Summary

Chapter Four allowed the research participants to share a deeper understanding of how exclusionary disciplinary practices and norms, gender stereotypes, and racial injustice marginalize Black girls and increase their likelihood of incarceration. The case study framework, individual interviews, and focus groups yielded four themes: equity, professional judgment/discretion, alternatives to discipline, and building relationships. Eight sub-themes were developed from the four main themes: fairness, PBIS, restorative practice, Safe Center, code of conduct, overrepresentation, discipline outcomes, and culture. These themes and sub-themes were aligned with the central research question and sub-questions. The most salient finding in this research was that the participants acknowledged that the infractions outlined in the code of conduct were aligned properly with the infraction, tier, and discipline outcome. However, one factor that aided in the disproportionality of Black girls was the actions of administrators and staff deciding to submit a referral or call for the removal of a student. School-level administrators

and staff have been allowing biases and frustration from student actions/behavior to drive the submission of discipline referrals and the discipline outcome.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this multiple-embedded case study was to explore school administrators' perspective on the school-to-prison pipeline (STPP) and the repercussions on Black females at high schools in the Eastern region of the United States. Exclusionary discipline policies lead students of color, particularly Black girls, down the STPP at a disproportionate rate. Eleven high school administrators from two high schools shared their perspectives. Chapter Five consists of the following five subsections: (a) interpretation of findings, (b) implications for policy and practice, (c) theoretical and methodological implications, (d) limitations and delimitations, and (e) recommendations for future research.

Discussion

The purpose of this discussion section was to interpret the study's findings through themes and sub-themes derived from data analyzed from individual interviews, focus groups, and discipline data. Administrator responses from individual interview and focus group questions were captured for analysis. This case study investigated, through the analytical lens of the social justice theory (SJT), administrators' assessment of racial bias and gender stereotypes' contribution to disciplinary sanctions. The interpretations of findings with empirical and theoretical sources and evidence from the study are presented. Interpretation of findings, implications for policy or practice, limitations and delimitations, and recommendations for future research are discussed in this section.

Interpretation of Findings

This multiple-embedded case study was guided by the theoretical framework of the SJT by Rawls (1971). The criterion sampling method was used to select the 11 high school

administrators consisting of assistant principals and deans of students. Individual interviews, focus groups, and document analysis were the data collection methods. To get the richest data possible, administrator responses were connected to determine the patterns and themes. The themes aligned with administrators' perceptions of the role that racism and sexism play in discipline consequences.

Summary of Thematic Findings

The 11 administrator participants provided a deeper understanding of how exclusionary disciplinary practices and norms, gender stereotypes, and racial injustice marginalize Black girls. The case study framework, individual interviews, and focus groups yielded four themes: equity, professional judgment/discretion, alternatives to discipline, and building relationships. Eight sub-themes were developed from the themes: fairness, PBIS, restorative practice, Safe Center, code of conduct, overrepresentation, discipline outcomes, and culture. These themes and sub-themes were aligned with the central research question and sub-questions.

Double Consciousness. In 1903, W.E.B. Du Bois published a book entitled, *The Souls of Black Folks*. In his book, Du Bois coined the term *double consciousness*. People from marginalized groups are faced with living between two worlds: one from their own culture and one from the country's dominant culture. Crawford and Bohan (2019) asserted that the members of the marginalized group had to learn to survive on both sides; this was called double consciousness. Being a member of two separate groups was what Walker (2018) meant by people being a cultural minority. Black administrators must be conscious of their own experiences with bias and racism and the role it plays in "colorism in their discipline decision" (Walter, 2018). Participants in this study voiced their experience with being torn between being a Black administrator and disciplining Black students. The administrators were at a crossroads of

following the district policy by way of the code of conduct versus factoring in cultural norms and their lived childhood experiences before making disciplinary decisions. Black administrators' disciplinary consequences tended to be more strict or harsh on Black students. As one of the participants stated, when disciplining boys, he disciplined them like they were his sons. He felt as though he was obligated as a Black male to have a hand in getting them ready for the world that they will face outside of the school walls. In addition, he wanted to teach them that they must be tough and to be a "man," and more importantly, a Black man in society. Conversely, from the Black male perspective of disciplining a Black female, participants voiced that they sanction the females differently from the males. The male administrators viewed Black females as their daughters. So, their sanction was not as harsh as the males; however, they were strict on teaching self-respect and acting like a lady. On the other side, none of the Black female administrators admitted to bias or viewing other factors when issuing disciplinary consequences. According to them, they treated both males and females equally in the discipline process without differentiated conversations. Consequently, the number of Black female administrators and the discipline data at both research sites stated otherwise.

Social Justice and Discipline. Rawls (1971) developed two fundamental principles of justice. The premise of the tenets was that all individuals should have the same rights and liberties, and everyone should be treated with equity and fairness. The present issue of discipline consequences in schools failed to provide equity and fairness in the decision-making process and outcome. This was shown by how Black girls were disciplined in comparison to Black boys at the hands of the administrator. School districts must face the lack of social justice in discipline decision-making among school building leaders affecting students of color, specifically Black girls. Even though district and building leaders may argue that harsh disciplinary sanctions are

necessary to maintain safety in the schools, empirical evidence has negated this notion (Butler-Barnes & Inniss-Thompson, 2020).

Program Implementation and Effectiveness. Both research sites had implemented a Safe Center within their respective buildings. The Safe Center incorporated mental health and anger management programs, conflict resolution specialists, and resources to aid students, families, and community members. The goal of the Safe Center programming was to remove any barriers that would prevent students from being successful. Contrary to the resources available in the school building, the data reflected a high number of in-school suspension and out-of-school suspension days sanctioned to Black girls. This led to the question of if any of the programs catered to the unique needs of the population, especially Black females.

Implications for Policy or Practice

The findings of this study had implications for policy and practice related to the administrators' perspectives on Black girls in high school and discipline. This section discusses implications and recommendations for schools, school districts, and building administrators. The implications were derived from the data gathered from the research and were aligned with the theoretical framework.

Implications for Policy

Punishments based on exclusionary disciplinary policies are not inherently bad. There are circumstances in which school administrators must apply exclusionary rules to ensure the safety of the school environment. The crux of discipline disproportionality for Black girls was not exclusionary punishment, but it was the administrator's discretion when issuing discipline consequences. The findings of the research have indicated that decisions made by school administrators' implementation of policies both mitigate and exacerbate the disparities

experienced by Black girls. Additionally, the findings of the study revealed that beyond the student code of conduct, there were factors, such as administrators' leadership styles and decision-making styles, which influenced how students are disciplined, and for this study, how Black girls are disciplined.

Implications for Practice

There were several implications for practice that were discovered through the research findings. Several implications were drawn from school administrators' careful labor to build an environment that holds Black girls responsible and accountable for their conduct while also preventing the continuation of the criminalization of Black students. Administrators should establish a platform where teachers and support staff can review discipline data and engage in in-depth dialogues with their colleagues about patterns and trends affecting Black female students in their respective high schools. For the administrators to facilitate an effective and purposeful conversation, administrators and staff must first recognize that Black girls are affected by a problem that has the potential to lead students to be suspended, expelled, and on the path to incarceration. The engagement will assist in a collaborative effort to find a practical solution. Another implication was that though not intentional, this study did not include the administrative perspective of discipline disproportionality from non-Black administrators. The administrative staff at both research sites were 100% Black. Additionally, school districts should employ resources that align with the needs of their respective school communities. These resources should make the path that Black girls have to walk through fairer and more equitable in all aspects of their educational journey.

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

This section discusses the empirical and theoretical implications of the findings for the study. This study centered on the issue of disparities in disciplinary infractions pertaining to Black girls. To address the gap in the literature regarding the impact of disproportionate disciplinary sanctions on Black girls, the researcher examined this phenomenon from the perspective of assistant principals and deans of students who are tasked with administering disciplinary consequences. The theoretical framework that aligned with the study was the SJT by Rawls (1971). The SJT illustrated how exclusionary discipline norms and practices, racial injustice, and gender stereotypes marginalize Black girls and increase criminal justice involvement.

Empirical Implications

The educational system treats young Black females as inferior and as unjustly today as it did in the past (Lerner, 1992; Taylor et al., 2019). Based on the findings of this study, administrators participating in the study all agreed that the district discipline code of conduct was aligned properly based on the tiered infractions and the consequence grid for each tier. However, based on the code of conduct and the discipline data, exclusionary discipline and zero-tolerance rules have contributed to the disproportionate number of Black girls being suspended from school.

This study and the empirical literature aligned with stating that Black females were more likely to be disciplined for disobedience, disruptive and aggressive behavior, and dress code violation. There was a clear racial and gender trend in the data on exclusionary discipline (Annamma et al., 2019; Office for Civil Rights, 2021). Racial disparities in disciplinary consequences have been associated with issues, including cultural inequalities between students

and building staff, unconscious biases, and perspectives and attitudes of building administrators (Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Suizzo et al., 2014). The study findings supported the empirical literature by indicating that the decisions implemented by building administrators aided in magnifying inequalities faced by Black girls. Furthermore, the study findings indicated that administrators' leadership styles and decision-making approaches impact discipline outcomes.

Theoretical Implications

According to Rawls (1971), there were two basic tenets of social justice. The most important tenet was that every individual deserves the same fundamental liberties and rights. The second tenet was unfairness in the world if individuals are not provided with the same possibilities (Rawls, 1971). The social justice concept said that people in power should advocate for individuals who cannot advocate for themselves (Buckingham, 2013). School administrators (e.g., principals, assistant principals, and deans of students) as social justice leaders should recognize the presence of racial inequalities that exist and take the necessary measures to eradicate them (Koonce & Kreassig, 2020). The SJT was a valuable theory used when the goal was to eliminate the intended and unintended exclusion of marginalized student populations (DeMatthews, 2015).

The historical treatment of Black females as inferior and unjust stands the same in today's educational system (Lerner, 1992; Taylor et al., 2019). Based on the findings of the study, building administrators' responses were inconsistent regarding being an advocate for the most marginalized group, which for this study was Black girls. The participants stated that they factored in external contributors before deciding on disciplinary consequences. However, when disciplining Black girls, the infractions and the disciplinary outcome ended up being on the far end of the discipline scale guide, in which administrators use their professional judgment and

discretion. This was shown based on the number of in-school-suspension days (i.e., low end of the discipline scale) versus out-of-school-suspension days (i.e., higher end of the discipline scale). Based on the discipline data from the two research sites, Black girls have surpassed Black boys in disciplinary sanctions. The decision of the discipline outcome was completely subjective. Additionally, district and building leaders may argue that the harsh consequences are necessary to maintain school safety (Butler-Barnes & Inniss-Thompson, 2020).

Part of the SJT maintained that people in power should advocate for individuals who cannot advocate for themselves. For this research, building leaders should be the voice and advocate for Black girls. Based on the data, there were several girls from both sites with over 10 infractions each for the review year of 2022–2023. It was not evident that administrators utilized the alternate discipline programs located at both sites. Discipline data confirmed that Black girls' involvement in fights surpassed that of Black boys. What was not revealed in the study was specific programming that was available specifically for girls who were repeat offenders, as well as girls involved in Tier 2 and Tier 3 offenses. Therefore, findings and interviews did not determine with fidelity that leaders were a voice and advocate for Black girls.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations are weaknesses that are identified within a research study (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). The weaknesses are beyond the control and scope of the researcher and could have an impact on the outcomes and findings of the study (Theofanidis & Fountouki).

Conversely, delimitations are restrictions that the researcher intentionally limits to ensure that the objectives and results are attainable (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). This section discusses the limitations and delimitations of the study.

Limitations

There were four limitations in this study. The first limitation was the lack of cultural diversity of the participants. All the administrators participating in the study self-identified as Black. The lack of racial and ethnic diversity limited the capability to generalize the findings to inclusive populations. The second limitation was that only discipline data for one academic calendar year was analyzed. The scope of data analyzed was limited to the 2022–2023 school year. Only analyzing 1 year of data did not discern historical data trends. The third limitation was that neither principal from the research sites participated in the study. Participation from principals would have added to the scope of the data. The fourth limitation was that the participating district did not allow the researcher to ask many of the questions, due to the questions being directly related to race, gender, SJT, and disproportionality.

Delimitations

There were three delimitations in this study. The first delimitation was that the study only included high-school administrators and not administrators from the elementary or middle-school level. Expanding the site levels may yield a more comprehensive perspective of administrators' views on discipline and disparities experienced by Black girls. The next delimitation was data collection from a single school district. Including multiple school districts would provide a broader perspective on discipline data and administrator perspectives. Third, a final delimitation was that the administrators and student population at both research sites were not culturally diverse and were predominantly Black. Including a more culturally diverse administrator perspective analyzing discipline data from other demographic groups would allow for internal and external stakeholders to see the impact of discipline policies and the code of conduct on diverse groups of students.

Recommendations for Future Research

Drawing from the findings, implications, limitations, and delimitations of the research, the following recommendations were put forth for future research. Based on the findings of the study, each school site had implemented a Safe Center, PBIS, and restorative practices. However, with the disproportionate number of Black girls receiving discipline consequences at both sites, the first recommendation for future research was to conduct a case study to explore the effectiveness of alternative discipline programs, such as the Safe Center programs, PBIS, and restorative practices, at the respective school sites.

This research unintentionally included only Black administrator participants, due to a lack of diverse staff and students in the participating schools. Future research could include administrators with varied demographic backgrounds and schools that have a more culturally diverse student population. Replication of this study can include increasing the sample size to include elementary, middle, and high school administrators. By the study having varied levels, researchers can gain various disciplinary approaches toward Black girls. Another recommendation for future research was to conduct a narrative inquiry of the lived experiences of administrators who are responsible for issuing discipline consequences to Black girls. Finally, to eliminate administrator and staff implicit bias toward Black girls, it was necessary that staff first acknowledged that they are biased in their decision-making when it comes to Black girls and discipline. It is imperative that district school leaders provide professional development to building administrators and staff in the area of social justice and discipline to make the disciplinary process more equitable.

Conclusion

The purpose of this multiple-embedded case study was to explore the administrators' perspective on the STPP and the repercussions on Black females at high schools in the Eastern region of the United States. This case study utilized the SJT to guide the research. Eleven administrators were selected using the criterion sampling method, and the data collection methods used were interviews, focus groups, and document analysis. As examined through the analytical lens of the SJT, two themes and one subtheme from the administrator participants were directly aligned with the guided principles of the SJT. Those themes that were aligned included equity with the sub-theme of fairness and professional judgement/discretion with the sub-theme of overrepresentation.

Data from the study revealed several important findings. Participants voiced their experiences with being a Black administrator and disciplining Black students. When imposing discipline decisions, Black administrators need to be aware of their own biases. The Black male administrators shared that they tended to discipline Black males harder than Black females. Black female administrators claimed that they viewed each student free of bias and that students were not disciplined harsher than others based on gender or race. However, based on the administrator demographics of both research sites, there were more female administrators than male administrators. If male administrators are sanctioning female students less harshly, this leads to questioning the reason for the inflated discipline numbers for Black females being suspended. Administrator responses were contradictory in terms of being an advocate for the most marginalized group, which in this case, was Black females. On one hand, administrators reported that external factors were viewed when determining discipline consequences, whereas,

on the other hand, infractions and discipline outcomes fall on the higher end of the discipline scale.

The study findings indicated that administrators' leadership style and decision-making approaches negatively impact discipline outcomes, and thus, contribute to the phenomenon of Black girls being "pushed out" of school, which leads to the dreams of Black females being deferred. Black girls are an underrepresented group that has frequently been overlooked while being overrepresented in school disciplinary reform. This marginalized group was in a state of crisis. Building administrators, district leaders, and policymakers must sound the alarm to save the group that has historically since slavery been a "sequence of mistakes—misunderstood, misidentified, disinformed, and misdirected" (Jones, 2015, p. 275).

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Appendix A

IRB Approval Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

August 4, 2023

Jacqueline Holland
Breck Perry

Re: IRB Approval - IRB-FY22-23-1743 A Dream Deferred: Black Girls And The School-To-Prison Pipeline:
Administrators' Perspective on Discipline Disproportionality

Dear Jacqueline Holland, Breck Perry,

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: August 4, 2023. If you need to make changes to the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit a modification to the IRB. Modifications can be completed through your Cayuse IRB account.

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

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. (NOTE: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. [45 CFR 46.101\(b\)\(2\)](#) and (b)(3). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.)

For a PDF of your approval letter, click on your study number in the My Studies card on your Cayuse dashboard. Next, click the Submissions bar beside the Study Details bar on the Study Details page. Finally, click Initial under Submission Type and choose the Letters tab toward the bottom of the Submission Details page. Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found on the same page under the Attachments tab. 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, PhD, CIP
Administrative Chair
Research Ethics Office

Appendix B

Site Approval Letter

BOARD OF EDUCATION

10000 University Blvd., Suite 1000
 Dallas, Texas 75243-1000
 Phone: 972.768.1000
 Fax: 972.768.1000
 Website: www.dallas.tx.us
 10000 University Blvd., Suite 1000
 Dallas, Texas 75243-1000

September 5, 2023

Dear Jacqueline Holland:

Your request to conduct the research study "Administrators' Perspective on Student Discipline: A Case Study" has been approved. Enclosed is a copy of the Research Agreement. Please note that while this approval permits you to approach individual schools and/or teachers within the _____ School system, the final decision regarding participation is a local option and rests with each school principal and teacher. A copy of this letter must be provided to schools along with any correspondence requesting participation in this study.

No identification of _____ (students' names, teachers' names, administrators' names, etc.) is to be included in data collected as a part of this study. Also, complete confidentiality of records must be maintained. Please remember to send a summary report once the study is complete to the address below. If any additional information or assistance is needed, please feel free to reach us at _____

If data collection continues for more than one year, you will need to complete and submit the "Research Modification / Continuation Form" (available on the DPE web page) before each additional year. This form can also be completed to request approval for changes to your data collection procedures.

We appreciate your interest in conducting research with _____

Sincerely,

 Executive Director - Strategy and Governance



Appendix C

Administrator Participant Recruitment Letter

Dear [REDACTED] High School Administrator,

As a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Philosophy in Education. My research aims to explore administrators' perspectives on student discipline policies, and I am writing to invite you to join my study.

Participants must be current school administrators within the Eastern School District who have served in that role within this district for at least one year. The participants must also ensure knowledge of current district discipline practices and policies. Individuals willing to participate in the research will sign a permission form outlining the details of the study.

Participants will take part in online interviews. Online interviews will be audio and video recorded using Microsoft Teams. Individual interviews will take approximately 30 minutes. A second method of information collection will include the use of focus group interviews. The focus group interviews will take place online and should last approximately 45 minutes. The participants will be given the option to check their individual and focus group interview transcripts for accuracy, which is an extra step to ensure that the participants' perspectives are unbiased. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but participant identities will not be disclosed.

Please contact me at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] to complete a screening questionnaire, schedule an interview, or receive additional information. A consent document is attached to this email. The consent document contains additional information about my research. To participate, you will need to sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the interview.

Sincerely,

Jacqueline Holland
Doctoral Candidate
[REDACTED]

Appendix D

Screening Questionnaire

1. How many total years have you been a school administrator?
 - a. <1 year
 - b. 1–2 years
 - c. 3–5 years
 - d. 6–10 years
 - e. 11+ years

2. How many years have you been a school administrator in this district?
 - a. <1 year
 - b. 1–2 years
 - c. 3–5 years
 - d. 6–10 years
 - e. 11+ years

3. What is your gender?
 - a. Female
 - b. Male

4. What is your identified racial makeup?
 - a. Black/African American
 - b. White/Caucasian
 - c. Hispanic/Latino
 - d. Native American/American Indian
 - e. Asian
 - f. Pacific Islander
 - g. Biracial

5. Do you make decisions on disciplinary sanctions for students in your school?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

Appendix E

Administrator Participant Consent Form

Title of the Project: A DREAM DEFERRED: BLACK GIRLS AND THE SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE: ADMINISTRATORS' PERSPECTIVE ON DISCIPLINE DISPROPORTIONALITY

Principal Investigator: Jacqueline Holland, Doctoral Candidate, Education Department, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. Participants must be current school administrators within the Eastern School District who have served in that role within this district for at least one year. The participants will also need to ensure knowledge of current district discipline practices and policies. Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

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

The purpose of this multiple-embedded case study is to describe the school-to-prison pipeline and the repercussions on Black females at high schools in the Eastern region of the United States.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

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

1. Participate in a virtual, audio, and video-recorded one on one interview that will take no more than 30 minutes.
2. Participate in a virtual, audio, and video-recorded focus group interview that will take approximately 45 minutes. The focus group will comprise of approximately 5-6 high school administrators (principals, assistant principals, and dean of students).
3. You will be given the option to check your individual and focus group interview transcripts for accuracy.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Your participation will contribute to the repercussions of disciplining black girls and the district's discipline guidelines, the code of conduct.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

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

Liberty University
IRB-FY22-23-1743
Approved on 8-3-2023

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.
- Data collected from you may be used in future research studies.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted, and all hardcopy records will be shredded.
- Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for three years until participants have reviewed and confirmed the accuracy of the transcripts and then deleted/erased. The researcher and members of her doctoral committee will have access to these recordings.

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?

There is no cost associated with participating in the research 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 or [REDACTED]

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

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

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

The researcher conducting this study is Jacqueline Holland. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [REDACTED] or

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IRB-FY22-23-1743
Approved on 8-3-2023

██████████. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Breck Perry, at ██████████.

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

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

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

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

The researcher has my permission to audio-record/video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

Liberty University
IRB-FY22-23-1743
Approved on 8-3-2023

Appendix F

Individual Interview Questions

1. What is your educational journey and what role do you serve?
2. Why did you want to become an administrator?
3. What is your perspective on zero-tolerance policies?
4. Have you analyzed demographic data at your school? If so, what did you see?
5. Explain a situation when you sanctioned students with varied disciplinary consequences for the same offense and why you made that choice.
6. Why do you believe students become disinterested in the learning process?
7. What impact does student discipline have on academic progress in reading and math?
8. What alternatives to zero tolerance as administrators in this district do you recommend to address student discipline and reduce suspension rates?
9. Based on your school discipline data, do you recognize a difference in students or groups?
10. What is your opinion on student discipline policies like suspension and expulsion?
11. When students return from suspension, do you notice a change in behavior?
12. Do you follow up or have follow-up procedures for students who return from suspensions?
13. Do you have any other thoughts or suggestions you would like to make regarding the discipline process?

Appendix G

Focus Group Interview Questions

1. What barriers do you encounter with discipline data at your school?
2. What are your administrative perspectives on the current policy addressing student discipline and suspension rates in this district?
3. As administrators, what factors do/should you consider when addressing student discipline in schools to ensure each student receives their mandated due process as outlined by federal and state law?
4. What strategies or advice do you have to offer other school administrators for reducing suspension rates?
5. A "chronic disciplinary problem student" is defined by law as a student who exhibits a pattern of behavioral characteristics that interfere with the learning process of students around him or her and which are likely to recur. What personal strategies do you utilize when implementing the district's discipline policies on a non-chronic and chronic discipline problem student?
6. Are there any additional factors that you consider that would impact your disciplinary process and decisions?
7. What resources are available in your school to promote fair discipline decisions for all students?
8. In what ways does the district provide assistance with disciplinary measures? What additional assistance do you think is needed?
9. Do you have additional comments about the research study?